

Virtue Training of the Āyukusala Practitioners of Dhamma (āyukusalagaṇe samaṇassa sīla-sikkhā)

Our historical Buddha Sakyamuni – in canonical texts often called Samaṇa Gotama – is the most noble example of a spiritual practitioner, in Pāli designated as *samaṇa*. The canonical common stock-phrase *samaṇa-brāhmaṇā* differentiates between the practitioner (*samaṇa*) and the priest (*brāhmaṇa*) with implications well applying to our contemporary situation, too. Dhammapada (verse 265) gives the following characterization of the Dhamma practitioner: *samītatā pāpānaṃ samaṇo ti pavuccati*, meaning the one who becomes pacified by having appeased the evil. There are other words, such as *anagārika* (homeless), *brahmacariya* (holiness striver), *muni* (silent), *tapassin* (ascetic), which designate the practitioners of any, not necessarily Buddhist, religious methods. None of them fits that well to designate the Dhamma practitioner, as the word *samaṇo* does. Within the Buddhist monastic and lay Sangha, there are nowadays used also the words *sāmaṇera*, *sāmaṇerī* (little *samaṇo* or novice), *bhikkhu*, *bhikkhunī* (mendicant monk and nun), *thera*, *therī* (elder monk or nun of high standing), *upāsaka*, *upāsikā* (lay follower) and other often non-Pāli expressions. All of these can be well included as more specific ones under the designation of the male practitioner as *samaṇo* or the female one as *samaṇī*. Thus far we leave aside questions of preaching and teaching professions, which are performed by some priests and spiritual masters.

Definition of a Spiritual Practitioner:

Samaṇa and *samaṇī* are thus the best general designations of the practitioners of Dhamma.

Not only the practitioners themselves, but also the general public is interested to know – even though intuitively only – the criteria for discerning the various types of religious people. Even in our very tolerant democratic Western world, we judge them. A man on the street would take into account some conception of the morals assigned to priests, monks, and others resembling them in behaviour and costume. Let us stay happily with the fact that most people would distinguish the religious practitioners only very generally without further differentiating among them. For that purpose, the Āyukusala usage of the global designations of *samaṇa* and *samaṇī* proves to be most convenient, as it allows the further differentiations and just only discerns the religious practitioners from the laity.

Nevertheless, a more sophisticated person would be able to tell some difference between a simple member of monastic order, a lay priest, or a clerical dignitary. The differences vary in different confessional denominations. Yet any religious practitioner – so far he or she cares to disclose it at all – signals by way of dressing and behaving certain limitations of what can be expected from him or her, or how he or she should be treated differently from members of the general public. This regards more the definition by those others. The self-defining is related to the principles of ones own ethical practice, which will be dealt with later on in some detail.

World-Ethos:

The signaling of ones own being different from general public not only imposes limitations on the religious practitioners themselves, but endows them with certain powers – even if it is only the power of living an exemplary mode of being, being an ethical example for the world, and thus promoting the world-ethos.

The true practitioners of Dhamma endeavor to train themselves in life mastery (*āyu-kusala*) by developing skills (*kosalla*) through training the ethical everyday acting (*sīla-sikkhā*), meditative training of mind (*samādhi-sikkhā*), and training of practical wisdom (*paññā-sikkhā*). Those who do not properly train themselves, but pay attention to the training of others, are mostly concerned with the morals and the possibilities to moralize, linked often to their misunderstanding of the principles of ethical training as some laws or commandments that would justify punishment.

Such a perverted approach to ethical training may be sometimes adopted even by religious practitioners themselves whenever they are short of the proper guidance.

The More Advanced Ethics, the Simpler Principles:

From the very beginning of his teaching career, Buddha used to guide every of his followers to his or her own decision how to regulate the everyday acting. There were no commandments and no vows, neither enforced through an outer authority nor self-imposed. This is a very important aspect of Buddhist ethics, which should exclude the possibility of either overacting due to the guilty feelings, or projecting the guilt outwards. Moreover, making ones own decision implies taking the responsibility for the acting, both in respect to the negative outcomes and in respect to the positive will to take ones own life into ones own hands. Just, decide and do!

The pupil of Buddha has freedom to do anything he or she likes to promote happy life. The limitations regard those ways of action that lead to suffering. Anything that causes suffering to oneself and to others – which is necessarily connected – is unethical. Specification of all the unethical actions is divided into five ambits, resulting in five decisions:

1. I decide to abstain from damaging and killing conscious beings.
2. I decide to abstain from taking what is not given.
3. I decide to abstain from wrong and harmful sensuality.
4. I decide to abstain from untrue and derogatory speech.
5. I decide to abstain from obscuring mind by drugs.

These decisions are known to all Buddhists as the five *sīla* or virtues. These five principles of ethical training are explained in the canonical Sikkhāpada-Vibhanga, of the ethical psychology of Abhidhamma, in a way that is valid for both lay and monastic practitioners. During the first decades of Buddha's teaching, there was no special monastic ethos such as developed later on into the 227 rules of *pātimokkha*, recorded in the Vinaya. The ethical training of the advanced practitioners, *samaṇa* and *samaṇī* of Āyukusala is based on the principles of three *sīla*:

1. decision to restrain and protect the doors of perception: *indriyasamvarasīla*.
2. decision to cultivate and purify the ways of livelihood: *ājīvapārisuddhisīla*.
3. decision to restrain the usage and acquirement of the requisites: *paccayasannissitasīla*.

Those wishing to receive the higher *upasampadā* ordination of a *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhunī* have to make also the fourth restrain in keeping the monastic rules: *pātimokkhasamvarasīla*.

Buddha has described these four types of *sīla* in the following way as summarized in the most comprehensive Manual of Dhamma Teachers, Visuddhi-Magga (VisM 1,42):

Catutthacatukka yaṃ bhagavatā “idha bhikkhu pātimokkhasamvarasamvuto viharati ācāragocarasampanno aṇumattesu vajjesu bhayadassāvī samādāya sikkhati sikkhāpadesū”ti (Vbh 508; D 1.193) vaṃ vuttam sīlam, idam **pātimokkhasamvarasīlam** nāma.

Yaṃ pana “so cakkhunā rūpaṃ disvā na nimittaggāhī hoti nānubyañjanaggāhī, yatvādhikaraṇamenam cakkhundriyam asamvutam viharantam abhijjhādomanassā pāpakā akusalā dhammā anvāssaveyyum, tassa samvarāya paṭipajjati, rakkhati cakkhundriyam, cakkhundriye samvaram āpajjati. Sotena saddam sutvā ...pe... ghānena gandham ghāyitvā ...pe... jivhāya rasam sāyitvā ...pe... kāyena phoṭṭhabbam phusitvā ...pe... manasā dhammam viññāya na nimittaggāhī ...pe... manindriye samvaram āpajjati”ti (M 1.22, 411; D 1. 213; A 4.198) vuttam, idam **indriyasamvarasīlam**.

Yā pana ājīvahetupaññattānam channam sikkhāpadānam vītikkamassa, “kuhanā lapanā nemittikatā nippesikatā lābhena lābham nijigīsanatā”ti (Nd 1. 224) evamādīnañca pāpadhammānam vasena pavattā micchājīvā virati, idam **ājīvapārisuddhisīlam**.

“Paṭisaṅkhā yoniso cīvaram paṭisevati, yāvadeva sītassa paṭighātāyā”ti (M 1.23; A 6.58) ādinā nayena vutto paṭisaṅkhānaparisuddho catupaccayaparibhogo **paccayasannissitasīlam** nāma.

These and some other paradigms of the monastic ethos are twice a daily recited by the *samaṇa* and *samaṇī* practitioners of the Āyukusala Tradition (see the <AyuPuja.pdf>).