

SD 64.7

Atta,hita Sutta 4

Catuttha Atta,hita Sutta

The 4th Discourse on Self-benefit

A 4.99

Ce **Khippa,nisanti Sutta**, The discourse on the quick-witted
(Catukka) Atta,hita Sutta 2, the 2nd (fourth) discourse on self-benefit

Theme: Persons in terms of self-benefit and other-benefit

Translated and annotated by Piya Tan 2009, ©2026

1 Sutta summary and key note

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY

The **Atta,hita Sutta 4** (A 4.99) defines the 4 kinds of persons in terms of moral conduct, that is, *abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, falsehood and intoxication*.

There are these 4 kinds of persons:

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| (1) one who only lives morally oneself, | but does not encourage others to do so; |
| (2) one who only teaches others to live morally, | but does not do so oneself; |
| (3) one who neither lives morally | nor encourages others to do so; and |
| (4) one who both lives morally | and encourages others to do so, too. |

1.2 MORAL CONDUCT AS SELF-RELIANCE

Our moral life is an appreciation of the being of others—that all humans love *life*, love *having* things, love to be able to *freely* do things or not, love to be *true* to themselves and to others, and love to be able to *know* things and so be happy. On a deeper level, this mutual appreciation of being is when people conduct themselves with moral goodness, they are then able to grow as wise individuals, create things of truth and beauty. In other words, humans are able to master themselves by lessening, even preventing, *greed, hatred and delusion*; that is, by cultivating *charity, love and wisdom*.

Hence, the Buddha declares:

*attā hi attano nātho
ko hi nātho paro siyā
attanā'va sudantena
nāthaṃ labhati dullabhaṃ*

One is one's own master [refuge and saviour]; [Dh 380a]
for, who else can the master be?
With oneself [the mind] well tamed, indeed,
one gets a saviour difficult to find.

(Dh 160)¹

This Dhammapada verse (Dh 160) gives the spiritual rationale for self-reliance, the basis for each of the 4 kinds of persons. Thus, of these 4, the 4th and last person—the one who both lives morally and encourages others to do so, too—is the best; he practises self-reliance in spiritual development and inspires others to be spiritually self-reliant, too.

¹ For other trs of **Dh 160**: SD 20.9 (II Mod Comy: Tha 1138) (free tr); SD 26.3 (2.1.2); SD 27.3 (3.1) self-mastery; SD 34.1 (5.2) self-refuge; SD 36.1(3.4.3); SD 38.4 (3.3.3.4); SD 49.2 (3.6.2); SD 64.7 (3.2); SD 57.33 (2.3.4.2). See also SD 60.1e (13.1.1); **Spiritual friendship: A textual study**, SD 34.1 (5.2).

2 The values of the moral life

2.1 THE 5 VALUES (PAÑCA, DHAMMA)

Thus far we can see that the Buddha teaches **self-reliance**, which does not mean merely caring for *our self* but rather **for ourselves**. Here, “our self” refers to being self-centred to the exclusion of considering others. Whereas “for ourselves” means that, in all our actions—body, speech and mind—we consider both self and others, especially how an action would impact another or everyone else.

The very first of the 3 trainings—that of **moral training** (*sīla, sikkhā*)—is about “others.” The 5 precepts are our most basic training in humanity—we are being human, that is, we are able to become human and progress as humans on account of these **5 values** (*pañca dhamma*):

- the value of **life**—beings fear death and love life;
- the value of **happiness**—we work to support ourselves, have things and skills with which to live productively and happily;
- the value of **freedom**—the right to say no and to live each in our own wholesome way;
- the value of **truth**—that helps and heals others, by not falsifying or withholding true reality; and
- the value of **the mind**—by keeping the mind free from intoxicants, we are calm and clear in our awareness of others, and live in interbeing with others and the world.

2.2 Boundless love of moral conduct

We need to live the moral life not only for personal purity and happiness, but because without peace surrounding and embracing us, we will never be at peace ourselves; we will then never have a calm and clear mind. Our inner peace should thus radiate as joy and peace that inspire others and so make a wholesome community and society possible.

Peace then is the *passive* “self” aspect of moral conduct; we *love* peace, *feel* peace and *share* peace; then that peace is not only possible but will grow and enrich others. **Love** is our *active* “other” aspect, also that aspect of us that knows ourself, and sees others as living extensions of ourself.

In practical terms, **boundless love** is expressed by respect for *life, property, freedom, truth and the mind* [2.1]. Love makes what we value becomes the source of joy and happiness. Hence, when there is love, there is **the joy** of *living, of having, of being free, of being true and of being mindful*. In this way, the precepts are guided and guarded by this one joyful quality—**love** for *self, others and the world*; that is, boundless love.

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Atta,hita Sutta 4

The 4th Discourse on Self-benefit

A 4.99

1 Bhikshus, there are these 4 kinds of persons found in the world.

What are the four?

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| (1) He practises for his own welfare [99] | but not for the welfare of others; |
| (2) he practises for the welfare of others | but not for his own welfare; |
| (3) he practises neither for his own welfare | nor for the welfare of others; and |
| (4) he practises both for his own welfare | and for the welfare of others. |

2 (1) And how, bhikshus, does a person **practises for his own welfare but not for the welfare of others?**

Here, a certain person

1. himself abstains from **the destruction of life**
but does not encourage others to abstain from *the destruction of life*.
2. He himself abstains from **taking what is not given**
but does not encourage others to abstain from *taking what is not given*.
3. He himself abstains from **sexual misconduct**
but does not encourage others to abstain from *sexual misconduct*.
4. He himself abstains from **false speech**
but does not encourage others to abstain from *false speech*.
5. He himself abstains from
strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which cause heedlessness,
but does not encourage others to abstain from
strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which cause heedlessness.

It is in this way that a person *practises for his own welfare but not for the welfare of others*.

3 (2) And how does a person **practise for the welfare of others but not for his own welfare?**

1. Here, a certain person does not himself abstain from the destruction of life
but he encourages others to abstain from *the destruction of life*.
2. He does not himself abstain from taking what is not given
but he encourages others to abstain from *taking what is not given*.
3. He does not himself abstain from sexual misconduct
but he encourages others to abstain from *sexual misconduct*.
4. He does not himself abstain from false speech
but he encourages others to abstain from *false speech*.
5. He does not himself abstain from
strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which cause heedlessness
but he encourages others to abstain from
strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which cause heedlessness.

It is in this way that a person *practises for the welfare of others but not for his own welfare*.

4 (3) And how does a person practise neither for his own welfare nor for the welfare of others?

1. Here, a certain person does not himself abstain from the destruction of life and does not encourage others to abstain from *the destruction of life*.
2. He does not himself abstain from taking what is not given and he does not encourage others to abstain from *taking what is not given*.
3. He does not himself abstain from sexual misconduct and he does not encourage others to abstain from *sexual misconduct*.
4. He does not himself abstain from false speech and he does not encourage others to abstain from *false speech*.
5. He does not himself abstain from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which cause heedlessness and he does not encourage others to abstain from *strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which cause heedlessness*.

It is in this way that a person practises neither for his own welfare nor for the welfare of others.

5 (4) And how does a person practise both for his own welfare and for the welfare of others?

1. Here, a certain person himself abstains from the destruction of life and encourages others to abstain from *the destruction of life*.
2. He himself abstains from taking what is not given and encourages others to abstain from *taking what is not given*.
3. He himself abstains from sexual misconduct and encourages others to abstain from *sexual misconduct*.
4. He himself abstains from false speech and encourages others to abstain from *false speech*.
5. He himself abstains from strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which cause heedlessness, and encourages others to abstain from *strong drinks, distilled drinks, fermented drinks, that which cause heedlessness*.

It is in this way that a person practises both for his own welfare and for the welfare of others.

These, bhikshus, are the 4 kinds of persons found in the world. **[100]**

—evaṃ—

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