

Sila

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The Pali term Sila means Morality. This may be defined as a mode of mind and volition manifested in our speech or action. Sila can rightly be said as the foundation of the whole Buddhist practice, and therewith the first of the three kinds of training that also forms the three fold division of the eight fold paths, namely: Sila, Samadhi and Prajna. It is said that no one can develop the Noble Eight-fold Path without practicing and cultivating Sila within themselves. The Bala Sutta of Mahavagga says "Evamevakhō, bhikkhave, bhikkhusilānissayasilāmpatitthayaariyamatthāṅgikammaggambhaviariyamatthāṅgikammaggambahulikaroti" which means "Monks, a bhikkhu can develop and practices the Noble Eightfold Path many times and, again and again based and depended on virtue".

Wholesome moral living is one of the most important ingredients for the practice of purifying our mind. Without the practice of Sila, positive personality changes cannot happen.

Sila plays a very important role in Buddhism. Sila acts as a precursor to a solid foundation of life. Be it Theravada or Mahayana sects of Buddhism, Sila acts as a precursor of a solid foundation of life. Whether it is concerned with the life of a recluse or lay person, Sila plays a pivotal role for both of them. In our day to day life when we encounter someone making unwanted comment or behaving in a way that is not considered as good then our general opinion is that the person is devoid of Sila. The society at times also generalizes things. For example, women are considered and also expected to be very polite and if they are so they are considered to be the followers of Sila and thus a general view formed is that the family is very cultured. Buddha quite often used to discuss about Hiri and Ottappa which may be described as a personal shame and social shame respectively. According to Buddha several people do not involve themselves into various immoral activities due to these two entities. Buddha therefore used to assert that till the time Hiri and Ottappa are here, the society will never cease to exist and the moment these two entities disappear the society will cease to

exist. Buddha also discussed in detail about the behavioural norms of people belonging to noble family and the behavior of people of indecent family.

As our behaviors play a very vital role in our life, Buddha therefore has prescribed ten moral precepts, technically called DasaSikkhapada, to be followed by the monks and nuns. The ten precepts are-

- i. PanatipataVeramani (The Precept to Abstain from Killing)
- ii. AbhinnadanaVeramani (The Precept of Not Taking Anything Which is Not Given)
- iii. AbrahmacariyaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Un-chastity)
- iv. MusavadaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from False Speech)
- v. SuramerayamajjappamadatthanaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Talking Liquor that Causes Intoxication)
- vi. VikalabhojanaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Eating at the Wrong Time)
- vii. Nacca-gita-vadita-visukadassanaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Vulgar Shows of Dancing, Singing and Music)
- viii. Mala-gandhavilepana-dharanamandana-vibhusanatthanaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from the Use of Garlands, Scents, Unguents and Wearing Finery)
- ix. UccasayanamahasayanaVaramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Using High and Large Beds)
- x. JataruparajatapatiggahanaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Accepting Gold and Silver)

The Ten Precepts

i. PanatipataVeramani (The Precept to Abstain from Killing)

This precept of abstaining from killing anyone can be called as the first base of moral life. The word Panatipata consists of three terms- Pana, Ati and Pata. The term Pana means living being, the term Ati has been used as a prefix which means quickly or rapidly while the term

Pata can be defined as to fall or to bring an end to anything. The term Veramani can be defined as an abstention from killing. Therefore, PanatipataVeramanican be defined as to abstain from destroying the life of any living being forcibly before it completes its full span of time.

ii. AdinnadanaVeramani (The Precept of Not Taking Anything which is Not Given)

This precept is AdinnadanaVeramani is composed of two terms, namely- Adinna and Adana. The letter Ain Adinna is a prefix that has a negative connotation while Dinna means to offer or to present. The term Adana means to accept or to possess etc. Combining these it becomes to not take or keep anything which is not given. Therefore, to take something while being aware that it does not belong to him or her is Adinnadana. In cases where a person commits theft, there are five conditions- that the property belongs to someone else, being aware that the property belongs to someone else, thoughts of stealing, efforts put in by the person for committing theft and taking away that object as theft. All these five conditions are necessary for committing theft. If the first four conditions are met but the last one is not materialized then theft will not be committed. There can be various kinds of thefts, like Samantapasadika mentions about twenty-five kinds of thief.

iii. AbrahmacariyaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Unchastity)

The third precept is AbrahmacariyaVeramani. The term Abrahmacariya consists of two parts, A and Brahmachariya. The term A means absence while the term Brahmachariya means celibacy. Combining these two means to be away from chastity. This precept therefore signifies that the person keeps himself away from being involved in all kinds of unlawful sexual activities.

iv. MusavadaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from False Speech)

The term Musavada consists of Musa which means false and Vada that means speech or discussion. Therefore Musavada means to speak which is not true. The precept MusavadaVeramani therefore refers to abstain from speaking what is not true.

v. SuramerayamajjappamadatthanaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Talking Liquor that Causes Intoxication)

The term Surain Suramerayamajjappamadatthanameans spurious liquor, Merajja signifies wine or intoxicating liquor, Majja refers to some intoxicating drinks which makes a person who consumes it ignorant or mad and Pamadatthana focuses on the situation where the person drinks whenever he or she finding an opportunity to drink.

Therefore, the precept SuramerayamajjappamadatthanaVeramani refers to abstaining from taking liquor that causes intoxication.

vi. VikalabhojanaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Eating at the Wrong Time)

The term Vikalabhojana is consists of Vi, Kala and Bhojana. The term Vi is used as a prefix which is a negative connotation. The term Kala refers to time or period and the term Bhojanasignifies to eat food or to have meal. Therefore the term Vikalabhojana means to eat at wrong time.

This precept of VikalabhojanaVeramaniwas given by the Buddha regarding Sattarasa monks in the Rajagriha. People used to give them food after taking bath when these monks went to beg for alms in the city. After begging these monks used to go to the garden and consume the alms in prohibited times. When this matter was brought to the Buddha's notice, he then delivered the law that whosoever a monk eats any kind of food at prohibited time is responsible for Pacittiya. Therefore by eating in the afternoon the person is breaking Sila.

vii. Nacca-gita-vadita-visukadassanaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Vulgar Shows of Dancing, Singing and Music)

The precept of Nacca-gita-vadita-visukadassanaVeramani deals with several kinds of dances, vulgar shows, music etc. The term Nacca in Nacca-gita-vadita-visukadassana means dance. Nacca signifies various kinds of dances whether it is done along with the playing of musical instruments or it is simply movements of the body. The term Gita refers to singing, with or without instruments and the term Visukadassana means acrobatic shows which are performed in clubs, fairs and on any occasion. Therefore this precept is about abstaining from vulgar shows of dancing, singing and music.

viii. Mala-gandhavilepana-dharanamandana-vibhusanatthanaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from the Use of Garlands, Scents and Wearing Finery)

The term Mala refers to garland and all kinds of decoration made by garlands of flowers, the term Gandhameans fragrance, Vilepanameans somekinds of lotions or cosmetics etc., the term Dharana means to wear, Mandana refers to some kinds of ornaments or adornments etc. Garlands, fragrances, cosmetics etc. are not for Mandana which means good looking and Vibhushan means to adorn. Therefore the precept of Mala-gandhavilepana-dharanamandana-vibhusanatthanaVeramani means to abstain from the use of Garlands, Scents and wearing finery.

ix. UccasayanamahasayanaVaramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Using High and Large Beds)

Uccasayana refers to sleeping on very high or cushioned beds. Mahasayana means those beds which are very big. Such types of beds which are exceedingly high and large should not be used by a monk.

This rule was framed when a monk named Upananda, living in Sravasti, was in the habit of sleeping on the high and cushioned beds. When Buddha saw his bed he made a rule that a

monk should not use a bed which is more than eight fingers in height and whosoever does not follow this rule will be held responsible for committing a Pacittiya.

x. JataruparajatapatiggahanaVeramani (The Precept of Abstaining from Accepting Gold and Silver)

In the precept of Jataruparajatapatiggahana, the term Jatarupa means gold, Rajata means silver, Patiggahana means to accept gold, silver or their alloys in any form. In Buddhism, no monk is allowed to accumulate wealth. Accepting and storing gold and silver from anyone by the monks are considered as committing the sin of NissaggiyaPacittiya. Therefore, this precept of JataruparajatapatiggahanaVeramani means to abstain from accepting gold and silver.

Apart from the DasaSila, Samannaphalasutta of the DighaNikaya talks about three kinds of Sila, namely-

i. Culasila-

It refers to small morality. This Sila is about abstaining from taking another creature's life, use of violence, to not take things which do not belong to the practitioner. It also preaches to live a pious life and no not speak untruth.

ii. Majjhimasila-

This Sila is about abstaining from hurting seeds or plants, cheating, being involved into slavery, forgery. This Sila also preaches to abstain from hoarding food, use of fragrances etc.

iii. Mahasila-

This Sila is about abstaining from livelihood like palmistry, fire oblations, skill in charms, snake-lore etc. This Sila also enlists prophecies like who will win or lose in the battle, giving or taking anything by the monks in the marriages etc.

Apart from these, Buddha has also laid down ten precepts for the householders which are-

i. Dana-

It means charity. One should not have craving and attachment to wealth and property, but should give it away for the welfare of the people.

ii. Sila-

It means high moral character. According to this one should never destroy life, cheat, steal and exploit others, commit adultery, speak what is not truth, and consume intoxicating drinks.

iii. Bhavana-

It signifies Meditation or Mental Culture. Bhavana aims at cleansing the mind of impurities and disturbances, such as lustful desires, hatred, worries and restlessness, and cultivating such qualities as concentration, awareness, the analytical mind, confidence, joy, tranquility etc.

iv. Pattidana-

The term Patti in Pattidana means meritorious deeds. It is believed that the fruits of meritorious deeds are necessary for births in higher plain. By performing meritorious deeds a person enjoys not only in this birth but also in all their future births.

v. Pattanumodana-

The term Pattanumodana refers to receiving something with love and kindness. In other words it is to accept offerings of merit with pure consciousness and with clear heart.

vi. Veyyavacca-

It means that all the charities or services towards humanity should be done with pleasant feelings in our minds and without compulsion. Our inner thoughts should be such that the services towards humanity should be in our habit.

vii. Apacayana-

It can be referred as etiquette. This is about our etiquettes and behaviors towards other our parents or any other people etc. This etiquette is also about serving the old people with love, affection and care.

viii. Desana-

Buddha set in motion the wheel of the Dhamma. To preach this Dhamma is called Desana. According to this precept even a householder can deliver Desana and can accumulate the merit from this merit.

ix. Dhammasavana-

According to this precept, people should listen to the religious discourses from time to time. This is considered as the best blessings. Buddha says that there is no mother or father without Dhamma so the people who are moral should listen to, keep in mind and also act according to the Dhamma.

x. DitthiUjukamma-

The term Ditthi means wrong views, uju refers to make straight. Therefore this precept means to make our mind free from all the wrong views. Brahmajalasutta mentions sixty two kinds of wrong views from which a person should try to free himself or herself.

VinayaRules for the Monks and Nuns

The Vinaya lays down 227 rules for the Monks and 311 rules for the Nuns. The rules and regulations are called Patimokkha which means liberation for everyone. All the monks and nuns have to work for Nibbana while adhering to these rules.

1. Patimokkha-Samvarasila

Abstaining from the prohibited behaviours and to obey the Patimokkha rules is known as PatimokkhaSamvarasila. The rules were recited on the day of the Upostha and then the guilty monks used to make their confessions. Following are the rules for the monks-

i. ParajikaDhamma-

There are four ParajikaDhamma. This Dhamma consists of all those activities like sexual intercourse, stealing things, to boast about oneself etc. which disqualifies the monk from being the member of the Sangha.

ii. SanghadisesaDhamma-

There are thirteen SanghadisesaDhamma. This rule is about those offences for which only the Buddhist Sangha can punish or also free the monk from all the charges levelled against him.

iii. AniyataDhamma-

There are two AniyataDhamma. This rule is about a monk being accused by any lay person of having committed an offence with a woman in secluded place. The final result depends on whether the monk acknowledges the offence or not. The monk is given the benefit of unless there is any other over-riding evidence. Thus it is not considered proper for a monk to be with a woman in any secluded place.

iv. Nissaggiya-pacittiyaDhamma-

There are thirty Nissaggiya-pacittiyaDhamma. The term Nissaggiya means entailing forfeiture. This rule is about entailing an item that the monk has acquired or used wrongly, and that he must forfeit that item before anyone known about that and he should confess it to the fellow monk, a group of monk, or to the Sangha as whole. This has been divided into three chapters- The Robe Cloth Chapter, The Silk Chapter and The Bowl Chapter.

v. PacittiyaDhamma-

There are ninety two PacittiyaDhamma. PacittiyaDhammaare rules that entails confession. These are considered as minor violations which do not entail expulsion or any probationary periods for the monks if he accepts his faults.

vi. PatidesaniyaDhamma-

This consists of four rules. The term Patidesaniya means to be acknowledged. PatidesaniyaDhamma therefore means entailing acknowledgement. The PatidesaniyaDhamma is about situations involving the acceptance of alms food from the nuns which should be openly confessed in front of the Sangha.

vii. SekhiyaDhamma-

This has seventy five rules. The term Sekhiya means “to be trained in”. This has been further sub-divided into four groups: etiquette in dressing and behaviour when in inhabited areas; etiquette in accepting and eating alms food; etiquette to be followed while teaching the Dhamma; and etiquetteto be followed while urinating, defecating, and spitting.

viii. AdhikaranasamathaDhamma-

The AdhikaranasamathaDhamma consists of seven rules. The term Adhikaranasamatha means “the settlement of issues”. The rules in this section talks about procedures for settling the different types of offences inside the Sangha mentioned under the Pacittiya offences.

2. Indriyasamvarasila

The term Indriya in Indriyasamvarasila refers to the six internal senses called Salayatan, Samvara refers to restraint of indulgence from all kinds of sense object. The six internal senses are Cakkhu (Eyes), Sota (Ear), Ghana (Nose), Jivha (Tongue), Kaya (Body) and Mana (Mind). These internal senses are also called as sense doors. When anything comes into contact with our internal sense it gets reflected in our mind. This reflection happens through different processes like Bhavanga, Javana, Sampaticchana etc.

There are also six external senses called Alambana, namely: Rupa (Visible Object), Sudda (Audible Objects), Gandha (Odourous Subject), Rasa (Sapid Object), Potthabba (Tangible Object) and the Dhamma (Ideational Object).

Therefore, Indriyasamvarasila is about restraining ourselves from all sorts of indulgences through sense doors.

3. Ajivaparisuddhisila-

Ajiva refers to right kind of livelihood. Parisuddhi means purity in the way of earning our livelihood. It may be therefore called as the purification of livelihood. According to this Sila a monk must not earn a living in the same way that a householder does, he should not earn his living by means of deceiving people.

A good monk should avoid seeking for almsfood etc. that are of impure origin and should only take what is of pure origin. For example, foods or robes obtained from the Sangha or a group of two or three monks or from a householders who has special qualities like purity of virtues, conscious mind, possess the knowledge of the Dhamma etc. are considered to be of pure origin.

4. Kuhana-

This can be termed as deceitful appearance of a monk that makes him look attractive in order to get some wishes fulfilled or for some deceitful gain. Visuddhimagga mentions it as scheming, grimacing etc. This is also of three types, namely: hypocrisy in the use of requisites, hypocrisy in discussion on subjects which are close to attainments of the Path and hypocrisy in changing postures in order to deceive lay followers.

5. Lapanana-

Lapanarefers to talking with some evil motive. For example, when a monk sees a lay devotee come to the sangha and he talks to them in order to lure and get some alms from them than

this falls under Lapana. In other words it is such a profession in which the monk earns his livelihood by persuading or using flattery words.

6. Nemittikata-

Nemittikata refers to making signs or giving indications with an evil motive to get some alms. In this the sign or interpretation is made in a charming way and in a way that convinces others to give some alms. For example, if a monk sees someone carrying food, he indicates that he also wants some food by saying: "Have you already got food? How do you manage to get it?"

7. Nippesikatā-

The term Nippesikatā means belittling, disparaging or harassing in order to get some offerings. This is about denigrating a devotee by saying that he does not give alms, or censures him. All-round denigration of the devotee is continual denigration. Tale-bearing is bearing tales from house to house, from village to village, from district to district, and thinking that by this way the lay devotee will give alms out of fear from my bearing tales. The pursuit of gain by belittling the virtuous qualities of lay devotees is called Nippesikatā.

8. LābbhenalābhamNijigisanatā-

LābbhenalābhamNijigisanatā refers to giving something with a view to getting something more. In other words it is to seek for more alms or get charity from another house by giving away the few offerings that he has already received is called LābbhenalābhamNijigisanatā.

9. Paccaya-sannissita-Sīla-

Paccaya-sannissita-Sīla refers to Morality with regard to the 4 requisites, namely: robes, alms food, dwelling and medicine. For example, when the monk wears his robes, he should remember that he is wearing it not to adorn himself but to protect himself against heat and cold, and also to cover up his private parts. A monk should eat food only for his survival, his dwelling place should only be to protect himself from heat, cold or for protection from

dangerous animals etc. A monk should take medicine by being fully aware that he will get cured from the disease and will not be in any pain.

Sila, according to Buddhism, is not a practice which can be given by someone to the others. It totally depends on our own observations. Sila remains important until our death. The education without Sila is considered to be of no use. There are several benefits of Sila-

- i. Sila helps in obtaining huge wealth.
- ii. Sila helps in getting good reputation and fame.
- iii. Those practicing Sila can meet anybody; can attend any congregation etc. without any hesitation.
- iv. Those practicing Sila are free from wretchedness while on the threshold of death.
- v. After death, the practitioner of Sila gets a good rebirth or will go to heaven.

These benefits of recollection of Sila is summarized in the following verse-

“Now, when a man is truly wise,
His constant task will surely be
This recollection of his virtue
Blessed with such mighty potency.”¹

Sila therefore is very beneficial for our present life as well as after death. Buddha has proclaimed that there is no fragrance like Sila. All the three divisions of Buddhism emphasize on practicing Sila. In Buddhism no one judges another's quality or morality with the external appearance but through his internal quality which is developed by practicing Sila. Thus, Sila can be said as one of the most essential teachings of Buddhism.

¹Visuddhimagga, I, p. 215. The path of Purification, p. 218.

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