

The Disciple Within

The Dhamma talk that I am about to deliver is based on the *Antevasika Sutta* of the *Samyutta-Nikaya*. *Antevasika* means the ‘disciple within’. If we put the ‘disciple’ into the Eight Worldly conditions, where would it fit in? Do you know what the Eight Worldly Conditions are? They are gain and loss, fame and disrepute, pleasure and pain and, praise and blame. If we put the disciple within into one pair of the Eight Worldly Conditions, it should be included in fame and disrepute. Fame and disrepute also means abundance of followers and lack of followers. Teachers have students; monks have disciples. Students and disciples are their followers, and if they have a lot of students and disciples, they will be very pleased. Don’t you all wish for ‘many disciples’? Disciples here mean ‘disciples within’. Is it good to have disciples within? Well, what do you say? I know whether it is good or not to have disciples within because I have disciples within. I have a feeling that most of you here tonight would like to have disciples within or, disciples nearby. When the Buddha mentioned the disciple within, was he referring to abundance of followers and lack of followers? We must consider this deeply. Tonight I shall share with you what our Buddha really meant. I promise you that it will open your eyes and make you think deeply and seriously about what the Buddha taught us.

This Dhamma is so rich in essence and, I will begin by reciting for you what the Buddha said;

“Anantevāsikamidam, bhikkhave, brahmacariyam vussati anācariyakam. Santevāsiko, bhikkhave, bhikkhu sācariyako dukkham na phāsu viharati. Anantevāsiko, bhikkhave, bhikkhu anācariyako sukham phāsu viharati.”

“Bhikkhus, This holy life should be lived without disciples within; without a master within. A bhikkhu with the disciple and the master within lives with suffering and without peace.”

“Bhikkhus, the bhikkhu who does not have the disciple and master within dwells in peace.”

That is what the Blessed One admonished with full of His loving-kindness and compassion. If the Buddha said that we should practice the holy life without the disciple, without the master within, doesn’t it make you wonder about a lot of things? What does it mean? It is difficult to understand immediately what the Buddha meant. It is quite puzzling.

Please listen again to what the Buddha said:

“The bhikkhu who has the inner disciple, the inner teacher – he will have to practice with suffering, with pain, with sadness. The one who practices without the disciple or the master within will be able to do so with joy, with happiness, with satisfaction. He can live in peace, in tranquility.”

Now, in one of the suttas the Buddha also said, “To escape from the suffering of the round of rebirths that is spinning like a windmill – it depends entirely upon good friends, good teachers and good mentors.”

Well, if the Buddha also said that the person who practices the holy life without an inner disciple, without an inner teacher – he will be able to live in peace, then these two statements

seem to contradict each other. It sounds like a puzzle, doesn't it?

So, we have to find out exactly what our Buddha meant by the 'disciple within' and the 'master within'. We have to find out and to see what sort of lives we are living in. It is time for us to re-examine how we are living and what sort of mind-set we have. As tonight happens to be the eve of the New Year 2008, I feel that this is a most appropriate time to reflect deeply upon this matter. That is why I wanted to deliver this talk tonight.

Now, in every living being's mind there are the defilements of greed (*lobha*), the defilements of hatred (*dosa*), and the defilements of ignorance (*moha*). Also, we have within us envy, stinginess (*issamicchaya*) and conceit (*māna*). Each one of us, we all have these defilements. Whenever we see something that we think is very desirable or undesirable, there arise in us evil unwholesome states that bind us up like fetters. Our senses, our memories, our perceptions and our feelings become very busy and active in arousing the unwholesome defilements (*akusala*). These defilements dwell within us. Since they dwell within us, they are called the 'disciples within.'

Our Buddha said that people who have such disciples within lead miserable lives. Also, these so-called disciples within – greed, anger, delusion, envy, stinginess and conceit – through our senses they overwhelm us and control us. That is why the Buddha said that if we have such disciples and teachers within, then we will never be able to live in peace in life.

We can have abundance of material wealth or, we can be lacking in material wealth. Which one of these two would you choose? You would want abundance, naturally. Similarly, if you were to choose between having an abundance of followers and having only very few followers, the choice would be to have many, wouldn't it? Praise or blame, wealth or poverty – if given

a choice, you would take the favourable ones only, I am sure. No one would want the bad ones. Although people want honour, they do not want disgrace.

However, whether they want it or not, human beings are forever being pursued by the Eight Worldly Conditions and, likewise, the Eight Worldly Conditions are always being followed by human beings. The opposites that are wealth and poverty, abundance of followers and lack of followers, praise and blame – whenever and wherever they emerge, the opposites that are happiness and sadness come to be. That is because we possess the master, which is the disciple within! Although we feel joy when we receive the favourable things, which are wealth, honour and fame, when we receive the opposites of such things, we experience great sadness. If there is happiness there will also be misery. If you wish to receive joy, you must also be prepared to receive sadness. That is inevitable with the disciple within. Therefore, all those who possess the master that is the disciple within, they will never be able to live in happiness but in misery.

To state it more lucidly, to be in possession of the defilements is like being laden with **debts**. Thus, an existence with defilements is an existence full of debts. You will constantly be in fear of when your creditor will come to you and demand that you repay the debts. To have *lobha* (greed) is very much like being heavily in debt. As long as you have not rid yourself of *lobha* you remain owing unpaid debts. Just like the creditor who comes to collect the debts from his debtor, so will the defilements call on you to repay the debts that you owe. "How I want those things!" – that is demanding repayment of debts. "Oh, how I cherish these things!" – that is *lobha* come to collect its debts. To feel the heart throbbing with excitement, to yearn for, to eat one's heart out over someone (to suffer from excessive longing), to want to be beside someone, to long to hear

someone's voice and to pine for things or people; to lust for sensuality, to feel covetous, to seek understanding, to wish for success, fame and abundance of followers – all such feelings and desires are due to being possessed of greed. In this way do human beings journey through life. So, all those with *lobha* are bound to repay debts.

Furthermore, to be filled with *dosa* (hatred) is like having debts that are waiting to be repaid. Unless one is devoid of hatred, one will always have debts to repay. The defilements of *dosa* will hound you like the creditor hounds the debtor for repayments. To be full of sadness, grief, lamentation, anxiety and discontentment; accusing, blaming, torturing and killing each other; being insolent and cruel to each other; bearing grudges and wreaking vengeance, bullying, terrorizing and oppressing others – why do such kinds of behaviour and feelings occur? It is all because humans have borrowed the defilement of *dosa*, and for this they have put themselves deep into debt! They have the disciple within!

Being jealous, stingy and conceited is also the same as being in great debt. If you cannot yet eradicate these defilements you will still have debts waiting to be repaid. ‘He or she has succeeded and has overtaken me! Oh, I’m so furious. How can I destroy his success? I detest people looking up to him. Let them all come only to me. What do they think I am? I can’t bear to let them say such things about me. I’ll let them know who I am. Who are you that I should bow down to?’ All those who bear such thoughts of ill-will and conceit are certain to have to pay debts.

As long as one has debts one’s creditor is bound to pursue you to settle those debts. Every single person has accumulated debts – kammic debts. There are kusala kammic debts and, akusala kammic debts. To perform kusala deeds and then to make wishes is also a form of taking on credit. If you have made

a wish to be able to perform services for the benefit of others and, when in the life that kamma yields its results, you will be able to render services as you wished. Because you yourself wished for it, the services will be quite wholesome. However, debts are debts and you cannot avoid it.

Our Bodhisattva endeavoured through four incalculables and a hundred thousand eons to fulfill *pāramīs* just so that he would be able to enlighten the minds of living beings. The kinds of debts that such extraordinary supreme beings incur upon themselves are incredible. Nevertheless, they wished for these (wishes) themselves and so, they had to pay their dues and they were prepared for it. The debts were, after all, all for good causes.

However, the debts paid for akusala (unwholesome) deeds are immense! They can be extremely severe, punishing, drastic, intolerable and deadly. If we study the earlier lives of the Bodhisattva we will see that, due to his immaturity during those existences, He harboured the defilements of greed, hatred, delusion, stinginess, jealousy and conceit which put Him into debt. It was even up until when He had already attained Enlightenment and, even up to The Buddha’s final *parinibbāna* that debts had to be paid in full! There was simply no way of getting out of it. The Buddha’s afflictions of backache, of headache, of diarrhea were such repayments.

In one of his past lives, the Bodhisattva was a well-known wrestler. Although he had already retired due to age, his arrogance and conceit in thinking he was the only one still capable of retaining the country’s honour, he went into the ring and broke his opponent’s back. Thus, even in His last existence as the Enlightened One He suffered severe backache as a means of repaying His akusala kammic debt.

In yet another one of the past lives, our Bodhisattva was a resident of a fishing village. During one session he happened to

take great delight in watching his relatives and fellow villagers beating in the head to kill the fish that had been caught and hauled ashore. That debt of evil delight borne of *lobha* was repaid by having to suffer headaches during the life as The Buddha. The Bodhisattva had merely been enjoying the sight of the fish being killed. He had not taken part in the slaughtering itself. This goes to show that even silent approval of akusala deeds will surely put you into kammic debt. Just imagine the intensity of akusala being developed by the spectators at a boxing match or a bullfight! They shout, they applaud, and they cheer the contestants to fight, to hurt, to beat and, sometimes even to kill each other. They want one side to win; they wish the other side to lose. How appalling! How horribly frightening! They are accumulating akusala and kammic debts. Do you wish to be a participant in such activities? As long as you have those defilements, which are the disciple within, you will be encountering evil all the way. You will not be able to escape it. So, beware.

In another past life, the yet immature Bodhisattva was a skilled physician. At one time he had to treat a miserly patient for diarrhoea. After being cured, the miser became crafty and was reluctant to pay the fee for the treatment. Although a physician's skills are for the benefit of patients, the Bodhisattva's anger and conceit led him to administer a very potent purgative that killed the patient. For this misdeed resulting from anger and conceit, the Bodhisattva suffered in hell for countless lives. Even in the last existence, The Buddha was made to pay His kammic debts by having to suffer from the disease of diarrhea. Those were the debts of akusala. Life is just getting into debt and paying off debts.

If there is the disciple within, then there will also be kamma. If there is kamma, then there are debts to be paid. Possessing defilements is getting into debt. Can these debts be paid? Can these debts ever be repaid in full in this lifetime? It is not pos-

sible. They will have to be carried forward into the next existence. Therefore, pay very serious attention towards your kamma.

If you develop wholesome kamma, you pay the corresponding kammic debt. If you choose to develop unwholesome kamma, then you will have to pay the corresponding kammic debt. What are we Bhikkhus doing? We are also paying our own kammic debts – wholesome kammic debts. However, debts are debts – all the same.

We can say that there are four ways in which we pay off our debts.

- (1) We pay back old debts (like repaying our parents);
- (2) We sell on credit, which is also a form of getting into debt (by giving to charity, friends and relatives, by doing works of merit, and by providing for our children so that they can repay us later);
- (3) We borrow for the future by performing bad deeds; and lastly,
- (4) We are paying off so as to be free from debts.

Now, it can be said that you are all in the process of paying back old debts. You are also selling on credit. It's not going to end. You are just asking to get deeper into debt. When you speak angrily to each other, you are getting into debt. When you ridicule one another, you are accumulating more debt. When you treat one another with arrogance – that also adds to your debt accounts.

Our Bodhisattva once ridiculed and accused a noble one who was replete in *sīla*, *saṃādhi* and *paññā*. Due to that akusala kamma, even after His Enlightenment He suffered ridicule and accusations. He had to pay His debts. He could not avoid it. That is why The Buddha said,

“People are born with a chopping knife in the mouth. The fool uses this knife to cut himself up by mouthing

badness.” So said The Buddha after attaining enlightenment.

How often have you already cut yourselves with your knife? You may have already done too much cutting! The more you have done it, the more debts you will have to repay. Taking on credit just means that some time or another you will have no alternative but to pay back these debts – that is certain. It is just as if you have sworn to pay back in this present life, those debts that you yourself had accumulated in your past lives. The accusations, derisions, insults that we are suffering are the payments of the debts that we have been owing. We bhikkhus are also paying back our own debts. Laymen, laywomen, nuns and everyone else are paying back their own respective debts. When you are paying back your debts don’t grimace, don’t put on a face. Try to do it with a smile. After all, you took the debt upon yourself, you have to pay it back yourself. If you do it with a scowl, you will have to continue paying debts.

I don’t want to make any more debts; I only want to be free from debt after paying back what I already owe. I am telling you this so that you will also wish to be free from any more kammic debts.

The inner disciple of defilements is also like a very dreadful and malignant **disease**. Whenever you catch a disease, you feel miserable. You experience fatigue and weariness both in body and in mind. When defilements such as greed, hatred and delusion take over your mind and body, and you stimulate and fuel them without restraint, without thinking – then you are going to suffer horribly like you suffer from an extremely severe disease. So, you can say that a person with defilements is a diseased person, can’t we? . Whenever we see things that we feel are delightful, craving and lust overwhelm us. We get to be tortured by these things. Whenever accusations, blame or malice are directed towards us, our bodies shake and tremble with rage and

hatred. Such afflictions are severe. Similarly, as conceit and arrogance arise and we begin to treat each other disdainfully, then how do we feel – cool and peaceful or hot and agitated? We become hot and agitated, of course! It is as if we have been afflicted with a disease. That is why those with defilements can be said to be afflicted with a disease.

Diseases of the human physical body may be treated and cured with conventional means and medicines. However, in the case of diseases of the defilements, the only form of cure that exists is to take the treatment and medicine prescribed by Our Buddha. The practice of the three noble trainings is for curing and eradicating the affliction of defilements. Without intensively practicing the development of *sīla, samādhi* and *paññā*, one can never be able to get rid of the disease of defilements which is the disciple within.

Furthermore, the evil defilements called the ‘disciple within’ are very much like a cage. In this world of ours there are prisons, and there are people who are being held captive in prisons. Such captives encounter so much suffering and agony. For them, their freedom has been replaced with confinement. They have no control over themselves. They are being made to obey the orders of others. The chains of defilements are binding them. Drivers that are the defilements are driving them. All those who are in prison cells suffer miserably. That is why defilements are so very much like **prisons**.

The arising of desire and craving indicates that one has fallen into the cage of *lobha*. The person who has landed into such a cage has to perform according to the will of *lobha*. When lust grows strong the place to touch to fulfill the wishes of lust has to be sought. That is the time when the pangs of hunger occur. That is when one has become a real captive in the cage of lust. What will one do when the place to touch has been located?

Will one take on credit and become yet indebted? Existence is so full of perils. It is so insecure. Greed and lust arise. It is falling into the prison of greed. Once one falls into this prison, one is bound to obey the prison warden's orders and to dwell accordingly.

Whenever one cannot feel satisfied until one has been able to retaliate or to seek revenge, it can be said that one has been bound up in the coils of hatred. To get angry or to feel hatred is to get oneself bound and held captive. In the jail-house of anger and hatred there can be no freedom. One must simply obey the commands of the jail warden.

The chains of defilements that have confiscated your freedom do not bind you only in the present life. You have already made debts that you will have to pay in future lives. Each new existence offers you the opportunity to set foot into the prison of defilements. Being imprisoned in the jail of *dosa* is to be paying back debts as well as taking more on credit. People afflicted with the disease of defilements are those who possess the disciple within. Being afflicted with the disease of defilements can be considered as being in prison. Even convicted criminals can look forward to an eventual date of release. However, for the inmates of the prison of defilements, no release date can be foreseen so long as they are in possession of defilements. The prison of defilements is a dreadfully rigorous place full of misery and wretchedness. That is why the Buddha said, "With the disciple within which is the master, no one can live in peace, only in suffering."

Yet another thing – defilements turn us into **slaves**. Do you want to be master or do you want to be slave? I am sure that you would wish to be the master. You may be trying to be the master, but you are yet a slave. If asked to show those who are slavishly obeying the orders of the defilements, we would have

to point at those who have the disciple within them. A person who is not in control of himself and is only submitting to the dictates of defilements is called a slave. If we review our lives on a day-to-day basis, we will see that most of the people are those living under the dictatorship of defilements and, as such, they are just slaves.

There must be innumerable cases of those who had been enslaved by defilements through many different forms of existence. To illustrate the point, I shall tell you an account of how one of our yogis came to be enslaved.

To be able to discover this you needed to see your past lives. Quite a few of our yogis have been successful in seeing some of their past existences and, I wish to share this account of one of them.

He was practicing meditation and had reached the stage of acquiring the Knowledge of Discerning Cause and Condition and, after he happened to see one of his past lives he felt very sad and so he wanted to tell me about it. But he just wrote it down and sent the experience to me. Later, when we met and I began to ask him about it, tears came to his eyes and he appeared to be feeling heart-broken and dejected. I wondered what sort of disciple within, what type of defilement had enslaved and tortured him in a past life? Before I tell you about it, let me read to you the translation of the letter that was sent to me. The note is quite serious and profound. It says:

As kamma dictated, with great pain and hardship the cart had to be drawn to the top of the hill to be loaded there with the materials and drawn back down to the foot of the hill.

After loading the cart with the things at the top of the hill, the trip down the hill had to be made with great care because the weight of the cart together with the weight of the load had to be borne with immense stress and strain.

Do you know what is going on - what is happening? I will describe what he found out. This is what he saw and felt:

He saw that in one of his past lives he had become a horse – a carthorse. But – before that life, he had been a very beautiful woman! She couldn't have been an Oriental. She must have been from the West or from the Middle East. And, she had the disciple within. She was a slave – a slave to the defilement of gambling. She was very keen on horseracing. She used to hold many horse races herself. She was quite wealthy but she was taking on credit and so, accumulating debts – the debts of kamma. Do you know how? She bred horses – racehorses. She was breeding horses for racing. She used to be particularly fond of one of her horses. When a horse is running in a race it has to run all out, as fast as it can. When it is running like that, the muscles of a horse tense and stretch with great stress and strain; it gets extremely exhausted from all the exertion. You might be able to imagine how tired a horse can get in such a race. The woman would feel thrilled in watching the movement of the horse's legs and muscles stretching and tensing and, she would be exultant whenever her horse won. She was also very attached to the horse.

Although in that life she was quite wealthy, unfortunately, in her dying moments her thoughts were of her horse and, do you know what happened? She was reborn as a horse in her next life! Her kammic debt from having made her favourite horse run races to exhaustion in the previous life had asked for repayment of that debt. So, as a horse, he had to pull a cart up a hill, and then pull the heavily loaded cart back down the hill, again and again and again. It was very strenuous, very exhausting. That was the way the kammic debt had to be paid – with intense suffering, hurt and pain – pain in the hooves and shoulders and all the muscles. There must be many others who are similarly repaying kammic debts with painful horns, painful

backs and painful necks and various other horrible ways.

One more thing – to be with the disciple within is like going on a long and difficult journey. When you go on a difficult journey you always feel very weary and spent. When going on such a journey across a desert, there is always the danger of running out of provisions, food and water. It is not at all easy to make it successfully across a sea of sand. Those who manage to make it successfully can be called the ones with good kamma.

In the same way, it is not at all easy to make it successfully across the desert of *saüsāra*. Those with good kamma manage to make it successfully. Those with bad kamma are people who are being manipulated by the defilements, being driven to follow the long, tortuous journey across the endless desert of *saüsāra*. As long as you continue to possess the defilements that are greed, hatred, delusion, likes and dislikes, happiness and sadness, wealth and poverty, pleasure and pain; as long as you will not stop entertaining your senses, you will be prolonging this grueling journey in *saüsāra*. And, the longer you keep these defilements, the disciple and the master within, you are going to be reborn again, and again, and again as if you had planned to remain in *saüsāra*. What happens is that when you get what you want, you feel happy and, when you don't get what you want you feel miserable. When you are wealthy you will feel good, but when you are poor you will feel bad, and so on. Whatever happens, whatever we receive, we are bound to receive the exact opposite as well. So, we can say that we will always be living in a world of misery and suffering. The life with the disciple within is a life being controlled by a master, which means that we need to try to live a life free of this disciple who is the master, and then and only then can we aim for a fully peaceful life.

Do you want to have to keep on accumulating and then repaying your kammic debts over and over again? Do you want to

have to keep on traveling along the grueling, tortuous and seemingly endless journey through *saüsāra*? Do you want to live your future lives being held captive in the prison of defilements? Do you want to be afflicted with the ghastly disease contracted from the disciple within? Do you want to be a slave of the disciple within, life after life after life with no freedom in sight forever? If you don't, then you must make sure that you do not take anything more on credit after you finish settling the debts that you have accumulated up to now. Actually, I would like to suggest that you do not go back home to pay the debts. After all, haven't you all come to this monastery to be free from accumulating any more debts? Well, I wish you all to be free from all these debts of kamma.

What we all should be really practicing is to eradicate these defilements that are like debts waiting to be repaid; defilements that are like fetters around our ankles; defilements that are holding us in prison cells; defilements that infect us like no other disease on earth; defilements that are the disciple within us who has made us its slave. This disciple within us who is the master holding the reins will never make our existence peaceful or tranquil.

That is why our Buddha said that possessing the disciple within, the master within will only lead to misery and suffering. That is also why the Buddha impressed upon us that if we are concerned with our welfare and what is beneficial for ourselves, we should try not to meet either with unholy joy – the joys of life or, with the miseries of life. If there is joy, there will also be misery. If you encounter happiness, you will not be able to avoid sorrow. You can never have one without the other. Do you know why? It is because of the disciple within!

That is why the Buddha said:

“The one who has the inner disciple, the inner teacher

– he will have to practice with suffering, with pain, with sadness. The one who practices without the disciple or the master within will be able to do so with genuine joy, with satisfaction. He can live in peace, in tranquility.”

So, to be able to practise without the disciple or the master within, one should intensely practise the three noble trainings which are *sīla* (morality), *saṃādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom).

That is the only way any of us can ever be able to pay off those kammic debts we have accumulated.

That is the only way any of us can ever be cured of the disease of defilements.

That is the only way we can avoid being imprisoned in the cell called defilements.

That is the only way we can be the master, not the slave – the slave of defilements.

That is the only way we can safely cross the sea of sand, which is the rounds of rebirth without the disciple within.

May you all be able to successfully eradicate the disciple and the master within!

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

Bhikkhu Revata

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery

The talk given on the eve of the New Year 2008, 31st December 2007 at Pa-Auk Tawya in Myanmar.

Translated into English by Bhikkhu Paññāgavesaka