

The Advantage of Morality (Sīla) Practice in Laity's Life

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Abstract : *Morality (Sīla) is the foundation of all good qualities. Only by laying the firm establishment of ethical purification as a first step, will one become emotionally and psychologically mature to advance towards the fulfillment of higher stages of concentration and wisdom. It also upholds whatever wholesome states one already have. The Buddha declared the lifetime of a person who lives without morality is worthless even although he should living for a hundred ages, compared to a one who lives for only one day keeping the morals pure. Indeed, the moral conduct or behavior is the first and the best important in Buddha's teaching.*

Morality is very important for all beings, to monastic as laity to live a pure and blameless life. Nevertheless, in Buddhism morality is not for the sake of morality alone, it is for the concentration and wisdom. We essential to therefore, practice meditation to fulfill these factors, study dharma and associate with upright persons.

The Buddha declared the morality and in Buddhists' daily route it is very important. Morality can make mankind happy and peaceful here and hereafter. In the social today, these intellectuals but there is no real peace and security. Something must be lacking. What is lacking is morality amongst mankind. If someone observes the morality, not only he but also other persons will be happy and peaceful. For example, someone always because one observes the first rule of five of precepts which Buddhists should at least observe, one who is virtuous will get happiness and peace here as hereafter, other living beings can live without fear and worry freely and happily. Life is dear to all, and all trembles at punishment, all terror death and value life. Hence, we cannot give and we should not harm other sentient beings. The true way to attain peace to others and to the world at large is to follow morality discovered by the Buddha over 2500 years ago.

The Pāli term "Sīla" rendered as morality is nonentity but a practice of restraint on one's bodily and verbal conducts. It is indispensable one in the social because it plays a dynamic role in pursuit of both worldly gain and liberation from the rotund of suffering. It covers the increase and

decrease of the globe and of each individual. In the Cakkāvatti-sūta¹ of the Pāṭhikavagga, the Buddha thus expounded on the increase and decrease of world as follows.

There had been a gradual decrease up to ten years in the life-span of beings since they were completely overwhelmed by immoral actions such as killing living beings, stealing others' properties, committing adultery, telling lie, and holding wrong views. Together with reduction of life span, the beauties of beings are also faded; and human attempts to be healthy and beautiful e.i, end in various catastrophic failures. Also there had been a gradual increase of human life span, beauty and absence of disasters in the social since people restrained themselves from doing immoral actions, with sense of urgency on the misfortunes of the world. Thus it is a proving description on the vitality of morality in pursuit of worldly gains.

Morality plays a fundamental role in pursuit of liberation from the suffering also. The practice leading to the liberation is systematically formulated by the Buddha as three-stepped training such as training of morality, training of concentration and training of wisdom. Among them, morality stands as the fundamental practice in Buddhism, for a purified morality can pave the way for the easy attainment of Arāhathood. In the Pāli text, there can find many stories proving the above-mentioned statement related by those who attained Arāhathood. There was uncountable number of beings who enjoyed worldly gains from observing morality in their present life and who enjoyed freedom from round of sorrow by observing morality.

Therefore, in the Visuddhimagga, the noble persons mentioned their firm conviction as to the practice of morality thus:

Wealth for a sound limb's sake should be renounced,

And one's limbs for the sake of one's life should be given up;

And wealth and limbs and life all together for the sake of one's morality should be abandoned.²

There is many a great discourse on the morality in the Pāli literature. Of them, the researcher going to lay emphasis only on morality

described and analyzed in the Visuddhimagga as the title of the thesis is “An Analytical Study of Morality (Sīla) in Theravāda Buddhism”. This thesis is arranged in six chapters. To illustrate and interpret morality mentioned in the Theravāda Buddhism, each chapter of this thesis explores selected evidence and stories found in the Pāli literature.

The Buddhism scriptures do show the common direction of Buddhist social thinking, and to that level they are suggestive for our own eras. Nevertheless it would be pedantic, and in some cases ridiculous, to apply truthfully to modern industrial social prescriptions complete to meet the desires of social order, which flourished over twenty-five centuries ago. The Buddhist householder of the *Siṅgālovāda Sūtra*³ experienced a different way of life.

In this context of Buddhist societal dimensions, it is better to describe Buddhist ethics for a hint. The most generally observed sets of principles followed by laity are the “five precepts” (*Pañcasīla*)⁴.

The first precept corresponds to the Hindu and Jain concept of *āhiṃsa*, ‘non-injury’, and is generally regarded as the best important one: Non-injury is the distinguishing mark of Dharma⁵. Thus in Burma, while most lay people, when asked which is the greatest important precept, specify the one on sexual misconduct, the nevertheless agree that killing leads to the worst karmic results and that physical and verbal abuse is the greatest blamable behavior.⁶

The second precept is realized as ruling out any act of theft. It also covers fraud, cheating, forgery⁷ and falsely denying that one is in debt to someone.⁸ In Thailand, it is understood as broken by borrowing without permission and breaking a promise, as this takes a liberty, which has not been given.⁹ This is not to say, though, that Buddhists never gamble. In Sri Lanka, however, on the advice of the 1956 Buddhist Committee of Enquiry, the government banned horse racing as associated gambling led to greater gain of wealth by the rich and further degradation of the poverty-stricken.¹⁰

The third precept relates primarily to the avoidance of causing suffering by one’s sexual behavior. Adultery - ‘going with the partner of another’ is the very straightforward breach of this precept. This precept does not relate only to not taking sex with somebody else’s wife or partner. It means which breaks the principle if one has contact with partner who are engaged, or who are still safe by any relative¹¹. Clearly, rape and incest are breaches of the precept.

The fourth precept is commonly perceived as the second most significant one (after the first precept). Meaning that a person who has no disgrace at intentional lying is skillful of any

horrible act.¹² Any form of lying, deception or exaggeration, either for one’s own benefit or that of another is understood as a breach of the fourth precept,¹³ even non-verbal deception by gesture or other indication or misleading statements.¹⁴

So Buddhism regards that speaking the truth is an essential aspect of socialization. Lies, when uttered, lead to faulty socialization by engendering unwholesome status of mind. A socialization based on untruth results in the creation of unpleasant consequences.

The fifth rule is the abstention from taking intoxicant drugs. In Burma, about half monks see the fifth precept, rather than the first (or fourth), as the most important, because of the consequences that can follow from breaking it.¹⁵ Drunkenness is described as ‘the delight of fools’ and in the *Siṅgālovāda Sūtra*, the Buddha says that breaking the fifth precept leads to six dangers: waste of cash, increased fighting, liability to illness, loss of noble name, indecent experience of one’s person and flagging of one’s wisdom.¹⁶

These five rules establish the fundamentals of human rights and duties between individuals, between individual and society and the state and between states, mutually. They are constructed on the understanding of the individual, of his place in, and relationship with society. They acknowledge the existence of the individual, but not as an isolated entity; they acknowledge the individual as an essential and integral part of the process, which has no movement, no progress, if not through individual effort.

The *Therā Buddhāgosa* also claims that there is not at all other thing but morality that devotees must rely on. He continues to say that no one can expound all its benefits or advantages. There are the five classes of its benefit that can be got by one who possessed of virtue. They are as follows:

- (1) Getting the worldly things or fortune,
- (2) Spreading abroad of a fair name,
- (3) Being able to enter an assembly without fear or hesitation,
- (4) Being died without confuse and
- (5) Attaining a happy plane after death¹⁷.

The Buddha said to his disciples about ethics thus:

“Although one should live a hundred years corruptly and uncontrolled, yet it would indeed be healthier to live one day virtuously and meditatively”¹⁸.

Nowadays, the Buddhist morality aims at endorsing a glad and harmonious life together for the individual and society. This moral conduct is measured as the indispensable establishment for all higher spiritual accomplishments. No holy advance is possible without this ethical basis. These moral principles aim at making society secure by

promoting unity, harmony and right relations among people.

ABBREVIATIONS

D.	:	Dīgha Nikāya
Kh.p.	:	Khuddakapātha
Atthakatha		
M.	:	Majjhima Nikāya
Vism.	:	The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)

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¹.D., III, pp. 44-62 & *The Long Discourse of the Buddha* (Dīghanikāya), pp. 398-403

².Vism A.1, p. 44 & *The Path of Purification* (Visuddhimagga), p. 47

³.D., III, p. 179.

⁴.The Pañcasīla (The Five Precepts) are:

(i) Abstention from killing living creatures,

(ii) Abstention from taking what is not given,

(iii) Abstention from wrong conduct in sexual pleasures,

(iv) Abstention from false speech and

(v) Abstention from taking intoxicant drugs.

⁵.I.B. Horner (Tr.), *Milindapanha - Milinda's Questions*, Pali Text Society, London, 1963, Vol. I, p.85.

⁶.M.E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Economic Action in Burma*, American Anthropologist, 1966, pp. 101-103.

⁷.Pe Maung Tin (tr.), *Atthasalini*, Pali Text Society, London, 1920, p. 98.

⁸.K. R. Norman (tr.), *Suttanipata*, Pali Text Society, London, 1984, pp. 119-21.

⁹.B. J. Terweil, *Monks and Magic*, Curzon Press, London, 1979, pp. 188-9.

¹⁰.G. D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka*, University of South Carolina Press, 1988, pp. 87-96.

¹¹.M., I, p. 286

¹².M., I, p. 415

¹³.M., III, p. 48

¹⁴.Kh.p., p. 26

¹⁵.M.E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Economic Action in Burma*, American Anthropologist, 1966, pp. 99-100.

¹⁶.D., III, pp. 182-3.

¹⁷.D., II, p.150 & Vism.A.1.p. 23

¹⁸.KN.Dhammapada.p.23.Myanmar version.p.40.(English version).