



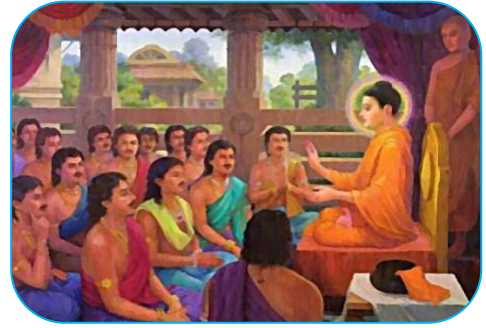
FOUNDATIONS OF BUDDHIST MORALITY: AN ANALYSIS OF SĪLA IN ETHICAL PRACTICE AND SOCIAL HARMONY

Ven. Jotissara

Research Scholar, Department of Buddhist Studies, Acharya Nagarjuna University,
Nagarjuna Nagar, Guntur, AP, India.

ABSTRACT

Most people comprehend that Buddhist meditation is a practice for self-liberation, but how about Buddhist ethics or morality Sīla? One will search for this solution under "Morality (Sīla): the foundation of ethics in Buddhism". Many Suttas describe how Sīla is practiced. The most fundamental method for a layperson to practice Sīla is to adhere to the five precepts. After that, there are the eight precepts, the ten precepts, and the 227 regulations for the monastic precepts. If we analyze all the Sīla, we can see two kinds: Cāritta Sīla and Vāritta Sīla. In the *Ovāda Pātimokkha*, the Buddha plainly stated in the concise account of Sīla that it is "not to do evil actions and to do goods". One essential item of Buddhist morality is still within the boundary of the Buddha's vital teaching of non-self. If Buddhists follow only for egotistical interests, their property, their families, and even their lives are at continual risk. Buddhist Sīla rules include prohibiting lying, theft, and murder, which will ensure the community's safety and serve a tranquil environment.



KEYWORDS : Practice, Cāritta Sīla, and Vāritta Sīla, *Ovāda Pātimokkha*, Non-self, Precept, Ethics, Morality, Non-self.

INTRODUCTION

Non-Buddhists consider Buddhism a self-centred religion, always searching for self-liberation and never considering social well-being. Recognizing that the five precepts are only crucial to Sīla morality is essential. Just because the code of ethics does not technically cover something does not mean it is pointless for the well-being of people. If we look attentively into Buddhist morality, the abstinence from wrongdoing and the practice of good actions by Buddhists can be seen as tremendously beneficial practices for themselves and others. One of the most prominent practices of Sīla is shown in the *Ovāda Pātimokkha* to achieve the perfect goal of Buddhism.

The Morality (Sīla) of Buddhism

The *Ovāda Pātimokkha* signifies the principal instruction of the Buddha or the core of all the teachings. It is considered the essence of the Buddhist teachings because it presents *Nibbāna* as the highest objective of Buddhism and the tripartite training, namely morality (Sīla), concentration (*Samādhi*), and wisdom (*Paññā*), as the principle teaching that leads to the practitioner to *Nibbāna*. The Buddha taught *Ovāda Pātimokkha*, thus; "Not to do all bad things (*Sabbapāpassa akaranam*); To do good

(*Kusalassa upasampadā*); To purify one's mind (*Sacitta pariyodāpanam*); These are the teachings of the Buddhas (*Etam buddhāna sāsanaṃ*).

In the *Ovāda Pātimokkha*, the Buddha declared the ideal aspiration of Buddhism: “*khanti paramam tapo titikkhā, nibbānam paramam vadanti buddhā; Na hi pabbajito parupaghāti, samano hoti param vihethayan to.*” “Enduring patience is the highest austere practice. *Nibbāna* is paramount, the Buddhas state. He, certainly, is not a recluse (*Pabbajito*) who damages another. Nor is he ascetic (*Samano*) who oppresses others.” The Buddha's words here first emphasize that Buddhism describes *Nibbāna* as the utmost ideal aspiration. This differs from other religions in India, which believed in reunion with Brahma, the creator, as the utmost objective. To accomplish *Nibbāna*, Buddhists must rely on their enduring effort and patience because no saviour gods or Brahma will lead anyone to *Nibbāna*. The Buddha states: “*Tumhehi kiccam ātappam, akkhataro tathāgata; patipanna pamokkhanti, jhāyino mārabandhana.*” “You have to work for your salvation, and the *Tathāgata* only show the way. The contemplative ones, who enter the way, are delivered from the constraints of *Māra*.”

Nibbāna is the ultimate extinction of defilements which cause suffering in life. Once the defilements are extinguished, suffering also comes to an end. This is why *Nibbāna* is the same as *Nirodha*, meaning the cessation of suffering, the third of the four noble truths: suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path leading to its cessation. The cessation of suffering is the ultimate objective of studying and practising the Buddha's teachings. This is the reason behind Buddha's statement that if the world had no more suffering from birth, ageing, and death, there would be no necessity for a Buddha to arise, nor would there be any reason for him to teach dhamma. For the world is still confronted with suffering, the Buddha is required, and his teaching needs to shine forth.” The purpose of the Buddha in causing the purity of dhamma to shine in a world that is inundated by the darkness of ignorance is to lead all beings to escape the cycle of suffering.

Nibbāna, or the end of suffering, has the same meaning as *Vimutti*, which is liberation from suffering. Sometimes, the Buddha claimed that Buddhism has only one taste, liberation from suffering, just as the ocean has only a briny taste. Therefore, freedom from suffering or *Nibbāna* is Buddhism's ultimate objective.

As the utmost aim of Buddhism has to be attained through human endeavour, in the *Ovāda Pātimokkha*, the Buddha revealed the principles for the practice so that human effort ultimately leads to *Nibbāna*. *Ovāda Pātimokkha* deals with how human efforts can lead to the end of suffering, *Nibbāna*. The principal practice is divided into three stages, as found in the first three lines of the verse, with one leading to another step until the attainment of the utmost objective, *Nibbāna*. They are:

- (a) The giving up of all evil means following precepts that require one to abstain from doing evil through physical action, such as killing beings, and through speech, such as telling untruths.
- (b) The cultivation of good implies meditation practice and enhancing wholesome qualities for one's and others' welfare and well-being.
- (c) The cleansing of One's mind means wisdom from meditation practice aimed at purifying the mind from being defiled by greed, hatred, and delusion.

These three-step principles represent the tripartite training, namely morality (*Sīla*), concentration (*Samādhi*), and wisdom (*Paññā*). They are the core of the dhamma practice that leads step by step to liberation from suffering (*Nibbāna*).

There are five fundamental moral principles for layman Buddhists (*Pañca sīla*), which are to be kept by laity persons. Keeping precepts is to control both corporeal and verbal, not to commit immoral deeds. These are;

1. Abstaining from murdering living beings;
2. Abstaining from taking what is not given;
3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct;
4. Abstaining from incorrect speech; and
5. Abstaining from taking intoxicants and narcotics.

The first precept is to refrain from murdering, including harming, tormenting, etc., causing harm to others. The second precept is to refrain from theft and what is not given. The most serious involving

threat or force will include robbery, theft, and kidnapping, and corruption is a different type and involves dishonest traders deceiving their customers, etc. The third precept is to refrain from the incorrect method of experiencing sensual pleasures. That causes injury to oneself as well as to others. Sexually transmitted diseases, e.g., AIDS and Child sexual violations etc., are the consequences of sexual misconduct. If one wishes to experience it, one must do so without generating violence or using any monarch of force, menace, or harmful conduct. The fourth precept is to refrain from lying, expressed through speech, writing, or corporeal gestures or even conveyed through a third party who may or may not be aware of the falsity. The fifth precept is to refrain from consuming intoxicants. Alcoholism and narcotics are destroying social or modern society. They are the root of many offences and performing offences.

According to the discourse of the result of moral and immoral action on the adverse effects of evil deeds, violation of precepts, when pursued, practised, and increased, causes one to arise in torment in the animal world and the realm of spirits. If restored as a human being, the following results: Killing will shorten one's existence. Stealing will lead to the loss of one's possessions. Sexual misconduct causes antagonism and animosity. False speech will cause one to be unjustly implicated. Taking intoxicants will cause one to be afflicted with insanity.

On the other hand, observing the five precepts leads to the accumulation of benign *kamma* bending to rebirth in the joyful realms of humans or deities. If reincarnated as a human being, the following results: Refraining from murdering will control hatred and cultivate compassionate benevolence, leading to longevity. Refraining from theft will control avarice and cultivate non-attachment, leading to prosperity. Refraining from sexual misconduct will control sensual desire, leading to integrity and dignity. Refraining from lying will cultivate honesty, leading to a good reputation. Refraining from consuming intoxicants will develop clear mental thinking, leading to mindfulness and wisdom.

Besides comprehending the five precepts, there are the eight precepts, the ten precepts, and the 227 principles for the monastic precepts. If we analyze all the *Sīla*, we can see two kinds: *Cāritta Sīla* and *Vāritta Sīla*. *Cāritta Sīlas* mean that they are inherently unwholesome, such as harming living creatures, taking off things not given by the proprietor, etc. Of course, since they are fundamentally evils, the Buddha prescribed his adherents to refrain from those harmful things, and they are known as *Cāritta Sīlas*. *Vāritta Sīlas* mean that apart from *Cāritta Sīlas*, the things that are not naturally unwholesome but people accept are the terrible behaviours or unacceptable actions in their society and environment, such as not showing the good way and the evil way of parents to their children or not sending them to school or not providing them to do business or not supporting them to marry. The Buddha also exhorted us to do such virtuous deeds, called *Vāritta Sīla*. It extends to the quality of existence like *Brahma Vihāra*: sympathetic pleasure, loving-kindness, compassion, and equanimity. It also mentions in *Singālovāda sutta* four methods of treating other people: charity, pleasant speech, beneficial action, and impartiality. These four methods will enable society to go in harmony. Therefore, the Buddhist precept involves interacting within civilization. It is a socialization process expressed in *Singālovāda sutta* (reciprocal relationship).

Moral principles are also vital for persons who seek to build a harmonious social environment. This involves offering (*Dāna*), morality (*Sīla*), and mental growth (*Bhāvanā*), which is conducive to merits and merit transfers to social duty and paid respect. It fosters love and respect, benefits helpfulness, no conflicts, unity, and peace. All one's acts will be cleaned, delivering many advantages to the public. Without moral rules, society would be selfish and anarchy.

The fundamental notion of *Sīla*, "Not to do evil" and "To do good", is not based on punishment and reward of any supernatural Gods but on the necessity to minimize selfish desire and nurture mental purity. Buddhism does not employ terror to force individuals into complying with these commandments. Using fear without knowledge can lead individuals to become superstitious and dogmatic. Understanding the source and impact of *Sīla* may alone give rise to the development of sympathetic understanding. As human beings, we must provide service to others by exercising generosity, loving compassion, and providing a hand to those who need help to get rid of their troubles.

Offering unselfish services to others not only provides advantages to others but may also minimize their selfishness. Buddhists conduct good things with high motivation as their deeds are cleansed with the self-concept. The avoidance of evil performance is taught in Buddhist *Sīla*, yet it is accepted that as long as greed, anger, and illusion remain in mind, one may still commit harmful actions. Hence, there is a means for moving further to extinguish or cleanse mental pollutants. When impure ideas and motives are extinguished, the mind is always lovely and pure, leading to Buddhism's ultimate aim (*Nibbāna*).

CONCLUSION

The Buddha clearly explained in short in the *OvādaPātimokkha* on account of *Sīla* that is "not to do evil actions and to do goods". According to the Buddhist philosophical point of view, practice is exclusively for developing *Kusala* (the virtuous acts). *Sīla* appears like a suitable ground for the development of all *Kusalas*. No spiritual growth can be attained without the foundation of *Sīla*. Non-Buddhists perceive that Buddhism is a self-centred religion constantly striving for self-liberation and never considered for societal well-being. It is vital to note that the five commandments are merely a foundation of *Sīla* morality. Just because the code of ethics does not formally cover something does not indicate that it is worthless for the well-being of people. If we look at Buddhist morals attentively, the abstinence from wrongdoing and the doing good actions of the Buddhists can be considered tremendously helpful activities for themselves and others. One significant feature of Buddhist morality is still within the boundaries of Buddha's primary teaching of non-self (*Anatta*). Selfish desires or deeds have absolutely no place in Buddhist practices. If Buddhists follow simply for selfish goals, their possessions, their families, and even their lives are in perpetual danger. Selfishness alone will consequently not allow for a civilized society. Buddhist *Sīla* norms include prohibitions against lying, stealing, and murdering, and these guidelines will provide a safe community and serve a peaceful environment.

REFERENCES:

1. *Anguttara-Nikāya-Pāḥi* Vol. IV, Yangon, Myanmar: Department of Religious Affairs, 1994.
2. *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, ed. R. Mirris and E. Hardy, Vols. II, IV, London: PTS, 1885-1900.
3. *Cūḷavagga, Vinaya Piṭaka*. Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā edition. Yangon, Myanmar: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1997.
4. *Dhammapada-atthakathā* Vols. I and II, Yangon, Myanmar: Department of Religious Affairs, 1994.
5. *Dhammapada Pāḥi*, ed. V. Fausball, Luzac & Company, London, 1900.
6. *Dīgha-Nikāya Pāḥi*, ed. T.W. Thys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, Vol. I, London: PTS, 1890-1911.
7. *Mahāvagga Aṭṭhakathā, Vinaya Piṭaka*. Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā edition. Yangon, Myanmar: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1997.
8. *Mahāvagga, Vinaya Piṭaka*. Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā edition. Yangon, Myanmar: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1997.
9. *Milindapañha*. Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā edition. Yangon, Myanmar: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1997.
10. *Pācittiya, Vinaya Piṭaka*. Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā edition. Yangon, Myanmar: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1997.
11. *Silakkhandhavagga-Pāḥi, Dīghanikāya*, Yangon, Myanmar: Department of Religious Affairs, 1992.



Ven. Jotissara

Research Scholar, Department of Buddhist Studies, Acharya Nagarjuna University,
Nagarjuna Nagar, Guntur, AP, India.