

## **LET US BE FREE OF THE FIVE BASIC UNWHOLESOME ACTIONS**

*By Kalana Dissanayake*

There may be a handful of persons who refuse to accept the necessity for a moral basis to sustain our social structure. As Buddhists we take refuge in the Triple Gem and observe the Five Precepts with a solid understanding of our commitment to upholding those precepts. Buddha had referred to the five unwholesome deeds, in brief, on many occasions.

### **KILLING/ TAKING OF LIFE**

Preservation of one's own life is a basic instinct common to all beings. If we practice non-violence with loving kindness, we would be blessed with reciprocal protection. Buddha had observed four characteristics of persons who do not respect life: cruelty, blood-stained hands, prone to destroy life and merciless towards other living beings. Buddha had further observed that those who take other lives are liable to be reborn in worlds of woe. Even if they were reborn in the human sphere, they would be born with deformities and would have shorter life-spans. A person who observes the Precept of Non-killing, would not use any weapon of destruction. He would be ashamed to take life: would be kind to animals, too. As a result of such behaviour, they would acquire much merit and further weaken their propensity to harm others: would be blessed with longevity: their lives would be filled with bodily and mental ease and comfort.

### **TAKING WHAT IS NOT GIVEN/ STEALING**

Whether you in a social surrounding or in a forest abode, taking what is not freely given amounts to stealing. Buddha's Observation was that stealing leads to fear and enmity. One is inclined to look at others with suspicion. One who observes the relevant Precept would avoid taking what is not freely given/ stealing. Such a person would not encourage others to steal: his/ her wealth will be protected and would be reborn into lives of comfort and ease.

### **UNACCEPTABLE SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Sexual relationships between unmarried singles are considered inappropriate. [Marriage, here, a union acceptable to member of families of both parties to a union.] Such relationships would lead to enmity and disruption of family life. They are liable to be reborn in woeful states. The Buddha had specified what unacceptable relationships could be:

- with females living under the guardianship of both parents;
- with females under the guardianship of fathers;
- with females under the guardianship of siblings;
- with females living under the guardianship of their respective clans;
- with females who have taken Precepts of morality;
- with females married to another person; and
- with females engaged to another.

In a broader sense, this means that it is unwholesome with any other person than to the one to whom he/ she is married. Such a person will have no enemies; would not be subjected to unnecessary fears.

### **UNTRUTHFULNESS/ LYING**

The Buddha's explanation of untruthfulness includes:

- denying what one knows;
- asserting what one does not know;
- denying what one had seen;
- asserting what one had not seen;
- denying what one had heard and
- asserting what one had not heard.

Untruthfulness leads to the assertion of what did not take place and denial of what did take place. Untruthfulness will be one of the causes that would lead to the disappearance of the practice of Buddhist religion. Tale bearing, use of harsh words and frivolous talk, too, come within the category of falsehood.

### **TALE-BEARING**

Tale-bearing leads to discord among those who live in amity. It would lead to further damages to strained relationships among people; would lead to the disruption of peaceful relationships. The aim of tale-bearing is to create discord among people who live in each other's trust. One who is not prone to tale-bearing would actually try to create harmony where there is discord. They would encourage concord among others. Harmony will bring happiness. Harmonious words will encourage peace.

### **USE OF HARSH WORDS**

Harmful, unpleasant words and those that hurt the hearer are considered harsh words. Harsh words lead to anger and fear. They lead to unwholesomeness. Avoiding harsh words will help develop wholesome thoughts and to extend loving-kindness to all other beings.

### **FRIVOLOUS TALK**

Frivolous talk includes harmful, unnecessary, untrue and that which could bring misery to others. Frivolous talk is so abundant in present day society and would lead to its corruption and debasement. It results in waste of valuable time. Those who engage in such talk will miss their opportunities to do wholesome deeds and forfeit their chances of advancement in this life and in lives they would be reborn in.

## **CONSUMPTION OF INTOXICANTS**

This is another very unwholesome deed which could lead to fear and enmity. Those who take intoxicants tend to be heedless. Many such people undergo immense suffering in this very life itself. They are liable to involve themselves in quarrels. They are prone to illness and waste their own wealth. They would have to live in discomfort and would lack social acceptance. Intoxication will stand in the way of acquiring merit. Unwholesome deeds will increase in their lives. They are liable to be reborn in woeful states. Even if born in the human sphere, they would be consumed by unbearable misery. Reborn as dullards, their thoughts and memories would be confused and weak. On the other hand, those who avoid intoxicants would peaceful lives.: would diffuse love and compassion. Not harming their health, they would live in comfort and wealth. Greater opportunities to do wholesome deeds would be there and have an accumulative snowballing effect in their future births.

The avoidance of the Five Basic Unwholesome deeds would provide a training ground for higher morality that would facilitate one's harmonious progress in traversing the Super Eightfold Path which would lead to final realization. Harmonious perspective, goal visualization, speech, action, lifestyle, practice, attentiveness and equilibrium could be developed without interruption within a wholesome life. Mental development with unshakable faith in the Triple Gem could take one to the first state of Sainthood, Sotāpañna. Born into this world with the capacity of instant understanding, one should try to maximize one's efforts higher goals with diligence.

Thus, observed the Buddha.