CHAPTER III

Buddhist Ethics in PÈli Literature

3.0. Introduction

Buddhism contains excellent moral codes, including one for the monk and another for the laity. It is much more than an ordinary moral teaching. The need for ethics arises from the fact that man is not perfect by nature: he has to train himself to be good. Thus morality becomes the most important aspect of living.

Morality in Buddhism is essentially practical in the sense that it is only a mean leading to the final goal of ultimate happiness. On the Buddhist path to Emancipation, each individual is considered responsible for his own fortunes and misfortunes. Each individual is expected to work his own deliverance by his understanding and effort. Buddhist salvation is the result of one's own moral development and can neither be imposed nor granted to one by some external agent. The Buddha's mission was to enlighten men as to the nature of existence and to advise them how best to act for their own happiness and for the benefit of others. Consequently, Buddhist ethics is not founded on any commandments which men are compelled to follow.
The Buddha advised men on the conditions which were most wholesome and conducive to long term benefit for self and others. Rather than addressing sinners with such words as 'shameful', 'wicked', 'wretched', unworthy', and blasphemous' He would merely say, 'You are foolish in acting in such a way since this will bring sorrow upon yourselves and others'.

The theory of Buddhist ethics finds its practical expression in the various precepts. These precepts or disciplines are nothing but general guides to show the direction in which the Buddhist ought to turn to on his way to final salvation. Although many of these precepts are expressed in a negative form, we must not think that Buddhist morality consists of abstaining from evil without the complement of doing good.

Morality (sīla) is only the preliminary stage and is a means to an end, but not an end in itself. Though absolutely essential, it alone does not lead to one's Deliverance or perfect purity. It is only the first stage on the Path of Purity. Beyond morality is wisdom (paññā). The base of Buddhism is morality, and wisdom is its apex. As the pair of wings of a bird are these two complementary virtues. Wisdom is like unto man's eyes; morality is like unto his feet. One of the appellatives off the Buddha

Morality in Buddhism is neither founded on any doubtful divine revelation, nor is it the ingenious invention of an exceptional mind. Rather it is a rational and practical code
based on verifiable facts and individual experience. In the opinion of Prof. Max Muller, the Buddhist moral code is one of the most perfect which the world has ever known.

Prof. Rhys Davids says: "Buddhist or no Buddhist I have examined every one of the great religious systems of the world; in none of those I have found anything to surpass in beauty and comprehensiveness the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. I am content to shape my life according to that path.

It is interesting to note that according to Buddhism there are deeds which are ethically good and bad deeds which are neither good nor bad, and deeds which tend to the ceasing of all deeds. Good deeds are essential for one's emancipation, but when once the ultimate goal of the Holy Life is attained, one transcends both good and evil.

In Buddhism, the distinction between what is good and what is bad is very clear: all actions that have their roots in greed, hatred, and delusion that spring from selfishness foster the harmful delusion of selfhood. They are called Akusala kamma. All those actions which are rooted in the virtues of generosity, love and wisdom, are meritorious- Kusala Kamma. The criteria of good and bad apply whether the actions are of thought, word or deed.

In this chapter, I will discuss ethics which are the most important for every one and every family as well as in the
society. Especially I will mentioned Five Precepts which are based on Eight fold Noble Path in this chapter.

3. 1. Definition of Morality or SÊla

The PÈÄi word ‘SÊla’ we have been translating as "moral discipline," appears in the texts with several overlapping meanings all connected with right conduct. In some contexts it means action conforming to moral principles, in others the principles themselves, in still others the virtuous qualities of character that result from the observance of moral principles. SÊla in the sense of precepts or principles represents the formalistic side of the ethical training, SÊla as virtue the animating spirit, and sÊla as right conduct the expression of virtue in real-life situations. Often sÊla is formally defined as abstinence from unwholesome bodily and verbal action. This definition, with its stress on outer action, appears superficial. Other explanations however, make up for the deficiency and reveal that there is more to sÊla than is evident at first glance.

The AbhidhammÈ, for example, equates sÊla with the mental factors of abstinence (viratiyo) - right speech, right action, and right livelihood- an equation which makes it clear that what is really being cultivated through the observance of moral precepts is the mind. Thus while the training in sÊla brings the ‘public’ benefit of inhibiting socially detrimental
actions, it entails the personal benefit of mental purification, preventing the defilements from dictating to us what lines of conduct we should follow.

The English word "morality" and its derivatives suggest a sense of obligation and constraint quite foreign to the Buddhist conception of sīla. This connotation probably enters from the theistic background to Western ethics. Buddhism, with its non-theistic framework, grounds its ethics, not on the notion of obedience, but on that of harmony. In fact, the commentaries explain the word sīla by another word, samīdhaṇa, meaning "harmony" or "coordination."

The observance of sīla leads to harmony at several levels, viz. social, psychological, kammic, and contemplative. At the social level the principles of sīla help to establish harmonious interpersonal relations, welding the mass of differently constituted members of society with their own private interests and goals into a cohesive social order in which conflict, if not utterly eliminated, is at least reduced. At the psychological level sīla brings harmony to the mind, protection from the inner split caused by guilt and remorse over moral transgressions.

At the kammic level the observance of sīla ensures harmony with the cosmic law of kamma, hence favourable results in the course of future movement through the round of repeated birth and death. At the fourth level, the contemplative,
sīla helps to establish the preliminary purification of mind to be completed, in a deeper and more thorough way, by the methodical development of serenity and insight.

When briefly defined, the factors of moral training are usually worded negatively, in terms of abstinence. However there is more to sīla than refraining from what is wrong. Each principle embedded in the precepts, as we will see, actually has two aspects, both essential to the training as a whole. One is abstinence from the unwholesome, the other commitment to the wholesome; the former is called "avoidance" (vīrītta) and the latter "performance" (cīrītta). At the outset of training the Buddha stresses the aspect of avoidance. He does so, not because abstinence from the unwholesome is sufficient in itself, but to establish the steps of practice in proper sequence. The steps are set out in their natural order (more logical than temporal) in the famous dictum of the Dhammapada: "To abstain from all evil, to cultivate the good, and to purify one's mind- this is the teaching of the Buddha"\(^1\).

The other two steps—cultivating the good and purifying the mind—also receive their due, but to ensure their success, a resolve to avoid the unwholesome is a necessity. Without such a resolve the attempt to develop wholesome qualities is bound to issue in a warped and stunted patter of growth.

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\(^1\) Dhammapada v. 183.
3. 2. The Buddhist Ethics in Buddhism

Essentially, according to Buddhist teachings, the ethical and moral principles are governed by examining whether a certain action, whether connected to body or speech is likely to be harmful to one's self or to others and thereby avoiding any actions which are likely to be harmful. In Buddhism, there is much talk of a skilled mind. A mind that is skilful avoids actions that are likely to cause suffering or remorse.

Moral conduct for Buddhists differs according to whether it applies to the laity or to the Saṅgha or clergy. A lay Buddhist should cultivate good conduct by training in what are known as the *Paṭcasila*\(^2\) (Five Precepts). These are not like, say, the Ten Commandments, which, if broken, entail punishment by God. The five precepts are training rules, which, if one were to break any of them, one should be aware of the breech and examine how such a breech may be avoided in the future. The resultant action (often referred to as *Karma*) depends on the intention more than on the action itself. It entails less feelings of guilt than its Judeo-Christian counterpart. Buddhism places a great emphasis on 'mind' and it is mental anguish such as remorse, anxiety, guilt etc. which is to be avoided in order to cultivate a calm and peaceful mind.

\(^2\) The *Paṭcasila* (The Five Precepts) are:
(i) Abstention from killing living creatures,
(ii) Abstention from taking what is not given,
(iii) Abstention from wrong conduct in sexual pleasures,
(iv) Abstention from false speech and
(v) Abstention from taking intoxicant drugs.
The life of the Buddhist layman is, or should be, regulated by the Five Precepts. These constitute the minimal requirements for ethical day-to-day living, to be of benefit both to the individual and to the community. All efforts towards higher spiritual achievement must begin with Virtue (sīla), for without Virtue, Mental Concentration (samādhi) and Wisdom (paññā) are not attainable. And without the self-discipline that Sīla inculcates, civilized life is not possible.

Aside from these obvious truths, the five principles of moral conduct were laid down by the Buddha, the supreme physician, for another reason also. They are to serve as a prophylactic against unwholesome Karma and the misery those results from it. They are the basic rules of mental and spiritual hygiene. Observance of the Precepts is a form of insurance against the risk of rebirth in states of greater suffering, a danger which is always present unless strenuous efforts are made to overcome the Taints (ᾲsava) and Defilements (Kilesa).

Every human being born into this world has in his character an accumulation of unwholesome tendencies from the Greed, Hatred and Delusion (Lobha, Dosa, Moha) of the past mixed with good ones, for if he were free from the craving, antagonism and ignorance that accompany the illusion of selfhood he would not have been reborn in this or any other sphere. He has to maintain a constant vigilance against these harmful qualities, whose greatest menace is directed towards himself. Virtue does not develop automatically; it calls for
diligent cultivation, sustained by self-analysis and unwearying self-discipline.

In the Kamavacara bhumi, the realm of sense-desires, there is a natural bias towards self gratification. It takes many forms, some of them highly deceptive so that we are often victims of the disease to a greater extent than we realize. For this reason it has to be resisted, not spasmodically but all the time, as gravity must be resisted when climbing uphill. Descent is easy and rapid, but ascent is always toilsome and slow.

We do not lack reminders of the inexorable nature of cause and effect, the universal law, for we see evidence of it everywhere. All around us people are suffering the results of their unwholesome karma of the past. They expiate it in disease, poverty, deformity, mental deficiency, frustration of their efforts and countless other kinds of misfortunes. There is no truth more obvious than that Dukkha predominates in life, heavily outweighing man's gleams of momentary and fragile happiness. The happiest man cannot say when misfortune will strike him, or what form it will take; and neither wealth, position nor skill can avail to ward it off. Yet men, even though they have been taught the moral law by a Supreme Buddha, still recklessly pursue their willful ends, as though intoxicated. They are intoxicated by craving for sense-pleasures and by the mental defilements which, like a poison in the blood-stream, driving them madly on oblivious of danger.
Just as flies swarm round a jar of honey, crawling to their doom over the bodies of other flies already caught in the alluring trap of death, so men disregard the warning signs given by the suffering of others they see all about them, and are drawn into the same trap by their craving for sense-gratification and the evil courses into which it too often leads them. Like the flies, they see their fellows suffering for their folly, yet they go on to the same end, regardless of the inevitable result. And just as the flies crawl over the struggling bodies of other flies already trapped, so men themselves often go to their doom trampling on the prostrate bodies of their fellow men. This is the grim picture the world presents; a fit subject for compassion. We may look in vain for any evidence of a merciful deity in this amoral wilderness; its creator is ignorance, and its ruler, desire. If it were not for Sīla, the pitiless jungle law would prevail everywhere.

The Five Precepts of the layman, as distinct from the augmented Eight and Ten Precepts to be observed on Uposatha Days, are meant to be followed by Buddhists at all times, the object being to establish a habit formation of virtuous and restrained conduct, in opposition to the unwholesome tendencies of greed, hatred and delusion that form a part of human nature and the ego-assertive instinct. Thus they serve a dual purpose, being at once a barrier to unwholesome mental impulses and deeds, protecting one who observes them from generating bad karma for which he would have to suffer in
future, and a necessary purification to make clear the way for Wisdom-insight and ultimate liberation from the round of births and deaths.

From this it naturally follows that the regular observance of the Five Precepts is more beneficial than the occasional observance of the Eight or Ten *Uposatha* Day vows. The extra precepts added to make up the eight or ten are not ethical rules but vows of a mildly ascetic nature whose purpose is to subdue the senses and strengthen the will. In daily life it is the moral principles involved in the five precepts which, colouring all our associations with other people, go to build up a consistently moral character. More sustained effort is required to keep the Five Precepts all the time than to keep eight or ten on special occasions. It is a mistake to assume, as some people seem to do, that the strict observance of *Uposatha* Day vows will compensate for a life that is spent, on the whole, in disregard of the five basic precepts. Ideally, both should be observed; but if a choice is to be made it should be in favour of the more difficult task, that of following the rules of disciplined conduct at all times and in all circumstances.³

The Buddhist tradition acknowledges that life is complex and throws up many difficulties, and it does not suggest that there is a single course of action that will be right in all circumstances. Indeed, rather than speaking of actions being

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right or wrong, Buddhism speaks of being skillful (kusala) or unskillful (akusala).

These five precepts constitute the fundamentals of human rights and duties between individuals, between individual and society and the state between states, mutually. They are based on the understanding of the individual, of his place in, and relationship with society. They acknowledge the existence of the individual, but not as isolated entity; they acknowledge the individual, as an essential and integral part of the process which has no movement, no progress, if not through individual effort.

In addition to these, each precept has two aspects—Negative and Positive aspects. The negative aspect is generally well known. When we examine the Paûcasûla, it is quite clear that they are some sorts of resolution taken upon oneself in order to abstain from actions harmful to society and the individual, but on the positive side, the person is exhorted to cultivate certain virtues simultaneously for the wellbeing and good of society.

### 3.3. The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path (Ariya Atthagika Magga), discovered by the Buddha Himself, is the only way to Nibbûna. It avoids the extreme of self-mortification that weakens one's
intellect, and the extreme of self-indulgence that retards one's spiritual progress. It consists of the following eight factors:-

1. Right Understanding (SammÈ Ditthi)

2. Right Thoughts - SammÈ Sankappa

3. Right Speech- SammÈ VÈcÈ

4. Right Action - SmmÈ Kammanta

5. Right Livelihood - SammÈ AÈjiva

6. Right Effort - SammÈ VÈyÈma

7. Right Mindfulness - SammÈ Sati

8. Right Concentration - SammÈ SamÈdhi

1. Right Understanding is the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths. In other words it is the understanding of oneself as one really is. The keynote of Buddhism is this Right Understanding. Buddhism as such is based on knowledge and not on unreasonable belief.

2. Right thoughts are threefold. They are the Thoughts of Renunciation - Nekkhamma Sankappa, which are opposed to lustful desires. Benevolent Thoughts - AvyÈpÈda Sankappa which are opposed to ill will, and Thoughts of Harmlessness (AvihimsÈ Sankappa) which are opposed to cruelty. These tend to purify the mind.
3. Right speech deals with refraining from falsehood, slandering, harsh words, and frivolous talks.

4. Right Action deals with refraining from killing, stealing, and unchastity.

5. Right livelihood deals with the five kinds of trades which should be avoided by a lay disciple. They are trading in arms, human beings, flesh (that is, breeding animals for slaughter), intoxicating drinks, and poison. Hypocritical conduct is cited as wrong livelihood for monks.

6. Right Effort is fourfold- namely,

   i. the endeavour to discard evil that has already arisen,

   ii. the endeavour to prevent the arising of unrisen evil,

   iii. the endeavour to develop unrisen good, and

   iv. the endeavour to promote that good which has already arisen.

7. Right Mindfulness is also fourfold. It is the mindfulness with regard to body, sensations, mind, and Dhamma (Phenomena).

8. Right Concentration is the one-pointedness of the mind.
The first two are grouped in Wisdom - PaÒÒÈ, the second three in Morality - SÊla, and the last three in Concentration - SamÈdhi.

Morality or SÊla is the first stage in Buddhism. Without killing or causing injury to any living being, the aspirant should be kind and compassionate towards all. Refraining from stealing, he should be upright and honest in all his dealings. Abstaining from sexual misconduct, he should be pure and chaste. Shunning false speech, he should be truthful. Avoiding pernicious drinks that promote heedlessness, he should be sober and diligent.

In this chapter, I have to discuss about morality or SÊla. I therefore will explain the second three path factors - right speech and right action-in detail.

3. 4. Right Action (sammÈ kammnta)

Right action means refraining from unwholesome deeds that occur with the body as their natural means of expression. The pivotal element in this path factor is the mental factor of abstinence, but because this abstinence applies to actions performed through the body, it is called ‘right action.’ The Buddha mentions three components of right action: abstaining from taking life, abstaining from taking what is not given, and
abstaining from sexual misconduct. These we will briefly discuss in order.

3. 4. 1. Abstaining from the taking of life

Herein someone avoids the taking of life and abstains from it. Without stick or sword, conscientious, full of sympathy, he is desirous of the welfare of all sentient beings.⁴

"Abstaining from taking life" has a wider application than simply refraining from killing other human beings. The precept enjoins abstaining from killing any sentient being. A ‘sentient being’ (pÈÓi, satta) is a living being endowed with mind or consciousness; for practical purposes, this means human beings, animals, and insects. Plants are not considered to be sentient beings; though they exhibit some degree of sensitivity, they lack full-fledged consciousness, the defining attribute of a sentient being.

The ‘taking of life’ that is to be avoided is intentional killing, the deliberate destruction of life of a being endowed with consciousness. The principle is grounded in the consideration that all beings love life and fear death, that all seek happiness and are averse to pain. The essential determinant of transgression is the volition to kill, issuing in an action that deprives a being of life. Suicide is also generally regarded as a

⁴. AN 10;176; Word of the Buddha, P.53.
violation, but not accidental killing as the intention to destroy life is absent. The abstinence may be taken to apply to two kinds of action, the primary and the secondary. The primary is the actual destruction of life; the secondary is deliberately harming or torturing another being without killing it.

While the Buddha's statement on non-injury is quite simple and straightforward, later commentaries give a detailed analysis of the principle. A treatise from Thailand, written by an erudite Thai patriarch, collates a mass of earlier material into an especially thorough treatment, which we shall briefly summarize here. The treatise points out that the taking of life may have varying degrees of moral weight entailing different consequences. The three primary variables governing moral weight are the object, the motive, and the effort. With regard to the object there is a difference in seriousness between killing a human being and killing an animal, the former being kammically heavier since man has a more highly develop moral sense and greater spiritual potential than animals. Among human beings, the degree of kammic weight depends on the qualities of the person killed and his relation to the killer, thus killing a person of superior spiritual qualities or a personal benefactor, such as a parent or a teacher, is especially grave act.

The motive for killing also influences moral weight. Acts of killing can be driven by greed, hatred, or delusion. Of the

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three, killing motivated by hatred is the most serious, and the weight increases to the degree that the killing is premeditated. The force of effort involved also contributes, the unwholesome *kamma* being proportional to the force and the strength of the defilements.

The positive counterpart to abstaining from taking life, as the Buddha indicates, is the development of kindness and compassion for other beings. The disciple not only avoids destroying life; he dwells with a heart full of sympathy, desiring the welfare of all beings. The commitment to non-injury and concern for the welfare of others represent the practical application of the second path factor, right intention, in the form of good will and harmlessness.

### 3. 4. 2. Abstaining from taking what is not given

He avoids taking what is not given and abstains from it; what another person possesses of goods and chattel in the village or in the wood, that he does not take away with thievish intent.⁶

"Taking what is not given" means appropriating the rightful belongings of others with thievish intent. If one takes something that has no owner, such as unclaimed stones, wood, or even gems extracted from the earth, the act does not count

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⁶. AN 10:176; Word of the Buddha, P.53.
as a violation even though these objects have not been given. But also implied as a transgression, though not expressly stated, is with holding from others what should rightfully be given to them.

Commentaries mention a number of ways in which "taking what is not given" can be committed. Some of the most common may be enumerated:

(1) stealing: taking the belongings of others secretly, as in housebreaking, pickpocketing, etc.;

(2) robbery: taking what belongs to others openly by force or threats;

(3) snatching: suddenly pulling away another's possession before he has time to resist;

(4) fraudulence: gaining possession of another's belongings by falsely claiming them as one's own;

(5) deceitfulness: using false weights and measures to cheat customers.\(^7\)

The degree of moral weight that attaches to the action is determined by three factors: the value of the object taken; the qualities of the victim of the theft; and the subjective state of the thief. Regarding the first, moral weight is directly proportional to the value of the object. Regarding the second, the weight

\(^7\) The Five Precepts and the Five Ennoblers gives a fuller list, PP. 10-13.
varies according to the moral qualities of the deprived individual. Regarding the third, acts of theft may be motivated either by greed or hatred. While greed is the most common cause, hatred may also be responsible as when one person deprives another of his belongings not so much because he wants them for himself as because he wants to harm the latter. Between the two, acts motivated by hatred are kammically heavier than acts motivated by sheer greed.

The positive counterpart to abstaining from stealing is honesty, which implies respect for the belongings of others and for their right to use their belongings as they wish. Another related virtue is contentment, being satisfied with what one has without being inclined to increase one's wealth by unscrupulous means. The most eminent opposite virtue is generosity, giving away one's own wealth and possessions in order to benefit others.

3. 4. 3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct

He avoids sexual misconduct and abstains from it. He has no intercourse with such persons as are still under the protection of father, mother, brother, sister or relatives, nor with
married women, nor with female convicts, nor lastly, with betrothed girls.\textsuperscript{8}

The guiding purposes of this precept, from the ethical standpoint, are to protect marital relations from outside disruption and to promote trust and fidelity within the marital union. From the spiritual standpoint it helps to curb the expansive tendency of sexual desire and thus is a step in the direction of renunciation, which reaches its consummation in the observance of celibacy (\textit{brahmacariya}) binding on monks and nuns. But for laypeople the precept enjoins abstaining from sexual relations with an illicit partner. The primary transgression is entering into full sexual union, but all other sexual involvements of a less complete kind may be considered secondary infringements.

The main question raised by the precept concerns who is to count as an illicit partner. The Buddha's statement defines the illicit partner from the perspective of the man, but later treatises elaborate the matter for both sexes.\textsuperscript{9}

For a man, three kinds of women are considered illicit partners:

(1) A woman who is married to another man. This includes, besides a woman already married to a man, a woman

\textsuperscript{8} AN 10:176; Word of the Buddha, P.53.  
\textsuperscript{9} The following is summarized from The Five Precepts and the Five Ennoblers, PP.16-16.
who is not his legal wife but is generally recognized as his consort, who lives with him or is kept by him or is in some way acknowledged as his partner. All these women are illicit partners for men other than their own husbands. This class would also include a woman engaged to another man. But a widow or divorcee woman is not out of bounds, provided she is not excluded for other reasons.

(2) A woman still under protection. This is a girl or woman who is under the protection of her mother, father, relatives, or others rightfully entitled to be her guardians. This provision rules out elopements or secret marriages contrary to the wishes of the protecting party.

(3) A woman prohibited by convention. This includes close female relatives forbidden as partners by social tradition, nuns and other women under a vow of celibacy, and those prohibited as partners by the law of the land.

From the standpoint of a woman, two kinds of men are considered illicit partners:

(1) For a married woman any man other than her husband is out of bounds. Thus a married woman violates the precept if she breaks her vow of fidelity to her husband. But a widow or divorcee is free to remarry.
(2) For any woman any man forbidden by convention, such as close relatives and those under a vow of celibacy, is an illicit partner.

Besides these, any case of forced, violent, or coercive sexual union constitutes a transgression. But in such a case the violation falls only on the offender, not on the one compelled to submit.

The positive virtue corresponding to the abstinence is, for laypeople, marital fidelity. Husband and wife should each be faithful and devoted to the other, content with the relationship, and should not risk a breakup to the union by seeking outside partners. The principle does not, however, confine sexual relations to the marital union. It is flexible enough to allow for variations depending on social convention. The essential purpose, as was said, is to prevent sexual relations which are hurtful to others. When mature independent people, though unmarried, enter into a sexual relationship through free consent, so long as no other person is intentionally harmed, no breach of the training factor is involved.

Ordained monks and nuns including men and women who have undertaken the eight or ten precepts are obliged to observe celibacy. They must abstain not only from sexual misconduct, but from all sexual involvements, at least during the period of their vows. The holy life at its highest aims at
complete purity in thought, word, and deed, and this requires turning back the tide of sexual desire.

3. 5. Right Speech (sammÈ vÈcÈ)

The Buddha divides right speech into four components: abstaining from false speech, abstaining from slanderous speech, abstaining from harsh speech, and abstaining from idle chatter. Because the effects of speech are not as immediately evident as those of bodily action, its importance and potential is easily overlooked. Nevertheless a little reflection will show that speech and its offshoot, the written word, can have enormous consequences for good or for harm.

In fact, whereas for beings such as animals who live at the preverbal level physical action is of dominant concern, for humans immersed in verbal communication speech gains the ascendancy. Speech can break lives, create enemies, and start wars, or it can give wisdom, and create peace. This has always been so, yet in the modern age the positive and negative potentials of speech have been vastly multiplied by the tremendous increase in the means, speed, and range of communications. The capacity for verbal expression, oral and written, has often been regarded as the distinguishing mark of the human species. From this we can appreciate the need to
make this capacity the means to human excellence rather than, as too often has been the case, the sign of human degradation.

### 3. 5. 1. Abstaining from false speech

Herein someone avoids false speech and abstains from it. He speaks the truth, is devoted to truth, reliable, worthy of confidence, not a deceiver of people. Being at a meeting, or amongst people, or in the midst of his relatives, or in a society, or in the king’s court, and called upon and asked as witness to tell what he knows, he answers, if he knows nothing "I know nothing," and if he knows, he answers: "I know"; if he has seen nothing, he answers: "I have seen nothing," and if he has seen, he answers: "I have seen." Thus he never knowingly speaks a lie, either for the sake of his own advantage, or for the sake of another person's advantage, or for the sake of any advantage whatsoever.  

This statement of the Buddha discloses both the negative and the positive sides to the precept. The negative side is abstaining from lying, the positive side speaking the truth. The determinative factor behind the transgression is the intention to deceive. If one speaks something false believing it to be true, there is no breach of the precept as the intention is common to all cases of false speech, lies can appear in different guises.

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10. AN 10: 176; Word of the Buddha, P. 50
depending on the motivating root, whether greed, hatred, or delusion, Greed as the chief motive results in the lie aimed at gaining some personal advantage for oneself or for those close to oneself—material wealth, position, respect, or admiration. With hatred as the motive, false speech takes the form of the malicious lie, the lie intended to hurt and damage others. When delusion is the principal motive, the result is a less pernicious type of falsehood: the irrational lie, the compulsive lie, the interesting exaggeration, lying for the sake of a joke.

The Buddha’s stricture against lying rests upon several reasons. For one thing, lying is disruptive to social cohesion. People can live together in society only in an atmosphere of mutual trust, where they have reason to believe that others will speak the truth; by destroying the grounds for trust and inducing mass suspicion, widespread lying becomes the harbinger signaling the fall from social solidarity to chaos. But lying has other consequences of a deeply personal nature at least equally disastrous. By their very nature lies tend to proliferate. Lying once and finding our word suspect, we feel compelled to lie again to defend our credibility, to paint a consistent picture of events. So the process repeats itself: the lies stretch, multiply, and connect until they lock us into a cage of falsehoods from which it is difficult to escape. The lie is thus a miniature paradigm for the whole process of subjective illusion. In each case the self assured creator, sucked in by his own deceptions, eventually winds up their victim.
Such considerations probably lie behind the words of counsel the Buddha spoke to his son, the young novice Rèhula, soon after the boy was ordained. One day the Buddha came to Rèhula, pointed to a bowl with a little bit of water in it, and asked: "Rèhula, do you see this bit of water left in the bowl?" Rèhula answered: "Yes, sir." "So little, Rèhula, is the spiritual achievement (sÈmaÒÒa, lit. 'recluseship') of one who is not afraid to speak a deliberate lie." Then the Buddha threw the water away, put the bowl down, and said: "Do you see, Rèhula, how that water has been discarded? In the same way one who tells a deliberate lie discards whatever spiritual achievement he has made." Again he asked: "Do you see how this bowl is now empty? In the same way one who has no shame in speaking lies is empty of spiritual achievement." Then the Buddha turned the bowl upside down and said: "Do you see, Rèhula, how this bowl has been turned upside down? In the same way one who tells a deliberate lie turns his spiritual achievements upside down and becomes incapable of progress." Therefore, the Buddha concluded, one should not speak a deliberate lie even in jest.  

It is said that in the course of his long training for enlightenment over many lives, a Bodhisatta can break all the moral precepts except the pledge to speak the truth. The reason for this is very profound, and reveals that the commitment to truth has a significance transcending the

11. MN 61.
domains of ethics and even mental purification, taking us to the domains of knowledge and being. Truthful speech provides, in the sphere of interpersonal communication, a parallel to wisdom in the sphere of private understanding. The two are respectively the outward and inward modalities of the same commitment to what is real. Wisdom consists in the realization of truth, and truth (sacca) is not just a verbal proposition but the nature of things as they are.

In order to realize truth our whole being has to be brought into accord with actuality, with things as they are, which requires that in communications with others we respect things as they are by speaking the truth. Truthful speech establishes a correspondence between our own inner being and the real nature of phenomena, allowing wisdom to rise up and fathom their real nature. Thus, much more than an ethical principle, devotion to truthful speech is a matter of taking our stand on reality rather than illusion, on the truth grasped by wisdom rather than the fantasies woven by desire.

### 3. 5. 2. Abstaining from slanderous speech

He avoids slanderous speech and abstains from it. What he has heard here he does not repeat there, so as to cause dissension there: and what he has heard there he does not repeat here, so as to cause dissension here. Thus he unites
those that are divided; and those that are united he encourages. Concord gladdens him, he delights and rejoices in concord; and it is concord that he spreads by his words.\textsuperscript{12}

Slanderous speech is speech intended to create enmity and division, to alienate one person or group from another. The motive behind such speech is generally aversion, resentment of a rival's success or virtues, the intention to tear down others by verbal denigrations. Other motives may enter the picture as well: the cruel intention of causing hurt to others, the evil desire to win affection for oneself, the perverse delight in seeing friends divided.

Slanderous speech is one of the most serious moral transgressions. The root of hate makes the unwholesome \textit{kamma} already heavy enough, but since the action usually occurs after deliberation, the negative force becomes even stronger because premeditation adds to its gravity. When the slanderous statement is false, the two wrongs of falsehood and slander combine to produce an extremely powerful unwholesome \textit{kamma}. The canonical texts record several cases in which the calumny of an innocent party led to an immediate rebirth in the plane of misery.

The opposite of slander, as the Buddha indicates, is speech that promotes friendship and harmony. Such speech originates from a mind of loving-kindness and sympathy. It wins

\textsuperscript{12} AN 10:176; Word of the Buddha, P. 50.
the trust and affection of others, who feel they can confide in one without fear that their disclosures will be used against them. Beyond the obvious benefits that such speech brings in this present life, it is said that abstaining from slander has as its kammic result the gain of a retinue of friends who can never be turned against one by the slanderous words of others.\textsuperscript{13}

\section*{3. 5. 3. Abstaining from harsh speech}

He avoids harsh language and abstains from it. He speaks such words as are gentle, soothing to the ear, loving, such words as go to the heart, and are courteous, friendly, and agreeable to many.\textsuperscript{14}

Harsh speech is speech uttered in anger, intended to cause to hearer pain. Such speech can assume different forms, of which we might mention three. One is abusive speech: scolding, reviling, or reproving another angrily with bitter words. A second is insult: hurting another by ascribing to him some offensive quality which detracts from his dignity. A third is sarcasm: speaking to someone in a way which ostensibly lauds

\textsuperscript{13} Subcommentary to DÊgaha NikÊya.

\textsuperscript{14} AN 10:176; Word of the Buddha, PP.50-51.
him, but with such a tone or twist of phrasing that the ironic intent becomes clear and causes pain.

The main root of harsh speech is aversion, assuming the form of anger. Since the defilement in this case tends to work impulsively, without deliberation, the transgression is less serious than slander and the kammic consequence generally less severe. Still, harsh speech is an unwholesome action with disagreeable results for oneself and others, both now and in the future, so it has to be restrained. The ideal antidote is patience—learning to tolerate blame and criticism from others, to sympathize with their shortcoming, to respect differences in viewpoint, to endure abuse without feeling compelled to retaliate. The Buddha calls for patience even under the most trying conditions: Even if, monks, robbers and murderers saw through your limbs and joints, whosoever should give way to anger thereat would not be following my advice. For thus ought you to train yourselves: "Undisturbed shall our mind remain, with heart full of love, and free from any hidden malice; and that person shall we penetrate with loving thoughts, wide, deep, boundless, freed from anger and hatred."\(^{15}\)

### 3. 5. 4. Abstaining from idle chatter

\(^{15}\) MN 21; Word of the Buddha, P. 51.
He avoids idle chatter and abstains from it. He speaks at the right time, in accordance with facts, speaks what is useful, speaks of the *Dhamma* and the discipline; his speech is like a treasure, uttered at the right moment, accompanied by reason, moderate and full of sense.\(^{16}\)

Idle chatter is pointless talk, speech that lacks purpose or depth. Such speech communicates nothing of value, but only stirs up the defilements in one's own mind and in others. The Buddha advises that idle talk should be curbed and speech restricted as much as possible to matters of genuine importance. In the case of a monk, the typical subject of the passage just quoted, his words should be selective and concerned primarily with the *Dhamma*. Lay persons will have more need for affectionate small talk with friends and family, polite conversation with acquaintances, and talk in connection with their line of work. But even then they should be mindful not to let the conversation stray into pastures where the restless mind, always eager for something sweet or spicy to feed on, might find the chance to indulge its defiling propensities.

The traditional exegesis of abstaining from idle chatter refers only to avoiding engagement in such talk oneself. But today it might be of value to give this factor a different slant, made imperative by certain developments peculiar to our own time, unknown in the days of the Buddha and the ancient

\(^{16}\) AN 10:176; Word of the Buddha, P.51.
commentators. This is avoiding exposure to the idle chatter constantly bombarding us through the new media of communication created by modern technology. An incredible array of devices - television, radio, newspapers, pulp journals, the cinema-turns out a continuous stream of needless information and distracting entertainment the net effect of which is to leave the mind passive, vacant, and sterile.

All these developments, naively accepted as ‘progress,’ threaten to blunt our aesthetic and spiritual sensitivities and deafen us to the higher call of the contemplative life. Serious aspirants on the path to liberation have to be extremely discerning in what they allow themselves to be exposed to. They would greatly serve their aspirations by including these sources of amusement and needless information in the category of idle chatter and making an effort to avoid them.

3. 6. The Buddhist Ethics for Laity

Buddhist ethics also include guidelines for good social relationships, though how these have been adopted in practice varies considerably from culture to culture. An important basic text in this area is the Sigalovada Sutta, described by Asoka as the code of discipline for the laity, paralleling that for monks and nuns.

17. MN, I, P. 129.
Commenting on this *Sutta*, the Venerable Buddhaghosa says, "Nothing in the duties of a householder is left unmentioned. This *Sutta* is called the *Vinaya* of the householder. Hence in one who practises what he has been taught in it, growth is to be looked for, not decay. "And Mrs., Rhys Davids adds: "the Buddha's doctrine of love and goodwill between man and man is here set forth in a domestic and social ethics with more comprehensive detail than elsewhere. And truly we may say even now of this *Vinaya* or code of discipline, so fundamental are the human interests involved, so sane and wide is the wisdom that envisages them, that the utterances are as fresh and practically as binding today and here as they were then at Rajagaha. 'Happy would have been the village or clan on the banks of the Ganges where the people were full of the kindly spirit of fellow-feeling, the noble spirit of justice which breathes through these naïve and simple sayings. 'Not less happy would be the village, or the family on the banks of the Thames today, of which this could be said.\(^{18}\)

When the Buddha meets Sigala, a Hindu householder the latter is seen practicing the holy rite of worshipping the six quarters. The Buddha gives a spiritual interpretation to the idea of the six quarters and says that the proper worship of the six quarters is to engage in moral practice. He talks to *Sigala*:

"yato kho, gahapatiputta, ariyasāvakassa cattēro kammakilesē pahĒnēhonti, cat|hica Ėhānēhi pĒpakammaṉ nakaroti, cha ca bhogēnaṉ apĒyamukhēni nasevati, so evaṉ cuddasa pĒpakapagato chaddisē paticchĒdi, ubholokavigayēya patipanno hoti, tassa ayaēceva loko Ėraddho hoti parocaloko so kayassa bedē paraṉ maranē sugatiṉ saggaṉ lokaṉ uppañjati”

(1) 'In as much, young householder, as the Ariyan disciple has put away the sour vices in conduct,

(2) In as much as he does no evil actions from the four motives,

(3) In as much as he does not pursue the six channels for dissipating wealth, he thus, avoiding these fourteen evil things, is a coverer of the six quarters; he has practiced so as to conquer both worlds; he tastes success both in this world and in the next. At the dissolution of the body, after death, he is reborn to a happy destiny in heaven.

What are the four vices of conduct that he has put away?

The destruction of life, the taking what is not given, licentiousness, and lying speech. These are the four vices of conduct that he has put away.

By which four motives does he do no evil deed?

19. DN, III, P.244.
Evil deeds are done from motives of partiality, enmity, stupidity and fear. But in as much as the Ariyan disciple is not led away by these motives, he through them does no evil deed."\textsuperscript{20}

The Buddha appeals to common sense to show the evils of immoral practices, and he shows the paradoxical evil results of some social pursuits. For example, he says that in gambling one is always logically bound to lose because if one wins then one is hated by others, and if one loses then one is sad about what one lost. Also, it is interesting to note that the Buddha regarded idleness as a moral evil.

"Which are the six channels for dissipating wealth?

The being addicted to intoxicating liquors, frequenting the streets at unseemly hours, haunting fairs, the being infatuated by gambling, associating with evil companions, and the habit of idleness.

"There are, young householder, these six dangers through the being addicted to intoxicating liquors: actual loss of wealth, increase of quarrels, susceptibility to disease, loss of good character, indecent exposure, impaired intelligence.

"Six, young householder, are the perils from frequenting the streets at unseemly hours: he himself is without guard and protection and so also are wife and children: so also is his

\textsuperscript{20}. DN, III, P.181-2.
property: he moreover becomes suspected (as the doer) of (undiscovered) crimes, and false rumours fix on him, and many are the troubles he goes out to meet.

"Six, younger householder, are the perils from the haunting of fairs :(He is ever thinking) where is there dancing? Where is there singing? Where is there music? Where is recitation? Where are the cymbals? Where the tam-tams?

"Six, young householder, are the perils for him who is infatuated with gambling: as winner he begets hatred: when beaten he mourns his lost wealth; his actual substance is wasted; his word has no weight in a court of law; he is despised by friends and officials; he is not sought after by those who would give or take in marriage, for they would say that a man who is a gambler cannot afford to keep a wife.

"Six, young householder, are the perils from associating with evil companions: any gambler, any libertine, any tippler, any cheat, any swindler, any may of violence is his friend and companion.

(Six, young householder, are the perils of the habit of idleness:

"atisÊtanti kammaÑ nakaroti, atiuÓhanti kammaÑ nakaroti, atisÊyanti kammaÑ nakaroti, atipÊtoti kammaÑ nakaroti, atichÊtosmÊti kammaÑ nakaroti, atidhÊtosmÊti kammaÑ nakaroti"
He does not work, saying

i. That it is extremely cold,

ii. That it is extremely hot,

iii. That it is too late in the evening,

v. That it is extremely hungry,

vi. That it is too full.

Living in this way, he leaves many duties undone, new wealth he does not get, and wealth he has acquired dwindles away.

Sleeping when the sun has arisen, sleeping by day, prowling around at night, entanglement in strife, doing harm, friendship with wicked men, hardness of heart, playing with dice, drinking strong drinks and going to women "ear as life to other men", are said to be causes that bring ruin to a man.

As we explained above, Buddhism emphasizes the need for friends. Good friendship (*kalyāṁśatā)* is said to be of the most fortunate and greatest possessions one can have. Therefore the Buddha goes into detail to describe the nature of friends and the criteria of a good friend.

"Four, O young householder, are they who should be reckoned as foes in the likeness of friends: *autto aṭṭhuha*
amitto mittapatir|pako veditabbo, vacÊparamo amitto mittapatir|pako veditabbo, anuppiyabhanÊ amitto mittapatir|palo veditabbo, apÊyasahÊyo amitto mittapatirupako veditabbo"

i. He who appropriate a friend's possessions,

ii. He who renders lip-service,

iii. He who flatters.

vi. He who brings ruin.

"Of these the first is on four grounds to be reckoned as a foe in the likeness of a friend: he is rapacious; he gives little and asks much; he does his duty out of fear; he pursues his own interests.

"On four grounds the man of words, not deeds, is to be reckoned as a foe in the likeness of a friend: he makes friendly profession as regards the past; he makes friendly profession as regards the future; he tries to gain your favour by empty sayings? When the opportunity for service has arisen he avows his disability.

"On four grounds the flatterer is to be reckoned as a foe in the likeness of a friend: he both consents to do wrong, and dissents from doing right; he praises you to your face; he speaks ill of you to others.
"On four grounds the fellow-waster companion is to be reckoned as a foe in the likeness of a friend: he is your companion when you indulge in strong drinks; he is your companion when you frequent the streets at untimely hours; he is your companion when you haunt shows and fairs; he is your companion when you are infatuated with gambling.

"Four, O young householder, are the friends who should be reckoned as sound at heart: "upakÈro mitto supado veditabbo, samanasukhadukkho mitto supado veditabbno, atthakkhÈyÊ mitto supado veditabbo, anukapako mitto supado veditbbo"

i. He who is a helpmate,

ii. He who is the same in happiness and sorrow,

iii. He who gives good counsel,

vi. He who sympathizes.

"On four grounds the friend who is a helper is to be reckoned as sound at heart: he guards you when you are off your guard, he guards your property when you are off your guard; he is a refuge to you when you are afraid; when you have tasks to perform he provides a double supply what you may need.

"On four grounds the friend who is the same in happiness and adversity is to be reckoned as sound of heart: he tells you
his secrets; he keeps secret your secrets; in your troubles he does not forsake you; he lays down even his life for your sake.

"On four grounds the friend who declares what you need to do is...sound of heart: he restrains you from doing wrong; he enjoins you to(do what is) right; he informs you of what you had not heard before; he reveals to you the way to heaven.

"On four grounds the friend who sympathizes is to be reckoned as sound at heart: he does not rejoice over your misfortunes; he rejoices over your prosperity; he restrains anyone who is speaking ill of you; he commends anyone who is praising you."21

Sympathy plays an important part in good friendship and the Buddha says that the relationship between friends should be similar to his example of the archetypal perfect moral relationship between the mother and the son:" The friend who is a helpmate, and the friend of bright days and of dark, and he who shows what it is you need, and he who throbs for you with sympathy: these four the wise should know as friends, and should devote himself to them as mother to her own, her bosom's child."

The Buddha gives homely advice as to how one should manage one's personal budget. He says that one should divide

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one's earnings into business and the fourth portion should be saved because it could become useful in emergencies.\textsuperscript{22}

3.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have mentioned the definition of morality (sÉla) and Eightfold Path (Ariya-AÔÔh~gika-Magga) which is called the way of life in Buddhism. Buddhist ethics are important for every one as well as in society. I have discussed about Five Precepts which lead to peace and harmony, in detail, based on Eight fold Noble Path. Not only five precepts but also Ten evils (dasa akusala) I have mentioned in this chapter.

3.7. 1. Importance of the topic

Buddhism can be considered as a path of moral perfection. The entire path is comprised of gradual stages of ethical purification. This is the reason why it was traditionally described as a visuddhimagga. The goal of Buddhism is a modification of a person's behaviour and a transformation of a person's emotive and cognitive constitution. The consequence of this modification and transformation is that the person concerned overcomes the ills of existence and ceases to

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 188.
produce suffering to other. The goal of Buddhism is defined purely in psychological terms. It is not merging with God or Brahman or surviving to eternity in some incomprehensible realm of being, but becoming free from greed, hatred and delusion.

The ethical teachings of Buddhism advocate an ideal of moral perfection as its ultimate goal. Moral perfection is attained when the unwholesome psychological roots of human behaviour, namely, greed, hatred and delusion are eradicated. They are described as unwholesome roots because it is through their influence that people are motivated to commit unethical acts such as destruction of life, causing harm or injury to other living beings, misappropriation of the belongings of others, indulgence in sexual misconduct and the wrongful enjoyment of sense pleasures, the use of false, harsh, frivolous and slanderous speech, etc. Buddhism recognizes a valid basis for the distinctions people make between what is morally right or wrong and good or bad.

According to the Buddhist teachings, a valid basis for making moral judgments has to be discovered with reference to human experience, but not with reference to any metaphysical reality. The condition under which human beings become happy and contented and the conditions under which they find life miserable are generally the same. Factual information about those conditions is directly relevant to our moral life.
3.7. 2. The significance of Buddhism to modern society

The significance of Buddhism to modern society is that it does not seek to determine the issue of what is right and wrong by tying the moral life to a set of metaphysical dogmas from which moral precepts are derived, or to the moral commandments of a sectarian God. People who have given up metaphysics and religious dogma in preference to the modern scientific, materialist and deterministic view of existence have moved towards a skeptical stance on the nature of moral values. They tend to associate morality with metaphysics and religion. The consequence of this attitude is the creation of a moral vacuum in their lives. Under such circumstances greed, hatred and delusion become the motivating forces of their behaviour.

The materialist and determinist ideology associated with modern science, which is seeking to displace metaphysics and religious dogma, attempts to transform society by effecting changes in the material conditions of living. The scientific world-view attaches no significance to the importance of morality. Morality is considered as a matter of attitudes and emotions. Moral values are considered to be relative and subjective. According to this view, only empirical facts have objectivity. Man is considered merely as a stimulus-response mechanism.
Man's capacity to understand and control the inner motivational roots of behaviour appears to gain little recognition in terms of the mechanistic world view of material science. Human behaviour is explained in terms of the external conditions that determine it. If external factors alone determine human behaviour, people cannot be responsible for their moral failings. They cannot be blamed for what they do. Such a view of the nature of human action encourages the renunciation of personal responsibility for what people do.

I will discuss about Buddhist Economic which is most important for people. Any-body in this world can not survice without wealth. It is discussed in the next chapter. According to Theravāda Buddhism, wealth is necessary evil. It is necessary because human life is incomplete and devoid of comfort, joy and many achievements without wealth. It is evil because it makes humans corrupt, cruel, greedy and unsatisfied. Let us turn to discuss these matters in the succeeding chapter.