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The Middle Way: Journal of The Buddhist Society Letters to the Editor

A letter from Jacquetta Gomes (Bodhicarini Upasika Jayasili), Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada), in response to Roger Farrington, 'Should Buddhists be Teetotallers?', *The Middle Way: Journal of The Buddhist Society*, 85 (3) November 2010, pp.167–70.

Dear Editor

In Theravada Buddhism there are two versions of the Eight Precepts: the *Atthangika Uposatha Sila* (Eight *Uposatha* Precepts) and the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth). The latter clarify the alcohol issue and explain how alcohol is included in the DKP (*Dasa Kusala Kamma-patha*) Ten Wholesome Courses of Action.

Ajivatthamaka Sila (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth)

1) *Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from killing living beings;

2) *Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking what is not given;

3) *Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from sexual misconduct;

4) *Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from false speech;

5) *Pisuna vaca veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from backbiting;

6) *Pharusa vaca veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from using harsh or abusive speech;

7) *Samphappalapa veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from useless or meaningless conversation;

8) *Micchajiva veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from wrong means of livelihood.

The *Ajivatthamaka Sila* Precepts correspond to the Ten Wholesome Courses of Action (*Dasa Kusala Kamma-patha*) mentioned in Mr Farrington's article. These precepts also correspond to the morality group of the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya Atthangika Magga*).

(I have discussed this topic at length in my article "The development and use of the Eight Precepts for lay practitioners, Upasakas and Upasikas in Theravada Buddhism in the West".

The *Ajivatthamaka Sila* are well known in Burma and Sri Lanka. In recent years the Sri Lankan Theravada Sangha in the West has offered the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* precepts for committed Western lay practitioners. Some Westerners expressed a wish to undertake these as a lifetime commitment at an official ceremony conducted by a senior monk.

Venerable Henepola Gunaratana Maha Thera, who is based at the Bhavana Society, West Virginia, USA, offers the Eight Lifetime Precepts (an expansion of the *Ajivatthamaka Sila*). The first seven

precepts are the same, but the eighth precept is an amalgamation of the eighth precept of the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* and the fifth precept of *Panca Sila* (the Five Precepts): I undertake the training rule [precept] to abstain from wrong livelihood; and drinks and drugs that cause heedlessness.

The Bhavana Society website (<http://www.bhavanasociety.org/>) explains that 'The lifetime precepts . . . include the right speech precepts found in the Eightfold Path and right livelihood . . . In traditional Buddhist countries, abstaining from intoxicants is assumed to be included in the precept on right livelihood. For clarification, we spell it out.'

Venerable Dr Balangoda Ananda Maitreya Mahanayaka Thera Aggamaha Pandita Abhidhaja Maharatthaguru DLitt DLitt (1896–1998) explained that the fifth precept of the *Panca Sila* is included in the *Ajivatthamaka*. His view is that the third precept *Kamesu Micchacara* . . . in the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* includes *Rasa Kamesu micchacara*, the wrong way of enjoying taste'.

In the 1980s, the late Venerable Medagama Vajiragnana Maha Thera, Head of the London Buddhist Vihara and Chief Sangha Nayaka of the UK (1928–2006), taught in a Dhamma class at the London Buddhist Vihara (in which my husband was a student) that only four precepts were given by the Buddha to his lay disciples during the early years of his 45-year ministry and that for the first 20 years there were no rules at all for the monks. It is recorded in the *Sutta Pitaka* that the Buddha explained this discrepancy to Sariputta, his chief disciple, by saying: 'Even the least among my monks, Sariputta, is a stream winner (*sotapanna*).' The Buddha goes on to say that the time will come when rules for monks would become necessary. This prophetic statement came true: as unsuitable people entered the Sangha, their misbehaviour necessitated the Buddha adding rule after rule; and when he passed away, the grand total was 227 rules. Venerable Vajiragnana mentioned that it was a misdemeanour by a monk that necessitated the Buddha adding the no-alcohol rule for monks and that he made this rule universal, including it in today's *Panca Sila*.

Ajahn Amaro, the abbot of Amaravati Monastery, has not heard Venerable Vajiragnana's story. He emphasizes that in some prominent places in the *suttas* only the first four precepts are mentioned, whereas all five precepts are described together in

other *suttas*. Ajahn Amaro points out that the first four precepts are *pakati-sila* whereas the fifth precept is *pannati-sila*. Venerable Nyanatiloka explains in his *Buddhist Dictionary* that *pakati-sila* [is] natural or genuine morality, [which] is distinct from those outward rules of conduct laid down for either laymen or monks. Those latter are the so-called prescribed morality (*pannatti-sila*).

Bhikkhu Bodhi too does not know the source of Venerable Vajiragnana's explanation. He says it may be found in an obscure commentary or from a source in the Singhalese tradition. The prohibition against the use of alcoholic beverages by monks in is *pacittiya* 51 in the *Vinaya Pitaka* (*The Book of the Discipline*, Vol. 2 pp. 382–6).

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See the webpages on the BGKT Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada) website

<http://buddhistgroupofkendal.co.uk/>

Ajivatthamaka Sila (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth) Bibliography

<http://buddhistgroupofkendal.co.uk/ajivatthamka-sila-eight-precepts-with-right-livelihood-as-the-eighth-bibliography/>

Buddhist Precepts Bibliography

<http://buddhistgroupofkendal.co.uk/buddhist-precepts-bibliography/>