

## Information on Basic Program Conduct & Practice



*In addition to the academic, the meditation and the retreat requirements, the Basic Program includes a requirement of a standard of conduct and practice. Students should observe conduct that accords with Buddhist ethics, in particular, to develop the practice of abstention from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct (adultery), and intoxicants and be practicing awareness of positive and negative states in one's mind and be developing the practice of patience and concern for others. Basic Program students fulfill this requirement by applying themselves to this practice to the best of their ability, sincerely and honestly. In order to help with and clarify this requirement, this info sheet explains how this element of the Basic Program has developed and outlines some of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's comments on the need for this.*

The essential purpose of the Basic Program is to encourage and develop the practice of altruistic transformation of one's own mind. Because moral discipline is an indispensable part of authentic dharma practice, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and the other teachers involved in the program have stressed the need for a minimum standard of conduct to be observed by all students.

Students who attend the program at FPMT centers can only qualify for the Basic Program final exam if they abide by this standard. Likewise, we request homestudy students who wish to fully participate in the program and receive accreditation to develop the practice of abiding in Buddhist ethics by sincerely assessing and modifying their behavior in this way during their Basic Program studies.

In discussing how to present the Basic Program behavior aspect, initially we defined Buddhist ethics as avoiding the seven non-virtuous actions of body and speech. Lama Zopa's response gives some indication of the reasons and need for this practice, and how it became formulated in the above mentioned way:

I think behavior should be based on the five lay vows. I think abstaining from the four negativities of speech (for example) is maybe a little strict, so maybe avoiding the opposite of the five lay vows is more reasonable. It is good if the students can stop drinking alcohol. In the cities there are so many problems from alcohol. Alcohol is one huge problem. Many people die in car accidents from alcohol ...

If students can actually take the vows that would be great, that would be fantastic. Then, it becomes very neat, very special. Leave aside ordinary universities, even Dharma centers do not have such a regulation. It would be an incredible thing if students can do this. But maybe just inspire them to do so. It is not necessary to make it obligatory ...

The minimum behavior should be based on avoiding actions that create disharmony and big problems. Sexual misconduct is one behavior that in my view creates big problems in relationships. Actions that harm many people, disturb them, cause them problems - behavior should be evaluated on that basis.

Avoiding that which harms many people is the minimum to be observed. That is the definition. So many problems in peoples' lives, in the cities, are relationship problems.

Someone has a wife or husband, but even so has a relationship with someone else; that creates so much pain, so many problems for many people ... So behavior should be based on that: that which does not harm many people. That is the minimum thing to observe. Generally, the minimum is that which does not harm many people.

Rinpoche has agreed that Basic Program students can assess for themselves whether they are meeting the standard. To do this realistically, one needs to understand that this requirement is intended as a practice and one is not expected to be perfect from the beginning. Lama Zopa Rinpoche:

Some people naturally think of the benefits of living in morality: how they will be so joyful at the time of death because they will have less negative karma and so much merit. Having kept morality they will have a good rebirth for hundreds of thousands of lifetimes. By thinking of the benefits, one can enjoy such a life, but some people do not think of the benefits, they suffer and get lung. They think it is too difficult and then will not be able to study well.

Thus, the conduct requirement is intended to ensure that students engage in sincerely working with these restraints and avoiding gross infractions.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has also specified that as Basic Program students we should practice awareness of positive and negative states in our mind and develop the practice of patience and concern for others in particular:

The attitude in daily life is to look at everyone as the source of all one's past, present, and future happiness, liberation, and enlightenment. Then also, cherishing and caring for others. That comes under ethics and behavior, it is ethics of mind or mental ethics. ... Then on this basis to be helpful and to have respect for others ...

We hope this information helps clarify what the standard of conduct and practice expected of Basic Program students entails. If you have further questions, please contact the FPMT Education Department at [education@fpmt.org](mailto:education@fpmt.org)