



# Promoting the Buddhist Five Precepts of People of Mahar Aung Myay Township, Mandalay, Myanmar

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## Abstract

This research article is aiming to promote of the Buddhist Five Precepts of people of Mahar Aung Myay Township, Mandalay, Myanmar in order to encourage people's consciousness of morality to lead the society to living a good life and peaceful cohabitation. In fact, the Five Precepts are the essential of all good qualities and the fulfillment of higher stages of concentration and wisdom. It also upholds whatever wholesome states one already has. This qualitative research article involves in-depth interviews of five key informants and 100 research participants for data concerning demographical characteristics and for the promotion of moral values of people of the Township mentioned in this paper. The results show that there is a higher tendency of people to break the precepts during the last couple of years (2017-2018) due to the continuous stimulation on such human natures as greed, avariciousness, and wants by mainly capitalism, and materialism. Besides, an in-depth interview gives informative knowledge about the causes of decline moral values and the way to promote moral values of their people in the township. In addition, the use of Training Program as an approach to promote moral values of people is successful. About 26 participants or 26% of total 100 participants drink alcohol, and 12 persons have decided to stop drinking alcohol. Nevertheless, in Buddhism the Five Precepts are not for the sake of morality alone, they are for the base concentration and wisdom.

**Keywords:** The Buddhist Five Precepts, Mahar Aung Myay Township, Morality.

## 1. Introduction

The Buddha prescribed a set of precepts as guidelines to good conduct. The most basic set of precepts found in the Buddha's teaching is the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*). The Five Precepts are basic principles for lay Buddhists with regard to *Vāritta*. They are abstaining from killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, telling lies and taking intoxicants and drugs. If a person observes these Noble Precepts, he not only leads religious way of life but also renders a better service to others by allowing them to live peacefully. By leading a pure life according to the Noble Eightfold Path, men can become noble themselves and their lives become more meaningful. Those who are spiritually advanced see nonsense at all in material possessions and worldly powers. Therefore, they renounce the worldly pleasures and observe the precepts in order to gain more peace and happiness.

As most Mahar Aung Myay Township people are Buddhists, they believe in the law of kamma, *samsāra*, and *nibbāna*. Furthermore they also believe that throughout *samsarā* if one does good deeds, he will get good result and if one does bad deeds, he will get bad result. They also believe that the ultimate goal of life is *nibbāna*, the cessation of suffering. As a cart equipped with a wheel without linchpin cannot reach the goal, a person who fails to preserve his moral responsibilities cannot realize *nibbāna*. In other words, as linchpin is indispensable part of the wheel, similarly, morality is indispensable part of human beings.

In ancient time, most Mahar Aung Myay has the good habits such as paying respect to the elder, older, and parents, supporting one's parents, and having grateful mind. The morality is the form of social consciousness. It is aggregation of principle, rule, and social standard with a view to correct and to evaluate the human behavior between each other and to social relations (BEWG 2011, 11). It is made by personal belief, by tradition, and by power of public opinion. Since people of Mahar Aung Myay Township to switch to the market economics and international integration, the preservation and promotion of traditional moral values as well as the construction of new moral value of system in this Township has been exposed many problems which need to be resolved. As a research student, I would like to make mention of a minor aspect within the great moral issues to society of Mahar Aung Myay lifestyle nowadays.

Since this Township to switch to the market economics and international integration, the preservation and promotion of traditional moral values as well as the construction of new moral value of system in people has been exposed many problems which need to be resolved. Nowadays, Mahar Aung Myay is beleaguered by intense defilements – perverted lust (*adhamma rāga*), malevolent greed (*visama lobha*) and wrong values (*micchādhamma*),

avariciousness, selfishness and unethical occupations, immoral entertainments and literature. (BEWG 2011, 78) Consequently, all this has been conducive to multifarious environmental conflicts.

## **2. Causes of Decline Moral Values of People of Mahar Aung Myay Township**

Decline in moral values is a global phenomenon. In the glamorous world of consumerism, the race for unlimited accumulation is formidable; hence moral values are generally given a short shrift. Ends alone matter most and means are free for all. The neglect of purity and morality in the means adopted inevitably leads to further fall in moral inhibitions. Moral values are linked with purity. Humanistic values upheld by an individual are a combination of moral, ethical and spiritual qualities acquired. Most of the policy formulations take only a partial view of economic and materialistic development which is considered synonymous with progress. Such a stance encourages violent behavior. The realization that violence must be checked by all means seems to have dawned upon educational policy makers globally. They are often coming across the terminology peace education used by international agencies. Preparing children to internalize the strength of non-violence is now on the agenda of schools and institutions of higher learning globally. Also, there are attempts to start specific orientation programme of training school is and teachers at earliest. The young of Mahar Aung Myay Township must internalize a sense of pride in their ancestors.

In sum, the above explanation reflects the symptom of the causes of decline. The moral value of people in Mahar Aung Myay Township according to the documentary study and discussion with officers of the Township it is concluded that the main causes of moral values are resulting from two doctrines:

- 1) Capitalism
- 2) Materialism as Modernization

Capitalism has developed continually from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and grew during the middle Ages. It became a global trend in 1989. It is the social system that leaves the individual free to act by reason in the pursuit of one's rational self-interest. In the mid-1988, the government of Myanmar made a drastic change in it.

Materialism as Modernization emphasizes that the extensive economic and political forces that drive cultural and social change are creating a convergence of values around

“modernization”. In general, modernization theories attempt to explain the causes and implications of social change, which is a change from a simple traditional society to a more complex modern society affecting people, values, trends and activities.

Modern societies are experiencing the wave of corruption driven by the “get rich quick syndrome”. Public goods and resources are audaciously stolen by individuals who are in leadership positions in a bid to acquire wealth for themselves and secure the future of their families caring less about the pain and burdens to be borne by other members of the society as a consequence of their actions. Today, people take pride in telling lies, engaging in ungodly practices and embellishment of various criminal acts. Integrity is lacking in the interactions of men with one another and flagrant abuse of the laws and of human rights is the order of the day (BEWG 2011, 41)

**Table 1:** Judiciary Situation in Mahar Aung Myay Township 2017 and 2018

Precepts	Criminal Case Occurring	2017	2018	Charge
First Precept	Murder, Rebel Against Established Government, Take weapon	4	8	100%
Second Precept	Law Robbery, Kidnap Attempt, House Breaking, Animal theft Case	4	13	225%
Third Precept	Rape Victims	8	13	62.5%
Fourth Precept	Rebel Against Established Government	-	1	-
Fifth Precept	Associate with Stupid Person	-	-	-
	Total	16	35*	118.8%

Source: Analyzed and calculated from Appendix A of researcher's dissertation.

\* It consists of 35 cases due to twice counting the First Precept and Fourth Precept for case number #8 (in Appendix A).

Table 1 shows that the change in breaking the precepts has increased during the past few years. By the end of last year, total number of judiciary situations had increased from 16 cases in 2017 to 35 cases in 2018. This states the growth of breaking the Five Precepts by people of Mahar Aung Myay Township by 118.8%, where the second precept was broken at the highest rate of 225%, followed by the breaking of the first precept increasing by 100%, and the third precept by 62.5%. This shows the symptoms of decline

moral values of people in Mahar Aung Myay Township due to the stimulation of people's wants and their greed by capitalism and materialism.

Due to different scholars giving different perspectives on causes and problems faced by people of Mahar Aung Myay Township from scholars' perspectives, the causes and problems have been summarized in brief as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Causes and Problems of Decline in Moral Values of Mahar Aung Myay Township

Perspectives	Causes	Problems
1 <sup>st</sup> Scholar's Perspective	1) People do not understand the moral value 2) They don't have three governesses 3) Avariciousness	1) Family do not care each member 2) Society have many crime 3) Disharmony
2 <sup>nd</sup> Scholar's Perspective	1) Bad situation of business 2) Bad situation of political 3) Bad situation of Education 4) Perverted lust ( <i>adhamma rāga</i> ) 5) Malevolent greed ( <i>visama lobha</i> )	1) Unhappy 2) Worry/ Concerns 3) Fighting
3 <sup>rd</sup> Scholar's Perspective	1) Due to lack of individual care 2) Due to family did not with associate schools about their children moral education 3) Did not the growth of the economy	1) Upset 2) Selfishness 3) Rudeness
4 <sup>th</sup> Scholar's Perspective	1) Greed 2) Hatred 3) Delusion	1) Anxiety 2) Fight 3) Doubt
5 <sup>th</sup> Scholar's Perspective	1) Perverted lust ( <i>adhammarāga</i> ) 2) People do not understand the moral value 3) Lack of individual care	1) Unhappiness 2) Many social crimes 3) Civil Wars

Source: Interview scholars by researcher, February 26 to March 22, 2018.

Table 2 can also be summarized the causes and problems of decline in moral values of people are grouped into 2 levels: 1) the individual as internal causes such as individual greed, hatred, delusion, lust, avariciousness, and as well as the societal or

external causes such as bad situation of business, politics, education, economy, and family, as detail shown in the Table 1.

- 1) People do not understand the moral values
- 2) They don't have three governesses
- 3) Human's nature such as avariciousness, lout, greed
- 4) Bad situation of business, polities, and education
- 5) Lack of individual care, family did not association with schools.

Besides, the problems of declining moral values from scholars' perspectives can be summarized into nine different problems as follow:

1) Lack of family care	2) Many social crimes
3) Concerns	4) Unhappiness
5) Upset	6) Disunity
7) Fighting/ Civil Wars	8) Selfishness

Those causes and problems have revealed the symptoms of the decline moral values by seven symptoms as follows:

- 1) People feel unsafe
- 2) People are robbed
- 3) Seriously injured late at night and early in the morning
- 4) Stealing money and mobile phones
- 5) The families of the victims
- 6) Carry iron rods
- 7) Harmful actions on account of irritation, dissatisfaction, and disharmony.

### **3. Mahar Aung Myay Township**

Mahar Aung Myay is the biggest township in Mandalay. The total population is approximately 192,331 people of 85% of total population of Mandalay. Besides, 90% of 177,096 people of Mahar Aung Myay Township population (The Union Report; Census Report 2014, 47) are Buddhists. In ancient this Township monastery education, the curriculum was based on Buddhism. Myanmar scholars wrote admonition to educate the youth to become clever, polite, and moral. These moral rules still flourish in contemporary Mahar Aung Myay society.

Mahar Aung Myay Township here refers to a contemporary community which consists of 21 wards, where this research focuses on only one village, named Sein Pan Ward. The total population is 15738 people which male 7428 and female 8310. The Family member is 2638. The people are mostly labours (32%), shopkeepers (30%), farmers (29%), and the rest (9%) is teachers and students. In regard to education, (47%), (38%), and (15%) of total participants have high school, university, and primary school educations, respectively. Pertaining to income, most of them were in the middle income class with a majority number of 52 (52%), about (39%) were in the lower income class, and the rest (9%) were in the high income class.

#### 4. The Five Precepts

The meaning of the term precept or ‘*sīla*’ is ‘morality’ or ‘discipline’. It is divided into two sections. They are *cāritta sīla*- the duties that one should perform (Vin IV p.301), and *vāritta sīla* abstinences from what is prohibited by the Buddha. Performing the obligatory duties towards parents, children, husband, wife, teachers, pupils, friends, monks and so on as mentioned in detail in *Singālovādasutta* (D III p.180) is fulfillment of *cāritta sīla*. Apart from this, observing Five Precepts, eight precepts, ten precepts whatever precepts and other disciplinary rules is fulfillment of *vāritta sīla*.

There are Five Precepts, which are basic principles for lay Buddhists with regard to *vāritta*. They are abstaining from killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, telling lies and taking intoxicants and drugs. If someone observes these noble precepts, he not only leads religious way of life but also renders a better service to others by allowing them to live peacefully. By leading a pure life according to the noble Eightfold path, we become noble ourselves and our lives become more meaningful. Those who are spiritually advanced see nonsense at all in material possessions and worldly powers. Therefore, they renounce the worldly pleasures and observe the precepts in order to gain more peace happiness.

The Five Precepts are essential for all societies, Eastern societies and Western societies. By following the Five Precepts, we can establish the world peace and harmony and happiness. There are five important aspects of life as follow: (Sīlācāra & Oate 1975, p.34).

- 1) Security of life
- 2) Security of property
- 3) Security of family life
- 4) Security of good name, fame
- 5) Security of health

These five aspects of life are essential for human beings. Without these five aspects of life, how can human beings can live in the world in peace and happily? All people are, indeed, of these five aspects of life, but unfortunately they are failing to have these. Five aspects of life are related to the five precepts.

- 1) By observing the first precept, we can get the security of life.
- 2) By observing the second precepts, we can get the security of property.
- 3) By observing the third precept, we can get the security of family life.
- 4) By observing the fourth precept, we can get the security of good name.
- 5) By observing the fifth precept, we can get the security of health.

Life and Property are universally important, everyone want to save the life and property. If everyone follows the precepts, everyone's security of life and property are confirmed. In Five Precepts, if one precept is broken, all precepts are broken. It is an impersonal terminological interpretation, it is up to you that you accept it or not. If first precept is broken, the rest four are automatically broken because killing is a type of stealing and confusion and making release of own desire and delusion. Madness in regard to the fifth precept, is created by the three states of mind, namely: greed, hatred, delusion.

## **5. Findings Derived from In-Depth Interview and the Training Program**

The Findings collected and analyzed according to the in-depth interview and training program are as follow:

### **5.1 Findings from Scholars' Perspectives**

From the scholar perspectives, the way of promoting peace is by following the Five Precepts. Buddhists or non-Buddhists, anyone who observes the minimum Five Precepts (*pañcasīla*-abstinence from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and drunkenness) brings about peace and harmony everywhere. People do not fear or doubt those who observe and practice the Five Precepts; for they are not murderers, thieves, immoral persons, liars and drunkards, but good-hearted people who try to spread peace, harmony, brotherhood and solidarity. Let us now make a brief survey of the Five Precepts. Liberality should be practiced not only with regard to human beings. Our dumb and forlorn fellows of the animal kingdom too must experience our liberality. All who are capable of benefiting by our gifts should be made partakers of our liberality.

## 5.2 Findings from the Training Program

The results from the Training Program displays good and successful tendency of this training program. The results show that 83 or 83% of total participants were informed about the training course and will join this kind of program again in the future because of the following reasons:

1) About 83% of them they received good guidance about the Five Precepts from the Training Program.

2) They understood the meanings and purposes of each precept at the Dhamma Talk ranging from the lowest 14% about the Third Precept to the highest 23% about the First Precept.

3) About 71% of them decided to quit smoking after joining the Training Program from almost all 72% participants who smoke, therefore, leaving 1% of them has remained smoking.

4) Among participants who drink alcohol 26 persons, 12 of them have decided to quit drinking alcohol, while 14 of them still cannot stop drinking it. This reduces a number of people who break the Fifth Precept directly, and it indirectly helps decrease percentage of people who break the other Four Precepts as well.

5) The first two activities at the training program that make changes to their lives are mediation 34% and pave the way in the community.

However, about 32% of participants are not sure that they can keep the Five Precepts completely. All in all, the training of promoting the Five Precepts through social activities has significance in cultivating moral values in the people's minds and in their behaviour in the Mahar Aung Myay Township, Mandalay.

## 6. Promoting the Buddhist Five Precepts of People of Mahar Aung Myay Township

The way to promote of Five Precepts to people's daily life is based on the perspectives of three scholar in the Mahar Aung Myay Township by the in-depth interview them in this Township in Mandalay during February 28, 2018- March 3, 2018.

The life of the Buddhist layman is, or should be, regulated by the Five Precepts. These constitute the minimal requirements for ethical day to-day living, to be of benefit both to the individual and to the community. All efforts towards higher spiritual achievement must begin with morality (*sīla*), for without morality, mental concentration (*saṃādhi*)

and wisdom (*paññā*) are not attainable and without the self-discipline that *sīla* inculcates, civilized life is not possible.

**Table 2:** The Way to Promote Moral Value of People of Mahar Aung Myay Township

Perspectives	The way to promote morality in people taught and practice
1 <sup>st</sup> Scholar's Perspective	1) Practice what the Buddha Practice 2) Respect each other 3) Loving-kindness
2 <sup>nd</sup> Scholar's Perspective	1) Take responsibilities 2) Practice the Dhamma the king 3) Reduce the perverted lust ( <i>adhamma raga</i> ) 4) Understand the moral value
3 <sup>rd</sup> Scholar's Perspective	1) Understand the causes and effects 2) Be loving-kindness 3) Be compassion 4) Respect for other
4 <sup>th</sup> Scholar's Perspective	1) kindness and compassion; 2) generosity and renunciation; 3) 'joyous satisfaction with one's own wife', contentment and fewness-of-wishes;
5 <sup>th</sup> Scholar's Perspective	1) loving truth by searching it out, recognizing falsity, and attaining precision of thought and 2) mindfulness and awareness

Source: Interview scholars by researcher, February 26 to March 22, 2018.

In conclusion, the way to cultivate moral value of people in Mahar Aung Myay Township, consist of seven ways as follows:

- 1) Practice what the Buddha Taught and Practice
- 2) Respect each other
- 3) Loving-kindness and compassion
- 4) Take responsibilities
- 5) Practice the Dhamma King
- 6) Reduce the perverted lust (*adhammarāga*)
- 7) Understand the moral value as well as causes and effects

- 8) Kindness and compassion;
- 9) Generosity and renunciation;
- 10) ‘Joyous satisfaction with one’s own wife’, contentment and fewness of wishes;
- 11) Loving truth by searching it out, recognizing falsity, and attaining precision of thought and
- 12) Mindfulness and awareness

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Five Precepts which the Buddha laid down as necessary in his own day are no less necessary today, and they require no modification to bring them into line with our own needs. Besides understanding the Five Precepts merely as a set of rules of abstention, Buddhists should remind themselves that through the precepts they practice the Five Ennoblers as well. While the Five Precepts tell them what not to do, the Five Ennoblers tell them which qualities to cultivate, namely, loving-kindness, renunciation, contentment, truthfulness, and mindfulness.

In all participants, 39% of them felt happy and 35% of felt very happy. Moreover, all of them had broken at least one precept in the past. Besides, the findings show that the majority of them 44% had broken the fourth precept, followed by the Fifth Precept 24%, the First Precept 19%, the Second Precept 10%, and the Third Precept 3%. Furthermore about 71% of them, smoke, while 26% of the total participants drink alcohol (*surā*). When people observe the First Precept of not killing, they control their hatred and cultivate loving-kindness. In observing the Second Precept, they also control their greed and cultivate their renunciation or nonattachment. They control sensual lust and cultivate their contentment in the Third precept. In the Fourth Precept, they abstain from having false speech and cultivate truthfulness, while they abstain from taking unwholesome mental excitement and they develop mindfulness through the Fifth Precept.

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