**PART II**

ETHICAL CONDUCT IN SANGHA LIFE and

THE BODHISATTVA PRECEPTS

*“The precepts have been developing over the past 2,500 years, since Shakyamuni Buddha’s time, as guidelines to help people who are practicing together to live in harmony.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

*"It would be comfortable to think that ethical conduct can be clearly codified, that it is founded on certainties, and to do good is simply to conform to these certainties. Unfortunately this isn't so. Life is full of grey areas and we are full of unexamined motivations and self deceptions. We are much better off when we admit this and are willing to look at our conduct honestly, with as much awareness as possible of our real motivations and the consequences of our actions.*

*Fixed moral codes are always theoretical. They are vastly subject to interpretation, since no ethical norm can take into account all of life's subtlety and complexity. Instead of focusing on such norms, we need to pay more attention to what we feel, what others feel, and what actually happens."*  From Norman Fisher "Taking Our Places"

The following ten Zen precepts, often known as the Prohibitory Precepts, relate well to the everyday world in which conflict is ubiquitous. Studying these precepts, while keeping the above caveats about fixed moral codes in mind, may be helpful in discovering and working through an ethical dilemma that may be at the root of the conflict.

The bold printing below is used for the precept itself as it's often expressed. The bracketed comments following each precept are meant to encourage further reflection especially relating to conflict.

1. **Not Killing**: (In the context of sangha life, to follow the precept of not killing is to generally look deeper than the killing of another person or animal being. How can hope be killed? Self worth? Could this contribute to conflict in the sangha?)
2. **Not Stealing**: (Stealing physical and “intellectual” property is considered a crime. Beyond property, what else could be stolen? What would be the effect on the person who was stolen from? What would be the effect on the “thief”? Could conflict be a result?)
3. **Not Misusing Sex**: (Sexual energy is powerful and wonderful but can also be very upsetting. “Being honest about our own sexual vulnerabilities, we know that others must have their sexual vulnerabilities too.”[[2]](#footnote-2) How could the misuse of sex upset the wellbeing of others?)
4. **Not Lying**: (Is it possible that two people speaking truthfully can have different, even conflicting views of the same event? Is one necessarily less truthful than the other? What is the truth?)
5. **Not Giving Or Taking Drugs**: (“Intoxication is an act of avoidance - refusing to face what is, by covering it over with something else we hope will be more pleasant”[[3]](#footnote-3) How could intoxication contribute to conflict in the sangha?)
6. **Not Discussing Faults Of Others**: (Gossip is generally understood to be harmful. How is it also harmful to the one who gossips, to those who hear it, and to the person or persons who are subject of the gossip? How can a manager, a parent, a chairperson etc do their job without discussing faults of others? “There is always a way to speak that communicates what needs to be said without diminishing the mind that sees the potential for good in others. Making the effort to speak like this is one of the best ways to transform our lives”[[4]](#footnote-4))
7. **Not Praising Yourself While Abusing Others**: (Is praising yourself while abusing others an act of defense? What would be defended? What effect could it have on sangha life? “To practice not praising self at the expense of others slowly extends the world in which we live, making it more and more inclusive and less and less in need of defending”[[5]](#footnote-5))
8. **Not Sparing The Dharma Assets**: (Norman Fischer refers to this precept as “Not to Be Possessive of Anything, but to Be Generous”. What are dharma assets? What role could “not sparing the dharma assets” play in a conflict situation?)
9. **Not Indulging In Anger**: (This precept has also been called not harbouring ill will. Harbouring is a sustained action. Over time could the ill will become detached from it’s original cause and transferred to other more or less similar causes that happen to be available? Could the original cause even be forgotten? Could harbouring ill will become a habit? An indulgence? How could it affect sangha life? Roshi Pat Enkyo O’Hara says: “Transforming suffering into wisdom. This is the precept of not being angry.”)
10. **Not Defaming The Three Treasures**: (“They are, of course, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha: enlightenment, the truth, and harmony. Not defaming them is the path of understanding them fully, keeping them clear in our minds, and presenting them in our lives.”[[6]](#footnote-6) How could this understanding be used to resolve conflict in sangha life?)
1. From “Taking the Precepts, Sewing Buddha's Robe” by Taitaku Pat Phelan [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. From “Taking Our Places” by Norman Fischer. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. From “The Mind Of Clover” by Robert Aitken [↑](#footnote-ref-6)