

Mind-body rules

These mind and body guidelines are for our happiness here and hereafter by way of the 10 wholesome courses of karma (*kusala kamma, patha*).¹

(1) Respect life. (Refrain from killing.) In whatever we think and do, life – not even religion – must come first. If there is no life, there is no religion. Religion is to better our lives, not our lives to better religion. We don't have to keep looking for a better mouse-trap, if we keep our home clean and pest-free. Our true home is our mind.

(2) Work to live. (Refrain from stealing.) Only philosophically, perhaps, we can say that life is nothing but work – this is like saying that life is suffering. But we can do something positive about it: we should investigate how we can happily work to live. This means working for what we really need in life. How much money do we really need to live happily? How much food do we really need to stay healthy? How much pleasure do we need? What do we really need right now to be happy? Notice we are asking questions: only we can answer them for ourselves.

(3) Pleasures that satisfy. (Refrain from sexual misconduct.) Each of us have our own idea of what makes us feel good. What do we really enjoy doing? How do we enjoy doing this – whether it is working, learning, exercising, socializing, having a relationship, or simply being oneself? A simple answer would be: we know when to stop. If we are unable to get what we want, we know how to direct our energies healthily in other ways.

We may not even be aware that we live as if all the pleasures are only in the body. We can only really enjoy bodily pleasures (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches) when we have the mind, or better, the heart, for it. True pleasure is in the mind and heart. That is why meditation raises our life-quality and capacity for true pleasure and happiness.

(4) Be courageous and honest. (Refrain from lying.) Note how difficult it is to be really honest with people. We get into autopilot mode when we speak with those we see as better (richer, classier, etc) than us, or with those we see as being inferior to us, or even as good as we are. Notice, we at once feel uncomfortable with people who do not introduce themselves when they chat with us whether face-to-face or online.

To get others to be honest with us, we need to start being honest (up to a wise point) with others first. Notice, too, how with really good friends, we don't need to be guarded, and can say whatever we like (up to a sensible point). With most people, we need to be somewhere in between: the middle way, which also means to be Dharma-inspired (not just talk Dharma). We should show others how happy we are with the Dharma.

(5) Principles, not people. (Refrain from slandering.) When something goes wrong, many tend to look for someone to blame. But if we look more carefully, we will discover that a number of conditions have brought it about. Even when someone

¹ On the 10 wholesome courses of karma, see **Sāleyyaka Sutta** (M 41,11-14), SD 5.7 & **Sañcetanika Sutta** (A 10.206,7.2-12), [SD 3.9](#).

does or says something destructive, it is easy to see him as being at fault. However, we learn more if we ask or investigate why he really felt that way, in the first place.

In other words, we should not merely look at the end-product, but also consider what it really is, and how it arose. People do not make mistakes: there are only the mistakes, nobody there. In short, we are talking about behaviour. When we understand behaviour, we understand people.

(6) Being firm helps. (Refrain from harsh speech.) What can we learn about a person who has great wealth who thinks that he can speak brashly? What, then, if he had power? Strong and angry words may work sometimes, but there is a terrible cost. People are likely to get hurt or may respond with fear. It's different to be firm, fiery and yet inspiring, especially with a tone of goodness in our words and actions. We learn more good from a critical person than one who keeps saying, "It's all right."

(7) Memorable words. (Refrain from frivolous talk.) Notice how we easily forget, or want to forget, most of what others say. Before we speak, it helps to consider, "Would this be worth remembering?" Notice how the wise want to remember what the Buddha has said more than two and a half millennia ago. Before we speak, we should consider how this person before us would understand or respond. We then adjust how to put our thoughts into words so that others find them worth remembering.

(8) Be generous. (Refrain from covetousness.) Even when we have the best of intentions, our actions can be misconstrued by others. We can never be too sure of why people do this. From our own experience, we know that when we are unhappy, we tend to also be unhappy with whatever people say or do. In other words, people who react badly to us may be unhappy about something else. We are merely the condition – not the *cause* – for their unhappiness. If we are able to help them define their happiness and deal with it, then we have brought more happiness into the world.

(9) Enjoy what we do. (Refrain from ill will.) To really be helpful to others, we should learn to enjoy the moment, even a difficult one. This is not just being polite, but to understand that even this shall pass. Thoughtful silence or quiet observation helps us see the bigger picture as things unfold before us. Notice how a few of our friends have a habit of being gently effusive with joy: they seem to be smiling no matter what the situation. We like to be with them. Or better, we can switch roles.

If we enjoy doing something, we will be better at it, or at least get it done properly. To really enjoy people is to be curious about them. Although we know some people seem to be stuck with themselves like a nail in a concrete wall, we should at least know it would take a lot of energy to pull them out of that wall! Perhaps we can try hanging some nice decorations on that nail. Often, it helps to sincerely tell a difficult person, "May you be well and happy! I think there's a lot of goodness inside you." Then, excuse yourself as soon as we can. If we are willing to invest some energy in the present, we will see some joy in it.

(10) A clear open mind. (Refrain from wrong views.) To be able to keep a clear open mind means that we must be willing and able to listen to others – even when we think we have the best answers. We could be wrong, or we can be better even than the

“best” answer. Often enough, we wish we have not said something, or said it in another way.

We need quiet or silent moments with ourself, such as at the end of our meditation. This is a taking stock of ourself, like spring-cleaning our room or house. We need to throw out useless stuff, replace broken ones, and perhaps rearrange the furniture more effectively and beautifully.

We often live as if our present beliefs and views will stay with us forever. Looking back, the older we are, the more we notice we have changed our views about a lot of things. For the same reason, it is unwise to blindly follow the views of others – they, too, will change their views in time.

The best way to learn is by examining where we have failed – which means we should not fear failure. We learn more from failures than we do from success. The best way to take charge of ourself is to smile the same smile at failure and at success, and to embrace change. It’s happening right now. We are still evolving: let the best person to surprise ourself be – ourself!

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