

## Sila (2)

One way of talking about morality in Buddhism might be to discuss each of the precepts in turn. In Zen training the import of each one of them is often taught to a class of aspirants before 'taking' them (and beforehand laboriously sewing a Rakusu) in a ceremony called *Jukai*. I'm not sure if we would want to go into that level of detail. I once did a philosophy course that considered many of the aspects of just one of these precepts, about killing. So even one of the precepts could be a huge subject. We looked at arguments for and against capital punishment, abortion, suicide, euthanasia, the difference between killing and allowing someone to die, and other jolly topics :)

Instead I am going to give a quotation from a Japanese Zen teacher, Gudo Nishijima:

"... Buddhist morality has no basis other than Buddhist morality itself. To understand this point we must realise that morality is not a theoretical or intellectual problem. Morality is a practical problem -- a real problem. What to do here and now is the problem and the answer is contained in this situation itself. This is the fact, and facts are the basis of Buddhist morality itself.

Q: So what is the relationship between the precepts and morality?

A: The precepts guide us in our life. They have come from the experience of the truth in the past, so we can say they are based on reality. But our lives are tremendously complex and varied. If we try to apply the precepts too strictly we may lose the freedom to act. We are living here and now so we must find rules that can be used here and now. You must find our precepts at the moment. Reality is changeable so our rules must also be changeable. True rules must work in the real world. True precepts are changeable and at the same time unchangeable. This is the nature of Buddhist precepts. They help us live correctly. They provide a framework which is exact and rather narrow. And yet we are free to act in the moment by moment situation of our life."