DN 31 — Sigalovada Sutta: The Buddha's Advice to Sigalaka

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Text

This is what I heard.

1. On one occasion, the Buddha[1] was living near the town of Rajagaha[2] at a spot in the Bamboo Grove called the Squirrel's Feeding Place.

At that time a young householder named Sigalaka arose early and set out from Rajagaha with freshly washed clothes and hair.[3] With palms together held up in reverence,[4] he was paying respect towards the six directions:[5] that is east, south, west, north, lower and upper.

2. Meanwhile the Buddha dressed himself in the early morning, took his bowl and robe and went in to Rajagaha on alms round. On the way, he saw Sigalaka worshipping the six directions. Seeing this, the Buddha said to him: "Young man, why have you risen in the early morning and set out from Rajagaha to worship in such a way?"

"Dear sir, my father on his deathbed urged me, 'My son, you must worship the directions'. So, dear sir, realizing, honoring, respecting, and holding sacred my father's request, I have risen in the early morning and set out from Rajagaha to worship in this way."

"But, young man, that is not how the six directions should be worshipped according to the discipline of the noble ones."

"Then how, dear sir, should the six directions be worshipped according to the discipline of the noble ones? I would appreciate it if you would teach me the proper way this should be done."

"Very well, young man, listen and pay careful attention while I tell you."

"Yes, dear sir," agreed Sigalaka.

The Buddha said this:

3. "Young man, by abandoning the four impure actions, a noble disciple refrains from harmful deeds rooted in four causes and avoids the six ways of squandering wealth. So, these fourteen harmful things are removed. The noble disciple, now with the six directions protected, has entered upon a path for conquering both worlds, firmly grounded in this world and the next. At the dissolution of the body after death, a good rebirth occurs in a heavenly world.

"What four impure actions are abandoned? The harming of living beings is an impure action, taking what is not given is an impure action, sexual misconduct is an impure action, and false speech is an impure action.[6] These four are abandoned."

That is what the Buddha said.

4. Summing up in verse, the sublime teacher said:

"Harming living beings, taking what is not given, False speech, and pursuing the loved one of another: These the wise surely do not praise."

5. "What are the four causes of harmful deeds? Going astray through desire, hatred, delusion, or fear, the noble disciple does harmful deeds. But, young man, not going astray through desire, hatred, delusion, or fear, the noble disciple does not perform harmful deeds."

That is what the Buddha said.

6. Summing up in verse, the sublime teacher said:

"Desire, hatred, delusion, or fear: Whoever transgresses the Dhamma by these, Has a reputation that comes to ruin, Like the moon in the waning fortnight. Desire, hatred, delusion, or fear: Whoever transgresses not the Dhamma by these, Has a reputation that

comes to fullness, Like the moon in the waxing fortnight."

7. "And what six ways of squandering wealth are to be avoided? Young man, heedlessness caused by intoxication, roaming the streets at inappropriate times, habitual partying, compulsive gambling, bad companionship, and laziness are the six ways of squandering wealth.

8. "These are the six dangers inherent in heedlessness caused by intoxication: loss of immediate wealth, increased quarreling, susceptibility to illness, disrepute, indecent exposure, and weakened insight.

9. "These are the six dangers inherent in roaming the streets at inappropriate times: oneself, one's family, and one's property are all left unguarded and unprotected; one is suspected of crimes; then rumors spread; and one is subjected to many miseries.

10. "These are the six dangers inherent in habitual partying: You constantly seek, 'Where's the dancing? Where's the singing? Where's the music? Where are the stories? Where's the applause? Where's the drumming?'

11. "These are the six dangers inherent in compulsive gambling: winning breeds resentment; the loser mourns lost property; savings are lost; one's word carries no weight in a public forum; friends and colleagues display their contempt; and one is not sought after for marriage, since a gambler cannot adequately support a family.

12. "These are the six dangers inherent in bad companionship: any rogue, drunkard, addict, cheat, swindler, or thug becomes a friend and colleague.

13. "These are the six dangers inherent in laziness: saying, 'It's too cold,' one does not work; saying, 'It's too hot,' one does not work; saying, 'It's too late,' one does not work; saying, 'It's too early,' one does not work; saying, 'I'm too hungry,' one does not work; saying, 'I'm too full,' one does not work. With an abundance of excuses for not working, new wealth does not accrue and existing wealth goes to waste."

That is what the Buddha said.

14. Summing up in verse, the sublime teacher said:

"Some are drinking buddies, Some say, 'Dear friend! Dear friend!'. But whoever in hardship stands close by, That one truly is a friend. Sleeping late, adultery, Hostility, meaninglessness, Harmful friends, utter stinginess: These six things destroy a person. Bad friends, bad companions, Bad practices — spending time in evil ways, By these, one brings oneself to ruin, In this world and the next. Seduction, gambling, drinking, singing, dancing, Sleeping by day, wandering all around untimely, Harmful friends, utter stinginess: These things destroy a person. They play with dice; they drink spirits; They consort with lovers dear to others. Associating with low-life and not the esteemed, They come to ruin like the waning moon. Whoever is a drunkard, broke, and destitute, Dragged by thirst from bar to

bar, Sinking into debt like a stone in water Into bewilderment quickly plunges. When sleeping late becomes a habit And night is seen as time to rise, For one perpetually intoxicated, A home life cannot be maintained. 'Too cold! Too hot! Too late!': they say. Having wasted work time this way, The young miss out on opportunities. For one regarding cold and hot As not more than blades of grass, Doing whatever should be done, Happiness will not be a stranger."

15. "Young man, be aware of these four enemies disguised as friends: the taker, the talker, the flatterer, and the reckless companion.

16. "The taker can be identified by four things: by only taking, asking for a lot while giving little, performing duty out of fear, and offering service in order to gain something.

17. "The talker can be identified by four things: by reminding of past generosity, promising future generosity, mouthing empty words of kindness, and protesting personal misfortune when called on to help.

18. "The flatterer can be identified by four things: by supporting both bad and good behavior indiscriminately, praising you to your face, and putting you down behind your back.

19. "The reckless companion can be identified by four things: by accompanying you in drinking, roaming around at night, partying, and gambling."

That is what the Buddha said.

20. Summing up in verse, the sublime teacher said:

"The friend who is all take, The friend of empty words, The friend full of flattery, And the reckless friend; These four are not friends, but enemies; The wise understand this And keep them at a distance As they would a dangerous path."

21. "Young man, be aware of these four good-hearted friends: the helper, the friend who endures in good times and bad, the mentor, and the compassionate friend.

22. "The helper can be identified by four things: by protecting you when you are vulnerable, and likewise your wealth, being a refuge when you are afraid, and in various tasks providing double what is requested.

23. "The enduring friend can be identified by four things: by telling you secrets, guarding your own secrets closely, not abandoning you in misfortune, and even dying for you.

24. "The mentor can be identified by four things: by restraining you from wrongdoing, guiding you towards good actions, telling you what you ought to know, and showing you the path to heaven.

25. "The compassionate friend can be identified by four things: by not rejoicing in your misfortune, delighting in your good fortune, preventing others from speaking ill of you, and encouraging others who praise your good qualities."

That is what the Buddha said.

26. Summing up in verse, the sublime teacher said:

"The friend who is a helper, The friend through thick and thin, The friend who gives good counsel, And the compassionate friend; These four are friends indeed, The wise understand this And attend on them carefully, Like a mother her own child. The wise endowed with virtue Shine forth like a burning fire, Gathering wealth as bees do honey And heaping it up like an ant hill. Once wealth is accumulated, Family and household life may follow. By dividing wealth into four parts, True friendships are bound; One part should be enjoyed; Two parts invested in business; And the fourth set aside Against future misfortunes."

27. "And how, young man, does the noble disciple protect the six directions? These six directions should be known: mother and father as the east, teachers as the south, spouse and family as the west, friends and colleagues as the north, workers and servants as the lower direction, and ascetics and Brahmans as the upper direction.

28. "In five ways should a mother and father as the eastern direction be respected by a child: 'I will support them who supported me; I will do my duty to them; I will maintain the family lineage and tradition; I will be worthy of my inheritance; and I will make donations on behalf of dead ancestors.'

"And, the mother and father so respected reciprocate with compassion in five ways: by restraining you from wrongdoing, guiding you towards good actions, training you in a profession, supporting the choice of a suitable spouse, and in due time, handing over the inheritance.

"In this way, the eastern direction is protected and made peaceful and secure.

29. "In five ways should teachers as the southern direction be respected by a student: by rising for them, regularly attending lessons, eagerly desiring to learn, duly serving them, and receiving instruction.

"And, teachers so respected reciprocate with compassion in five ways: by training in self-discipline, ensuring the teachings are well-grasped, instructing in every branch of knowledge, introducing their friends and colleagues, and providing safeguards in every direction.

"In this way, the southern direction is protected and made peaceful and secure.

30. "In five ways should a wife as the western direction be respected by a husband: by honoring, not disrespecting, being faithful, sharing authority, and by giving gifts.

"And, the wife so respected reciprocates with compassion in five ways: by being well-organized, being kindly disposed to the in-laws and household workers, being faithful, looking after the household goods, and being skillful and diligent in all duties.[7]

In this way, the western direction is protected and made peaceful and secure.

31. "In five ways should friends and colleagues as the northern direction be respected: by generosity, kind words, acting for their welfare, impartiality, and honesty.

"And, friends and colleagues so respected reciprocate with compassion in five ways: by protecting you when you are vulnerable, and likewise your wealth, being a refuge when you are afraid, not abandoning you in misfortunes, and honoring all your descendants.

"In this way, the northern direction is protected and made peaceful and secure.

32. "In five ways should workers and servants as the lower direction be respected by an employer: by allocating work according to aptitude, providing wages and food, looking after the sick, sharing special treats, and giving reasonable time off work.

"And, workers and servants so respected reciprocate with compassion in five ways: being willing to start early and finish late when necessary, taking only what is given, doing work well, and promoting a good reputation.

"In this way, the lower direction is protected and made peaceful and secure.

33. "In five ways should ascetics and Brahmans as the upper direction be respected: by kindly actions, speech, and thoughts, having an open door, and providing material needs.

"And, ascetics and Brahmans so respected reciprocate with compassion in six ways: by restraining you from wrongdoing, guiding you to good actions, thinking compassionately, telling you what you ought to know, clarifying what you already know, and showing you the path to heaven.

"In this way, the upper direction is protected and made peaceful and secure."

That is what the Buddha said.

34. Summing up in verse, the sublime teacher said:

"Mother and father as the east, Teachers as the south, Spouse and family as the west, Friends and colleagues as the north, Servants and workers below, Brahmans and ascetics above; These directions a person should honor In order to be truly good. Wise and virtuous, Gentle and eloquent, Humble and accommodating; Such a person attains glory. Energetic, not lazy, Not shaken in misfortune, Flawless in conduct, and intelligent; Such a

person attains glory. A compassionate maker of friends, Approachable, free from stinginess, A leader, a teacher, and diplomat; Such a person attains glory. Generosity and kind words, Conduct for others' welfare, Impartiality in all things; These are suitable everywhere. These kind dispositions hold the world together, Like the linchpin of a moving chariot. And should these kind dispositions not exist, Then the mother would not receive Respect or honor from her child, Neither would a father. Upon these things The wise reflect; They obtain greatness And are sources of praise."

35. When all was said, the young householder, Sigalaka, exclaimed to the Buddha:

"Wonderful, dear sir! Wonderful! It is as though you have set upright what was overturned, or uncovered what was concealed, or shown the path to one gone astray, or brought an oil-lamp into the darkness such that those with eyes could see. So too has the Buddha made clear the Dhamma by various ways. I go for refuge to the Buddha and to the Dhamma and to the monastic community.[8] May the exalted one accept me as a lay-follower gone for refuge from henceforth for as long as I live."

Notes

1.

Throughout the text the word used to signify the Buddha is Bhagavant, a Pali word meaning "Blessed One" or "Fortunate One". To make the language clearer for modern audiences we have chosen to just use "the Buddha".

2.

Literally meaning "the house of the king", Rajagaha was a large city and the capital of the Magadha kingdom.

3.

Sigalaka's freshly washed clothes and hair perhaps highlight that he has just performed the Vedic bathing ritual of tarpa.na. While chanting mantras, the bather would cup his hands with water and then allow it to flow back into the river. Following the ablution, he dresses in clean clothes. (See Klaus K. Klostermaier, A Survey of Hinduism, 2nd ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), Chitrabhanu Sen, A Dictionary of the Vedic Rituals: Based on the Srauta and Grhya Sutras (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1978).)

4.

More specifically, Sigalaka is worshipping with joined hands outstretched.

5.

The Pali words denoting the six directions have obvious symbolic implications in relation to the six groups of people that the Buddha associates with them. Puratthima ("east") derives from the Sanskrit word purastaat, which in addition to denoting the east, means "before, forward, in or from the front;... in the beginning" (Monier Monier-Williams, Carl Cappeller, and Ernst Leumann, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages, New ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002), 634.). The parents are represented in the east, as they are our beginning. Dakkhi.na, the south, also means "the right (as opposed to the left)" (T. W. Rhys Davids and Wilhelm Stede, The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1999), 311.). The right side, considered as respectful, aptly represents the teachers. As the sun sets in the west, pacchima symbolizes the conclusion of one's life where one's own spouse and family are found. While the Pali word he.t.thima, denoting the lower direction, does not give great symbolic context, a Sanskrit equivalent, dhruva, in the Atharva-Veda (AV) III.26, 27 does. As six directions are mentioned only in three Sanskrit texts, these references are important. The adjective dhruva, when taken with di"s, as it is here, means "the point of the heavens directly under the feet" (Monier-Williams, Cappeller, and Leumann, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, 521.). As servants and slaves represent the direction underfoot in the Si"ngalovada-Suttanta, a clear image of social inferiority emerges with the under-classes literally being trodden on. Uparima, the uppermost direction, represents the Brahmans and ascetics, who may be seen as being closer to heaven and spiritually higher than the layperson.

6.

The impure actions which are abandoned by the noble disciple constitute the first four of five precepts taken by laypeople which make up the siila, or morality, group referred to in the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, that is, Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. Siila is a prerequisite for the other path groups (the samaadhi, concentration, group and the pa~n~naa, wisdom, group) for a very practical reason; the remorse and guilt that disturb the mind of an immoral person make meditation, and thus progress towards awakening, impossible. The five precepts can be baldly stated as: 1) not taking life; 2) not stealing; 3) not committing adultery; 4) not lying; and 5) not taking intoxicants. However, they go beyond a simple list of prohibitions and offer a model lifestyle that develops the qualities of an awakened person. So not taking life holds within it the implication of an active determination to preserve life, to live with care and consideration for the well-being of others. Not stealing implies a sensitivity for the possessions of others (both material and otherwise), as well as for the natural resources available in nature. Not committing adultery also means committing to one's relationship wholeheartedly. Not lying connotes a reverence for the truth as well as for the value of gentle, mild speech. Taking intoxicants is to risk breaking all of the other precepts through heedlessness, and so is to be avoided. Maintaining siila is a private matter for individuals; there is no authority meting out punishment for non-observance. One able to maintain the precepts is one who lives a careful, considerate, and mindful existence, most conducive to the development of concentration, wisdom, and ultimately nibbaana. The latter of course is the Buddha's real goal for his students, a goal that goes far beyond mindless adherence to a set of rules.

7.

It may be significant to note that the Pali continually uses the word "and" to connect the duties of the wife as well as those of the servants and workers in paragraph 32. Could this be because these people were considered socially inferior?

8.

The Sa"ngha.