

Marriage, Family & Relationships

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Programme Five Outline

Asking the Questions

3 minutes

A kaleidoscope of images and questions introduces issues related to family life, marriage and sexual relationships. Young people comment through a series of soundbites.

The Buddhist Teaching

The place of marriage and attitudes to divorce and family life in Buddhism are outlined against the setting of pilgrims visiting the holy site of Bodhgaya in northern India.

The Five Precepts

4 minutes

Dawn, a teacher at a Buddhist school in Brighton, takes part in end-of-term activities with her family. The **Five Precepts** are introduced as the basis of ethical life for all Buddhists, and as the source of the school rules.

The Third Precept

2 minutes

Vanessa, Dawn's 16 year-old daughter, reflects on the pressures on young people of her age. The third Precept, which relates specifically to sexual behaviour, is introduced and explained.

Buddhists Respond

17 minutes

Filmed in situ, practising Buddhists give their views on

- **marriage, family life and divorce**
- **sexual relationships**
- **lifestyle**

Contributors

Theravada - Most Venerable Vajiragnana **Tibetan Tradition** - Ken Holmes
Soto Zen - Adrienne Pitman **Japanese Pure Land** - Reverend Professor Sato
Friends of the Western Buddhist Order - Dharmachari Prasadu and
 Dharmacharini Vidyamala

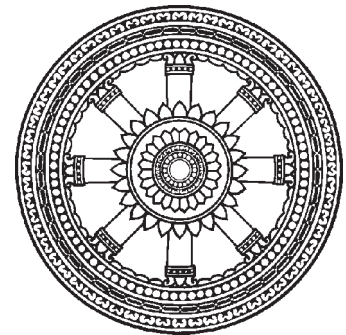
Background Information

The Dharma School, Brighton, England

The Dharma school is the first school in the UK to be based on Buddhist principles. It opened in the front room of a private house in 1994, with 4 pupils. In June 1995 it moved to the White House, a former nursery school, and now has 65 children, aged 3-11 years. It is open to pupils of all beliefs who are willing to observe the school rules, which are based on the Buddhist Precepts.

The school is private, more affluent parents supporting those who find it harder to meet the fees. The staff are either Buddhist or committed to living by Buddhist principles. Though fully qualified teachers, they work for less than half of the standard teacher's salary. The headteacher, Kevin Fossey, practises within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. It is the aim of the Dharma School Trustees to help other such schools become established.

For more information see Contacts, p62.



Setting

Ken Holmes practises within the **Tibetan** tradition (Karma Kagyu Lineage). He is Director of Studies at Samye Ling Tibetan Centre in Eskdalemuir, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, where he lives with his wife. He is a scholar and translator of Buddhist texts.

Most Venerable Vajiragnana is Head Monk of the London Buddhist Vihara. He is one of the most senior monks in the **Theravada** school resident in Britain.

Dawn Austin-Locke is a parent and teacher at the Dharma school. Dawn practises within the **Theravada** tradition.

Reverend Professor Sato runs the Three Wheels Temple, West London, the first establishment of the Japanese True **Pure Land** (Jodo Shin Shu) school in Britain.

Adrienne Pitman is a lay ordained minister within the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives (**Soto Zen** tradition). She is a nurse and a widow with two grown-up children.

Dharmachari Prasadu is a psychologist and member of the **Western Buddhist Order**. He lives in Yorkshire with his wife and family.

Dharmacharini Vidyamala is a New Zealander and a member of the **Western Buddhist Order**. She lives with six other women in a Buddhist community in Manchester, England.

Contributors

Guidelines for Living



Key Points

For Buddhists, the **Five Precepts** provide guidelines for leading an ethical life. The Precepts

- apply to all relationships including marriage, family life and sexual relationships
- express the principle of **ahimsa** or non-harm
- are based on an understanding of the interconnectedness of all life
- extend to all beings
- cover any deliberate action of thought, word or deed
- indicate harmful behaviour to avoid and positive behaviour to develop
- are not commandments, but a set of principles taken on voluntarily - in Buddhism there is no God to lay down commandments

Lists of Precepts occur in several places in the Buddhist scriptures. The following is taken from the *Anguttara-Nikaya (The Book of Gradual Sayings)* in the *Sutta Pitaka* of the Pali canon.

**When a lay follower possesses five things,
he lives with confidence in his house,
and he will find himself in heaven
as sure as if he had been carried off and put there.**

What are the five?

He abstains from:

killing breathing things,

from taking what is not given,

from misconduct in sensual desires,

from speaking falsehood,

and from indulging in liquor, wine, and fermented brews.

- *Anguttara-Nikaya (The Book of Gradual Sayings) Sutta Pitaka*

The basic Precepts are the same for all Buddhists, but at their ordination monks and nuns take on a **vinaya**, or set of rules of conduct. These rules of conduct differ from one tradition or school to another.

Key Points

The Third Precept - abstaining from misconduct in sensual desires

The third Precept applies the principle of **ahimsa**, non-harm, to sexual behaviour.

- sensual misconduct is sexual behaviour that causes harm, to oneself or others
- its cause is craving or greed, hatred and ignorance
- traditionally rape and abduction were cited as examples of sexual misconduct
- the opposite of sexual craving is the cultivation of stillness, simplicity and contentment

The goal of Buddhism is the attainment of Nirvana (Nibbana in Pali), or Enlightenment. The word *nirvana* literally means a blowing out - of the fires of craving or greed, hatred and ignorance.

Celibacy

The Buddha lived a celibate life and encouraged those of his followers who were able to do likewise. The third Precept for monks and nuns is to observe celibacy; i.e. not to engage in any sexual activity of body, speech or mind. Celibacy enabled monks and nuns to remain free from family responsibilities and to work to overcome the craving associated with sexual activity.

Marriage and Divorce

Within Buddhism

- marriage is a secular arrangement, not a sacrament or holy rite
- monks do not conduct the marriage ceremony, but often bless the couple
- it is recognised that divorce may be necessary if the two people concerned cannot live together happily
- a variety of marriage laws and customs and patterns of family life exist in different traditions

The Third Precept



Marriage and Divorce



Theravada

Most Venerable
Vajiragnana

Head Monk
London Buddhist Vihara

Interview Transcript

Marriage and Family

In the Theravada tradition we don't have ceremonies for marriage but either before the marriage or after, the couple may come to the temple for blessings: if it's before the marriage they come individually, and if it's after, they come together.

The *Sigalovada Sutta* explains very clearly the duties and responsibilities of family members, between husband and wife, parents and children, friends, employees and employers, clergy and lay people, teachers and pupils. It covers the whole of society and gives the family a very important place.

Divorce

I don't object to divorce, because we can't force people to live together if they are not friendly. It would be hell, and it's better to be peacefully separated and live happily; that's my personal opinion. The Buddha did not talk about marriage or divorce. He did give advice on how to lead a happy married life, but he didn't talk about the marriage ceremony. He didn't intervene in marriage or divorce because it was seen as a social thing.

Sex

Regarding sexual behaviour, we have to remember the third of the Five Precepts, which is 'I undertake to refrain from unlawful sex.' All sexual relations are covered by this principle. Anything that brings unhappiness to oneself or the other person should be avoided.

Lifestyle

The celibate life is more helpful to the spiritual life, as is very clearly explained in the text: *Family life is full of impediments and problems, whereas a monk's life is like open space.* It has no barriers to spiritual practice. But that doesn't mean other lifestyles have no place in the spiritual life. Many people, at the time of the Buddha, gained the highest of spiritual attainments while still living as lay people. Thus I can't say that monastic life is the only way to spiritual attainment. It simply has more opportunity, more room for personal practice.

This transcript from the video interview has been edited, retaining the key points.

Buddhists Respond Relationships



Theravada

Dawn Austin-Locke
Parent and Teacher

The Dharma School

Marriage and Family

Within the Theravada tradition I don't think anyone would suggest that people should live together if neither is feeling any spiritual development or happiness from that. I don't think children can thrive in that sort of situation. The important thing is that people separate without harming each other or the children.

As a parent and teacher, I think children need respect, space and a right path. Children need to feel that they have a valued place in the family and that they can contribute to it as well as take from it.

Sex

In relationships with other people, including sexual relationships, we always need to be very mindful of people's needs and feelings and the effects our actions might have on them. It might seem very easy to have a short relationship outside of a regular partnership but the effects of a very small action can be devastating and can spread like ripples on a pond to harm many people.

So I don't think you can lay down the law; all you can say is, "Think about what you are going to do; think about the effect on the other person and the families involved. If you still decide to do it then at least be responsible in your actions and make sure there are no unwanted children as a result."

When my children were teenagers I just reminded them that other people had the same feelings and needs as they had!

Lifestyle

I often think about whether a monastic or householder's lifestyle is more conducive to spiritual development. I quite envy the monastics having the space for meditation and for spiritual development they do have! But family life brings out certain qualities: I'm encouraged to be more sharing, tolerant and patient than I am by nature. These are all things that I like to work on and that I like to think have been given to me as a spiritual challenge. Maybe another time, in another life, I'll have the privilege of living a monastic life and see the other side of it.

This transcript from the video interview has been edited, retaining the key points.



Tibetan Tradition

Ken Holmes
 Director of Studies
 Samye Ling Monastery
 & Tibetan Centre

Interview Transcript

Marriage and Family

In the Tibetan tradition marriage is not considered sacred. It's part of worldly life, but because it's so important for most people, we have a blessing, in which we pray for the blessings of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas on the marriage and advise the people to let each other grow; to help each other become better human beings; to work in peace and harmony together for the welfare of the world.

Divorce

If people do come to a Buddhist lama for counselling, sometimes he'll encourage them to make the effort to live together, especially if there are children, but if that's just going to cause more suffering, then it's better to separate. There isn't a religious guideline that one definitely ought to stay married.

Lifestyle

When it comes to lifestyle and spirituality there are two answers: a general answer which is that the monks' and the nuns' lifestyle is more conducive to spirituality simply because it gives you more time; and then more specifically in the Tibetan tradition, there's the belief that all one's spiritual growth comes from working with a personal teacher who guides you and tailors the Buddha's teaching to your specific needs.

So someone might need to go and work with family and friends, to be really immersed in society, because they need to see more of humanity's situation and develop more compassion. At another time, somebody might to go on retreat; become a monk or a nun and move away from family and worldly life.

It can be very useful for some people to spend a year or more as a monk or a nun. Here at Kagyu Samye Ling Monastery people can take ordination for one year - that gives them the time to evaluate their own spirituality - it's a challenge but after that they can take it or leave it.

This transcript from the video interview has been edited, retaining the key points.

Buddhists Respond Relationships

Marriage and Family

Family life is very important in Buddhism, and it's not just the nuclear family of husband and wife and children living in one household, but what we call the people who practise Buddhism: the Sangha. Family life includes the Sangha.

The values of family life that Buddhism encourages are that you need to be compassionate, understanding and aware of other people's feelings within your own household. Through meditation you become aware of the feelings arising within yourself but you don't necessarily act immediately on them.

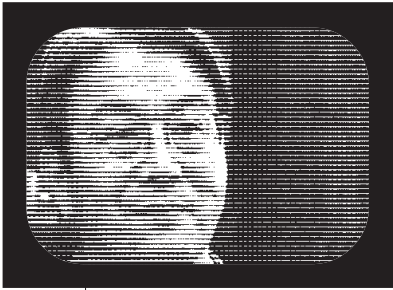
My children seem to learn from my practice although I don't actually tell them they ought to do this and they ought to do that. But they seem to pick up on things.

Buddhism makes you a better mum because you're more understanding and you have a sense of fun and think about what's going on, and you allow your children to be people because you're not being 'mum' and 'child'; you can see that they are actually people in their own right, and allow them to have the freedom to make their own choices - but with guidance; with you being there, just gently saying, "Do you think that's the right thing to do? Have you thought about what the consequences will be?"

**Soto Zen**

Adrienne Pitman
Lay Minister
Order of
Buddhist Contemplatives
Throssel Hole Abbey

This transcript from the video interview has been edited, retaining the key points.



Pure Land

Reverend Professor
K.T. Sato

Head Priest
Three Wheels Temple

Interview Transcript

Marriage and Family

In our tradition marriage is extremely important. The founder of our tradition, Shinran, did get married and the biography of Shinran devotes one chapter to describing how he made the decision to do so. Priests in our tradition are expected to marry. Indeed, in our tradition, each half of a married couple is thought of as respecting the other as an embodiment of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, each ultimately leading the other to the Pure Land.

Family life is also considered very important in our tradition, because one's relationships with other members of the family, especially one's relationship with one's parents, is thought of as the primary or primordial foundation of one's wider life in society. Personal relationships within family life have a deep effect on human relationships in social life, in most cases quite unconsciously. Therefore it is very important for us to establish a healthy family life through introspection and faith in Amida Buddha.

Divorce

Divorce is very rare in our Sangha. In this country people get divorced much more easily than in our country and in our tradition we try to avoid divorce as much as possible.

Sex

Sexual mores seem to be changing so rapidly in modern society. Although I want to avoid easy generalisation, the main principles I would like to keep in mind are respect for life, awareness of the dignity of the individual and love: unselfish love characterised by humility and thoughtfulness. If your way of living deviates too widely from these principles, your sexual life will become miserable.

This transcript from the video interview has been edited, retaining the key points.

Buddhists Respond Relationships

Interview Transcripts

Marriage and Family

In the FWBO we think the quality of the relationship matters much more than anything else. Some people do want to get married, and if they do, they get married in a registry office, and then perhaps have a blessing in the Buddhist centre afterwards.

My children seem to have benefited from Buddhism in two ways: first, they seem to have developed a keen sense of what's right and what's wrong, and they're very keen to be straightforward and honest in their dealings with other people. The second thing is that I'm a vegetarian and, I guess by my example, the children have decided that they want to be vegetarian too. It's not something that I've insisted on; they've decided quite spontaneously that they don't want to eat meat.

Lifestyle

What we say is that commitment to the spiritual life is primary, the most fundamental thing, and that lifestyle is secondary to that. So it's possible to live a monastic life, or to live with a family, or in a residential community, or on one's own. Commitment is much more important than lifestyle.

These transcripts from the video interviews have been edited, retaining the key points.

Sexual Relationships

Being in a sexual relationship as an ordained Buddhist with a man who is an ordained Buddhist has been very interesting. It's given me lots of cause to think about ethics in the area of sexual relationships. I've come to see that it's not about things like whether you're married or not, or what your orientation is, or whether you live with your partner. It's about the human side of it - how you treat each other - being caring, loving, honest, not cheating, always trying to bring respect and love for this human being that you're with.

Lifestyle

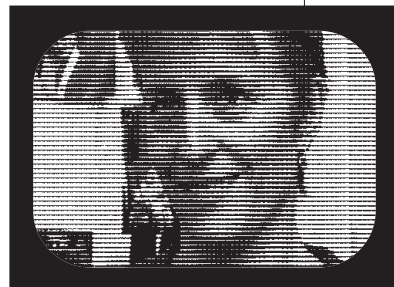
I'm not choosing to be celibate at this time in my life, so I am in a sexual relationship that I'm very happy with. I'm ordained into the Western Buddhist Order. I don't consider myself to be a nun; neither am I a lay person. I'm a fully committed Buddhist. I live in a community with five other Buddhist women, and I see that as a very positive alternative to living as a sexual couple with my partner. We've all got very good friendships with each other. It's very caring and supportive. We meditate together; we try to practise the Precepts together. We support each other in our practice.



FWBO

Dharmachari Prasadu

Western Buddhist Order



FWBO

Dharmacharini Vidyamala

Western Buddhist Order

Relationships **Buddhists Respond**