

Dhammapada 360-362: Restraint

Bhante Bodhidhamma · YouTube Talks · 21:57

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhasa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhasa. Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhasa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-awakened one.

So the subject this week is restraint. I shall do my usual chanting and we'll take it from there.

Cakkhuna samvaro sadhu, sadhu sotena samvaro, ghanena samvaro sadhu, sadhu jivhaya samvaro. Kayena samvaro sadhu, sadhu vachaya samvaro, manasa samvaro sadhu, sadhu sabbattha samvaro. Sabbattha samvuto bhikkhu, sabbadukkha pamuccati. Hatthasamyato padasamyato, vachasamyato samyatuttamo, ajjhatarato samahito, eko santusito tam ahu bhikkhu.

And that translates as: Restraint of the eye is good. Good is the restraint of the ear. Restraint of the nose is good. Good is the restraint of the tongue. Restraint of the body is good and good is the restraint of speech. Restraint of the mind is good. Good is restraint in all circumstances. Restrained in all circumstances, the Bhikkhu is released from all suffering. The one with hands restrained, feet restrained, speech restrained, who is foremost among the restrained, inwardly delighted, composed, solitary and contented. He is called a Bhikkhu.

Now Bhikkhu, remember, stands for everybody. It's one of those figures of speech, all hands on deck. So when you see monk in the scriptures or anywhere, it's everybody.

So just a couple of little words there. What the Buddha is saying is that if we do practice restraint, we will achieve this inner joy, and we will be resolved and collected, settled, composed. We'll also be solitary - it's just being happy by oneself. It's not the same as loneliness where you are dependent on somebody else for your well-being or well-feeling. To be solitary means that you're happy just being by yourself. And finally, *santusito*, which means contented. And that's one of the signs of somebody who is fully liberated, a sense of contentment, which means there's no wrong desires. It's as simple as that.

Now, this word *samvara* that we're looking at, it just means restraint, full stop. In the dictionary, that's the only word he's got, restraint.

So we'll go straight to the stories. I shall use this little book here which has all the stories in it. So the first two - the story is this: Once there were five bhikkhus in Savatthi, five monks, and each of them practiced restraint of just one of the five senses, and each of them claimed that what he was practicing was the most difficult, and they could not come to an agreement. Finally, they reported their disagreements to the Buddha who told them, each of the senses is just as difficult to control as the others, but the bhikkhu's

control of all five senses will escape suffering.

The story that goes with the second one - that's the last one which ends with delighted within, composed, solitary and contented - once there was a bhikkhu who was very skilled at throwing stones. He could even hit a fast moving object. And one day while sitting with another bhikkhu after having taken a bath in the river, he saw two geese flying over and he said to his friend he could hit the eye of one of the geese. So he took a pebble, aimed and threw it at one of the geese. The pebble struck the bird's eye. The bird cried out in pain and dropped dead at the feet of the young Bhikkhu. Other Bhikkhus seeing this incident reported it to the Buddha. Monks are always snitches! And he admonished the young Bhikkhu. He said, my son, why have you killed the bird? Especially as a Bhikkhu, you should be practicing loving kindness to all beings and should also be striving ardently for liberation. A Bhikkhu must control his thoughts, words, and deeds.

Now, it might seem you have to be 21 before you can actually become a monk, so somehow I think this refers to the *samaneras*. You can become a *samanera* at the age of eight, and I was at one monastery which was a teaching monastery that was teaching Pali mainly to - well, they looked to me about 10 onwards. And I saw two 10 year olds with catapults going after birds. So as they say, boys will be boys, I suppose.

So that's the little stories that surround it. It doesn't make sense to me, of course, if geese are flying overhead and you throw a stone and hit one in the eye and it falls to your feet, there's something wrong with the dynamics. But anyway, you never know with these stories.

However, the commentary - so remember there's always commentaries on the actual stories, commentaries on the verses, and there are commentaries on commentaries. And these days, of course, there's a whole industry of studying the scriptures again. So it says restraint over the senses - and remember the sixth sense in Buddhism is the mind, mind, heart - is one of the basic requirements for really beneficial meditation practice. Without this control, the meditation cannot progress because we will always be distracted from it by input from one of the five, six senses. Therefore, we must practice concentration and mindfulness in our daily lives and then apply this tool in our meditation practice. So here we have the importance of restraint.

Now, if we just go into the whole idea of restraint - so it's not a word that we use these days, is it? I have a memory of my father telling me to restrain myself, but I've never heard it being used these days. You walk into a department store, you don't see a sign saying please restrain yourself, or into a restaurant it would be good for you to restrain yourself. It just doesn't happen. We've become so much involved in consumerism. And in the dictionary it says a measure or condition that keeps what someone or something under control - so that's of course our own inner desires.

And when you look for synonyms, it really pinpoints it. Self-control, self-discipline, self-possession, moderation, prudence, reserve. So that's what we're actually practicing.

There's a lovely case in the scriptures of Pasenadi who was the king of Kosala which is north of the Ganges and who was a friend and supporter of the Buddha. I presume that these people, the warrior caste would know each other, especially the leaders of tribes like the Sakyas, which the Buddha belonged to. He would have met people like Pasenadi because he was subject to the kingdom of Kosala. They were subjects. So he was a good friend. Anyway, as he entered into middle age, he put on a lot of weight. So he went to the Buddha and asked what he could do. And so the Buddha said to him, tell your servant to put a little less food on the plate every day so that you don't actually notice that you're eating less. So every day you take a little bit off and then a little bit more and a little bit more. Now, it doesn't say whether it worked or not. Well, at least it's something we could try for ourselves if we find ourselves overeating.

So, restraints. It's all part of the whole process of renunciation, and this renunciation remember is not trying to kill our senses. We're not trying not to enjoy things. We're just trying to see that distinction between enjoying something and indulging it - it's a difficult one to get because they're very close.

Unlike aversion, the aversion or fear pushes what you don't want away. But indulgence sucks into what you want. So trying to separate them is quite difficult. And it's good to take one of the senses. So I suppose the one that we're always feeding at least two or three times a day, if not more, is eating. And just to go into the body and sense how much hunger is in there and to know that part of it is natural appetite and part of it's this override. And then just to be careful we don't slip into that override.

It's the same with - I was thinking, the generation, I had a great aunt. She was the last child of my grandfather, great grandfather, who was an Italian, by the way, came from Milan. And he married two Irish women because in the north of England there were - the Catholics were either Italian or Irish so they would have met in church or whatever. And she was the last child of the second marriage. I think he had something like 12, 15 kids in those days. She - I remember being with her in the kitchen, I was only a kid, being with her in the kitchen and she was preparing cucumber sandwiches and sandwiches with jam. And when she took the butter, she put it onto the piece of bread and then scraped it off. And then when she put the jam on she did the same - she put the jam on and then scraped it off so that what you were left with were these pieces of bread with a hint of butter and just a little splat of jam and the cucumbers were so finely chopped. And it just takes you back to those days when things were scarce, for heaven's sake, especially during the war and afterwards. I always remember that.

So what are the qualities that we need to develop in order to develop this *samvara*, this restraint? Well the first one is *nana*, which means to understand. So obviously we've got to understand why we have to restrain ourselves. I can't imagine many people really understanding why you should do that. I mean they can understand not getting completely drunk, but why not get tipsy? It's a little bit beyond comprehension these days.

So remember, it's all part and parcel of letting go of our attachment to this form. And we experience the form through the senses. Everything that we know, everything that we experience is coming through the

five senses, six senses, the sixth being of course the heart-mind. So emotions that arise, thoughts, images that arise are always coming up onto a sense door within the mind itself. And in fact everything that comes in through the five physical senses enters again through the mind door. So for instance at the ear what you actually experience is pressure - you don't, it's not a sound, it's just pressure, and it's the next moment when it enters the mind that gives it a sound. So everything is happening within the mind.

And it's the understanding that what we're experiencing, we also have this relationship with it. I mean, we're trying to find happiness through it, full stop, which is understandable. And there's a certain amount of happiness and joy to be had. But then it's this override. So understanding that is really the path of renunciation. And part of it is to be able to restrain ourselves when we see we're overdoing it.

So I remember there were these two young fellows I met in Sri Lanka when I was there. And they were traveling around and they were taking all sorts of drugs in order to maintain a sense of contentment and happiness. So even when they were traveling on a bus, just to make it easy for them, they took tranquilizers. It was just amazing when I talked to them. And there was no arguing about it. That's what they thought, well, that's what life was about.

The next one is understanding the restraints by way of the moral practices. And by the way, that comes to what in Christian monasticism you call imperfections. So we're not talking about killing people and all that. We're talking about just those overrides where we're being unwholesome or unskillful.

And I thought I might read to you some of the rules of monks that the Buddha established. And there's right at the end, there are 75, what are called training rules, *Sekhiyyadhamma*. I'll just read one or two of them. So for instance, I shall wear the robe round, all the way round, perfectly round. Now, one time Sariputta was dragging his robe on the floor and a little *samanera* came up and told him what he was doing. And he praised the *samanera* for helping him get his robe right.

I shall walk, sit etc with downcast eyes. See now that's what we do when we're on retreat - when you're on retreat you don't want this constant barrage of images into your mind so you keep your eyes lowered or you keep them closed. But according to this as a monastic I should be doing this all the time.

I shall not go laughing loudly in inhabited places. I shall not sit laughing loudly in inhabited places. I should go quietly in inhabited places. So it's all to do with deportment and how people see you. But it's also part of the training.

I shall not go fidgeting in the body, fidgeting in the arms, fidgeting the head. I shall eat alms food with attention to the bowl. See and there's a lovely one here just to finish off: I shall not look enviously at another's bowl. And I shall not make up extra large mouthfuls. I shall not speak with a mouthful. I shall not eat stuffing out the cheeks.

The final ones or one of the final ones is: I shall not make the sound *chapu chapu* - that's when I'm eating - and I shall not make the sound *suru suru* when I'm drinking - slurping.

So these 75 little indications of training come towards the end of the *Patimokkha*, which is all about really that sense of containment, of self-restraint, deportment, etc. So that's to do with the second quality, which is ethical standards.

The next one is awareness, of course. Now this awareness, remember, is an intuitive awareness. So it's a sensitivity. As soon as you see that there's an override, you're sensitive to it. So it's really beginning to develop that sense of knowing when the line's being crossed. And that's through practice. That's just through practice.

Remember that awareness is always two qualities. It's an intuitive awareness. And if the intuition is badly informed, then it becomes a delusive awareness. So the Buddha doesn't talk about awareness. He talks about right awareness, *samma-sati*.

I mean, if you rob a bank, you're going to be really aware, really awake and aware. But unfortunately, it's not the path to freedom. When I reminded myself of this, I remember this little interview where a well-known bank robber in America was asked, why do you rob banks? And he said, well, that's where the money is. I thought, that's a very good answer.

The fourth one is *viriya*, which means effort, commitment. And that's what we're often lacking, that we'll do it for a little while and then we stop. And then we do it for a little while and then we stop or we back off. But it's this real commitment to know this distinction and to keep working at it, which will have the results.

And then finally there's *khanti*, which is a sense of forbearance. Now that's the difficult thing, you see, because when you restrain yourself, there is the pain of letting go. And that's what you've got to bear. So just wanting that another cup of tea, another coffee, another biscuit, another mouthful, and just waiting until that desire exhausts itself is not a pleasant thing to do. But if we do that, then you get this little bit at the end where you get that sense of relief, the sense of release from that over desire. And it's really taking it to that point that makes us realize that there's a good ending to this process.

And if we go back to the good ending, the Buddha is quite clear. With it we are inwardly delighted, composed, solitudinous, and contented. So these are the prizes that we get if we practice restraint.

I can only hope my words have been of some assistance, that I have not caused even greater confusion, and that you will by your devotion to restraint be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

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