

02. Sīla: Virtuous Conduct

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 13:29

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa
Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa

Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened.

So continuing with these perfections, and remember that's an odd sort of translation—it's those virtues, actions that we need to arrive at the other shore. That's what *pāramī* means, the other shore. It's just the Buddha's way of talking about Nibbāna, it's that other place, transcendent place.

And what he says is, when he's asked the question, or when he asks the question, what is karmically wholesome morality? It is wholesome bodily actions, wholesome verbal actions and purity of livelihood. So when we talk about *sīla*, morality, it really is confined to outward actions, to the way we affect the world through our actions, our speech, and through our livelihood.

It starts with the negative propositions. So there are various levels. The first one is this five, the *Pañcasīla*, the five *sikkhāpada*, which means root training rules. And that's what we chant in the evening. So they're pretty basic to any society. We're not going to kill each other, kill beings in that sense, but to kill other human beings. And we're not going to steal, take what is not freely given. Not misuse our sexual powers. Not to use wrong speech. That's divided into both telling lies and lying, slanderous speech, doing people down, gossip, and coarse speech—there's one other. It'll come to me. So, and then finally, of course, intoxicants. Nothing that's going to affect our consciousness.

So those are your five basic not-to-dos. And obviously, once we stop behaving like that, then it becomes more and more refined. So whereas it's not killing human beings, we don't want to harm any living beings. So there's a refinement of that. And then of course it transforms. So from not wanting to harm any living beings, we want to protect them. So that's the process, starting with that very negative formulation, and we end up with a very positive one.

So it's the same with taking what is not freely given. So from gross thieving from the banks and that, to being careful even with simple things like not taking pens from work. One gets very sensitive about that. But of course what one moves towards is generosity, giving away.

Sexual energy and that is refined in the sense that it moves from only using that energy within a skillful relationship, a loving relationship. And of course if you're not in relationship then it moves you towards celibacy. And celibacy is not simply—it's not a denial of sexual energy, it's a transformation of it, it's a

sublimation of it. Sublimation is not a word we come across these days, because I think we get confused about suppressing. But suppressing something is a negative thing. It's about pushing something away out of negativity or fear.

But sublimating is seeing that actually what there is is just energy and through our conditioning we've channelled it in certain areas. And if we've channelled it into our sexual appetite, then it's a case of, as it were, letting that energy move over towards something more skillful, if we can't use our energy as a sexual energy. It's not stuck there. So that's a refinement of that energy.

When it comes to speech, the speech moves from coarse speech—that was the one I missed out—coarse speech, we move towards truthfulness, kindly speech, and speech at an appropriate time. So often we're being truthful, we're being kind, but we're not quite choosing the right situation to say what we want to say, and it causes upset, when if we had just waited for the opportunity, then we would have been able to have said something to help a situation.

So you've got these refinements. And the last one is intoxication. So basically in the spiritual life, you want to keep your consciousness clear. You want to keep it awake. So putting anything into consciousness is going to distort it. It's exactly what you don't want to do. And the refinement of it is this moment-to-moment awareness. That's what we're moving towards.

So those, you might say, are your basic platform of practice. And then the Buddha gives an opportunity to lay people to, as we say, turn the screw a bit on the full moon days. That's when, in Theravada Buddhist countries, the person might practice the eight *sīla*, the eight *sikkhāpada*, the eight rules of training.

So on a full moon day or a new moon day, you might find that people go to the local monastery and there they take slightly monastic vows in the sense that they don't eat after lunch, they don't worry about entertainment, they let go of radio, TV, iPods, all that sort of stuff. They don't worry about self-beautification, cosmetics, jewellery, all that sort of stuff. And if they're staying overnight they're just happy with just a straightforward bed, abandoning luxurious beds.

So those training rules are, as it were, finding out where your attachments are. That's what they're about. And by doing that, of course, you've got something to work with because it's attachments that we have to undermine.

Then there's the entrance into the order, what we call the *sāmaṇera*. So that moves into ten precepts. And it's the same as the eight, except the bit about entertainment and beautification are made into two. But added to that is this business of not touching money, not using money. So you're retreating from the world, from the world of enticement, once you've got no money, that's it.

And then finally when you join the order, there's a 227—it leaps, it's a quantum leap into 227. And again the whole idea of the rules is that part of it is based on that moral rule of not to harm living beings and so on, but the other side of it are just institutional rules which are meant to help the monastic remain more

and more mindful.

So clothes for instance—it never occurs to me to get up in the morning and think I shall wear blue today. It's just this is it, I've just got these robes and that's the end of it. And it stops any worry or concern about how you look or how you should look, because you all look the same. The whole idea is to draw a line as to what it is you want to get involved with when it comes to the world.

Food—we only eat what we are given, so we don't choose what to eat. So those are refinements in terms of letting go of wants, the ordinary wants of life.

And a lot of this the layperson can also practice, just reducing the amount of—I mean, looking at your wardrobe and just asking, do I need all this stuff, how many pairs of shoes do you need. So that's how the morality in Buddha's understanding works because morality is the measure of wisdom or lack of it. So wisdom isn't something abstract. Wisdom is a way of relating to the world. It's not a knowledge, it's a relationship, a wise relationship. And this mirrors itself in our attitudes and this goes outwards into the world in right speech, right action and then right livelihood.

So this right livelihood, for instance—the worst of course is you don't want to get involved in the traffic of arms and human beings, flesh, intoxicants and arms. So once you're not involved in that, really any other form of livelihood can be taken as being something wholesome and to be used as a spiritual practice. That's what you do with your energy into society. And it's finding ways of making our livelihood and our ordinary daily lives work for us towards the spiritual end. So we have to have the principles right. So basically we're developing the good heart. Anything that we do with a good heart, from putting our attention and care into things, becomes a spiritual path, just naturally.

So that's what *sīla* means in the Buddha's practice, in the Buddha's understanding. Morality, we translate it as morality or ethics, behaviour, moral behaviour. And he just laid out a very simple platform that we can use to investigate our actions. And it's good practice, sometime in the day, sometime in the evening, just to review the day and just see whether we've been skillful or unskillful. So that's the words. That's how we translate this, *kusala-akusala*. Wholesome, unwholesome, skillful, unskillful.

They're not to be looked at as commandments, putting down upon us. They're just basic rules and regulations that come out of our human existence. Just being humans, this is the situation we're in, and because of our relationship to the world, we do things which are unwholesome, and they can be, in some way, fitted into these five basic laws about harm, about truthfulness, about our relationship to things, objects, taking what's not freely given, about our sexual energy—that can be widened out to just all appetites. Whether we're eating or enjoying this or enjoying that, it all comes under, in a sense, that business of greed. And intoxicants, just being careful not to put into the body what's going to upset our consciousness.

So I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner

rather than later.

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