

**Discipline** (Skt. *Shila*) - *Ethic, Moral, Character, Conduct, Humility, Rule, Order, Precision*

*Discipline is the virtue that produces discernment, knowing what to cultivate and what to abandon. Like a narrow mountain pass along a steep cliff, keeping true prevents disaster. Like ripples in a pond, the conduct of our body, speech, and mind reverberates creating the mind we will have and the world we and future generations will live in. True discipline is taking the reigns of our mind and aligning our life with natural rule and order. Each action, word, and thought become the basis of perceptions and habits. In turn, perceptions and habits become our way of acting, speaking, and thinking. With conduct, we adhere to the path. Without the extremes of a heavy hand or a lax temperament, we practice the arts of not too tight / not too loose and tightening the tight / loosening the loose. With precision, we are humble and refined in our views and actions. Transcendent Discipline is doubtless. Knowing this to be true, I will cultivate virtue while abandoning non-virtue.*

**Commentary**

**Word**

*To enjoy good health, to bring true happiness to one's family, to bring peace to all, one must first discipline and control one's own mind. If a [person] can control [their] mind [they] can find the way to Enlightenment, and all wisdom and virtue will naturally come to [them]. —Buddha*

*Shila* means discipline or conduct. It is the view and actions of body, speech, and mind that create our relationship with ourselves and our world. Literally, the Sanskrit word *shila* means “cool” pointing to how discipline cools the agitation and heat of samsaric suffering. Dharma is sometimes called “the way” or “the law”, referring to the natural rule and order of the world, and more specifically, the mind. A natural rule and order is noticing how things work and aligning ourselves with them. In the world, for example, in ancient times we noticed that water runs down hill and that to move water to our crops we needed to keep the slope of our irrigation downward until the water meets our crops. In terms of the mind, it means how the mind works and how to understand how to act, how to speak, and how to think based on knowing our own psychology and the effect of our body, speech, and mind on ourselves and the world. By studying the mind in meditation we get to know our psychology and how the mind is influenced by its interaction with the world and how the world is influenced by our mind. This is often termed karma, or cause and effect. When this happens, that happens. When this does not happen, that does not happen. When we make choices, they have natural consequences. Whether a consequence is positive or negative, consequences are a natural outcropping of choices made and the resulting effect that occurs. We pay attention and get to know how we and others create suffering or free ourselves of suffering through the cause and effect of our body, speech, and mind. For example, when we steal something, we may worry that we will get caught or we risk being actually caught. If we don't steal something, we don't worry that we will get

caught or have to face actually being caught. We notice the movement of the mind or lack of movement based on our actions, speech, and thoughts.

Traditionally, *shila* refers to three aspects of the eightfold path given by the Buddha: right speech, right action, and right livelihood. These ways of being are not “right” because they are sanctioned by a god or person, but are discovered as “right” because of our understanding of cause and effect or what calms the mind bringing about peace, clarity, and freedom and what stirs up the mind creating agitation, confusion, and, in general, suffering. Right speech is speech that is true and does not harm. Right action consists of actions that refrain and protect from harm. Right livelihood is to have a way of supporting oneself and others in life that does not cause harm.

## Similar Words

Other words that shila may be translated by and/or ways of understanding shila are:

- **Ethic** comes from the greek, *ēthikós* (ἠθικός), meaning relating to our character and outlook. It can either refer to a personal ethic, ethics of a society, or to a natural or transcendent ethics.
- **Moral** is often used synonymously with ethical and has the meaning of our (personal or societal) conduct and character disposition.
- **Character** is a defining feature of an individual, group, or society based on outlook and conduct.
- **Conduct** is the way we (personally or societally) behave and express our character.
- **Humility** literally shares the same root as humus or earth and means to make ourselves lowly, obedient, to act with modesty, and have manners. Humility is how much we personally align ourselves with our personal, the societal, and/or natural rule and order. When we place the ego above any rules or order, we place the ego in the position of a god above any rules of society or the natural world. So being humble is seeing our place in the cosmos and aligning ourselves with our values and the natural rule and order.
- **Rule** refers to the way we measure ourselves or the formula to which conduct must be conformed. When referring to natural rule, similar to the Dao or Way of Daoism, it is the self-existing power and balance of existence in which we live. For example, to not follow the natural rule of being in harmony with the earth and ecosystems in which we inhabit is to create sickness and potentially ecological devastation. In terms of the rule of karma, we may notice that sometimes when we purposefully cause harm to another, that person or others on their behalf try to purposefully cause harm to us. We can see the rule that harm begets harm no matter the scale.
- **Order** means the organization or how the rule is expressed and maintained. It often also means the result of that rule. For example, when we restore a polluted and unhealthy wetland, we restore order as the wetland returns to its natural rules or how it naturally functions without human intervention. In terms of the mind, when we don't cause harm through our body, speech, or mind, we are more peaceful. Peacefulness is the result or order of non-harm.

- **Precision** means an exactness or how well the rule is established, maintained, or adhered to. The more well established, maintained, and adhered to the rule is, the more order the individual, society, and natural world has.

## **Contemplation, line by line, word by word**

### **Opening Statement**

*Discipline is the virtue that produces discernment, knowing what to cultivate and what to abandon.*

*A Native American grandfather was speaking to his grandson about violence and cruelty in the world and how it comes about. He said it was as if two wolves were fighting in his heart. One wolf was vengeful and angry, and the other wolf was understanding and kind. The young man asked his grandfather which wolf would win the fight in his heart. And the grandfather answered, "The one that wins will be the one I choose to feed." —Pema Chödrön*

The virtue of discipline brings about discernment. Discernment means to know what to cultivate and what to refrain from, what to go towards and what to go away from, what habits lead to balance, peace, and happiness and what habits lead to chaos, discord, and suffering. By practicing discipline and studying our experience we begin to get to know cause and effect (Skt. *karma*) or how everything works. If we want to not suffer, we get to know what leads to suffering and what leads away from suffering. If we want to be happy, we get to know what leads to happiness and what leads away from happiness. When we examine our experience, we can know that we suffer when we lash out at our children for little things as it is not who we want to be. We also know that we feel happy when we get to the meditation cushion or exercise that day. Our conduct has an effect and we examine that effect. We also examine the effect or result and look for the cause. If we don't like that we lashed out at our children, we spend time examining what is at the base of our impatience and anger. Maybe we did not get much sleep, maybe we are just doing what our mother did, or maybe we feel out of control. If we can figure out what is the cause and work with that, we can understand ourselves and change our outlook and actions in the future.

Discipline is an ongoing refinement of our conduct as our discernment becomes refined. Since the conduct of body, speech, and mind becomes our character, we are specifically working with our character moment by moment as expressed through the conduct of our body, speech, and mind. Like the quote above about the two wolves, which direction we choose is the result we will have. Many people relate to mindfulness or meditation as a way to calm down, but mindfulness is fundamentally about character development and developing the enlightened qualities of the paramitas in our stream of being. By being present and reflective, we are able to refine the actions of our body, speech, and mind.

Many of us relate to discipline in one of three ways: external, internal, and punishment. External discipline is the rules, expectations, and order of our parents, friends, adults, community, workplace, society, culture, etc. It is any way that others influence or measure the conduct of our body, speech, and mind from the outside in. Internal discipline is rules,

expectations, and order we ourselves hold toward our own conduct of body, speech, and mind. Internal discipline is trying to influence and measure our own conduct from the inside out. Internal discipline may be influenced by the external expectations of others or may be solely from the individual. Many external disciplines started as an internal discipline of a person or community that then became widespread expectations beyond the person or community. Punishment is the consequences of not following either the external or internal discipline whether stated or unstated. Typically some “other” punishes us, either our parents or an aspect of our society, or we punish ourselves for not following the rules and expectations. Punishment can take many forms such as imprisonment, torture, abandonment, harsh words, etc., but is always a way of inflicting suffering and injury. In punishing ourselves, we verbally and mentally abuse ourselves and sometimes physically too. Some people strongly associate discipline with punishment and the reason is that many of our societies and religions are strongly oriented toward punishment, force, and abuse. Many religions and nations have “an eye for an eye” philosophy, forced conversions to spread their beliefs, or self-flagellation as a method of shaping behavior.

*Too often we forget that discipline really means to teach, not to punish. A disciple is a student, not a recipient of behavioral consequences.*

—Daniel J. Siegel

The Buddhist approach is different from a punishing discipline as a central Buddhist value is “do no harm”. A Buddhist understanding is that any act that intentionally creates harm will eventually put forth the causes and conditions that will create more harm. The historical Buddha, Siddhartha, advised kings he guided to support and nurture other religions and their believers and not try to convert them to Buddhism. In this way Buddhism does not proselytize or force conversions. In fact, Siddhartha stated that not everyone will want to or be able to follow his message and he was ok with that. To abuse oneself to create inner discipline may create some discipline, but a Buddhist understanding is that ultimately that abuse will only create a spiritual starvation as the means do not match the intent. The historical Buddha eventually gave up austerity practices as they did not prove fruitful to his goal and left him weak and unable to meditate. A Buddhist approach to consequences is toward reflection and discernment. A kind and gentle parent will, through words and example, have the expectation that their child think of the good of all and ask their child to reflect on the effect they had on themselves, others, and not just what they want. Overtime, the child becomes thoughtful and less reactive from their egoic desires and aggressions. Looking at how children develop discipline, it is mostly from the parenting of their parents. Consistent and disciplined parents provide an example and support for the child to develop an internal model of discipline over time. The same is true in the opposite, in that inconsistent and undisciplined parents provide an example and support in the opposite direction.

If we want to develop a discipline whether it is learning a new language or practicing the violin, we need to look to another to teach us or support us, even if that other is a book or video. Many people try to practice meditation on their own, but struggle. This is where external discipline is helpful. Many people rely on religions, work places, or their life partners for models of discipline in adulthood. Practicing meditation with a meditation group helps us develop internal discipline overtime rather than expecting the discipline to be there already. We are working on internal discipline with gentleness and kindness and we may need patience and to

rely on external discipline until our internal discipline is robust enough. We also may need to have a discipline of restarting and reestablishing our internal discipline again and again when we lose it, as life so often happens and throws us off course for a time. In this way, we become discerning about our discipline too.

## **Analogous Statements**

*Like a narrow mountain pass along a steep cliff, keeping true prevents disaster.*

*We must all suffer from one of two pains: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret. The difference is discipline weighs ounces while regret weighs tons. —Jim Rohn*

Walking along a narrow and steep path is perilous, one wrong step and we can come to danger. The ethical and spiritual journeys are like this narrow and steep path. The sense of this statement is that by making a “wrong move” or behaving in a way that is unethical or outside of our values may cause us personal regret, damage our character, or cause harm to ourselves or others. Mindfulness is about paying attention to our behavior, words, and thoughts “on the cushion and off the cushion”. By paying attention to our body, speech, and mind we take the reins of our own life and choices. The meditative journey is bringing our mindfulness practice to our own mind and life and moving beyond the ego and its manifestations. Little by little we apply effort and discipline and become more and more aligned with our values, and at the same time we make fewer and fewer egoic choices. Eventually, we are fully aligned with our values and virtue.

Keeping true is aligning or humbling ourselves to what is true and ethical. The virtues are about bringing out the best in us and so we explore what we really want in the long term and how to bring this about in the world. Ultimately, we are trying to align with the best of who we are. We all know what it is like to not show up in the world how we would like. Our body, speech, and mind feel off, tension grows, we feel like we are carrying extra weight of our decisions or non-decisions. When we acted in some way we are not proud of, usually for a brief moment we felt powerful, fulfilled a desirous or aggressive impulse, avoided something unpleasant or confusing. But then the situation has a negative consequence, we feel out of line with who we want to be, and/or we feel remorse, guilt, and shame. By procrastinating doing our taxes, we did not have to deal momentarily with the frustration and confusion we know we will feel. Yet at the last moment, we are now staying up late, losing sleep and feeling frustration and confusion wishing we would have taken care of it earlier.

The disaster of falling off the cliff is that we eventually end up being someone we don't want to be or having consequences we don't want to have. When we can't forgive ourselves and feel like we have gone too far away from who we want to be, we enter a kind of psychological hell filled with punishing torment. This psychological hell is the true disaster.

*Like ripples in a pond, the conduct of our body, speech, and mind reverberates creating the mind we will have and the world we and future generations will live in.*

Imagining a small stone being thrown into a tranquil pond, we see the ripples that reverberate out to the edges of the pond. As the pond ripples when a stone is thrown in, so does

our body, speech, mind, and the world itself ripple with each thought, word, and action. Every thought, word, and action has an effect. Some thoughts, words, and actions have more effect than others, but they all have an effect. We are constantly creating our world all the time with every thought, word, and action.

Some thoughts, words, and actions go into such a large pond that the ripple doesn't have a large effect and sometimes either the pond is so small or the stone we throw is so big that it has very large consequences. This process of reverberation is called *karma*. Karma is a Sanskrit term for cause and effect. There is individual karma, family karma, situational karma, societal karma, world karma, and the interaction effect of all of those types of karma. Karma sometimes has immediate reverberations or consequences and sometimes not. Sometimes the consequence does not match what we would assume would happen as the reverberation is not as big or is bigger. Karma is so complex and at different levels, that most of our assumptions of it being individual, immediate, or connected directly to an action doesn't actually work as we think it would. Yet, karma is always at play.

Many struggle with the Buddhist notion of reincarnation, but if we think about reincarnation as the reverberation of our thoughts, words, and actions beyond this moment and even this life we get a sense of what we're really talking about. Reincarnation does not mean that we, in this body and brain, literally are reborn or come back. We and our personality, genetics, and brain die with this body, but what carries forward is the reverberation of our life and choices. In this way, discipline is fundamentally about creating the conditions for the mind, life, society, and world in which we want to live and that we would like future generations to live. The Iroquois nation's Seventh Generation principle of making decisions thinking about the welfare of seven generations from now is a literal application of what this verse means.

## **Explanatory Statements**

*True discipline is taking the reigns of our mind and aligning our life with natural rule and order.*

*Rule your mind or it will rule you. —Horace*

Many of us are like a bull with a ring in its nose being led around wherever our master wants us to go. Our masters are the discursive mind and ego: the negative mind states of desire, aggression, and ignorance, and the views of eternalism, nihilism, and materialism that keep the ego alive. We are conditioned and ignorant of the situation we find ourselves in going wherever our masters direct us. Meditation is shifting this relationship by becoming conscious: investigating the mind and its interaction with the world, learning to take the reins of our own mind through training, and opening the mind and heart to nowness. This is fundamentally what the Buddhist spiritual/psychological journey is about: stop taking the illusory reality as reality, align ourselves with the natural rule and order, develop the virtues, and wake up to the present moment. Natural rule and order is karma. Aligning with natural rule and order is knowing what leads to what. For example, when we are frustrated at something in our life and kick the dog or yell at our husband, there is an effect. Our dog or husband begins to fear us and our aggression or our husband or dog lashes back at us. Aggression, although it can briefly feel powerful, it ultimately does not feel good in the body as it creates tension, the mind becomes narrow and hyper focused from only a certain viewpoint, and the aggressive expression creates reactivity by

others of fear or aggression back towards us. If we reflect on how we want ourselves and others to feel, we generally want to feel peace, not conflict. Possibly in moments we are ok with aggression or conflict, but ultimately, this is not what we want to feel, how we want to live our life, or how we want the world to be. Usually our values are positive aspects of ourselves, aspirations of how we want ourselves or the world to be, or how we want to be viewed by others. Heeding the truth of karma and taking the reins of our life, we become mindful, conscious, and move in valued directions.

*Each thought, word, and action become the basis of habits.*

Our character is based on our thoughts, words, and actions. What kind of character we have is based on what kind of thoughts, words, and actions we cultivate through unconscious or conscious development. We are always developing our character, just what character are we developing? When we are not intentional, conscious, or aware of what we are thinking, speaking, or doing, we are along for the ride reacting or repeating what ourselves, families, and society have conditioned. In being conditioned, we don't have much say or take responsibility for our body, speech, and mind. Many of us do not take to heart that every moment we have a new choice. Unless we reflect on our conditioning and where the patterns we enact come from, we are simply along for the ride. In contrast, when we intentionally and consciously reflect on and take responsibility for our body, speech, and mind, we begin to undo the conditioning.

Every thought, word, and action can easily become habits with or without intentional volition. In mindfully paying attention, we discover the habitual nature of the mind. People who engage in meditation retreats start to see how unimaginative and unfresh our minds are as they are just stuck in patterns repeating again and again the same old same old. Much of our thoughts, speech, and body movement is just a habitual pattern that we repeat again and again. Whether chosen or conditioned, mindful or mindless, habits are both how we go to sleep in the suffering of samsara and how we wake up in the freedom of nirvana. As we mindfully and purposefully investigate and move in a valued direction with conscious choices towards our values, we also create habits. Mindfulness and loving-kindness become habits of mind, but habits that liberate us.

*In turn, habits become our way of thinking, feeling, and acting.*

Habits are either virtuous, neutral, or non-virtuous. If we have not considered what habits we are creating, we find ourselves thinking, speaking, and acting in patterned ways based on whatever has come before. It is as if we are on automatic pilot reacting to the phenomena of the mind and world. If we don't know how to work intentionally with our minds and choices, we end up like zombies moving from one desire to another, one aggression to another, ignoring or avoiding one ego dystonic experience or another. When Chogyam Trungpa first came to the West, he stated that many people he encountered were like zombies, just reacting to the next thing but without much real life in them. We all put on our social mask and go into the world going from one thing to the next. It is not until there is some different perspective, usually brought about by a tragedy or near death experience, that we momentarily wake up and start to question if we want to wear this mask and move around the world mindlessly.

Every choice we make, every thought we think, everything we do can become a habit, and when it becomes a habit we simply are more likely to continue in that same direction and from that same point of view. Our thoughts, words, and actions are trainable. The mind is

mutable, in that it takes the shape that we give it. Some people have experienced things that make their minds more conditioned and reactionary, and yet their minds still have the ability to shift and move in more valued directions. It is truly up to us what habits, thoughts, words, and actions we want to create, virtuous or non-virtuous.

*With conduct, we adhere to the path.*

The Buddhist path is essentially about reducing suffering and increasing happiness. Our conduct is a result of our mind states. When we understand the Buddha's message that certain mind states lead to more suffering and certain mind states lead to more happiness, we study our own mind and get to know which mind states to cultivate and which to refrain from. In adhering to the path we are developing our discipline by cultivating the conduct that is in tandem with the mind states we want to cultivate and refraining from the conduct that is in tandem with the mind states we want to refrain from. Classically, in Buddhism there are four main methods of developing discipline:

1. Refraining from non-virtue
2. Cultivating virtue
3. Mind training
4. Working for the benefit of all beings

Refraining from Non-Virtue

The first method of developing discipline is through refraining from non-virtue. Refraining is trying to not engage in non-virtuous actions of body, speech, and mind. In refraining from non-virtue there are ten refrains each divided into three actions of body, four actions of speech, and three actions of mind. Below are the refrains:

### **Non-Virtuous Refrains**

#### **Body**

1. Killing / Taking Life
2. Stealing / Taking What Is Not Offered
3. Sexual Misconduct / Non-Consensual, Disrespectful, and/or Dishonest Conduct of a Sexual Nature

#### **Speech**

4. Lying /Being Dishonest or Indirect
5. Meaningless Speech / Complaining, Giving Unsolicited Opinions, Mindlessly Filling Space with Words
6. Divisive Speech / Gossiping and Speech that Divides or Sows Discord
7. Harsh Speech / Hurtful and Unpleasant Speech

#### **Mind**

8. Covetousness / Desiring another's Possessions or Accomplishments
9. Ill Will / Wishing Harm
10. Wrong Views / Holding or Perpetuating Views Discordant with the Dharma/Reality such as Eternalism, Nihilism, or Materialism



What makes these actions of body, speech, and mind non-virtuous is that they cause confusion, harm, suffering, and are based in egoic desire, aggression, and ignorance. Desire is the craving and grasping onto anything that is ego syntonic or gratifying. Aggression is the aversion and hatred of anything that is ego dystonic or dissatisfying. Ignorance is the conscious or unconscious ignoring and pretending that dissociates or blunts the effect of reality. In essence, refraining from non-virtue is not allowing the ego to be in control moment by moment. It is an important part of Buddhist ethics that these refrains are truly only looking at what creates suffering and moves us and others away from happiness. If there were a time when lying or another non-virtue would be an egoless act or came out of true compassion to save another life, then in that moment it would become a virtuous act. An example is of the town of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon who banded together during Nazi occupation to save over three thousand Jews by hiding them in the mountainous countryside, lying to Nazi officials, forging documents, and helping the Jews cross the border. This is why Buddhist ethics are not absolute, but relative to the situation and require the paramita of wisdom to discern or know when the ego is driving us and when we are responding from true compassion. As the ego can use logic upon logic to justify itself, we have to be extremely mindful and honest of what the true intention is.

### Cultivating Virtue

Cultivation is purposefully directing our actions of body, speech, and mind towards virtue. Like refraining from non-virtue, in the cultivation of virtue there are ten divided into three actions of body, four actions of speech, and three actions of mind. Below are the cultivations:

### **Virtuous Cultivations**

#### **Body**

1. Honoring and Protecting Life
2. Generosity and Making Offerings
3. Respecting Ourselves & Others / Consenting Sexual Relations Known to All

#### **Speech**

4. Being Honest and Direct
5. Meaningful Speech, Memorizing and Reciting Dharma, and Enjoying Silence
6. Harmonious Speech / Saying only the Good of Others and Reconciling Disputes
7. Kind and Pleasant Speech

#### **Mind**

8. Rejoicing in the Good of Others and their Accomplishments
9. Cultivating Loving-Kindness for All Beings
10. Developing the Wisdom and Discernment that accurately sees what is

A cultivation is to purposefully and intentionally act in these ways with the intention of non-harm. Generally, in cultivating virtue we are training in the paramitas. Specifically we are enacting the discipline of our body, speech, and mind to behave, speak, and think in ways that bring about the paramitas.

### Mind Training

Mind training is the main activity of adhering to the path. Mind training includes refraining from non-virtue and cultivating virtue, but also includes directing and working with the mind to develop mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom. A mind that is not trained goes

wherever the ego and winds of karma blow. An untrained mind is weak in resisting non-virtue and the trained mind is strong in adhering to the path even in the midst of obstacles. Mind training is essentially developing a strong, compassionate, and wise mind. There are two main methods to train the mind: formally or “on the cushion” and informally or “off the cushion”. “On the cushion” means in formal meditation we contemplate, meditate, and work with the mind during meditation sessions. “Off the cushion” or informally means bringing the view and practice of mind training into our everyday life. We engage in “on the cushion” or formal meditation as it strengthens and sharpens the mind’s the ability to be mindful, reflective, and compassionate. Our formal practice bleeds into our informal or “off the cushion” practice so that no matter what we are doing we continue to be mindful, compassionate, and wise. Ultimately, everything we do provides an opportunity to mix our body, speech, and mind with the dharma. This entire book is about mind training, so contemplating and practicing the paramitas is also mind training.

### Working for the benefit of all beings

When we truly apply the teachings in our life and open our heart/mind, we see the amount of suffering everywhere. The natural response to seeing ourselves or others suffering is compassion and wanting to relieve it. So we dedicate ourselves to benefiting and being of service. Benefiting and being of service is adhering to the path and can take any varied means from being kind with ourselves, dedicating our practice to others, teaching the Dharma, or doing direct action. Often we think in extremes, that it only matters if we go and actually help the earthquake victims or get the homeless person off the street, or we can’t do anything and so feel helpless. We can not intervene in every tragedy and way that others suffer, nor do we have the knowledge, skills, or resources to do so. We also are not helpless or unable to do anything. Wisdom and discernment are what allow us to know when to act or not act, what action is needed, and how to act. We may hear about a distant tragedy and practice tonglen for everyone. We may give a donation to a relief effort. We may leap into action to help our neighbor’s dog. As we cultivate the wish to be of benefit to others, we find the ways that we can intervene with our body, speech, and mind.

### Partial and Full Karmic Acts

From a Buddhist ethical perspective there are four things that need to be present in both virtuous and non-virtuous actions to have a full karmic result:

1. Object
2. Intention
3. Action
4. Completion

The first is the object, to identify the direction of our action. If we were going to kill someone it would be to actually identify who it is that we are going to kill. If we are going to save someone, it is to identify who it is that we are going to save. If we were to accidentally kill someone or save them, it is not a full and complete karmic act even though there still may be karmic consequences. Second, the intention, which is often considered the most important or having the most significance of the karmic acts, is that we actually have developed the motivation and wish to act in a certain way. In the example of killing someone, we have

developed the motivation and wish to kill them. If our motivation to kill is from malice or hatred, it has the largest consequences. If we were to kill from wanting to protect someone, it has the least consequences. Third, action is that we actually carry out the action, part of the action, or we don't carry out the action at all. If you identify who you want to kill and develop the intention to kill them, but don't carry out the action or only try but don't succeed, you have created some karma but not the whole karmic act. Lastly, completion is how we feel after the action has happened or not happened. Do we regret it or are proud of what object, intention, and action we committed? If we killed someone having identified them, intended to kill them, carried out the killing, and felt good about killing them, we have created a full karmic act of killing.

The import of a full vs a partial karmic act is the level of consequence in our mind and life. Full karmic acts have larger import and partial karmic acts have less. We can look to our own objects, intentions, actions, and completions to examine our behavior. For example, if we send an angry and attacking email to a coworker, we have an object (coworker), an intention (to express our anger and lash out), an action (having actually sent the email), and the completion (how we feel about sending the email). What is the effect of our actions? If we actually send the email, this will damage the relationship, we may not feel good about ourselves, we may be proud of ourselves for standing up for ourselves, we may threaten our employment, among many more possible outcomes and consequences. If we did not actually send the email, we may have gotten out some feelings in writing it, we may preserve how others think of us, or we may prevent ourselves from being fired. We can apply this same formula to practicing the virtues. Do we have an object, intention, action, and completion with enacting generosity, patience, or any other virtue? Full and partial karmic acts have consequences. We can't remove ourselves from the law of karma, it follows us everywhere like a shadow we can't shake.

*Without the extremes of a heavy hand or a lax temperament, we practice the arts of not too tight / not too loose and tightening the tight / loosening the loose.*

The Buddha was approached by a musician who asked, "how do you meditate?" The Buddha responded with a question to the musician, "How do you tune your instrument?" The musician responded with "Not too tight and not too loose, just until it makes the proper note". The Buddha responded, "The same is how you meditate, not too tight and not too loose". If we hold the mind too tightly, the mind becomes agitated. If we hold the mind too loosely, the mind becomes discursive. We are trying to find the middle ground between these extremes. This same idea applies to not just meditation but also to the rest of our life.

Buddhism is often called "the Middle Way" which has come to be used as the middle way between all kinds of extremes, one of which is the temperament of too tight or a heavy hand and the other is the temperament of too loose or laxity. The historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, was said to give up the life of asceticism and the life of gluttony, seeing that neither gave him the result he was searching for. We have a tendency to read or take things too literally, not to mention some of us want someone to tell us what the right course of action is so that we can follow the rule and be the "good girl/boy" rather than have to go through the process of discerning the best course of action based on our own effort. We also have a tendency to look at things in a "black or white" or "all or nothing" mindset. These tendencies make our practice of discipline too tight. One example of taking the discipline of not harming others too tightly is by preventing the surgeon from making an incision to remove a deadly cancer. Some of us put a lot

of pressure on ourselves to be perfect or keep to the exact letter of the law. These tendencies make our practice of discipline too tight.

On the other hand, we can also have a tendency to read or take things too symbolically, not to mention we don't want anyone else to tell us what to do. We also have a tendency to throw our hands up and say "what is the point" and hide out in our laziness. One example of taking the discipline of not harming others too loosely would be to convince oneself that taking drugs or committing suicide isn't harming others forgetting that the people in our life care about us and that we are "an other" too. Some of us have had trouble establishing discipline in our life, and so too loosely say that this path is not for us as it just makes us feel bad so we don't even try. These tendencies make our practice of discipline too loose.

We are trying to find the middle ground where we don't hold the mind too tightly or too loosely and we eventually develop our discipline properly. Once the discipline is developed properly and it is starting to become more robust, then we can apply the art of tightening the tight and loosening the loose. This is also known as refining or perfecting discipline. Here, we begin to tighten the discipline of exertion and loosen the discipline of relaxing. The end result in our meditation is lucid clarity and calm bliss, where we rest in the non-conceptual direct experience of what is. The end result in the rest of our life is we are completely aligned with our values and virtues as we refine and perfect the paramitas.

*With precision, we are humble and refined in our views and actions.*

The precision of discipline leaves us humble as we get to know how much further we still need to go. Yet we are also joyful as there is nothing else we have done with our lives that is having the positive impact of feeling freer and more joyful than refining our discipline. Refining our discipline of study, meditation, sleep, diet, yoga, work, etc., refines our view and actions in these areas. As we refine our views, we become more easily able to discern what actions to take. This leaves us feeling more clear. As we refine our actions we have less and less agitation in the mind and the mind does not sink into depressions or get stirred up in anxiety as much. This leaves us feeling more calm. As we become more and more calm and clear, the ego does not take over and true humbleness deepens. Being humble and having humility is seeing our connection with all other beings where we no longer put ourselves above others.

## **Transcendent Discipline**

*Transcendent Discipline is doubtless.*

There are two types of doubt, self-doubt and intelligent doubt. Self-doubt is made up of second guessing ourselves and fear of making a wrong decision or generally being unsure. Intelligent doubt is using critical intelligence to question and develop understanding in order to know what is true and what to accept and what to reject. Although fear is not the main driver in intelligent doubt, it is still present in a basic distrust such as in not wanting to get swindled. When discipline is transcendent and beyond ego there is no longer any doubt about the actions of our body, speech, or mind. We see clearly and are calmly present, not drawn away by the past or future. When we begin the journey of meditation, doubt is present both in self-doubt and intelligent doubt. When we are on the journey for a long time, intelligent doubt increases and we have much less self-doubt. When we get to the edge of stepping through the door to

enlightenment, the last thing we have to work with is doubt. At this point, the desire to sharpen the sword of our critical intelligence will only dull it. Doubt and fear are intimately connected and influence each other. The fear that underlies all doubt continues until we have actually reached a fearless state. In moments along the way, we may have momentary experiences of a fearless state, but because we have not fully embodied it, it is only momentary. In the state of fearlessness, there is no longer any doubt. At that point there is no longer something to be disciplined toward, there is no one to be disciplined, and there is no discipline itself. There is simply the fearlessness and doubtlessness of the present moment.

## **Commitment**

*Knowing this to be true, I will cultivate virtue while abandoning non-virtue.*

The essential discipline is to abandon non-virtue and to cultivate virtue. This begins to move our mind towards the accumulation of merit and the cultivation of our character. We bring together our discernment and our exertion to embody discipline. Just by practicing virtue and abandoning non-virtue our mind will settle and have more peace. Eventually, virtuous actions become the norm and non-virtue the exception. Further, when we are not separate from discipline, there is nothing to cultivate and nothing to abandon. By joining all the other virtues with discipline we reach the changeless state of fearlessness.

## **Ways other paramitas influence discipline**

Wisdom is intimately connected with discipline. Discipline results in discernment which further develops our wisdom. Our wisdom also then provides the discernment for future discipline. This symbiosis is how all the paramitas interact again and again. Wisdom also allows us to know when our discipline is waning or that we have abandoned it, and it lets us know when discipline is having a beneficial effect. Wisdom also knows when we are too tight or too loose, and when we can tighten the tight and loosen the loose. The overall roadmap and moment by moment insight into our practice and process with discipline and all the paramitas is what wisdom provides.

The generosity of discipline is in the willingness to give ourselves that which will actually help us in the long term. This is like reminding ourselves, "I really want my future self to be happy, and therefore, I need to accomplish this activity now to make my future self happy". Loving-kindness helps us to be disciplined because we love and have friendliness for ourselves and for others, and therefore, we know that discipline sometimes takes time and we can be gentle until our discipline develops. Truth interacts with discipline by being honest with what obstacles we face in trying to develop discipline, what might be needed in order to develop discipline, and also when discipline becomes heavy-handed or too loose. The discipline of discipline is tightening our discipline making it more effective and directing it to specific areas that need attention. We also practice the discipline of loosening our grasp and need to control the outcome allowing ourselves to loosen the loose. The exertion of discipline is the development and enactment of our motivation to be disciplined. It is why we are doing it and keeping our eye on the prize. The patience of discipline is being willing to endure the hardship that is sometimes created by developing discipline, whether that hardship is by not being able to go and play with

our friends or that we're sick and we really don't feel like it, but we do it anyway. Meditation influences discipline as our mind develops stability, in that, when we are more stable in our mind and outlook, our discipline naturally increases as we move past many of the obstacles that eroded our discipline. We bring our disciplined path to our meditation and we bring our meditation path to our discipline. Equanimity influences discipline as we are more stable and not on the roller coaster of our emotions allowing more stability in our discipline. Renunciation is what we are abandoning in relation to discipline: laziness, lethargy, agitation, and distraction. These mind states take us away from our discipline as we get caught up in the excitement of something other than what we are trying to focus on, we give in to our tiredness and not feeling like it, or a forgetfulness where we lose our motivation. The skillful means of discipline is utilizing certain methods to increase our discipline through reflection and study, relying on external people or situations, or working on increasing our motivation to strengthen our discipline by setting goals and commitments.

### **Ways of Practicing Discipline**

Below are some of the ways that one may practice discipline. There are countless ways, so you are encouraged to find your own and to seek ways to support others being disciplined.

- Get a meditation app
  - Pick one short meditation and try it
  - Practice the meditation daily
- Practice meditation with a meditation community
- Take a meditation class or retreat
  - Sign up and go to a meditation class
  - Sign up and go to a meditation retreat
- Join a meditation community
  - Become a member
  - Help the community
- Challenge ourselves
  - Come up with a short term or long term goal to see if we can practice meditation or work on a behavior that we identify like being patient with our kids or being generous with strangers and try to stick to it as long as we can.
  - Repeat the above
- Make a personal commitment
  - Commit to practice a virtue everyday
  - Commit to a daily activity like make the bed or keep the sink empty of dishes.
  - Commit to go to the gym/workout once or more a week.
  - Commit to bring food to a neighbor/someone in need.
- Refrain from harm and vice
  - Commit to identifying the harm that we create
  - Pick one area that we have identified as creating harm in the world and commit to practice refraining.
  - For an hour, a day, or a week, try to not create any harm to humans, animals, plants, etc.
  - Search for our vices and identify any major ones.

- Commit to refrain from that vice in the next minute, hour, or day.
- Cultivate Virtue
  - Study one virtue everyday
  - Pick one virtue and put it into practice for a day, week, month, or year
- Mind Training
  - Study everyday
  - Contemplate a virtue everyday
  - Meditate everyday
  - Go through advanced Buddhist Study and Meditation such as Shedra or Three Year Retreat
- Dedicate our life to the benefit of all beings
  - Take a personal vow to be of benefit to all beings
  - Take the Bodhisattva Vow
  - Everyday make this our first thought upon waking up and last thought before sleeping
  - Have the continual aspiration, intention, and action while waking and sleeping to benefit all beings

### **Embodiment of Discipline**

When we study and practice discipline, our thoughts, emotions, and perceptions begin to shift toward discernment. We are not held in the same egoic tangles and we have more freedom. Below are some of the ways that we know when discipline is being embodied.

- Discipline comes easily
- Discernment is strong
- Not swayed by others or the fear of missing out
- Our mind and body are flexible and gentle
- Don't have conflictual emotions about activity
- Commitment is natural
- Accomplish intentions easily
- Radiate gracefulness
- Lack of anxiety