Sīla/Precepts Update

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 51:21

I just wanted to speak a little bit tonight about the practice of sīla, or conscious conduct, which we always mention briefly at the beginning of a retreat. We run down the five precepts or the eight precepts, and I think for myself, over the years of my commitment to practice, I've been finding that working with awareness of my speech and actions is such a deep and profound aspect of practice, such a rich path of understanding. I would like to talk about it because I have found it very inspirational and also very subtle and quite difficult in many ways. And I think it's very important.

Joseph mentioned last night that our meditation practice can come from the foundation of loving-kindness—that it really can be a practice rooted in joy. Not every moment joy, but really rooted in loving-kindness and joy. This is how I relate to ethical conduct, or sīla, often translated as morality. It's a practice rooted in loving-kindness, in our understanding of the oneness of all beings. It's both an expression of that understanding, and in our continued mindful attention to our speech and actions, it serves to deepen that understanding.

We often speak about sīla as being the foundation for the more formal meditation practice. Really, I feel it's much more than that. It both opens the gateway to liberating understanding in itself, as well as being the expression of our understanding.

As most of you probably know, the Buddha spoke of his Eightfold Path—eight areas of our life that are an expression of an awakened life. These are divided into three areas: wisdom, wise action, and the so-called samādhi group, which deals with meditative aspects of mind.

Much of what I say tonight I'm speaking quite personally from my own experience of meditation retreats and working with sīla. I'm not claiming to speak for the Theravāda tradition per se—I'm just speaking from my own experience.

I've always acknowledged that sīla is important, but for me, often in the past, there was this feeling of, "Yes, sīla is important. It's an aspect of the Eightfold Path. So we'll take the five precepts or we'll take the eight precepts. Of course it's important not to harm, but let's then just get onto the real business of doing the meditation. That's where the understanding is going to come from. That's what's really important." And we just put up with sīla as a necessary—and of course important—byproduct.

I feel that attitude does us such a disservice because in a way it shuts out such a rich area of life. It's all of life really: our speech and our actions, our intentions. When we somehow think that it's just rules to follow, when we don't have the same care, the same interest, the same willingness to learn from paying

attention to our speech and actions, we somehow think that freedom isn't really going to come from paying attention to this—it's going to come from getting certain states of mind in meditation. This is a bit of a gross dichotomy I'm creating, but it's a way to explain a feeling I've had over time of somehow not giving ethical conduct the profound importance it can have in our understanding.

When I relate to sīla, when I relate to paying attention to conduct as just as viable a path, an opening to freedom as formal meditation, it opens up an area of such beauty in all of life, in all of action. It makes appreciation of whatever's happening in this moment so much more possible and so much deeper.

Sometimes I think that for me, some of this sense of separation came about because when we first brought this style of meditation to this country from Asia, it was taken out of context. The way we do ten-day or three-month meditation retreats is separated from the rest of our life and from the context of the society we're living in. Whereas in Thailand, for example, where I was a nun for a year, the meditation is very much rooted in the context of people's lives. Sīla, samādhi, and wisdom—paññā—are really integrated in people's understanding. People come to the monasteries daily or weekly to take the five precepts and they go home again. They might come once a month or so and take eight precepts and spend the night, do meditation for a night, or stay for some days and do meditation, and then return again to their life. There's not such a sense of dichotomy, such a sense of separation. Even when doing the formal meditation and returning to daily life, there's a real appreciation of sīla as being the groundwork from which the meditation is coming.

Of course we have a strong sense of ethical conduct in our society, but it's not so seamlessly woven together with the meditation. It's been easy—especially when I first started practicing—to just go and do a retreat, have good moral conduct at the time of the retreat, but somehow not quite get it that it was also just as important how I acted and how I paid attention to my mind outside of the retreat. The culture I went back to had no understanding of what I was doing, and so there wasn't a sense of support for that. I had to kind of do it on my own.

Over the years, I've been appreciating more and more—I think it happens quite naturally—the profound depth of understanding that can come from this practice of sīla. And how interwoven paying attention to our speech, our actions, our intentions of mind is with the growing of understanding, with the development of the qualities of mind: energy, concentration, and mindfulness. They all come together.

What I find interesting when I think about the way the Buddha laid out the Eightfold Path is that wise action is not the first step.

The Eightfold Path begins with wise understanding. The second step is wise thought or intention, and it is then that it moves into wise action. What I hear in this is that our understanding is what informs how we think, our intentions of mind, and that is what our actions arise from.

From this we can see that working with sila, with conscious conduct, is not a matter of blindly following

some set of rules. Rather, as we begin to awaken to the nature of reality, to the nature of our own existence—even just a little, the first initial recognition perhaps of impermanence, the sense of non-separation or connectedness—whatever a beginning of understanding is, this then is what can give rise to the beginnings of our caring about our conduct. To the beginnings of caring about how we act and move in the world. To paying attention and seeing that how we act, how we speak, affects everyone else we come into contact with. We begin to see that our actions are the natural effect of our understanding, and so the whole path is really very intertwined.

A simple example: we begin to notice the nature of cause and effect, that if I act in a certain way it has this effect. If I tend to lie, if I tend not to be truthful, I begin to notice that people don't trust me. It's quite natural. And then that doesn't feel very good to me—I want to be trusted. This is obvious, but it is a result of understanding cause and effect. Actually, when we begin to understand cause and effect, that's the beginning of seeing anatta, a sense of no-self. Because when we're seeing that this cause brings this effect, this effect makes me feel like this, we're seeing that we're not separate autonomous beings. There's a cause and an effect and another cause and another effect, and there's no way to be separate. We are all one.

That understanding then gives rise to the caring and the interest to continue paying attention to our actions and speech. Perhaps then I try to be more truthful. And being more truthful tends to lead to more harmony, both outwardly and inwardly, which allows for more space to really pay attention to the fact that there is a connection between all of us. The sense of understanding oneness and the sense of harmony grows deeper through the behavior. It's like a cycle that keeps spiraling deeper and deeper.

I know for me in the beginning, I did try to follow the precepts, but it was more out of a sense of, well, I guess it sounds good. Obviously, intellectually, I don't want to harm people. I'd like to be a good person. It was basically good motivation, but more a sense of should. What's been happening more and more is that it moves, in my experience, from being a sense of should—my relationship to actions and speech feels more like a movement of my heart. The actions become an expression of a greater harmony that I feel inwardly, and I also get more immediate feedback from myself when I'm not acting in harmony.

I don't like to really use the phrase "break a precept," because that sounds so much like this is a rule and you broke it and you're bad and you're guilty. This really is not about guilt. None of this is about guilt or judgment. It's about being interested and being able to pay attention in order to learn, in order to grow—not to make ourselves bad, simply to see what happens.

I've been finding that as my relationship to working with conscious conduct comes more from my heart, more from a willingness to learn, when I blow it, so to speak, the feedback is so much more immediate, and in that way it actually serves again to deepen my understanding. A small example, but a common one: if I'm not paying much attention and I say something abrasive, something cutting or harsh—and that can happen quite easily—usually now, as soon as it's out of my mouth, I don't have to wait for some kind of feedback from the other person. I viscerally feel a sense of separation, a sense of contraction in the heart

or the mind. Right away that action has contributed, in that moment, to a greater sense of separation.

But because there's this willingness just to pay attention, rather than having that sense of separation turn into an even greater sense of separation through blaming and judging—"Oh, what a horrible person I am"—or having to justify myself, just noticing that, being willing to bring this non-judging, mindful attitude to what happens, the fact that we're really not separate, the fact that how I act affects others, that I can't separate my pain from another's pain, becomes more clear. It becomes more of a visceral experience.

As soon as I've said something harsh, I actually suffer myself, even before that other person says, "Wow, that really hurt. Why did you say that?" Sometimes they'll say that to me, and sometimes they won't. But what becomes clear is that action coming from harming, from harsh speech, has brought in that moment a pain that can't be separated, whether it's me or the other person. And so even by blowing it, it can be an occasion to again experience the oneness of all of us.

Actually, Sayadaw U Pandita, when he speaks about working with the precepts, I've often heard him say that acting from the precepts is acting from our understanding—it's an expression of the oneness of all beings. So it's really a very powerful practice.

The Buddha said, and I like this a lot, that by protecting others through our care with non-harming actions, we protect ourselves—protect ourselves from suffering and pain. And similarly, by protecting ourselves, by being careful with our actions so that we don't suffer the unpleasant consequences, we're simultaneously protecting others. Again, no difference.

What really helps us understand how to protect ourselves and others—and this is just a very short synopsis because we'll talk about this in much more detail over the course of the three months—is understanding that when we talk about conscious conduct of speech or action, of what is skillful, we're really talking about a morality of intention. Every thought or speech or action has a volitional force, an impetus that drives it, that makes it happen. And this motivation, this intention that brings about the thought, the speech, or action, is seen as skillful or unskillful depending on what mental factors, what qualities of mind are present feeding that intention, so to speak.

For example, an action or speech would be seen as skillful if the intention is associated with the mental factors of compassion or wisdom, equanimity, loving-kindness, among many others. And of course, unskillful if it's associated with rage or greed or hatred or cruelty, confusion. You can see how subtle this can be, because what it means is that the same action can be coming from very different motivations, and it's the motivation that determines the skillfulness of the action. It's the motivation that we can work with, that we can pay attention to—in a way we have no control whatsoever over the results of our actions.

An action can be performed with the deepest sincerity and very skillful intentions, and the results might look very harmful or might actually be harmful. An example that is given in the suttas is of a blind

bhikkhu, a blind monk, who was doing walking meditation. As he was walking in the forest, he was walking on all these ants and killing them. Some of the other monks saw this and they went running to the Buddha. I have to say, there seem to be a lot of suttas where monks are running to the Buddha and kind of tattling—so-and-so did this and so-and-so did that. It sounds like it's no different from today.

Anyway, they went and said, "He's supposed to be free, he's supposed to be enlightened, and he's killing ants. Clearly that's a precept, that we don't kill, so what's the story?" And that's when the Buddha explained that being blind, he had absolutely no way of knowing he was killing ants, and his intentions in the walking meditation were completely pure. And so his action was not unskillful.

You see, it's very interesting, and this is why I find it so fascinating, when we begin to open up to a really deep commitment to explore how we relate in our speech and action to ourselves and to the world. Because it requires a great deal of honesty with ourselves. Also a great deal of mindfulness to even be able to tell honestly what the intentions, what the motivations are. And to be willing—mindfulness means a clear attention, but it also means a non-judging, accepting quality of attention—so that when, for example, we see ourselves doing something that's really disgusting, we can just see it for what it is and explore it without adding a whole extra load of self-hatred and judgment and guilt, because that doesn't help us to learn.

So sila is so much more profound than just five or eight or two hundred twenty-seven rules that we follow. It's not just a list. I feel for myself, when I am committed to paying attention, when I am committed to working with my relationship to my speech and conduct—and it takes a huge amount of energy; I certainly can't say every moment I feel actively committed to working on it—but when I am, I really feel that it's an actual practice of oneness. It really is practicing loving-kindness and compassion. It really, to me, feels like a practice of freedom when I relate with real integrity and commitment.

So I'd like to briefly share, just again this is personal, some of my reflections and some of other people's on just the basic five precepts—just showing, sharing with you how subtle it can be. And I'm sure my just mentioning a few things will bring up many more ideas in your own mind, in your own experience. And also I think how exciting and how interesting it can be to explore these nuances of intention, of behavior and speech.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen master, talks a great deal about working with the precepts. He says to really see them as guidelines, as directions in which we incline the mind. It's essential that we not begin by expecting to be perfect. And I know for myself and a lot of people I talk to, we tend to have that tendency to right away think that we should be perfect. I'm going to observe the five precepts of not killing, not stealing, not harming with my sexuality, not lying or using harsh speech, not taking intoxicants to cloud the mind—and right away I'm going to do it all perfectly. It's really difficult.

As Thich Nhat Hanh says, we try all our lives to understand and practice the precepts better. I really think it's like that. The more I pay attention, the more I see subtler and subtler ways that I haven't been paying

attention before, that I am not coming from non-harming. And you can see why mindfulness is so necessary.

Thich Nhat Hanh says, "Mindfulness is the fundamental precept. Think of the precepts as the manifestation of mindfulness. Because when you are mindful, you're responsible."

When we truly pay attention, when we're genuinely present and open in a moment, we naturally don't do things that are harmful to ourselves or others. When we're not paying attention or feeling disconnected, having the precepts as guidelines can serve as a helpful reference point.

So, not killing. At first, this seems fairly clear. Most of us probably don't kill other human beings. We probably don't kill animals. But it gets very tricky, especially when we expand it to non-harming. Even not killing animals—can any of us do that perfectly? What about when we're digging in the garden? What about when there's an infestation of cockroaches, something we've been dealing with here for years? What about when the house across the street that we at IMS owned and were renting to tenants had an infestation of fleas so severe that I walked in and walked out thirty seconds later with my legs black with fleas? How can you ask tenants to live in a house like that? What do you do? It's genuinely complicated.

Robert Aitken, the Zen Roshi in Hawaii, once said that the practice of peace and harmony *is* peace and harmony—it's not some technique designed to induce them. In other words, we don't try to do something in order to become peaceful and harmonious. Rather, as Thich Nhat Hanh teaches, we practice being peace and then acting from that space.

When I first arrived at the temple in Thailand where I ordained as a nun, I had very long hair. You sleep on the floor in these kutis, these little huts. That first night I woke up with ants streaming through my hair—there was a river of ants crossing the kuti with no way to stop them. I didn't know what to do. Being new in Thailand, I ran to the assistant of the abbot, who was actually quite well-known. I asked him, "What do I do? How can I get rid of them?" I was shocked when he went into the kuti and came back handing me a can of Raid. I was just blown away.

There are questions without easy answers. At that time I desperately wanted easy answers. Now I've come to love that there aren't any, because if there were, I could just tune out again—follow the list of what to do and stop paying attention. But because there aren't easy answers, I have to stay truly aware. I have to remain connected. I have to care about what I'm doing, care about other beings, care about the environment. I have to be awake. Working with the precepts helps me stay awake and wake up again when I fall asleep.

Perhaps I feel—and it's rather presumptuous to say—that I understand about not killing animals out of anger. But what about out of indifference? If I don't have my glasses on and step into the shower, I can't tell what's on the bottom. I can't distinguish between a piece of lint and a tiny ant. If I don't take the trouble to bend down and check before turning on the water, and it is an ant, I've just washed it away.

Because I'm aware of this, because it's happened more than once, it's not like the blind bhikkhu who genuinely didn't know. It's an action arising from delusion or laziness. How do I relate to the precept of non-harming? How much effort am I willing to put in, even though I don't consciously want to harm?

It keeps expanding when we consider it as non-harming. I think a lot about the violence in our popular entertainment culture—what effect does it have on my mind, and what effect does it have on others? If I pay to see a violent movie, in a way I'm supporting that. Does this contribute to the violence in our culture? I don't know. But if I think it might, yet decide to go anyway just for entertainment, what does that say about my commitment to non-harming?

I just heard on the news about the ongoing controversy around certain rap songs and the violence in them. There was some new song they were having a controversy about, again talking about killing cops. And some young guy was driving in a stolen car, and a cop stopped and pulled him over and walked up to the car, and the kid killed him. In the tape deck was this song about killing cops. And the kid said, "Well, you know, I was all jacked up from listening to this song, and that really is what made me kill him."

I mean, who knows? But then I have to wonder, what am I doing that might be contributing to that? And what I found is that this kind of reflection doesn't bring on more guilt if I'm really trying to look honestly. Rather, what it does is help me become so much more attuned to our oneness, to our interconnectedness.

I was just in Germany, and I don't know if you've heard, but there's a lot of violence going on between different cultures, really, is what it is. A lot of young people who are out of work are attacking refugees—they call them asylum seekers—in different parts of Germany. And how much of this stems from the sense of not perceiving our oneness, that somehow this group of people is other than me? I just got a letter in the mail asking for money and talking about various episodes of the same kind of racial violence—Asians against Latinos, whites against blacks—taking place in this country, just lots of isolated little incidents.

So then I have to look at myself and see: when I shut off my sense of oneness enough that I don't bother to look down and see if it's an ant, that might seem really minor. But what's the effect in my consciousness? If I pay attention at that moment, I notice that it's as if the consciousness contracts, the heart shuts, there's a feeling of separation. And it might sound silly, but I really have to reflect on whether that has an effect in the culture. When I'm contracted like that, when I'm not willing to take an extra little bit of energy not to harm, how is that energy reflected in the culture and what's my responsibility? How am I contributing to the greater violence that's taking place in our cultures?

You can see it just keeps expanding, actually and infinitely, and we each have our own areas in which we can look at this.

The same applies to the second precept: not taking what is not given, which is another way of saying not stealing, but a little broader. And again, it's looking at it as intention. What's our intention? It's much more

than just not stealing. And even just on that level, blatantly, none of us are probably going to go into each other's rooms and riffle through people's stuff looking for money—or maybe chocolate as the retreat goes on.

But it's much broader than that. For instance, when I'm in the bathroom: "Oh, look at that neat shampoo. I've been wanting to use that for a long time. I'm sure that person wouldn't mind." Probably they wouldn't. But what's the motivation in that?

If we flip it from the negative way of saying it—not stealing, not taking what's not given—and give it a more positive aspect, it would be really coming from a sense of inner contentment, not just abstention from unskillful action. Dogen, the great Zen master, said, "The self and the world are just as they are—the gate of emancipation is open." When we're like that, when the self and the world are just as they are, in that sense of deep inner contentment, there's no thought of neediness even. If you saw that shampoo—"Oh, that's a nice shampoo"—the thought of wanting it doesn't even arise. In that state, the gate of emancipation is open. To me this is really the deepest expression of this second precept. And can this be enough for our life? A deep appreciation of what is just as it is, without needing something more.

Aitken Roshi, again talking about stealing and how much stealing comes from the sense of inner poverty, the sense of lack of contentment—and he's talking not just about stealing objects, that sense of inner poverty that we need more objects. He asks how much do we steal from ourselves? Do we steal peace from ourselves? When we get lost in some gaining idea, even in meditation, when we try to make ourselves someone else or try to gain some other state that we don't have, in that moment we're stealing peace from ourselves. We're stealing from ourselves the possibility of opening to what is true because we're so busy reaching for something else—the sense of inner poverty.

It says in the Tao Te Ching: "If you realize that you have enough, you are truly rich. Be content with what you have. Rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you." When we're living with that understanding, when you realize that nothing is lacking, it makes no sense to want anything. That's the sense of the self and the world being just as they are. That's when the gate of emancipation is opened.

And when I continue to reflect on stealing, again it broadens from just my own immediate action to how I am as part of society. I question a lot whether stealing is part of our economic system. The whole capitalist system is set up in order to manufacture more wants for us. If you look at the ads on TV or in magazines, look at ads for kids' toys—the whole focus of them is to make the kids want that toy and go out and get it. I look in the New York Times Magazine and they have all these different perfume ads, all these new perfumes. Does the world need a new perfume? And then somehow I can find myself thinking, "Oh yeah, I really would like to have that perfume."

Where is that coming from? And what kind of society is it that runs on manufacturing more wants?

I got this statistic from the Union of Concerned Scientists talking about environmental crisis, and it hit me hard. Energy consumption in the United States, for example, is so high that 250 million Americans consume as much as all 4 billion people in developing nations. That's amazing. We consume as much as 4 billion other people in the world.

When I read that, I can't think of it as anything other than taking what is not freely given. And by my actions—when I turn the heat up in my house and keep it really warm—I'm stealing from other people in the world.

When I come back from England or Germany, England is a good example. It's really cold and they really keep the heat down. Once I was there in December, it was freezing. The house had a big meeting the first of December to decide whether to turn on the heat. They decided to turn it on and kept it at 58 degrees. We wouldn't dream of that. It was hell. It was really hard. I don't know if I could live like that.

But that kind of statistic is just enough to make me look. Every time I turn on the heat, it's an act. I don't mean I shouldn't have heat. But what's my intention? What's my motivation? Am I aware of my connectedness to everyone else in the world when I turn the heat up really high? Or if I decide to eat a hamburger? Am I aware that we are so interconnected that that hamburger has something to do with the fact that people are starving in the Horn of Africa? And I mean that quite literally.

I don't say this to bring up guilt about having a hamburger, but to really open my awareness to the depth of our interconnectedness. It becomes not a practice of guilt or feeling bad about everything that I do that other people in the world don't have, but rather that the choices I am able to make to let go of some things come out of love—out of the feeling of our oneness. With those choices, the visceral experience of our oneness deepens, and it's actually a practice of great joy, of deepening love and compassion and connection with the rest of the world.

When I shut off from that and just get back in my own little routine with a sense of disconnection, that's a real feeling of suffering. The openness to how we're all connected, even though it might make our life more difficult on the outward physical level, is actually so much richer.

I want to briefly mention the other three precepts because you can see from the ones I've talked about how carefully we can examine our intentions and how subtle it gets.

The third precept is not misusing sex—honoring our commitments to ourselves and to each other. Of course, on retreat you don't have much chance to act on sexual energy, but we can pay attention to where the impulses are coming from, simply to learn. Do we use our sexual energy from love and commitment? Or do we use it from fear, from neediness, from exploitation, for a sense of personal power, for self-image? Really to learn and to see how we affect each other. And when we talk about not hurting people through our sexual activities, I always like to add: remember that you're one of the people involved too. It also means not hurting yourself.

The fourth precept is working with wise, non-harming speech. Sometimes, for me anyway, this is the most complex and difficult area. It's so easy to stray off into harmful or frivolous speech. There are four areas that are traditionally spoken of: not lying, not using harsh or abusive speech, not using speech to divide—that kind of backbiting that causes division among people—and not just spending time in idle frivolous chatter. You can see that covers an awful lot of our speech.

I want to talk a little about just the complexities of the first one, not lying, which seems simple. I felt, "I don't lie. I don't have any intention to lie and no need to lie." But once a friend and I were leading a weeklong "sandwich retreat" in the city, where people would get together and sit in the evening, then everyone would go to work during the day, and come back the next evening. We were working with right speech. So one day we were all going to focus simply on not lying, just paying attention.

And I think we all went out feeling a little cocky, like, well, we don't lie, but we'll pay special attention today. When we came back to talk about it that night, every single one of us had at some point caught ourselves in a lie. And sometimes it was hours later before we realized it. It was really fascinating. And they were subtle. Some people found that they were lying through their actions—trying to give the impression that they were working really hard at work when actually they were completely spacing out. Someone else found that they were lying in order to protect someone else, or lying to maintain a particular self-image. Or they had a job in sales and found that in just doing their job, trying to sell, they found themselves telling lies. It was really fascinating to see.

And then I started paying more attention, noticing how many little exaggerations I might make in describing something. And what's the intention behind that? For self-image, to give a certain impression of myself? Or I don't really want to admit how many times I've done something stupid, so I sort of scale it down to about half. Just paying attention to things like that.

In retreats, I think this commitment to honesty in looking at our own minds, our own motivations, is one of the most powerful parts of the meditation practice for me. Because I see how much—just in paying attention to what's happening in my own mind, not even that I have to tell anybody about it, just to observe it for myself—how much of what's going on I somehow don't want to quite acknowledge. It's too painful, or it's too difficult, or it's too disgusting, or somehow I can't believe this is coming up again after twenty years. And to just really be honest with that, that that's okay. Honesty is so powerful.

It's said that of all the different perfections of a Buddha, the different qualities of mind that the Bodhisattva who's going to become the Buddha cultivates over eons and eons of lifetimes, truthfulness is the one that was never broken. Very powerful, this willingness to be honest.

And the fifth precept: not taking intoxicants or drugs that cloud the mind and lead to heedlessness. Again, that seems obvious. Or as Sayadaw U Pandita says, once you break the fifth precept and take intoxicants, it's so much easier then to mess up all the other four. But just watching that in ourselves, more out in life than here.

I just want to end by reading a short passage about how powerful this practice of working with the precepts can be, from Thich Nhat Hanh. It becomes really moving—from a sense of "should," perhaps, or a dry doing of what seems like it might be helpful in order to move the meditation along, it comes much, much more from an inner understanding, from a movement of the heart. And then the practice of sila is also a very powerful purification—purification of action. And it really is, in this time, the strong and necessary foundation for the deepening of our meditation practice. But it's much, much more than that.

This is a strong statement of the potential of our work with sila:

"In summary, it could be said that these precepts issue a clarion call of emptiness and non-ego in action. Each precept is permeated with the understanding that concepts, thoughts, and actions are inherently impermanent and insubstantial. Each precept enjoins a form of moral action that is based on non-separation and an aware state of compassion. Not holding on to a notion of self, we are invited to engage ourselves courageously in the world and, with discriminating awareness, to undertake the task of liberating all sentient beings."

It can be a very powerful practice.

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