

Vipassana Discourse Day 2

Universal definition of sin and piety-the Noble Eightfold Path: sīla and samādhi

The second day is over. Although it was slightly better than the first day, difficulties still remain. The mind is so restless, agitated, wild, like a wild bull or elephant which creates havoc when it enters a human dwelling-place. If a wise person tames and trains the wild animal, then all its strength, which has been used for destructive purposes, now begins to serve society in constructive ways. Similarly, the mind which is far more powerful and dangerous than a wild elephant, must be tamed and trained; then its enormous strength will start to serve you. But you must work very patiently, persistently, and continuously. Continuity of practice is the secret of success.

You have to do the work; no-one else can do it for you. With all love and compassion an enlightened person shows the way to work, but he cannot carry anyone on his shoulders to the final goal. You must take steps yourself, fight your own battle, work out your own salvation. Of course, once you start working, you receive the support of all the Dhamma forces, but still, you have to work yourself. You have to walk the entire path yourself.

Understand what is the path on which you have started walking. The Buddha described it in very simple terms:

Abstain from all sinful, unwholesome actions.

Perform only pious wholesome ones.

Purify the mind.

this is the teaching of enlightened ones.

It is a universal path, acceptable to people of any background, race, or country. But the problem comes in defining sin and piety. When the essence of Dhamma is lost, it becomes a sect, and then each sect gives a different definition of piety, such as having a particular external appearance, or performing certain rituals, or holding certain beliefs. All these are sectarian definitions, acceptable to some and not to others. Dhamma, however, gives a universal definition of sin and piety. Any action that harms others, that disturbs their peace and harmony, is a sinful, unwholesome action. Any action that helps other, that contributes to their peace and harmony, is a pious, wholesome action. This is a definition in accordance not with any dogma, but rather with the law of nature. And according to the law of nature, one cannot perform an action that harms others without first generating a defilement in the mind--anger, fear, hatred, etc.; and whenever one generates a mental defilement, then one becomes miserable, one experiences the sufferings of hell within. Similarly, one cannot perform an action that helps others without first generating love, compassion, good will; and as soon as one starts developing such pure mental qualities, one starts enjoying heavenly peace within. When you help others, simultaneously you help yourself; when

you harm others, simultaneously you harm yourself. This is Dhamma, truth, law--the universal law of nature.

The path of Dhamma is called the Noble Eightfold Path, noble in the sense that anyone who walks on it is bound to become a noble-hearted, saintly person. The path is divided into three sections: *sīla*, *samādhī*, and *paññā*. *Sīla* is morality--abstaining from unwholesome deeds of body and speech. *Samādhī* is the wholesome action of developing mastery over one's mind. Practicing both is helpful, but neither *sīla* nor *samādhī* can eradicate all the defilements accumulated in the mind. For this purpose, the third section of the path must be practiced: *paññā*, the development of wisdom, of insight, which totally purifies the mind. Within the division of *sīla* are three parts of the Noble Path:

(1) *Sammā-vācā*--right speech, purity of vocal action. To understand what is purity of speech, one must know what is impurity of speech. Speaking lies to deceive others, speaking harsh words that hurt others, backbiting and slanderous talk, babbling and purposeless chatter are all impurities of vocal action. When one abstains from these, what remains is right speech.

(2) *Sammā-kammanta*--right action, purity of physical action. On the path of Dhamma there is only one yardstick to measure the purity or impurity of an action, be it physical, vocal, or mental, and that is whether the action helps or harms others. Thus killing, stealing, committing rape or adultery, and becoming intoxicated so that one

does not know what one is doing are all actions that harm others, and also harm oneself. When one abstains from these impure physical actions, what remains is right action.

(3) *Sammā-ājīvā*--right livelihood. Everyone must have some way to support himself and those who are dependent on him, but if the means of support is harmful to others, then it is not a right livelihood. Perhaps one may not oneself perform wrong actions by one's livelihood, but encourages others to do so; if so, one is not practicing right livelihood. For example, selling liquor, operating a gambling den, selling arms, selling living animals or animal flesh are none of them right livelihoods. Even in the highest profession, if one's motivation is only to exploit others, then one is not practicing right livelihood. If the motivation is to perform one's part as a member of society, to contribute one's own skills and efforts for the general good, in return for which one receives a just remuneration by which one maintains oneself and one's dependents, then such a person is practicing right livelihood.

A householder, a lay person, needs money to support himself. The danger, however, is that earning money becomes a means to inflate the ego: one seeks to amass as much as possible for oneself, and feels contempt for those who earn less. Such an attitude harms others and also harms oneself, because the stronger the ego, the further one is from liberation. Therefore, one essential aspect of right livelihood is giving charity, sharing a portion

of what one earns with others. Then one earns not only for one's own benefit but also for the benefit of others.

If Dhamma consisted merely of exhortations to abstain from actions that harm others, then it would have no effect. Intellectually one may understand the dangers of performing unwholesome actions and the benefits of performing wholesome ones, or one may accept the importance of *sīla* out of devotion to those who preach it. Yet one continues to perform wrong actions, because one has no control over the mind. Hence the second division of Dhamma, *samādhī*-developing mastery over one's own mind. Within this division are another three parts of the Noble Eightfold Path:

(4) *Sammā-vāyama*--right effort, right exercise. By your practice you have seen how weak and infirm the mind is, always wavering from one object to another. Such a mind requires exercise to strengthen it. There are four exercises to strengthen the mind: removing from it any unwholesome qualities it may have, closing it to any unwholesome qualities it does not have, preserving and multiplying those wholesome qualities that are present in the mind, and opening it to any wholesome qualities that are missing. Indirectly, by the practice of awareness of respiration (*Anapana*) you have started performing these exercises.

(5) *Sammā-sati*--right awareness, awareness of the reality of the present moment. Of the past there can only be memories; for the future there can only be aspirations,

fears, imaginations. You have started practicing *sammā-sati* by training yourself to remain aware of whatever reality manifests at the present moment, within the limited area of the nostrils. You must develop the ability to be aware of the entire reality, from the grossest to the subtlest level. To begin, you gave attention to the conscious, intentional breath, then the natural, soft breath, then the touch of the breath. Now you will take a still subtler object of attention: the natural, physical sensations within this limited area. You may feel the temperature of the breath, slightly cold as it enters, slightly warm as it leaves the body. Beyond that, there are innumerable sensations not related to breath: heat, cold, itching, pulsing, vibrating, pressure, tension, pain, etc. You cannot choose what sensation to feel, because you cannot create sensations. Just observe; just remain aware. The name of the sensation is not important; what is important is to be aware of the reality of the sensation without reacting to it.

The habit pattern of the mind, as you have seen, is to roll in the future or in the past, generating craving or aversion. By practising right awareness, you have started to break this habit. Not that after this course you will forget the past entirely, and have no thought at all for the future. But in fact, you used to waste your energy by rolling needlessly in the past or future, so much so that when you needed to remember or plan something, you could not do so. By developing *sammā-sati*, you will learn to fix your mind more firmly in the present reality, and you will find that you

can easily recall the past when needed, and make proper provisions for the future. You will be able to lead a happy, healthy life.

(6) *Sammā-samādhī*--right concentration. Mere concentration is not the aim of this technique; the concentration you develop must have a base of purity. With a base of craving, aversion, or illusion one may concentrate the mind, but this is not *sammā-samādhī*. One must be aware of the present reality within oneself, without any craving or aversion. Sustaining this awareness continuously from moment to moment--this is *sammā-samādhī*.

By following scrupulously the five precepts, you have started practicing *sīla*. By training your mind to remain focused on one point, a real object of the present moment, without craving or aversion, you have started developing *samādhī*. Now keep working diligently to sharpen your mind, so that when you start to practice *paññā* you will be able to penetrate to the depths of the unconscious, to eradicate all the impurities hidden there, and to enjoy real happiness--the happiness of liberation.

Real happiness to you all.

May all beings be happy!