

Three Pillars of Buddhism

Dāna

Sīla

Bhāvanā



By Venerable Mahinda

DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ

Published by Australian Buddhist Mission Inc. (for Aloka Meditation Centre)

www.aloka.info

First print 1000 copies (September 2023)

Sponsored by Members & friends of Australian Buddhist Mission & Aloka Meditation Centre

Cover, Illustrations
and Layout by Alokamitra Editorial & Graphics Team

Printed by Purinto Press Sdn Bhd

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Foreword

Through this publication, Venerable Mahinda aims at providing the readers with a better understanding of Buddhism as a way of life, not only to "equip us to meet the challenges of our times" but also to "promote peace, harmony, and stability within our family, society, nation, and the world".

This book summarises the entire teaching of the Buddha into three important categories: DĀNA, SĪLA, and BHĀVANĀ, and explains the importance of them from various perspectives, with reference to canonical discourses.

Firstly, after giving the definition of DĀNA, it goes on to a discussion on three basic categories of DĀNA and their practical value for the progress of our spiritual journey towards Full Awakening (NIBBĀNA), and, for which purpose, how we should practise them properly.

The second chapter of the book is on SĪLA, which discusses its various classifications and criteria, followed by a variety of different training rules. It concludes by explaining the purpose and benefits of SĪLA.

The final chapter is on BHĀVANĀ – meditation, i.e., holistic cultivation based on the Noble Eightfold Path. It will discuss the purpose of inner cultivation based on the seven stages of purity and some different techniques for training the mind. Finally, it will touch on certain qualities and abilities of the mind.

It is encouraging for a practitioner to learn the gradual development through his or her own purification process. After purifying one's morality, one becomes motivated to concentrate one's virtuous qualities and attain higher levels of mental composure.

The entire book is written in plain English which will enable general readers to enjoy reading it from beginning to end without being tired. In order to benefit from the in-depth meanings of the explanations, however, one has to re-read them attentively.

Dr. Sumana Ratnayaka

Dr. Sumana Ratnayaka spent nearly seventeen years as a senior lecturer in Pali and Buddhist studies at Peradeniya University, Sri Lanka, until his retirement in 2019. He now lives in Sweden, where he established the Stockholm Buddhist Vihara in 1985, and has since been active teaching Buddhism in Europe and elsewhere.

Publisher's Introduction

Following the compilation of Buddha Dhamma Sangha into a book, Venerable Mahinda has written yet another gem – a three-in-one on DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ, which are values indispensable for one's cultivation and progress along the Buddha's Dhamma path.

The Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia (BMSM) considers it a great privilege to have the permission of Venerable Mahinda to publish yet another essential guide which all Buddhists will find invaluable as the compass handy to traverse the challenges of daily life.

Cited by Venerable Mahinda as the basic values underpinning the Buddhist way of life, DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ have been the thrust of his teachings together with other Suttas throughout the Novitiate Programmes that were held at the Buddhist Maha Vihara in Brickfields as well as at the Aloka Novitiates in Australia and at the four main Buddhist holy places in India and Nepal.

It is indeed very encouraging that Venerable Mahinda, during his 47th Vassa spent at our newly established centre, Pusat Buddhis Dhammaduta Malaysia (PBDM) in Putrajaya, decided to pen these teachings on DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ for them to be published and available to others.

We hope many will benefit from this publication. DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ form the three pillars of Buddhism and Venerable Mahinda has presented them in a simple and concise manner for easy understanding of these fundamental principles of the teachings of the Buddha and how to put them into practice in our daily lives.

As we know, it is through genuine study (PARIYATTI), practice (PAṬIPATTI), and realisation (PAṬIVEDHA) in the Dhamma that we will be able to better equip ourselves with the necessary knowledge and skills to face challenges of our time and to live in peace and harmony with all around us.

On behalf of BMSM, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of all those who assisted in rendering this valuable publication especially the editorial team and designers from Aloka Meditation Centre in Australia and Aloka Mitra Singapore.

We also wish to acknowledge the Foreword of Dr Sumana Ratnayaka, a close friend of Venerable Mahinda for more than 40 years.

May our dhammaduta efforts in publishing Dhamma books not only continue the legacy of our Founder, the late Ven. Dr K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Thera, but also enable us to accomplish our Vision to be the dhammaduta organisation to Touch Lives with Dhamma.

May the blessings of the Buddha Dhamma Sangha be with all of you.

Loh Pai Ling
President
Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia

DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ

Three Pillars of Buddhism

Venerable Mahinda

DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ

Introduction

In the world today, there is an overabundance of information. Through modern technology and communications, knowledge about anything and everything is at our fingertips. Yet, knowledge about the very basic values of life is often overlooked. The result is increasing confusion in the minds of individuals and within society at large.

This book aims to address that confusion, by explaining the essence of Buddhism as a way of life: how to live in peace and harmony with oneself and the world around us.

DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ are the basic values underpinning the Buddhist way of life. Together, they not only equip us to meet the challenges of our times, but also promote peace, harmony and stability within our family, society, nation and the world.

They pave the way not only for a happy life, but also for a good rebirth (where one is able to continue to grow in the Dhamma's path, if liberation is not attained in this lifetime). Most importantly, these three qualities are indispensable for our progress along the path to enlightenment, to attain our final liberation and true freedom from all suffering.

DĀNA refers to an act of giving or generosity – including the giving of material things; the giving of confidence; and the gift of Dhamma or Truth. The true purpose of practising DĀNA or generosity is to reduce greed or attachment which is the cause of DUKKHA (suffering or unsatisfactoriness).

DĀNA is the basis of SĪLA, morality or good conduct, which involves the restraint of one's speech and body actions. In the Noble Eightfold Path, SĪLA comprises Right Speech, Right Body Action and Right Livelihood. SĪLA is commonly practised through the observance of the Five and Eight Precepts.

The observance of SĪLA paves the way for BHĀVANĀ, without which it would be impossible to fully overcome greed, hatred and delusion, the root causes of DUKKHA.

The term BHĀVANĀ is generally translated as meditation or mental culture, but it actually involves a holistic approach to the development and purification of the mind. By cultivating oneself in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path, the tendencies of grasping and aversion will naturally be reduced, thereby resulting in the purification of the mind.

In essence, the whole teachings of the Buddha can be found contained within these three values: DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ.

DĀNA



DĀNA

The term DĀNA in Pali, refers to an act of giving or generosity. When used in a more specific sense, it refers to almsgiving to monks and nuns individually (PUGGALIKA-DĀNA) or to the whole Sangha community (SAṄGHIIKA-DĀNA). From a broader perspective, there are three kinds of DĀNA:¹

Three Kinds of DĀNA

- ĀMISA-DĀNA - the giving of external material things (such as food, clothing, shelter, medicine, etc.) and internal material things (such as the gift of one's own bodily possessions in the form of blood, organ or tissue donation).
- ABHAYA-DĀNA - the giving of confidence, or helping others to overcome fear and danger (such as through kind and consoling speech, or saving lives by offering refuge and protection).
- DHAMMA-DĀNA - the gift of Dhamma or Truth, i.e. the sharing of knowledge or teachings that lead to one's final liberation or enlightenment.

1. Cariyāpiṭaka Aṭṭhakathā, commentary on the Brahmajāla Sutta, by Ācariya Dhammapāla, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi.

ĀMISA-DĀNA – the giving of material things

The most common aspect of ĀMISA-DĀNA is the giving of external material things such as food, clothing, shelter, medicine and so on. For example, the Buddha instituted the practice of PIṆḌAPĀTA for the Sangha – going round to collect alms-food from the lay community. This provides an opportunity for the lay community to practise DĀNA and experience the joy of giving. This practice still continues today, especially amongst Sangha members of the forest tradition.

Starting with the simple act of offering basic requisites such as food, shelter, robes and medicine to Sangha members, devotees learn to donate towards the construction of viharas or monasteries, meditation and retreat centres, as well as stupas or monuments that cater to the spiritual needs of the community. In fact, most of the Buddhist monasteries, stupas and shrines throughout the world have been built through the generosity of donors. It is through such practice of generosity that the BUDDHA-SĀSANA (the dispensation of the Buddha) has lasted for more than 2,500 years.

The practice of ĀMISA-DĀNA is not only confined to the Sangha, but also extended to the poor and needy, through a whole range of humanitarian activities such as orphanages, aged care centres, free clinics and so on.

Besides the external material gifts such as food, clothing, shelter and medicine, there is also the gift of our bodily possessions in the form of blood, organ and tissue donation to save lives (for example, giving one's eyes or cornea, kidneys or other parts of the body).

There are many stories in the Jātaka tales which show how the Buddha in his past lives offered his own limbs and other bodily possessions, and even his own life. One outstanding story is how King Sivi practised DĀNA by giving up his own eyes to restore the sight of a blind man.

Sivi Jātaka²

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Once the Bodhisatta was a King named Sivi, renowned for his generosity. Although he had given many external gifts, he was not satisfied, and he made a firm determination that if ever he were asked for a part of his body, he would cut it out and give it away.

Sakka, king of the gods, perceived his determination, and when the king went out of his palace, he appeared before him in the guise of an old, blind Brahmin.

“O King! You are famous for being a great and generous man. I am blind, and you have two eyes. Would you give me one eye, then we shall each have one?”

The Bodhisatta king immediately told the old man, “I’ll give you both my eyes”, and, sending for the royal surgeon, the blind man’s eyes were replaced with the King’s eyes.

After a few days, Sakka again appeared before the blind King. Sakka wanted to restore the King’s eyes, but he couldn’t with his own power.

“Your Majesty, although I’m Sakka, king of the gods, I cannot give an eye to anyone. But by the power of truth -- through your act of giving -- your eyes shall be restored to you.”

The Bodhisatta King Sivi made an act of truth and instantly both eyes appeared again.

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2. Jātaka 499, trans. W.H.D. Rouse, The Jātaka Vol. 4 (1901).

Sasa Jātaka³

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In another lifetime, the Bodhisatta was born as a rabbit. One full moon day the rabbit determined to observe the precepts and practise generosity. He thought to himself, "If anybody asks me for food, I will give my own flesh as a meal."

Sakka decided to test the rabbit, and he transformed himself into a poor Brahmin.

He asked the rabbit "What are you doing?". The rabbit replied, "I am observing the precepts on the full moon."

"O friend, if I could get something to eat, I would also observe the precepts like you," said Sakka.

The rabbit was overjoyed. "O good brahmin, please prepare a fire. I will gladly jump into it and offer you my life. When my flesh is cooked, please eat as you like and observe the precepts."

Sakka, by his divine power, quickly kindled a fire and the rabbit jumped fearlessly into the blazing fire.

But miraculously, the good rabbit was not burnt. By his divine power, Sakka took him in his hands, and saved his life. And it is said, in order to make known this noble act to the whole world, Sakka drew the rabbit on the moon.⁴

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3. Jātaka 316, trans. H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, The Jātaka Vol. 3 (1897).

4. In East Asian folklore, the dark markings on the near-side of the moon are believed to represent a rabbit or a hare.

ABHAYA-DĀNA – the giving of confidence

ABHAYA-DĀNA refers to the gift of confidence, or helping others to overcome fear and danger, such as through kind and consoling speech, or saving lives by offering refuge and protection. Traditionally, this has been understood as ‘acts of mercy’, as in the case of kings who show mercy to criminals or refugees and protect the poor. Today, it could also include services such as counselling and pastoral care.

ABHAYA-DĀNA involves the practice of METTĀ (loving-kindness) and KARUṆĀ (compassion), and the observance of the precept of non-killing. One common example is the practice of animal liberation which is performed amongst Buddhists in many countries. It usually involves purchasing live creatures such as cows, fish or birds which have been captured to be eaten or sold, and releasing or arranging for them to live in a suitable environment free from danger.

The story of how the young Prince Siddhartha rescued a swan that had been shot by his cousin, Devadatta, is a good example of ABHAYA-DĀNA. Prince Siddhartha found the wounded bird and tended its wounds with his own hands. When his cousin demanded the swan, saying that it belonged to him, Prince Siddhartha refused. They eventually took their dispute to the palace court, which decreed that the bird belonged to the one who saved its life, not the one who tried to harm it.

DHAMMA-DĀNA – the gift of Dhamma

This refers to the gift of Dhamma, the sharing of knowledge or teachings that eventually lead to one's final liberation or enlightenment.

SABBA-DĀNAṀ DHAMMA-DĀNAṀ JINĀTI

The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts.

After his enlightenment at Bodhgaya, the Buddha spent 45 years teaching the Dhamma which he had realised. He gave his teachings to humans as well as non-humans, including devas, nāgas and others – showing them the path to end all suffering. He also established the order of the Holy Sangha to reach out to spread the Dhamma in all directions.

The Dhamma or Truth as taught by the Buddha is considered the best of all gifts because it leads to one's final liberation and puts an end to the saṃsāric cycle of birth and death. Then there will no longer be any need for other kinds of gifts.

The dissemination of Dhamma has continued for more than 2,500 years up to today, through traditional and modern methods – including Dhamma talks or sermons, publications and recently through social media. The gift of Dhamma also includes the construction of institutes and training centres for the training of monks and nuns.

As long as the Buddhist community continues to support the Sangha wisely in their role to disseminate the sublime teachings of the Buddha, the dispensation will continue for the welfare and happiness of the many.

The Practice of DĀNA

In this way, DĀNA or generosity, in all its different aspects, plays a vital role in the spiritual development of the community. It also paves the way for renunciation, giving up the lesser happiness for the greater happiness.

Although DĀNA can be classified in different ways, it is important to understand that the quality of generosity, giving or sharing, is not limited by these classifications. There are many things which can be given – such as giving our time to volunteer and render services to benefit others; giving a kind smile to someone on the street; or just listening to someone talk out their problems. All these and more encompass acts of generosity.

On one occasion the Buddha spoke on five timely or seasonable gifts, as follows: “One gives to a newcomer. One gives to one going away. One gives to one who is ill. One gives in time of famine. One sets the first fruits of field and orchard in front of those who are virtuous.”⁵

The practice of generosity is fundamental in Buddhism. It is the first of the Ten Perfections (DASA-PĀRAMĪ), as well as of the Ten Meritorious Actions (DASA-PUÑÑĀ-KIRIYA-VATTHU), the first of the four principles of service (SAṄGAHA-VATTHU), and of the ten duties of a king (DASA-RĀJĀ-DHAMMA). It is also one of the seven kinds of wealth.⁶ The Buddha spoke about DĀNA on many occasions, especially to new audiences who did not yet regard him as their teacher.

5. Kāladāna Sutta. AN III.41, “Seasonable Gifts” translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 3 July 2010, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an05/an05.036.than.html>.

6. Vitthataadhana Sutta. AN IV.4. The seven kinds of wealth are: faith, virtue, conscience, prudence, learning (or listening), generosity, and wisdom.

DĀNA is simple to understand and to practise in comparison to other virtues. Someone who finds it difficult to keep the precepts can find it easy to perform acts of giving. Often there are people who do DĀNA or make offerings with all sorts of worldly expectations, but through connection with the Sangha, they begin to understand the true purpose of giving, paving the way for them to correct wrong views and to cultivate SĪLA - morality or good conduct. In this way, DĀNA forms the basis of SĪLA and many other virtues.

The Generosity of the Buddha's Lay Disciples

Amongst the foremost lay disciples of the Buddha, many of them exhibited extraordinary generosity in offerings to the Buddha and the Maha Sangha which paved the way for themselves and many others to grow in Dhamma.

King Bimbisāra offered the Bamboo Grove or Veḷuvana, his pleasure garden, to the Buddha and the Sangha as a place to stay. This was the first ĀRĀMA or monastery accepted by the Buddha.

Another important monastery was offered by Anāthapiṇḍika, a wealthy merchant. His name (actually a nickname) meant "one who gives alms to the needy". After he heard the Buddha preach, he offered to build a monastery for the Buddha and the Sangha in his hometown of Srāvasti. The only place big enough was a park owned by Prince Jeta, who said he would only sell it if Anāthapiṇḍika covered the whole ground with coins. Prince Jeta thought that nobody would accept such an offer, but the next day he saw Anāthapiṇḍika ordering his workers to tile the entire park with gold coins. Inspired by this, the Prince offered the remaining land that was not yet covered with coins, and all the trees within it.

This is why in the Suttas it is always referred to as ‘Anāthapiṇḍika’s Monastery in Jeta’s Wood’, recognising both the donors. The Buddha spent nineteen Rains retreats there, more than any other place.

The foremost female lay disciple of the Buddha was Visākhā, a wealthy matriarch. She offered meals to the Sangha daily and always kept the house door open so that people in need of food or clothes could call for assistance. She also offered a monastery to the Buddha, called Pubbārāma, also in Srāvastī, where the Buddha spent six Rains retreats. (So the Buddha actually spent 25 Rains in Srāvastī, out of his 45 years’ ministry.)

Prince Vessantara⁷

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The Buddha himself perfected his DĀNA to the highest level, until he was able to readily give up his most treasured possessions, parts of his body and even his own life.

In his second-last birth as a human, he was born as Prince Vessantara. Even as a little child he exhibited extraordinary generosity, giving all his princely adornments away to his nursemaids. When he was eight years old, he even thought of giving away his flesh or his organs, should anyone ask for them.

When he became king, he gave away the kingdom's auspicious white elephant. At this, the people were outraged and Vessantara was banished to the mountains with his wife and children. There, an old Brahmin came and asked for his children and he gave them away. Finally, Sakka, once again decided to test the Bodhisatta's generosity and taking human form, he asked Vessantara for his wife. Hesitating only for a moment, he said yes. This shows the Bodhisatta's extraordinary determination to perfect his generosity in order to achieve Buddhahood, by giving up even his beloved family members. Immediately, however, Sakka revealed himself and returned his wife, and they were later reunited with their children.

This is yet another example of how the Buddha strived to perfect DĀNA to the highest level in order to become a perfectly-enlightened Buddha.

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7. Jātaka 547, trans. E. B. Cowell, The Jātaka Vol. 6 (1907).

The Benefits of DĀNA

According to the law of karma or cause and effect, what you have now is what you have given in the past, and what you give now is what you will receive in the future. There are many benefits of generosity, but according to Buddhist teachings, they are usually classified under the fourfold and fivefold blessings.

The fourfold blessings:⁸

1. *ĀYU* - long life (or increase of life-span)
2. *VAṆṆA* - complexion
3. *SUKHA* - happiness
4. *BALA* - strength

These blessings are often recited by Sangha members upon receiving DĀNA or alms food.

The food that one offers helps to sustain and prolong the life of the receiver. It also provides the necessary nutrients to maintain a healthy complexion and to give happiness and strength. As such, these same blessings are invoked for the donor.⁹ These qualities are a useful support for the cultivation of one's mind, to develop wisdom and insight into the true nature of life, thereby paving the way for one's ultimate liberation.

8. Dhammapada verse 109: "Abhivādanasīlissa niccaṃ vuḍḍhāpacāyino; cattāro dhammā vaḍḍhanti āyu vaṇṇo sukhaṃ balaṃ."

9. Bhojana Sutta, AN III.41. "The donor gives five things to the recipient. Which five? Life, beauty, happiness, strength, & quick-wittedness. Having given [these things]... he/she has a share [in them]." Cf. 'Āyuraṃ deti, vaṇṇaṃ deti, sukhaṃ deti, balaṃ deti, Paṭibhāṇaṃ deti.'

The fivefold blessings:¹⁰

1. *gain the affection of many*
2. *noble association*
3. *good reputation*
4. *fulfilling (household) life*
5. *heavenly rebirth*

One who is generous will naturally be loved by others, and through generosity one is able to make connections with authentic teachers, including noble members of the Sangha. Good reputation and the ability to lead a fulfilling household life will also grow for one whose generosity is well directed. And upon death a good heavenly rebirth is assured.

Generally, DĀNA or giving yields wealth. However, the benefits will depend on the purity of both parties – the donor and the recipient. It is said that immediately upon donating the Mūlagandha Kuṭi in Sārnāth for the Buddha to spend his first Rains retreat, a large mansion appeared in the celestial realm for the donor. In particular, the purity of the donor's intention to give without expectation of reward is of paramount importance.

10. Dānānisamsa Sutta, AN III.40. "Bahuno janassa piyo hoti manāpo; santo sappurisā bhajanti; kalyāṇo kittisaddo abbhuggacchati; gihidhammā anapagato hoti; kāyassa bhedā paramā maraṇā sugatiṃ saggaṃ lokaṃ upapajjati."

How to practise DĀNA

In terms of the Noble Eightfold Path, the act of generosity or DĀNA comprises four of the eight path factors: Right Action, Right Effort, Right Understanding and Right Mindfulness.¹¹ And in order to purify or properly perform the act of giving, the four other path factors should also be taken into consideration: Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Livelihood and Right Concentration.

In other words, in order to obtain the full benefit of our acts of generosity, we need to have proper understanding why we perform such actions. The true purpose of practising DĀNA is to reduce greed or attachment (TAṆHĀ) which is the cause of suffering. Outer expressions of DĀNA, such as material gifts and physical actions are an important support for us to cultivate the inner quality of generosity – an open heart, free from clinging and attachment.

However, many people give with all sorts of ulterior motives. Giving with the intention to increase one's profit, fame or influence is not an act of generosity because it will not reduce greed and attachment.

Different individuals practise generosity according to their level of understanding. Some will give a little, expecting a lot in return. Some will give because others ask them to give. Some give because they feel obliged to give. Very few people are able to give without any strings attached, without any expectations.

Most people like to receive rather than to give. But we can learn a lot about giving from nature and the environment around us. The plants with beautiful, fragrant flowers give their nectar and pollen to the birds, bees and insects. In return, they receive the benefits of being pollinated,

11. Ref. Mahācattārisaka Sutta MN III.71 ff.

fertilised and propagated far and wide. In the same way, our generosity will go a long way to benefit others as well as ourselves. It is the natural law of cause and effect: ‘What goes around, comes around’. As we receive, so should we give.

Many people may be prepared to give away something which they do not like or are unable to use, but few are those who are able to give things which they cherish most. Parting with things which you like very much may be difficult and painful at first. But it will bring much joy and happiness, because the real purpose of giving is to reduce craving and attachment, which is the root cause of all our suffering.

Extending the Practice of DĀNA

There is a saying that ‘charity begins at home’, however, we should not confine generosity towards our immediate family only. If we believe that this is not our only lifetime, and that we have lived from life to life, we will soon realise that our family members are not limited to those at home.

The Buddha taught:

NA SO BHIKKHAVE
SATTO SULABHARŪPO YO
NA MĀTĀ-BHŪTA-PUBBO
NA PITĀ-BHŪTA-PUBBO
NA BHĀTĀ-BHŪTA-PUBBO
NA BHAGINĪ-BHŪTA-PUBBO
NA PUTTA-BHŪTA-PUBBO
NA DHĪTĀ-BHŪTA-PUBBO
IMINĀ DĪGHENA ADDHUNĀ ¹²

12. Mātu Sutta SN II.189 ff.

Difficult it is, O monks,
to find a being who has not been your mother, your father,
your brother, your sister, your son, your daughter;
at some point in the past.

As such, we need to learn to extend our acts of generosity and hospitality to all those around us, whoever is in need of help – irrespective of the colour their skin, the language they speak, or the country they were born in. The way to break such barriers is through the cultivation of *METTĀ* or loving-kindness. *METTĀ* promotes and enhances generosity.

When we understand the true purpose and benefits of *DĀNA*, we will be able to give joyfully, knowing it will help us to reduce and overcome greed (*TANĦĀ*). Giving should also be performed with humility, with courteous speech, and the gift given should be obtained through Right Livelihood – that is, through righteous means – not by killing, stealing, lying, harming others or other improper methods.

Our acts of generosity become pure when they are performed without *TANĦĀ* (greed), *MĀNA* (conceit) and *DIṬṬHI* (false view).

DIṬṬHI or false view refers to the idea of “I, my, me, mine”. We often give to others, thinking that “**I** am giving you **my** item”. Actually, there is no such thing as “I, my, me, mine”. They are merely concepts which we use in conventional language. Those who study and practise the Dhamma will realise the reality of “I” and “my” and that is how they will be able to practise the ultimate giving – understanding that the giver is empty in nature, the act of giving is empty, and the receiver is also empty.

Such giving is also free from pride and conceit which arises through comparing one’s gift to that of others. It is also free from fear, such as the fear of what others would think of us if we do not give.

Once the idea of “I, my, me, mine” is dissolved, giving is just giving, pure and simple. But we need to learn how to give, step by step, before we are able to reach that state of pure, ultimate giving, where there is no expectation whatsoever.

Those who are able to give without any expectation of return will not suffer from disappointment. Those who give with ulterior motives may be disappointed at times and become discouraged from practising generosity.

Another way in which we are able to purify our acts of giving is by maintaining pure and wholesome thoughts throughout the process of giving – before, during and after the act of giving. We should rejoice from the time the thought of giving arises. While we are performing the act of giving, we also rejoice. And after the act of giving, whenever we think that we have given, we rejoice with our actions.

Making aspirations

In practising DĀNA we should also know how to make proper aspirations that will eventually lead us to our final liberation. Aspirations and expectations are two different things. In making aspirations, we are setting the direction in which we wish our meritorious actions to ripen.

We should understand that good begets good. Knowing that our good actions will yield good results, we direct our aspirations where we wish the good results to ripen. Expectation is wanting something in return for our good action, often for worldly gain.

In making aspirations, we need to consider three kinds of aspiration:

1. *aspirations concerning this lifetime* – for success in this life.
2. *aspirations for our next life* – to have a good birth hereafter so that we will be able to continue our Dhamma practice.
3. *aspirations for the attainment of Nibbāna* – to put an end to all sufferings, by putting an end to the saṃsāric cycle of birth and death by overcoming greed, hatred and delusion. There is also a nobler aspiration to attain enlightenment in order to be able to lead others out of saṃsāra.

Aspirations are intentions generated in our minds. As such they are karma performed at the mental level. It is like sowing the seeds of enlightenment. Once the seeds are sown, we need to nurture them through the practice of SĪLA or sense restraint, and BHĀVANĀ or mental culture.

SĪLA



**Avoid Evil,
Do Good!**

Morality

SĪLA

SĪLA means morality, virtue, or good conduct and involves the restraint of one's speech and body actions. It is one of the mental factors (CETANA) which compose the mind and forms the basis of SAMĀDHI (concentration) and PAÑÑĀ (wisdom).

SĪLA or morality comprises Right Speech (SAMMĀ-VĀCĀ), Right Body Action (SAMMĀ-KAMMANTO), and Right Livelihood (SAMMĀ-ĀJĪVO).¹³ Right Speech is the avoidance of lying, slander, harsh speech, and frivolous talk. It is also speaking the truth, speaking in a manner that unites rather than divides people, as well as speech that is polite, courteous, and useful (instead of harsh or useless talk such as gossiping).

Right Body Action refers to the avoidance of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, whilst respecting the sanctity of life, respecting the rights of ownership and respecting established relationships.¹⁴

13. Cūḷavedalla Sutta MN I.299 ff.

14. Saccavibhaṅga Sutta, MN III.247 ff.

Right Livelihood involves the avoidance of killing, stealing, and causing hurt or harm to any living being. It includes the avoidance of five kinds of unrighteous livelihood, namely:¹⁵

1. *production and sale of armaments or weapons to kill beings.*
2. *slave trade (including human trafficking)*
3. *bringing up animals for slaughter*
4. *production and sale of intoxicants, which cause one to lose control of one's mind*
5. *production and sale of poisons*

There are also other classifications that enhance our understanding of SĪLA:

VĀRITTA-SĪLA & CĀRITTA-SĪLA¹⁶

1. VĀRITTA-SĪLA – the avoidance of unwholesome actions through the observance of precepts or moral training rules, such as avoiding killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying etc.
2. CĀRITTA-SĪLA – the performance of wholesome actions such as having respect for the sanctity of all living beings, respect for the rights of ownership and so on, and fulfilling one's duties and responsibilities towards others (as mentioned in the Sigālovāda Sutta). It also refers to the development of positive qualities such as reverence, humility, gratitude or patience.

VĀRITTA-SĪLA and CĀRITTA-SĪLA can be summarised as 'avoiding evil' and 'doing good'.

15. Vaṇijjā Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya V.177: 'Pañcimā bhikkhave, vaṇijjā upāsakena akaraṇīyā. Katamā pañca: Sattavaṇijjā, sattavaṇijjā, mamsavaṇijjā, majjavaṇijjā, visavaṇijjā. Imā kho bhikkhave, pañca vaṇijjā upāsakena akaraṇīyāti.'

16. Visuddhimagga I.26.

PAKATI-SĪLA & PAÑÑATTI-SĪLA¹⁷

1. PAKATI-SĪLA – naturally occurring moral laws, which when transgressed, give rise to remorse and disturbance in oneself, even though nobody knows about one's actions. Such actions include killing, stealing, and lying.
2. PAÑÑATTI-SĪLA – prescribed, man-made rules which may vary from time to time and place to place, and are karmically neutral.

It is important to understand the distinction between PAKATI- and PAÑÑATTI-SĪLA, otherwise, doubts about the importance and application of morality or ethics may arise. Some people believe that “morality lies in the eyes of the beholder”, and that what is ethical to one person may not be ethical to others. The truth is that there is such a thing as naturally occurring moral law (PAKATI-SĪLA). It is the prescribed or man-made law (PAÑÑATTI-SĪLA) that may change according to circumstances.

The Criteria for Moral Actions

From the Buddhist perspective, there are specific criteria for moral actions, as laid out in the Kālāma Sutta.¹⁸ The Buddha asked the Kālāmas “Is greed good? Is hatred good? Is delusion good?” to which the Kālāmas responded that no, these three things are not good. Then the Buddha asked, “Is generosity good? Is loving-kindness good? Is wisdom good?” to which the Kālāmas replied that yes, these things are good. In this way, the Buddha demonstrated to the Kālāmas that any moral action may be called ‘good’ on the basis that it is performed through generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom. And on the other hand, immoral or ‘evil’, actions are those performed through greed, hatred, and delusion.

17. Sumaṅgala Vilāsinī (Comm. on Dīgha Nikāya), I.290.

18 Kālāma (Kesamutti) Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya III.65.

It is also important to understand the distinction between 'good' and 'evil' actions, and 'skilful' and 'unskilful' actions, according to the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha actually made use of two separate pairs of terms to describe our actions:

PUÑÑĀ-KAMMA & PĀPA-KAMMA

The words PUÑÑĀ and PĀPA were used by many religious groups during the Buddha's time. They referred to actions that are praiseworthy (PUÑÑĀ) or blameworthy (PĀPA). The Buddha used PUÑÑĀ to describe actions that support and bring happiness in this life and the next. He used PĀPA to describe actions that will obstruct and bring suffering in this life and the next.

An example of PUÑÑĀ-KAMMA is the **Ten Meritorious Actions, (DASA-PUÑÑĀ-KIRIYA-VATTHU):**

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Generosity | DĀNA |
| 2. Moral discipline | SĪLA |
| 3. Mental culture | BHĀVANĀ |
| 4. Reverence | APACĀYANA |
| 5. Service | VEYYĀVACCA |
| 6. Transference of merit | PATTIDĀNA |
| 7. Rejoicing in others' goodness | ANUMODANĀ |
| 8. Listening to Dhamma | DHAMMA-SAVANA |
| 9. Sharing Dhamma | DHAMMA-DESANĀ |
| 10. Straightening one's views | DIṬṬHIJJU-KAMMA |

PUNÑA is also referred to as ‘merits’. Meritorious actions will bring us happiness and a more comfortable life in our present and future births, but they do not necessarily lead us out of the suffering of saṃsāra. Although our conduct may be meritorious and praiseworthy, it can still be motivated by self-interest and influenced by tendencies of greed, hatred, or delusion.

KUSALA-KAMMA & AKUSALA-KAMMA

On the other hand, the terms KUSALA and AKUSALA are unique to Buddhism. The Buddha used the word KUSALA to refer to actions that are skilfully done. According to the commentaries,¹⁹ the word KUSALA comes from ‘kusa’ grass, which is thin and sharp like a sword, and will cut whatever it touches. Similarly, actions described as KUSALA skilfully cut away any defilements that may arise. KUSALA-KAMMA, wholesome or skilful actions, help one to overcome greed, hatred and delusion in thought, speech and body action, and thus lead towards one’s liberation from saṃsāra.²⁰

Amongst the list of Ten Meritorious Actions, or the DASA-PUNÑĀ-KIRIYA-VATTHU mentioned earlier, all of them are PUNÑĀ-KAMMA, meritorious actions that support and bring happiness in this life and the next. However, not all of them would necessarily be KUSALA-KAMMA, directly contributing to the overcoming of greed, hatred and delusion, except the first three: DĀNA, SĪLA, BHĀVANĀ.

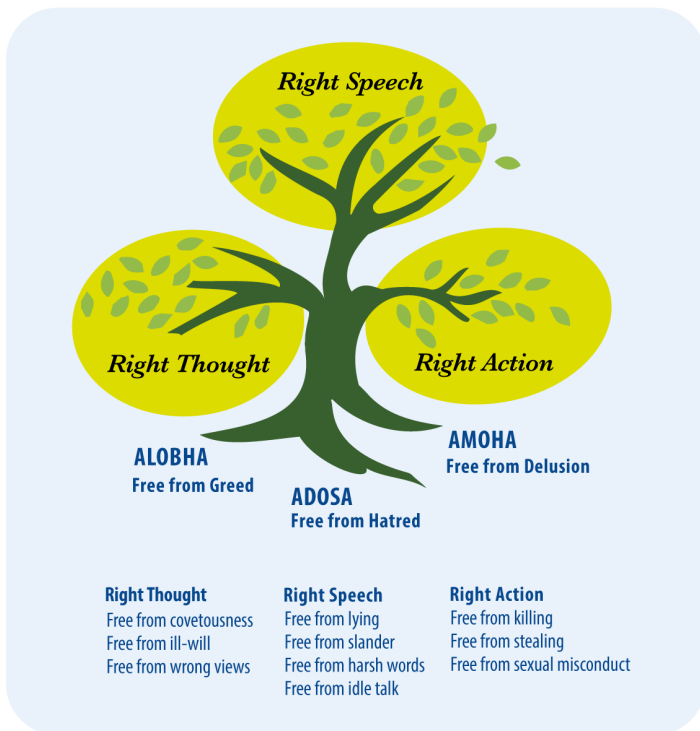
The ten wholesome actions, or DASA-KUSALA-KAMMA, are frequently explained in terms of their opposites, the ten unwholesome actions to be avoided.

19. Atthasālinī 39.

20. Interpretation of Two Principle Ethical Terms in Early Buddhism, P.D. Premasiri.

These AKUSALA-KAMMA arise from greed, hatred and delusion, and their results are suffering and continuing bondage in saṃsāra. They are:

- *three kinds of wrong bodily actions – killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct*
- *four kinds of wrong speech – lying, slander, harsh words, and idle talk*
- *three kinds of wrong thoughts – greed (or covetousness), ill-will, and wrong views.*



Ten Wholesome Actions DASA-KUSALA-KAMMA

Precepts or Moral Training Rules

In order to protect both monastic and lay followers from engaging in actions that give rise to suffering, and to promote a harmonious way of life, the Buddha prescribed the practice of SĪLA in terms of precepts or moral training rules. These include the Five Precepts, Eight Precepts, Ten Precepts, and the code of conduct (or PAṬIMOKKHA) for the BHIKKHU (monks) and BHIKKHUNĪ (nuns) Sangha.

The Five Precepts – PAÑCA SĪLA

PĀṆĀTIPĀTĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from taking life.

ADINNĀDĀNĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from stealing.

KĀMESU-MICCHĀCĀRĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM
SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from sexual misconduct.

MUSĀVĀDĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from false speech.

SURĀ-MERAYA-MAJJA-PAMĀDAṬṬHĀNĀ VERAMAṆĪ
SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs that cause heedlessness.

Whilst these precepts refer specifically to avoiding the negative aspects of bodily actions and speech, at the same time the positive aspect is also implied. In other words, for the first precept – abstaining from

Avoid	Respect
1. Taking life	1. The sanctity of life
2. Stealing	2. The rights of ownership
3. Sexual misconduct	3. Established relationships
4. False speech	4. And uphold the truth
5. Taking intoxicating drinks /drugs	5. Mental health

The Five Precepts

killing – respecting the sanctity of all living beings is implied. In the same manner, instead of stealing, one respects the rights of ownership. Instead of sexual misconduct, one respects others’ established relationships. Instead of lying, one upholds the truth. Instead of indulging in drugs and intoxicants, which cause one to lose control of one’s mind, one has respect for mental health.

These five precepts are the basic moral training rules for lay Buddhists. They are observed voluntarily upon the understanding that good begets good, and evil begets evil. They promote and maintain harmony at home or wherever one lives, so that the immediate environment is conducive to mental cultivation and discipline of the mind.

Although the five precepts are considered basic moral training rules, they may not be so easy for some people to observe, owing to the nature of those people’s livelihood, their association with the wrong company, and also due to their own habitual tendencies. However, a sincere Dhamma practitioner, upon realising the negative consequences of transgressing these precepts, would willingly take it upon themselves to observe them.

Even though they may continue to make mistakes over and over again, they will make a determined effort to renew and observe these basic precepts, especially on full moon days, new moon days and other occasions when they are able to visit the vihara or temple.

Association with good company – which is recommended in the Maṅgala Sutta²¹ and other teachings – is important for those who wish to lead a peaceful and harmonious way of life, as it supports one to uphold the precepts and practise other virtues.

It is also important to understand that precepts, unlike ‘commandments’, are observed voluntarily. That is why there is a tradition of requesting the administration of the Three Refuges and Five Precepts on formal occasions.

Participating in formal ceremonies where there is a Sangha member to administer the Three Refuges and Five Precepts is useful as it provides support for one’s determination to observe the precepts, until such time as one is confident to renew the precepts on one’s own. It is very good to discipline oneself and make it a habit to go for refuge and to renew the Five precepts on a daily basis. The practice of renewing our precepts reminds us to avoid evil and do good. Hence the need for a religious routine.

The fact that amongst the Buddha’s disciples, people such as Aṅgulimāla, a bandit who killed many people, and Āmbapālī, a courtesan or prostitute, were able to gain their final liberation within that very lifetime, clearly shows that there are effective methods of transcending good and evil through the practice of Dhamma. In particular, the cultivation of mindfulness results in such purification of the mind.

21. Khuddaka Nikāya, Sutta-Nipāta 2.4.

During meditation retreats based on mindfulness, one is usually expected to go for refuge in the Buddha Dhamma Sangha and undertake to observe either the Five or Eight Precepts. The observance of precepts comprises avoiding evil and doing good, and the practice of mindfulness involves the purification of the mind. That is what Buddhism is about: “To avoid all evil; to do good; and to purify one's own mind.”

The Eight Precepts

UPOSATHA-AṬṬHAṄGA-SĪLA

On UPOSATHA²² (or Sabbath) days, such as Full Moon, New Moon and quarter moon days, the more devout lay Buddhists may take upon themselves to observe the UPOSATHA-AṬṬHAṄGA-SĪLA – **the Eight Precepts observed on UPOSATHA days:**

PĀṆĀTIPĀTĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from taking life.

ADINNĀDĀNĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from stealing.

ABRAHMACARIYĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from incelibacy.

MUSĀVĀDĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from false speech.

SURĀ-MERAYA-MAJJA-PAMĀDAṬṬHĀNĀ VERAMAṆĪ

SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs that cause heedlessness.

22. UPOSATHA – usually observed on Full Moon and New Moon days.

VIKĀLA-BHOJANĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI
I undertake the precept to abstain from eating at improper times.

NACCA-GĪTA-VĀDITA-VISŪKA-DASSANĀ MĀLĀ-GANDHA-
VILEPANA-DHĀRAṆA-MANḌANA-VIBHŪSANATṬHĀNĀ
VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI
I undertake the precept to abstain from dancing, singing, music,
shows, wearing garlands, using perfume and beautifying myself
with cosmetics.

UCCĀSAYANA-MAHĀSAYANĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM
SAMĀDIYĀMI
I undertake the precept to abstain from using high and luxurious
seats and beds.

Compared to the basic Five Precepts, there are three extra precepts involving abstinence from indulgence in food and other sensual pleasures such as singing, music, shows, etc., and indulgence in luxurious seats and beds. In addition, instead of just avoiding sexual misconduct, the training rule here is the observance of celibacy.

The aim of these extra training rules that are observed on UPOSATHA days is to facilitate the training of the mind. It does not mean that Buddhists are not allowed to sing, dance, and so on. These precepts are to be taken voluntarily on certain occasions in order to support one's mental cultivation.

ĀJĪVA-AṬṬHAMAKA-AṬṬHAṄGA-SĪLA

Lay Buddhists who wish to cultivate their minds in retreat conditions or on a long-term basis may observe another kind of Eight Precepts called ĀJĪVA-AṬṬHAMAKA-AṬṬHAṄGA-SĪLA – **the Eight Precepts ending with Right Livelihood:**

PĀṆĀTIPĀTĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from taking life.

ADINNĀDĀNĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from stealing.

ABRAHMACARIYĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from incelibacy.²³

MUSĀVĀDĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from false speech.

PISUṆĀYA VĀCĀYA VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from slander.

PHARUSĀYA VĀCĀYA VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM

SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from harsh or impolite speech.

SAMPHAPPALĀPĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from frivolous talk.

MICCHĀ-ĀJĪVĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI

I undertake the precept to abstain from improper or unrighteous livelihood.

23. Householders may substitute 'KĀMESU-MICCHĀCĀRĀ VERAMAṆĪ SIKKHĀPADAM SAMĀDIYĀMI' - I undertake the precept to abstain from sexual misconduct.

The alternative Eight Precepts consist of abstaining from the three kinds of wrong bodily actions and four kinds of wrong speech, and observing right livelihood, which involves honesty and sincerity in Dhamma practice and the avoidance of hypocrisy and deceitful conduct, thus making one worthy of alms-food.

These alternative Eight Precepts are meant especially for long-term practitioners irrespective of gender. When practised together with mindfulness, they provide an excellent opportunity for the cultivation of the Noble Eightfold Path – the path to overcome all the sufferings that accompany birth, old age, sickness, and death.

Apart from the common Five and Eight Precepts, there are also the Ten Precepts and still higher precepts observed by the ordained BHIKKHU (monks) and BHIKKHUNĪ (nuns).

The purpose of the observance of precepts

For some people, undertaking the observance of precepts may seem like a sacrifice of one's freedom and enjoyments, but it is an important step in training to overcome the habitual tendencies of greed, hatred, and delusion. Considering all the pain and suffering created for oneself and others from life to life through wrong thoughts, speech, and bodily actions, any sacrifice involved is surely worthwhile.

Observing precepts serves to free the mind from remorse. A mind that is free from remorse will naturally be composed, which in turn conditions joy, happiness, and calmness – qualities which are conducive to the development of SAMMĀ-SAMĀDHI or Right Concentration. Right Concentration conditions the ability to 'see things as they are' which in

turn conditions disenchantment, dispassion, and detachment to arise. And through detachment arises freedom or liberation.²⁴



Progress of Practice from Sila to Liberation

In this way, SĪLA provides the foundation for the development of concentration, which in turn conditions wisdom to develop. Without concentration, we will not be able to gain the wisdom and insight into the true nature of life, and without morality and the restraint of our sense faculties, we will not be able to perfect our concentration. That is why the Noble Eightfold Path is also described progressively in terms of SĪLA (morality), SAMĀDHI (concentration) and PAÑÑĀ (wisdom).

24. Paṭhama-upanisā Sutta, AN V.313.

The benefits of observing SĪLA

While the greatest benefit of observing SĪLA is liberation, there are also other benefits at the worldly level. The Saṅgīti Sutta mentions five benefits:²⁵

1. *amassing a large fortune*
2. *good reputation which spreads far and wide*
3. *confidence in dealing with others*
4. *peaceful death*
5. *good rebirth*

The fact that the observance of SĪLA gives rise to wealth is often overlooked because most people believe that lying and cheating are necessary in order to become rich. An honest, respectful, and dutiful child is likely to be loved by their parents and receive the family inheritance. A hard-working and respectful student will naturally receive the attention and commendation of their teachers, which will pave the way for a good start in life. A reliable and trustworthy employee will be rewarded by their employer and promoted to positions of responsibility. Honest, hardworking businesspeople will develop goodwill amongst their customers and succeed in their business.

Success obtained through good moral conduct often results in large fortune and peaceful life, whereas wealth acquired through lying, cheating, and other devious or unrighteous means may give rise to a large fortune but little peace and harmony. Hence the importance of the observance of SĪLA or moral training rules.

25. DN III.236.

The second benefit with regard to a good reputation is not difficult to understand. Those who are virtuous and of good conduct will naturally earn a good reputation. They will also have nothing to fear in facing any assembly. It is usually those who have committed wrongdoing such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying who will be fearful and lack the courage to face others because of their guilty conscience. Those who are addicted to intoxicants also run the risk of earning a bad reputation. In a court of law and amongst the public in general, the words of alcoholics and gamblers will not be accepted.

The remaining benefits of the observance of SĪLA with regard to a peaceful death and a good rebirth are very important if we are to continue our spiritual journey to enlightenment.

The benefits of the observance of SĪLA are often echoed in the traditional blessings chanted after the administration of the Five Precepts:

SĪLENA SUGATIṂ YANTI,
SĪLENA BHOGA-SAMPADĀ,
SĪLENA NIBBUTIṂ YANTI,
TASMĀ SĪLAṂ VISODHAYE.²⁶

Through SĪLA one attains a good rebirth.
Through SĪLA one acquires wealth.
Through SĪLA one attains one's final liberation, or Nibbāna.
Therefore one should keep one's precepts pure.

26. Traditional exhortation by Preceptor to the laity taking the Five Precepts, in the Thai tradition.

Kulāvaka Jātaka²⁷

★★★

The following Jātaka story illustrates the merits of observing the Five Precepts.

Once the Bodhisatta was born as a man named Magha the Good. He used to encourage all the other families in the village to do good, and to engage in various forms of social services. Due to his virtues and meritorious activities, upon death, he was reborn as Sakka, king of the gods. Of Magha's four wives, three had actively joined in his good work, and thus they were also reborn in Tāvātimsa where Sakka resides. The fourth, however, had shown no interest in those meritorious deeds and as a result, she was born as a crane. King Sakka perceived where she had been born and thought "Because she did no merit, the foolish girl has been reborn as an animal. It is my duty to have her perform some work of merit and bring her here."

Sakka appeared before her and through his divine power he showed her where his other wives had been born. He told her that she had been reborn as a crane because she had not done any merit, and then he taught her the Five Precepts and told her to keep them without fail.

From that time on, the crane only ate fish that had died a natural death. After a few days had passed, Sakka decided to test her. He took the form of a fish, and lay down on the sand, pretending to be dead. When the crane saw the fish, she took it in her beak. Just as she was about to swallow the fish, it wriggled its tail. The instant she discovered the fish was alive she released it into the water.

Three times he tested her, and each time she released the fish, bearing in mind the First Precept. Sakka revealed himself and

27. Jātaka 31, trans. Robert Chalmers, The Jātaka Vol. 1 (1895).

told her it was good she was following the Five Precepts and that she should continue to do so.

Before long, the crane passed away, and due to the merit she had gained from observing the Five Precepts, she was reborn as a human, the daughter of a potter. After some time, Sakka again looked for her, and this time he disguised himself as an old man with a cart full of golden cucumbers. Many people came to buy these amazing cucumbers, but he refused, saying they were not for sale, but he would give them away to one who is wholesome and practises the Five Precepts.

The townspeople said they have never heard of the Five Precepts. But the potter's daughter told him that she follows Five Precepts and is peaceful and happy. Sakka presented the cucumbers to her and told her "Here is wealth sufficient for you to live on. Keep the Five Precepts unbroken."

For the rest of her life, the woman was very generous with her wealth and finally gained the merits to take rebirth as the daughter of the King of Asuras. The Asura king was pleased with her goodness and unusual beauty. He gathered all the Asuras together and gave her the freedom to choose a husband. Sakka, perceiving his former wife's latest rebirth, came to the Asura world and took the form of an ordinary ugly Asura. He thought, 'If she chooses a husband whose inner qualities of wholesomeness are the same as hers, we will be reunited at last!'

Because of her past association with Magha the Good and King Sakka, the Asura princess was drawn to him and she chose him from amongst all the Asuras. King Sakka took her to Tāvātimsa and again made her his wife.

★★★

How to practise SĪLA

In order to develop SĪLA to perfection, one should be ready not only to sacrifice one's material possessions or body parts but even one's own life. That is how the Buddha practised SĪLA in his past lives. The perfection of SĪLA is one of the Ten Perfections of a fully-enlightened Buddha. Therefore, it is important that we know how to put SĪLA into practice and develop steadfastness in the Dhamma.

We need to have a sense of HIRI or shame over our moral transgressions, and OTTAPPA or fear of doing wrong. The sense of shame and fear, or conscience, is something natural within all of us. It prevents us from indulging in wrong thoughts, speech, and bodily actions, and from making the same mistakes over and over again. It becomes stronger when we practise the Dhamma and start to realise the consequences of our unskilful actions, which result in suffering for ourselves and others.

These qualities are useful during the course of training, but if we become very judgemental and overburdened by guilt conscience, they can also hinder our development. The right balance can be achieved through the cultivation of METTĀ, KARUṆĀ, MUDITĀ, UPEKKHĀ, which will eventually lead us to cultivate the wisdom of non-duality (going beyond good and evil) leading to the purification of the mind.

The admission of shortcomings and seeking forgiveness from the Buddha Dhamma Sangha is also a very important practice to support our cultivation of SĪLA. This will help to relieve one from the burden of remorse or a guilty conscience, and should form part of our daily religious routine. For the monastic Sangha, the practice of admission of shortcomings and confession is formally observed as a community on UPOSATHA days. This plays an important role in maintaining unity and harmony within the Sangha.

Proper reflection or contemplation is also an important support to deter us from indulging our senses. It is often our clinging to sensual pleasures that leads to violation of precepts. The contemplation on the loathsomeness or repulsiveness of the body²⁸ and the reflection on the realities of life²⁹ are very useful in reducing our tendency of clinging to the body or form, and thereby to sensual pleasures, and well as developing a sense of urgency to put the Dhamma into practice.

In addition, reaffirming our own aspirations and determination frequently will help us to maintain and improve our practice of SĪLA. Owing to the strength of the habitual tendencies we have developed over many lifetimes; we need effort and perseverance to overcome our habit patterns. We also need to have the right motivation to cultivate virtues, along with skilful speech and skilful bodily actions, so that we will be able to develop and purify our minds in order to gain our final liberation, as well as to be able to pave the way for others to walk the Dhamma's path.

Just as DĀNA (or generosity) is the basis of SĪLA (or good conduct), SĪLA is the foundation of BHĀVANĀ (or mental culture).

28. The 32 parts of the body.

29. The five reflections on old age, sickness, death, separation and karma. See page 55.

BHĀVANĀ



Mental Culture

BHĀVANĀ

The term BHĀVANĀ (from the Sanskrit and Pāli root √bhū, bhāvane: 'to cultivate') was a common word in ancient India. BHĀVAYATI/BHĀVETI came from the verbal root √bhū, which means to produce or cultivate a field of crops.³⁰

A farmer has to know many things beyond simply sowing seeds in order to harvest a crop – such as how to prepare and nourish the soil; when to sow, irrigate, prune and harvest; how to mend and maintain his tools etc. In the same way, BHĀVANĀ encapsulates the entirety of the Buddhist path – a holistic inner development involving body, speech and mind. However, in the context of DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ, the emphasis is more specifically on the mental aspects of cultivation.

BHĀVANĀ is sometimes translated into English as 'meditation', but in modern society, when people hear the word 'meditation', they commonly think of a method of calming the mind and 'zoning out'. The holistic cultivation implied by the term BHĀVANĀ goes above and beyond this. Here, we will use the term 'mental culture', because BHĀVANĀ is about cultivating and harmonising our mental faculties, in order to overcome and ultimately transcend the saṃsāric cycle of birth and death.

30. Entry 93949 (bhāvana), Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary: causative of √bhū 'to be' = 'causing to be, producing, manifesting'. See also Kaṣī-bhāradvāja Sutta SN I.4, where the Buddha compares mental cultivation with ploughing a field.

Mental culture

BHĀVANĀ involves Right Effort (SAMMĀ-VĀYĀMA), Right Mindfulness (SAMMĀ-SATI), and Right Concentration (SAMMĀ-SAMĀDHI).³¹ Right Effort is fourfold. It refers to the effort to prevent and overcome unwholesome or unskilful states of mind, and the effort to develop and maintain wholesome or skilful states of mind.

Right Mindfulness refers to the cultivation of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness – namely: mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind, and the Dhamma – and not clinging to, nor having aversion towards any of these four foundations.

Right Concentration involves clear awareness of the cultivation of the four mental absorptions, namely PAṬHAMA, DUTIYA, TATIYA and CATUTTHA JHĀNAS; or the first, second, third, and fourth JHĀNAS.

These three factors are the foundation for the development of wisdom or PAÑÑĀ, which enables us to overcome the root causes of suffering: greed, hatred and delusion.

When we use the terms ‘mental cultivation’, ‘mental culture’ or ‘meditation’, it implies the need to get used to dwelling in certain mental states of calmness and clarity by applying the three path factors of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. In the process of training or taming the mind, one needs to get into the state of calmness and clarity again and again, and to remain there for longer and longer, until the mind really becomes familiar with such calm and peaceful states. We cannot cultivate the mind by merely reading or listening to the meditation instructions a few times. We need to do it again and again, and develop a continuity of mindfulness in order to overcome the proliferation of thoughts.

31. Cūḷavedalla Sutta MN I.299 ff.

Seven Stages of Purity

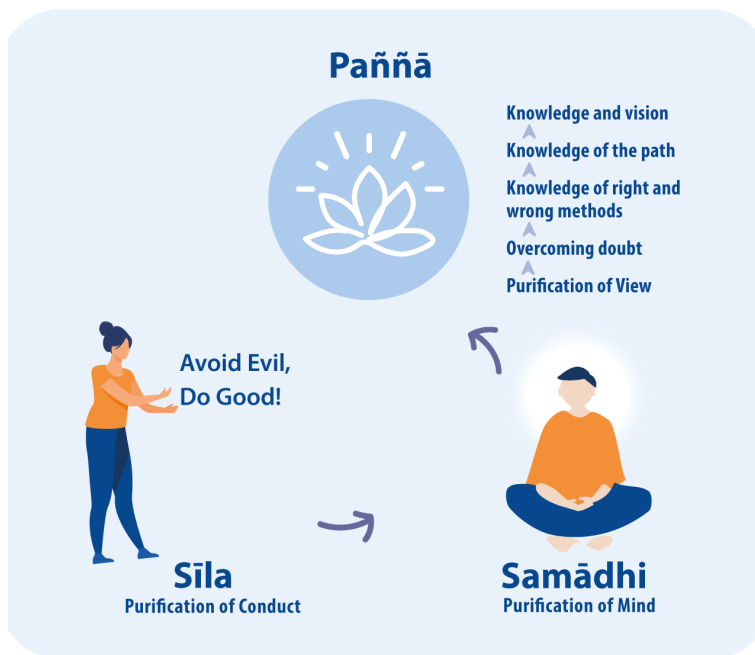
By developing the mind in accordance with the Noble Eightfold Path, the tendencies of grasping and aversion will naturally be reduced, thereby resulting in the purification of the mind. This process involves seven stages of purity, or SATTA-VISUDDHI.³² The first stage of purity is SĪLA, followed by SAMĀDHI. Thereafter follow five stages of purification related to PAÑÑĀ: purification of view; purification by overcoming doubt; purification through knowledge of right and wrong methods; purification through knowledge of the path; and finally, purification of knowledge and vision.³³

Purification of view trains the mind to clearly distinguish the self in terms of mind and body, or mental and physical phenomena – NĀMA-RŪPA-PARICCHEDA. Then, one purifies doubts about this view by investigating the relationship of mind and body in terms of cause and effect, or HETU-PACCAYA. When confidence about the composite nature of the self is established, one then in turn extends this to all phenomena, examining them in terms of rising-falling or UDAYA-VAYA. This will naturally lead to the experiential knowledge of ANICCA or impermanence, accompanied by a sense of bliss. Purified through this right method, the mind begins to perceive reality as it is, according to the three characteristics of existence: ANICCA, DUKKHA, ANATTĀ; or impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self.

At this point, the path to enlightenment becomes clear and one is purified by this knowledge of the path, as one gains deeper and deeper

32. Rathavinīta Sutta, MN I.145: Sīlavisuddhi, Cittavisuddhi, Ditthivisuddhi, Kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhi, Maggāmaggañāḍassanavisuddhi, Paṭipadāñāḍassanavisuddhi, Ñāḍassanavisuddhi. This list became the seven key points around which the Visuddhimagga was developed.

33 The Path of Serenity and Insight, Henepola Gunaratana, pp. 154-74.



Seven Stages Of Purity

understanding into rising and falling and the three characteristics of existence, until a certain point is reached where the mind enters a perfectly equanimous and clear state. Immediately after this, the knowledge and vision of Nibbāna arises directly for the first time, and the mind is purified as the first three fetters³⁴ that bind us to saṃsāric existence begin to wear away. The meditator who continues in this way will certainly attain one of the four stages of sainthood.

34. There are Ten Fetters (DASA-SAMYOJANA), or chains, that bind us to saṃsāric existence. When the first three fetters are eradicated, one is said to have attained to the first stage of sainthood or SOTĀPANNA, i.e. the Stream-Enterer.

The purpose & practice of BHĀVANĀ

The benefits of meditation or mental development have been investigated by the scientific community since the 1950s, beginning in the West and then spreading worldwide.³⁵ Such studies mainly focus on the benefits of meditation with regard to stress management and mental health (as therapy for certain mental and mood disorders), and in improving interpersonal relationships and workplace effectiveness.

The aim of Buddhist meditation encompasses a much wider scope. In the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta,³⁶ the Buddha clearly mentions the aims of cultivating mindfulness, one of the key factors of mental development. They are:

1. SATTĀNAṀ VISUDDHIYĀ
– for the purification of beings (that is, the purification of the mind from the tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion);
2. SOKA-PARIDEVĀNAṀ SAMATIKKAMĀYA
– for overcoming sorrow and lamentation;
3. DUKKHA-DOMANASSĀNAṀ ATTHAṄGAMĀYA
– for ending mental and physical stress;
4. ÑĀYASSA ADHIGAMĀYA
– for the attainment of higher knowledge and insight into the right path;
5. NIBBĀNASSA SACCHIKIRIYĀYA
– for the attainment of nibbāna.

35. "Meditation practices for health: state of the research", Ospina MB et al. (2007).

36. DN II.289 ff.

Our main aim in cultivating the mind should be to break the habitual tendency of the mind to create thoughts. It is our habit pattern of thinking and rethinking that is responsible for the generation of craving, attachment and eventually karma.³⁷

When we see a visual object, for example, and attach a value to it, such as ‘nice’ or ‘beautiful’, and we go on thinking and rethinking about it, a pleasant feeling will arise. This will condition craving, the cause of suffering, to arise. As we continue to think about it, again and again, we add fuel to the force of craving and thus attachment develops. The same applies to what we hear, smell, taste, and touch.

That is why it is essential to cultivate and train the mind to overcome this habit of thinking and rethinking. As this habit pattern is something which we ourselves have created, we ourselves are able to dis-create it through the silencing or stilling of the mind.

In the beginning, we need to focus our attention on a particular object of meditation, without thinking or analysing, in order to effectively still the mind. For example, if our object is the in-and-out breath, we simply apply awareness, or bare attention, to the breath. Whatever phenomena that arise, such as sound, feeling, etc., the mind remains focused on the in-and-out breath, without reacting to any external phenomena.

The Pali tradition lists forty different objects of meditation which are able to bring about calmness and tranquillity.³⁸

37. Cetanā Sutta SN II.65: "Mendicants, what you intend or plan, and what you have underlying tendencies for become a support for the continuation of consciousness. When this support exists, consciousness becomes established. When consciousness is established and grows, there is rebirth into a new state of existence in the future. When there is rebirth into a new state of existence in the future, future rebirth, old age, and death come to be, as do sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. That is how this entire mass of suffering originates." Trans. Bhikkhu Sujato.

38. Vidarsana Pota: (1) Ānāpānāsati, (2-11) Kasinas, (12-21) Asubhas, (22) Kāyagatāsati, (23-32) Anussati, (33-36) Arūpa Jhānas, (37-40) Brahma Vihāras. Also cf. Visuddhimagga III.104.

The first method is mindfulness of the in-and-out breath (ĀNĀPĀNĀSATI), which the commentaries state is unique in being suitable for people of all kinds and temperaments. Then there are ten KASINAS or devices that help the mind to concentrate: the four elements, four colours, light, and space. There are also ten contemplations on loathsomeness (ASUBHA), meditating on the various stages of decay of a corpse. Next is the contemplation on the 32 parts of the body, followed by ten recollections (ANUSSATI): recollecting the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha; recollecting Morality, Generosity, and Tranquillity; recollecting Devas, death, the repulsiveness of food, and the elements which make up the body. Finally, there are the meditations on the four ARŪPA JHĀNAS, and the four BRAHMA-VIHĀRAS.

SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ

The calmness and tranquillity developed through meditation is known as SAMATHA. However, calmness is not enough to gain our liberation. The Buddhist methods of meditation also generate wisdom and insight, which is known as VIPASSANĀ. In particular, this involves developing insight into the true nature of things, that is, the characteristics of impermanence (ANICCA), unsatisfactoriness (DUKKHA), and non-self (ANATTĀ). In accordance with the principle of causality, when calmness arises, wisdom and insight arise. One conditions the other. As such, it is important to understand that SAMATHA and VIPASSANĀ are not two separate kinds of meditation.

The Buddha taught his disciples based on their different dispositions and temperament. For some, he would encourage them to develop calmness before developing insight. For others, he would guide them to develop insight before they were able to develop calmness and tranquillity.

These different approaches serve different individuals according to their own level of development and affinities. That is why it is important for serious practitioners to find authentic teachers who are able to guide them to recognise the different meditative states through the practice of SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ.

The training of the mind through SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ can effectively lead us to our final liberation.

Mindfulness of the in-and-out breath (ĀNĀPĀNĀSATI), is one of the most common objects of meditation. This method not only brings about calmness and tranquillity (SAMATHA), but it is also capable of generating insights and wisdom (VIPASSANĀ).

There are slightly different approaches to the cultivation of SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ. Some methods emphasise the development of full JHĀNAS (APPANĀ), or mental absorption, before proceeding to VIPASSANĀ practice. Some methods only utilise access concentration (UPACĀRA SAMĀDHI) while still others only require momentary concentration (KHAṆIKA SAMĀDHI).

In the process of developing calmness and tranquillity, such as in the development of JHĀNAS, a certain degree of fixation may be involved. But this is only a means to stabilise the mind to cultivate wisdom and insight – the VIPASSANĀ aspect of meditation. For one who has established their practice of SAMATHA-VIPASSANĀ, there is yet another method of mental cultivation that goes beyond any fixation and does not depend on any object of meditation.

As mentioned in Verse 5 of the Ratana Sutta:³⁹

39. Khuddhaka Nikāya, Khuddakapāṭha 6.

YAM BUDDHASEṬṬHO PARIVAṆṆAYĪ SUCIM

SAMĀDHIM ĀNANTARIKAÑ ÑAM ĀHU

SAMĀDHINĀ TENA SAMO NA VIJJATI

That sanctity praised by the Buddha Supreme,
described as ‘concentration without interruption’;

There is nothing equal to that concentration.

This refers to a state of mind which is clearly aware, letting go of all phenomena related to sight, sound, smell, taste, and feeling, and without interfering with any of these phenomena as they appear and cease. In other words, there is no longer any particular object of meditation.

Ultimately, the goal of Buddhist meditation is to attain that state of pure awareness, where there is no fixation whatsoever. The mind simply dwells in its intrinsic state of clarity and awareness. This leads to the realisation of the ASAÑKHATA-DHAMMA – the unborn and unconditioned.

METTĀ-BHĀVANĀ

Besides the cultivation of mindfulness on the breath through ĀNĀPĀNĀSATI, another common practice is METTĀ-BHĀVANĀ or the cultivation of loving-kindness. METTĀ is defined as the wish for all beings to be well and happy. There are various methods of METTĀ-BHĀVANĀ, such as radiating thoughts of METTĀ in different directions or to various different individuals.

The Mettānisamsa Sutta⁴⁰ clearly spells out how we should practise again and again until METTĀ becomes part and parcel of ourselves. It also

40. AN IV.150.

provides a clear idea of the meaning of BHĀVANĀ or mental cultivation that eventually leads to one's final liberation. The Buddha said:

METTĀYA BHIKKHAVE CETOVIMUTTIYĀ

O Monks, concerning the freeing of the mind through METTĀ:

1. ĀSEVITĀYA – It should be frequently recalled to mind,
2. BHĀVITĀYA – cultivated,
3. BAHULĪKATĀYA – energetically practised,
4. YĀNĪKATĀYA – mastered like driving a vehicle,
5. VATTHUKATĀYA – made as a firm foundation,
6. ANUṬṬHITĀYA – upheld in everything you do,
7. PARICITĀYA – made familiar,
8. SUSAMĀRADDHĀYA – well established.

Contemplation

An important aspect of BHĀVANĀ is the practice of contemplation. Contemplation is about reflecting or considering something over and over again. Amongst the different objects of meditation, a number of them are considered contemplations or recollections, which also function to train or shape the mind in a certain manner. METTĀ-BHĀVANĀ, for example, will help us to reduce aversion, while the contemplation on the 32 parts of the body will help us to reduce attachment to the body.

Some forms of contemplation or reflection are meant to motivate us to meditate. The contemplation on the realities of life is designed for this purpose – to generate a sense of urgency to make good use of our human

life and to persevere in our practice. The contemplation is as follows:

JARĀ-DHAMMOMHI JARAM ANATĪTO

I am of the nature to decay and grow old; I have not gone beyond old age.

VYĀDHI-DHAMMOMHI VYĀDHIM ANATĪTO

I am of the nature to fall sick; I have not gone beyond sickness.

MARAṆA-DHAMMOMHI MARAṆAM ANATĪTO

I am of the nature to die; I have not gone beyond death.

SABBEHI ME PIYEHI MANĀPEHI NĀNĀBHĀVO VINĀBHĀVO

Everything that is mine, all that I love and cherish, will one day be separated from me, will vanish before me.

KAMMASSAKOMHI KAMMADĀYĀDO KAMMAYONI

KAMMABANDHŪ KAMMAPAṬISARAṆO

Karma is my real inheritance; I am heir to my karma; born of my karma; related to my karma; I live this life supported by karma;

YAṀ KAMMAṀ KARISSĀMI KALYĀṆAṀ VĀ PĀPAKAṀ VĀ

TASSA DĀYĀDO BHAVISSĀMI"TI. EVAM AMHEHI ABHIṆHAṀ

PACCAVEKKHITABBAṀ.

Whatever actions that I do, good or bad, that I shall inherit. ...

There are also other forms of contemplation that provide similar motivation to cultivate the mind.⁴¹

41. For example, Caturārakkhā (Sri Lankan tradition) and the Four Thoughts (Tibetan tradition). Caturārakkhā: Buddhānussati, Mettānussati, Asubhānussati, Maraṇānussati – These four can be found in the 40 subjects of meditation given in the commentaries. The earliest attestation that they are put together as a set for meditation, is found in the Mihintale Tablets (IV, EZ. I, p.85; AA. p.351; MA p.100), which date to the reign of King Mahinda IV [956-972 AD]. The Four Thoughts are: the difficulty of finding the freedoms and advantages (or the preciousness of human life), the impermanence of life, the defects of saṃsāra, and actions: the principle of cause and effect (Words of My Perfect Teacher, Patrul Rinpoche (trans. Padmakara Translation Group), pp. 19-131).

Five Mental Faculties – PAÑCA-INDRIYA

All the different methods of training the mind serve to strengthen and balance the five mental faculties (PAÑCA-INDRIYA):

1. *SADDHĀ* – Faith/confidence
2. *VIRIYA* – Energy/effort
3. *SATI* – Mindfulness
4. *SAMĀDHI* – Concentration
5. *PAÑÑĀ* – Wisdom

SADDHĀ refers to faith, confidence or conviction in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha. It will condition VIRIYA – mental energy or effort – to arise. This mental energy or effort should then be directed towards the cultivation of mindfulness (SATI) which in turn conditions the arising of concentration (SAMĀDHI) and wisdom (PAÑÑĀ).

In order to progress on the path and eventually attain to enlightenment, these mental faculties must be balanced. SADDHĀ, faith, must be balanced with PAÑÑĀ or wisdom. Too much faith with little or no wisdom leads to blind faith which lacks discernment. Too much wisdom or rationalisation with little or no faith leads to hard-hearted intellectualism. When both faith and wisdom are balanced, we get rational faith – faith based on wisdom and understanding.

In a similar manner, VIRIYA and SAMĀDHI, or effort and concentration should be balanced. If too much effort or energy is applied when the mind is still unable to focus properly, then restlessness will arise.

Mindfulness or SATI is the key to maintaining proper balance of all the mental faculties, in order for enlightenment to take place.

Six IDDHIŚ

When the mind is well-trained, certain accomplishments may be realised. These are called IDDHI in Pali and SIDDHI in Sanskrit. There are six main accomplishments:⁴²

1. *IDDHI-VIDHA*
– or mundane psychic abilities, such as walking on water, passing through walls or flying through the air ⁴³
2. *DIBBA-SOTA*
– the ability to hear sounds from all the six realms of existence, even in other world systems or in one's own body
3. *CETO-PARIYA-ÑĀṆA*
– the ability to know the state of mind of other beings, whether they are happy or angry, mundane or liberated
4. *PUBBE-NIVĀSĀNUSSATI-ÑĀṆA*
– the recollection of past lives
5. *DIBBA-CAKKHU* or *CUTŪPAPĀTA-ÑĀṆA*
– the ability to see how beings die and are reborn according to their karma
6. *ĀSAVAKKHAYA-ÑĀṆA*
– the knowledge that results in the final and total elimination of greed, hatred and delusion

42. Visuddhimagga, Chap. 8-9 (Iddhividhā-niddesa & Abhiññā-niddesa).

43. DN I.77: "Having been one, he becomes many; having been many, he becomes one. He appears and vanishes. He goes unhindered through walls, through enclosures, through mountains, as though in open space. He dives in and out of the earth as though in water. He goes on unbroken water as though on earth. Seated cross-legged he travels in space like a winged bird. With his hand he touches and strokes the moon and sun so mighty and powerful. He wields bodily mastery even as far as the Brahmā-world..."

The Buddha himself demonstrated both the mundane and supramundane accomplishments. For example, on two occasions he performed what is known as the Twin Miracle, which it is said that only fully-enlightened Buddhas can perform. The first occasion was when he visited his home kingdom of Kapilavastu. In order to convince his proud kinsmen of his enlightenment, he rose in the air with fire emitting from the top half of his body and water from the lower half simultaneously. On the second occasion in Śrāvastī, the Buddha was challenged by the leaders of six other religious sects. He first created a jewelled walkway in mid-air, then performed the Twin Miracle, alternating streams of fire and water between the upper and lower half of his body before these shot upwards to illuminate the cosmos.

It should be noted that although the Buddha possessed such mundane psychic abilities, he used them only in cases where beings could not be tamed by any other method, and admonished the Sangha not to display any such abilities they may possess to lay people.

On many occasions the Buddha used his ability to see and hear what an ordinary person could not, as well as his ability to know the state of mind of beings, to teach and enlighten beings according to their temperament and situation.

The profound knowledge of his own past lives and also the lives of other beings and how they die and are reborn according to their karma, arose on the night of the Buddha's enlightenment. This led him to see how things arise dependent on cause and conditions, how suffering arises dependent on craving, and how craving ceases. With the complete cessation of craving, he attained the supreme accomplishment of enlightenment, becoming a fully-awakened Buddha.

IDDHI-PĀDA

The development of all such powers depends on four factors (IDDHI-PĀDA):

CHANDA	– the wish, aim or goal
VIRIYA	– effort
CITTA	– single-mindedness
VĪMAṂSĀ	– discerning wisdom

These are four factors we need to have to succeed not only in our meditation practice, but in any aspect of our lives.

We mentioned earlier the word BHĀVANĀ comes from the verb BHĀVAYATI meaning to produce or cultivate a field of crops. The Buddha himself used this as a metaphor on the following occasion:

The Story of Kasībhāradvāja

★★★

On one occasion the Buddha went to the village where five hundred ploughs belonging to the Brahmin Kasībhāradvāja were harnessed for sowing. Kasībhāradvāja saw the Buddha waiting for alms and spoke thus – “I, O ascetic, plough and sow; and having ploughed and sown, I eat. You also... should plough and sow; and having ploughed and sown, you should eat.”

“I, too, O brahmin, plough and sow; having ploughed and sown, I eat.” said the Buddha.

“But we see not the Venerable Gotama’s yoke, or plough, or ploughshare, or goad, or oxen...” remarked the Brahmin.

“A farmer you claim to be, but we see none of your tillage. ...

Please answer us so that we may know your ploughing.”

The Buddha answered: “Confidence (SADDHĀ) is my seed; discipline (TAPO) is the rain; wisdom (PAÑÑĀ) my yoke and plough; modesty (HIRI) the pole of my plough; mind (MANO) the rein; and mindfulness (SATI) my ploughshare and goad.”

“I am controlled in body, controlled in speech, temperate in food. With truthfulness I cut away weeds. Absorption in the Highest (Arahantship) is the release of the oxen.”

“Perseverance (VIRIYA) is my team of oxen that carries me towards freedom (i.e. Nibbāna).”

“Thus is the tilling done: it bears the fruit of Deathlessness... one is freed from all sorrow.”

Whereupon Kasibhāradvāja, filling a large bronze bowl with milk-rice, offered it to the Buddha. However, the Buddha refused to accept, saying that enlightened beings do not accept reward for reciting verses (or teaching the Dhamma).

“Serve the fully-perfected... great sage ... with other kind of food and drink, for he is like a field to one who desires to sow good deeds.”⁴⁴

★★★

44. SN I.171.

In this way, the Buddha compared the cultivation of mind to the cultivation of crops, mentioning seven important factors:

1. <i>Faith</i>	<i>SADDHĀ</i>
2. <i>Discipline</i>	<i>TAPO</i>
3. <i>Wisdom</i>	<i>PAÑÑĀ</i>
4. <i>Modesty</i>	<i>HIRI</i>
5. <i>Mind</i>	<i>MANO</i>
6. <i>Mindfulness</i>	<i>SATI</i>
7. <i>Perseverance</i>	<i>VIRIYA</i>

In traditional methods of farming, the soil needs to be tilled before seeding. Once germinated, the seedlings need to be nurtured and protected from insects and other pests. They also need to be fertilised before harvesting. In a similar manner, our mind requires preparation and tender care.

We need to prepare our minds by developing faith and confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, before receiving meditation instructions. After which, we need to carefully nurture the mind with the practice of mindfulness and strengthen it with effort, perseverance, and endurance before finally realising the fruition.

The Mind is Luminous

Although we have been using the terms ‘mental cultivation’ and ‘mental purification’, we need to understand that in reality there is nothing to add to, or get rid of, from the mind. The Buddha defined the intrinsic nature of the mind as follows:

PABHASSARAM IDAṀ BHIKKHAVE CITTAM,
TAÑ CA KHO ĀGANTUKEHI UPAKKILESEHI VIPPAMUTTAM.⁴⁵

This mind is luminous, O monks,
and it is freed from adventitious defilements.

The mind can be compared to the vast open sky, and our mental defilements – greed, hatred, delusion, and all their derivatives such as jealousy, envy, stinginess and so on – are like clouds in the sky. They are adventitious in nature. They come and go. But if we cling onto them, creating more and more thoughts of craving and aversion, the clouds will become thicker and thicker, further obstructing our view of the true nature of things. When we are unable to understand and see things as they really are, we will tend to react to various phenomena and situations. We thereby become more and more stressed and upset, blaming others for unpleasant experiences and the impermanent nature of things.

When the mind is in a good state, calm and peaceful, everything will appear good. When the mind is not in a good state, everything will appear unpleasant. Even a well-prepared, delicious meal may not taste good. That is why we need to apply effort to cultivate the mind and maintain calmness and clarity all the time.

45. AN I.10, Ekakanipātapāḷi Accharāsaṅghātavaggo.

In order to make proper progress in developing the mind, one needs to have the right view or understanding of the intrinsic nature of the mind, and the right motivation. If we understand the true nature of the mind, we will not be fixated in our practice; and if we have the right motivation, we will develop endurance and perseverance, and will not give up our practice easily.

NA TAṂ MĀTĀ PITĀ KAYIRĀ AÑÑE VĀ PI CA ÑĀTAKĀ
SAMMĀ-PAÑIHITAṂ CITTAṂ SEYYASO NAṂ TATO KARE

What neither mother, nor father, nor any other relative can do,
A well-directed mind can indeed do one greater good.⁴⁶

In other words, a well-trained and developed mind can bring even greater happiness and good things in our lives than whatever our parents, relatives or loved ones can do for us. That is why BHĀVANĀ is so important.

46. DhP 43.

CONCLUSION

Our life as a human being is very precious, because humans are unique in having the ability to develop the mind to gain liberation from the saṃsāric cycle of birth and death. The Pali/Sanskrit word for human being is MANUSSA/MANUṢYA derived from MANAS, meaning mind, and USSANATĀ, which means elevated or developed. That is, humans are beings with a developed mind, or the potential to develop the mind for the purpose of gaining liberation.

The whole teachings of the Buddha can be summarised in the well-known stanza:

SABBA-PĀPASSA AKARAṆAṃ
KUSALASSA UPASAMPADĀ
SACITTA-PARIYODAPANAṃ
ETAṃ BUDDHĀNA SĀSANAṃ⁴⁷

To avoid all evil
To do good, and
To purify one's own mind:
This is the teachings of all Buddhas.

47. DhP 183.

This demonstrates the key role of mental cultivation (BHĀVANĀ) in Buddhism. Without the development and purification of our minds, we will not be able to free ourselves from the root causes of suffering – greed, hatred and delusion – in our own minds. But we should also understand that developing our minds to gain enlightenment requires a proper foundation. The foundation lies in avoiding evil and doing good at the level of speech and body action, through the practices of SĪLA, or morality, and DĀNA, or generosity.

That is why DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ are considered the basic values underpinning the Buddhist way of life. They are values that lead to awakening: awakening of the individual, and awakening of society at large. Our individual progress in life will depend on our generosity, moral discipline and mental development. And it is only when there is peace within ourselves that there can be peace and harmony in the world around us.



.....

*DHAMMO HAVE RAKKHATI DHAMMACĀRIṀ
DHAMMO SUCIṆṆO SUKHAM-ĀVAHĀTI
Dhamma protects the Dhamma practitioner;
Dhamma well-practised brings happiness.*

.....

About the Author

Venerable Mahinda



Venerable Mahinda was ordained in 1976 under the tutelage of the late Venerable Dr K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Thera.

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DĀNA SĪLA BHĀVANĀ explains
the essence of Buddhism as a way of life:
how to live in peace and harmony with
oneself and the world around us...