

# **The Golden Rules of Buddhism**

## **by H.S. Olcott**

First printed as a pamphlet in 1887; Second edition, 1891; Third edition, 1902

Published in 1918

Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Chennai [Madras] India  
The Theosophist Office, Adyar, Madras. India

### **CERTIFICATE**

MALIGAKANDA, November 27, 1887

I HAVE read Colonel Olcott's compilation of moral precepts from the Buddhist Scriptures, and recommend the same as a book of instruction for Buddhist youth.

H. Sumangala, High Priest

### **PREFACE**

THE too prevalent ignorance among even adult Sinhalese Buddhists of the ethical code of their religion leads me to issue this little compilation. Similar moral precepts exist by hundreds in the Buddhist Scriptures; where, also, all the present quotations will be found in the places indicated. They should be committed to memory and practised by parents and taught to their children, especially when the latter are being educated under anti-Buddhistic influences.

Orientalists and other impartial persons admit that no religion in the world contains a more sublime system of moral rules than Buddhism, but if we wish this to become known to Buddhist children, we adult Buddhists must take the task upon ourselves. Many a Buddhist boy has been "converted" to Christianity, or otherwise brought to despise his ancestral religion, from ignorance of its merits.

Adyar, Madras

H.S.Olcott.

17th November, 1887.

AUTHORS CONSULTED	
Vinaya Texts	Davids and Oldenberg
Buddhist Literature in China	Beal
Catena of Buddhist Scriptures	Beal
Buddhaghosha's Parables	Rogers
Buddhist Birth Stories	Fausboll and Davids
Legend of Gaudama	Bigandet
Chinese Buddhism	Edkins
Kalpa Sûtra and Nava Tattva	Stevenson
Buddha and Early Buddhism	Lillie
Sutta Nipâta	Sir Coomara Swamy
Nâgânanda	Boyd
Kusa Jâtaka	Steele
Buddhism	Davids
Dhammapada	Beal
Romantic History of Buddha	Beal
Udânavarga	Rockhill
Twelve Japanese Buddhist Sects.	B. Nanjio
My <i>Buddhist Catechism</i> was compiled from the same excellent translations	

### MERITS AND DEMERITS

LET him [the householder] not destroy, or cause to be destroyed, any life at all, or sanction the acts of those who do so. [One who buys butcher's meat or poultry violates this gâthâ. For by paying the butcher for meat he has killed, the buyer shares his sin by "sanctioning" his act ] Let him refrain from even hurting any creature, [" An inaccurate expression, adopted from Christian writers. A "creature" is something created (by God), but Buddhists regard all living organisms as evolved by due process of natural law.] both those that are strong, and those that tremble in the world.

(Dhammika Sutta, v. 19)

A disciple then knowing [the Law] should refrain from *stealing anything* at any place; should not cause another to steal anything, should not consent to the acts of those who steal anything, should avoid every kind of theft.

(Dhammika Sutta, v. 20)

A wise man should avoid unchastity as if it were a burning pit of live coals. One who is not able [Page 2] to live in a state of celibacy should not commit adultery.[The history of all monastic establishments shows that there are persons temperament all unfit for celibate life, and whose lapses bring great scandal upon their orders. The Sañgha has not escaped this misery, offenders having been noted even in our Lord's

own time. Yet the general blamelessness of Buddhist monks has been acknowledged even by clerical opponents. A true regard to the honour of the Saṅgha should prompt senior priests to insist upon the relinquishment of the robe by such as are not sexually self-masterful. "It is better to marry than burn", says St. Paul ]

(Dhammika Sutta, v. 21)

Four things does a reckless man obtain who covets his neighbour's wife — a bad reputation; an uncomfortable bed; thirdly, punishment; lastly, future torment.

(Dhammapada, v. 309)

Of all the lusts and desires, there is none so powerful as sexual inclination. This is so strong that there is no other worth speaking of beyond it. ... Lust and desire, in respect of a man, are like a person who takes a lighted torch and runs with it against the wind.

(Sûtra of the 42 Sections, Beal's *Catena*, p. 198)

When one is come to a royal assembly [*i.e.*, any official inquiry], he should not tell lies to anyone, or cause any to tell lies, or consent to the acts of those who tell lies; he should avoid every kind of untruth.

(Dhammika Sutta, y. 22)

The householder who delights in the Law should not indulge in intoxicating drinks [or stupefying drugs], should not cause others to drink, should not [Page 3] sanction the acts of those who drink, [Then no Buddhist, can without grievous sin become an arrack renter, or seller, or drinker ] knowing that it results in insanity.

(Dhammika Sutta, v. 23)

He who destroys life, who speaks untruth, who takes in this world what is not given him, who takes another man's wife, and the man who gives himself up to drinking intoxicating liquors; he, even in this world, digs up his own root.

(Dhammapada, v. 246, 247)

The ignorant commit sins in consequen

ce of drunkenness, and also make others drink. You should avoid this: it is the cause of demerit, insanity and ignorance — though it be pleasing to the ignorant.

(Dhammika Sutta, v. 24).

The fields are damaged by weeds, mankind by-passion; therefore a gift bestowed on the passionless brings great reward.

(Dhammapada, v. 356)

The virtuous man is happy in this world, and he is happy in the next; he is happy in both. He is happy when he thinks of the good he has done; he is still more happy when going in the good path.

(Dhammapada, v. 18)

What ought to be done is neglected, what ought not to be done is done; the sins of unruly, thoughtless people are always increasing.

(Dhammapada, v. 292) [Page 4]

Let each man make himself as he teaches others to be; he who is well subdued may subdue [others]; one's own self is difficult to subdue.

(Dhammapada, v. 159)

Whoever, being asked for what is good, teaches what is not good, [and] advises [another], concealing something from him, know him to be a Vasala. [A slave]

(Vasala Sutta, v. 11)

### PASSIONS

Hatred is never quenched by hatred; hatred ceases by [showing] love; this is an old rule.

(Dhammapada, v. 5)

Let a man overcome anger by love, evil by good, the greedy by liberality, the liar by truth,

(Dhammapada, v. 223)

Do not speak harshly to anybody; those who are spoken to will answer thee in the same way.

(Dhammapada, v. 133)

Cut down the whole forest of lust, not the tree. When thou hast cut down every tree and every shrub, then thou wilt be free.

(Dhammapada, v. 283)

Not nakedness, not platted hair, not dirt, not fasting, nor lying on the earth, not rubbing with dust, not sitting motionless, can purify a mortal who has not overcome desires.

(Dhammapada, v. 141) [Page 5]

If a man becomes fat and a great eater, if he is sleepy and rolls himself about, that fool, like a hog fed on slops, is born again and again.

(Dhammapada, v. 825)

The avaricious go not to the world of the gods [devas], for the fool commends not charity.

(Udānavarga, x, v, 2)

He who holds back rising anger like a rolling chariot, him I call a real driver; other people are but holders of the reins.

(Dhammapada, v. 222)

A wicked man who reproaches a virtuous one, is like one who looks up and spits at the sky; the spittle soils not the sky, but comes back and defiles his own person. So again, he is like one who flings dirt at another when wind is contrary; the dirt does but return on him who threw it. The virtuous man cannot be hurt, the misery that the other would inflict comes back on himself.

(Sûtra of the 42 Sections, Beal's *Catena*, p. 193)

The fool who is angered and who thinks to triumph by using abusive language, is always vanquished by him whose words are patient.

(Udānavarga, xx, v. 14)

The fault of others is easily perceived, but that of oneself is difficult to perceive; the faults of others one lays open as much as possible, but one's own fault one hides, as a cheat hides the bad die from the gambler. [Page 6]

If a man looks after the faults of others, and is always inclined to detract, his own weakness will grow.

(Dhammapada, v. 252, 253)

What is called "Name" or "Tribe" in the world, arises from usage only. It is adopted here and there by common consent.

It comes from long and uninterrupted usage, and from the false belief of the ignorant.

(Vāsettha Sutta, v. 55, 56)

Whatever man is proud of his caste, is proud of his wealth, is proud of his family [and] despises his relations, that [man] is a cause of suffering loss.

(Parābhava Sutta, v. 14)

Anger, drunkenness, obstinacy, bigotry, deception, envy, self-praise, disparaging others, high-mindedness [conceit?], evil communications, these constitute uncleanness; not verily the eating of flesh.

Neither abstinence from fish or flesh, nor going naked, nor the shaving of the head, nor matted hair, nor dirt, etc., etc., etc., will cleanse a man not free from delusions.

[The meaning of the Teacher is here so obvious that I cannot understand how this Sutta could have ever been cited as authority for buying and eating butcher's meat. Nothing herein lessens the force of the positive instruction in the *Dhammapada Sutta (v.ante)* to abstain both from destroying, causing to be destroyed, or *sanctioning the act of those who destroy the life of any being*. I know a large and increasing number of Sinhalese indulge in meat-eating, and quiet their consciences by quoting the above gathās; and I have listened with amusement to the sophisticated argument that the sin of the killing is with the butcher and not with his sanctioning and abetting customer. Still, I must hold to my opinion until the problematical future time when black shall be proved white ]

(Āmagandha Sutta, V. 7, 11) [Page 7]

### ASSOCIATES AND FRIENDS

He who walks in the company of fools, suffers a long way; company with fools, as with an enemy, is always painful; company with the wise is pleasure like meeting with kinsfolk.

(Dhammapada, v. 207)

Therefore one ought to follow the wise, the intelligent, the learned, the much-enduring, the dutiful, one ought to follow a good and wise man as the moon follows the path of the stars.

(Dhammapada, v. 208)

Good people shine from afar like the snowy mountains [the Himalayas]; bad people are not seen, like arrows shot at night.

(Dhammapada, v. 304}

If a traveller does not meet with one who is his better, or equal, let him firmly keep his solitary journey; there is no companionship with a fool.

( Dhammapada, v. 61)

If any intelligent person be associated for even one moment with a wise man, he will soon perceive the fact.

(Dhammapada, v.65)

### PARENTS, TEACHERS AND CHILDREN

Parents should:

1. Restrain their children from vice.
2. Train them in virtue.
3. Have them taught arts and sciences.
4. Provide them with suitable wives or husbands.
5. Give them an inheritance.

The child should say:

1. I will support them who supported me
2. I will perform family duties incumbent upon them.
3. I will guard their property.
4. I will make myself worthy to their heir.
5. When they are gone I will honour their memory.

(Sigālovāda Sutta]

Happy in this world is he who honours his father, so likewise he who honours his mother is happy.

(Udānavarga, xxx, v. 23)

The succouring of mother and father, the cherishing of child and wife, and the following of a lawful calling, this is the greatest blessing.

(Mahāmañgala Sutta, v, 5)

Whoever, being able [to do so], does not support his feeble and aged mother or father, know him as a Vasala. [A slave ]

Whoever strikes, or abuses by words, his mother, father, brother, sister, or mother-in-law, know him as a Vasala.

(Vasala Sutta, T. 9, 10)

### RESEARCH RECOMMENDED

Extensive knowledge and science, well regulated discipline and well spoken speech, this is the greatest blessing.

(Mahāmañgala Sutta, v. 4) [Page 9]

The world exists by cause; all things exist by cause; all beings are bound by cause, [even] as the rolling cart-wheel by the pin of an axle-tree.

(Vāsettha Sutta, v. 6)

From whomsoever a man learns the Law, he should worship him, even as the gods worship Indra. The learned man, being thus honoured, his mind pleased with [his disciple], makes the Law more manifest.

(Nāvā Sutta, v. 1)

### THE MORAL LAW INEXORABLE

There exists no spot on the earth, or in the sky, or in the sea, neither is there any in the mountain-clefts, where an [evil] deed does not bring trouble [to the doer]. [A man can never escape punishment for evil Karma, nor can anyone deprive him of the reward of his good Karma. A Buddhist friend asks me to here

recall the case of the robber Angulimala, who, becoming converted by Lord Buddha, attained the state of Arhat. But this does not alter the principle here related. Angulimala's Karma was to be, first a robber, and then a saint ]

(Udānavarga, ix, v. 5)

The evil-doer suffers in this world, and he suffers in the next; he suffers in both. He suffers when he thinks of the evil he has done; he suffers more when going on the evil path.

(Dhammapada, v. 17)

Surely an evil deed does not turn on a sudden like milk [curdling]; it is like fire smouldering in the ashes, which burns the fool. . . . An evil deed [Page 10] kills not instantly, as does a sword, but it follows the evil doer [even] into the next world.

(Udānavarga, ix, v. 16, 17)

All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.

(Dhammapada, v. 2)

#### **ADEPTSHIP A FACT**

The Rahat [Adept, or Mahatmas ] is able to fly through the air, change his appearance, fix the years of his life, shake heaven and earth.

(Sutra of the 42 Sections, Beal's Catena, p. 191)

Matanga, the Doctor of the Law, having before this arrived at the condition of a Rahat, forthwith, by his miraculous power, ascended up into space and there exhibited himself, undergoing various spiritual changes, e.g., flying, walking, sitting, sleeping and so on.

Hereupon was a rain of precious flowers, so that the feelings of the beholders were deeply moved, etc..

(Ming Ti pen nut chouen. Beal's trans.)

Lord Buddha's aunt, Mahaprajapati, and five other holy women, who lived according to the rules, "walked on the water as on dry land; others, leaving the ground, walked in the air, or sat, or lay down, or [Page 11] stood still all in the same element. Fire and water were seen flowing from the right side of some, and from the left side of others. In others it was seen issuing from their mouths". [Bishop Bigandet, in his *Legend of Gaudama* and Rev. S. Beal, in his *Catena of Buddhist Scriptures*, give many data with respect to the powers (*iddhi*) attained by Rahats (adepts, or "Mahatmas"). ] (Edkin's *Chinese Buddhism*, p.49)

At a great assembly of the gods, Buddha, thinking that it would be better if his discourse was delivered to them in the form of a dialogue, and finding that the gods were backward to join in the dialogue, created a



duplicate of himself, [Or, as expressed in modern scientific language, "projected his own double, or astral body". An aged priest in the Southern Province of Ceylon kindly gave me a small silver toy representing this phenomenon. It is called Samparana, (For an account of the wonders, see Bigandet's *Legend of Gaudama*, Vol. I.)] who, standing before him, put the questions which Gotama has answered in the *Sammāparibbajaniya Sutta*. (See translation by Sir Coomara Swamy).

### THE TRUE BUDDHIST PRIEST

There are four kinds of priests; not a fifth, O Chunda! Whoever has crossed all his doubts, is freed from the dart (of sorrow), attached to Nibbāna, divested of greediness, the guide of all the world and the gods, such an one the Buddhas call Maggajina [the victorious wayfarer].

Whoever, knowing here the best as the best, preaches and discourses extensively on it; him [Page 12] [the Buddhas] declare to be the doubt-cutting sage, who is freed from desire, the second of priests, Maggadesi [who teaches the way].

Whoever lives in the paths which are taught [as] the Paths of the Law, well trained, possessed of a good memory, him they call the third priest, Maggajivi [who follows the blameless paths],

He who, putting on the garb of well conducted men, [The robes of the Buddhist monk ] [yet rushes] forward [to acquire different objects], and brings disgrace on families, [and being] forward, hypocritical, ill-trained, babbling, walks in the garden of good men, is a Maggadūsi [who defiles the way].

(Chunda Sutta)

Whoever, not being a sanctified person, pretends to be a saint, he indeed is the lowest Vasala, [A slave ] the thief in all worlds, including that of Brahmā.

(Vasala Sutta, v. 20)

A priest fond of quarrelling — hemmed in by the attributes of ignorance, understands not the advice [given by others], nor the Law preached by Buddha;

Led away by ignorance, he knows not that quarrelling is injurious to those whose hearts are practised in religion, and that it is sinful, [and] a road to hell.

Such a priest, going to hell, flits [thence] from womb to womb, [ In constant rebirths. ] from darkness to darkness, [and] certainly meets with affliction.

(Dhammachariya Sutta, v. 3, 4, 5) [Page 13]

Of old there were only three diseases [viz.], desire, want of food, decay. Owing to the killing of cattle there sprang ninety-eight diseases.

This old sin of injuring [living beings] has come down [to this day]. Innocent cows are killed. Priests have fallen off from their virtues.

Thus this old [and] mean act is despised by the wise. Men despise a priest in whom such vice is found.

(Brāhmanadhammika Sutta, v. 29, 30, 31)

Some fortify themselves for controversy. We praise not those small-minded persons; temptations from here and there are made to cling to them and they certainly send their minds very far away when engaged in it,

(Dhammika Sutta, v. 15)

The priest who, like one who seeks flowers on fig-trees, has not found any more good in repeated births, gives up Orapara, [*i.e.*, destroys that, yearning for life in the body which results in rebirth ] as a snake [casts off its] decayed, old skin.

The priest in whose heart there are no feelings of anger [and] who likewise has gone past merit and demerit, gives up Orapara, etc..

(Uraga Sutta, v. 5, 6)

Many men whose shoulders are covered with the orange robes are ill-conditioned and unrestrained; such evil-doers by their evil deeds go to hell.

(Dhammapada, v. 307)

He whose head is shaven, and who wears the saffron-coloured robe, but who seeks only for food, [Page 14] drink, clothes, and bedding, is his [own] greatest enemy.

(Udānavarga, xiii, v. 14)

He who smites will be smitten; he who shows rancour will find rancour; so likewise from reviling comes reviling, and to him who is angered comes anger.

(Udānavarga, xiv, v. 3)

Those foolish priests who know not the holy law, though this life be brief, in the foolishness of their hearts they give themselves to wrangling.

(Udānavarga, xiv, v. 4)

"He abused me, he reviled me, he beat me, he subdued me"; he who keeps this in his mind, and who feels resentment, will find no peace.

(Dhammapada, xiv, v. 4)

Like a beautiful flower full of colour but without scent, are the fine but fruitless words of him who does not act accordingly.

(Dhammapada, v. 51)

One is the road that leads to Wealth, another the road that leads to Nirvana.

(Dhammapada, v. 75)

If a man consorting with me [Buddha] does not conform his life to my commandments, what benefit will ten thousand precepts be to him?

(Sûtra of the 42 Sections, Beal's *Catena*, p. 202)

Better it would be that a man should eat a lump of flaming iron than that one who is unrestrained and [Page 15] who has broken his vows should live on the charity of the land.

(Udânavarga, ix, r. 2)

If thou hast done evil deeds, or if thou wouldst do them, thou mayest arise and run where'er thou wilt, but thou canst not free thyself of thy suffering.

(Udânavarga, ix, v. 4)

The thoughtless man, even if he can recite many gâthâs, but is not a doer of the law, has no part in the priesthood, but is like a cowherd counting the cows of others.

(Dhammapada, p. 19)

Who is the good man ? The religious man only is good. Who is the great man? He who is strongest in the exercise of patience. He who patiently endures injury, and maintains a blameless life — he is a man indeed !

(Sûtra of the 42 Sections, Beal's *Catena*, p. 196)

When a fire is placed under a pot, and the water within it made to boil, then whoever looks down upon it will see no shadow of himself. So the three poisons (covetousness, anger, delusion), and the five obscurities (envy, passion, sloth, vacillation, unbelief) which embrace it, effectually prevent one attaining supreme reason.

(Sûtra of the 42 Sections, Beal's *Catena*, p. 196)

A man who is under the influence of religious principle may be compared to a single warrior opposed to ten thousand in a fight.

(Sûtra of the 42 Sections, Beal's *Catena*, p. 200)[Page 16]

If one man conquer in battle a thousand times thousand men, and if another conquer himself, he is the greatest of conquerors.

(Dhammapada, v. 103)

By oneself evil is done, by oneself one suffers; by oneself evil is left undone, by oneself one is purified. Purity and impurity belong to oneself, no one can purify another.

(Dhammapada, v. 165)

Self is the lord of self: who else could be the lord ? With self well subdued, a man finds a master such as few can find.

(Dhammapada, v. 160)

That priest whose [ideas of] omens, meteors, dreams and signs are destroyed, and who is released from [a belief in] the evil consequences of omens, conducts himself well in the world. That priest who, not quarrelling in word, thought, or deed, [and] knowing the Law well; looks forward to Nirvana, conducts himself well in the world.

(Sammāparibbajaniya Sutta, v. 2, 7)

Kinsfolk, friends, and lovers salute a man who has been long away, and returns from afar. In like manner his good works receive him who has done good, and has gone from this world to the other; as kinsmen receive a friend on his return.

(Dhammapada, v. 219, 220)

Even a good man sees evil days, as long as his good deed is not ripened; but when his good [Page 17] deed has ripened, then does the good man see happy days.

(Dhammapada, v. 120)

In fit time, observe kindness, impartiality, mercy, freedom from sin, delight at the prosperity of others; unopposed to the whole world, let one walk alone like the rhinoceros.

(Khaggavisāna Sutta, v 39)

If a man's thoughts are not dissipated, if his mind is not perplexed, if he has ceased to think of good and evil, then there is no fear for him while he is watchful .

(Dhammapada, v. 39)

Procrastination is [moral] defilement, continued procrastination is defilement, By non-procrastination [punctuality] and knowledge, root out your darts [of sin].

(Utthāna Sutta, v. 4)