

Ajivatthamka Sila (The Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth) in the Pali Canon

The *Ajivatthamaka Sila* corresponds to the *Sila* (morality) group of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The first seven Precepts of the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* correspond to the first seven of the *Dasa Kusala Kamma-patha* (Ten Courses of Wholesome Action)

The *Ajivatthamaka Sila* occurs in the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, *Sutta Pitaka* and the Commentaries.

Abhidhamma Pitaka

Dhammasangani* Translation *The Expositor

The *Dhammasangani* is described in the Pali Text Society's 2002 *List of Issues* as 'the first volume of the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* [which] is a compilation from various sources analysing and classifying the phenomena (*dhamma*) that comprise all mental and material conditions'. *Buddhist Psychological Ethics* is the Pali Text Society's translation of the *Dhammasangani*. *The Expositor* is the Pali Text Society's translation of *Atthasalini*, Buddhagosa's commentary on the *Dhammasangani*.

The Expositor, Book I, *Risings of Consciousness*, part III Discourse on Doors or Gates, Chapter IV Discourse on *Kamma* (Voluntary Action), page 119 explains:

...the transcendental Path may be included in, and classified under three forms of *kamma* (bodily, vocal, mental). To expand: restraint of the wickedness of transgression by body should be understood as bodily; restraint of the wickedness of transgression in speech, as vocal. Thus Right Action is bodily *kamma* and Right speech is vocal *kamma*. When this pair is taken, Right Living, because it consists of each, is included. Restraint of the wickedness of transgression of thought is mental.

The Expositor, Book II, *Material Qualities (Rupa)*, part II Discourse on the Chapter of the Summary, Chapter II Couplets and Other Groups, page 505 explains:

... 'that which is absence of excess in deed' is the threefold bodily good conduct; 'that which is absence of excess in word' is the fourfold good conduct in speech. By the expression 'in deed and word', virtue, produced (in these seven ways) at the body-door and the speech-door and, with livelihood as the eighth, is comprised.

Nyanaponika Thera explains and expands the description given in *The Expositor*, in his book *Abhidhamma Studies: Researches in Buddhist Psychology*, Chapter 3 The Scheme of Classification in the *Dhammasangani* on pages 31-33. While explaining the description of wholesome consciousness in the *Dhammasangani* he explains that *The Expositor (Atthasalini)* list supplementary factors, three of which correspond to the *Ajivatthamaka Sila*.

63. Abstinence from wrong Bodily Action (*kaya duccharita-virati*)

64. Abstinence from wrong Speech (*vaci duccharita-virati*)

65. Abstinence from wrong Livelihood (*ajiva duccharita-virati*)

Sutta Pitaka

***Culavedalla Sutta* Translation The Shorter Series of Questions and Answers (*Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta 44*)**

In the *Culavedalla Sutta* the lay Buddhist Visakha questions his former wife now *Bhikkhuni* Dhammadina. She is described as the foremost *Bhikkhuni* in expounding the *Dhamma*, in *The Book of The Gradual Sayings (Anguttara Nikaya)*, *The Book of the Ones*, Chapter XIV (e) Women disciples, page 21.

She explains that the threefold training [*Sila* (morality), *Samadhi* (concentration) and *Panna* (wisdom)] is not

included in the Noble Eightfold Path, however the Noble Eightfold Path is included in the threefold training.

Right speech, right action and right livelihood - these states are included in the aggregate of virtue. Right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration - these states are included in the aggregate of concentration. Right view and right intention - these states are included in the aggregate of wisdom. (*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, 1995 page 398)

Visakha described the conversation to the Buddha, who endorsed *Bhikkhuni* Dhammadina's answers:

The *Bhikkhuni* Dhammadina is wise, Visakha, the *Bhikkhuni* Dhammadina has great wisdom. If you had asked me the meaning of this, I would have explained it to you in the same way that the *Bhikkhuni* Dhammadina has explained it. Such is its meaning, and so you should remember it. (*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, 1995 page 403-404)

The explanation of this is that Right View (the first step of the Noble Eightfold Path) is initially intellectual understanding or intuitive understanding. The Four Noble Truths are not understood in a deep way or realized at this initial stage. Once *Sila* (morality) and *Samadhi* (concentration) have been developed, *Panna* (wisdom) develops at a higher level.

Samanamandika Sutta* Translation *Samanamandikaputta (Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta 78)

The Buddha describes morality in the same way as the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* in the *Samanamandika Sutta*.

What are unwholesome habits? They are unwholesome bodily actions, unwholesome verbal actions, and evil livelihood. They are called unwholesome habits ... What are wholesome habits? They are wholesome bodily actions, wholesome verbal actions, and purification of livelihood.

These are called wholesome habits. (*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, 1995 pages 650-651)

What now is karmically wholesome morality (*kusala sila*)? It is wholesome bodily action (*kaya kamma*), wholesome verbal action (*vaci kamma*), and also purity with regard to livelihood which I shall call morality. (*Buddhist Dictionary*, 1980 page 210)

***Mahacattarisaka Sutta* Translation The Great Forty (Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta 117)**

The *Mahacattarisaka Sutta* includes a description of the Noble Eightfold Path at both the mundane (*lokiya*) and the higher supramundane (*lokuttariya*) level.

***Samma Ditthi Sutta* Translation The Discourse on Right View (Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta 9)**

Venerable Sariputta the Buddha's Chief Disciple gave this Discourse.

The *Samma Ditthi Sutta* explains the first factor of the Noble Eightfold Path - Right View. This *Sutta* also describes the *Dasa Kusala Kamma-patha* (Ten Courses of Wholesome Action) and the *Dasa Akusala Kamma-patha* (Ten Courses of Unwholesome Action).

***Sevitabbasevitabba Sutta* Translation To be Cultivated and Not to Be Cultivated (Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta 114)**

The *Sevitabbasevitabba Sutta* explains the *Dasa Kusala Kamma-patha* (Ten Courses of Wholesome Action) and the *Dasa Akusala Kamma-patha* (Ten Courses of Unwholesome Action) in detail.

The Commentaries

***Nettipakarana* Translation The Guide**

The *Nettipakarana* is described in the Pali Text Society's

2002 *List of Issues* as a "Treatise setting out methods for interpreting and explaining canonical texts, similar in content to the *Petakopadesa* and used by Buddhaghosa and other commentators. (Possibly first century B.C.E.)". *The Guide* is the Pali Text Society's translation of *The Nettipakarana*. Part III Counter-Demonstrative Subsection, Chapter i 16 Modes of Conveying: Separate treatment (*The Guide* 1977, page 68) describes the seven courses of action as:

Herein, killing breathing things, malicious speech and harsh speech are moulded by hate; taking what is not given, misconduct in sensual-desires, and false speech are moulded by greed; and gossip is moulded by delusion. These seven kinds of acting are acting as choice. The analysis of action here is more easily grasped if the following distinctions are kept in mind. A 'course of action' (*kammapatha*) is a completed 'historical act' regarded as continuing from the first planning of it down to the carrying of it out, which 'course' involves body and/or speech. The 'choice' (*cetana*) here is the momentary mental willing (or 'affirmation') at each and every stage of the 'course'.

***Visuddhimagga* Translations The Path of Purification and The Path of Purity**

Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa wrote the *Visuddhimagga* (a treatise on the whole of the Pali Canon) in the fifth century in Sri Lanka. The *Visuddhimagga* is described in the Pali Text Society's 2002 *List of Issues* as "...one of the most influential Pali texts, this compendium of Buddhist doctrine and metaphysics is the most important book written by Buddhaghosa. It provides a systematic exposition of Buddhist teaching and is also a detailed manual for meditation."

Bhadantacariya Buddhaghosa clarifies the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* by explaining the difference between 'good behaviour' consisting only of the three kinds of wholesome bodily and four kinds of verbal action, and 'good behaviour' which has right livelihood as the eighth'.

The PTS Pali Text Society's translation *The Path of Purity* explains:

The 'fundamental precept' is the foundation of the exalted practice of the Path; and is a synonym for the set of eight precepts of which pure livelihood is the eighth. This set of eight is the foundation of the Path, because it ought to be in purified practice previous to the Path. Hence [the Buddha] has said 'Previously his bodily action, his vocal action, his livelihood have been well purified'.

The BPS Buddhist Publication Society's translation *The Path of Purification* explains:

Good behaviour itself is that of good behaviour; or what is announced for the sake of good behaviour is that of good behaviour. This is a term for virtue other than that which has livelihood as the eighth. [The three kinds of profitable, bodily kamma or action (not killing or stealing or indulging in sexual misconduct), the four kinds of profitable verbal *kamma* or action (refraining from lying, malicious speech, harsh speech, and gossip), and Right Livelihood as the eighth).] It is the initial stage of the life of purity consisting in the path, thus it is that of the beginning of the life of purity. This is a term for the virtue that has livelihood as the eighth. It is the initial stage of the path because it has actually to be purified in the prior stage too. Hence it is said 'But his bodily action, his verbal action, and his livelihood, have been purified earlier'.

This is clarified by Bhikkhu Bodhi in his footnote 1341 to the *Mahasalayatanika Sutta* [translated as The Great Sixfold Base] (*Majjhima Nikaya, Sutta* 149):

The eight factors of the path mentioned here seem to pertain to the preliminary or mundane portion of the path. *MT* [*Majjhima Nikaya Tika* a subcommentary to the *Majjhima Nikaya*] identifies them with the factors possessed by a person at the highest level of insight development, immediately prior to the emergence of the supramundane path. In this stage only the former five path factors are actively operative, the three factors of the morality group

having been purified prior to the undertaking of insight meditation. But when the supramundane path arises, all eight factors occur simultaneously, the three factors of the morality group exercising the function of eradicating the defilements responsible for moral transgression in speech, action, and livelihood. (*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*, 1995 page 1356)

Bibliography

See page *Ajivatthamaka Sila Bibliography* on this website

“The development and use of the Eight Precepts for lay practitioners, *Upasakas* and *Upasikas* in Theravada Buddhism in the West”, Jacquetta Gomes, *Contemporary Buddhism*, Volume 5(1) (May, 2004) 47-63 (ISSN 1463-9947). (Available online at www.journalonlinetandf.co.uk) (Available online at www.wlu.ca/documents/6478/The_development.pdf)