

Precept addressing Gambling

The Buddha did not have his monks take vows against gambling, and this is likely due to the fact that they took vows not to handle money at all. This would be like taking a vow not to put a car in reverse if you had already taken a vow not to ever get into a car. At the time there was no perceived need.

The traditional vow against handling money is tricky for modern monks, especially in America, where most are not able to live in temples where they are supported by the community. Instead, many have jobs and live by themselves with their families, whom they may support with their jobs.

There have been some cases in modern times where Buddhist priests and monks have gambled a great deal of money, causing problems for themselves, their orders, and others whom we may never know about. For example, in 2012, several Korean monastics were caught drinking and gambling for stakes of over \$800,000 ([Hell-raising holy men: Secret video shows Buddhist monks gambling, drinking](#)). More recently, a Thai abbot was accused of stealing 300 million baht (almost \$90 million) to fund gambling ([Abbot of renowned Nakhon Pathom temple arrested over alleged 300m baht embezzlement](#)).

The Buddha did speak about gambling, although usually to laymen rather than monks. He considers it a condition for downfall and to be eschewed. In the Parabhava Sutta ([nalanda.org.my/e-library/parabhavasutta/download/Parabhava Sutta.pdf](http://nalanda.org.my/e-library/parabhavasutta/download/Parabhava%20Sutta.pdf)), he says:

“The man who is a womanizer, a drunkard, a gambler, and one who squanders whatever he possesses – this is the [eighth] cause of one’s downfall.”

Another translation renders it as such:

“To be a rake, a drunkard, a gambler, and to squander all one earns — this is a cause of one's downfall.” ([Parabhava Sutta: Downfall](#))

In another Sutta, the Buddha is speaking to the householder Sigalaka, who basically asks how to live a good life ([Sigalovada Sutta: The Buddha's Advice to Sigalaka](#))

"These are the six dangers inherent in compulsive gambling: winning breeds resentment; the loser mourns lost property; savings are lost; one's word carries no weight in a public forum; friends and colleagues display their contempt; and one is not sought after for marriage, since a gambler cannot adequately support a family.”

I personally prefer this translation ([Everyman's Ethics: Four Discourses of the Buddha](#))”

"What are the six channels for dissipating wealth...?

- (a) "indulgence in intoxicants which cause infatuation and heedlessness;
- (b) sauntering in streets at unseemly hours;
- (c) frequenting theatrical shows;

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- (d) indulgence in gambling which causes heedlessness;
- (e) association with evil companions;
- (f) the habit of idleness.

"There are, young householder, these six evil consequences in indulging in gambling:

- (i) the winner begets hate,
- (ii) the loser grieves for lost wealth,
- (iii) loss of wealth,
- (iv) his word is not relied upon in a court of law,
- (v) he is despised by his friends and associates,
- (vi) he is not sought after for matrimony; for people would say he is a gambler and is not fit to look after a wife.

When investigated, it becomes clear that gambling is a source of *dukkha*. Even when you win, someone else had to lose. We all know that there is far more losing than winning by individuals. The companies profit off of this suffering. Casinos often offer free alcohol while one is gambling, making people more heedless and more likely to gamble more than they can afford. We could probably make an argument about how gambling companies harm the environment and how they may be affiliated with organized crime, both of which cause tremendous suffering. We could speak about how gambling is designed to become addictive, which has many obvious and subtle harms.

Yet, even when you “win,” this is a type of *dukkha*. It is the happiness at the top of the roller coaster that cannot be sustained and does not make your mind at ease. It perpetuates the belief that outside things such as money can make you happy. Yes, you may be happy for a while, but it does not last, and if you keep gambling, it clearly cannot last because the odds are not in your favor. Furthermore, your gambling does not only affect you, but your families and your communities. There is very little or no potential benefit for long-term gain, and a great deal of potential harm to be caused by gambling.

We therefore are recommending amending our 58 and 250 precepts to include a precept against gambling.

Ven. Myeohye Do'an, Soen Sanim

Ven. Myeong'il Cheolsoeng, Soen Sanim