

Invasives Control and the First Precept

Because so much of the Earth Sangha's conservation work involves the control of invasive alien species, we are often asked how we reconcile this activity with the Buddhist emphasis on nonviolence. After all, the first Buddhist Precept is usually understood to be "Do not kill," yet invasives control generally involves the killing of large numbers of organisms.

Our position is as follows.

If:

1. the invasives control activity is part of a coherent effort to preserve the biological diversity native to the area in question, and
2. killing is the only feasible method of control, and
3. the killing is not done in a way that inflicts unnecessary pain or that encourages cruelty on the part of participants or witnesses,

then we regard the activity as a legitimate conservation effort. As such, we believe it to be, not a violation of the Precept, but in keeping with the Precept's spirit, because such efforts prevent the killing of entire species through the various forms of environmental degradation that humanity is inflicting on the world.

We note further that an attempt to interpret the First Precept in a purely literal fashion would result in all sorts of absurdities:

One could not cure a person of any infectious disease because treatment generally involves the killing of the pathogens that cause the disease.

One could not cure a person of cancer because treatment requires the killing of cancerous cells.

One could not produce food because agriculture requires the killing of agricultural pests (this is true even of organic agriculture—it's just that the pests are killed differently).

One could not construct a building, road, or indeed any structure, because construction requires the killing of soil organisms, as well as most of the vegetation and wildlife on the site.

One could not even bathe, because bathing destroys all sorts of micro-organisms growing on the skin.

For an alternative interpretation of the First Precept, see the Earth Sangha's version of the [Five Most Common Buddhist Precepts](#), available through the Buddhism link on the Library page of our website (Main Menu: In Depth: Library).