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### **On Precepts: With the Wisdom of Recognizing Delusions and Afflictions as a Premise**

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## **Abstract**

Buddhist precepts are the cornerstone of practice, aiming to purify body and mind, cease evil deeds, cultivate good deeds, and lead to liberation. The core argument of this study is that taking the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction as a prerequisite is key to upholding Buddhist precepts. Its function lies in fundamentally enhancing the self-awareness and effectiveness of precept practice, thereby leading to ultimate liberation. Delusion and affliction, as the core internal obstacles of an individual, are essentially false cognitions arising from unreal phenomena. They are generated through complex mechanisms involving the evocation of "past dust" (previous experiences), the fusion of present emotions with latent afflictions, and subjective "fabrication." These pose a serious threat to practice and precept-keeping, disturbing body and mind, eroding meritorious deeds, and leading to violations and suffering. This paper delves into the aspects of wise contemplation of the illusory nature of delusion, discerning the root and harm of affliction, establishing right view, and sublimating altruistic aspiration, thereby solidifying the foundation for upholding precepts. Precept-keeping guided by the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction transcends external "cessation of evil," reaching the internal "non-desire for evil"; it shifts from "passive defense" to "active purification"; and it enables the skillful application of precepts in complex situations, promoting a

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virtuous cycle between meditation and precept-keeping, thus deepening the practice of precepts.

This study employs textual analysis to explore Buddhist scriptures' discourses on delusion, affliction, and wise conduct, and combines literary works and business cases to verify the adverse consequences of clinging to delusion and affliction and the beneficial outcomes of wise altruism through comparative analysis. This further corroborates that the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction can better facilitate the upholding of Buddhist precepts, leading to peace and liberation. It is hoped that this paper can provide a theoretical basis and practical insights for modern Buddhist practice.

**Keywords:** Wisdom, Precepts, Delusion, Affliction, Liberation, Bodhisattva Practice, Right View

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## **I. Introduction**

Buddhist precepts, as an important component of the Buddha's teachings, are the foundation for guiding practitioners to cease evil deeds, cultivate good deeds, and progress towards liberation. Precepts not only regulate external behavior but also aim to purify the mind and cultivate virtuous character. However, the practice of precepts lacking the guidance of wisdom often remains confined to the formal observance of rules, neglecting inner motivation and making it difficult to achieve spontaneous virtuous conduct. Without a profound insight into delusion and affliction, precept-holders are easily swayed by internal delusions and afflictions, unintentionally violating precepts, thereby hindering the progress of practice and deviating from the path to liberation.

In view of this, the core argument proposed and substantiated in this paper is that taking the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction as a prerequisite is key to upholding Buddhist precepts, effectively enhancing the self-awareness and effectiveness of precept-keeping, promoting the purity of conduct, and ultimately leading to liberation. This is not to negate the importance of the precepts themselves but to emphasize that the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction should be placed at the foundational position of precept practice, regarding it as a necessary prerequisite for deepening the practice of precepts.

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This study primarily analyzes Buddhist scriptures and related texts to explore the definition, complex generative mechanisms, and multi-layered harm of delusion and affliction. On this basis, it elucidates how the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction functions from different dimensions, including contemplating the illusory nature of delusion, discerning the root and harm of affliction, establishing the motivation for upholding precepts based on the right view of causality, and sublimating precept-keeping into the aspiration for altruism. Furthermore, it analyzes how the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction deepens the practice of precepts, upgrading it from mere "cessation of evil" to "non-desire for evil," transforming it from "passive defense" to "active purification," and enabling the skillful application of precepts in specific situations, while also promoting the mutual enhancement of precept-keeping and meditation.

To verify and elucidate the aforementioned theoretical viewpoints, cases from different fields are incorporated. Through a comparative analysis of Murong Fu and Xuzhu, two literary characters in Jin Yong's novel *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils*, the adverse consequences of clinging to delusion and affliction and the beneficial outcomes of upholding inner wisdom and altruistic aspiration are demonstrated. Simultaneously, the business case of Elon Musk's open-sourcing of Tesla's charging pile technology is introduced, drawing a parallel from a secular perspective

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to illustrate how altruistic behavior can bring about widespread beneficial outcomes, aligning with the Buddhist principle of good causes leading to good effects, thereby further supporting the value of behavior guided by the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction.

This paper hopes to provide modern Buddhist practitioners with operative theoretical guidance through systematic argumentation and diverse case analyses, emphasizing the central role of the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction in strictly upholding precepts, thereby promoting the purity of conduct and the stability of the path to practice, ultimately realizing the goal of progressing towards peace and liberation.

## **II. Definition, Generation, and Harm of Delusion and Affliction**

On the path of upholding pure precepts, the most fundamental and stubborn internal obstacles are the delusions and afflictions accumulated by individuals since beginningless time. If one cannot have a thorough understanding of them and discern their complex generative mechanisms and far-reaching harm, upholding precepts will be difficult to solidify, like trying to build a tall tower on quicksand, facing the risk of collapse at any time. This chapter aims to dissect these two core concepts of delusion and affliction, laying a solid foundation for the subsequent discussion on how to use wisdom to recognize them and thereby effectively uphold precepts.

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## (I) Definition and Generation of Delusion and Affliction

### 1. Definition of Delusion and Affliction

Delusion in Buddhism is synonymous with ignorance and wrong views, referring to false and unreal thoughts. The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* states that delusion is a false thought.<sup>1</sup> Its falsity leads individuals to have inverted perceptions of things, such as mistaking impermanence for permanence and impurity for purity, thereby triggering behaviors that violate precepts.

Affliction refers to psychological factors that disturb the purity of body and mind. The fundamental afflictions include greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt. Delusion and affliction are closely related, intertwined, and jointly drive precept-violating behaviors. For example, violating the precept against stealing often originates from the affliction of greed, and greed stems from the false cognition that wealth can be permanently possessed and bring lasting happiness, which is a delusion. This failure to see the nature of impermanence drives individuals to generate the greedy thought that possessing this object will bring lasting satisfaction, thus leading to theft. This clearly illustrates how delusion, as an inverted cognition combined with affliction, distorts an individual's judgment and ultimately prompts them to violate precepts.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Pāramitā: *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, Scroll 1: "These are the false appearances of past dusts, deluding your true nature!", *Taisho Tripiṭaka*, Volume 19, p. 108 (bottom).



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## **2. Generative Mechanisms of Delusion and Affliction**

Delusion and affliction do not exist in isolation; their generation is a complex psychological process involving the interplay of past experiences, present emotions, and subjective "fabrication," which distorts cognition and drives unwholesome speech and actions.

Firstly, delusion selectively evokes material that aligns with present emotions based on "past dust" (past experiences, habits, subconscious memories), exhibiting significant bias. For example, an individual with a history of betrayal develops a sense of distrust. When their current wife has frequent contact with male colleagues due to work, it triggers their affliction of suspicion. They selectively retrieve past memories of being deceived; their ex-wife also used "work relations" as a reason for frequent contact with the opposite sex. They recall how they believed their ex-wife's explanations at the time, only to discover they were being lied to. Consequently, they misinterpret their current wife's normal interactions, believing she is "unfaithful," and speak ill of her to friends, sowing discord, thus violating the precept against divisive speech. This selective evocation of past betrayal experiences provides material and a faulty judgmental framework for their delusion.

Secondly, delusion and the individual's present feelings and latent afflictions mutually fuse and interpenetrate. Present emotional states, such as anxiety and depression, significantly influence the content and

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intensity of delusions. For example, an individual in an anxious state may be more prone to activating fear-related delusions about health, mistakenly "fabricating" normal physiological reactions (such as a rapid heartbeat) as symptoms of a serious illness. Latent afflictions, such as strong greed or deep-rooted anger, provide powerful impetus and a clear direction for the development of delusions. Consider an individual with a latent strong affliction of anger who, due to a minor mistake at work, is criticized by a superior. The latent anger is activated, driving them to interpret the criticism as deliberately targeting them, even suspecting a conspiracy. This anger not only provides emotional fuel for the delusion's development but also guides their thinking in a negative, hostile direction, potentially leading to behaviors such as spreading rumors (violating the precepts against false speech and divisive speech).

In this complex interactive process, "fabrication" is the core characteristic of delusion's operation. Individuals, based on their preferences, fears, and attachments, subjectively construct and connect the evoked "past dust" with present perceptions and afflictions, fabricating scenarios and distorting facts. This "fabrication" is not based on rational logical reasoning but rather on cognitive processing driven by emotions and the subconscious, causing originally insignificant neutral events to be assigned extremely negative meanings under the processing

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of delusion, thus triggering stronger emotional reactions and inappropriate behaviors.

Take the affliction of doubt as an example of its operational mechanism: an individual may begin to speculate about others' motives due to inner insecurity (present negative feeling/latent anxiety affliction) or past experiences of being deceived (past dust). In the process of "fabrication," they might subjectively interpret another person's delayed response to a message as evidence of "hiding something" or "not valuing me," and then, driven by latent anger, spread these unverified suspicions, harming others (violating the precepts against false speech and harsh speech), or even sow discord among different people to verify their suspicions (violating the precept against divisive speech).

Another example, analyzing the operational mechanism of the affliction of greed from a temporal dimension: when an individual is enjoying the sensory pleasure of delicious food (present satisfaction), the power of latent greed may temporarily weaken. However, as the feeling of fullness gradually dissipates and the memory of the food (past dust) is recalled, greed may become active again. At this point, if others prevent or deprive them of the opportunity to enjoy it again, the individual will quickly generate afflictive emotions such as dissatisfaction and anger due to the frustration of their desire. This emotion stems not only from the loss of material but more deeply from the strong

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attachment to "possession" and "continuous satisfaction," leading to psychological disparity. Furthermore, this strong affliction may drive them to adopt irrational or even aggressive behaviors, such as robbing food, and may even lead to physical conflict (potentially violating the precept against killing).

Thus, the operation of delusion and affliction is a complex psychological dynamic involving the evocation of "past dust," the fusion of present bodily and mental states with latent afflictions, and the core process of "fabrication." It is not merely a wrong thought but a powerful driving force closely combined with affliction. Without wise contemplation, individuals are extremely susceptible to being swayed by its distorted cognition and enveloped by its emotions, leading to unwholesome speech and actions, ultimately resulting in precept-violating behaviors. Understanding this complex mechanism is a key prerequisite for using wisdom to recognize delusion and affliction, thereby achieving pure precept-keeping.

## **(II) Multi-layered Harm of Delusion and Affliction**

Delusion and affliction are not only the internal driving forces behind precept violations but also major obstacles on the path of Buddhist practice, especially in upholding precepts. Their harm is comprehensive and far-reaching, negatively impacting everything from

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an individual's physical and mental health to the accumulation of meritorious deeds and the ultimate path to liberation.

## **1. Disturbing Bodily and Mental Harmony, Harming Health**

Delusion and affliction first directly act upon an individual's three karmas of body, speech, and mind, disrupting their harmonious operation and consequently harming physical and mental health. Volume 8 of the *Śrāmaṇera-karmavācanā* points out: "If the mind acts unlawfully, then the myriad officials will rebel and harm each other, hence the four great elements become imbalanced, the various faculties become obscured, leading to illness and death, all due to the mind's evil actions."

<sup>2</sup>Here, "mind acting unlawfully" refers precisely to wrong psychological activities driven by delusions and afflictions such as greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt, which are contrary to the Dharma. For example, if a practitioner is long immersed in anxious delusions about their progress in practice, worrying about falling behind fellow practitioners, this continuous negative mental state will lead to an imbalance of body and mind, potentially triggering physiological symptoms such as insomnia, nervous tension, and headaches. Physical and mental discomfort further causes them to be listless in daily practice activities, making it difficult to concentrate and even harder to maintain

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by Zhiyi: *Śrāmaṇera-karmavācanā*, Scroll 8, *Taisho Tripiṭaka*, Volume 46, p. 532 (bottom)-533 (top).

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a pure state of body and mind to strictly observe the precepts established by the Buddha. For instance, a sick monastic may find it difficult to adhere to the precept of not eating after noon. <sup>3</sup>This is an example of how delusion and affliction (anxiety) lead to bodily and mental disharmony, which may ultimately indirectly cause violations of precepts.

## 2. Eroding Meritorious Deeds, Leading to Precept Violations

Delusion and affliction are the root cause of all evil deeds. They not only drive individuals to directly violate precepts but also continuously erode and even destroy the accumulated meritorious deeds like termites. Volume 18 of the *Mahāvaipulya Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra* states: "If there are delusive discriminations, then there are afflictions."<sup>4</sup> Volume 3 of the *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarīka Sūtra* also says: "All evil arises from delusive thoughts."<sup>5</sup> Volume 6 of the *Mahāyāna-mūla-jātaka-hṛdaya-darśana-sūtra* also records: "Delusive thoughts being rampant, meritorious deeds are lost."<sup>6</sup> These scriptures emphasize the close connection between delusion and affliction, and

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<sup>3</sup> Translated by Kāśyapa Mātanga and Dharmaratna: *Sūtra of Forty-two Chapters, Scroll 1, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 17, p. 722 (middle).*

<sup>4</sup> Translated by Dharmakṣema: *Mahāvaipulya Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra, Scroll 18, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 13, p. 123 (top).*

<sup>5</sup> Translated by Anonymous Translator: *Mahākaruṇāpuṇḍarīka Sūtra, Scroll 3, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 3, p. 140 (top).*

<sup>6</sup> Translated by Prajñā: *Mahāyāna-mūla-jātaka-hṛdaya-darśana-sūtra, Scroll 6, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 3, p. 318 (bottom).*

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their importance as the starting point of evil karma and the loss of meritorious deeds. For example, the affliction of jealousy often accompanies delusive discriminations about others' achievements, driving practitioners to feel dissatisfied and resentful when fellow practitioners receive offerings or praise, and may even lead to gossiping about their faults behind their backs. This behavior directly violates the precepts against harsh speech and divisive speech. At the same time, jealousy itself is an unwholesome karma, directly harming the meritorious deeds that the practitioner may have accumulated through generosity, precept-keeping, meditation, etc. Just as Volume 1 of the *Buddha's Last Instructions Sūtra* says: "If one loses mindfulness, then all meritorious deeds are lost."<sup>7</sup> Delusion and affliction lead to loss of mindfulness, causing practitioners to become mentally scattered and unable to abide in wholesome Dharma, ultimately leading to behaviors that violate precepts and erode meritorious deeds.

### 3. Heretical Views Deviating from the Right Path

Volume 1 of the *Tathāgatācintyaviśayabuddhakṣetraguṇavyūha Sūtra* states: "Bound by heretical views, one loses the right path."<sup>8</sup> As mentioned earlier, the core argument of this paper emphasizes taking

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<sup>7</sup> Translated by Kumārajīva: *Buddha's Last Instructions Sūtra*, Scroll 1, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 12, p. 1111 (bottom).

<sup>8</sup> Translated by Śikṣānanda: *Tathāgatācintyaviśayabuddhakṣetraguṇavyūha Sūtra*, Scroll 1, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 10, p. 912 (top).

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the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction as a prerequisite for upholding precepts. However, when an individual is bound by heretical views, this wisdom is difficult to arise or function, thereby shaking the foundation of precept-keeping and ultimately deviating from the right path to liberation.

Heretical views, as inverted knowledge and opinions, have at their core a wrong understanding of the nature of things and the law of causality. When an individual generates heretical views such as "doing good is useless, doing evil is harmless," which deny causality, they fundamentally negate the law of karma. This negation directly leads to doubt about the importance of upholding precepts. If one does not believe that good and evil actions will bring corresponding consequences of happiness and suffering, then the significance of upholding precepts and restraining one's own behavior vanishes. Individuals may consider precepts as mere external constraints, hindering personal freedom and the satisfaction of desires, thereby belittling or even abandoning precept-keeping, ultimately leading to laxity and precept violations. This is completely contrary to the paper's emphasis on using wisdom to discern delusion and affliction and generating the intention to uphold precepts from within. Without a correct understanding of the law of causality, individuals cannot comprehend that upholding precepts is a



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necessary path to eradicating evil karma, accumulating good karma, and ultimately leading to liberation.

For example, in contemporary society, some extreme utilitarian ideologies, while not necessarily directly advocating "doing evil is harmless," excessively emphasize personal gain while neglecting moral principles and the long-term consequences of behavior. Under the influence of such ideologies, some people may hold the heretical view that as long as benefits can be obtained, even adopting some immoral or even illegal means (such as commercial fraud, tax evasion, etc.) is acceptable. They may believe that the law is just a bottom line, and as long as they do not violate the law, they can be relatively lenient morally. The root of this view is the lack of a deep understanding of the law of causality and being blinded by the delusive desire to pursue material benefits. They fail to recognize that even if they escape legal sanctions, immoral behavior has sown the seeds of evil and will produce painful consequences in the future. This contempt for morality and precepts is precisely because of the lack of the ability to wisely contemplate their own delusive desires, failing to see their illusory nature and potential harm. It is evident that heretical views are one of the greatest obstacles to upholding precepts, making it impossible for individuals to establish a correct direction of behavior, let alone uphold pure precepts.

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In summary, delusion and affliction bring comprehensive negative impacts to practitioners, from harming physical and mental well-being and eroding meritorious deeds to deviating from the right path and moving away from liberation. The depth of their harm warns practitioners that the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction must be placed at the core of practice. One needs to continuously observe and identify delusion and affliction with the power of mindfulness, not follow them, only then can one strictly observe precepts and achieve pure wholesome results. Conversely, if one lacks the wisdom to recognize delusion and affliction and allows them to grow and spread, it will not only lead to violations of precepts but also bring various suffering consequences and obstacles, ultimately making practice difficult to achieve. Therefore, cultivating the wisdom to recognize delusion and affliction is a necessary prerequisite for pure precept-keeping and progressing towards liberation.

### **III. Taking the Wisdom of Recognizing Delusion and Affliction as the Basis for Upholding Precepts**

Having recognized the harm of delusion and affliction to practice and precept-keeping, the next step is to clearly understand how to effectively counter them. The Dharma points out that the fundamental way to deal with afflictions lies in wisdom. The concept of wisdom in

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Buddhism has rich layers; broadly speaking, *jñāna* is singular, while *prajñā* is the collection of all wisdoms, i.e., all-knowing wisdom. With wisdom, practitioners can become aware of the harm of delusion and affliction, thereby powerfully cutting off the continuity of evil karma, establishing the continuity of good karma, and realizing the purity of precepts. The following will elaborate on how taking the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction as a prerequisite lays and deepens the foundation for upholding precepts from four key aspects.

## **(I) Wise Contemplation of the Illusory Nature of Delusion**

Wisely contemplating the illusory nature of delusion is key to dismantling its deceptive power, thereby breaking practitioners' attachment to delusion and reducing the likelihood of being driven by it to violate precepts, laying a cognitive foundation for precept-keeping.

Volume 2 of the *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra* provides the basis for recognizing the illusory nature of delusion: "However, this deluded mind has no self-nature, it also arises depending on conditions. That is, because it cognizes the preceding conditions through recollection and awareness, it is called mind."<sup>9</sup> This passage reveals two core characteristics of delusion: no inherent existence and arising dependent on conditions. Delusion itself does not have a fixed,

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<sup>9</sup> Translated by Bodhidīpa: *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra*, Scroll 2, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 17, p. 907 (top).

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unchanging, independent entity; its arising entirely depends on "recollection"—the mind's clinging to and awareness of the "past dust" (people, things, events of the past) and the presently appearing "conditions".

For example, when faced with the same critical words, different practitioners, due to their different past experiences (past dust), present emotional states, and latent afflictions, will cling to different memory fragments and concepts, projecting completely different meanings. A person lacking wisdom may interpret it as malicious attack, giving rise to strong anger; while a person with wisdom may see it as a kind reminder, giving rise to gratitude or a desire to improve. This illustrates that the thoughts and judgments generated towards the same external condition (i.e., delusion) are entirely subjective constructions made by the mind based on its own state and past habits, are products of the aggregation of conditions, and are not real or permanent existences.

Furthermore, as the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) states: "All conditioned phenomena are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, a shadow, like dew and lightning; thus shall you contemplate them."<sup>10</sup> Delusion, as a conditioned phenomenon fabricated by the mind, is also illusory and unreal like a dream or a bubble. If practitioners can truly contemplate delusion with wisdom, they will no longer mistake

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<sup>10</sup> Translated by Kumārajīva: *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, Scroll 1, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 8, p. 752 (middle).

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it for reality and develop strong attachment to it. Just as recognizing the illusory nature of a dream while dreaming prevents suffering from the dream's fears and sorrows, when practitioners no longer cling to delusions, the driving force of delusions over them will significantly weaken or even disappear.

For example, when strong delusive thoughts of anger arise in the mind, such as "This person is truly hateful," "I wish they would disappear," and so on, if the practitioner can use wisdom to contemplate these thoughts—that they are illusory, merely products of the mind clinging to external conditions and internal afflictions, and not inherently real—then the attachment to these thoughts will lessen, directly weakening anger's driving force on behavior, making it more likely to avoid being controlled by anger and committing various actions that harm others and violate precepts. This wisdom of recognizing the illusory nature of delusion is an important step in cutting off the generation of delusion and the resulting precept-violating behaviors from the source of cognition.

## **(II) Wise Discerning of the Root and Harm of Affliction**

Merely recognizing the illusory nature of delusion is not enough; one also needs the wisdom to discern the root of affliction (the defiled mental states that arise together with delusion) and its harm to oneself

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in order to truly generate a strong determination to eliminate affliction, thereby more rigorously protecting the precepts.

Volume 2 of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* reveals the root cause of the arising of affliction: "Ordinary beings, from inversion and arising delusive discriminations, generate greed, hatred, and ignorance."<sup>11</sup> The "inversion" mentioned here refers to the wrong cognitions that ordinary beings generate due to a lack of wisdom. For example, clinging to the impermanent body as a permanent "self" will lead to excessive protection and attachment to the body, further triggering various afflictions. Delusive discriminations are the various false thoughts and judgments that arise based on this inverted cognition. The fundamental afflictions such as greed, hatred, and ignorance are precisely generated from these inverted delusions. For example, based on the attachment to "self," the delusion "I should be respected" arises; when the expectation is not met, afflictions such as anger (annoyance at disrespect), pride (feeling unappreciated), and worry arise. Therefore, fundamental afflictions like greed, hatred, and ignorance are directly generated from inverted delusive discriminations. The function of wisdom lies in being able to clearly discern that the root of affliction lies in wrong cognition and attachment.

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<sup>11</sup> Translated by Kumārajīva: *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*, Scroll 2, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 15, p. 44 (bottom).

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Furthermore, one needs to deeply recognize the harm of affliction. Volume 8 of the *Aggañña Sutta* states: "Among them, if there are those who are learned, virtuous, wise, and intelligent, knowing that these evil thoughts are like diseases, sores, boils, and arrows, having thought thus, they fix their minds on right recollection, do not follow the mind's lead, causing the mind to be still, bringing much benefit."<sup>12</sup> The scripture uses the metaphors of "diseases, sores, boils, and arrows" for evil thoughts (manifestations of delusion and affliction), emphasizing their toxic harm to the practitioner's mind. It also points out that only those who are learned, virtuous, wise, and intelligent can deeply recognize the negative impact of delusion and affliction, and consequently be able to fix their minds on right recollection, not follow the mind's lead, causing the mind to be still, bringing much benefit—that is, maintain right mindfulness and awareness, not follow the driving force of afflictions to create evil karma, thereby obtaining great benefits.

For example, if a practitioner fails to wisely contemplate their attachment to fame and gain, they may lose their way in the pursuit of these. Such as exaggerating their own realizations to gain the praise of followers, or catering to the preferences of donors to receive offerings; these behaviors may violate precepts such as not lying. Only by deeply recognizing the harm brought by greed will one truly let go of

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<sup>12</sup> Translated by Jñānagupta and others: *Aggañña Sutta*, Scroll 8, *Taisho Tripiṭaka*, Volume 1, p. 350 (top).

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attachment to fame and gain (eliminate affliction), generate from the depths of their heart a desire for pure precept-keeping, thereby firmly upholding precepts and not being stained by fame and gain.

Volume 1 of the *Buddha's Last Instructions Sūtra* further emphasizes the importance of recognizing the harm of affliction with a more alarming analogy: "The thieves of afflictions constantly lie in wait to kill people, even more so than enemies. How can you sleep without being alarmed and awakened? The poisonous snakes of afflictions sleep in your heart, like black vipers sleeping in your room. You should use the hook of upholding precepts to remove them early. Only when the sleeping snakes are out can you sleep peacefully. Sleeping while they are not out is the act of a shameless person."<sup>13</sup> Here, afflictions are compared to thieves and poisonous snakes, warning practitioners to always be vigilant and use the hook of upholding precepts to eliminate afflictions early. This also indirectly emphasizes that recognizing the harm of afflictions is a prerequisite for taking protective measures.

In summary, through the discernment of wisdom, allowing practitioners to clearly see the root of afflictions in wrong cognition and attachment, and their harm, can reduce the likelihood of violating precepts due to them, enabling them to steadily progress on the path of practice.

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<sup>13</sup> Translated by Kumārajīva: *Buddha's Last Instructions Sūtra*, Scroll 1, *Taisho Tripiṭaka*, Volume 12, p. 1111 (middle).



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### (III) Establishing the Motivation for Upholding Precepts with Right View

Another important manifestation of wisdom is the establishment of right view, that is, correct understanding and insight. Right view is the root of upholding precepts. As stated in *A Study of Buddhism through Buddhist Principles*: "All practices take this right view as their foundation."<sup>14</sup> This statement points out the important position of right view in the entire system of Buddhist practice. Volume 90 of the *Zong Jing Lu* states: "Therefore, the five perfections are like the blind, and prajñā is like the guide."<sup>15</sup> Here, prajñā (wisdom, including right view) is likened to a guide, emphasizing the guiding role of right view for the six perfections, including upholding precepts.

The reason why right view can establish the correct motivation for upholding precepts is that it enables practitioners to truly recognize the law of causality of actions and the necessity of upholding precepts for leaving suffering, attaining happiness, and progressing towards liberation. For example, Volume 1 of the *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra* states: "Sentient beings in Jambudvīpa, every movement and thought is karma, every one is a sin."<sup>16</sup> And Volume 5 of

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<sup>14</sup> Written by Shì Yinshùn: *A Study of Buddhism through Buddhist Principles*, New Continued Tripiṭaka, Volume 16, p. 95 (top).

<sup>15</sup> Compiled by Yánshòu: *Zongjinglu*, Scroll 90, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 48, p. 906 (top).

<sup>16</sup> Translated by Śikṣānanda: *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra*, Scroll 1, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 13, p. 783 (middle).

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the *Adbhūta-dharma-parīṇdana Sūtra* also says: "The retribution of good and evil causes is clearly evident."<sup>17</sup> These scriptures emphasize the recognition of the law of causality, making practitioners deeply believe that even the slightest arising of thoughts will have consequences, thereby becoming more cautious in protecting precepts, ceasing evil deeds, and cultivating good deeds. Therefore, when practitioners truly understand the causal relationship between good and evil actions and the resulting happiness and suffering through right view, they can generate the intention to uphold precepts from the depths of their hearts, transforming it from passive restraint to active practice of keeping precepts.

For example, there are two practitioners. Practitioner A upholds precepts merely out of fear of being punished by monastery rules; their motivation is passive. Practitioner B, on the other hand, deeply believes that upholding precepts is an effective way to cease evil, cultivate good, leave suffering, and attain happiness, and that it lays the foundation for future liberation; their motivation is active. When there are no external constraints, Practitioner B will still consciously protect the precepts, while Practitioner A may relax their demands. This example illustrates that upholding precepts based on right view is more proactive and stable.

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<sup>17</sup> Translated by Dharmadeva: *Adbhūta-dharma-parīṇdana Sūtra*, Scroll 5, *Taisho Tripiṭaka*, Volume 15, p. 444 (middle).

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Thus, the right view established by wisdom naturally breaks through delusion and affliction. It transforms precept-keeping from a passive external behavioral constraint into a practice of conscious protection of conduct generated by the practitioner based on the understanding of the law of causality and the aspiration for the benefits of liberation. This transformation not only makes precept-keeping more firm but also lays a solid foundation for practitioners to reach the state of leaving suffering, attaining happiness, and ultimate liberation.

#### **(IV) Sublimating the Aspiration for Precepts into Altruism with Wisdom**

Wisdom not only establishes the correct motivation for upholding precepts, transforming it from passive observance to active practice, but also sublimates it into the altruistic aspiration of a Bodhisattva.

Buddhism believes that all paths to liberation originate from wisdom. Volume 18 of the *Madhyamāgama* states: "The path comes from wisdom, not from ignorance."<sup>18</sup> This statement applies to the entire path of practice. If practitioners can illuminate their hearts with wisdom, they can gradually recognize that all sentient beings possess Buddha-nature and are suffering various hardships in the cycle of rebirth, thereby generating unconditioned great compassion and the altruistic

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<sup>18</sup> Translated by Saṃghadeva: *Madhyamāgama*, Scroll 18, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 1, p. 540 (bottom).

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mind of oneness. At this time, when the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction is combined with a strong altruistic mind, upholding precepts is no longer merely for personal liberation but is sublimated into an important component of Bodhisattva practice for the benefit of others.

The phrase "precepts for the benefit of sentient beings" in Volume 1 of the *Upāsaka-pañcaśīla-vidhi Sūtra*<sup>19</sup> clearly points out the aspiration to uphold precepts with the aim of benefiting all sentient beings. This aspiration drives practitioners to willingly abandon worldly pleasures and strictly observe precepts, with the purpose not only of personal liberation but also of better benefiting sentient beings through the merits accumulated by upholding precepts.

For example, upholding the precept against killing is not just about avoiding directly taking the lives of other beings but extends to actively protecting weak lives, such as rescuing injured animals and persuading others to abstain from killing and release life. This aspiration for upholding precepts is entirely based on the benefit of others. Similarly, abandoning greed and upholding the precept against stealing is not only for self-benefit but also for accumulating resources and broadly benefiting others.

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<sup>19</sup> Translated by Guṇabhadra: *Upāsaka-pañcaśīla-vidhi Sūtra*, Scroll 1, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 24, p. 1119 (bottom).

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Therefore, when the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction sublimates precept-keeping into the aspiration for altruism, it transcends individual self-perfection and leads to the vast aspiration and practice of benefiting all sentient beings, deepening the foundation of precept-keeping.

#### **IV. How the Wisdom of Recognizing Delusion and Affliction Deepens the Practice of Precepts**

This chapter will elaborate on how upholding precepts premised on the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction surpasses the way of upholding precepts that only focuses on external behavioral norms in terms of ceasing evil, purifying the mind, applying flexibly, and promoting meditation, fundamentally deepening the practice of precepts and reducing the likelihood of violating them.

##### **(I) From Cessation of Evil to Non-Desire for Evil**

Precept-keeping guided by wisdom, its goal is not merely the external behavioral norms of precept-keeping, but also directly addresses the inner mind, reaching the state of non-desire for evil.

For example, when the thought of jealousy arises, a practitioner lacking wisdom may only strive to restrain from expressing jealousy in behavior; they may not speak ill of the other person behind their back or

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openly exclude them. However, because they have failed to fundamentally deal with the inner affliction of jealousy, they may still feel displeasure, pain, and anxiety inwardly due to others' achievements, and even secretly hope for the other person's failure, plotting hidden retaliation. This state has not truly purified the mind.

On the other hand, a practitioner with the wisdom to recognize delusion and affliction, when the thought of jealousy arises, can immediately use wisdom to contemplate that this thought is illusory, is associated with affliction, and can discern the harm of jealousy—it not only makes one's inner mind suffer but also erodes meritorious deeds and brings about evil consequences (the more one is jealous, the more one loses). Based on this recognition, they will not identify with this thought, let alone act upon it. Instead, they will actively use wisdom to transform this mental state, for example, by practicing rejoicing in others' merits. They will observe the good causes and conditions upon which others' achievements depend and sincerely rejoice in the good results of others, while also vowing that they too can possess the same good causes, conditions, and results through correct practice. Through this wise contemplation, discernment, and transformation, the thought of jealousy will gradually subside and dissolve, eventually reaching the state of "non-desire for evil." At this point, there is no longer the affliction of jealousy as a driving force to generate any behavior that

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violates precepts. This is a deeper level of practice of precept-keeping guided by wisdom.

## **(II) From Passive Defense to Active Purification**

Precept-keeping lacking wisdom often involves practitioners being cautious and meticulous out of fear of violating the rules; their effort is directed towards avoiding transgression, which is a passive defense. Precept-keeping premised on wisdom, however, is an active process of inner purification. Practitioners use wisdom to directly counter inner afflictions, taking precept-keeping as a positive means of transforming afflictions.

For example, a practitioner lacking wisdom but possessing the affliction of pride, when upholding the precept against lying, may only carefully avoid lying because they fear that if their lies are exposed, they will lose their reputation and face. This is a typical passive defense. Deep down, their mind may still be full of emotions such as "I am stronger than others" and "I should be treated specially," which are rooted in pride.

A practitioner with wisdom, however, knows that pride is one of the fundamental afflictions that poisons the mind and hinders practice, leading to the deterioration of interpersonal relationships, complacency and regression, and even precept-violating behaviors such as lying

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(exaggerating one's own realizations or belittling others to elevate oneself). Therefore, they will actively use wisdom to subdue the inner pride, diligently cultivate humility and respect, sincerely treat everyone, and appreciate and learn from the strengths of others. This process of fundamentally purifying the inner mind and subduing the affliction of pride naturally enables them to be cautious in speech and action, genuinely respect others from the heart, thereby avoiding lies arising from pride (such as exaggerating their own spiritual experiences or belittling others to elevate themselves). This not only protects the precept against lying but also fundamentally subdues the affliction of pride. This is the active purification achieved by precept-keeping guided by wisdom.

### **(III) Flexible Application of Precepts in Specific Situations**

Buddhist precepts provide practitioners with clear behavioral norms. However, real-life situations are often complex and variable. How to appropriately apply precepts in specific situations, rather than getting caught up in the literal wording, requires the guidance of wisdom. Wisdom enables practitioners to transcend the literal meaning of precepts, deeply understand the essential principle of precepts being rooted in the mind, and thus make judgments in specific situations that



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best align with the path to liberation and the principle of benefiting others. Volume 4 of the *Upāyakaśālya Sūtra* records a typical case:

Therefore, I now speak to you according to his thought. You should consider what skillful means you can employ to prevent this evil person from committing the act of killing and avoiding the retribution of hell, and also to ensure that the merchants all preserve their lives. Why? Because these five hundred merchants have all attained irreversible establishment in Anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi, and if that evil person commits the act of killing against those who abide in the Bodhisattva Dharma, he will forever fall into hell, with no hope of release. Therefore, you should now devise skillful means to rescue them well.

...At that time, the leader of the merchants, having thought thus, immediately employed skillful means and took his life. When that evil person died, he was reborn in the heavens.<sup>20</sup>

This passage describes how a Bodhisattva, in a critical situation, used skillful means (methods corresponding to wisdom) to prevent an evil person from killing five hundred merchants who had attained the stage of non-retrogression in their Bodhisattva path, thereby avoiding the extremely heavy evil karma and the consequence of falling into hell for

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<sup>20</sup> Translated by Dānapāla: *Upāyakaśālya Sūtra*, Scroll 4, Taisho Tripiṭaka, Volume 12, p. 175 (bottom).

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countless eons for that evil person. In this situation, the Bodhisattva used wisdom, not adhering rigidly to the literal precept against killing, but with a thorough understanding of causality (mind being the root), and through skillful means, took an action that aligned with the ultimate benefit and the core spirit of the precepts (preventing evil karma, purifying mental conduct, and rescuing sentient beings). This illustrates that the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction (including a deep understanding of causality) enables practitioners not to be bound by the rigid observance of precepts but to focus on the mind as the root and purify the precepts.

#### **(IV) Mutual Promotion of Precept-Keeping and Meditation**

Buddhist practice emphasizes the sequence and interrelationship of the three non-outflow studies: precepts, concentration, and wisdom. Pure precept-keeping provides the foundation for concentration, profound concentration creates the conditions for the arising of wisdom, and wisdom, in turn, guides precept-keeping and concentration. Precept-keeping premised on the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction can powerfully promote the cultivation of concentration. At the same time, the increase in the power of concentration can conversely solidify the upholding of precepts.

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Volume 4 of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* states: "You but do not follow the three continuities of the world, karma-results, and sentient beings. Because the three conditions are severed, the three causes do not arise. Then, in your mind, the madness of Yajñadatta will naturally cease; cessation is Bodhi."<sup>21</sup> This passage reveals that not following delusions (of the world, karma-results, and sentient beings) is key to stopping the inner turmoil and realizing Bodhi. From the perspective of actual practice, pure precept-keeping is an important foundation for helping practitioners not follow delusions and gather their body and mind. When practitioners carefully guard their three karmas of body, speech, and mind, avoiding violations of precepts, they can effectively reduce inner distractions and gross afflictions, creating favorable conditions for entering deeper states of concentration. The purer the precept-keeping, the easier it is for the mind to become stable, and the easier it is for the power of concentration to arise and grow.

Conversely, profound concentration can also powerfully promote the upholding of precepts. The inner clarity and sharp awareness brought by concentration enable practitioners to clearly see the arising and operation of delusion and affliction. Through this clear wise awareness, practitioners can more timely and powerfully counter them, thus making it easier to uphold precepts and avoid committing

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<sup>21</sup> Translated by Paramiti: *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, Scroll 1, *Taisho Tripiṭaka*, Volume 19, p. 121 (middle).

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precept-violating behaviors driven by delusion and affliction, forming a virtuous cycle of mutual promotion and support between precept-keeping and concentration.

In summary, precept-keeping guided by the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction can fundamentally enhance the depth and breadth of precept practice, enabling practitioners to, on the basis of ceasing evil, further realize inner purification and the growth of wisdom, thereby progressing towards liberation more quickly and more steadily.

## **V. Consequences of Delusion and Affliction vs. Wise Altruism (Case Analysis)**

This chapter will specifically illustrate the adverse consequences of clinging to delusion and affliction and the beneficial outcomes of upholding the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction and practicing altruism through a comparative analysis of literary characters and the insights from a business case. This will further argue that the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction is not only the foundation for pure precept-keeping but also an important prerequisite for obtaining good results and peace.

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## **(I) Literary Case Comparison: Murong Fu and Xuzhu**

In Mr. Jin Yong's novel *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils*, the vastly different fates of the characters Murong Fu and Xuzhu vividly illustrate the stark contrast between the harm of clinging to delusion and affliction and the beneficial outcomes of wise altruism.

Consider Murong Fu, whose life ambition was to restore the Great Yan kingdom. From a Buddhist perspective, this ambition originates from a strong greed and attachment to worldly power and fame. This attachment completely blinded his mind, causing all his actions to revolve around this delusive affliction, filled with scheming and lacking in kindness. He could resort to any means to achieve his goal, such as using Duan Yu and even cruelly killing Bao Butong, his loyal retainer. These behaviors are typical precept violations, stemming from his heart being completely driven and controlled by the delusion of restoring his kingdom and the accompanying afflictions of greed, anger, ignorance, and pride.

Volume 35 of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* profoundly reveals the harm of afflictions such as greed, anger, and ignorance:

Those who are stained by lust, their minds obscured by lust, harm themselves, or harm others, or harm both themselves and others; they experience suffering and grief in this life and in the next life, and in both this and the next life; their minds are constantly filled

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with sorrow and painful feelings. If they are obscured by hatred, obscured by delusion, they harm themselves, harm others, harm both themselves and others, and so on, even to constantly experiencing sorrow and painful feelings. Furthermore, lust is blinding, without sight, without wisdom, with weak wisdom-power, an obstacle, not clear, not rightly awakened, not leading to Nirvana. Hatred and delusion are also like this.<sup>22</sup>

Murong Fu's strong obsession with restoring the Great Yan kingdom is a vivid portrayal of the obscuration of lust described in the scripture. This strong delusive greed blinded his mind and moral judgment, driving him to use any means to achieve his goal, harming others. Ultimately, his scheming failed to achieve the goal of restoring his kingdom, but instead led to his isolation, loss of reputation, and a tragic end, even causing him to become mentally deranged because he could not bear the shattering of his delusive ambition. This is a typical case of clinging to delusion and affliction inevitably leading to adverse consequences.

In contrast, Xuzhu was naturally simple and kind, his actions often stemming from innate goodness and a desire to help others, which highly aligns with the Buddhist thought of "altruism." Even when facing life-threatening dangers, he did not act according to delusion and

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<sup>22</sup> Translated by Guṇabhadra: *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Scroll 35, *Taisho Tripiṭaka*, Volume 2, p. 251 (middle-bottom).

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affliction but adhered to kindness and altruism, making correct choices (such as the "self-eating chess piece" move in the Zhenlong chess game, disregarding his own life to save Tianshan Tonglao).

As stated in the *Itivuttaka*: "All that exists is based on meritorious deeds, but not worth one-sixteenth part of the liberation of the heart filled with loving-kindness. The radiance of the liberation of the heart filled with loving-kindness is excellent and illuminating."<sup>23</sup> Xuzhu's kindness and helping others are behavioral manifestations of the liberation of the heart filled with loving-kindness praised in the scripture. His kindness and altruistic actions enabled him to resolve numerous crises and ultimately achieve a seemingly accidental but actually consistent with his inner qualities, perfect ending.

Through the stark contrast between Murong Fu and Xuzhu, it is clear that clinging to delusion and affliction, the behaviors driven by them are full of harming others, inevitably leading to violations of precepts and the adverse consequences of mental and physical suffering. Conversely, upholding the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction, following altruistic good intentions, even when facing crises, can resolve them and ultimately lead to good outcomes.

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<sup>23</sup> Translated by Wuxing: *Itivuttaka, Southern Canon, Volume 26, p. 195 (top)-196 (top)*.

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## **(II) Insights from a Business Case: Elon Musk's Business Strategy**

Observing business cases can also reveal insights that align with the Buddhist wisdom of altruism and the law of causality. Elon Musk and his company Tesla's certain business strategies provide a thought-provoking case.

For example, Tesla's move to open-source its electric vehicle charging pile technology patents, from a short-term profit perspective, allows competitors to use its technology, which seems like a disadvantageous behavior. However, from a long-term perspective, this altruistic behavior aimed at promoting the development of the entire electric vehicle industry ultimately helped Tesla establish a broader market base and industry leadership.

Analyzing from a Buddhist perspective, Musk's decision embodies a breaking through of the delusion of "self-centeredness." Traditional business models are often based on the thinking of "exclusive resources," that is, treating technology as a competitive advantage and striving to maximize one's own interests. This thinking originates from a strong attachment to "I," "my technology," and "my interests," which is a manifestation of delusion and affliction.

Musk's choice to open-source patents is a behavior that transcends "self-centeredness." He recognized that the development of the electric



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vehicle industry requires the common progress of the entire ecosystem, rather than the exclusive dominance of a single company. This wisdom focused on promoting the common development of the industry has common ground with altruistic behavior in Buddhism.

This insight also aligns with the understanding of the law of causality in Buddhism. Buddhism believes that all actions have their causes and effects. Short-term "self-benefiting" behaviors may bring immediate gains, but in the long run, they harm overall interests and ultimately harm one's own interests. "Altruistic" behaviors, although seemingly sacrifices in the short term, can ultimately bring broader and more lasting good results.

Musk's behavior of open-sourcing patents is a practice of this law of causality. Through "altruistic" behavior, he promoted the development of the entire electric vehicle industry, ultimately bringing huge benefits to Tesla as well.

Of course, the complexity of commercial behavior should also be rationally analyzed to avoid simply equating it with Buddhist practice, but the long-term benefits of altruism shown by its results have the same underlying logic as recognizing delusion and affliction (removing obstacles that obscure wisdom), establishing right view (understanding the law of causality), and ultimately generating an altruistic mind

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(expanding the scope of benefit) leading to peace and liberation in Buddhism.

Through the above analysis of literary character comparison and business case, it can be seen that clinging to delusion and affliction often leads to adverse consequences; conversely, behaviors based on the wisdom of recognizing delusion and with altruism as the starting point can bring about long-term good results. This strongly corroborates that the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction, and the pure precept-keeping and altruistic behaviors guided by it, are important prerequisites for obtaining good results. Only by clearly seeing the illusory nature and harm of delusion and affliction, and guiding actions with an altruistic mind, can one progress towards peace and liberation.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This paper has deeply explored the arising and operational mechanisms of delusion and affliction, as well as their multi-layered harm. Based on this, it has argued that taking the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction as a prerequisite is key to upholding Buddhist precepts. The study shows that this wisdom not only helps practitioners discern the root of inner evil thoughts and establish the motivation for upholding precepts based on right view but also fundamentally enhances the autonomy and effectiveness of precept practice.

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Consequently, precept-keeping transforms from passive external behavioral norms to active inner purification, and further sublimates into altruistic Bodhisattva practice. Through the analysis of literary characters and business cases, it is further demonstrated that clinging to delusion and affliction inevitably leads to adverse consequences, while upholding wisdom and embracing an altruistic mind can bring about long-term good results and peace. This conclusion highlights the crucial role of the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction in guiding pure precept-keeping and altruistic behavior, and its value in leading to peace and liberation.

Precept-keeping based on the wisdom of recognizing delusion and affliction not only regulates the behavior of body, speech, and mind but also delves into the inner mind, requiring practitioners to observe and transform potential delusion and affliction with mindfulness. Through continuous introspection and purification, precepts will gradually be internalized as spontaneous virtuous conduct, thereby realizing the thorough purification of physical and mental behavior, ultimately leading to the goal of leaving suffering and attaining happiness.

Future research can explore how to integrate this wisdom into modern psychological counseling systems to develop practical coping strategies for psychological problems commonly faced by contemporary people, such as anxiety and stress, which are caused by delusion and

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affliction. This not only has important academic value but can also provide practical significance for promoting mental health in modern society.

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