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THE PRACTICING OF SILA (MORALITY)

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ABSTRACT :

The Dhamma taught by the Buddha shows us the correct path which leads to ultimate peace. This path can be classified into three stages. They are Sīla (morality). Samādhi (concentration) and Paññaṅga (wisdom). They are three cornerstones of Buddhism, which lead us ultimate peace. They can be fulfilled over many lifetimes with great effort.

KEY WORDS: *They are Sīla (morality). Samādhi (concentration) and Paññaṅga (wisdom).*



INTRODUCTION

The first stage is *sīla*. Discipline, good conduct, virtue, precept and morality are synonymous with this word *sīla*. This is foundation to lead a religious way of life. If a house is built without laying a proper foundation, it will be very unstable. Modern man had learned how important it is to live in *sīla*. We must learn how to live as harmless and gentle human beings. In simple language, we must know how to live without disturbing the peace and good-will of others. It means respecting the right of others to live in peace and harmony. If we are able to do this, it will indeed be a great achievement. A good Buddhist has a deep respect and concern for the well-being of every other being. This is *sīla* (morality). The objective of this essay is to introduce the core terms and ideas of morality, distinguish morality from other closely related areas and then move towards a basic working definition of morality.

The Concept of Morality

What is the morality? In order to further define morality we need to say how it is similar to and different from other areas and non moral uses of key terms. Ethics like aesthetics is a part of philosophy concerned with values. Ethics differs from aesthetics in that it is concerned with moral value although moral value and aesthetic value connect and overlap.

Non-moral uses of the key terms; good, bad, right and wrong are often used in a non-moral sense, e.g., good meal, bad tooth, etc. These uses often refer to function. Aristotle argued that morality is tied to the function of a human being. This should not be confused with any idea that meals or teeth are directly linked to the moral. Manners and etiquette are forms of socially acceptable and unacceptable behavior. For example, swearing or use of foul language is in most contexts considered unacceptable. However there is no necessary connection between this and immorality. Of course manners and morals overlap but care is required to distinguish them when there is no obvious connection.

The Meaning of *Sīla*

The Meaning of the Term '*Sīla*' is morality or discipline. In the *Buddha's* Teaching, morality or virtue (*sīla*) is of vital importance, for only by laying a firm foundation of moral purity will one be able to proceed towards the attainment of the higher stages, namely, concentration (*samadhi*) and wisdom (*panna*) as it is said in the *Visuddhimagga*: "A wise man, after establishing well in virtue, develops consciousness and understanding." An aspirant therefore specially needs purity of body (action), purity of speech and purity of mind.

The morality or virtue (*sīla*) is divided into two sections. They are *cāritta-sīla* (the duties) that one should perform and *vāritta-sīla* (abstinences) from what is prohibited by the Buddha. Performing the obligatory duties towards parents, children, husband, wife, teachers, pupils, friends and monks etc. mentioned in detail in *Singālovāda-sutta* is fulfillment of *cāritta-sīla*. Apart from these, observing five precepts, eight precepts, ten precepts etc. other disciplinary rules is fulfillment of *vāritta-sīla*. To be an ideal person or virtuous person, one has to fulfill both *cāritta-sīla* and *vāritta-sīla*.

Fundamental of Moral Conduct for a Lay Buddhist

Five precepts are the fundamental moral conduct for a layperson in Buddhism, through which bodily and verbal actions are controlled. The five precepts provide good qualities of life such as prosperities, grace, courage, mindfulness and birth in the happy states after death. Individual and social harmonies also depend on it. There are many kinds of moral precepts: namely- the five precepts, the eight precepts, the ten precepts and the fourfold purity of monastic moral precepts etc. Of these, the five precepts which is fundamental moral conduct for every Buddhist layperson would have been studied from canonical point of view. The original *Pāli* word of five precepts is *Pañca-sīla*. Here, *sīla* means restraint in physical and verbal actions. It means purity in thought, word and deed. The two basic helpful foundations for moral precept (*sīla*) are *hirī* (shame to evil) and *ottappa* (fear to do evil). These two causes are the proximate ones to get moral restraint or discipline in moral life. Although there are many kinds of *sīla* given by the lord Buddha, on the whole, it is of two kinds: *cāritta-sīla*, fulfilling the moral codes prescribed by the Buddha and *vāritta-sīla* refraining from immoral conducts prohibited by the Buddha.'

Impurity and Purity of *Sīla*

In observing the five precepts, if the first or last precept is breached, the *sīla* is said to be broken, if one of the middle precepts is breached, the *sīla* is said to have a hole in it. If alternate precepts are breached, the *sīla* is said to be spotted. If two or three precepts are breached in a row at the beginning, the middle or the end, the *sīla* is said to be striped. These broken, punctured, spotted and striped *sīla* are impure *sīla*.

Sīla that is unbroken, intact, spotless and unstriped is pure morality. It is called *Bhujissa-sīla* because it can lead one to liberation from slavery to craving (*taṇhā*). It is also called *Vinnupasattha-sīla* because it is praised by the wise. It is also called "*Aparāmattha sīla*" because it is devoid of strong desire to gain the great wealth and happiness of human beings or *devas* and devoid of bigoted belief that one can realize *nibbāna* by mere moral practice. Therefore *sīla* that is unbroken, intact, spotless, unstrained, able to resist craving, praised by the wise and untarnished by craving and wrong view is the pure morality.

Sīla endowed with these seven factors is conducive to concentration of mind. Therefore, one who wants to develop concentration must exert oneself to be endowed with these seven factors. One should safeguard the moral precepts well just like a female pheasant safeguarding her eggs at the risk of her life. Or just like a yak safeguarding its feather at the risk of its life, or just like a person who has one and only son or daughter looks after him or her tenderly and fondly, or just like one whose one eye is blind safeguarding the remaining eye.

Five Precepts (*Pañca-sīla*)

The five precepts prescribed in the *Pāli* canon for every lay Buddhist are: (1) Abstaining from killing a living being (2) Abstaining from taking what is not given (3) Abstaining from sexual misconduct (4) Abstaining from telling lies (5) Abstaining from taking intoxicants.

First Precept

The first of the five Precepts is to refrain from killing a living being. Killing of any living being with intention means a breach of the first precept of non-killing. By observing the first precept of non-killing, we save the lives of one, two, three and other countless beings. *Sīla* ensures the safety of all living beings and augments the flourishing of *metta*, *karunā*, and *muditā* towards all living beings. Thus the world will become a more auspicious peaceful and enjoyable abode where all sentient beings will live happily ever after.

Suppose, if a man is killing living being, the victim will suffer terribly. All beings are crying, shaking in fear of death. If we observe this first precept, we save their lives, make them happy and give them freedom. They will live peacefully and harmoniously in the world.

However, some people are killing living beings. The worst thing is that people are fighting and killing each other, waging civil wars, regional wars and world wars where many people die, some become handicapped, some homeless. In some countries people kill each other claiming “ethnic cleansing”. Actually these unpleasant things are created by people who ignore the first precept of abstaining from killing living beings.

Motivated by anger and hatred, they kill. They should control their anger in order to keep this precept by cultivating loving kindness and compassion. Moreover, they should reflect on universal law of *kamma*, the law of action and reaction. According to this law, if one kills others, he will be killed in this life or in the next life. If he abstains from killing, he will have advantages such as being healthy and having longevity etc....

Five factors of the First Precept

There are five factors of the first *sīla*, which are able to make a decision whether it is *Panātipāta-kamma* or not. Which are: (1) The one to be killed is a living being (2) One knows that the one to be killed is a living being. (3) One has the volition to kill. (4) One makes the effort to kill. (5) The being dies because of that effort and action. Any action performed in accordance with the above five factors is called *Panātipāta-kamma*. The penetrator will suffer the bad consequences in this life and he will also be reborn in the four miserable realms after his death.

If anyone of the above five factors is missing, the action can't be called *Panātipāta-kamma*. For instance, if one steps accidentally on insects and kills them as one walks along the road, one does not commit *Panātipāta-kamma* because this incident happens unintentionally. It is just a demeritorious action. For this action, although the penetrator will not be reborn in miserable realms, he may suffer the evil consequences of his demeritorious action commensurately.

The Results of Killing Living-beings

Whosoever kills any living being will be reborn in one of the four lower abodes after death. Even when he is freed from there and is again reborn as a man, he will encounter the following evil consequences: (1) Having physical deformities and disfigurements, (2) Being ugly, (3) Being pale and feeble (4) Being dull and inactive (5) Being easily frightened when confronted with danger (6) Being killed by other or facing death in youth, (7) Suffering from many diseases (8) Having few friends and (9) Being separated from beloved ones.

The consequences of killing a living being may be great or small depending on different situations. According to the size and moral virtue of the victim, the consequences may be great or small. With regard to animals naturally, lacking in morality, if the size of the animal is small, the consequence is small; if the size of animal is large, the consequence is great. With regard to human beings, if the victim is of low morality, concentration and wisdom, the consequence is small, if the victim is of high

morality, high concentration and great wisdom, the consequence is great. Where the victims are of equal size and of equal morality, the consequence is small if the killer's motive and effort are weak, and the consequence is great if the killer's motive and effort are strong.

CONCLUSION

Buddhism accepts the importance of all levels of happiness in life, including bodily or material happiness. To obtain happiness in this level, however, morality must be employed as the guideline in order to prevent exploitation both to one's own self and others. Buddhism believes that benefit is not only something that enhances the arising of happiness but also happiness in itself. The creation of benefit, therefore, should be for one's self and others. Buddhism teaches people to consider themselves as well as others.

Buddhism has always accepted the truth that happiness is an essential part of ethics. Happiness gives significance to the practice of *dharmma* and forms the ground or support for religious observance both on the level of *dharmma* practice and the level of ethics in general. Therefore, all people should have suitable happiness in accordance with their standing in life. From the Buddhist view of happiness, which sees it divided into three levels—sensual happiness (*kāmasukha*), *jhāna* happiness (the happiness of meditative absorption states), and *nibbāna* happiness - we see that the pursuit of happiness on the sensual level, or physical or material happiness, is not at odds with Buddhist ethics if we do not allow our minds to become infatuated with it or attach fast to it, and our minds are free and ready to step up to higher levels of happiness.

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