

## Learn To Say “No!”

by Piya Tan

The Buddhist life is sometimes said to comprise the three trainings: training in **moral virtue**, training in **mental concentration** and training in **wisdom**. Training in moral virtue is basically the restraining and refining of our bodily actions and speech. Mental training is that of letting go of mental distractions so that it is focused with inner stillness. And training in wisdom deals with overcoming wrong views.

Another way of looking at the three trainings has to do with knowing when to say *yes* and when to say *no*. The three trainings then can be said to be learning to say *yes*, learning to say *no*, and learning to be silent. In moral training, we learn to say *no* to various unwholesome actions (that is, keeping to the Five Precepts). In mental cultivation, we train in joy to support our meditation. And in wisdom training, we discover the nature of true reality that is beyond words.

Buddhist living begins by our learning to say “no,” that is, no to harming life, no to taking the not-given, no to sexual misconduct, no to falsehood, and no to drunkenness and addiction. For the sake of mental cultivation and inner peace, we must be courageous to say “No!” to the close-minded evangelists who try to force their unwholesome views upon us.

Mental cultivation begins with saying “yes” to your inner goodness. We make every effort to remember our happy days and goodness within us, and the happiness and goodness that others have shown us. Negative thoughts easily shadow us uninvited. We need to make extra effort to brighten our lives with happy memories and faith in goodness.

Even if we think that the “real” world is cruel and unjust, we should spend quiet time to remind ourselves that our own goodness is its own reward. If we learn to be happy with our inner stillness then we are not dependent on external stimulation for our happiness. We are emotionally independent, at peace with ourselves.

To be emotionally independent is to be like the gentle green grass that bends with the wind, only to rise up again in the sunshine when the storm is over. These winds are called gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and obscurity, happiness and sorrow.

To train in wisdom is to see impermanence in all things, bad or good. When bad things happen to us, remind ourselves that they are impermanent. That way, we learn not to “own” the pain: we let go of suffering. When good things happen to us, we remind ourselves they are impermanent; so we value them more and learn to be better from them.

When we are wise in saying NO at the right time, we refuse to run our lives by other people’s rules and expectations. When we are wise in saying YES at the right time, we empower ourselves to touch the best in us and to benefit others. Most importantly, there are times to be simply silent, so that we can truly know ourselves and be truly free.

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