

From the Buddha...

One should not kill living beings
or take what is not given;
one should not speak falsehood
or drink intoxicants;
one should refrain from sexual activity,
from unchastity;
one should not eat at night or outside
the prescribed time.

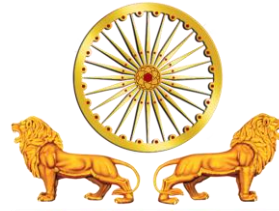
One should not wear garlands or apply scents;
one should sleep on a low bed
or a mat on the ground;
this, they say, is the eight-factored uposatha
proclaimed by the Buddha,
who reached the end of suffering.

As far as the sun and moon revolve,
shedding light, so beautiful to gaze upon,
dispellers of darkness,
moving through the firmament,
they shine in the sky, brightening up the quarters.

Whatever wealth exists within this sphere—
pearls, gems, and beryl, an excellent stone,
singi gold or natural mountain gold,
and the gold called *hataka*—
those are not worth a sixteenth part
of an uposatha complete in the eight factors,
just as all the hosts of stars
do not match the moon's radiance.

Therefore a virtuous woman or man,
having observed the uposatha
complete in eight factors
and having made merit productive of happiness,
blameless goes to a heavenly state.

Visakha Uposatha Sutta
Numerical Discourses, AN 8:43



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Imitating the Enlightened Ones

The Eight Uposatha Precepts

A Day for Special Dedication

The Buddha encouraged his lay-followers to keep the Five Precepts (abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants) for as long as life lasts. He also recommended that they follow some additional precepts as often as possible. These are known as the Uposatha Precepts, or simply the Eight Precepts. They are traditionally observed on the full-moon days (uposatha), but they can be taken at any time.

Following these extra precepts gives us the opportunity to practice some of the renunciation that monks and nuns follow every day. The precept on abstaining from sexual misconduct is changed to abstaining from any kind of sexual activity at all. The last three involve giving up other forms of enjoyment. We limit the food we eat by not taking solid food in the afternoon. We give up entertainment and beautifying our bodies. And we use only very simple furniture.

Giving up these things, even just temporarily, helps us to recognize and reduce our attachments. By spending time without these things, we have the opportunity to focus on practicing meditation and experiencing a happiness not based on material things.

We know that those who follow the Buddha's teaching to the highest goal of enlightenment give up these things completely. So when we spend time following these training rules, we can remember that we are imitating these great spiritual beings. When we understand the benefit of practicing in this way, we can make our minds happy simply remembering the time that we have practiced with this extra dedication.

Taking the 8 Precepts

Usually we begin by paying homage to the Buddha and going for refuge to the Triple Gem. Then we recite:

1. I observe the precept of abstaining from killing beings.
2. I observe the precept of abstaining from stealing.
3. I observe the precept of abstaining from incelibacy.
4. I observe the precept of abstaining from telling lies.
5. I observe the precept of abstaining from taking intoxicating drinks and drugs.
6. I observe the precept of abstaining from eating at improper times.
7. I observe the precept of abstaining from dancing singing music shows wearing garlands and beautifying with cosmetics.
8. I observe the precept of abstaining from using luxurious and comfortable seats and beds.

Imitating great arahants, I follow these precepts for happiness in this life, for rebirth in heaven, and to realize the Four Noble Truths in this Gautama Buddha's Dispensation.

Common Questions

Do I have to wear white?

No. It is beneficial to wear white, but not essential. Some people wear a white shirt and any color pants. Traditionally, people often wear a white piece of cloth over their left shoulder and pinned together at the waste under the right arm.

What can be eaten in the evening?

Fruit juice, water, sugar, honey, rock candy. Tea and coffee can be taken without milk.

What should I sleep on?

Try and sleep on the simplest bed possible, using the most basic bedding you have. It is good if you can put the mattress on the floor.

How do I take the precepts on my own?

Most people will first recite the Three Refuges and then simply recite the eight precepts out loud.

How do I stop observing the 8 precepts?

Simply take the five precepts on your own.

Can I observe the 8 precepts on any day?

Absolutely. Traditionally, people will observe them on full and new moon days. But the Buddha encouraged people to observe them as often as possible.

What if I forget and eat something in the afternoon?

This is very easy to do if we are observing the precepts at home or anywhere outside a group setting. Don't worry. Simply mentally determine to take the precept again. You may find that wearing white helps you remember. You may even like to put up a sign on the fridge.

Do I have to stay home and meditate all day while observing the Eight Precepts?

No. It is traditional, and of course very beneficial, to devote the day to Dhamma practice. But it is still beneficial to keep the precepts on a day when we may not be able to dedicate ourselves entirely to spiritual practice.