

Cosmopolitan Zen Buddhist Precepts Primer

Affirm Life - Do Not Kill

Jun Po Roshi: I respect all sentient and insentient beings and always act with compassion towards them. In order to live, it is necessary for me to take life. I do so with reverence for the life taken. In gratitude, I do not take my own life for granted.

Bodhidharma: Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the everlasting Dharma, not giving rise to the idea of killing is called the Precept of Not Killing.

Dogen Zenji: The Buddha seed grows in accordance with not taking life. Transmit the life of Buddha's wisdom and do not kill.

Zen Peacemakers: Recognizing that I am not separate from all that is. This is the precept of Non-Killing.

ZPO Day of Reflection: As peacemakers throughout all space and time have observed the Precept of Non-killing, not leading a harmful life nor encouraging others to do so, so will I, with gratitude, recognize that I am not separate from all that is. I will live in harmony with all life and the environment that sustains it.

Hakuun Yasutani Roshi: Refrain from taking life.

John Daido Loori Roshi: Affirm life. Do not kill.

Robert Aitken Roshi: Not killing: Don't kill; encourage life. There is no thought of killing.

Kaza: Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine, we vow not to kill.

Norman Fischer: Not to kill but to nurture life.

Sangharakshita: I undertake the item of training which consists in abstention from killing living beings. With deeds of loving-kindness, I purify my body.

Thich Nhat Hahn: Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I vow to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, and plants. 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.

The Brahma Net Sutra: On Killing. A disciple of the Buddha shall not themselves kill, encourage others to kill, kill by expedient means, praise killing, rejoice at witnessing killing, or kill through incantation or deviant mantras. They must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of killing, and shall not intentionally kill any living creature. As a Buddha's disciple, one ought to nurture a mind of compassion and filial piety, always devising expedient means to rescue and protect all beings. If, instead, one fails to restrain themselves and kills sentient beings without mercy, one commits a Parajika (major) offense.

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Avatamsaka Sutra: Bodhisattvas that abide in this stage are by nature completely free from the killing of living things. They are without brutality or the need to use weapons, and they do not harbor feelings of anger and resentment. With humility, they are full of good will and forgiveness towards living beings, only wishing for their welfare. These Bodhisattvas do not even have thoughts of distressing living beings, much less think of turning these thoughts into doing actual harm.

Act Generously - Do Not Steal

Jun Po Roshi: I act with generosity and open-handedness. I receive only things that are freely given to me. I remember that clinging and attachment are the root of suffering.

Bodhidharma: Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the unattainable Dharma, not having thoughts of gaining is called the Precept of Not Stealing.

Dogen Zenji: The self and things of the world are just as they are. The gate of emancipation is open.

Zen Peacemakers: Being satisfied with what I have. This is the precept of Non-Stealing.

ZPO Day of Reflection: As peacemakers throughout all space and time have observed the Precept of Non-stealing, so will I, with contentment, be satisfied with what I have. I will freely give, ask for, and accept what is needed.

Hakuun Yasutani Roshi: Refrain from stealing.

John Daido Loori Roshi: Be giving. Do not steal.

Robert Aitken Roshi: Not Stealing.

Kaza: Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine, we vow not to take what is not given.

Norman Fischer: Not to steal what is not given, but to receive what is offered as a gift.

Sangharakshita: I undertake the item of training, which consists of abstention from taking the not-given. With open-handed generosity, I purify my body.

Thich Nhat Hanh: Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing and oppression, I vow to cultivate loving kindness and learn ways to work for the wellbeing of people, animals, and plants. I vow to practice generosity by sharing my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in real need. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others. I will respect the property of others, but I will prevent others from profiting from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

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The Brahma Net Sutra: A disciple of the Buddha must not themselves steal nor encourage others to steal, steal by expedient means, steal by means of incantation or deviant mantras. One should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of stealing. No valuables or possessions, even those belonging to ghosts and spirits or thieves and robbers, be they as small as a needle or blade of grass, may be stolen. As a Buddha's disciple, one ought to have a mind of mercy, compassion, and filial piety – always helping people earn merits and achieve happiness. If, instead, one steals the possessions of others, they commit a Parajika offense.

Avatamsaka Sutra: By nature Bodhisattvas do not steal. They are always perfectly satisfied with their own possessions and, with kindness and good will towards others they do not encroach upon their belongings. If they think about the possessions of others, they never have a thought of taking them. They would never even think of taking a single blade of grass that was not given to them, much less any other possession.

Be Loving - Do Not Misuse Sexuality

Jun Po Roshi: I am conscious and loving in all of my relationships. In sexuality, I discern the difference between love and lust and do not take advantage of other human beings. I transform the arising of lust into true loving.

Bodhidharma: Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the ungilded Dharma, not creating a veneer of attachment is called the Precept of Not Misusing Sex.

Dogen Zenji: The Three Wheels are pure and clear. When you have nothing to desire, you follow the way of all Buddhas.

Zen Peacemakers: Encountering all creations with respect and dignity. This is the precept of Chaste Conduct.

ZPO Day of Reflection: As peacemakers throughout all space and time have observed the Precept of Chaste Conduct, so will I, with love, encounter all creations with respect and dignity. I will give and accept love and friendship without clinging.

Hakuun Yasutani Roshi: Refrain from impure sexuality.

John Daido Loori Roshi: Honor the body. Do not misuse sexuality.

Robert Aitken Roshi: Not misusing sex.

Kaza: Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine, we vow to not engage in abusive relationships.

Norman Fischer: Not to misuse sexuality but to be caring and faithful in intimate relationships.

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Sangharakshita: I undertake the item of training which consists in abstention from sexual misconduct. With stillness, simplicity, and contentment, I purify my body.

Thich Nhat Hahn: Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I vow to cultivate responsibility and learn ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without love and a long-term commitment. To preserve the happiness of myself and others, I am determined to respect my commitments and the commitments of others. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct.

The Brahma Net Sutra: A disciple of the Buddha must not engage in licentious acts or encourage others to do so. [As a monk] one should not have sexual relations with any female – be she a human, animal, deity, or spirit – nor create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of such misconduct. Indeed, he must not engage in improper sexual conduct with anyone. A Buddha's disciple ought to have a mind of filial piety – rescuing all sentient beings and instructing them in the Dharma of purity and chastity. If, instead, one lacks compassion and encourages others to engage in sexual relations promiscuously, including with animals and even their mothers, daughters, sisters, or other close relatives, one commits a Parajika offense.

Avatamsaka Sutra: By nature Bodhisattvas do not commit acts of sexual immorality. They are satisfied with their own spouses and do not seek those of others. They do not bear any thoughts of desire or lust for others' spouses or lovers, much less act on these thoughts or have sexual relations with them.

Manifest Truth - Do Not Lie

Jun Po Roshi: I honor honesty and truth. I speak with integrity from the depth of my heart.

Bodhidharma: Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the inexplicable Dharma, not preaching a single word is called the Precept of Not Lying.

Dogen Zenji: The Dharma Wheel turns from the beginning. There is neither surplus nor lack. The whole universe is moistened with nectar, and the truth is ready to harvest.

Zen Peacemakers: Listening and speaking from the heart. This is the precept of Non-Lying.

Version of Zen Peacemaker Atonement: As peacemakers throughout all space and time have observed the Precept of Non-lying, speaking the truth, and deceiving no one, so will I, with honesty, listen and speak from the heart. I will see and act in accordance with what is.

Hakuun Yasutani Roshi: Refrain from telling lies.

John Daido Loori Roshi: Manifest truth. Do not lie.

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Robert Aitken Roshi: Not lying.

Kaza: Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine, we vow to not speak falsely or deceptively.

Norman Fischer: Not to lie but to be truthful.

Sangarakshita: I undertake the item of training, which consists of abstention from false speech. With truthful communication, I purify my speech.

Thich Nhat Hanh: Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

The Brahma Net Sutra: A disciple of the Buddha must not use false words and speech, or encourage others to lie, or lie by expedient means. One should not involve themselves in the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of lying, saying that one has seen what he has not seen or vice-versa, or lying implicitly through physical or mental means. As a Buddha's disciple, one ought to maintain Right Speech and Right Views always, and lead all others to maintain them as well. If, instead, one causes wrong speech, wrong views or evil karma in others, one commits a Parajika offense.

Avatamsaka Sutra: By nature Bodhisattvas do not speak falsely. They speak the truth, saying what is so and what is appropriate to the occasion. Even in their dreams they do not desire to use words to deceive or cover up the truth, much less actually do so consciously.

Respect Clarity - Do Not Abuse Intoxicants

Jun Po Roshi: I act at all times with mindfulness and clarity. I do not abuse my body or cloud my mind with the misuse of intoxicants

Bodhidharma: Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the intrinsically pure Dharma, not giving rise to delusions is called the Precept of Not Giving or Taking Drugs.

Dogen Zenji: Drugs are not brought in yet. Don't let them invade. That is the great light.

Zen Peacemakers: Cultivating a mind that sees clearly. This is the precept of Not Being Ignorant.

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Version ZCLA Atonement: As peacemakers throughout all space and time have observed the Precept of Not Being Deluded, nor encouraged others to do so, so will I, with awareness, cultivate a mind that sees clearly. I will embrace all experience directly.

Hakuun Yasutani Roshi: Refrain from using intoxicants.

John Daido Loori Roshi: Proceed clearly. Do not cloud the mind.

Robert Aitken Roshi: Not giving or taking drugs.

Kaza: Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine, we vow to not harm self or others through poisonous thought or substance.

Norman Fischer: Not to intoxicate with substances and doctrines but to promote clarity and awareness.

Sangharakshita: I undertake the item of training which consists of abstention from harsh speech. With words kindly and gracious, I purify my speech.

Thich Nhat Hanh: Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I vow to ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in myself and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

The Brahma Net Sutra: A disciple of the Buddha must not trade in alcoholic beverages or encourage others to do so. One should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of selling any intoxicant whatsoever, for intoxicants are the causes and conditions of all kinds of offenses. As a Buddha's disciple, one ought to help all sentient beings achieve clear wisdom. If instead, one causes them to have upside down, topsy-turvy thinking, one commits a Parajika offense.

Honor Silence - Do No Talk About Others' Errors and Faults

Jun Po Roshi: I remember the preciousness of silence. I see the perfection in others and refrain from gossip and frivolous conversation. I remain thoughtful and mindful of the effects of my speech.

Bodhidharma: Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the flawless Dharma, not expounding upon error is called the Precept of Not Speaking of Faults of Others.

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Dogen Zenji: In the Buddha Dharma, there is one path, one Dharma, one realization, one practice. Don't permit faultfinding. Don't permit haphazard talk.

Zen Peacemakers: Unconditionally accepting what each moment has to offer. This is the precept of Not Talking About Others Errors And Faults.

Early version ZCLA Atonement: As awakened ones (or peacemakers) throughout all space and time have observed the Precept of Not Talking about Others' Errors and Faults, so will I, with kindness, for the duration of this day, unconditionally accept what each moment has to offer. I will acknowledge responsibility for everything in my life.

Hakuun Yasutani Roshi: Refrain from speaking of the shortcomings of others.

John Daido Loori Roshi: See the perfection. Do not speak of others' errors and faults.

Robert Aitken Roshi: Not discussing faults of others.

Kaza: Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine, we vow not to dwell on past errors.

Norman Fischer: Not to speak of others' faults but to speak out of loving-kindness.

Sangarakshita: I will undertake the item of training which consists in abstention from frivolous speech. With utterance helpful and harmonious, I purify my speech.

The Brahma Net Sutra: On Broadcasting the Faults of the Assembly: A disciple of the Buddha must not broadcast the misdeeds or infractions of Bodhisattva-clerics or Bodhisattvalaypersons, or of [ordinary] monks and nuns—nor encourage others to do so. One must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of discussing the offenses of the assembly. As a Buddha's disciple, whenever one hears evil persons, externalists, or followers of the Two Vehicles speak of practices contrary to the Dharma or contrary to the precepts within the Buddhist community, one should instruct them with a compassionate mind and lead them to develop wholesome faith in the Mahayana. If, instead, one discusses the faults and misdeeds that occur within the assembly, one commits a Parajika offense.

Avatamsaka Sutra: By nature Bodhisattvas do not have a hateful mouth. This is speech that is poisonous and injurious, coarse and rude, hurtful to others, speech that makes others angry and hateful, and speech that is openly or covertly mean, cheap and low, unpleasant to hear, angry and hateful, like a fire burning the mind, tied up in resentment, hot and distressful, impossible to care for or like, and capable of harming themselves and others. Having completely forsaken this speech and freed themselves from it, they always speak with words that are comforting and kind, soft and gentle, pleasing and nice to hear. They give joy to those that hear them and skillfully reach people's heart. Their speech is graceful and refined, authoritative, loved and enjoyed by all people, and makes the body and mind rejoice.

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Celebrate Others - Do Not Elevate Yourself and Blame Others

Jun Po Roshi: I rejoice in the good fortune of others. I do not, through my thoughts, words or actions, separate myself from others through coveting, envy or jealousy.

Bodhidharma: Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the equitable Dharma, not dwelling upon I against you is called the Precept of Not Praising Yourself while Abusing Others.

Dogen Zenji: Buddhas and Ancestral Teachers realize the empty sky and the great earth. When they manifest the noble body, there is neither inside nor outside in emptiness. When they manifest the Dharma body, there is not even a bit of earth on the ground.

Zen Peacemakers: Speaking what I perceive to be the truth without guilt or blame. This is the precept of Not Elevating Oneself And Blaming Others.

Early version ZCLA Atonement: As awakened ones throughout all space and time have observed the Precept of Not Elevating Themselves and Blaming Others, so will I, with humility for the duration of this day, speak what I perceive to be the truth without guilt or blame. I will give my best effort and accept the results.

Hakuun Yasutani Roshi: Refrain from praising yourself and downgrading others.

John Daido Loori Roshi: Realize self and other as one. Do not elevate the self and blame others.

Robert Aitken Roshi: Not praising yourself while abusing others.

Kaza: Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine, we vow to not speak of self separately from others.

Norman Fischer: Not to praise self at the expense of others but to be modest.

Sangharakshita: I undertake the item of training which consists in abstention from slanderous speech. With utterance helpful and harmonious, I purify my speech.

The Brahma Net Sutra: On Praising Oneself and Disparaging Others: A disciple of the Buddha shall not praise oneself and speak ill of others, or encourage others to do so. One must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of praising themselves and disparaging others. As a disciple of the Buddha, one should be willing to stand in for all sentient beings and endure humiliation and slander—accepting blame and letting sentient beings have all the glory. If, instead, one displays their own virtues and conceals the good points of others, thus causing them to suffer slander, one commits a Parajika offense.

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Avatamsaka Sutra: By nature Bodhisattvas do not have dissembling speech that is silken and flowery. Their speech is always intentional and judicious, appropriate to the occasion, truthful, meaningful, logical and reasonable, carefully considered, thoughtful and well measured. Even when telling a joke, Bodhisattvas are always intentional and judicious, and they are never prattling nonsense.

Be Giving - Do Not Be Stingy

Jun Po Roshi: I give generously of myself, sharing freely my love, my gifts, my talents and my abundance for the benefit of all. I do not selfishly withhold. I do not add any more suffering to the world.

Bodhidharma: Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the genuine, all-pervading Dharma, not being stingy about a single thing is called the Precept of Not Sparing the Dharma Assets.

Dogen Zenji: One phrase, one verse—that is the ten thousand things and one hundred grasses; one dharma, one realization—that is all Buddhas and Ancestral Teachers. Therefore, from the beginning, there has been no stinginess at all.

Zen Peacemakers: Using all of the ingredients of my life. This is the precept of Not Being Stingy.

Early version ZCLA Atonement: As awakened ones throughout all space and time have observed the Precept of Not Being Stingy, so will I, with generosity for the duration of this day, use all of the ingredients of my life. I will not foster a mind of poverty in others or myself.

Hakuun Yasutani Roshi: Refrain from begrudging the Dharma treasure.

John Daido Loori Roshi: Give generously. Do not be withholding.

Robert Aitken Roshi: Not sparing the Dharma assets.

Kaza: Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine, we vow to not possess anything or form of life selfishly. Not to be possessive of anything but to be generous.

Sangarakshita: I undertake the item of training which consists of abstention from covetousness. Abandoning covetousness for tranquility, I purify my mind.

The Brahma Net Sutra: A disciple of the Buddha must not be stingy or encourage others to be stingy. One should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of stinginess. As a Bodhisattva, whenever a destitute person comes for help, one should give that person what they need. If, instead, out of anger and resentment, one denies all assistance—refusing to help with even a penny, a needle, a blade of grass, even a single sentence or verse or a phrase of Dharma, but instead scolds and abuses that person—one commits a Parajika offense.

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Avatamsaka Sutra: By nature Bodhisattvas are without greedy desire for the wealth or belongings of others. They do not seek or wish for it.

Embody Compassion - Do Not Hold Onto Anger

Jun Po Roshi: I recognize and enlighten my greed, anger and ignorance. I transform my negative emotions and act with equanimity, sympathetic joy, compassion and loving kindness.

Bodhidharma: Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the selfless Dharma, not contriving reality for the self is called the Precept of Not Indulging in Anger.

Dogen Zenji: Not advancing, not retreating, not real, not empty. There is an ocean of bright clouds. There is an ocean of solemn clouds.

Zen Peacemakers: Transforming suffering into wisdom. This is the precept of Not Being Angry.

Old Version of ZCLA Atonement: As awakened ones throughout all space and time have observed the Precept of Not Being Angry, not harboring resentment, rage, or revenge, so will I, with determination for the duration of this day, transform suffering into wisdom. I will roll all negative experience into my practice.

Hakuun Yasutani Roshi: Refrain from anger.

John Daido Loori Roshi: Actualize harmony. Do not be angry.

Robert Aitken Roshi: Not indulging in anger.

Kaza: Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine, we vow to not harbor ill will toward any plant, animal, or human being.

Norman Fischer: Not to harbor anger but to forgive.

Sangarakshita: I undertake the item of training, which consists in abstention from hatred. Changing hatred into compassion, I purify my mind.

The Brahma Net Sutra: A disciple of the Buddha shall not harbor anger or encourage others to be angry. One should not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of anger. As a disciple of the Buddha, one ought to be compassionate and filial, helping all sentient beings develop the good roots of non-contention. If, instead, one insults and abuses sentient beings, or even transformation beings [such as deities and spirits], with harsh words, hitting them with their fists or feet, or attacking them with a knife or club—or harbors grudges even when the victim confesses their mistakes and humbly seeks forgiveness in a soft, conciliatory voice—the disciple commits a Parajika offense.

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Avatamsaka Sutra: By nature Bodhisattvas are free from anger and hatred. For living beings they always inspire a mind of kindness and desire to benefit, and they offer empathy, joy, friendship, and acceptance. They are ever free of anger, resentment, malice and the heat of distress. They are always considerate and act with benevolence, kindness and the desire to care for and be of benefit to others.

Steward The Earth

Jun Po Roshi: I hold sacred this planet Earth. I seek to understand Nature's interconnections and celebrate my own interdependency. I work toward achieving a lifestyle that gives more back to this Earth than I take from it.

Manifest This Way, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha - Do Not Speak Ill of the Three Treasures

Jun Po Roshi: I hold precious this Sangha and the sacred life we embody, especially these three treasures:

This absolute purity of our Awakened Mind!

This life filled with wisdom, compassion and skillful means!

This never-ending mystery of life unfolding! All brothers, all sisters, all beings!

Bodhidharma: Self-nature is subtle and mysterious. In the realm of the One, nor holding nihilistic concepts of ordinary beings and sages is called the Precept of Not Defaming the Three Treasures.

Zen Peacemakers: Honoring my life as an instrument of peacemaking. This is the precept of Not Thinking Ill of the Three Treasures.

Early version ZCLA Atonement: As awakened ones throughout all space and time have observed the Precept of Not Thinking Ill of the Three Treasures, so will I, with compassion, honor my life as an instrument of peacemaking. I will recognize myself and others as manifestations of the Oneness of Buddha, the Diversity of Dharma, and the harmony of Sangha.

Hakuun Yasutani Roshi: Refrain from reviling the Three Treasures.

Robert Aitken Roshi: Not defaming the Three Treasures is a matter of finding them in your heartmind.

John Daido Loori Roshi: Experience the intimacy of things. Do not defile the Three Treasures.

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Kaza: Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine, we vow to not abuse the great truth of the Three Treasures.

Norman Fischer: Not to do anything to diminish the Triple Treasure but to support and nurture it.

Sangharakshita: I undertake the item of training, which consists in abstention from false views. Transforming ignorance into wisdom, I purify my mind.

The Brahma Net Sutra: A Buddha's disciple shall not speak ill of the Triple Jewel nor encourage others to do so. One must not create the causes, conditions, methods, or karma of slander. If a disciple hears but a single word of slander against the Buddha from externalists or evil beings, one experiences a pain similar to that of three hundred spears piercing their heart. How then could one possibly slander the Triple Jewel themselves? Hence, if a disciple lacks faith and filial piety towards the Triple Jewel, and even assists evil persons or those of aberrant views to slander the Triple Jewel, one commits a Parajika offense.