



## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SĪLA-MORALITY IN BUDDHISM

Vasetha

Ph.D Research scholar, Centre for Buddhist Studies,  
Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, India.

### ABSTRACT :

In order to understand clearly, the significance of practice of *sīla*-morality will be expressed in detail in the light of its meaning, practices, classifications, and its benefits or results. In Buddhism, basically, to know the Buddhist way of daily life is very important for everyone. The foundation of Buddhist ethics for laypeople is the five precepts which are unit commitments to abstain from killing beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication. The five precepts or morality is the simplest form of discipline thought by the Buddha and to establish and maintain peaceful life and social harmony.



**KEY WORDS:** The practice of *Sīla*-Morality and its Benefits.

### INTRODUCTION:

In this article I would like to express is discussed on how to practice *Sīla* (morality) to be a valuable life as a good Buddhist. *Sīla*-morality is also very important for everyone Buddhist or non-Buddhist in our society. In Theravāda Buddhism, as a Buddhist should keep five precepts at least in daily life then we can call the one as a good Buddhist. Because precepts or morality can help people to live a peaceful and harmonious life and by practicing *sīla*-morality, *samādhi*-concentration and *paññā*-wisdom the one can gain Nibbāna (the end of suffering). In this article, it is described the definition of *Sīla*-morality, its significance, its benefits and its classifications etc, in the concept of Theravāda Buddhism.

### The Meaning of *Sīla*-Morality

In Buddhism, *Sīla* means as morality, ethics, virtue, and moral conduct etc. Actually, *Sīla*-morality comprises three stages along the Noble Eightfold path- right speech, right action and right livelihood. *Sīla*-morality is controlling of the three bodily misdeeds and the four verbal misdeeds (*Vārittasīla*) and cultivating virtuous habits (*Cārittasīla*). The latter means pay respect (*Apacāyana*) to the Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Samgha*, and to parents, teachers, and those who senior in age, status, or morality or helping anyone with a meritorious deed as if it were one's own undertaking (*Veyyāvacca*). It is the basic requirements for modern society in the world to get peace and harmony in present life.

### The Significance of practice of *Sīla*-Mortality

From the beginning someone must first purify his own virtue. Herein, virtue is purified in four modes: (1) by the purification of one's inclinations (*ajjhāsayavisuddhi*); (2) by the undertaking of precepts (*samadāna*); (3) by non-transgression (*avītikamana*); and (4) by making amends for

transgressions (*paṭipākatikaraṇa*). For someone, who is dominated by personal ideals is naturally disgusted with evil through the purity of his own inclinations and purifies his conduct by arousing his inward sense of shame.

Someone else, who is dominated by a consideration for the world, afraid of evil, purifies his conduct by receiving precepts from another person and by arousing his sense of moral dread. Both establish themselves in virtue through non-transgression. But if, due to forgetfulness, they sometimes break a precept, then through their sense of shame and moral dread, respectively, they quickly make amends for it by the proper means of rehabilitation. Virtue is twofold as avoidance (*vāritta*) and performance (*cāritta*). Herein, this is the method by which virtue as avoidance should be practiced.

Someone should have such a heart of compassion (*Karuṇā*) for all beings that he should not feel any resentment towards anyone, even in a dream. He should help others; he would no more misappropriate the belongings of others. If someone is a monk, he should live in chastity and abstaining from the seven bonds of sexuality, not to speak of adultery. If someone is a householder, he should never arouse even an evil thought of lust for the wives of others. When he speaks, his statements should be truthful, beneficial, and endearing, and his talk measured, timely, and concerned with the *Dhamma*. His mind should always be devoid of covetousness, ill-will, and perverted views. One should possess the knowledge of the ownership of *kaṃma* and have settled faith and affection for recluses and brahmins who are faring and practicing rightly. One should abstain from unwholesome states and from the unwholesome courses of *kaṃma* leading to the four planes of misery and the suffering of the round, and he should establish in the wholesome courses of *kaṃma* leading to heaven and liberation.

Someone should desist from killing and injuring others, (*pāṇātipāta*) he should give the gift of fearlessness to all beings. He should perfect the meditation on loving-kindness without trouble, and enjoy the eleven benefits of loving-kindness. He should eradicate the mental impression of hatred. So too, because he should desist from taking what is not given, (*adinnādāna*) his possessions cannot be confiscated by thieves, etc. Someone would be unsuspecting to others, dear and agreeable, trustworthy, unattached to prosperity and success, inclined to relinquishing, and someone should eradicate the mental impression of greed.

By desisting from adultery (*kāmesumicchācāra*) someone would be unexcitable, peaceful in body and mind, dear and agreeable, unsuspecting to beings. A good report would circulate concerning him. He would be without lust or attachment to women, would devote to renunciation, achieve distinguished characteristics and eradicate the mental impression of greed. By desisting from false speech (*musāvāda*) his words would come to be authoritative for others. He would be regarded as reliable and trustworthy, one whose statements will always accept. His mouth would give off a sweet fragrance and his bodily and vocal conduct would be protected. He would achieve distinguished characteristics and eradicate the mental impression of defilements.

By desisting from slander (*pisuṇavācā*) someone would possess unbreakable faith in the true *Dhamma*. He would be a firm friend, as exceedingly dear to beings as though they were acquainted with him in the last existence. And he would be devoted to non-defilement.

By desisting from harsh speech (*pharusavācā*) someone would become dear and agreeable to beings, pleasant in character, sweet in speech, held in esteem. And he would develop a voice endowed with eight factors. By desisting from idle chatter (*samphapplāpa*) someone would become dear and agreeable to beings, revered, and held in esteem. His statements would be accepted and his talk measured. He acquires great influence and power, and would become skilful in answering the questions of others with the ingenuity that creates opportunities (to benefit others).

Through his freedom from covetousness (*abhijjhā*) a person would gain what he wishes and obtain whatever excellent possessions he needs. He would never be vanquished by his adversaries, would be never defective in his faculties, and would become the peerless individual. Through his freedom from ill-will (*byāpāda*) someone would gain a pleasant appearance. He would be esteemed by others, and because he will be delight in the welfare of beings, he would automatically be inspiring their confidence. He would become lofty in character, abides in loving-kindness, and acquire great influence and power. Through his freedom from wrong view (*micchādiṭṭhi*) someone would gain good

companions. Even if he will be threatened with a sharp sword, he will not perform an evil deed. Because he would hold to the ownership of *kaṃma*, he does not believe in superstitious omens. His faith in the true *Dhamma* would be established and firmly rooted. He should get faith in the enlightenment of the *Tathāgatas-Buddha*, and no more delights in the diversity of outside creeds. He would be skilful in fully understanding the three characteristics of (impermanence, suffering, and non-self), and in the end can gain the unobstructed knowledge of omniscience. Thus, someone who wants to be a bodhisattva should diligently and thoroughly perfect his virtue as a hen guards its eggs, through the power of mindfulness and clear comprehension in the control of bodily and vocal action, in the taming of the sense-faculties, in purification of livelihood, and in the use of the requisites. The points mentioned above are called the undertaking of precepts (*samadāna*) and non-transgression (*avātikkaṃana*).

This is the method of practicing virtue (*vāritta-sīla*) as avoidance.

The practice of virtue as performance should be understood as follows: Herein, at the appropriate time, someone should practice salutation, rising up, respectful greetings, and courteous conduct towards good friends worthy of reverence. At the appropriate time he should render them service, and he wait upon them when they are sick. When he receives well-spoken advice he expresses his appreciation. He would be nimble in fulfilling his duties towards beings when these are conducive to their good. He would serve as their companion. When beings are afflicted with the suffering of disease, etc., he would prepare the appropriate. He would dispel the sorrow of those afflicted by the loss of wealth, etc.

Of a helpful disposition, he would restrain with *Dhamma* those who need to be restrained, rehabilitate them from unwholesome ways, and establish them in wholesome courses of conduct. He would inspire with *Dhamma* those in need of inspiration. When he hears about the loftiest, most difficult, inconceivably powerful deeds of the great bodhisattvas of the past, issuing in the ultimate welfare and happiness of beings, by means of which they reached perfect maturity in the requisites of enlightenment, he will not be agitated and alarmed, but reflects: "Those Great Beings were only human beings. But by developing themselves through the orderly fulfillment of the training they attained the loftiest spiritual power and the highest perfection in the requisites of enlightenment. I too, should practice the same training in virtue, etc. In that way I too, will gradually fulfill the training and in the end attain the same state."

He would strive to dispel sensual desire, ill-will, sloth-and-torpor, restlessness-and-worry, and perplexity in those obsessed by these hindrances, and to dispel wrong thoughts of sensuality, ill-will, and aggression in those subjugated by these thoughts. Out of gratitude to those who have helped him, he would make benefits and honors them with a similar or greater benefit in return, congenial in speech and endearing in his words. This is called making amends for transgressions (*paṭṭipākatikaraṇa*). Because his inclination is to benefit others, he would never harm them, abuse them, humiliate them, arouse remorse in them, or incite them to act in ways which should be avoided. Nor would he place himself in a higher position than those who are of inferior conduct. He would be neither altogether inaccessible to others, nor too easily accessible, and he would not associate with others at the wrong time.

He would associate with beings that it is proper to associate with at the appropriate time and place. He would not criticize those who are dear to others in front of them, nor praise those who are resented by them. He would encourage those endowed with faith with a discourse on the benefits of faith and he would encourage as well those endowed with virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom with a discourse on the benefits of those qualities.

This is called the purification of one's inclinations (*ajjhāsayavisuddhi*). Thereby he would establish the faithless (immoral, ignorant, stingy, and dull-witted) in faith (virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom). He would make them enter the Buddha's Dispensation and brings to maturity those already endowed with these qualities. This is the method of practicing the perfection of virtue (*cāritta-sīla*).

### The Benefits of *Sīla*-Morality

*Sīla* has controlling system and it is controlling of bodily action, verbal action and mental action of beings. It does not permit physical and verbal actions to take place in a violent, disorderly manner it controls and directs them to become quiet and gentle. If whoever have to keep of *Sīla*-morality (at least five kinds of *sīla*) in their mind, they are really peaceful even in this present life and wherever they live in cities, towns, and villages and even in the forest, their environment is peace in stability and there is no robber, thieves, rapist, drinker and terrorism etc., because they maintained their *Sīla*-morality and then controlled their minds and their behavior is good whenever they act. Therefore people, in the world, should practice *Sīla*-morality whoever, wherever and whenever because so many kinds of weapon and nuclear bombs and missiles are scattering in the world.

According to Buddhism, *Sīla*-morality (*cāritta* and *vāritta sīla*) is very important and essential for beings not only in the present life, but also after lives because without practice *sīla*-morality, nobody can go to superior realms. If someone practices it, they have chance to go to superior realms without hesitation and they are beyond awful lives. In *siṅgālovāda-sutta*, *cāritta sīla*-morality are discussed as human duties to cultivate for the betterment of human society as a whole. *Sīla*-morality (*cāritta*) especially provides to the people to get loving-kindness, compassion, joyfulness and equinity. When they really practise *sīla*-morality, they support to each other with (four kinds of *brahmavihāra*: *mettā*, *karunā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā*) the six of social units and each of individual duties such as parents toward to children, teachers toward to pupils, husbands toward to wives, clansmen toward to friends, employers toward to employees, monks toward to laities because of *sīla*-morality.

A man of virtuous conduct enjoys many benefits such as a gladdening heart which leads to joy and happiness (*Pāmojja*). This in turn results in delightful satisfaction (*pīti*). In one who enjoys delightful satisfaction, there arises calmness of mind and body (*passaddhi*) followed by bliss (*sukha*). The tranquil state of mind and body brings about development of concentration (*samādhi*) which enables one to see things as they really are (*yathābhūtañāṇa*). When one gains this knowledge of things as they really are, one gets wearied of and detached from the ills and suffering of the cycle of rebirths. In him arises powerful insight into reality (*balava Vipassanāñāṇa*). With this insight he becomes detached from craving and achieves the knowledge of the Path, which leads to full liberation (*vimutti*) through the knowledge of Fruition.

After gaining the Path and Fruition knowledge, he develops reflective knowledge (*paccavekkhanā-ñāṇa*) which enables him to see that the cessation of phenomena of the aggregates of *nāma* and *rūpa* has taken place in him. In other words, he has realized the Perfect Peace, Nibbāna. Thus morality has many benefits including the realization of Nibbāna. In several discourses the Buddha mentions the following five benefits gained by one who observes precepts and who is established in morality: (1) based on mindfulness through *sīla*, he acquires great wealth, (2) he gains fame and good reputation, (3) he approaches and enters any assembly of nobles, brahmins, householders or recluses with complete self-assurance (born of his morality), without any indication of inferiority complex (4) he lives the full span of life and dies unconfused, (5) he is reborn after that in happy realms of *Devas* and human beings.

In the *Ākaṅkheyya Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya*, the Buddha enumerates 13 benefits which come from practicing morality; such benefits range from reverence and respect shown by fellow followers of the teaching to realization of *Arahatta phala*, that is, attainment of Arahantship. The art of morality (*Sīla*) is beneficial not only for oneself but also for other beings and it can make the mind support to *Nekkhamma* (*Samsāra* and *kāma*) and it is also ready to go to forest and to take meditation in secluded place.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that everyone, Buddhist and non-Buddhist should practice at least the five precepts taught by the Buddha for the welfare and well-being of our society. Nowadays, the world is full of sufferings in every part of country and why because most of the people do not know concerning the five precepts and the Buddhist way of peaceful life. Only, a few people know the five

precepts and practice according to the teaching of Buddha. That is why only a few people get a noble life in peace, happiness and harmony in present lifetime.

Additionally, Buddha's teachings on morality are founded on cosmic law rather than the laws handed down by a supernatural being. In practicing a moral life, we can attain the embodiment of *Dhamma*, and anyone who lives according to the precepts and virtues can have good *kammic* outcomes, such as happiness, a good reincarnation in the next life, and finally the attainment of Nibbāna- the end of sufferings, characterized by the end of suffering and desires. That is why let us practice the five precepts according to the guidelines of Buddha's teachings for welfare and well-beings of the world.

#### REFERENCES

1. The Path of Purification By Bhikkhu Ñānamoli.
2. *Vinayaśāṅgaha Aṭṭhakathā*.
3. Bhikkhu Bodhi, A Treatise on the *pāramīs*.
4. The Great Chronicle, Volume One, Part One.



**Vasettha**

**Ph.D Research scholar, Centre for Buddhist Studies,  
Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, India.**