

# 5. Husbands and Wives

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 14:16

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*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammāsbuddhassa*

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

So we've now come to his advice to husbands and wives. I've chosen, there's a couple of discourses here, but I've chosen two of them. So the first one, he says, different kinds of marriages.

On one occasion the Blessed One was travelling along the highway between Madura and Veranja, and a number of householders and their wives were travelling along the same road. Then the Blessed One left the road and sat down on a seat at the foot of a tree, and the householders and their wives saw the Blessed One sitting there, and approached him. And having paid homage to him, they sat down to one side, and the Blessed One said to them, "Householders, there are four kinds of marriages. What four? A wretch lives with another wretch. A wretch lives together with a goddess. A god lives together with a wretch. And a god lives together with a goddess."

"And how does a wretch live together with a wretch? Here, householders, the husband is one who destroys life, takes what is not given, engages in sexual misconduct, speaks falsely, and indulges in wines, liquors, and intoxicants, the basis for negligence. He is immoral, of bad character. He dwells at home with a heart obsessed by the stain of stinginess. He abuses and reviles ascetics and Brahmins, and his wife is exactly the same in all respects. And in such a way, a wretch lives together with a wretch."

It's pretty clear, isn't it? The thing about this is, just a little aside, is just to notice that he talks always about wines, liquor and intoxicants as the basis for negligence.

So how does a wretch live together with a goddess? So a husband is one who destroys life, etc., etc., abuses and reviles ascetics and Brahmins, but his wife is one who abstains from the destruction of life. She does all the opposite, so abstains from taking what is not freely given, abstains from sexual misconduct, abstains from speaking falsely, does not indulge in wines, liquor and intoxicants, the basis of negligence. She is not immoral or of bad character. She dwells at home with a heart not obsessed by the stain of stinginess. She does not abuse and revile ascetics and Brahmins.

The other little aside there is their relationship to ascetics and Brahmins. Obviously, there were people in those times who didn't like these loafers. The Buddha, in fact, there's one point where a Brahmin abrades him as being absolutely useless. He's walking around. The Buddha defended himself. We'll come to that

maybe another time.

So then, of course, the other combination is a god who lives with a wretch. And finally, a god who lives with a goddess.

Now, when you read this, you realize that the Buddha, when he's talking about happiness, when he's talking about harmony, he's always on this level of morality, or ethics rather. So, he's never talking about somebody who's rich living with somebody who's poor, or somebody who's healthy living with somebody who's sick. It's always about how you relate to people.

So, ethics is basically around our relationships, whatever our relationships are, whether in this case it's between a husband and wife, or between yourself and nature, or even a stone. So that's what ethics is about. And as far as the Buddha is concerned, happiness is based upon the way we relate to things, either wholesomely or unwholesomely, or skillfully or unskillfully.

And his whole teaching is about that. In fact, the path to liberation is about purifying the heart. It's very simple, isn't it? In the Dhammapada he makes it very clear. He says, "Cease from evil, do good, purify the heart. This is the teaching of all the Buddhas." He drives it down to that simplicity. How do we relate to the world around us? And if we get that right, then we'll be happy. We'll be gods and goddesses. So that's the first little thing.

And I've got a little note here from Uncle Eddie. Uncle Eddie is an archaeologist, and he was taking people around Anuradhapura, which is the main ancient city in Sri Lanka. And he had these little jokes, and one of them was, in marriage there are three kinds of rings: there's the engagement ring, the marriage ring, and suffering. He's a killer. He was very funny.

Now this is where we sometimes are disappointed in the Buddha because we forget that his personality and his character is a product of his time and place. So we can't expect them to be postmodern. So there's a lovely discourse here on the seven kinds of wives. And after you've read it, of course, you can displace wife with husband and you get much the same thing.

So on one occasion, the Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvatti in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. And Anāthapiṇḍika, remember, was the very rich merchant who bought him his first monastery. In the morning the Blessed One dressed, took his bowl and robe, and went to Anāthapiṇḍika's house, where he sat down in a seat prepared for him. On that occasion people in the house were making uproar and a racket, and the householder, Anāthapiṇḍika, approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side. And the Blessed One then said to him, "Who are people in your house making this uproar and racket, householder? One should think they were fishermen making a haul of fish."

"Then Venerable Sir, that venerable sir is our daughter-in-law Sujātā. She is rich and has been brought here from a rich family. She does not obey her father-in-law or mother-in-law nor her husband. She does not even honour, respect, esteem and venerate the Blessed One."

Then the Blessed One called the daughter-in-law Sujātā saying, "Come Sujātā."

"Yes, venerable sir," she replied. She went to the Blessed One, paid homage to him and sat to one side.

And the Blessed One said to her, "There are seven kinds of wives, Sujātā. What seven? One is a slayer, one is a thief, one is a tyrant, one is a mother, one is a sister, one like a friend, and one like a handmaiden. These are the seven kinds of wives. Now which of these seven are you?"

"I do not understand in detail the meaning of the Blessed One's brief statement. It would be good, Venerable Sir, if the Blessed One would teach me the Dhamma in such a way that I might understand the meaning in detail."

"Listen, Sujātā, and attend carefully, and I will speak."

"Yes, venerable sir," Sujātā replied, and the Blessed One said this: "With hateful mind, cold and heartless, lusting for others, despising her husband, who seeks to kill the one who bought her, such a wife is called a slayer."

Here's an interesting thing, that obviously in those days, the husband bought the wife from the family that she came from.

"When a husband acquires wealth by his craft or trade or farm work she tries to filch a little for herself, such a wife is called a thief. The slothful glutton bent on idling, harsh, fierce, rough in speech, a woman who bullies her own supporter, such a wife is called a tyrant."

"One who is always helpful and kind, who guards a husband as a mother her son, who carefully protects the wealth he earns, such a wife is called a mother. She who holds her husband in high regard as a younger sister holds the elder born, who humbly submits to her husband's will, such a wife is called a sister."

Stinger, isn't it, that one? It's not quite feminist, that one. I'll come back to that in a minute.

"One who rejoices at her husband's sight as a good friend might welcome another, well-raised, virtuous and devoted, such a wife is called a friend. One without anger, afraid of punishment, who bears with her husband free of hate, who humbly submits to her husband's will, such a wife is called a handmaid."

"These types of wives are called a slayer, a thief, the wife like a tyrant. These kinds of wives, with the body's breakup, will be reborn deep in hell. But wives like mother, like a sister, friend, and a wife called a handmaid, steady in virtue, long restrained, with the body breakup, goes to heaven. These, Sujātā, are the seven kinds of wives. Now, which of these are you?"

"Beginning today, venerable sir, you should consider me as a wife like a handmaid."

So obviously we can change wife to husband and go through it all. Yes, I mean, there are things which

don't ring so happily for us about obedience and all that. These days we presume equality and all that, a sense of negotiation. But all these qualities that he talks about are on either side, aren't they? He holds his wife in high esteem as a younger brother holds his elder brother, rejoices at her sight, as one might welcome another. One without anger, afraid of punishment. That's a difficult one for us to get to. Afraid of being barked at, I suppose. Who bears his wife free of hate. So once you turn these things around, they have a more general meaning for it.

One little thing that comes out here is this whole business of authority. There's two things isn't there? There's being in authority over and an authority in. So if you're in authority over then what you inspire is fear. But if you're an authority in, then you inspire respect. So when you go to the doctor, generally speaking, we respect the person because we see them as an authority in their doctrine. But they don't have an authority over us.

I remember once when I had a bad cold, and it went on and on and on. And I went to see my doctor, and he obviously knew that there were certain types of people that when you made a prescription, they didn't take it anyway. So it was funny, because he said to me, after he'd given me this prescription, he said, "And make sure you take them."

I said, "What?" How did he do it? Which of course I didn't, because it was only a cold for heaven's sake. He gave me antibacterial stuff.

So the purpose of reading these things that the Buddha gives advice to lay people is that he is engaged in all the daily life and people went to him for what we would call just ordinary problems. And when you read the stuff, it's always around ethics and how we relate. Always around ethics and how we relate to people, to nature, to things. And that's what brings about, in his terms, a real sense of happiness, connectedness and all that.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be fully liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later, even if you're married.

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