

Individual, Society and Inter-Personal Relations

(Transcribed from Prof. Oliver's Lecture)

1. The Six Pairs of Social Units

According to ***Sigālovāda Sutta*** (DN), the society operates 106 basic units and in each of these units the individual has the role to play in relation to the others. In this sutta, both the **individual** and **social relations** are taken into the consideration. The vision of the *Sigālovāda Sutta* is that the behavior of the individual becomes significant in the social context. If one refrains from consumption of liquor, it could be really meaningless as long as others of the society are still consuming the liquor. The individual cannot effect to the society if all others are consuming. Therefore, the consumption of liquor should be eradicated both by the individual and the society itself.

The first doctrinal issue which is discussed in the *Sigālovāda Sutta* is called ***cataro kammakilesa*** (the four defiling acts): harming others; taking what is not given; sexual misconduct; falsehood. I may not harm others. That is good ethically; but if all others are harming others, my refraining from harming others is meaningless. It is my duty to refrain from telling lies as well as to get others to refrain from telling lies. The **personal** ethical behavior would not make the **society** change. It is **a collective effort**. **the householders** (*kulaputtā*) treat their neighbours

In keeping this in mind, the Buddha has given **the six basic pairs of units**: parents and children; teachers and pupils; husband and wife; householders and neighbours (friends and acquaintances);¹ clergy and laity; employers and employees. All the basic problems of any society are taken into consideration in this six element classification of the society. One is missing; it is the relation of king and servants or the ruler and the ruled. The reason for this is that if each member of the six pairs of the units behaves well within the discipline given, the role of the state is minimized. So the Buddha told that the relationship between the ruler and the ruled would not be discussed. The second reason is that the Buddha did not have a sympathetic attitude towards the kings in his time. He criticized them severely and wanted to reform the system. So he introduced a new rule under the designation of *cakkavatti* rule. Politics is completely out of the discussion in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*.

The householders and neighbours

Among the six pairs of the social unit, the fourth one is the sons of the **householder** and their **neighbour** relationship (*kulaputtā* and *mittāmaccā*). I don't think it is a relationship between friends.

¹ Prof. Oliver says that the relationship between friends does not belong to the six units; but, according to the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, it is the fourth unit. "These six things are to be regarded as the six directions. **The east** denotes mother and father. **The south** denotes teachers. **The west** denotes wife and children. **The north** denotes **friends** and companions. **The nadir** denotes servants, workers and helpers. **The zenith** denotes ascetics and Brahmins." *DN* (trans. Walshe), 466. But **Prof. Oliver** still insists that **the fourth** is the relationship between the **householder** and his **neighbour**.

The friend relationship is so important that the sutta treats it separately in a longer section: talking about who are the good or bad friends.

There are five ways between **the householders** (*kulaputtā*) treat their neighbours:

- (1) **dānena**: by engaging in giving; generosity, opposite of stinginess;
- (2) **piyavācāya**: by pleasing words; they should refrain from four speeches which are not good;
- (3) **atthacariyāya**: by meaningful behavior which can be carried out in four ways; they should generate faith (*saddha*), virtues (*sīla*), sharing (*cāga*), and wisdom (*paññā*);
- (4) **samanattatāya**: by equality; they should not treat their neighbors as inferior to them;
- (5) **avisamvādatāya**: by concord and harmony; the householder should not go into conflict with his neighbor.

The first four are well known **four forms of** the Buddhist **hospitality**.

The neighbours (*mittāmaccā*) should response to them in five ways too:

- (1) **pamattaṃ rakkhanti**: the householders who failed in their businesses should be protected by their neighbours;
- (2) **pamattassa sāpateyyaṃ rakkhanti**: the belongings of the failed householder should be protected;
- (3) **bhitassa saraṇam yanti**: those who are scared should be given refuge;
- (4) **āpadāsu na vijahanti**: when they are in trouble, they should not be discarded.
- (5) **aparapajā pi assa paṭipujenti**: the family (children) of the person who is in trouble should also be respected.

You should read the Sutta by yourself for more detailed information. Here I would like to point out one thing. In the books, which are discussing this sutta, **the terms** used are duties, obligations, and so on. For example, they are talking about duties of the parents and children, obligations of the teachers and pupils, etc. It is not so. Taking the example of the husband and wife relationship, the Buddha says that the husband should extend his **gratitude** toward his wife and that the wife should her **sympathy** toward her husband. These gratitude and sympathy are **not** either **duty** or **obligation**; it is something else.

2. Three Important Pairs Regarding Discipline

Now I will take three pairs on this particular topic: parents and children; teachers and pupils; clergy and laity. These are the most important people in the society. Interestingly, all three (parents, teachers, and religious leaders) are requested to form the same towards the society. The Buddha says that **parents** should try to keep their children away from bad and let them engaging in good (***mātāpitaro pāpā nivārenti kalyane nivesenti***). This is exactly what is to be done by the teachers towards their pupils; by the clergy towards the lay people. Thus the Buddha requested the important groups of the society **to establish discipline** in the society.

It is interesting to note that in this sutta the parents, the teachers and the clergy are requested to look after the educational need of the children, the pupils, and the lay; but this **educational need** is mentioned **after** remarks of **discipline** (*pāpā nivārenti kalyane nivesenti*). The Brahmins say that knowledge (or science) gives discipline. Buddhism says that discipline gives knowledge (or science). Discipline comes first; then education comes.

After establishing their children, pupils, and the lay in **discipline**, what these three groups should do is thus: the parents should teach their children some skill well (*mātāpitaro sikkhaṃ sikkhāpentī*); the teachers should give their pupils discipline well and make them well take what the teacher has (*ācariya suvinitaṃ vinenti suggahitaṃ gāhāpentī*); the ascetics and Brahmins should teach the lay what they have not heard before and correct what they heard (*samanabrahmānā assutaṃ sāventi suttaṃ pariyaodapenti*). Thus discipline and education go together; without discipline there is no education. It is the duty of the elders in the society that establish discipline. Giving discipline is the primary mandate; then the education and wisdom can be distributed. This lesson of the *Sigālovāda Sutta* is very relevant to the society of all countries.

3. The Husband and Wife Relationship

Now I am going to take husband and wife relationship separately and comprehend it. The Pāli sentence is thus: *sāmikena bhariyā paccupatthātabbā* (the wife should be shown the gratitude by the husband); *bhariyā sāmikaṃ anukampati* (the wife shows the sympathy to the husband). This is the relationship between one husband and one wife. It is very important because it recommends the system of **monogamy** while all the previous religions were recommending polygamy.

According to the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, the husband should **show his gratitude** toward his wife in **five ways**:

- (1) the wife should be praised (*sammānanāya*);
- (2) the wife should not be scorned (*anavamānanāya*);
- (3) the husband should be loyal to the wife (*anaticariyāya*);
- (4) the authority of the household should be given to the wife (*issariyavossaggena*);
- (5) the husband should give his wife adornments (*alaṅkāraṇuppadānena*).

In response to the husband, **the wife** should do in five ways thus:

- (1) *susamvīhita kammantā*: she should organize the industries;
- (2) *sangahitaparijanā*: those who are related to the family such as friends, relatives, and workers should be looked after by the wife;
- (3) *anaticcārinī*: she should be loyal to the husband;
- (4) *sambhataṃ anurakkhati*: she should look after what is earned by the husband;
- (5) *dakkhā hoti anulasā subbakiccasu*: she should be competent and vigilant in all affairs.

Taken this into consideration, as I said the other day, according to Buddhist teaching, **the entire household** should be **governed by the wife**, not by the husband. When we look at such list given above, we can find that what is assigned to the husband is much lesser important than the wife's assignment.

In the analysis of socialization found in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, two women are animated: the mother and the wife. This is very important when we consider the position given **to women** in the society during the Buddha's time. There was **no religious freedom** for the women: they could not go to the religious place; they could not utter the sutras and mantras; they could not listen to the sermon. They were three aspects of religion taken away from the women during the time of the Buddha. **Their duty**, according to the Hindu texts, was **to look after the husband**. She should attend on the husband all the time. Forgetting the religious affairs, just by looking after the husband, she could go to the heaven. So in the society like this, **the Buddha exalted two women**, the **mother** and the **wife**, in this discourse and also in other discourses.

When we see the term **mātāpitaro** in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, the emphasis is on the mother; it comes first. Thus mother with father is the first teacher. They can teach their children various things much more than the teacher can do. **Mother** teaches the language, well lives, the behavior and patterns, so on. Most children especially in the Eastern family learn a lot from their mother before the proper schooling start. Mother instills religious and ethical values in her children at home. Therefore, the mother is called **the first teacher**. The Buddha says that the mother **also is the friend** at home. She is friendly all the time while friends are friendly not all the time. The Buddha also says, "In my religion, blood is nothing but mother's milk." The service given by mother to her children cannot be compensated in any way. Once the householder renounces the household life, he should not look after anyone; but he is requested by the Buddha that parents are exempted. **The monk can look after his parents** by providing them food and various other things. Only on this occasion, they are permitted to attend to the household activities.

When we take the wife into consideration, **wife is the noblest friend** who the husband can have. In the context of the society that the Brahmin was allowed to have six wives, it is said that "the youngest is the best wife." On the contrary, the Buddha says that **the wife who listens to the husband is the best wife** (*susūsā setṭhā bhariyā*). There are various other words of the Buddha which praise and exalt these two women: the mother and the wife. The wife becomes mother; and the mother is always wife. Therefore, what are said for the mother is common to the wife, and vice versa.

4. Three Teachings of the Husband and Wife Relationship

There are three teachings regarding the husband and wife relationship in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*. **The first teaching** is that the **Sattaka Nipāta** of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* reckons the seven kinds of wife.

- (1) **vadhaka-bhariyā**: wife who is cruel; obstructs the good affairs of the husband;
- (2) **cora-bhariyā**: wife who steals what the husband earned;

- (3) **ayya-bharyā**: wife who behaves like master; gives the husband order all the time; wants her authority to be prevailed;
- (4) **matu-bharyā**: wife who behaves like mother; compassionate towards the husband like mother towards son;
- (5) **bhagini-bharyā**: wife who looks after the husband as the younger sister;
- (6) **sakkhī-bharyā**: wife who behaves like friend; both the wife and the husband are equal in companionship;
- (7) **dāsī-bharyā**: wife who attends on the husband in all activities as his servant.

In the context of that **Sujātā**, the **daughter-in-law of Anāthapiṇḍika**, was misbehave, the Buddha explained those seven types of wife and asked her, "How would you recognize your self; in which category are you in?" Then Sujātā replied, "From today, Ven. Sir, I would like to be a **dāsī-bharyā**." It does not indicate that the best is the *dāsī-bharyā*. It is her choice in the context of being criticized that she, came from a rich family, was not used to obey her father-in-law and mother-in-law, nor her husband. The four types of wife such as **matu-bharyā**, **bhagini-bharyā**, **sakkhī-bharyā**, and **dāsī-bharyā** were recommended by the Buddha while the first three types are condemned.

The second teaching is that, in the **Catukka Nipāta** of the *Anguttara Nikāya*, the husband and wife relationship is given in four ways.

- (1) **A corpse-like husband** lives with a corpse-like wife;
- (2) A corpse-like husband lives with a goddess-like wife;
- (3) **A god-like husband** lives with a corpse-like wife;
- (4) A god-like husband lives with a goddess-like wife.

The recommended relationship is the last one in the discourse. Those two terms are defined in the discourse: **corpse-like** is defined as the person who is in misbehaviors, not-loyal, cruel, and stingy, so on; **god-like** or **goddess-like** is defined as the person who inspires the ethical good, refrains from unwholesome actions, so on.

The third teaching, related with this case, there is another interesting details found in the **Dhammapada Commentary on the 53rd stanza**. It notes on **the qualified wife**. Briefly saying, wives are requested not to slander; not to talk of ill-will of the husband nor the father-in-law nor the brother-in-law; and further she is requested not to give anything to anyone that cannot be taken by; but to give everything to everyone if that will be return back, so on. There are **ten points** given in this particular description. When we read the original source, the Buddha hints at these points but they are not given in the discourse itself. They are in the commentary.

So, this shows that the husband and wife relationship is described very much **in detail** in Buddhism. What is said **more about** is about **the wife**. That is because wife was condemned during the time of the Buddha. Therefore, the Buddha wants to **uplift her position**. We should understand all the descriptions **in the social context**.

5. The Clergy and the Lay Relationship

The clergy should be responsible to the laity in **six ways** according to the discourse. In all other cases the number taken into consideration is in five ways. But here it is in six ways:

- (1) **pāpā nivarenti**: duty of the clergy is to advise followers to refrain from unwholesome activities;
- (2) **kalyāne nivesenti**: monk should instill good in the followers; *kalyāne* is good and *pāpā* is bad, so the monk should give them the sense of distinguish good and bad;
- (3) **mettāsahagatena manasā anukampanti**: he should show sympathy towards the lay people with mind of full of loving kindness; it is very difficult for the lay to develop loving kindness; there are four biases or prejudices (*agati*) which cause the lay not to think about others lovingly. They are *chanda* (strong attachment), *dosa* (hatred), *bhaya* (fear), and *moha* (ignorance). The position of monk is not so; he is devoid of all these four so that he can develop loving kindness and show it to the lay;
- (4) **assutaṃ sāventi**: what is not heard should be made to hear; the monk should give new knowledge to the lay; at the end of the almsgiving, the monks give *anumodanā* (it means that he rejoices the crowd who are present at the almsgiving);
- (5) **sutaṃ pariyodapenti**: what is heard should be corrected; there are various things we have taken wrongly. They are to be purified, clarified, or corrected by the monks;
- (6) **sagassa maggaṃ ācikkhanti**: the monks should show the lay people the path to the heavenly world.

Regarding the fourth duty, in the discourses of the Buddha, the terms indicate this are **bhuttāvī anumodati**; but later on it was changed to **bhuttānumodanaṃ karoti** which is prevail now. The first term means that **having eaten** (*bhuttāvī*), the Buddha **gladdens the people** (*anumodati*). The Buddha says that at the end of the partaking of the food, one of the monks present should advise the lay people; and the Buddha teaches the monks how to do it in the discourses. The Buddha says, "Don't talk a single word about the almsgiving; don't say anything about person who gives the almsgivings; don't expect another almsgivings from the same family of the person; don't praise what you have eaten; don't criticize also what you have eaten; and **tell them what they do not know**." So the advice to the gathering at the almsgiving is mean to enlighten the people on something that they do not know. The Buddha himself showed the example in the discourse. He attended at the almsgiving prepared by a rich Brahmin who was very knowledgeable; then the Buddha enlighten him by taking the topic he had never thought. This is the meaning of *bhuttāvī anumodati*; not just show the gratitude to the almsgiving (*bhuttānumodanaṃ karoti*) as it prevails in today's practice.

The last point is very interesting. The term **sagassa-magga** is the path to the heaven; the Buddha did not say the **mokkhassa-magga** which means the path to *nibbāna*. What the monks should show to the lay is not the path towards *nibbāna* but to the divine world. It is very important in today's context of that there are various meditation institutes, skills, and retreat centers; now meditation is very popular; even non-professional meditator talks about meditation such as medical doctors and scientists; there are various categories of people who talk about meditation. But here the Buddha wants his disciples to show path to the heavenly world, not to the *nibbāna*.

As we know Anāthapiṇḍika was one of the great lay disciples of the Buddha, and he became *sotāpanna*. When Anāthapiṇḍika was in death way, Ven. Sāriputta visited him and gave him a deep influence very philosophically. Then Anāthapiṇḍika said, "Ven. Sri, I have been with you so many years. I have become *sotāpanna* also. But you have never given me a talk so deep like this. Why didn't you do that?" Ven. Sāriputta answered, "Anāthapiṇḍika, you have been engaged in many people to live good life. That is what should be done by the lay people. The lay should not listen to this type of doctrinal talk. You are dying, so I talked on this to you."

Therefore, I should say that **meditation is not recommended to the lay**. As far as I know, nowhere in the Pāli Tipiṭaka, the Buddha tells on the meditation for the lay people. There is no single discourse talking of the lay meditation; all the discourses about mediation are mean for the monks. That is very important because in the *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* (MN), the Buddha says that spiritually speaking, there are **four individuals** in the society: *puṭhujjanas*, *sekkhas* (those who are learning), *arahants*, and *the Buddha*. There is **no discourse** to talk **of meditation to the ordinary people**. Meditation is recommended at the particular stage in the path which is given in so many ways; in the noble eightfold path, meditation is taken into consideration in the seventh and eighth path factors. Before that, the six path factors are causally and dependently related. The *Mahācattārisaka Sutta* (MN) begins with the question of what is the basis of *sammā-samādhi*; the Buddha answers that **sammā-samādhi** is based **on the all former path factors**. To engage in the eighth path, you should complete the former stages.

The Buddha says that there are two ways of discipline: **gahaṭṭha-vatta** (practice which compatible with the householder life) and **pabbajita-vatta** (practice which is compatible with the monks who renounce the householder life). What happens in Sri Lanka today is that the lay people follow the path which is recommended for the monks, and vice versa. The paths are completely confused. What I mean by the term 'meditation' here is the meditation which is the highly developed form such as **Ānāpaṇasati**. The lay cannot do it properly according to the doctrinal teachings. If they want to practice such meditation, they must renounce the householder life. You should also have very deep **knowledge of the Dhamma** in order to go into the meditation.