The fundamental of Buddhist teachings is summarized by the Buddha in the Dhammapada:-

“Not to do any evil,

To cultivate good,

To purify one’s mind”

**Morality**

* Morality is the preliminary stage on the path to attain Buddhahood. It is a necessary condition, though not sufficient, leading to wisdom. It is absolutely essential for enlightenment.
* Morality in Buddhism is a rational and practical mode based on verifiable facts and individual experience.
* According to Buddhism, the criterion for morality is depicted in the admonition given by the Buddha to young Rahula:-

“If there is a deed, Rahula, you wish to do, reflect thus: is this deed conducive to my harm, or to others’ harm, or to that of both? Then is this a bad deed entailing suffering. From such a deed, you must desist.

If there is a deed, Rahula, you wish to do, reflect thus: is this deed not conducive to my harm, or to others’ harm, or to that of both? Then is this a good deed entailing happiness. Such a deed, you must do again and again.”

* In assessing morality, a Buddhist takes into consideration the interest of both himself and others (animals are excluded).

**Five Precepts**

1) I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living things (Pānātipātā veramaņi- sikkhāpadaṁ sāmādiyāmi)

2) I undertake the precept to refrain from taking things not given (Adínnādānā veramaņi- sikkhāpadaṁ sāmādiyāmi)

3) I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct (Kāmesu micchācārā veramaņi- sikkhāpadaṁ sāmādiyāmi)

4) I undertake the precept to refrain from false speech (Musāvādā veramaņi -sikkhāpadaṁ sāmādiyāmi)

5) I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicant (Surā-meraya majjappamādaţţhānā veramaņi -sikkhāpadaṁ sāmādiyāmi)

* The five precepts are the curriculum of Buddhist teachings, which are embraced in the moral code of Buddhism. By observing precepts, not only do you cultivate moral strength, but also perform highest service to your fellow beings.

1) The first precept is to refrain from killing

* One must not deliberately kill, injure, torture any living creatures, either by committing the act oneself, instructing others to kill or approving of or participating in the act of killing. It is a respect to others’ lives.
* One should not deprive others including animals of the right to live. If one is hurt or killed, one’s family, relatives, friends will suffer.
* The effect of killing to the performer is brevity of life, ill health, handicapped and fear. It is the cause of rebirth in the woeful states.
* The precept is violated if the five conditions of killing (panatipata) are fulfilled:

1) The being must be alive (excluding bacteria and other micro-organisms).

2) The knowledge that it is a living being.

3) The intention to kill.

4) The effort made to kill (including asking another to do it).

5) The being dies through the act.

2) The second precept is to refrain from stealing

* Stealing may range from filching minor things like sweets or plastic toys at early stages leading to greater robbery, theft, bribery, fraud, impersonation, swindle and the like at various levels.
* Respecting one’s own and others’ property at home and at school, being generous to those in need, being unselfish, contented, simple, honest, trustworthy and reliable are qualities that could be easily cultivated from a young age within the family.
* The amount of loss and misery, frustration and fear caused to the victims of stealing and the anxieties, fear, threat of punishment etc caused to the state and taxpaying society can be seen in everyday life. Thus, one should uphold honesty and truthfulness.
* The effect of stealing is loss of wealth, poverty and untrustworthiness.
* Whether taking what is not given is done personally or through another person acting on one’s instructions, the precept is violated if the five conditions of stealing (adinnadana) are fulfilled:

1) The object has an owner.

2) The knowledge that the object has an owner.

3) The intention to steal.

4) The effort made to steal.

5) The object is obtained through the effort made to steal.

3) The third precept is to refrain from sexual misconduct

* Violation of this precept causes most disastrous and alarming repercussion on the physical health, mental health of the individual, disruption of the family unit, shirking of duties and responsibilities to spouse and children, and putting their children at risk.
* This precept can be broken by one self only. It is the absence of self-control and understanding of right and wrong, selfishness, greed for money and other commercial incentives drive people to violate this precept.
* The effect of sexual misconduct is enmity and defamed.
* The precept is violated if the four conditions to sexual misconduct (kamesumicchacara) are fulfilled:

1) A forbidden person

2) Intention to have sexual intercourse with the person.

3) Effort made in committing the sexual act.

4) Consent to the sexual act.

4) The fourth precept is to refrain from false speech

* Abstaining from speaking false words including written or printed erroneous statements that are not true, slanderous, harsh and idle chatter.
* The observance of this precept would result in gaining truthfulness, trustworthiness, friendliness, pleasantness, gentleness, meaningfulness and fruitfulness in what one says.
* The effect of false speech is deceived and slander by others.
* The precept is violated if the five conditions of telling lies (musavada)are fulfilled either by oneself or when one instigates or instructs another to do it:

1) An untruth.

2) The intention to express the untruth or to deceive.

3) The effort made through body or speech to communicate the untruth.

4) Deception occurs.

5) The other party suffers a loss.

5) The fifth precept is to refrain from intoxication

* Intoxicants in whatever form, liquid or solid such as liquors and drugs. Under the successive influence of intoxicants, a person loses self-control of both body and mind and causes problems to one self and society.
* It is a world-wide problem irrespective of age, sex, race and religion. Mainly homes, schools and wherever people gather are affected and a variety of crimes are being increasingly committed. Family breakdown, children being adversely affected, robberies, bodily harm, murders, abuse, deaths, loss of wealth and property and so on.
* The effect of taking intoxicants is loss of intelligence, madness and shameless conduct.
* The precept is violated if the four conditions of taking intoxicant are fulfilled:

1) Substance that causes intoxication which is either liquor or drug or glue sniffing.

2) The intention to consume.

3) The effort made to take it.

4) Ingestion of it.

However, taking intoxicant for medical purpose does not violate this percept.

**The benefits of taking the five precepts**

1) Benefits pertaining to the present life:

* Protects one from coming into trouble with the law, ensuring immunity from temporal punishment at least with regard to those actions covered by the precepts.
* Helps to establish a good reputation among the wise and virtuous.
* Freedom from remorse. An ease of conscience that can evolve into the bliss of blamelessness when we review our actions and realize them to be wholesome and good.
* The ability to die peacefully, without fear or confusion.

2) Benefits pertaining to future lives:

* It ensures a good rebirth in the human or heavenly worlds.
* One will have great wealth and health
* Possession of upright view and intelligence.

**How should precepts be observed?**

* Ideally, our observance should not only be motivated by fear of the dire consequences of breaking the precepts, but also by compassionate loving-kindness as well.
* This is done by complement the passive aspect of abstention by being proactive:

1) Instead of just refraining from killing, try to:

* Promote non-violence (ahimsā) to ensure a sense of security;
* Advocate the right means of livelihood;
* Supports altruistic spirit for the welfare of all beings;
* Heal the hurt and save life.

2) Instead of just refraining from taking what is not given, try to:

* Practice generosity and non-attachment;
* Promote honesty and trust.

3) Instead of just refraining from sexual misconduct, try to:

* Be sincere and faithful;
* Cultivate self-control, self-restraint and self-discipline.

4) Instead of just refraining from telling lies, try to:

* Be truthful about what is beneficial and say it kindly at the right time;
* Cultivate honesty, virtuous and beneficial speech.

5) Instead of just refraining from divisive speech, try to promote peace and harmony.

6) Instead of just refraining from harsh speech, try to be considerate of others’ feelings.

7) Instead of just refraining from frivolous talk, try to be circumspect about what we want to say and speak only what is beneficial.

8) Instead of just refraining from ingesting intoxicants, try to be always sober by being mindful and clearly aware of our mental, verbal and physical activities.

**Conclusion**

* The five precepts is not a set of commandments passed on by the Buddha. They are meant as guidelines for us to follow on the path to our future security, happiness and welfare. The degree to which we would like to abide by these guidelines is completely left to us.
* The Dhamma respects the fact that each of us, ultimately, is responsible for our own destiny.

“Only by oneself has evil been done, by oneself is defiled;

By oneself has evil not been done, only by oneself is purified.

Purity and impurity are personal, no other can purify another”. (Dhammapada 165)