

THE SOCIAL VALUES OF THE FIVE PRECEPTS

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In Society the respectability of a person is distinguished by his good manners or good behaviour. This good behaviour is nothing but disciplined living. Vissuddhi Magga describes it as "Seelangnama Samadanankaya Kammadinan Suseelya Vasena Avippakinnakati Atta" Vissuddhi Magga which describes the controlling of deeds and speech as Seela, has specifically stated that Seela is the only refuge for man's virtues. If Seela means the restraining of both physical action and speech, its value should be investigated.

In social life what a person is, is known by the way he speaks and the way he behaves. The criterion by which a man is judged as good or bad is his behaviour in word and deed. Therefore his sincerity in restraining both word and deed rests in how far he is restrained in Mind. Thus a person will have control over his senses only if he is restrained in word, deed and mind. The senses such as the eye, the ear, the nose etc. will be pleasant. Unrestrained in senses the person will be judged in society as ill-mannered, ill-behaved and mean. (purisadhamo)

All this depends upon habit. In man, the senses lead to both good and bad. Unrestrained to ill-being Restrained to well-being.

The senses function for both the well-being and the ill-being of man. Habit is strong enough to subdue even his genetic kamma. Human life tends very easily to evil habits and not so to good "Sukharani Asadhuni". Evil is easily committed says the Buddha. Man's ability should be to organise the sensual activities as to bring about good habits. We should herein understand that a noble life means a cultured life of restrained and tempered senses. The Buddha has said "Whoever possesses this group of Seela, enjoys internally the happiness of being correct. Therefore a life cultured in Seela, possesses the satisfaction of being 'not wrong' is essential to distinguish himself in society as a great being. He who develops his social life on the principles of Pancha Seela (Five Precepts) will have the quality of greatness in him. An honest social worker can have no better certificate than to feel assured that he has committed no wrong.

In this manner, to be a good citizen and to be a good member in society, one should at least observe the five precepts. He who observes the five precepts will be one who stands on the basic principles of good conduct as laid down in

Sigalovada sutra. Avoiding the four fold acts of defilements of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and lying, he will lead a good and benevolent life. If a person avoids threefold physical acts of cruelty, stealing and sexual misconduct, the fourfold wrong acts of lying, tale bearing, uncouth words and frivolous talks committed by speech, he will be an exemplary person in society. Although the precept of avoiding intoxicating drinks is not included in the fourfold acts of defilements, it is included in the Pancha Seela. That a person lives avoiding the fourfold acts of defilement is the result of Pancha Seela.

That all beings are, as do I, afraid of death and that all wish happiness is a noble thought of equality of beings. The unfailing method of developing noble human qualities in man, is to follow the principles of Five Precepts.

If the aim of Buddhist culture is to lead man to socialism, then its strong foundation is the equality of beings. In this way, the noble quality of looking at beings as equals will be nourished by five precepts. This will be plainly seen in examining the five precepts, one by one. Reflecting on one's own self, he should allow the other beings the right of existence. Avoiding the great social corruptions of Robbing others of their belongings, sexual misconduct, lying, and indulging in intoxicants that lead to the disaster one's self as well as his family are the qualities of a noble socialist out to ensure the right of existence to all beings.

The way the five precepts should be observed based on the principles of equality of beings is clearly described in the Veludvara Sutra. There the five precepts are referred to as Arya Kantha Seela - "Aryakantha Seelani nama Pancha Seelani." Aryakantha means praised by the nobles or Aryas. As described herein each precept of the Pancha Seela should be observed purified in three ways.

1. One should himself avoid all wrong.
2. He should prevent the others from all such wrongs.
3. He should proclaim to the society the blessings of avoiding such wrongs.

In fact that the observance of the five precepts is beneficial to both the individual and the Society is very obvious.

In this wise, it is plain that the five precepts is the strong foundation for socialism. The five precepts ensure the necessary discipline for socialist principles in the individual and also gives him that necessary strength for social works.

Vissuddhi Magga describes the blessings of the five precepts in the following manner. The person who observes the Five Precepts:

1. becomes heir to great wealth "Mahantan Bogakkhandan Adhigaccati"
2. gains a good reputation — Kalyanokitti Saddo Abbhuggaccati.
3. will enter fearlessly and boldly when entering any society be it of the Kattiyas (ruling class) of Brahmins (scholarly religious class) of lay householders or of Samanar (mendicants).

These three are essential for a sincere social worker.

4. will die with full consciousness
5. will after death be born in a happy state.

When you consider the blessings of observing the five precepts separately, it will be seen that the observance of the five precepts will have in himself that purity and nobility necessary for a great social life.

If by Buddhist culture progress of both the individual and Society is expected it should not be forgotten that the life strength of Socialism in Pancha Seela or Five Precepts.