

Dhamma Talk: The Power of Morality (Sīla) for Inner and Outer Harmony

Dhamma Speaker: Bhante Pannasara- September 6th 2025

1. Opening Reflection

Dear Dhamma friends,

Today, we gather to reflect on a very important foundation of the Buddha's path — *Sīla*, or moral discipline. The Buddha compared the world to a great fire. Everywhere beings are burning with suffering — burning with birth, burning with aging, burning with death, burning with sorrow and lamentation.

In the *Visuddhimagga*, a verse is quoted that asks:

**Antojāta bahijātā, jātāya jātijappajā;
Taṃ taṃ Gotama pucchāmi, so imaṃ vijati jātan.**

Inside beings are burning, outside beings are burning. Everything is consumed by the flames of suffering. Who, O Gotama, can put out this fire?

And the Blessed One replies:

**Sīle patitṭhāya naro sapañño,
Cittaṃ paññañca bhāvayaṃ;
Ātāpī nipako bhikkhu,
So imaṃ vijati jātan.**

The wise one, established in morality, cultivating mind and wisdom, with energy and mindfulness — such a person overcomes this fire of suffering.

So friends, let us reflect on the power of morality, not only for our personal peace but also for the peace of families, societies, and the whole world.

2. What is Sīla?

When we hear the word *Sīla*, we can think of it simply as **living in harmony**.

- Harmony with ourselves, because we live without guilt or remorse.
- Harmony with others, because we do not harm them.
- Harmony with the law of kamma, because we plant wholesome seeds that bring wholesome fruits.

For lay followers, the Buddha encouraged the **Five Precepts** (*pañca-sīla*, DN 31 *Sigālovāda Sutta*):

1. **Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī** – to refrain from killing, cultivating compassion for all beings.
2. **Adinnādānā veramaṇī** – to refrain from stealing, living with honesty and generosity.
3. **Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī** – to refrain from sexual misconduct, living with respect and responsibility.
4. **Musāvādā veramaṇī** – to refrain from false speech, speaking truthfully and creating trust.
5. **Surāmeraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī** – to refrain from intoxicants, keeping the mind clear and mindful.

Friends, these are not commandments. They are training rules, undertaken with wisdom and compassion. When we keep them, our life becomes lighter, our mind becomes peaceful, and our relationships become trustworthy.

3. Protecting Morality

But how should we protect our morality? The *Visuddhimagga* gives us a beautiful verse:

**Kikīva āṇḍaṃ camarīva vāladhiṃ,
Piyaṃva puttāṃ nayaṇaṃva ekakaṃ;
Tath’eva sīlaṃ anurakkhamānako,
Sube sada sāgaravo.**

Just as a hen protects her eggs,
Just as a yak guards her tail,
Just as a mother protects her only child,
Just as a person protects their only eye —
In the same way, one should carefully guard their morality,
With reverence and with care.

If we lose morality, it is like losing our only eye. Without it, we walk in darkness. With it, we see the path clearly.

4. Hiri and Ottappa – The Guardians of the World

But friends, how do we make sure morality is protected? The Buddha taught about two powerful qualities that safeguard the world. In the **Lokapāla Sutta (AN 2.9, Aṅguttara Nikāya)** he said:

“Dveme bhikkhave dhammā lokassa pālā. Katame dve? Hiri ca ottappaṃ ca. Ime kho bhikkhave dve dhammā lokassa pālā.”

“These two bright qualities protect the world: *Hiri* and *Ottappa*. Without them, the world has no protection from mothers with sons, brothers with sisters, or teachers with pupils.”

- **Hiri** is moral conscience — the inner voice that says: *“This is not worthy of me. I cannot do this wrong.”*
- **Ottappa** is moral fear — the wise concern: *“If I do this, it will harm myself and others. I must refrain.”*

Without these, even the love of a parent for a child or the respect between teacher and student would not be enough to protect the world. With them, however, there is safety, peace, and trust.

Friends, think of *Hiri* and *Ottappa* like the brakes of a car. Without brakes, even the best car will cause destruction. With brakes, the car becomes safe and useful. In the same way, without moral conscience and moral fear, even an intelligent person may destroy themselves and others. With them, wisdom and compassion grow.

5. The Benefits of Sīla (Upanisā Sutta, SN 12.23)

The Buddha taught how *sīla* naturally leads step by step towards liberation.

- **Sīla** → **Avippaṭisāra** – Morality gives rise to non-remorse.
- **Avippaṭisāra** → **Pāmojja** – From non-remorse comes joy.
- **Pāmojja** → **Pīti** – Joy leads to rapture or uplifting gladness.
- **Pīti** → **Passaddhi** – Rapture calms the body and mind, bringing tranquility.
- **Passaddhi** → **Sukha** – From tranquility comes happiness.
- **Sukha** → **Samādhi** – Happiness supports deep concentration.
- **Samādhi** → **Yathābhūtañāṇadassana (Paññā)** – Concentration leads to wisdom, seeing things as they truly are.
- **Ñāṇa** → **Nibbidā** → **Virāga** → **Vimutti** – Wisdom gives rise to disenchantment, to detachment, and finally to freedom — liberation of the heart.

So friends, morality is not just about rules. It is the first step on the staircase that leads all the way to Nibbāna.

6. Stories that Teach Sīla

(a) Angulimāla (MN 86, Angulimāla Sutta)

Angulimāla killed almost a thousand people. His heart was burning with hatred and delusion. But when he met the Buddha, his life was transformed. He gave up killing, took up morality, became a monk, and later attained arahantship.

Lesson: Even the most immoral person can be transformed through morality.

(b) The Mother Bird (Jātaka Tale, Rājovāda Jātaka No. 151)

A forest fire spread across the land. A mother bird refused to abandon her eggs. She chose to give her life protecting them.

Lesson: Just as the bird protected her eggs, we must protect our morality with courage and love.

(c) Everyday Example

Consider someone addicted to alcohol or drugs. Their family suffers, their health declines, society is burdened. But when they take up the fifth precept, they regain clarity, rebuild trust, and live with dignity.

Lesson: Morality heals not only the person but also the community.

7. Sīla and Society

The Buddha, in the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31), explained that morality is the very foundation of society.

- Children respecting parents,
- Husbands and wives honoring each other,
- Friends dealing honestly,
- Workers and employers treating each other fairly.

These relationships are strong only when guided by morality. Laws and punishments may restrain people from outside, but only morality — supported by *Hiri* and *Ottappa* — restrains from within.

8. Sīla for World Harmony

In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN 16), the Buddha explained that when morality declines, societies decline; but when morality is upheld, societies flourish.

Think of the problems in the world today: wars, conflicts, corruption, and destruction of the environment. At the root is greed, hatred, and delusion.

And what is the medicine? *Sīla*.

- Non-violence instead of aggression.
- Generosity instead of exploitation.
- Truthfulness instead of deception.

When one person lives morally, peace arises in that one life. When many live morally, peace spreads across families, communities, and even nations.

9. Closing Reflection

Dear friends, morality is not something small or old-fashioned. It is the very foundation of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Buddha said:

- Protect morality like a hen guards her eggs.
- Protect morality like a yak guards her tail.
- Protect morality like a mother guards her only child.
- Protect morality like a person guards their only eye.

With *Sīla*, supported by the guardians of the world — *Hiri* and *Ottappa* — we find safety, peace, and liberation.

Let us end by remembering the Buddha's words:

**Sīle patitṭhāya naro sapaṇṇo,
Cittaṃ paññaṇca bhāvayaṃ;
Ātāpī nipako bhikkhu,
So imaṃ vijati jātan.**

The wise, grounded in morality, cultivating mind and wisdom, overcomes the fire of suffering.