



Ethical Commitment

For Dharma practitioners, teachers, and sangha communities

Why This Commitment?

As Buddhist practitioners, we tend to adopt a non-judgemental attitude. A compassionate view of humanity. But how should we then relate to current global problems? Can we possibly remain neutral while an entire population in Gaza is being starved and annihilated in plain sight? Many of us are struggling with that question. Isn't neutrality a silent endorsement of the genocide taking place there? Yes, in our view it is. Silence in face of oppression is not a neutral stance w— it is a form of complicity.

The Dharma teaches us to reduce suffering, to cultivate compassion, and to speak truthfully. But what happens when suffering is systematically ignored, and compassion is extended only selectively?

More and more practitioners are discovering that core ethical values – which many assumed were universally shared – are in fact not held by everyone, also within Dharma spaces. This includes acknowledging the ongoing genocide and occupation of the Palestinian people, carried out by the Israeli state and military, and supported by most Western governments.

This ethical commitment is an invitation:

- **To ground our practice in truth and courage**
 - **To use our voices when others are silenced**
 - **To align our teachers and sanghas with engaged, inclusive, and non-violent principles**
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Ethical Commitment

We invite all practitioners, teachers, and sanghas who resonate with these principles to use, adapt, and share them.

1. Compassion Means All Beings

The first principle of the Dharma is *ahimsa* – non-harming. We affirm the dignity, safety, and freedom of all beings, across race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and ability. Selective compassion is not true compassion. We commit to practices and communities that include those at the margins – not just those at the center.

2. Liberation is Collective

The Buddha taught *interdependence* (paṭiccasamuppāda): we are not free unless all beings are free. Structural injustice and systemic violence bind all of us. We recognize that personal liberation is inseparable from social and political liberation.

3. Silence is Not Neutral

In the face of injustice, silence does not preserve peace – it preserves power.

Not naming the aggressor in a context of asymmetrical violence distorts reality. It protects the violent and erases the violated. In the case of Palestine, language that vaguely refers to a “conflict” while avoiding the naming of Israel as the occupying and attacking force, contributes to the normalization of genocide.

From the perspective of Dharma ethics, this is a failure of:

- *Sacca* – truthfulness
- *Karuṇā* – compassion
- *Sammā vāca* – right speech

We therefore assert:

It is ethically and spiritually unacceptable to remain silent or vague when people are being killed, displaced, and erased. As Dharma practitioners, we must learn to speak from the heart *and* from reality – even when that truth is painful or unpopular.



Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us:

"...I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life." We cannot support any act of killing; no killing can be justified. But not to kill is not enough. We must also learn ways to prevent others from killing. We cannot say, "I am not responsible. They did it. My hands are clean." If you were in Germany during the time of the Nazis, you could not say, "They did it. I did not." If, during the Gulf War, you did not say or do anything to try to stop the killing, you were not practicing this precept. Even if what you said or did failed to stop the war, what is important is that you tried, using your insight and compassion."

— *For a Future to Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts* (1993)

Further Reading and Reflection

For those who wish to explore more deeply the questions around silence within the Buddhist world regarding Gaza, Liberation Circle has compiled a selection of recommended articles and essays.

You can find them at: liberationcircle.org#reads

Practices to Break Silence and See Through Its Roots

Silence often grows from fear, a wish to belong, or the hope that suffering will resolve without our voice. In mindful contemplation we can ask: *What am I protecting by not speaking?* Let the feelings surface and soften. Practices such as tonglen—breathing in fear and breathing out courage—and metta—sending kindness to those silenced and to ourselves—help us see that our voice is part of a larger web of care. Through this awareness of interconnectedness, breaking silence becomes not only a personal act but a contribution to collective healing.

When We Speak Out

To speak is to act. In times of genocide and systemic erasure, words can interrupt violence, awaken conscience, and restore dignity.

- To speak truthfully is to practice right speech.
- To speak from the heart is to embody compassion.
- To speak against killing is to uphold non-harming.

Silence isolates. Speech connects. When we speak out, we say:

- We see you.
- Your lives matter.
- We will not look away.

This is the Dharma in action. This is how we protect life.



4. We Stand with the Palestinian People

We explicitly recognize the systematic oppression, apartheid, displacement, and large-scale killing of Palestinians by the Israeli state and military.

We name this as genocide – consistent with legal, historical and ethical analyses by human rights organizations and survivors.

We name Israel as the aggressor, and reject the framing of this as a symmetrical or “complex” conflict. While violence on all sides must be mourned, moral clarity requires naming disproportionate power and harm.

To stand for *all beings*, we must not turn away from one of the clearest, most documented examples of state violence in our time.

5. The Dharma Must Speak

Right speech (sammā vāca) is not just about avoiding harm – it is about speaking wisely, truthfully, and when necessary. In the tradition of *Engaged Buddhism*, as practiced by Thich Nhat Hanh and others, we understand the Dharma as a living, breathing response to suffering.

In times of war, displacement, and genocide, the Dharma must speak. It must align with the vulnerable.

To remain silent in such moments is not wisdom. It is fear, privilege, or avoidance disguised as neutrality.

6. Accountability is Practice

We will make mistakes. We are still learning. But we commit to staying in dialogue, being open to feedback, and repairing harm when we cause it. Ethical living is not perfection – it is willingness to grow in courage, awareness and compassion.



Visit LiberationCircle.org to Sign the Ethical Commitment as a Teacher or Sangha.

We call on every teacher and sangha to take a clear stand—formally sign this Ethical Commitment and help bring these essential values visibly to the forefront.

By signing, you or your sangha will be publicly listed under “*Sanghas and Teachers Who Have Signed*”, joining a growing, courageous movement that upholds and affirms these ethical foundations.



How to Use This Commitment

- As a practitioner or teacher, you can use this Ethical Commitment to express your ethical alignment, and initiate meaningful conversation within your sangha.
 - As a teacher and sangha, you can reflect on your position and decide whether to publicly align with this ethical commitment.
 - Liberation Circle offers visibility to teachers and sanghas that affirm these values by listing them as part of a shared, engaged Dharma network.
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Why This Matters

The Buddha taught: *“What we think, we become. What we speak, we manifest. What we do, we embody.”*

Let our words and actions be guided by truth, by love, and by the commitment to leave no one behind – not in our hearts, not in our sanghas, not in our silence.

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