

Buddhist Publication Society Newsletter

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Taking the Precepts

by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana

You should not be afraid to make the commitment to keep the precepts. You should be happy that you have determined to take steps to make you life happy.

You take precepts to make your lives happy, not miserable. People have unhappy lives because they are not observing any discipline, they are not following the normal guidelines or principles for a happy life. Sooner or later they need to realize the importance of the precepts.

Taking the precepts is a reminder, a way of helping you to be mindful. When you begin an action that violates one of the precepts, your mind will say, "Stop! Remember?" and you will say, "Ah! I have vowed not to . . ." The precept operates like the light touch of a whip that reminds the horse to stay on course, like the beep of a horn to remind a driver to stay in his lane.

Observing the precepts will also improve your meditation. When the mind is clear, your conscience is not pricked. When there is no reason for remorse, your concentration will be better.

Some people say, "What good would this be to us? We do not like following these external rules. Life is all right the way it is." But their lives are not all right. If they were, they would not need to engage in lying, stealing, gossiping, or speaking harshly. Instead of spending their energy breaking the precepts, they would be better off using it in wholesome activities.

If people habitually break the precepts, they will have great difficulty when trying to stop. They are addicted. They constantly get themselves in trouble. Not just through stealing or sexual misconduct, but also by lying, participating in gossip, speaking harshly.

Here are some words of the Buddha that remind us of the importance of right speech:

Every fool who is born
Has an axe within his mouth
With which he cuts himself
When he uses wrong speech. — Sn 657

One should utter only words
Which do no harm to oneself
And cause no harm for others
That is truly beautiful speech. — Sn 451

Speak kind words, words
Rejoiced at and welcomed
Words that bear ill-will to none;
Always speak kindly to others. — Sn 452

The worse of the two is he
Who, when abused retaliates.
One who does not retaliate
Wins a battle hard to win. — SI162

The fool thinks he has won a battle
When he bullies with harsh speech
But knowing how to be forbearing
Alone makes one victorious. — SI163

People addicted to alcohol or drugs or gambling or some other unwholesome activity have a very hard time deciding to stop. They drag their feet and come up with many excuses. But once they have made the commitment to stop and have maintained that commitment for a period of time, suddenly they find they are thinking clearly, eating well, saving money, and developing good relations with their families and other people. Then they are grateful and congratulate themselves for taking this step.

Giving up an addiction is very difficult; a person may make many attempts that fall short of the goal. But if his aspiration remains strong, eventually he will succeed. In the same way, you may have difficulty making the commitment to abandon unwholesome behavior, but once you make the commitment and work at it consistently, you too will be very happy and glad to have made a decision that brings such an improvement to your lives.

Henry van Zeyst

A website has been set up that features the works of Henry van Zeyst, a Dutchman who came to Sri Lanka in the 1930s to practise and teach Buddhism: <http://henri-van-zeyst.buddhasasana.net>.

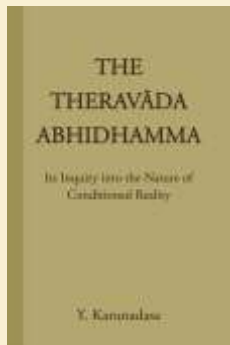
Fake Buddha Quotes

Many sayings misattributed to the Buddha such as “Rule your mind or it will rule you” (which is based on a saying by Horace) circulate in social media, etc. This website exposes them: <http://fakebuddhaquotes.com>.

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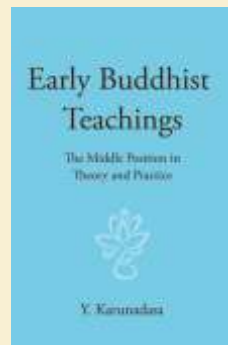
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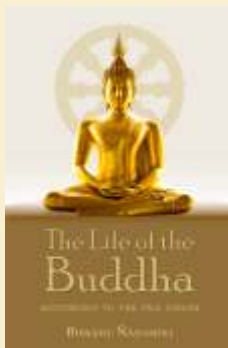
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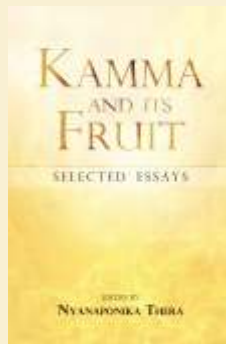


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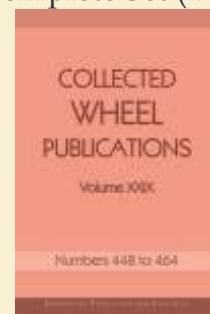


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