

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

**Practicing the Ten Virtuous Actions
and restraining from the Ten Non-Virtuous Actions**
For increasing positive karma, accumulating *sonam* (merit), and purifying negative karma

The profound wisdom of the omniscient mind of Shakyamuni Buddha gave us ten powerful actions—three of body, four of speech, and three of mind—for accumulating *sonam* and purifying our negative karma. *Sonam* (often translated as merit) is the powerful positive energy and potential that grows and accumulates in the subtle continuum of our consciousness as we gradually and habitually become oriented to virtuous, other-centered actions of body, speech, and mind. The more we engage in these kinds of virtuous actions, the more we will purify our negative karma and increase our positive karma. These actions can be immediately practiced at our current level of understanding and ability on a daily basis. The far-reaching positive power and purifying force of these actions should not be underestimated. As we habituate ourselves over time to the following ten virtuous actions of body, speech, and mind and resolve to restrain from the ten non-virtuous ones, we will remove the obstacles that obscure our realization of love, happiness, and insight.

Three virtuous actions of body

- 1. Save and protect the lives of others.** Do this when you can—even with the smallest insect. This will help purify your mind-stream and subtle energies of the poisonous imprints that have resulted from *killing* or having physically harmed others being in the past.
- 2. Be generous and unselfishly giving.** This will purify the karmic imprints of *stealing*, being stingy, or having taken what does not belong to you.
- 3. Be harmless in your sexual conduct.** This will help purify the poisonous karmic imprints of *sexual misconduct*.

Four virtuous actions of speech

- 4. Speak honestly to others.** Always do this in a way that is helpful and kind. This will purify the ruinous karmic imprints of deceitful, manipulative *lying*.
- 5. Use agreeable, inclusive speech.** This purifies the negative karmic imprints of creating discord through *divisive speech*.
- 6. Speak with kind and encouraging words.** This purifies the poisonous imprints of speaking with insulting, *harsh words*.
- 7. Speak with purpose and mindfulness.** This purifies the negative imprints of endless *idle talk* that has no meaningful purpose or value.

Three virtuous actions of mind

- 8. Develop an appreciative mind.** Take pleasure in others' good fortune, circumstances, and qualities—this will purify the poisonous karmic imprints of having a jealous, *covetous mind*.
- 9. Develop the intention to always be of help.** This purifies the poisonous karmic imprints of *intending harm*.
- 10. Meditate repeatedly on the correct views of emptiness, karma, and impermanence.** This will purify the poisonous imprints of ignorance and the ego's delusional *wrong views*. Ultimately, this last virtuous action is the most important of the ten, because all of our suffering arises from our mistaken views of how we exist and the nature of reality, which is the basis for all of our non-virtuous actions.

Three non-virtuous actions of body

- 1. killing**
- 2. stealing**
- 3. sexual misconduct**

Four non-virtuous actions of speech

- 4. lying**
- 5. divisive speech**
- 6. harsh words**
- 7. idle talk**

Three non-virtuous actions of mind

- 8. covetousness**
- 9. harmful intent**
- 10. wrong views**

In the *Sun Essence Sutra* the Buddha says that engaging in the ten virtuous actions and having the resolve to restrain from the ten non-virtuous actions will destroy *all* karma, afflictions, and obscurations to the Dharma teachings.

The resolve to not repeatedly commit a negative action must be extremely firm. Moreover, the development of this resolve depends upon the power of one's regret. In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, the revered Tibetan lama Pabongka Rinpoche presents a way of gradually training in this power of resolve. The chronic, compulsive harmful actions we are in danger of doing, such as using harsh words or lying, also threaten to give the lie to our resolve to never do these things again. This is the essence of addictive behavior. If we don't resolve to exercise restraint, the purification of our non-virtuous actions will not be complete.

At the outset, we should abandon to the very root the things we can abandon to their very root. There will still be some things we can stop doing for maybe a month; others we can give up for only a week. But if we decide *each day* we can stop doing some of these things, we will then stop doing things that we *can* stop for that day. Perhaps the next week we will be able to stop doing these things for two days. The point of training in this way is so that we can break the continuity of our strong habitual addiction to negative actions gradually over time. This is a particularly skillful means, and a practical instruction given to Pabongka Rinpoche by his own guru.

As we work with these ten actions to break our chronic negative habits and generate positive ones, it's essential to be working at the same time on transforming our mind through the Dharma. As we listen to the Dharma, study the Dharma, practice the Dharma, and meditate on the Dharma, the Dharma itself will become a powerful and positive habitual propensity in our mind-streams, determining and regulating our actions of body, speech, and mind. In this way we will be able to accumulate large amounts of *sonam* merit and purify our negative karma.