

11

*Sīlānussati*The Recollection of Moral Virtue | **Vism 7.101-106**

Theme: The power of our moral goodness

Translated by Piya Tan ©2005

1 The (Akusala) Kamma Nidāna Sutta (A 10.174)

When we break any of the moral precepts or training rules, we are always motivated by one or more of the **3 unwholesome roots** (*akusala mūla*), that is, greed, hate and delusion, as stated in **the Akusala-hetuka Sutta** (A 10.174):¹

The destruction of life,	bhikshus, is threefold, I say: <u>it is caused by greed, or by hate, or by delusion.</u>
The taking of the not given, too,	bhikshus, is threefold, I say: <i>it is caused by greed, or by hate, or by delusion.</i>
Sexual misconduct, too,	bhikshus, is threefold, I say: <i>it is caused by greed, or by hate, or by delusion.</i>
False speech, too,	bhikshus, is threefold, I say: <i>it is caused by greed, or by hate, or by delusion.</i>
Divisive speech, too,	bhikshus, is threefold, I say: <i>it is caused by greed, or by hate, or by delusion.</i>
Harsh speech, too,	bhikshus, is threefold, I say: <i>it is caused by greed, or by hate, or by delusion.</i>
Frivolous chatter, too,	bhikshus, is threefold, I say: <i>it is caused by greed, or by hate, or by delusion.</i>
Covetousness, too,	bhikshus, is threefold, I say: <i>it is caused by greed, or by hate, or by delusion.</i>
Ill will, too,	bhikshus, is threefold, I say: <i>it is caused by greed, or by hate, or by delusion.</i>
Wrong view, too,	bhikshus, is threefold, I say: <i>it is caused by greed, or by hate, or by delusion.</i>
Therefore, bhikshus,	
<u>greed</u>	is a source of the karmic chain (<i>kamma,nidāna,sambhava</i>); ²
<u>hate</u>	is a source of the karmic chain;
<u>delusion</u>	is a source of the karmic chain.
But when greed is destroyed,	there is the ending of the karmic chain;
when hate is destroyed,	there is the ending of the karmic chain;
when delusion is destroyed,	there is the ending of the karmic chain.

(A 10.174/5:261 f)³

¹ Also called **Akusala Hetuka S** (The discourse on what is caused by the unwholesome) or **Dosa,lobha,moha,-hetuka S** (The discourse on that which is caused by greed, hate and delusion). Here I follow the title as given in Ce. Cf **Vibhaṅga Comy** (in the Sikkhāpada Vibhaṅga), where, clearly different from the Lobha,dosa,moha,hetauka S, it is stated, “As to root, the killing of living beings has hate and delusion as root. Taking the not-given sometimes has greed and delusion as root, and sometimes has hate and delusion as root. Misconduct has greed and delusion as root. False speech sometimes has greed and delusion as root, and sometimes has hate and delusion as root. Drinking of strong drinks has greed and delusion as root.” (VbhA 382). However, the apparent discrepancy is more textual than actual; for, while the sutta is making a comprehensive statement, VbhA is giving examples of practical situations. See **(Akusala) Kamma Nidāna S** (A 10.174/5:261 f), SD 18.8.

² *Kamma,nidānam sambhava* can also be rendered as “born of the karmic chain [cycle],” meaning that the 3 unwholesome roots are further fed by our habitual tendencies: see **Sall’atthena S** (S 36.3.7 f/4:208 f), SD 5.5.

³ See also **Akusala,mūla S** (A 3.69/1:201-205).

On a deeper psychological level, these unwholesome roots are in turn created and fed by the 3 kinds of desire, that is, the desire for sense-pleasures, for becoming this and that, or for getting rid of something.⁴ This last desire is interesting: it is what we usually do when we are unable to obtain what we desire. We may be able to temporarily suppress greed and hate, but rarely can we act without delusion, unless we are arhats.

2 Levels of practice

2.1 THE 3 TRAININGS. The Buddhist training is often spoken of as the noble eightfold path (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*). As the name suggested, it is a *path*, a way of practice, that is, on the preliminary, but is it also the destination itself, on the higher level. This common model of the Buddhist pilgrim's progress is often found in the Nikāyas: especially prominent is the “fruit of recluseship” (*sāmañña,phala*) sequences found in the Sīla-k,khandha Vagga, that is, the first thirteen suttas, of the Dīgha Nikāya.⁵

The *sāmañña,phala* sequence follows a well-defined order with the preliminary stages of the path grouped as moral virtue (*sīla*), the middle stages as concentration (*samādhi*), and the final stages as wisdom (*paññā*).⁶ The *sāmañña,phala* is more commonly known as “the 3 trainings” (*ti,sikkhā*), comprising the training in higher moral virtue (*adhisīla sikkhā*), the training in higher mind (*adhicitta sikkhā*), and the training in higher wisdom (*adhipaññā sikkhā*).⁷ The purpose of the training is, of course, to destroy the mental defilements. This process can be summarized in this chart:⁸

<u>Training (sikkhā)</u>	<u>abandoning (pahāna) of</u>	<u>defilement</u>	<u>abandoning (pahāna) by</u>
Higher moral virtue	transgression (<i>vītikama</i>)	misconduct	substitution (<i>tad-aṅga</i>)
Higher mind	obsession (<i>pariyuṭṭhāna</i>)	craving	suppression (<i>vikkhambhana</i>)
Higher wisdom	latent tendencies (<i>anusaya</i>) ⁹	view	uprooting (<i>samuccheda</i>)

2.2 THE HIGHER MORAL TRAINING

2.2.1 “Higher moral training” (*adhisīla sikkhā*) here refers to **the dedicated practice of the moral precepts**, motivated by the desire for “higher mind training” (*adhicitta sikkhā*). For monastics, this refers to the observance of the Vinaya, “complete and pure,” that is, in its spirit and letter, as a basis for mental training, conducive to the attaining of deep meditation, especially dhyana, and on to spiritual liberation.¹⁰

The higher moral training for the laity entails understanding at least the 5 precepts and keeping to them fully and habitually. The purpose of moral training is to stop and prevent any transgression (*vītikama*) of the moral precepts, that is, allowing the gross manifestation of the defilements of misconduct (*mic-*

⁴ That is, *kāma,taṇhā, bhava,taṇhā* and *vibhava,taṇhā*.

⁵ See, eg, **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2/1:47-86), SD 8.10, viz, moral development (§§39-63), concentration (mental development) (§§64-96), and wisdom (§§97-98). For a very concise def (the 3 trainings), see **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44.9/1:300 f), SD 21.7.

⁶ For a detailed discussion, see **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6; see also **(Ti) Sikkhā S** (A 3.88/1:235), SD 24.10c.

⁷ D 1:207, 3:220; A 1:229.

⁸ See **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14 (5).

⁹ Latent tendencies (*anusayā*). There are 7 of them: (1) lust for sensual pleasures (*kāma-c,chanda*); (2) repulsion (*paṭigha*); (3) wrong view (*diṭṭhi*); (4) spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*); (5) conceit (*māna*); (6) lust for existence (*bhava,rāga*); (7) ignorance (*avijjā*). They are listed in **Saṅgīti S** (D 33,2.3(12)/3:254), **Anusaya S** (A 7.11 & 12/ 4:9) and **Vibhaṅga** (Vbh 383). They are deeply embedded in one's mind through past habitual acts and can only be uprooted on attaining the Path. (3)-(4) are eliminated upon streamwinning; (1)-(2) upon non-return; (5)-(7) upon arhathood. See Abhs 7.9: “The latent dispositions (*anusaya*) are defilements which ‘lie along with’ (*anuseti*) the mental process to which they belong, rising to the surface as obsessions whenever they meet with suitable conditions. The term ‘latent dispositions’ highlights the fact that the defilements are liable to arise so long as they have not been eradicated by the supramundane paths. Though all defilements are, in a sense, *anusayas*, the 7 mentioned here are the most prominent.” (Abhs:B 268). See also Abhs:SR 172; and also **Madhu,piṇḍika S** (M 18), SD 6.14(5) & **Sall’atthana S** (S 36.3), SD 5.5 Intro.

¹⁰ See **Sīla samādhi paññā**, SD 21.6, esp (2) & **Right livelihood**, SD 37.8 (1.4).

chācāra) through physical actions and verbal actions, which the **5 precepts** (*pañca,sīla*) entail, as follows:¹¹

1. I undertake the training-rule to refrain from harming life [and to practise compassion.]
Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhā,padaṃ samādiyāmi.
2. I undertake the training-rule to refrain from taking the not-given [and to practise generosity.]
Adinn’ādānā veramaṇī sikkhā,padaṃ samādiyāmi.
3. I undertake the training-rule to refrain from sexual misconduct [and to practise sense-restraint and contentment].
Kāmesu micchā,cārā veramaṇī sikkhā,padaṃ samādiyāmi.
4. I undertake the training-rule to refrain from falsehood [and to practise wise truthfulness].
Musā,vādā veramaṇī sikkhā,padaṃ samādiyāmi.
5. I undertake the training-rule to refrain from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which causes heedlessness [and to practise mindfulness].
Surā,meraya,majja,pamāda-ṭṭhāna veramaṇī sikkhā,padaṃ samādiyāmi. (KhpA 24)

2.2.2 On this level, the defilements are only temporarily abandoned by the substitution (*tad-aṅga*) of the unwholesome deed (bodily or verbal) with its wholesome counterpart, shown within square brackets in the above formula. That is to say:

Precept (sīla)

harming life	is prevented by
taking the not-given	is prevented by
sexual misconduct	is prevented by
falsehood	is prevented by
taking intoxicants and drugs	is prevented by

Virtue (dhamma)

the practice of compassion;
the practice of generosity;
the practice of sense-restraint and contentment;
the practice of wise truthfulness;
the practice of mindfulness.

The fifth precept, although broken through the body door (*kāya,dvāra*), by the drinking of an intoxicant or being addicted to any habit-forming substance, serves as a link to the training of the mind door (mano,-dvāra): a sober mind is the beginning of a calm and clear mind.

2.2.3 More specifically, the “higher moral training” (*adhīsīla sikkhā*) refers to the monastic life of celibacy and sense-restraint, under the guidance of the monastic code and right livelihood. In short, this is the renunciant’s way of life, as a preparation of the body and speech for the higher mind training.

The Saṃyutta Commentary says that the noble saints do not violate (*na kopenti*) any of these 5 precepts even when are reborn in new existences. Hence, these virtues are dear to them (SA 2:74). We need to train ourselves (*sikkhati*) to abstain from breaking any of these precepts because they embody natural morality, which means that they are karmically potent in a negative way, turning us into the very negative acts and habits that we fall into. In other words, this is the minimum moral standard we must keep to.¹²

2.3 THE HIGHER MIND TRAINING

2.3.1 “Higher mind training” (*adhicitta sikkhā*) refers to the practice of constant mindfulness, best done through the traditional methods of meditation (*kammaṭṭhāna*). While meditation, as sitting practice or mindfulness practice with a retreat ambience, is ideal, present moment awareness and a consistently wholesome mind should be the on-going training. This level of training consists in mostly of carefully “watching” (*samanupassati*) the mind for any “obsession” (*pariyuṭṭhāna*) arising in our mind, as it is such obsessive compulsion due to craving (*taṇhā*), on a preconscious level, that drives us to break the precepts or prevents us from cultivating the five virtues (*pañca,dhamma*).

¹¹ On def of the first 4 precepts, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41/1:285-290), SD 5.7 (2). On the 5th precept, see **Sigāl’-ovāda S** (D 31,8/3:182 f), SD 4.1.

¹² On natural morality, see SD 37.8 (2.1); SD 40.1 (13.2). See also **Karma**, SD 18.1.

The higher mind training facilitates the “suppression” (*vikkhambhana*) of the defilement, that is, as long as we are mindful, or the drive of the defilement is not too strong, it is suppressed. Unlike repression, which is an unconscious tendency (dealt with on the third level), suppression is a conscious act that begins to work at wearing down the unwholesome habitual tendencies (*nati*).¹³ The basic mechanism of higher mind training is the attrition of unwholesome habits, replacing them with wholesome ones.

2.3.2 One of the main hindrances to mental cultivation is thinking in terms of “things” instead of “processes,” or that the spiritual training is one of getting things “done” or “achieving” some state, instead of a gradual letting go of all such conceptions. **Sumedho** puts it insightfully thus:

To be aware we have to use skilful means, because at first we’re mystified. We tend to conceive awareness and try to *become* aware, thinking that awareness is something we have to *get* or *attain* or try to develop; but this very intention, this very conceptualization makes us heedless! We keep trying to *become* mindful, rather than just being aware of the mind as it tries to become and tries to attain, following the three kinds of desire [desire for sense pleasure, for becoming, and for getting rid of something] that cause us suffering.

The practice of “letting go” is very effective for minds obsessed by compulsive thinking: you simplify your meditation practice down to just two words—“letting go”—rather than try to develop *this* practice and then develop *that*; and achieve *this* and go into *that*...just “let go, let go, let go.” (1992:43)

2.3.3 More specifically, for monastics, the “higher mental training” (*adhicitta sikkhā*), refers to the practice of meditation, and the attaining of dhyana to fully overcome any need for sensual pleasures or attraction to them. The monastic would then be naturally celibate, and works towards the attaining of non-return, or with the ridding of all the 10 fetters,¹⁴ of arhathood itself.

2.4 THE HIGHER WISDOM TRAINING

2.4.1 “Higher wisdom training” (*adhipaññā sikkhā*) is not so much a “training” as it is the result of having fulfilled the higher mind training. When the habit-replacement endeavour reaches a critical mass, such that we are unlikely to fall back of the unwholesome past as a springboard or excuse for unwholesome deed, word and thought, then we have attained some level of higher wisdom.

The higher wisdom training is a more refined level of higher mind training, where the mind unrelentingly works at uncovering our latent tendencies (*anusaya*), that is, facing our demons squarely by naming Māra and thus casting him away. These dark hidden tendencies can only be effectively dealt with in the light of higher mind training, but with the finer tools of higher wisdom training where we begin to understand the true nature of “views” (*diṭṭhi*).

2.4.2 With spiritual wisdom, we begin to see that we have habitually been living, thinking and working with the false notion of an abiding selfhood that is our body (simply put, a sublime self-centredness). When we understand that this is nothing but the notion of self-identity (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*), we begin to put it aside for good. Only after having seen how this self-identity works in us, that we are able to burst this ego bubble. In this way, we prevent old negative habits from returning; then we eradicate them; and go on to cultivate new wholesome habits, and to maintain them. (These are, of course, the fourfold right efforts). Thus, by destroying the latent tendencies, we have uprooted (*samuccheda*) the defilements for good.

2.4.3 More specifically, “higher wisdom training” (*adhipaññā sikkhā*) refers to the realization, or at least a good understanding, of the 3 universal characteristics, especially that of non-self. A full understanding of the third characteristic, non-self, leads to arhathood. This full understanding is the same as the breaking of all the 10 fetters [2.3], which leads to arhathood.

2.5 MEME

2.5.1 There is an interesting academic discovery in contemporary learning that seems to be in the direction of an awareness of the nature of self-identity. In recent times some anthropologists and sociologists tend to dismiss all religions as **memes**. The idea comes from biological evolution, according to

¹³ See eg **Dvedhā, vitakka S** (M 19,6/1:115) & **Cetanā S 3** (S 12.40/2:67).

¹⁴ See **Kīṭa, giri S** (M 70) @ SD 11.1 (5.1); (**Sekha**) **Uddesa S** (A 4.85), SD 3.3(2); also S 5:61; A 5:13; Vbh 377.

which, the genes ability to replicate itself is important if it is to propagate itself. Similarly, ideas that can replicate themselves will survive and reproduce. This propagation, however, need not have anything to do with truth or reality.

2.5.2 A *meme* (rhymes with “dream”) may be defined as a self-referential system belief system that contains within itself the instructions (genes) for its own propagation.¹⁵ It is a parasitic mental process that grows in the same manner as a chain letter, “if you spread me something nice will happen to you; if not, then something horrible will happen.”

2.5.3 A religion, to make sure that it works, tends to demand the absolute faith of its believers, taking faith as superior to reason. Understandably, such religions tends to be God-centred, as the God-idea revolves around the notion of *power* (that is, surrendering our self-accountability and freedom to another), and such power is protected and propagated through rituals and vows, as memes,¹⁶ reinforcing and perpetuating themselves. We can see how the laws and commandments of a religion effectively control and limit the thinking of its followers, and how its ritual and ritualistic structures keep them in the rut of blind faith. Often such memes are the remnants of childhood indoctrination or the result of aggressive religious marketing.¹⁷

2.6 OVERCOMING SUPERSTITION

2.6.1 “Superstition” has been defined as “a belief, conception, act, or practice resulting from ignorance, unreasoning fear of the unknown or mysterious, morbid scrupulosity, trust in magic or change, or a false conception of causation.”¹⁸ Interestingly, the creator God-idea falls under this definition insofar as total faith or “unreasoning fear of the unknown or mysterious” is concerned, as would the notion, by way of “trust in chance,” that we could happily make a fortune through gambling. In either case, we are led by the false notion that good (however we define it) can come to us without working for it (“a false conception of causation”).¹⁹

2.6.2 The religion meme, being a sub-species of self-identity, invariably tries to survive by reproducing itself. This self-replication occurs, like biological evolution, with the “survival of the fittest,” where nature is red in tooth and claw, as it were. Hence, religious intolerance and exclusivism are hallmarks of such notions, and that there is no salvation outside the group.

2.6.3 When we begin to understand the nature of self-identity (*sakkāya*), we also begin to see how rituals or repetitive habitual actions can reinforce a belief (whether or not it corresponds with reality). The blind ritualistic observing of the precepts—not understanding its purpose as a basis for mental cultivation—has the same effect of a habit-forming superstition, especially where there is *fear* or *guilt* about “breaking” a precept, when we should really be examining the reasons and conditions for such breaches and correct them.

2.6.4 Otherwise, we are fettered by the attachment (or addiction) to rituals and vows (*sīlab, bata, parāmāsa*). However, when we are clear about why certain ritual actions (such as puja offerings and bowing) are performed, or ritual objects (such as Buddha images and stupas) venerated—that they are reminders of impermanence and of our spiritual task—then, they can be helpful in facilitating spiritual fellowship and expediting our journey to awakening.

2.7 OVERCOMING DOUBT

2.7.1 Clearly, the unreasoning need to depend on a parent-figure or habitual acts points to self-doubt, the belief (albeit false) that we are powerless to help ourselves. This spiritual helplessness and sense of lack arise when we seek salvation outside of ourselves, thinking it can be found anywhere else other than

¹⁵ The term *meme* was coined by Richard Dawkins in his book, *The Selfish Gene* (1976; rev Oxford: Oxford Univ Press, 1989, esp ch 11). Other major proponents of the meme idea are Daniel Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Ideas* (London: Penguin, 1995:515-517), and Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). See eg: Tim Holt: <http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/memetics.html> & Albert Kwelos: <http://kwelos.tripod.com/memes.htm>.

¹⁶ See **Memes**, SD 26.3.

¹⁷ For a fuller discussion on memes, see **Memes**, SD 26.3.

¹⁸ Webster’s 3rd New International Dictionary, 1961, 1981.

¹⁹ Further see **Superstition**, SD 79.1.

within ourself. The perceived lack is deep in our own minds, and the perceived power outside actually also lies deep in our mind (but we are either unwilling or unable to see this). Understandably, we can never fill up this inner emptiness by another emptiness.

2.7.2 The notion of self-identity tricks us into thinking in terms of self and other, that we must replicate ourself to survive, that we must spread our ego to dominate others in order to live, that our choices are only flight or fight. The reality is that each of us lives in our own self-created world of virtual realities that often overlap in our *perception* of the same sense-objects around us. However, our *conception* of such realities can only be private and personal, never the same at one moment with any other. We may experience the same world around us, but each of us makes our own sense of it. The only common reality we share here is that such experiences are *impermanent* and *mind-made*.

2.7.3 The ten short remarkable suttas of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta** all speak of the “descent” (*okkanti*) into the path towards streamwinning—and gaining streamwinning in this life itself—whether we are, each of us, one who “has faith, who firmly believes” (*saddahati adhimuccati*) in the impermanence of the 6 internal senses,²⁰ or accepts this truth “after pondering over them with some wisdom” (*paññāya mattaso nijjhānaṃ khamanti*).²¹ Besides the 6 senses, we could also reflect on the impermanence of the 6 external senses, the 6 sense-consciousnesses, the 6 sense-contacts, the 6 feelings, the 6 perceptions, the 6 volitions, the 6 cravings, the 6 elements,²² and the 5 aggregates.²³

2.7.4 When we understand that our whole being or the whole universe is impermanent no matter whichever way we look at it—by way of the internal sense organs, or the external sense objects, or the 6 kinds of consciousness, or the 6 contacts, or the 6 feelings, or the 6 perceptions, or the 6 volitions, or the 6 cravings, or the 6 elements, or the 5 aggregates—then self-knowledge begins to arise and spiritual doubt (*vicikicchā*) begins to wane.

3 The 5 precepts: a quick overview

3.1 NATURAL MORALITY

3.1.0 The 5 precepts are based on natural morality, and, as such, universal in significance and application. Whether we are Buddhist or not, whether we recite the 5 precepts or not, whether we believe in karma or not, their karmic effects still work on us. Natural morality is the way good and bad work naturally on us and others in the universe.²⁴

3.1.1 The first precept is against killing, that is, the respect for life. All living beings value life. We don’t even need religion to tell us this. No one invented this truth; it is always there. It is a natural truth.

3.1.2 The second precept is against stealing, that is, not taking what is not given. We all have to work for a living, or we are supported by others who work for a living. Through industry and honesty, we earn our supports for life. If someone were to take this away, it would bring us suffering. When we steal from someone, we are effectively and wrongfully taking away his happiness. This applies to all human beings. It is a natural truth.

3.1.3 The third precept is against sexual misconduct, that is, we should not disrespect the body. We do not like others to do what they like with our body. This is also true of everyone else. In other words, we naturally want others to respect us when we say “No.” This is our natural freedom. When we rape, abuse or kidnap someone (for example), we are taking away that person’s freedom. That person suffers pain.

3.1.4 The fourth precept is against falsehood, against communicating what is untrue, harsh, disharmonious and useless. This is again something natural: if there is no truth, then it is no use of my writing

²⁰ (**Anicca**) **Cakkhu S** (S 25.1/4:225), SD 16.7.

²¹ On lay followers attaining streamwinning, see **Laymen saints**, SD 8.6 & **The layman and dhyana**, SD 8.5(3), esp **Sa,upādisesa S** (A 9.12/4:380-382).

²² The 6 elements (*dhātu*) are: earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness. See **Dhātu Vibhaṅga S** (M 140,-7+14-19), SD 4.17.

²³ **Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25), S 25.1-10/225-228.

²⁴ On natural morality, see SD 40.1 (13.2).

about all this. You would have wasted your time reading this! Truth is the very basis of wholesome human communication.

3.1.5 The fifth precept is against taking anything intoxicative or addictive, such as drinks. The aim here is not to cloud our mind or lose self-control, which will then make it easier for us to break any or all of the previous four precepts. If we have difficulty keeping this precept, we must learn how to stop before we get drunk. This fifth precept is like a door leading to mental cultivation or meditation. If our mind is clear, then it is easier to cultivate it.

3.2 BENEFITS OF KEEPING THE PRECEPTS

3.2.1 Reciting the precepts [2.2] is a good way of reminding ourselves to have greater resolve to keep them. However, when we break any precept, we should not feel guilty, as this is not a commandment, but they are more like the rules of a game. If we break the rules of football, for example, then it is no more fun to play the game.

3.2.2 If we have broken a precept, then we should examine the conditions that caused us to do so. We should work at reducing or removing those conditions. This is what the precepts are about: removing the negative conditions, and becoming happier people.

3.2.3 The 5 precepts are the minimum standards of our being human. They are the tools of quality control for our humanity. When we keep our precepts well, we will never fall into any subhuman state (as an animal, a ghost, an asura, or a hell-being) in this life or in those to come.²⁵

3.2.4 Through keeping the precepts, our good works become truly effective. We are not merely *showing* that we are good: we *are* really good. Through our moral virtue, we will see heaven here and now, and it is easier to become a streamwinner, to start our journey on the sure path to awakening.²⁶

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The Recollection of Moral Virtue

Based on Vism 7.101-106; cf SA 3:277

101 If we wish to cultivate the recollection of moral virtue, we should go into solitary retreat [spend personal quiet time] and recollect our own moral virtues, thus:²⁷

Aho vata me sīlāni, “akhaṇḍāni acchiddāni asabalāni akammāsāni bhujissāni viññū, pasatthāni aparāmaṭṭhāni samādhi, samvattanikāni ti

Indeed, my various moral virtues [precepts] are “unbroken, untorn, unmixed, spotless, liberating, praised by the wise, untarnished, bringing about concentration.”²⁸ (A 6.10,5/3:286)

A lay person should recollect them by way of the lay moral virtues, while the renunciant should recollect them by way of the moral virtue of the renunciant.

²⁵ On the subhuman planes (*apāya*), see SD 2.22 (1).

²⁶ On streamwinning, see **Entering the stream**, SD 3.3.

²⁷ These are the “virtues dear to the noble ones,” *ariya, kantāni sīlāni*. The virtues of the noble one are explained at Vism 7.101-106/221 f. SA says that the noble ones do not violate (*na kopeṇti*) the 5 precepts, even when they are reborn in any new existences; hence, these virtues are dear to them (SA 2:74) [2.2].

²⁸ “Unbroken, . . . giving rise to concentration,” *akhaṇḍehi acchiddehi asabalehi akammāsehi bhujissehi viññūpasatthehi aparāmaṭṭhehi samādhi, samvattanikehi*. See UA 268. For details, see Vism 1.143-161/51-58 & 7.101-106/221 f.

102 Whether they are the moral virtues of a householder or the moral virtue of the renunciant, when none of them is broken in the beginning, or in the end, not being torn like a piece of cloth frayed at the edges, then they are unbroken (*akhaṇḍa*). [222]

When none of them is broken in the middle, not being rent like a piece of cloth that is holed in the middle, then they are untorn (*acchida*).

When they are not broken twice or thrice in succession, not being blotched like a cow whose body is partly coloured black or red, and so on, disproportionately coloured, with a long patch or a round patch appearing on her back or her belly, then they are unmixed (*asabala*).

When they are not broken from time to time, not being mottled like a cow speckled with disproportionately coloured spots, then they are spotless (*akammāsa*).

103 Or, in general, they are *unbroken, untorn, unmixed, spotless*, when they are unharmed by the seven bonds of sexuality,²⁹ and by anger and enmity, and the other evil states.³⁰

104 Those very same moral virtues are liberating (*bhujissa*) because they liberate one from the slavery of craving.

They are praised by the wise (*viññū.pasattha*) because they are praised by such wise men as the awakened ones.

They are untarnished (*aparāmaṭṭha*) because they are not tarnished with craving and view [DA 537], or because of the impossibility of it succumbing (to the statement), thus: ‘There is this flaw in your moral virtues.’

They bring about concentration (*samādhi, samvattanika*) because they conduce to access concentration and full concentration, or to path concentration and fruition concentration.

105 As long as he recollects his own moral virtues by way of their being unbroken, and so on, in this way, then [as stated in **the (Anussati) Mahānāma Sutta**],

...at that time, his mind is not obsessed by greed, or by hate, or by delusion. Indeed, at that time, his mind has become straight (*uju, gatam*), taking moral virtue as his object.³¹

(A 6.10,3/3:285)

105.2 [THE SUCCESSFUL RECOLLECTION] So when he has suppressed the mental hindrances, by preventing obsession (*pariyuṭṭhāna*) by greed, etc, and his mind is straight (*uju*) before the meditation subject, then his initial application and sustained application occur with an inclination towards the moral virtue.

As he continues to exercise initial application and sustained application on the moral virtue, *zest* (*pīti*) arises in him. With a zestful mind, with the zest as a basis [proximate cause], his bodily and mental disturbances gain tranquillity (*passaddhi*). When the disturbances have been tranquillized, bodily and mental joy (*sukha*) arise in him. Being joyful, his mind, taking moral virtue as object, becomes concentrated (*samādhīyati*), and so the dhyana factors eventually arise in a single thought-moment.

But due to the depth of the moral qualities, or else due to his being occupied in recollecting qualities of many kinds, he only reaches access concentration,³² not full concentration (*appanā*), that is, dhyana. That (access concentration) is itself regarded as the recollection of moral virtue, because it has arisen by virtue of the recollecting of moral virtue.

²⁹ *Satta, vidha methuna, samiyoga*: (1) sexual intercourse; (2) sensual massage and manipulation; (3) sexual bantering; (4) sexual excitement through listening to others; (5) recalling past sexual amusements; (6) gazing at other enjoying sense-pleasures; (7) keeping rituals and vows hoping for rebirth as a deity: see **Methuna S** (A 7.47/4:54-56; qu at Vism 1.144-150/51 f), SD 21.9.

³⁰ See Vism 1.151 f/53.

³¹ “Taking...as his object,” *ārabbha*, lit “having begun, beginning with or from, having initiated”; here it is used in the sense of “mentally focused on; inspired by.” See CPD sv.

³² “Access concentration” (*upacāra*). In meditation, an entirely clear and immovable image (*nimitta*) arising in very deep concentration is called **a counter-image** (*paṭibhāga, nimitta*). As soon as this image arises, the stage of neighbourhood (or access) concentration (*upacāra, samādhi*) is reached. For details, see **Bhāvanā**, SD 15.1 (9.2 + 9.6); SD 13.1 (3.1.4) (7); also see BDict: *kaṣiṇa, samādhi*.

106 [BENEFITS] And when a monk is devoted to this recollection of moral virtue, he has respect for the training.³³ He lives in communion (with his fellows in the holy life). He is diligent in hospitality [welcoming guests]. He is free of the fear of self-reproach, and so on. He sees danger in the slightest fault. He gains abundant faith, and so on. He has much zest and gladness.

If he penetrates no higher, he would at least cross over to a happy destiny.

Therefore one who is truly wise would surely cultivate heedfulness,

In this way, one always has great power (*anubhāva*) through recollection of his moral virtue.

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³³ This is the 4th of the 6 kinds of respect (*gāravatā*), namely, to: (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma, (3) the Sangha, (4) the training, (5) heedfulness, and (6) hospitality (A 6.32/3:330 f).