

**Mindfulness and Modern Life:
HCOL 40000-617
Spring 2020**

Buddhism Precepts Exercise



As part of our study of Buddhist notions of *self*, we ask that you complete this set of precepts exercises. You should write about one or two paragraphs on each of the precepts. Your final essay should be 750 to 1000 words. Submit your essay to the drop box titled “Buddhism precepts exercises” before class on **Thursday, February 20**.

These exercises offer you an opportunity to reflect on what it would be like to follow the first five precepts of the Buddhist tradition. You need not accept any Buddhist doctrines to do this; all you need is the capacity to be aware of your thoughts and actions. The aim is twofold: for you to better understand basic Buddhist ethical practices and to become more aware of your thoughts, feelings, and actions, and their effects on other beings. Both understanding other worldviews accurately and increased reflective self-awareness are important goals of liberal arts inquiry and are central to developing as critical thinkers. These exercises will also serve as the foundation for the socially-engaged mindfulness paper.

Choose a different precept for each day and that evening write one or two paragraphs about your experience on the series of questions listed under the precept. You may follow the precept or engage in the proscribed activities; your goal is to be mindful in any event. You may take the precepts in any order. You should combine those individual reflections into a single essay. In your essay, you are welcome to take up each precept individually, or you can integrate them into a broader reflection on the experience.

Note: While the fourth Buddhist precept clearly focuses on avoiding sexual desire, we are choosing not to include that here; instead, we are construing it more broadly to mean lust for consumer products, like an iPhone, clothing, a new car, etc., or for the recognition of others and status within a group: becoming famous or wealthy, attaining a high position in a sorority or fraternity, etc. For the fifth precept, avoiding intoxicants, we encourage you to construe intoxication broadly to mean losing control of one's faculties or behavior, which can include social media, the internet, online gaming, and so on.

1. **Avoid harming sentient beings.** In the past twenty-four hours have you:

Eaten anything? What? How did it get on your plate—who planted or nurtured it, harvested or butchered it, cleaned and cooked it?

Harmed anyone (or thing)? By striking? By aggressive behavior or avoidance? By speech or facial expression, intentional or unintentional? By laughter?

2. **Avoid taking what is not offered.** In the past twenty-four hours have you:

Bought anything? How? Was it “freely given?” Where did you get the money? Did you really need the item? Why? What would you do if you didn't have it?

Borrowed anything? Why? Was it really given freely? Will your use diminish its value, or cause hardship to the loaner?

3. **Avoid false speech.** In the past twenty-four hours have you:

Lied? Said something not strictly true? Equivocated? Exaggerated? Hidden the truth from another? Why? Have you thought about the effect of your words before you spoke?

Have you actively sought the truth in your studies? Out of class? Do you honor your teachers and mentors and the knowledge they share?

4. **Avoid lust.** In the past twenty-four hours have you:

Wanted something you can or should not have? Why? Why can't or shouldn't you have it? Would it harm others to have it? Would it harm you?

5. **Avoid intoxicants.** In the past twenty-four hours, have you:

Taken or engaged with mind/consciousness altering substances? What was the impact on your senses and awareness? Were there later physical or mental consequences?

Have you intoxicated your consciousness by going on the Internet (checking email, Facebook, gaming), listening to music, or watching TV or a movie?

Did your use of such intoxicants cause you to violate any other precept (harming, taking, lusting, false speaking). Did it take time away from your studies and the pursuit of wisdom?