

## 2. MORALITY, THE FIRST AND LAST TRAINING

The original Pali word for this training is *sila*, which I am translating as “morality”. People translate it in various ways. Regardless of the word we choose, it is likely to resonate for people both positively and negatively. If the word “morality” bothers you due to the associations it suggests, look at the assumptions, agendas, and practices of this training and come up with your own word for it. I don’t think that it is so important what we call it. I do, however, think that we should give careful attention to trying to live it.

From my perspective, training in morality has as its domain all the physical, verbal, and mental behaviors belonging to every single aspect of life that is not explicitly meditative. When we are trying to live a good life in the conventional sense, we are working on training in morality. When we are trying to work on improving our physical, emotional, and mental health, we are training in morality. When we philosophize, we are training in morality. When we exercise, we are training in morality. When we are taking care of others or ourselves, we are training in morality. When we try to guard the environment by not misusing or wasting resources, reform corrupt governments, or make this world a better place for everyone, we are training in morality. When we commit to a non-harming and benevolent livelihood, build a healthy marriage, raise healthy children, or shave our heads and move to a remote place to dedicate ourselves to intensive spiritual practice, we are training in morality. Whatever we do in the ordinary world that we think will be of some benefit to others and ourselves is an aspect of working on this first training.

I should add a qualifier here, relating to what a life well-lived might mean. For some, that is a life of riches, decadence, and hedonism. That is not what I am talking about. It is not that wealth is inherently bad, though there are strong moral arguments to be made for a vastly more equitable distribution of wealth. It is not that all decadence is inherently bad, and I would hate to make someone feel terrible for having a second dessert occasionally, but clearly there is a great degree of spending on luxury that is contributing to the destruction of the planet and behavior that simply leads to more misery for all concerned in the name of “fun”. It is not that we shouldn’t enjoy our lives, as an enjoyable life is a much easier one to accept, but clearly plenty