

guide for lay practice



ven. sayadaw u pandita

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**VEN. SAYADAW
U. PANDITA**

The following desana was given during a Vipassana Meditation Retreat at the Insight Meditation Society, Pleasant Street, Barre, Massachusetts, by the most Venerable Sayadaw U Panditabhivamsa of the famed Mahasi Meditation Centre, Rangoon, Burma.

During one of the group interview sessions (30th June 1984) with the yogis, the Ven. Sayadaw was asked to give some advice to those who are breaking retreat soon to return to the world.

The following is the edited version of a live-translation of the Venerable Sayadaw's response.

GUIDE FOR LAY PRACTICE

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GUIDE FOR LAY PRACTICE

by Ven. Sayadaw U Pandita

There is some sincere advice that I would like to give. I would like to remind you that getting this opportunity to be reborn as a human being is a very precious one, and having become human beings, we should try to live a conscientious life, cultivate a good heart and develop wisdom to penetrate into the truth.

All of you must be well aware of *sila* or virtuous conduct. The basic five precepts are abstention from taking life, from taking what is not given, from improper sexual conduct, from lying, and from taking intoxicants. This is very clear to you.

Purity in conduct ensures that one is able to tame one's wild behavior, manifested through speech and action. But *sila* by itself will not be able to control the mind. It will not directly be able to deal with the negative tendencies that arise within us. In order

2

to overcome such negative mental tendencies, or kilesa, one has to practice concentration of mind. This can be done through the cultivation of metta (loving kindness), karuna (compassion), and mudita (rejoicing in others' success and well-being). There is a variety of other meditation objects which one can give attention to, which will help to calm the mind and keep the kilesa at bay. Also, it is possible to control such negative tendencies through the practice of insight or vipassana meditation, by trying to be mindful in your daily activities, to have presence of mind, to be with the moment as much as possible.

When the mind is sufficiently free from the hindrances it will become calm, clear, and concentrated. Wisdom will then very naturally arise, allowing an insight into the true nature of reality: being able to distinguish between mind and matter, to comprehend conditionality and the three characteristics, to go through the various levels of insight, and ultimately to realize nibbana, a supreme sort of bliss and happiness.

Of course when you get back to the world you have various duties to attend to. You do not have as much time as you would like to devote to meditation like you have during a meditation retreat. You have your social responsibilities; you have your business responsibilities; you have your family responsibilities; and you have other things to do with respect to enjoyment and so forth in life. All these responsibilities can be taken care of systematically. You can divide your life into sections and put aside a section for **Vipassana** practice to be done daily – perhaps an hour or two – as part and parcel of your life, and look at that part of your life as something essential. Just as you have to eat every day in order to nourish your body, so too you have to meditate regularly in order to nourish your mind.

The Buddha gave a discourse on four types of happiness for lay people. It is really an injunction by the Buddha to those people who have to live in society, in the world, and are not free from social obligations and so forth. It is an injunction to such people to try their level best to achieve these four types of happiness, which are 1) the happiness of

having, 2) the happiness of using, 3) the happiness of being free from debt, and 4) the happiness of being free from blame and fault.

For people who are not free from social obligations, and especially family obligations, it is obvious that they have to work in order to live. It is essential to learn a trade, to earn a livelihood. If you are industrious, honest and sincere in what you do, trying to do a job that is good and within the law, then you can be happy and have a sense of security when you get your wages. It cannot be denied that money is very important for people who live in the world, for those who have social responsibilities and family obligations. Working hard and getting money is a part of life, and having wealth and property a part of happiness.

So it is clear that this happiness of having the means to provide necessities and luxuries of life — is very essential, and indeed this first sort of happiness leads to the second in happiness of using. Precisely because you have the resources the money and to procure the necessities of life, you can achieve the happiness of using: utilizing things

that you obtain through your money, through your efforts. With the money that you earn and the property obtained by it, you can support yourself and your family comfortably, and even luxuriously depending on the sort of life you want to lead.

Also, with enough resources, you can have the opportunity to do good deeds. Depending on your religious belief you can practise charity in various ways. You can give donations to charitable institutions, to welfare homes, to noble projects and so forth. Thus the sense of satisfaction in being charitable belongs to happiness, the happiness of using.

It is basic common sense that you should try to live a life within the limits of your wealth. There must be proper utilization of your resources. You should just try to be content with what you have and live within your means, rather than trying to outdo the Joneses, so to speak. Leading a very spendthrift life, spending more than what you earn, you will accumulate lots of debts. This in turn can lead to a lot of suffering, worry, anxiety, deceit and so forth. Therefore, the third sort of happiness is the happiness

6

of freedom from debt. If you are able to live a life of contentment within your means, relative to the resources available to you, then you can have access to this happiness.

There are some people who are not quite content with living within their means. They are very showy. They have a lot of greed and desire to live a life of luxury, although they cannot really afford it. So in order to live an ostentatious sort of life they start to borrow money, through loans and so forth from friends, private companies or the government. It is not uncommon to find people who are unable to repay their debts. This creates a lot of tension, anguish and anxiety in their minds, causing psychosomatic diseases like heart disease and gastric illnesses. Some people may become rather neurotic; some really go mad and others even commit suicide. You can see how debts can be the cause of so much suffering and how much ease and happiness you can enjoy through freedom from debts.

Some people may have a very happy and harmonious family life, but because of their inability to

pay their debts, the situation may sour and cause the breakup of an otherwise happy family. There are also many causes of people with broken family lives resulting from this problem of debt, and as a consequence of such a background, they deteriorate in terms of humanity.

"Contentment is the greatest wealth." That is what the Buddha himself said.

Finally, the last sort of happiness is that which is free from fault, free from blame. It is very important that as long as we exist on this planet, we should endeavor to maintain a high standard of humanity and live a life that is free from fault and blame. Basically, there are two ways in which people live on this planet. The first is the way in which they want to impress other people. They like to be held in high esteem, so their behavior is orientated towards impressing others. The second way is that of very honest and sincere living. It is a very noble endeavor to live a life that is free from fault, free from blame.

Proponents of the first way of living are quite satisfied as long as people honor them. After all, their

whole life is based upon the motivation of impressing others, of having people honor them, and so long as they get this honor and respect from others, so long as they are able to impress others, they are quite content and happy. But this does not mean that what they do for the sake of respect, honor and esteem is wholesome or skillful. They may resort to very unscrupulous means in order to gain respect. In fact, this is a very dangerous game to play because the means used to achieve the end, which is honor and respect, may be something that might catapult back on them. It may be so unskillful that in the end it may bring about much notoriety, disfavor, or dishonor.

But, to those who try to live an impeccable life without thinking of impressing other people, honor, respect and esteem come very naturally. If you're able to live a life that is honest, sincere, full of self integrity and wholesome, then the wise will automatically praise you and give you due respect.

There are two aspects in leading an impeccable life: one is related to the ways of the world and the other to the Dhamma. Briefly, leading an impeccable life in relation to the ways of the world refers to the

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-L.B. Homer

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various mutual responsibilities and obligations that we have. With respect to man and wife, you should have mutual respect for one another and endeavor to fulfil mutual responsibilities and obligations. There are also the mutual obligations pertaining to parents and children: love and gratitude should be reciprocal as far as both parties are concerned. There are the mutual obligations in respect to relatives and friends. There are your social obligations to your country: to live and abide by her laws, her constitution and so forth. As long as all of these mutual responsibilities and obligations are fulfilled to the best of your capability, then one can say you are trying to live an impeccable life in accordance with the ways of the world. In fact there are very many subtle shades with which you can fulfil these responsibilities.

Leading an impeccable life with respect to the ways of the Dhamma refers to abstention from the ten types of immoral behavior. These are none other than the three types of immoral behaviour through physical action, the four types of immoral behavior through speech, and the three types of immoral behavior manifested through the mind.

The three types of immoral physical behavior refer, of course, to the taking of life, stealing, and committing adultery. To live an impeccable life in accordance with the Dhamma, you should try to abstain from these unwholesome activities and be content with what you have. If you are able to successfully abstain from committing such unwholesome, unskillfull actions, then you are actually cultivating very noble attitudes of mind. For example, you are cultivating a lot of loving care (**Metta**), and compassion for other beings (**Karuna**) if you always make it a point to abstain from succumbing to the urge to torture, harm, or kill another being. You are also cultivating a very good sense of considerateness towards other people if you refrain from taking what is not given. Because you exercise control over greed you are able to cultivate that attitude of considerateness. Things which belong to others we should not take, for people are attached to their property. Understanding this makes it easier to be considerate. Moreover you are cultivating a deep sense of control over lust, greed or desire, and also a sense of contentment with what you have by refraining from committing adultery, from participating in immoral sexual relations that will hurt or harm another party.

The four types of unwholesome behavior manifested through speech have been talked about very often, and they are 1) lying, 2) instigation to cause disharmony, 3) harsh, crude speech that will hurt others, and 4) useless chatter, frivolous talk. Having abstained from these four types of unwholesome speech, you can learn to cultivate the type of wholesome speech. Firstly, you can practise speaking only what is true, being committed to the truth, being honest whenever you speak. Secondly, you can also cultivate the quality of always speaking words which do not cause disunity but, on the contrary, foster friendship, goodwill, fellowship and unity. Thirdly, through abstaining from crude language, you can learn to speak in a very polite and refined way so that your words will be pleasing to other people's ears. Fourthly, refraining from frivolous talk will help you cultivate a sense of realizing the importance of speaking only that which is beneficial.

The final category of unwholesome behavior manifested through the mind comprises 1) covetousness, 2) destructive and aggressive thoughts, and 3) wrong view with respect to the law of kamma – a very strong opinion that the law of kamma does not exist, that whatever good is done will not give rise

to good results and whatever evil that is committed will not result in correspondingly evil consequences. If you are able to transcend such unwholesome mental behavior, then you can rechannel your energy into thoughts of charity, thoughts of wanting to help others and thoughts of loving care and compassion for others, in opposition to destructive and aggressive thoughts. You can correct your wrong views, change your opinions with regard to the law of kamma, and try to understand and appreciate that whatever good or evil that is done will give rise to correspondingly good or evil consequences.

For one who lives an impeccable life in accordance with the ways of the world and the ways of the Dhamma, the scriptures tell us that his life will be very stable. Just as a die thrown upwards into the air will land on the ground and sit on its flat surface in a very stable manner, so too the life of such a person in the present existence as well as in future wanderings through samsara, will be very stable. Thus, if you are able to reflect on your life and appreciate the good things you have been doing, your sincere endeavor to live an impeccable life, and how successful you have been in that respect, you can feel very satisfied and joyful, for you will

have gained access to the final sort of happiness, the happiness of being free from fault. No matter how much material wealth you may have, no matter how high a social status you may enjoy, as far as this last type of happiness is not achieved, you are still vulnerable to the many types of suffering awaiting you. There are many occasions for remorse, regret, anxiety and so forth. On the other hand, you may not be materially wealthy, nor belong to a high social status, but if you are very honest and have a lot of self integrity, being devoted to leading an impeccable life in accordance with the ways of the world and that of the Dhamma, then you will have the opportunity to be filled with a deep sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, joy and happiness, when you reflect on how impeccable your life is.

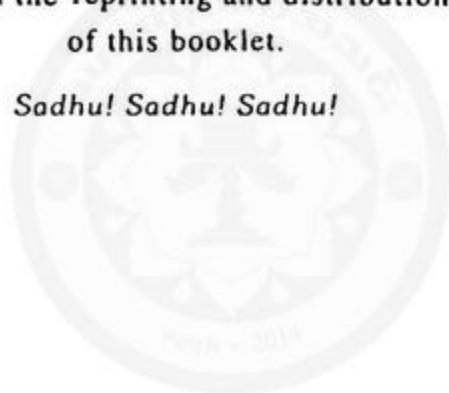
On top of this happiness that you experience by reflecting on the impeccability of your life, you will have access to higher levels of happiness if you are further able to develop your mind through *samatha* or *vipassana* meditation. *Samatha* meditation provides happiness by tranquilizing your mind, while *vipassana* brings about the happiness of realizing the true nature of things as they really are. May you be able to practice in this way to achieve all these types of happiness!

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