

Treat Yourself as You Would Others

By Rev. Master Phoebe

Almost always when we talk about how our meditation practice can really not be separated from working with the Precepts, someone will lament how hard that is. And we all agree, it is hard if you wish to label it that way. But what does that actually mean? Why do we think of it as hard? Or perhaps, why do we make it hard for ourselves?

How about if we say, **using** the Precepts to help ourselves make and experience less suffering? The Precepts are not there to make life hard, but to point us in a different direction, sometimes called a **safe direction**. They are not forced upon us, but rather we turn to them in times of confusion or pain, and they arise naturally from our own meditation. To feel regret over an attitude or action is painful, and with that comes the resolve to try something better, to press reset, to take “safe direction”.

It turns out that often very good and kind people make their own lives harder by getting very upset when they find themselves going against what they know in their hearts is in harmony with their meditation. This is perhaps where it may be good to see how we need to apply the Precepts to ourselves first, in the sense of treating ourselves as if we are our own friend, as the Buddha recommends we do. When a friend tells us how he or she has made a mistake, we are sympathetic and encouraging, rather than harsh and unforgiving. We can try the same attitude with ourselves, but it may take some practice, and involves using the Precepts to reevaluate how we treat ourselves may be helpful. Here is another way to look at the Ten Precepts in this light:

Do not kill yourself with too much work, too much or not enough food or exercise, too little relaxation or enjoyment in life. Rather, nourish and protect your own wellbeing, health and spiritual practice so that you will make most use of your time and energy.

Do not steal from yourself by over-committing, not giving yourself enough time to do well what you need to do, multi-tasking or “burning the candle at both ends”. Rather, take care to be realistic with your expectations and grateful for what the day brings

Do not covet or wish to be other than who you are. The Buddha says: “know your capacities and be content with them.” This points to both our limitations and our potential, and we each have to explore in depth for ourselves over time what that means and how we fully express Buddha Nature in the form we call “me”.

Do not lie to yourself about yourself, sell yourself short in your own mind or gossip about yourself to yourself. Instead, be willing to sit up straight and keep coming back to what is next.

Do not sell the wine of delusion to yourself, cloud your mind with distractions, denial or justifications, but on the contrary look to the wisdom that arises from your own heart and allow it to guide you.

Do not speak against yourself in your own mind, watch the way you discourage yourself by thinking negative thoughts and devalue your own efforts. Nobody is perfect and in a friend we will see the good intentions and many ways in which they find fruition. The small mistakes can be accepted with kindness and addressed with a friendly attitude, and ingrained personality traits can be treated with more patience and encouragement.

Do not be proud of your “good” self and devalue your “bad” self. This should be obvious, and not need talking about, and yet it seems to be so pervasive that it is probably good to reflect on it regularly. Both our strengths and our weaknesses are part of our own minds, and can be used for practice if we wish. It may be liberating to think of one’s potential as just that, to be used for whatever we decide to use it, rather than as a dark force that we are unable to resist. Energy can be redirected, once we see more clearly what is driving us and what we wish to achieve. Here again the notion of **safe** direction is beneficial.

Do not be mean in giving anything – not just to others, but also to yourself. Be generous, but not necessarily indulgent, with your own needs and requirements. Give yourself some time every day to just be, to replenish your energies and your sense of wellbeing, so that you will be more able to be generous with what you have to give to others. Give yourself permission to make mistakes, recognize them and make amends. Give yourself the benefit of the doubt, just as you would others, and trust your heart.

Do not hold on to anger, especially anger with yourself. If we cannot love ourselves, how can we ever really love another? It is one thing to be thoroughly annoyed and fed up with something we have been doing and that can be used as a powerful incentive to change, but that is not the same as being angry with ourselves and darkening our view. Purified anger will give a brightness and energy to our thinking and actions, and shine light on what we need to do differently.

Do not defame the Three Treasures. Says the Kyojukaimon: “To do something by ourselves, without copying others, is to become an example to the world and the merit of doing such a thing becomes the source of all wisdom.” To be ourselves and act in accord with our innermost heart of meditation as best we can is a great act of kindness to ourselves, and to all beings.