

## *How to refrain from abusing sexuality*

Our sexual urges can be seriously harmful to our lives. How can we protect and free all others from all harm caused by such urges?

### **1. BE INTIMATE WITH YOUR BODY**

First, we get to know our body. Getting to know our body means learning to notice the patterns of urges or impulses that we feel here and now. We are already learning when we take the form of a fetus in the uterus of our mother. Before we are born, our brain and other organs begin to develop. Then we are born. As our bodies grow and change, and as we interact with others, we may come to feel strong urges or impulses when we encounter certain people or situations. Some urges may feel wonderfully pleasant and diffuse like a cloud; other urges may feel equally pleasant but intense like a sharp point. Some urges may feel painfully unpleasant; other urges may feel confusingly ambiguous. By the time we pass through puberty, we may feel signs of sexual arousal when we encounter certain people or situations, and these signs may seem to mix with other pleasant or unpleasant feelings and with our other mental activity.

By paying close attention to the patterns of sexual arousal and other urges that we feel when we encounter certain people or situations, we become intimate with our body. We study carefully how these patterns come to be and how they go away. If we do not pay close attention, our sexual arousal and other urges may seem to overwhelm us and, seduced by pleasant impulses or repelled by unpleasant ones, we can act in ways that cause pain and harm to ourselves or others. Because we want to act always to protect and benefit all others, we use our attention to stay close to our whole body, to all of the sexual arousal and other urges that we may be feeling, neither denying what

we feel nor letting what we feel overwhelm us. We practice integrating all of our mental and physical activity so that our sexual arousal and other urges are not split off from any of our other feelings or from our desire to live for the benefit of all others.

Practicing in this way, we are intimate with the warmth and life of our whole body, and this intimacy is the fertile soil within which we can plant honor and respect for all bodies and relationships.

## **2. HONOR ALL BODIES AND RELATIONSHIPS**

Second, having become intimate with our body, we vow in each moment to find ways to honor the bodies of all others. This honor, or deep respect and gratitude, blossoms in the soil of our intimacy with our body when we realize that our body is not separate from all other bodies. Our body has come to be, and continues being, only through the activity of others. When we acknowledge that we come to be in every moment through the activity of others, we feel gratitude for the presence of all others. We realize that we are never separate from any others; because others are present, we are present. Because they are present and we are present, the present moment does not go away. During all our present moments we practice realizing gratitude for the presence of all others and acting always for their benefit.

Before we are born, when we are a fetus in the uterus of our mother, we already find ourselves in a fabric of relationships, or close associations with other humans. We already have parents and other ancestors and we may have siblings. After we are born, our parents and/or other adults take care of us when we are young so that we can grow to be adults. As we grow to be adults, we may find ourselves desiring to establish a special relationship with another human being in whose presence we feel especially pleasant feelings, and/or with whom we want to take care of one or more children as their parent or

guardian. If we encounter another human being with whom we share a mutual desire to establish such a special relationship, we may make a mutual vow that we will not engage in sexual activity with anyone else but him or her. We honor that special relationship by upholding our vow. If we encounter another human being who has already made such a vow with someone else, we honor their vow, and help them to honor it, by not engaging in sexual activity with them.

Although we may take a mutual vow to engage in sexual activity with only one human being a spouse or partner or take a solitary vow to engage in sexual activity with nobody, nevertheless in all situations we remember that our true commitment is to all beings. Our community may help us remember this true commitment by witnessing our vows in a commitment ceremony, and by recognizing and supporting our commitment. When we practice in this way, our sexual activity is the expression of our intention to live for the benefit of all others.

When we encounter others and we feel grateful for their presence and we realize that we are inseparable from them and we know that we want to live for their benefit and we honor all vows, then our sexual urges are integrated and pacified and all bodies and relationships are honored.

### **3. ACT TO PREVENT ALL ABUSE OF SEXUALITY**

Third, since we are rooted in the warmth of intimacy with our body and deep respect and gratitude for the bodies of all others, we act to prevent all abuse of sexuality by self or others. Abuse of sexuality includes all sexual activity that occurs without intimacy, deep respect, and gratitude for the bodies of all others. Abuse of sexuality includes all sexual activity that involves anyone who has not gratefully and eagerly consented to participate. Abuse of sexuality includes all

sexual activity that occurs at an inappropriate time or place, such as during public events or in public spaces. Abuse of sexuality includes all sexual activity forbidden by professional codes of conduct. Abuse of sexuality includes all sexual activity that breaks any vows that a human being has taken to engage in sexual activity only with one human being a spouse or partner or with nobody.

An especially serious form of abuse of sexuality is any sexual activity with children or exposure of children to sexual activity between adults; such abuse of sexuality is among the most extreme forms of harm to children's precious lives. "We undertake to protect all children and other people. And we also undertake to help those who abuse children sexually, because they are sick and need our help. The ones who made us suffer become the object of our love and protection. We see that until the sick are protected and helped, children are going to continue to be abused sexually. We undertake to help these people so that they will not molest children any longer. At the same time, we undertake to help children. We take not only the side of children who are being molested, but the other side also. These molesters are sick, the products of an unstable society. They may be an uncle, an aunt, a grandparent, or a parent. They need to be observed, helped, and, if possible, healed."

We vow to act to prevent all abuse of sexuality by talking with others about how to be intimate with their body, how to honor all bodies and relationships, and how to act to prevent all abuse. This vow is called the third grave precept, and it is not separate from **the first grave precept** *no killing life* and **the second grave precept** *no stealing* . All of the precepts are about acting with complete warmth and devotion for the welfare and happiness of all others. When we investigate and practice these three precepts, we understand more and more deeply how important it is for us to aim for utterly meticulous and immaculate conduct in every waking moment of our lives.

## SOURCES

This guide to how to refrain from abusing sexuality was rendered by Nathan Strait [nathanstrait.com](http://nathanstrait.com) on the 22nd of February of 2014. It is a meditation on the third grave precept of **the ethical principles of bodhisattvas**. The writing was greatly helped by Shi Faxun's book *One Life, Five Precepts*, Singapore: Shi Faxun, 2011, and by Reb Anderson's book *Being Upright: Zen Meditation and the Bodhisattva Precepts*, Berkeley: Rodmell Press, 2001. The quoted passage is from the chapter on the third precept in Thich Nhat Hanh's book *For a Future to Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Mindfulness Trainings*, Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993.