

The Unheralded Value of the Vinaya

The Buddhist Teachings on Social Discipline

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translated by Robin Moore

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Anumodanā – Appreciation

For many years the Buddhist followers of Wat Nyanavesakavan have printed numerous books as a ‘gift of the Dhamma’ (*dhamma-dāna*) for free distribution. Sometimes these faithful individuals have wished that people from other countries can be introduced to and learn about Buddhism by way of these books, and they have therefore translated them themselves or supported skilled and knowledgeable individuals to translate them on their behalf. As a result, many Dhamma books, both large and small, have been translated into foreign languages—in particular into English.

About 2-3 years ago, the Buddhist congregation (*buddha-parisā*) at Wat Nyanavesakavan, both monastics and close lay supporters, agreed that there should be a systematic, earnest, and ongoing effort and procedure for translating Dhamma books into English and publishing them for wider distribution. Establishing such a procedure will help to ensure that the study of Dhammavinaya and the propagation of Buddhism proceeds in a stable and secure way. Fortunately, a skilled and accomplished translator was at hand to perform this task on a regular basis, namely Mr. Robin Moore. In respect to funding this project, Khun Peeranuch Kiatsommart has faithfully shouldered responsibility throughout, both in supporting Wat Nyanavesakavan and in providing financial assistance to the translator. This has been a tremendous act of generosity and dedication.

On this occasion, the book titled ‘The Unheralded Value of the Vinaya’ has been completed as an English translation.*

* Trans.: the Thai title of this book is วินัย:เรื่องใหญ่กว่าที่คิด.

I wish to express my gratitude to Khun Peeranuch Kiatsommart who has acted as patron and managed various tasks with devotion to the Triple Gem, wholesome enthusiasm for the threefold training, and great goodwill and kindness towards students and practitioners of Dhammavinaya, enabling this gift of Dhamma to bear fruit and meet with success. Furthermore, may I express thanks to Mr. Robin Moore, who has cultivated the Four Paths to Success—wholesome desire, effort, committed attention, and thorough investigation. He has used his skill and expertise to carry out this scholarly work to fulfilment, which will be of long-lasting value and benefit to people worldwide.

Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P. A. Payutto)

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The Unheralded Value of the Vinaya¹ The Buddhist Teachings on Social Discipline

It is widely recognized that a disregard of discipline (*vinaya*) is an epidemic problem in Thailand. At the present time we are in need of a democracy, of which discipline is an important component. If we are unable to establish a functional disciplinary code for Thai people, our efforts to develop democracy will most likely fail. This is because democratic societies exist based on rules and laws. It is imperative that people respect these rules, laws, and agreed-upon standards. This respect of society's rules and laws is one vital aspect of social order. If there is a lack of discipline, a lack of respect for rules and laws, democracy is deprived of an essential foundation. It cannot function well. We should thus give this matter care and attention. In particular in regard to education, we should find ways to establish and nurture democracy on the basis of a social discipline.

Origin and Meaning of Vinaya

Before discussing the methods for establishing a social discipline, we should examine the meaning and importance of the Pali word *vinaya*.

Vinaya is an important term, whose meaning is more comprehensive than generally used in the Thai language ('*vinai*'—วินัย). It is of great significance in Buddhism, and is used in tandem with the term *dhamma*, as seen in the term representing Buddhism: Dhammavinaya. The terms *dhamma* and *vinaya* have related meanings.²

¹ This is a transcript of a sermon presented at the Behavioral Science Research Institute at Srinakharinwirot University, Prasarnmit, on 25 January 1995. The talk was originally titled 'National Code of Ethics: Importance and Means of Implementation.' The name was changed to better match the text.

² Trans.: you will see here that I sometimes write Dhamma, at other times *dhamma*. In this

Buddhism maintains that the truth of all phenomena is inherent in nature. Regardless of whether a Buddha appears or not, these phenomena exist naturally, as a matter of course. This law of nature (*dhammatā*), or unity of natural phenomena (*dhamma-jāti*),³ is called Dhamma.

The Buddha discovered this truth of nature and then proclaimed and revealed it to others. The Buddha's sole responsibility vis-à-vis the Dhamma was to discover it and then teach it to others. The Dhamma itself is a truth inherent in nature.

In order for this truth of a nature to be of practical benefit to people in society, it is necessary to establish and organize it into a structured system or code of conduct. Here, one takes this truth of nature—this law of causality, the existence of all phenomena following interrelated causes and conditions, and the governing principles inherent in this law—and formulates it into statutes and regulations for society. Natural laws are converted into human laws. The laying down and formation of this set of regulations is referred to as *vinaya*.

The laws of nature are called *dhamma*; human laws are called *vinaya*. These two kinds of laws are interrelated:

First, it is essential that *vinaya* is established on a foundation of *dhamma*, i.e. natural truths must act as a basis for *vinaya*. If this is not the case, the *vinaya* is void and ineffective.

Second, the reason for setting down rules and regulations in human society is to receive the benefits of the Dhamma. The *vinaya* aims for and aspires to the Dhamma, i.e. it is set down so that actions in

book they are meant to be the same. *Vinaya* on the other hand, I only write in lowercase italics. This is because the uppercase *Vinaya* is usually used in a more narrow sense, referring to the formal monastic code.

³ Trans.: note that this Pali term *dhamma-jāti* first appears in the commentaries.

harmony with truth bear fruit in human society. This is the objective for setting down rules and regulations. In other words, we set down rules and regulations to instil a confidence that we are complying with and benefiting from the laws of nature in the most advantageous way.

Natural laws exist inherent in nature; human laws are conventions (*sammati*). The term *sammati* can be translated as ‘convention,’ ‘collective agreement,’ or ‘shared approval.’ This term is a compound of *saṃ* + *mati*. *Mati* means ‘acceptance,’ ‘approval,’ or ‘agreement.’ *Saṃ* means ‘mutual,’ ‘joint,’ ‘collective,’ or ‘shared.’ *Sammati* is thus an agreed-upon convention.

Social conventions are valuable. They arise from a rational understanding of truth, which people apply when establishing rules and regulations in order to meet their needs. For instance, if one hires someone to dig a hole one lays down reasonable rules and stipulations. These are conventional rules, but we establish them based on an understanding of the causal relationships inherent in nature. There are thus two overlapping laws: the laws of nature inherent in reality and the conventional laws of human beings.

According to the laws of nature, referred to as Dhamma, digging is the cause and the hole is the result. In human society, one may agree to give the worker a wage of \$100 for digging the hole. Here one establishes a regulation, i.e. digging the hole is the cause and receiving a payment of \$100 is the result. Establishing such a regulation is referred to as *vinaya*. *Vinaya* is a truth arising as a consequence of human agreements. It is a conventional truth (*sammati*) rather than a truth inherent in nature.

What is Genuine Truth?

What is the actual result caused by digging? The actual result of digging is the hole or cavity created in the earth. This is considered the certain and natural result of digging. This result is invariable and undeviating. The arising of a hole is dependent on digging; digging is the cause and the hole is the result. This is a reliable and genuine interconnected process.

Receiving a payment of \$100 for digging is a human regulation, which also follows a causally related process. The laws of nature, however, are certain and absolute. If one wishes for a result one must invariably create the necessary causes. Human laws on the contrary are uncertain and unreliable. Yet they appear genuine. It is a rational assumption that in order to receive \$100 one must dig a hole. But this premise does not exist as a truth of nature. It exists solely as a human convention; it is a conventional truth arising from mutual and conditional consent. If this consent and approval is absent the regulation immediately becomes obsolete.

If the person digging has accomplished this task but the person hiring him refuses to pay, or if the person digging fails to complete the job but the employer still pays out of kindness, the causal relationship is lost. With a failure of consent, the regulations are annulled.

In sum, these two laws can be distinguished within a single dynamic. In the process of digging a hole, the genuine law of nature, or *dhamma*, is that the act of digging results in a hole. The conventional law of human beings, a truth arising from mutual approval, or *vinaya*, is that the act of digging results in a payment of \$100.

Relationship between Natural Laws and Human Laws

For human laws to have any value they must be based on natural truths. Our goals need to be based on a foundation of Dhamma. For instance, we may seek someone to help dig in order to obtain a hole. This indicates that our genuine wish is aligned with Dhamma. The reason why we set down rules, preconditions, and conventional structures is to generate wellbeing in society. For people to exist they must obtain means to support life. If we desire a hole, unless we are willing to wait for conditions in nature to create a hole on its own, we must find someone to dig it. The person digging the hole requires money to earn a livelihood. We therefore set down criteria and regulations. By complying with these regulations we acknowledge and express our approval of them. This is the establishment of a form of discipline (*vinaya*).

Hence, a *vinaya* needs to be based on the Dhamma, and it will be truly effective when people are instilled with Dhamma—with honesty and virtue. If people lack such righteousness many problems and difficulties will arise. For instance, the person hired to dig does not want to dig, but only wants money; digging is simply a precondition for obtaining cash. In this case he will dig with reluctance. If he can avoid digging, but still obtain the money, he will do so. This half-hearted, begrudging action on his part is devoid of joy, devoid of a contentment in honouring the code of ethics. The work will be done with disinterest, insincerity, and inefficiency. He may even choose to act immorally, attempting to obtain the money without digging a hole. In the end the work is ineffective and the persons involved are unhappy.

If people are able to link the *vinaya* with the *dhamma* into an integrated whole, to accurately understand the aim of human

conventions and regulations, i.e. if their desires accord with the genuine results arising from natural processes, they will work with determination and enthusiasm. In the case of digging a hole, the labourer still wishes for the \$100, but now his desires also match the genuine causes and effects of digging, i.e. he recognizes the benefits and advantages of obtaining a hole. He will dig, without extra incentives, because he wants there to be a hole. The monetary reward of \$100 becomes a separate matter. He will dig with willingness, sincerity, joy, and contentment. The work is effective and the persons involved are happy.

There will be problems, however, if he does not sincerely wish for a hole. In such circumstances, society will have to establish many layers of complex restraining and regulatory systems, which are often unsuccessful. To sum up, whenever our conduct embraces the truth, then our code of ethics—or systems of social regulation—will automatically and naturally be effective. People’s work will proceed with commitment and dedication, without any necessary outside control. This illustrates the relationship between *dhamma* and *vinaya*.

Effectiveness of Social Discipline

The Buddha discovered the Dhamma—the truth of nature. In order for the Dhamma to benefit human beings he set down the *vinaya* as a set of guidelines and regulations. The term *vinaya* refers to the establishment of an entire code of living or social system, e.g.: defining an economic system in the teaching on how to live with the four requisites; establishing a system of government; establishing a system of adjudication; etc. This is the original definition of the term *vinaya*, which has a very broad scope meaning.

The definition of *vinaya* commonly held in Thailand today in the sense of order and discipline, for instance the strict rules governing traffic and travel, or the required regulations for living together in a community, institution, school, etc., is only one small aspect of this term. This is only a narrow interpretation of the term *vinaya*.

The genuine and far-reaching definition of *vinaya* is the entire set of regulations and codes of conduct governing human life and human society. The ability to set down such social structures and codes of living is unique to human beings; animals do not possess this ability. As mentioned above, for this social discipline to be secure and successful, it must be accompanied by an understanding of the basic unity and integrity of the *vinaya* with *dhamma*: of human regulations with natural laws. Here, one must first gain some insight into the truth of nature.

The Buddha realized the Dhamma—the truth of nature—and was able to take this knowledge of truth and set down an effective social system in line with this truth. Besides realizing the Dhamma he was also able to establish a *vinaya*, and for this reason he was called a ‘Perfectly Enlightened Buddha’ (*sammāsambuddha*). Those individuals who realize the Dhamma without guidance from others, yet are unable to establish such a social structure and code of conduct, are called ‘Silent Buddhas’ (*paccekabuddha*). The establishment of a code of ethics and system of social regulations is thus a unique and exceptional capability.

In reference to the Dhamma the word *desanā* (‘presentation,’ ‘teaching’) is generally used, because the Dhamma is a truth inherent in nature. Our duty vis-à-vis the Dhamma is to accurately present and describe it. The word *paññatti* (‘regulation,’ ‘prescription’) on the other

hand refers to formulating principles and guidelines for practical application. The *vinaya* is a matter of prescription or legislation, i.e. it does not exist inherently in nature. It requires a skill to convert the truth of nature and forge it into a code of conduct and discipline enabling human society to live well and at peace.

The ability to establish a social discipline and code of ethics thus requires a special aptitude.

In a civilized society, observing an ethical code and social discipline is equivalent to deriving practical benefit from the truth, from Dhamma. When people honour such discipline based on natural truths, their society will prosper. This essential maxim illustrates important aspects of the relationship between *dhamma* and *vinaya*, including:

1. A system of social discipline must be firmly based on natural truths. If this is not the case the disciplinary system (*vinaya*) will be makeshift, ineffective, and unstable.

2. The system of social discipline must aim for righteousness and virtue, e.g. social justice, human integrity, human dignity, etc.

If those people prescribing codes of discipline, e.g. laws and statutes, are bad-intentioned and corrupt, for instance they seek only personal gain, they may set down laws that are unjust and in conflict with Dhamma, i.e. laws that are at odds with and adverse to goodness and virtue. Or else they may lack sufficient understanding and wisdom in regard to laws of nature. As a consequence, the laying down of rules or of a system of social regulations will be defective, and the desired benefits of these rules and regulations will be absent.

Take for example elected representatives in a government assembly. For them to issue laws it is imperative that they have some understanding and insight into truth. Before passing legislation, they

need to know the relevant principles, objectives, and supporting conditions of these laws. They need to possess moral integrity and be well-intentioned. If they are only intent on self-interest the laws will be unjust and illegitimate, i.e. they will be in conflict with truth. The relationship between *dhamma* and *vinaya* will be compromised and impaired. The legislation (i.e. the *vinaya*) will be ultimately ineffective.

The laying down of a social discipline—establishing conventional structures and codes of conduct—e.g. enacting legislation, involves two essential factors:

1. **Wisdom:** having an insight into truth; knowing the facts of a specific matter at hand; being aware of the desirable legitimacy and correctness of a specific issue.
2. **Good intentions:** possessing pure and upright intentions; aiming for results conforming to the truths one has recognized.

Social Discipline (*vinaya*) & Moral conduct (*sīla*)

Here, it is important to introduce another Pali term—*sīla*—whose meaning is very similar to that of *vinaya*. These two terms often appear in tandem.

In contemporary Thai the meaning of *sīla* (‘seen’—ศีล) has become very restricted, and is sometimes far removed from the meaning of ‘*vinai*’ (*vinaya*). In fact, these two terms are very similar and closely related.

As mentioned earlier, a system of social discipline (*vinaya*) is a body of conventional, prescribed regulations created by human beings. It involves establishing a code of living and setting down social structures. This term *vinaya* encompasses three layers of meaning, or has three definitions, namely:

1. Establishing regulations and setting down a code of conduct = *vinaya*.
2. The actual regulations, rules, etc. = *vinaya*.
3. Training and establishing people in such a code of conduct = *vinaya*.

When people observe such a code of conduct until they begin to embody the principles inherent in it, i.e. people's personalities and personal attributes are imbrued by these principles, this is referred to as *sīla* ('morality'; 'ethical conduct').

A person established in moral conduct (*sīla*) is thus one who is established in a code of ethics (*vinaya*). Being grounded in a code of ethics, or maintaining a social discipline, is one essential definition of *sīla*.

A code of ethics is an external matter. When this code is internalized by people, i.e. when being established in a code of ethics becomes people's normal and natural behaviour, this is referred to as 'moral conduct' (*sīla*). The meanings of these two terms have become mixed up. In fact, *sīla* is one aspect of a system of study or training, i.e. a system of spiritual development on the level of *vinaya*. A code of ethics or social discipline (*vinaya*) is a training tool. *Sīla* is a person's behaviour resulting from such a disciplinary training. Moral conduct is an internal matter. It pertains to self-development and to personal attributes.

The term *vinaya* has a broad range of meaning. It is used exclusively in the singular, referring to a collection of rules, regulations, statutes, etc., i.e. to an entire code of conduct. When this code is divided into separate rules and regulations, each individual rule, etc. is called a *sikkhāpada*—'training rule,' 'training precept.' Each rule and regulation is set down as a means for people to train themselves.

In Thai, the five precepts are colloquially referred to as the five *sīla*. The original term for these five precepts is the five *sikkhāpada*. They are training rules.

The Buddhist system of spiritual training is threefold, consisting of moral conduct (*sīla*), mental composure (*samādhi*; ‘concentration’), and wisdom (*paññā*). In general, the initial stage of training is referred to as moral conduct. The training in moral conduct, i.e. the training giving rise to moral virtue, is accomplished by using a code of ethics (*vinaya*). The *vinaya* is thus a mode of training, instilling people with moral values. It may be said that one is training in order to be disciplined (i.e. to possess a *vinaya*), but in the Buddhist teachings it is more accurate to say that one trains to give rise to virtuous conduct, or one trains, by using a code of ethics, to generate virtue (i.e. to be endowed with *sīla*).

In sum, training people to be disciplined is the same as training people to be virtuous. Training at this level focuses on people’s behaviour. Within a spiritual training system this focus must be linked with other aspects of training, i.e. with concentration and wisdom, for it to truly generate blessings.

A Code of Ethics Provides an Opportunity for Growth

People generally see the term *vinaya* in a negative light, considering it to be merely a form of constraint. This is a very narrow, unsophisticated definition of this term.

It is more desirable to view the term *vinaya* in a positive sense, i.e. to see it as an opportunity for providing one’s life and society with a useful set of regulations, enabling one to live and work conveniently and at ease. If one lacks order and discipline, one often loses the chance to enhance one’s life and to succeed in one’s work, thus obstructing true progress and development.

Why Create a System of Social Regulations?

If people's lives are chaotic, disordered, and undisciplined, the opportunities for improving one's life are lost. For instance, if anarchy were to rule in this meeting, the chairs and tables might be jumbled in a mess. You listeners in the audience would be walking hither and thither. Although I would be talking, there might be so much disorder that you would be clueless about what I was saying. The same would be true in our homes. If we were to scatter the furniture in a chaotic, disorganized fashion, it would be difficult to walk; we would constantly bump into things. It would take us a few minutes just to get to the front door! But if we establish order, agreeing that one particular area should be set aside as an aisle, we can walk through the room quickly and at ease.

The success of our work depends on order and discipline. Take the example of a medical operation. Here, the surgeons must exercise tremendous discipline. They, along with the nurses, must arrange all the necessary equipment in proper order with strict attention. They must be in complete agreement on which instruments to use at which stages of the operation, along with the proper handing over of such equipment. Everyone in the operating theatre must stand in exactly the correct places. The timing of the procedure must be well rehearsed and orchestrated, because this is a time of life and death. Nothing can be amiss because the time is limited. The more serious, complex, and life-threatening the procedure, the greater the need for rigour and precision.

On a wider scale, if there is a lack of discipline and order in society, people feel unsafe, for instance due to an increase of theft and assault. They hesitate to go out at certain times or to certain places for fear of being attacked. When people harbour this suspicion and fear about

travelling, people's work and society's businesses become impeded and obstructed.

A code of conduct and social discipline thus engenders productivity and proficiency in people's individual lives and in society. When establishing a social discipline it necessary to constantly take this objective and goal in mind. During this process we should examine whether the established code of conduct clearly fulfils these goals, i.e. whether it promotes our life and work, and increases favourable opportunities. Having established a code of conduct we should be confident that opportunities for developing our lives increase, and that our work progresses smoothly, leading us to wholesome ends.

One of the objectives of setting down a code of ethics is to promote the longterm development of human beings. If there is an extended period devoid of social discipline, confusion and turmoil reign. A code of discipline, or code of ethics, is a crucial factor for democracy because democracy requires that people have the opportunity to communicate and express themselves, to effectively access their capability and potential for jointly creating a wholesome society.

In sum, a social discipline (*vinaya*) is a positive and favourable thing. It provides the opportunity for people's individual lives and for society to be at ease, to be effective, unhindered, and fruitful. Moreover, it enables people to develop and grow in wholesome and virtuous qualities.

The essence of a social discipline or code of conduct is teaching people to be morally upright, to be endowed with virtuous conduct (*sīla*). Virtuous conduct is vital. The Buddha stated that being grounded in a code of ethics, i.e. being well-disciplined, is one of the seven essential factors known as the dawn of a virtuous and dignified life. Moral discipline or virtuous conduct is the dawning of a spiritual life.

The Buddha said that just as the dawn's golden light precedes the rising of the sun, so too, fulfilment of moral conduct and moral discipline is the forerunner of a virtuous life. If people are grounded in a social discipline and endowed with moral conduct one can be confident that their lives will prosper. It is as if the Buddha gave an assurance that virtuous, disciplined conduct is the dawn of a spiritual life, a sign of spiritual development and a life full of blessings.

Ways to Fortify Social Discipline

A. Establishing a Code of Conduct by Reinforcing Habitual Behaviour

The most effective way to teach moral discipline is to rely on human nature, to use human nature as an aid, i.e. to allow things to proceed in accord with human nature. Most people live their lives out of habit, by following routine behaviour. Most of the time, when we experience things, we respond and handle the situation out of habit.

How are habits formed? Habits arise naturally; they arise out of the natural process of causal factors unfolding in people's lives. When people perform a specific action several times, they develop a proclivity and become accustomed to act in this way. They tend to repeat the action until it becomes a habit. They persist with this action and find pleasure and satisfaction from such familiar behaviour. Habitual behaviour is difficult to amend or change. And the harder a person holds fast to habits the more difficult it is to uproot or cancel them. Unawakened persons often become defensive and use justifications to hold on to their habits, refusing to change, saying e.g.: 'I insist on doing things this way; I don't care if others want me to behave otherwise.' For this reason, we should take advantage of people's habits and routine behaviour to benefit these people themselves.

Most people live their lives by following habitual patterns. At the same time human beings need to receive an education and they are generally amenable to training. In order to effectively train people, one needs skill as well as a system of training that accords with nature. This can admittedly be a challenging and tiring process. As mentioned above, it can be difficult to undo people's deep-seated habits. Once we acknowledge the importance of habitual behaviour, we use habits as a preliminary form of training. We actually promote habitual behaviour by setting down a code of conduct and encouraging people to observe this code in a routine fashion.

Here, early on in a person's life, or when a person enters a new community, we take the opportunity to provide him or her with instruction, by applying our understanding that life entails active engagement and decisive behaviour. When people encounter things in the world, or when they face specific situations, they will respond and behave in particular ways. When they encounter the same situation again they will have a proclivity to repeat the same behaviour. When these actions are frequently repeated they become habits; the person's behaviour becomes habitual.

If a person's first response to a situation is unskilful or unwholesome—before habitual behaviour is formed—this is tantamount to being at a disadvantage or squandering an opportunity. It is quite likely that this initial, undesirable response will develop into a habit. If this does become habitual, ingrained behaviour we are in trouble, since it is difficult to rectify. In order to seize the opportunity, by generating positive actions and preventing negative actions, we should hasten to introduce wholesome habitual behaviour, which is incorporated into a code of ethics (*vinaya*). When the wholesome response becomes the first option, and the person embraces this behaviour, it becomes part

of his or her disposition to act in this way when encountering the same situation a second time. And when the action is repeated several more times, it develops into wholesome habitual behaviour. Here one can rest at ease. Using this basic method of establishing a code of conduct can be done without investing much effort. Otherwise we may miss a valuable opportunity. Whatever the circumstances, people will naturally develop habitual behaviour. Here we seize the chance to create wholesome habitual patterns. We use habitual behaviour as a foundation. Generating wholesome habits is thus a preliminary means for establishing a social discipline.

This principle is particularly effective with children, who have just entered the world and have not yet formed habitual patterns of behaviour. We can introduce wholesome qualities to them from the beginning. Children's first role models are their parents. If the parents are well-disciplined it is likely that their children will follow their example. And when the children enter a new community, e.g. a school, they will tend to conform to the behaviour of those students who have enrolled before them. Similarly, when people enter a new workplace, they will generally follow the behaviour of those employers and employees already working in that institution. This behaviour will develop into a habit without them being fully conscious of what is happening. If a boss or director is insightful and circumspect, he or she will act as a guide and leader in introducing favourable and positive behaviour to the employees. New workers will identify with this behaviour and it will become part of their routine and familiar form of conduct, creating an easeful, relaxed work situation. If, however, one misses this opportunity and allows people to develop unskilful habits, the situation will be difficult to rectify; one will face constant trouble and turmoil.

B. Applying Pre-established Traditional Codes of Conduct

Tradition can be helpful in this context because it acts as one condition for establishing habitual forms of behaviour. Take for example an occasion when parents take their child to a place providing public service to many people. If the parents wait in the queue with the other people the child will follow suit. The family may visit this place several times and each time the child will wait in line with the parents. Later, the child will enter the queue automatically, without requiring any explanation or reminder. Waiting in a queue is a pre-established tradition and custom. This is an example of a code of conduct naturally integrated into people's everyday way of life.

If a specific code of conduct has become a tradition or custom within a specific community or society, people who newly enter this community will automatically adopt such behaviour. Therefore, those societies that have established and transmitted an effective code of discipline are at an advantage in generating wholesome habits through the use of tradition. Later generations will engage with the codes of discipline through a natural process of adopting these traditional forms of behaviour. If, however, a society lacks traditional customs, it will have to rely on social leaders who are aware of these principles to establish and apply codes of conduct. Using tradition in this way is another basic form of maintaining social discipline.

C. Establishing a Social Discipline by Way of an Integrated System

For a training in social discipline (i.e. moral education) to be successful it must rely on a system of integrated factors working in unison. This integrated system depends on the coordination and collaboration of its inherent parts. In spiritual training or human development, three factors, i.e. external conduct, state of mind, and wisdom, must act in

concert to bring about an integrated, complete whole. Developing these three factors then lies at the heart of a person's life. When providing people with spiritual training it is therefore imperative that we pay close attention to these three aspects of life:

1. **Conduct (*sīla*):** if people's normal, routine behaviour is skilful and exemplary, things may be considered basically all right.
2. **State of mind (*citta*):** if people are satisfied and happy with their wholesome behaviour, it will become increasingly stable and reliable. In regard to mental states, or to the state of a person's mind, it is thus vital for people to experience joy and satisfaction when observing a moral code.
3. **Wisdom (*paññā*):** if people possess a rational understanding of their behaviour, recognizing its value and benefit, this understanding will further bolster the mental factors of joy and satisfaction.

Both of these aspects—a wise understanding and mental satisfaction—help to steady and balance people's wholesome behaviour.

These three factors are thus mutually supportive and must be cultivated in unison. If one goes about this process in a rigid or ignorant way, one may simply create a system of coercion. If people feel coerced they will not experience joy. Devoid of joy, people will act unwillingly and with resentment, liable to disobey rules and precepts, potentially causing problems. Moreover, if one is unsuccessful at fostering wise discernment, people may develop misunderstandings, failing to see the significance and validity of following an ethical code. They will then begin to doubt and waver before acting. It is thus necessary to introduce all three factors, of upright conduct, inner satisfaction, and wise discernment. A training in moral discipline requires the full integration of these three factors.

D. Establishing a Code of Conduct by Using Supporting Factors

An ethical code is able to produce joy and satisfaction by relying on other factors besides wise discernment. One example is having good friends. For instance, if a teacher is endearing and able to make students feel at ease, they will want to pay attention to what she says out of a sense of respect, admiration, and love. The students will on the whole find joy and satisfaction in complying with that which the teacher recommends. In such a situation it is easy to create a code of conduct. These vital factors of confidence and devotion are linked to good friendship (*kalyāṇamittatā*).

Good friends and teachers support the setting down of a social discipline based on habitual behaviour by bolstering the three factors mentioned earlier:

- They act as virtuous role models for behaviour (*sīla*).
- They provide love and affection, bringing about reassurance, intimacy, confidence, and joy (*citta*).
- They possess an understanding of causality, able to explain to their protégés or pupils the effects of their actions, to instil sound judgement and wise evaluation (*paññā*).

E. Establishing a Code of Conduct by Way of Motivation and Inspiration

Another method of using mental factors is to establish social ideals, generating will-power and commitment in people. For instance, a nation may set a target longing for national distinction and superiority, with such proclamations as: 'Our nation must be great. May we be universally famed for our discipline and social order! May we fervently pursue this ideal with conviction and determination!' This can be an effective method for inducing people to follow a social

discipline, but there is a danger that it becomes excessive and overzealous, drawing on the mental defilement of pride. People may think: 'Oh! How fantastic our country is!' This method generally creates an attitude of comparing oneself to others, rousing such thoughts as: 'How orderly and decent our community is for maintaining such a moral discipline! Compared to that academic institution over there, we are celebrated, honoured, and respected! We are so proud of being an eminent, respectable school!' Using such a method of rousing emotion is sometimes none other than a means of inciting conceit (*māna*).

Initially, *māna* is simple pride, but if it intensifies it becomes disparagement of others, vying for prominence, and thirsting for fame, which is fraught with peril. Therefore, if one opts for this method, one should use it only as a preliminary measure and then hasten to replace it with other more wholesome means. If one relies on conceit throughout, problems between people will arise. One will be happy to defend one's own group, but there will likely be conflict with other groups. Moreover, negative mind states will multiply, e.g. disdain, arrogance, vanity, hostility, etc. This method lacks true wisdom. Some communities, societies, and even nations maintain moral discipline using this method. They even promote other forms of virtue and goodness through boosting self-importance and pride. But by doing this one is caught within a competitive system. At the very least one must rely on pride, which almost always turns into some form of arrogance and conceit. For this reason this method is generally not encouraged in the Buddhist teachings. If it is used one should do so cautiously, hastening to replace it by more wholesome means, as mentioned above.

F. Establishing a Code of Conduct by Using Constraining Rules and Regulations

Another means of establishing social discipline is by applying rules, regulations, laws, etc. to control people and to punish them when these laws are violated. It is possible to establish social discipline this way, but this method is unskilful, misguided, and incompatible with Dhamma principles, i.e. it is in conflict with the laws of nature. It is impossible for true morality to be crammed down people's throats. Moral virtue only arises through cultivating it within one's own heart. Coercion and intimidation work as long as the authoritative power reigns; but once this power is absent people will tend to transgress the rules and regulations. When this happens there is even more unrest and damage. Although societies using coercive laws enforced by a higher authority are often ordered and disciplined, whenever the dictatorial power ends the society tends to fall into turmoil. The measures used to impose discipline end up being fruitless.

In some cases the use of such rules and regulations can be effective if the sense of constraint and obligation is not overly severe or harsh, and if there is an adequate span of time for people to develop habitual patterns of behaviour, often unconsciously. The process then dovetails with the natural law conforming to the first method described earlier, i.e. the method by which a basic social discipline is created by forming habits. The natural process of habitual behaviour thus takes over from a system of exerting dictatorial power. In this case this method of constraint is effective.

Using rules and laws when teaching a social discipline and instilling moral conduct can be successful without needing to resort to coercive power and meting out punishment. Here, people need to appreciate that they are engaged in a form of spiritual training, and recognize the

purpose and value of complying with these rules and regulations. An understanding and awareness of their practice and training will generate contentment and a willingness to comply. People will receive the benefits of engaging in a genuine system of training, in which the three factors of conduct, state of mind, and wisdom are in harmony.

Social Discipline as an Element of Democracy

There is another dimension to training in a social discipline (*vinaya*), namely that social discipline is a fundamental aspect of democracy. Without social discipline it is difficult for democracy to be stable, because democracy is rule and governance by the citizens of a country themselves. For this rule to be possible, each adult individual in the society must be able to govern and manage him- or herself. Those who are able to do this are those who are well-disciplined. Those who lack discipline and restraint are unable to manage their own affairs. If one lacks self-discipline and self-restraint, how can one effectively participate in a democratic government? If democracy is run by such undisciplined people, it will not survive.

In sum, true democracy is the rule and governance by those people who are capable of controlling and managing themselves.

To enable people to manage their own affairs, one must first establish them in a code of ethics, i.e. to be endowed with virtuous conduct and to be disciplined. One of the sources of indiscipline, or nonobservance of a code of ethics, however, is connected to a vital aspect of democracy itself, i.e. freedom. If people misunderstand the true meaning of freedom, freedom will be at odds with social discipline. For instance, some societies are plagued by a disregard of moral discipline due to people holding wrong views about freedom, i.e. they fail to understand the true essence of freedom. Instead, they

believe that freedom means following one's own preferences; freedom is equivalent to doing as one pleases. They then go on to claim that this kind of freedom is a necessary component of democracy. With this sort of misunderstanding it is impossible to maintain social discipline. By distorting an essential principle of democracy these people end up destroying democracy. By misinterpreting the essence of democracy people create conflict and discord within democracy itself. This results from an erroneous understanding of the meaning of freedom.

Freedom is not simply acting according to one's preferences and desires. People often interpret freedom as having one's own way within the permitted boundaries of social laws and conventions, or doing as one likes without violating the rights of others. This interpretation, however, does not accord with the essential principles of democracy. This form of freedom is limited to one aspect of external behaviour.

Freedom is an essential constituent of democracy and it is directly linked with the true objective of democracy. Democracy is a system of government. Every form of government is designed to provide wellbeing and happiness to society. It is widely recognized that democracy is the optimal system of government for achieving this goal. Many countries thus decide to establish democracy so that the people themselves govern together and so that each individual participates in such governance. In order to promote the participation by each citizen to help govern, we must give people independence and freedom so that they can draw on their intelligence and skill in creating a healthy society. If people lack basic freedoms they will not have the opportunity to participate in this way.

In this sense, freedom as an essential principle of democracy refers to each individual having the opportunity and privilege to access his

or her capability and potential to share in generating benefits and advantages for the community as a whole. This is true freedom. Sham freedom is where each individual simply seeks personal gain and profit, with the attitude: 'I must get what I want!' Genuine freedom in democracy promotes wellbeing for the whole by providing each individual with the opportunity to help build a thriving society.

If people are denied freedom, they will not have the opportunity to apply their ideas, opinions, and knowledge to participate in developing society. In contrast, if they are given freedom their intelligence and constructive opinions can be applied to develop a virtuous society and fulfil the aims of democracy. On the contrary, a flawed democracy becomes corrupted; it turns into a system of rivalry and contention, in which each private individual seeks personal gain. Freedom and liberty are seen primarily as ways to feather one's own nest. When such an attitude is dominant democracy fails.

For this reason it is crucial that we define freedom in a new way, as each individual having the privilege to use his or her potential and abilities while taking part in developing society. This is the true meaning of freedom, compatible with the aims of democracy, a system set up for the benefit of society.

It is useful to clarify the definitions of some of these terms, because of their importance and because they are interrelated. If we misconstrue the gist of these terms, our cultivation of various virtues will likely miss its mark. Successfully establishing a social discipline must go hand-in-hand with other principles connected to democracy. For a social discipline or code of conduct to be an integral part of democracy and its attendant aspects, one must define 'discipline' (*vinaya*) and 'freedom' (*serī-bhāva*) correctly. Finally, these various

factors must be combined into a coherent whole. Only then will one bring about true integration.

When one understands the genuine meaning of freedom one recognizes that a social discipline provides us with the opportunity to truly use our freedom to benefit society. Endowed with this understanding, people will be glad to comply with a social discipline; they will respect ethical guidelines set down by their society.

A Social Discipline Evolves in Line with Human Development

What is the purpose of setting down a social code of conduct? Codes of conduct are set down for the benefit of the community at large, for the collective wellbeing of each member of the community, so that he or she may live comfortably and at ease. As mentioned above, a code of conduct provides people with the valuable opportunity of building a healthy society. At heart, an ethical code is an instrument providing people with such an opportunity and is thus directly related to freedom and self-determination.

As people become more engaged in spiritual development (or as a society becomes more ‘civilized’), their understanding of social discipline—of moral guidelines and regulations—evolves.

At first, people may not be ready to accept a code of conduct because they lack wisdom and sound judgement. When they encounter a social code of discipline they see it as a form of compulsion, hindering them from acting according to their desires and preferences. People who have not received any spiritual training see social discipline as a constraint, obstructing their personal pleasure. At this stage they are mentally unprepared and lack discernment. They are in conflict with this discipline, acting unwillingly, begrudgingly, with annoyance and distress.

Later, when their understanding matures and they gain insight into the law of causality, they recognize ethical codes as forms of spiritual training. At this stage they appreciate the purpose and value of these moral guidelines. Here they are in harmony with the social discipline, accepting it, complying with it willingly, and perhaps even delighting in it.

Eventually, when people are spiritually developed, their understanding of a social discipline (*vinaya*) changes. They will see it as a set of mutually agreed-upon regulations to be followed properly, designed to help guide how people conduct their lives, how they live together well, and how they perform their collective activities. Every society requires some form of decisive standards of living for it to function well. This is the true purpose of ethical codes. Take the case of fully awakened beings—the arahants. Although they follow all sorts of rules and regulations, they do not see them as a form of constraint. They do not need to force themselves to follow these rules because they recognize their purpose and objective, of fostering healthy co-existence between people in society and being conducive to a life of ease and freedom from trouble. Without any social discipline there is only chaos and confusion.

Imagine twenty arahants living in a single monastery, each one residing in his own individual hut (*kuṭī*). In order to decide when to eat together or when to gather for meetings, they need to make an arrangement. For instance, they may agree that at 7am each morning someone will ring the bell as a signal calling everyone together for the meal. They then agree on a seating arrangement, deciding who sits where in the line. For the sake of simplicity and order, there needs to be some system or procedure. This is referred to as a social convention, which even arahants establish amongst

themselves. Those people who have undergone a spiritual training recognize social disciplines and moral codes as merely conventional notions used to guide people's lives and actions, providing them with the opportunity to live honourably, simply, and smoothly. They find satisfaction and delight to behave in this way. Wise practitioners fully comprehend the purpose, objectives, and value of moral codes, and they are able to adjust them constantly in order to accord with righteous principles. Consistent with this understanding, their minds are bright and joyous and their conduct is even and composed.

It is for this reason that the interpretation and understanding of social discipline (*vinaya*) changes in line with people's spiritual development. Those people who have received no spiritual training see social discipline as a matter of force and constraint. After commencing a training people view social discipline as an aspect of spiritual practice, as a means to foster social wellbeing. They are glad to comply to a code of ethics in order to cultivate their own lives and to bring about peace in their society. When people are spiritually mature, social discipline is seen as merely a shared convention used for communal life, to bring about individual and social harmony and concord.

In a true democracy this final interpretation of social discipline reigns. If the citizens of a democratic society fail to receive spiritual training, although the society will be run by rules, laws, and contracts, there will be an inherent discord and conflict between people's understanding of freedom and understanding of social discipline. The society will be beset by turmoil and unrest. If one interprets freedom simply as acting according to one's personal desires and preferences without breaking any laws or infringing others' rights, society will have to set down an increasing number of rules, i.e. people's lives will

be dictated by a sense of legal liability. After an extended period of living in such a legalistic society, laws will begin to appear as coercion and constraint, statutes as strictures. Even in a democratic society, if an increasing number of laws are used to hold people in check, people will begin to feel intimidated and oppressed. One will not escape from defaulting back to using punishment as the chief means of justice. If people fail to recognize the essential principles of democracy, the democracy will become a form of legal dictatorship.

Factors for Establishing a Social Discipline

To review, the Buddha said that social discipline or being established in a code of ethics—otherwise known as practice in moral conduct (*sīla*)—is the dawning of a virtuous life or the harbinger of spiritual training.

As mentioned earlier the Buddha mentioned seven harbingers of the spiritual life, similar to the seven spectral colours comprising the dawn's first blush of light. Each of these seven factors arises in relation and as a complement to the others.⁴ When establishing a code of ethics, one thus relies on the other six factors for support. The following three factors are especially important and closely connected to moral discipline:

1. Virtuous friendship (*kalyāṇamittatā*): having good friends is enormously helpful, because they can act as guides and role models, beginning with assisting us in forming wholesome habits.

Virtuous or beautiful friends are those individuals who have practised well, those who are disciplined and endowed with virtuous

⁴ Trans.: the seven precursors of the Noble Path are: 1. virtuous friendship; 2. fulfilment of moral conduct (*sīla-sampadā*); 3. fulfilment of wholesome desire (*chanda*); 4. self-fulfilment (*attasampadā*); 5. perfection of view (*diṭṭhi-sampadā*); 6. perfection of heedfulness (*appamāda-sampadā*); 7. fulfilment of wise reflection (*yonisomanasikāra-sampadā*).

conduct. In respect to children, virtuous friends or teachers act as role models. Even when children do not yet comprehend the reasons for acting in a specific way, they will follow the example of their virtuous mentors. As a consequence they will automatically develop decent and respectable habits.

Besides setting a good example and instilling wholesome habits, virtuous friends are endowed with superior qualities, e.g. loving-kindness and goodwill. Again, in respect to children, they will derive confidence and comfort from their mentors and teachers. When a cherished teacher recommends a course of action, children will be glad to comply with devotion and admiration. They will feel reassured and happy.

Virtuous friends and teachers are also endowed with wisdom. They understand cause and effect. They are able to explain to their pupils the objectives, benefits, and value of specific behaviour. In this context, children will cultivate wisdom within themselves, steadying and securing their behaviour. The factor of virtuous friendship is thus vital for spiritual development.

2. Wholesome enthusiasm (*chanda*): love of goodness; desire for goodness; aspiration for knowledge; desire for active engagement. Children endowed with wholesome enthusiasm are creative and innovative. They aspire towards the good, wish for a wholesome life, and want everything they encounter to be in a prosperous and favourable state. They wish for their classroom, school, and wider community to be well-ordered and flourishing. This crucial factor of *chanda* is also considered a harbinger of the spiritual life.

In respect to virtuous friendship, children are still dependent on an external factor. Once wholesome enthusiasm is generated,

however, they develop an inner resource. They have the motivation for action and engagement. Everything they do they wish to do well, and everything they engage with they wish to have exist in a state of excellence. An ethical code is designed to bring about goodness and excellence in people's lives and in society. Recognizing this fact, children endowed with this desire for goodness will straight away wish to follow such a code.

If one possesses wholesome enthusiasm one wishes for everything one encounters to exist in an optimum state. This extends also to human beings. Wholesome desire vis-à-vis other people is expressed as loving-kindness (*mettā*), the wish for others to experience the greatest degree of happiness and health. This extremely positive mind state of wholesome enthusiasm needs to be cultivated. When it arises it is a harbinger of good things to come. No matter what virtuous quality or wholesome conduct one wishes to develop, one can expect success if *chanda* is present.

3. Self-fulfilment (*attasampadā*): perfection of oneself; self-actualization. This refers to realizing the fulfilment of one's potential, i.e. developing oneself to spiritual completion or bringing about true accomplishment. Here, one is scrupulous in spiritual practice and training.

When children have the moral sense to study, train, and develop themselves, one can expect them to progress. They will be prepared to embrace and advance in everything good and dignified. They will now be equipped with both wholesome desire and a conscientious wish to engage in spiritual training. They will realize that human beings differ from other animals. Human beings require training and self-development. It is imperative that as human beings we engage in this cultivation of the heart.

Buddhism teaches that human beings are *damma*: they are trainable or they need to be trained. One of the frequently recited attributes of the Buddha (*buddha-guṇa*) is: *anuttaro purisadammasārathi*, translated as: 'He is the unsurpassed trainer of those beings in need of training.' Human beings achieve excellence and distinction by way of spiritual training; they have the capability of being trained to the ultimate degree. Having trained one can reach the exaltedness of a Buddha, who is venerated even by the devas and Lord Brahma. People should thus maintain self-esteem and self-confidence in their own potential, remaining conscientious in their spiritual endeavours.

When one has become scrupulous in spiritual training one may rest at ease. This scrupulousness and conscientiousness lies at the heart of the spiritual life. One will view anything that one encounters and experiences in life—work, academic learning, specific circumstances, etc.—as an arena and fuel for practice. When children develop this factor of *attasampadā*, we can relax. We do not need to use extra incentives when teaching them. When they encounter things they will see this as an opportunity to train and to learn. They will develop a fighting spirit. They will be undaunted by hard work or difficult fields of study, because they will feel that the more difficult the challenge the more they will learn and grow. People scrupulous in spiritual training seek out difficult situations. Indifferent or unscrupulous people, on the other hand, shy away from difficult work or challenging study, which gives rise to adverse effects, namely:

1. They experience discouragement and lack of enthusiasm; they are deprived of joy and their mental health is impaired.
2. They lack enthusiasm and as a consequence their efforts frequently end in failure.

Conscientious people see difficult situations as a valuable opportunity to train and cultivate themselves. They feel that the more difficult the situation the greater the opportunity for growth. This is true for children too. Children endowed with this quality of scrupulousness will seek out difficult challenges in order to learn. They feel that if they can pass these difficult life tests then without a doubt they can handle the more easy situations they will face. Moreover, they will accumulate valuable experiences. They gain proficiency in their life and work, giving rise to advantageous effects, namely:

1. They find contentment and satisfaction in applying themselves, leading to joy and happiness in their work and studies.
2. They are determined and committed and as a consequence their efforts end in success.

In sum the work is fruitful and the person is happy. This is the truly desirable goal of applying oneself to an activity.

If people are able to instil such a conscientious attitude towards spiritual training, social discipline and an ethical code will have meaning and importance. Being already established in a basic form of spiritual training, a further training in social discipline will appear easy. In regard to children, one should aim to foster this conscientiousness in learning and training, so that they face up to, and even seek out, difficult challenges with enthusiasm and joy.

Social Discipline within a System of Global Stewardship

A social discipline or code of ethics pertains to the interrelationship between people, and also to the relationship between people and nature. Technically, this dynamic can be distinguished into two

aspects: the Dhamma and the *vinaya*. According to this principle life in the world involves two distinct relationships:

1. The interrelationship between human beings.
2. The relationship of humans to nature or to natural truths.

On the one hand the interrelationship between people must be well protected and maintained. At the same time it is essential not to neglect our proper relationship to the natural world. This is because, regardless of all other factors, our own lives, the lives of others, and the existence of our societies is subject to the laws of nature. In order to sustain a healthy and wholesome life, we must maintain a correct relationship to these two aspects of our lives. If this is accomplished, we will experience joy in our personal lives and society will be well-ordered and tranquil.

If one only pays attention to human interrelationships and neglects the principle of causality in line with natural laws, one's life will be incomplete and unstable, and one's society will eventually face confusion and turmoil. Similarly, if one only gives import to the truth of natural laws and neglects healthy human relationships and mutual hospitality, the world becomes dreary and human interactions will be devoid of joy. For this reason it is vital that people protect these two kinds of relationships: the relationship with other people and the relationship to natural laws.

The Buddha thus gave teachings on how to generate a balance between human interrelationships and the interactive system of humans with nature. If we follow these principles we will bring about a more complete integrated manner of living. This healthy balance can be summarized as follows:

A. Three basic principles: we should preserve a wholesome relationship to other human beings by maintaining mutual kindness, hospitality, and assistance in three different situations:

1. In times when others abide in a normal state of happiness and ease, we maintain goodwill and friendliness. This quality is referred to as 'loving-kindness' (*mettā*).
2. In times when others are in trouble and distress, we feel empathy, wishing to assist them in dispelling their suffering. This quality is called 'compassion' (*karuṇā*).
3. In times when others meet with happiness and success, we feel delight and promote this success. This quality is called 'appreciative joy' (*muditā*).

The Buddha taught these principles of lovingkindness, compassion, and appreciate joy to be applied during these three circumstances regarding other people. They pertain to the interrelationship between human beings.

As valuable as these principles are, one must be careful not to allow human interrelationships to conflict with causal truths and virtues inherent in natural laws, including the valid and measured truth applied by people when they lay down human laws (*vinaya*). If human interrelationships adversely affect the truths inherent in nature and in upright human laws, we must set aside the three principles stated above in order to provide an opportunity for the proper functioning of the Dhammavinaya. This is a crucial point whereby we allow natural laws (and human laws based on them) to assert their practical meaning and benefit. In other words, people need comply with genuine laws, i.e. the laws of nature (*dhamma*) and the conventional laws of human beings (*vinaya*). Here, the guidelines for ethical behaviour, the

principles of truth, integrity, and righteousness, and the legislation of society are taken up and adopted into practice. This marks the fourth eventuality, which we can distinguish as a separate theme:

B. Special principle:

4. In the case that the supportive conduct between people outlined in events 1-3 above undermine or have a negative impact on principles of truth, righteousness, justice, and virtue naturally existing in nature (*dhamma*), or on human laws and regulations set down based on such principles (*vinaya*), we must cease or desist from such conduct. Instead, we make way for conduct in line with *dhamma* and *vinaya*, so that truth remains established in the world. In this situation one acts by maintaining a neutral and detached attitude and relationship to others. One refrains from interfering with or impeding the actualization of the *dhamma* or *vinaya*. In other words, one allows other people to reap the results or effects of natural and human laws. This quality is referred to as 'equanimity' (*upekkhā*).

If people exclusively maintain good mutual relations without taking into account the principles of Dhammavinaya, ill-effects ensue. People assist each other but they disregard social ethical codes. This can be seen in some societies in which human interrelationships are given primary importance. People provide kind assistance to one another, but they overlook, neglect, or violate social codes of discipline. They fail to honour natural and human laws. As a result the truth inherent in nature and preserved in social guidelines becomes indistinct and is forgotten. This is tantamount to colluding in the destruction or ruling out of natural and human laws. In the long run harmful effects will beset society as a whole.

Conversely, if people only give import to rules and regulations, neglecting mutual assistance, minimizing human interaction, and generally disregarding each other, a system of every man for himself is implemented. Everyone takes responsibility for social discipline, for ethical principles, for natural and human laws, obeying established statutes and conventions, but an attitude develops of: 'You can do whatever you want, but just don't break a law or perform disorderly conduct. Otherwise, I'll crack down on it right away!' Such an unsupportive, intolerant society of fending for oneself is imbalanced. It is barren and devoid of warmth. The citizens will feel stressed and ill-at-ease. And if the level of human interaction drops beyond a certain point, people will begin to feel angry and resentful, thinking that no-one cares or offers support. They will develop an attitude of 'Enough! I don't accept this. Let's do away with these rules and regulations.' This only causes harm. For this reason the Buddha encouraged a balance between human interrelationships and the relationship to nature. If one can maintain this balance, society will be in a state of equilibrium and the world will be at peace.

How does this subject relate to a code of ethics (*vinaya*)? A genuine code of ethics is comprised of those rules and regulations based on truth (*dhamma*). We should thus give importance to ethical codes, made up of laws, rules, regulations, etc., as they are a benchmark of society. We should not allow human interrelationship to eclipse the significance of social discipline.

In some societies, one key reason why social discipline does not get established is because the citizens give too much consideration to human interactions and relationships. There is so much mutual aid and assistance that a large percentage of the population do not work at growing and developing themselves. Because they can expect help

from social elders, relatives, and friends, etc., they simply wait for and become dependent on these acts of welfare. They do not make effort because they take this assistance for granted. An attitude develops of: 'It doesn't matter if I commit some transgressions. All I have to do is tell my boss. He's such a kind man that he will forgive me.' People thus feel that they do not have to comply with the laws of their society. In such cases the human interrelationships marked by mutual aid become too prominent. Society loses its equilibrium because people lack equanimity (*upekkhā*). Essential natural and social laws are consequently neglected and overlooked.

As mentioned above, in other societies, supportive relationships based on goodwill are disregarded. People give importance exclusively to laws, rules, and regulations. Personal issues are considered relatively unimportant. Everyone feels accountable for his or her own actions according to the rule of law, but to an extreme. This becomes a system of just fending for oneself.

Practice in this area is complex; upholding the truth is challenging. We must ask ourselves what is the best way to bring about balance and moderation. This balance is outlined in the Middle Way (*majjhimā-paṭipadā*), i.e. the balance between human interrelationships and the relationship to nature. It is also outlined in the teaching on the sublime states of mind (*brahmavihāra*; divine abidings), namely:

1. Loving-kindness (*mettā*): love, goodwill, and friendliness during ordinary circumstances.
2. Compassion (*karuṇā*): concern, empathy, and a wish to help when others are troubled and distressed.
3. Appreciative joy (*muditā*): rejoicing in and wishing to promote the achievements, success, and happiness of others.

4. Equanimity (*upekkhā*): detachment and non-interference when others must take responsibility in line with natural and human laws.

The first three factors are formulated in order to protect and watch over interrelationships between people. One can see that they emphasize human emotions; they do not necessarily require wisdom.

However, when human interactions have a negative impact on natural and conventional laws, we must break off such interactions in order to protect and defend these laws. Here, one is not relying on emotion. Instead, one applies wisdom, using our knowledge and understanding to monitor, balance, or even suppress emotions. Take the example of a child successfully stealing \$100 from someone else. If one only draws upon the first three factors above, one would respond to this situation by expressing an attitude of congratulation (*muditā*), condoning and praising the child by saying: 'Well done! What good luck! Next time may you get even more money.' Expressing appreciative joy in such a situation is incorrect, no?

Appreciative joy here is misguided because in such a situation human interactions damage and impair natural and human laws as they manifest in society. Instead, one should desist from responding in this way and abide by the Dhammavinaya, i.e. one should act in line with essential principles, rules, regulations, and social agreements. If people can maintain such balanced conduct, society will not falter and will remain stable.

In order to safeguard a code of ethics, it is thus necessary to limit and confine human interrelationships. Otherwise, it will be very difficult for a code of ethics to fulfil its purpose. Social discipline therefore depends on the fourth sublime state of mind, namely equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Equanimity refers to taking an objective and dispassionate attitude, to refrain from feeding into or supporting a disruption of the dynamics of natural and human laws. One allows the inherent principles and guidelines of Dhammavinaya to be expressed by way of wise and steady conduct. One is not swayed by the appeals of emotion. *Upekkhā* is equanimity; it is not indifference, apathy, or turning a blind eye. Rather, it is impartial and neutral discernment. If one possesses this quality and encounters any kind of mistake or setback, one is prepared to rectify the situation immediately. If it is the proper time to assist others one is prepared to offer assistance without hesitation. The reason for maintaining neutral and objective discernment is to permit behaviour and conduct to proceed in line with people's responsibilities towards natural and conventional governing principles.

The term *upekkhā* is widely misunderstood, and this factor is more difficult to practise than the other three. The first three factors pertain primarily to emotions expressed during specific circumstances; they do not require much discernment or wisdom. Equanimity, however, requires wisdom. *Upekkhā* stems from the roots *upa* ('on,' 'upon,' 'close by,' 'near') and *ikkha* ('to see,' 'to look at') and can thus literally be translated as 'looking on' or 'regarding closely.' It refers to objective discernment, rather than disregard or indifference. This means not actively assisting people in interfering with or obstructing dynamics of natural and human laws, because one wishes for conduct to be in harmony with such laws. Providing people with the opportunity to be accountable for their actions in line with this principle of equanimity is a vital condition for establishing a social discipline and bringing about social equilibrium.

When people are endowed with these four qualities they are said to possess the 'divine abidings' (*brahmavihāra*); they exist at the level of the Brahma gods.

Buddhism maintains that every person should turn him- or herself into a Brahma. According to the tenets and teachings of Brahmanism, Lord Brahma is considered the creator and protector of the universe. Buddhism teaches us not to wait for or yearn for the deity Lord Brahma. If we pin too much hope on the god Brahma, we may simply follow our preferences, neglect our responsibilities in caring for the world, and cause more distress and misery. If this happens we end up destroying the planet; we then have to wait for Brahma to create a new one.

The Buddha exhorted us to become Brahmas. As Brahmas we can help to build this world; all of us can then care for it and maintain it in a state of wellbeing and stability. Endowed with these four qualities we become Brahmas, because we are able to create and protect the world; we become its stewards and cultivate peace and happiness.

Those human beings who have become Brahmas are those people who have developed themselves spiritually. They are endowed with the four sublime states of mind, which maintain a suitable balance between preserving wholesome interrelationships between people and preserving a healthy relationship to nature. When this is accomplished, people live together in harmony and the principles of nature (*dhamma*) as well as the laws set down by society as a code of ethics (*vinaya*) endure and prevail.

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November 7, 2009



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