

Bodhicari Precepts

Bodhicaris can be defined as “practitioners of the *Buddha Dhamma* who have attainment of enlightenment as their goal”. In Pali, the feminine form is *Bodhicarini*.

The *Bodhicari* Precepts are an expansion of *Ajivatthamaka Sila* (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth) and *Panca Sila* (The Five Precepts).

The Bodhicari Precepts

1) *Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept to refrain from killing and injuring living things

2) *Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept to refrain from taking that which is not given

3) *Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept to refrain from sexual misconduct and excessive sensuality

4) *Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept to refrain from false and harmful speech

5) *Pisuna vaca veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept to refrain from backbiting

6) *Pharusa vaca veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept to refrain from using harsh or abusive speech

7) *Samphappalapa veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept to refrain from useless or meaningless conversation

8) *Sura – meraya – majja pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept to refrain from drink and drugs which fuddle the mind and reduce mindfulness

9) *Micchajiva veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept to refrain from wrong means of livelihood

10) *Sabba sattesu metta sahagatena cetasa viharana sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept to live every moment with loving-kindness to all living beings

11) *Yavajivam aham ratanattayam na niggahissami tatheva tam samadarena garukaram karissamiti sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept not to revile the Three Treasures [the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha] but to cherish and uphold them

12) *Karunopaya kosalla pariggahitanam dasaparaminam paripurana sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the Precept to practise the Ten Perfections with compassion and skill

Imani dvadasa sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake these twelve Precepts with full sincerity

Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara Los Angeles USA

Under the leadership of the late Venerable Havnapola Ratnasara Maha Thera and Venerable Walpola Piyananda Maha Thera the Dhama Vijaya Buddhist Vihara were pioneers in the development the use of Precepts for *Upasakas* and *Upasikas* in the West. Their *Dhammacari* and *Bodhicari* Precepts are an expansion of the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth).

“In time it occurred to Bhante [Venerable Walpola Piyananda] that the best way to establish Buddhism here [the USA] with native teachers was to develop a new system to supplement, not replace, the traditional system... In consultation with Ven Dr. [Havnapola] Ratanasara and Ven. Lenagala Sumedha Ananda Maha Nayaka and the support of

Ven. Madewala Punnaji Ven. Piyananda and Ven. [Pannile] Ananda were able to develop a three-step system of ordination. First, anyone who takes five precepts and is initiated into Buddhism is called an *Upasaka* [*Upasika*]. He or she is expected to follow a specific study program and practice meditation. After practising for two years and showing development, he or she can advance to the level of *Dhammacari*. The *Dhammacari* follows 9 precepts, and follows a more advance syllabus of study. He or she is qualified to teach Sunday school and start meditation classes, but is not considered a fully ordained minister. The *Dhammacari* is basically a lay religious teacher. Finally, after a few more years of study and practice, those so inclined can apply for the level of *Bodhicari* who follows 12 precepts. He or she is a fully ordained lay minister, on the level of, say, a Japanese Jodo Shinshu or a Methodist minister. He or she can perform many religious ceremonies and activities, yet remains a lay person. Dharma Vijaya also has a *Brahmacari* initiation for those so inclined."

(Dharma Vijaya Magazine, Triannual Publication of Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara, Los Angeles, "Dharma Vijaya: Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara Silver Jubilee 1980-2005: Golden Jubilee of Ordination of Bhante Walpola Piyananda 1955-2005", Anniversary Issue, (October, 2005). (Available online at www.dharmavijaya.org)

"Experimentation with Intermediate Religious Statures

Traditional Theravada Buddhism stresses the distinction between lay and monastic lifestyles. Even so, the tradition offers specific opportunities for lay Buddhists to approximate the renunciatory monastic ideal on a limited basis. Lay devotees may take the Eight Precepts (*attanga sila*) during *uposatha* (sacred) days, wearing white and living in a disciplined and reflective manner at the temple... Various Buddhist groups in the West have implemented novel hierarchies of graduated religious statures for their members... For more than a decade Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara of Los Angeles has experimented with such categories. In part to provide initiation ceremonies for American converts to Buddhism, but more importantly in an

effort to train an indigenous American leadership in lieu of cultivating a native *bhikkhu-sangha*. "Buddhism can hardly occupy a firm place in the mainstream of American society if it constantly has to be replenished with foreign born clergy who themselves may not be integrated into our society," asserts Dharma Vijaya's pamphlet describing its most recent hierarchy of lay statuses. Taken as a whole, Dharma Vijaya's five categories represent intermediate religious statuses between the ordinary layperson and the *bhikkhu* which creates something of a para- or quasi-monastic order ...At the first level, *Upasaka*, a person makes "a commitment to approach life from a Buddhist point of view." The *Upasaka* receives an ivory-coloured sash at an initiation ceremony, promising to live by the Five Precepts and to recite some basic Buddhist verses twice daily. The special nature of the at least one year of study and practice, at least eighteen years of age (or parental and temple monks' approval) - set this apart from the traditional status of Buddhist lay devotee (*upasaka/upasika*). A *Dhammacari*, the next status, must be an *Upasaka* of at least two years' practice and deemed "suitable" by the monks of the temple. "A *Dhammacari* is a committed practising Buddhist, at least 18 years of age, who has the knowledge and experience to teach Dhamma School, give Dhamma talks, conduct meditation classes, and even organize Buddhist groups." The candidate receives a light yellow sash at an initiation ceremony, pledging to adhere to nine precepts in life - the standard Five Precepts plus abstention from "tale-bearing," "harsh speech," "idle chatter," and "wrong livelihood" - and to practice a twice-daily recitation ritual. Dharma Vijaya considers the third status in its hierarchy to be on the same level as the *Dhammacari*, though it reflects one difference in lifestyle." The *Anagarika* is a *Dhammacari*, who substitutes the more stringent precept of abstention from all sexual relations (*abrahmacariya*) for the usual precept of abstention from simple sexual misconduct (*kamesu micchacara*)." (Paul David Numrich "Theravada Buddhism in America: Prospects for the Sangha" Chapter 8 of Charles S Prebish and Kenneth, K. Tanaka, *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, 1998, page 158-159)

Numrich further comments: "With the institution of the..."

Bodhicari, Dharma Vijaya has sought to fill the “gap” in the Western transmission of Theravada Buddhism created by the dearth of monks. “A *Bodhicari* is a Buddhist lay minister, neither a lay person nor ordained Sangha,” whose responsibilities and authorities... include... the possibility of conducting certain religious services [when monks are unavailable], holding chaplainships, conducting weddings and funerals, [and] initiating *Upasaka*.” ... Nomination requirements include a minimum of four years of college and three years of training with a monk... the *Bodhicari* follows twelve precepts, the twelfth being the most important in emphasizing the selfless service exemplified by the Buddha in his previous lives as *bodhisattva* or Buddha-to-be: “I undertake the Precept to practise the Ten Perfections with compassion and skill”. The *Bodhicari* also holds to a detailed daily ritual regimen. The final special status granted by Dharma Vijaya is *Brahmacari*, a *Bodhicari* who abstains from all sexual relations (*abramacariya*)... The temple has ordained a total of four *Bodhicaris* including the former *samaneri* Reverend Dhamamitta [a Thai woman]” (Paul David Numrich “Theravada Buddhism in America: Prospects for the Sangha” Chapter 8 of Charles S Prebish and Kenneth, K. Tanaka, *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, 1998, page 159-160)

Paul David Numrich reports that an American laywoman received the *Panca Sila* (Five Precepts) from Venerable Ananda Maitreya in 1986 at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara Los Angeles. She was one of the first two people to take the *Bodhicari* Precepts and received the Buddhist name Vajira at the same Vihara in 1991. *NIBWA Newsletter on International Buddhist Womens Affairs* (Number 34) explained that Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya was in Sri Lanka at this time, and gave his approval from there. She has since joined the Buddhist Sangha Council of Southern California (under the title of “Reverend”), and she serves as the Buddhist Chaplain at UCLA. (Paul David Numrich, *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples*, 1996, page 114)

Professor Paul Numrich attended the Wesak ceremony in

1991 when the first *Bodhicaris* took these *Bodhicari* Precepts. Three *Upasakas* also took five Precepts and two *Dhammacaris* took Nine Precepts. The Nine *Dhammacari* Precepts are an amalgamation of the *Panca Sila* (The Five Precepts) and the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth). Numrich explains:

“The twelve *Bodhicari* Precepts include ... two borrowed Pali phrases and one Precept composed by Venerable Piyananda himself. The borrowed Pali, with translation and sources according to Venerable Piyananda, are (1) *Sabba sattesu metta sahagatena cetasa viharana sikkhapadam samadiyami* ‘I undertake the Precept to live every moment with loving-kindness to all living beings’ (from *Nava Uposatha Sila* [the Nine *Uposatha Sila* with loving-kindness as the Ninth]); and (2) *Karunopaya kosalla pariggahitanam dasaparaminam paripurana sikkhapadam samadiyami*, ‘I undertake the Precept to practise the Ten Perfections with compassion and skill’ (from Buddhagosa’s commentary on the *Jataka*). Venerable Piyananda’s original Precept was; *Yavajivam aham ratanattayam na niggahissami tatheva tam samadarena garukaram karissamiti sikkhapadam samadiyami*, I undertake the Precept not to revile the Three Treasures [the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha] but to cherish and uphold them’.”

(Paul David Numrich, *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples*, 1996, page 130)

By 2005 *Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara* reported that there are eleven *Bodhicaris* at Dharma Vijaya over half of whom were women.

The Asian Tribune: A Newspaper Published by World Institute for Asian Studies reported on the 2009 Wesak celebrations at Dharma Vijaya. It explained “We must mention that the highlight of the Vesak program was the acceptance of Buddhism by eight candidates who had studied the doctrine under the guidance of the venerable monks. They were recognized in three categories; 1 *Upasaka/Upasika* 2. *Dhammacari* 3. *Bodhicari*. This initiation ceremony which originated at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist

Vihara is an ongoing program where the recipients are expected to adhere to a certain code of ethics and also disseminate the Dhamma by being examples of the Buddha's teachings."

"Wesak Celebrations at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara", *The Asian Tribune: A Newspaper Published by World Institute for Asian Studies* (Volume 9, No 184, 16th May 2009)

(available online at www.asiantribune.com/)

Sakyadhita (International Association of Buddhist Women) demonstrated interest in the Bodhicari Precepts. *Bodhicari Vajira* described The *Bodhicari* Precepts in Volume 4 (1) (Summer, 1993) issue of *Sakyadhita Newsletter* as follows: "Just two years ago, on Vesak in 1991, a new ministerial ordination was developed by Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles... the ministerial ordination of "*Bodhicari*"... as a paradigm to be used by other temple congregations in America and abroad. So far monks, nuns, laypeople, and scholars around the world have expressed great interest in this new ordination. The general response has been overwhelmingly positive." The paper issue of the *Sakyadhita Newsletter* included a beautiful illustrated version of the Bodhicari Precepts. (*Sakyadhita Newsletter* is available online at www.sakyadhita.org click on *Newsletters*)

Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya
Mahanayaka Thera Aggamaha Pandita
Abhidhaja Maharatthaguru DLitt DLitt
(24th August 1896 -18th July 1998)

Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya Mahanayaka Thera Aggamaha Pandita Abhidhaja Maharatthaguru DLitt DLitt (24th August 1896 -18th July 1998) is the person who did the most to support and encourage these developments. He took part in the BBC TV series *The Long Search*, and regularly visited the West.

He wrote "The perfect moral conduct or character can be categorised under the Eight Precepts called *Ajivatthamaka*

Sila. These are refraining from eight unwholesome ways, namely, killing, taking what is not given; a life devoted to sensuality; falsehood, slandering, backbiting, harsh speech, gossip; and wrong livelihood. All the good conduct and keeping Precepts or *Patimokkha* rules of Buddhist monks are included in these eight Precepts." (*Nine Special Qualities of the Buddha & Other Essays*. Venerable Dr. Balangoda Ananda Maitreya Mahanayaka Thera. London: World Buddhist Foundation, 1995, page 16)

Paul David Numrich reports that an American laywoman received the Panca Sila (Five Precepts) from Venerable Ananda Maitreya in 1986 at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara Los Angeles. She was one of the first two people to take the *Bodhicari* Precepts and received the Buddhist name Vajira at the same Vihara in 1991. *NIBWA Newsletter on International Buddhist Womens Affairs* (Number 34) explained that Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya was in Sri Lanka at this time, and gave his approval from there. She has since joined the Buddhist Sangha Council of Southern California (under the title of "Reverend"), and she serves as the Buddhist Chaplain at UCLA. (Paul David Numrich, *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples*, 1996, page 114)

Venerable Narada Maha Thera gave Jacquetta Gomes the Buddhist name Jayasili when she became an *Upasika* by taking *Panca Sila* (Five Precepts) in Sri Lanka on 31st July 1975. Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya was the Preceptor when she took the *Bodhicari* Precepts at the London Buddhist Vihara on 3rd August 1994). This was reported in "Newsround", *The Middle Way: Journal of The Buddhist Society*, 69(3) (November, 1994). Venerable Pidiville Piyatissa (born in Sri Lanka) head of Ketumati Buddhist Vihara Oldham led a retreat for BGKT Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada) at Kendal Fire Station community room over the weekend of 24th and 25th September 2011. As far as we are aware this the first retreat led by a Buddhist Monk to take place in a Fire Station in the UK. Fire Officer Graham asked *Bodhicarini*

Upasika Jayasili from BGKT to represent minority faiths at the Kendal Neighbourhood Forum meeting at Kendal Town Hall on 26th September 2007 where the Community Room was announced.

Venerable Piyatissa presented *Bodhicarini Upasika* Jayasili with a *Bodhicari* sash which is the same as the sashes worn by Bodhicaris in the USA. She took the *Bodhicari* Precepts with Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya Mahanayaka Thera Abhidhaja Maharatthaguru Aggamaha Pandita DLitt DLitt (1896-1998) as Preceptor, in 1994 at the London Buddhist Vihara. She was the first person to take these Precepts outside the USA. As far as we are aware this is the first time such a presentation has taken place outside the USA. Her elderly Father worked for the London Fire Brigade and is delighted that this took place in a Fire Station.

Further information is available on the Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada) website
www.communicate.co.uk/lakes/buddhistgroupofkendal/

Further information and photos are available on the Facebook pages:
Buddhism UK (NBO Network of Buddhist Organisations)
Dharma Vijaya Vihara

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Websites

The Buddhist Chaplaincy Support Group Kalyana Mitra
www.buddhistchaplains.com

BGKT Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada)
www.communicate.co.uk/lakes/buddhistgroupofkendal/

Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara, Los Angeles
www.dharmavijaya.org

Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women
www.sakyadhita.org

Articles

"Buddhist Precepts and Lay Dhamma Teaching in the West",
Jacquetta Gomes, *Yasodhara Newsletter on International
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25(1) No 97, 15-17. (ISSN 0875-1996)

"Buddhist Precepts and Lay Dhamma Teaching in the West",
Jacquetta Gomes, *Lotus: the Lay Review and Newsletter of
the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara*, Issue 31 (Spring, 2010) 4-
6. (available online at
www.bbvt.org.uk/lotus_arch/lotus_31.pdf)

"The development and use of the Eight Precepts for lay
practitioners, *Upasakas* and *Upasikas* in Theravada
Buddhism in the West", Jacquetta Gomes, *Contemporary
Buddhism*, Volume 5(1) (May, 2004) 47-63 (ISSN 1463-
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mentioned this article in their *MLBD Newsletter: A Monthly
Indological Bibliography*, XXVII (6) (June, 2005) 14.)

"A Female Ordained Lay Buddhist Minister", *NIBWA
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Affairs)*, 33 (October-December, 1992), 11-12.

"Investigating the Integration of Buddhism into Western
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(Volume 11 No 618, 4th November 2012)
(Available online at www.asiantribune.com/)

"Letter from our Reader", *NIBWA Newsletter (Newsletter on
International Buddhist Womens Affairs)*, 34 (January-March,
1993), 19-20.

"Newsround", *The Middle Way: Journal of The Buddhist Society*, 69 (3) (November, 1994), pages 207-208.

"The Value of Precepts", *Bodhicari Vajira, Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women Newsletter*, Volume 4 (1) (Summer, 1993), pages 11-12.
(available on-line at www.sakyadhita.org click on newsletters)

"Wesak Celebrations at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara", *Asian Tribune: A Newspaper Published by World Institute for Asian Studies* (Volume 9, No 184, 16th May 2009)
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Buddhist Ministry in the West, (Dharma Vijaya: Triannual Publication of Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara, Los Angeles) (Kathina Issue, October, 1994), Volume 6 (1).

Books

Balangoda Ananda Maitreya, Venerable, and Jayasili (Jacquetta Gomes), *Introducing Buddhism* (Taipei, Taiwan, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2007) (Book code EN074) (www.budaedu.org) (This includes the booklet: *Requirements and Ceremonies for the Five Precepts (Panca Sila), The Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth (Ajivatthamaka Sila), Dhamma Teachers Certificate*, issued by the Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada) and Ketumati Buddhist Vihara at Wesak 2006)

Balangoda Ananda Maitreya Mahanayaka Thera, Venerable, *Nine Special Qualities of the Buddha & Other Essays*.

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Numrich, Paul David. *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples*. (Knoxville Tennessee, The University of Tennessee Press, 1996) (0-87049-905-X)

Prebish, Charles S and Tanaka Kenneth, K. *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998) (0-520-20460-3)