**COMMITMENTS FOR AWAKENING**

By Peter Carlson

The commitments listed here are meant to present what are considered the basic precepts of classical Buddhist practices in a more contemporary dynamic way. The intention remains the same, that is, to provide ethical guidelines as a foundation for the cultivation of liberation from greed, aversion and delusion. People often feel a sense of resistance to what seems to be an externally motivated behavior (a problem I have with the Ten Commandments, which represent an ethical life, but seem to be controlled by someone else).

When the precepts were originally formulated, the cultural norms were quite different than what currently prevails. The values are still relevant, but the circumstances have changed. To show the contrast, Here are the five traditional precepts:

* I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking life.
* I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking what is not given.
* I undertake the training rule to abstain from [sexual](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_sexuality) misconduct.
* I undertake the training rule to abstain from false speech.
* I undertake the training rule to abstain from fermented drink that causes heedlessness.

It is also customary for lay practitioners to take on another set of precepts during retreats or certain ceremonial occasions, increasing the number to eight, and including focus on eliminating obstacles to effective meditation:

* I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking life.
* I undertake the training rule to abstain from taking what is not given.
* I undertake the training rule to abstain from [sexual](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_sexuality) misconduct.
* I undertake the training rule to abstain from false speech.
* I undertake the training rule to abstain from fermented drink that causes heedlessness.
* I undertake to abstain from eating at the wrong time (the right time is after sunrise, before noon).
* I undertake to abstain from singing, dancing, playing music, attending entertainment performances, wearing perfume, and using [cosmetics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmetics) and garlands (decorative accessories).
* I undertake to abstain from luxurious places for sitting or sleeping, and overindulging in sleep.

Traditionally, the precepts are chanted often; monastics repeat them each day (and there are far more precepts for monastics than lay meditators). We don’t live in that sort of environment—our culture doesn’t support large numbers of people living in a monastic setting. Therefor we must find a different way to encourage the memorization and integration of the concepts. I propose using commitments for this purpose. Precepts are rules or guidelines, while commitments suggest dedicated application of effort.

A commitment is an internally developed and sustained effort to realize a value or aspire to a goal. This involves an ongoing inner resolve that organizes the mind towards fulfilling an aspiration or achieving a goal. Buddhist teachings describe different levels of intentional effort: *initiating effort, sustained effort* and *determined effort.* **My hope is that the word *commitment* is aligned with *determined effort*.** These commitments place a stronger emphasis on meditative training and behavioral activation than the classical forms of Buddhism that are more conventional. I encourage you to make a copy of these commitments and post them in an area that will foster determined effort to integrate them into daily life.

The benefits of mindfulness meditation don’t apply only to the insights and peacefulness experienced during formal meditation periods. The goal is to use daily meditation practice to develop the capacity for insight and self-discipline that can be applied during daily life routines. We are practicing to realize the potential of Buddhist principles and concepts, not to just understand them conceptually. Awakening is a lived experience, the foundation of which is living an ethical life. My hope is that these commitments will foster that process.

Here are the daily commitments I propose. I hope they are of benefit to yourself and anyone whose life would be benefitted by your practice:

**DAILY COMMITMENTS**

**I COMMIT TO CULTIVATING MINDFULNESS THROUGH DAILY MEDITATION AND INTEGRATION INTO LIFE ROUTINES TO REDUCE DELUSION AND IMPULSIVE REACTIVITY IN THE MIND.** This commitment supports the ability to train the mind for overcoming the mental processes that hinder spiritual growth, to cultivate Wisdom, that is, Clear Awareness and Benevolent Intention.

**I COMMIT TO MINDFUL AWARENESS OF HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND REDUCE CRAVING FOR PLEASANT EXPERIENCE IN THE MIND.** This commitment addresses the tendency towards greed and selfishness, with the intention to generate kindness and generosity. It counters compulsive and addictive tendencies related to intoxicants, food, sensuality, consumerism and media involvement.

**I COMMIT TO MINDFUL AWARENESS OF HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND REDUCE AVERSION AND ILL-WILL IN THE MIND.** This commitment addresses the tendency towards aversion, hostility and aggression, with the intention to cultivate kindness and compassion.

**I COMMIT TO MINDFUL AWARENESS OF HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND PRACTICE SPEECH AND BEHAVIOR THAT IS BENEVOLENT.** This commitment addresses the dynamic interactions of social life, with the intention to generate truthfulness, kindness, compassion and increased interpersonal trust.

**I COMMIT TO MINDFUL AWARENESS OF HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND MANIFEST BENEVOLENT ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION.** This commitment addresses the dynamic interactions involving the environment, promoting thoughtfulness and the well-being of the biosphere.