

The Virtue of Precepts

*Excerpts from Dharma Talk by Venerable Sumedo Bhikshu
City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, March, 1983*

"Precepts are a form we hold ourselves in. They have a long-term effect. By holding them over a period of time, they eventually become automatic." "When I first began to study and hold the Precepts I didn't appreciate or see the reason for many of the rules and regulations by which a monk governs his life."

"With time, and the development of some degree of skill in practice, the monk comes to appreciate how Precepts are a natural way of life." "A monk's life is simple. It involves giving constant attention to body, action, and speech. Compared to the laity, our way of existence is uncomplicated. We commit our lives to the limitations of the form of the Precepts. If we are willing to comply with the form, our minds become less confused."

"With Precepts, we always base ourselves in harmlessness and gentle conformity to the sublime rules." "Holding strictly to the Precepts, a monk may be challenged by those of lesser understanding: 'You are too attached!' However, you should be aware that such people speak only from an ideological level. They have no experience with the practical situation. If we do not venerate the Precepts and hold them strictly, then when faced with situations of everyday life, we monks have no guide. Therefore, the proper course is to hold firmly to the Precepts, abide by the form they create for us."

"We refrain from evils of body, speech, and mind. We do not pick flowers or dig in the soil. We live so as to be harmless to those around us. Not only do we not touch the belongings of others, we don't even allow our eyes to gaze upon things which do not belong to us. When we can operate in this refined and beautiful way, then we become centered in ourselves and aware of others. Without Precepts, how could we ever hope to attain such refinement?"