

# Questions and Answers on Dhamma Service

## 1. *Sīla* on Dhamma Land

Q: Goenkaji, why is it so important to maintain the Five Precepts on Dhamma land?

A: It is important to observe the Five Precepts everywhere, not only on Dhamma land. But it becomes all the more important when you are on Dhamma land.

The first important thing is that it is so difficult to observe these precepts; there are so many factors around, which may make many people break their *sīla*. On this land, you've got a wonderful Dhamma atmosphere. The influence of *Māra* is much less here than in the outside world. If one cannot observe *sīla* in an atmosphere like this, what can be expected of this person? How can this person develop in Dhamma? If you get the opportunity to live in a wonderful atmosphere, full of Dhamma vibrations, free from *Māra's* influence, you should strengthen yourself in *sīla*, taking advantage of the atmosphere.

Another, more important thing is that observing *sīla* anywhere is very meritorious, but observing *sīla* on a Dhamma land is much more meritorious; that breaking *sīla* anywhere is harmful, but breaking *sīla* on a Dhamma land is much more harmful. Why? Understand! The atmosphere on a Dhamma land is full of Dhamma vibrations, purity. And when you break a *sīla*, you can't break any *sīla*, unless you generate some defilement or the other, like anger, like greed, like passion, like ego, some impurity or the other must first come into the mind, before manifesting itself as an unwholesome action of speech or an unwholesome action of the body. And as soon as you have generated a defilement in the mind, the vibration, your contribution to this atmosphere is such a bad vibration, that you've started polluting the atmosphere.

If you have generated this kind of vibration in a marketplace, which is full of unhealthy vibrations, you've contributed something bad, but already it is full of bad vibrations. It is not that conspicuous like if somebody is wearing a very dirty cloth or a dirty shirt, and some new dirt comes on it, it is not so conspicuous. But if someone is wearing a very white, clean shirt, then even a little dot of impurity becomes so conspicuous. You've spoiled it! The atmosphere here, the good vibration, is polluted by generating a defilement in the mind.

The mind is like a generator - it doesn't stay idle. Either it generates impurity, or it generates purity. If you don't generate impurity, that means you're generating purity - good vibrations. When you are generating a good vibration in this atmosphere, this is your contribution. After all, how does a Dhamma land become a Dhamma land? Because people meditate there. People purifying their mind generate good vibrations, and that gets permeated in the atmosphere around.

You have given your contribution. This is your *dāna*. All material *dāna* is nothing compared to this dhamma *dāna* - the good vibrations that you have given.

Understand, the vibration of a Dhamma land - the good vibrations of a Dhamma land - are not merely for people who come to a course, 100 or 200; not merely for workers, 20

or 30, who come to a course. This is an ongoing process. The Dhamma land vibration becomes stronger, stronger, stronger; more and more people come and meditate, it becomes stronger; more people come and meditate, it becomes stronger. And so it continues. If a Dhamma land is a really good Dhamma land, and we want all our centres to become very good Dhamma lands - and they are becoming so; we are experiencing it, this atmosphere of pure Dhamma will work for years and years, for centuries, for generations.

You don't know who is going to come, after five centuries and after 10 generations etc. What a wonderful contribution you are giving to those unknown people when they come here. How much benefit they will get! Your *dāna* is a wonderful *dāna*. And the pollution that you may produce is harmful. You're harming not only the present meditators, you're harming also the future meditators. They won't get such strong, good vibrations as they should get. That is why *sīla*, observing *sīla*, on a Dhamma land, is much more important, much more valuable, is much more fruitful, fruitful to one who generates good vibrations, and fruitful to others also, at present, and in future. So therefore observe *sīla*, it's very important. *Sīla* is the foundation of Dhamma. Keep the foundation strong! Good!

## 2. Dhamma Service and *Pāramī*

Q: Goenkaji, could you please clarify for us how Dhamma service helps us to develop our *pāramī*?

A: Dhamma service itself is *pāramī*. What is Dhamma service? You become a part of dhamma *dāna*. Something is happening; people are coming here to get Dhamma, and you are a part of the management. You are serving so that this *dāna* of Dhamma can be given properly to people. And *dāna* is one of the biggest *pāramīs* out of the 10 *pāramīs*. And of all the *dāna*'s, dhamma *dāna* is the highest *dāna*. *Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti* are the words of Buddha. The highest *dāna* is the *dāna* of Dhamma; and you are a part of that. You are contributing to this donation of Dhamma to people.

And not only *dāna*. When you come to a 10-day course and give service, you will find that you get an opportunity to develop all the 10 *pāramīs*. As you are meditating in a 10-day course you are generating *pāramīs*, *pāramīs* all the 10 *pāramīs* are becoming stronger, stronger. So also while you're serving in this atmosphere. Little by little you are developing each of your *pāramīs*. You build your *sīla* while you're here - because you are very careful - you are on a Dhamma land. You're not here to spoil the vibration of the Dhamma land, you're here to contribute good vibrations, to observe your *sīla*. If you observe *sīla* anywhere outside, it is good; it's a meritorious action, it gives good results. But if you observe *sīla* on a Dhamma land, it gives much, much better results. You get an opportunity while you are here for 10 days you are observing your *sīla*.

Similarly for every *pāramī*. Tolerance! Now you are facing the students; and the students are agitated - an operation is going on. Someone may generate negativity and throw it on you. Oh! and you smile - a miserable person. You just generate *mettā*. You don't react with negativity. Your *khanti pāramī* is becoming stronger, stronger. You get the opportunity two or three times a day to meditate; so your *samādhi* becomes stronger, your *paññā* becomes stronger, your *mettā* becomes stronger; you get an opportunity to work on all of the 10 *pāramīs*, as if you are on a course.

In a course you deal with only yourself. When you are serving, then you are learning how to live life in the outside world. You may have done very good practice of Vipassana, maintaining equanimity with the vibrations etc. But you are not supposed to live in a glasshouse, like a glasshouse plant; you have to face the outside world. And, after taking deep courses, if immediately you go and face the world, it is not very easy. You find difficulties. So how to face the world? You get training here! For 10 days you are facing the world, you are extroverted. You're dealing with 100 or 200 or whatever the number of students who have come there. And you are dealing with them in such a protected, healthy, wholesome atmosphere. This atmosphere gives you strength; you are able to face this properly. This is how you train yourself.

Serving others is itself a big *pāramī* and you serve in a proper atmosphere, which helps you to serve people outside in the world also, and to face the vicissitudes of life in the outside world. In every way, Dhamma service gives wonderful results. Those who have started giving Dhamma service, they come and tell me - I know this with my own experience also - that their meditation is now becoming much better; that when they meditate they go much deeper; that they've got more equanimity; they've got more *mettā*. So your meditation becomes stronger because you have developed some more *pāramī*. By your Dhamma service you have accumulated more *pāramī*, and that *pāramī* goes to your credit account, and this credit account makes you a stronger person, and you find your meditation is going better. So in every way, Dhamma service gives wonderful results.

Another important thing that I note, is about giving *dāna*. If you give *dāna* in a hospital, or you give *dāna* in a school, you give *dāna* in an orphanage, people are benefited by that *dāna*. Good! That's a *pāramī*! But if you give *dāna* of money where Dhamma is being taught – you've given some donation - this is much higher. When you give *dāna* to someone who is hungry, you give food, but next day again this person is hungry. Somebody is thirsty and you give water. Again he is thirsty. Somebody needs clothing and you give clothing. But that gets torn, and he needs again after some time. But, if somebody is miserable and you give Dhamma, and one gets the path of liberation from misery. There can be nothing like that. So the donation given for an organization, for a centre that is giving *dhamma dāna*, is a very valuable *pāramī* of *dāna*.

But I see that the value of the *pāramī* of *dāna* is much more when you give physical service there. *Pāramī* after all is what? It's just a volition, a mental volition. Before you give *dāna*, you feel: "Ah! Wonderful". This money, my money, will be used for a very good purpose. I better give some of what I have earned; a portion of that should go to Dhamma.

That volition becomes your *pāramī*; you've given. You get the thought: "I should give," and you have given. And you feel happy that: "Yes, I have given". But when you are giving service for 10 days - all 10 days - every moment you are working. You are cooking food, you are serving others, you are sweeping. You are doing anything! Whatever you do, all the time the thought is that: "Look, by my service many people are getting benefited. Oh! More and more people should get benefited. Their difficulty in meditation should be removed. How can I be helpful to see that they work very peacefully without any obstacles, without any hindrances." This is volition; and that volition continues for 10 days.

So your *pāramī*, of Dhamma service, the *dāna* of Dhamma service, is so high compared to the *dāna* of money that somebody gives. We don't say that giving money is bad - that is very important. It's good, and gives very good results. But giving service is many, many times more fruitful. Because the time, for so long. For so long you keep on thinking, when you are serving. You are serving, not to get anything in return, you are serving for the benefit of others. So the *mettā* is there. You feel happy to see others getting Dhamma. Every moment your service develops your *pāramī*. So Dhamma service, to me, is the biggest *dāna*; a *dāna* much more than the *dāna* that you give at the monetary level. And every *dāna* is your *pāramī*. The *Dhamma dāna* and the physical *dāna* of dhamma service is a very strong *pāramī*.

Certainly! Good! Be happy!

### 3. Conflicts Between Workers

Q: Goenkaji, sometimes on a course, we find that for some reason or another, conflicts arise between Dhamma servers. How can we best use our service to confront our own egos and to develop humility?

A: While you are giving service, conflict arises? That's your question?

Q: Yes.

A: Then retire from service, don't serve, when you are not in a position where you can keep your mind calm and quiet, full of love and compassion for others, and you find that there is negativity coming in the mind for one reason or another. You may say that: "The fault is not mine; the fault is of the other person." Whatever it is, it is your fault that you have started generating negativity. You are involved in some kind of conflict with others, confrontation with others. Then understand: "I am not fit to serve now, this is not the proper time. I better meditate." Retire from the service; sit and meditate. You can't serve people when you are generating negativity, because you'll be throwing this vibration of negativity to the people.

Keep on understanding that even if you find that there is some fault with other workers who are with you, very politely and very humbly you can point out: "To me, it looks this is not right, this is not Dhamma." But the other person doesn't understand. Again, after some time, very politely, very humbly, you make your point, but the person doesn't agree. You've given all your reasons, all your understanding. Without making your mind unbalanced, with a very calm mind, you've explained, but it doesn't work. I would say that two times is enough. But in very rare cases you can go a third time, but not more than that - never. Otherwise, however correct your view may be, it shows that you have developed a tremendous amount of attachment to your view. You want things to happen according to your understanding, your view. And that is wrong! You point out, like to a brother who is mistaken, a sister who is mistaken, you point out once, twice, at most thrice. But if that doesn't help, then no backbiting. Tell him or her politely "Well, I understand that way; perhaps the seniors, the elders will explain to you; then maybe some senior students" but before putting the case to anybody else, first talk to the person with whom you have a difference of opinion. And then inform the elders; the senior students, the trustees, the assistant teachers, the senior assistant teachers, the

coordinators, the teacher; you can go and inform them; but first you have to discuss the matter with the person concerned.

And there should be no unwholesome speech, otherwise there's backbiting, which again is wrong. But if nothing is happening, and this person cannot be corrected, don't have aversion, have more compassion. You have to always examine, that even if you want something very right to be done and it's not being done, and you feel agitated because of that, that means your ego is strong, your own attachment to your ego, your attachment to your views - this is predominant - and this is not Dhamma. Try to correct yourself, before trying to correct others.

#### 4. Negativity from Students

Q: Sometimes it seems that we are picking up negativity, fear, etc. from the students we are serving. How does this happen, and what can we do when it does?

A: You can't pick up anything from anybody else. Actually, you have got a stock of the same type of impurity in you. Somebody has got a fear complex, and by the practice of Vipassana, that fear complex is coming on the surface. And when that is coming on the surface, the atmosphere, the vibration of the atmosphere gets charged with that kind of vibration, which stimulates your own fear. You have got a stock of fear yourself; and that is being stimulated. That starts coming up. So thank him. That he allowed your own impurity to come out. And meditate with it. And come out of it. Why get frightened about it?

If anything comes up while you're here in this atmosphere, you can work on it and get rid of it. If you are free from that particular impurity, nothing will happen. If somebody is generating anger, the Buddha will not start getting his own anger coming up - he is totally out of it. Like that, so long as you have the seed of a particular impurity and the same impurity is coming up from somewhere else, then it triggers your own negativity. Good! Be happy!

#### 5. Right Speech

Q: We feel that the hardest *sīla* for us to observe when we are serving is Right Speech. As Dhamma workers, it is difficult to avoid engaging in idle banter or gossip, and sometimes we unwittingly spread misinformation or negativity. Also, private information about students sometimes gets discussed. Can you guide us as to how to practise Right Speech?

A: Idle talk is one of the types of wrong speech. You are breaking your *sīla*, by having such kind of gossip and idle talk. If somebody wants to talk, gossip, then they better leave the Dhamma centre, go out somewhere. But here, as Buddha repeatedly used to say, either Dhamma talk or *Tuṇhī bhāva* - Noble Silence, complete silence. Nothing else! No other subject is to be discussed on the Dhamma land. Otherwise, whatever things that you have stated now, these things are bound to come up. When you are having idle talks, your mind is so loose, and the talk becomes very loose, and you don't care what you are saying, which may turn into such a wrong thing that it may create so much difficulties for other students - so this must be totally avoided.

## 6. Physical Contact

Q: Why are both students and Dhamma workers asked to refrain from physical contact with others at a course site or centre, whether a course is going on or not? Can't physical contact also be a way of expressing *mettā*?

A: The danger is that, even if you say this is just an expression of *mettā*, it is a very slippery ground. You don't know when you get caught in passion. So, avoiding this kind of danger is very important. No argument for this kind of contact! People keep on coming and telling me that in the West, body contact doesn't have passion. Maybe, I don't know because I was not born in the West. But I am sure, because I have seen cases, in the West, where a student started having body contact, saying that there is no passion, which ultimately resulted in something very unhealthy; especially because you are working on a Dhamma land, where the anti-Dhamma forces will always try to pull you down. You're representing Dhamma, and if you've got any little weakness - and this is the biggest weakness, passion - then these forces, these vibrations, anti-Dhamma vibrations, will arouse passion in you, and you'll spoil the entire atmosphere. So better avoid any kind of bodily contact, whatever argument people may give. Don't listen to any arguments! This is a strict rule, that in every Dhamma centre, or even at just gypsy camps while the camp is going on, no bodily contact is allowed.

## 7. Segregation of Sexes

Q: Why is it necessary to maintain segregation of sexes on the courses and at the centre?

A: The same reason as give above. It is so dangerous. Unless you have segregation there is every likelihood of things going bad. Passion is the biggest weakness and it will find some way or the other to express itself. So better remain segregated. This is healthy for you and healthy for the students who have come for the course.

## 8. New Relationships

Q: When students are serving on courses, or staying at centres, they might feel an attraction to a person with whom they would like to establish a relationship, and hopefully a Dhamma partnership. How should students who are at the beginning stages, or later stages of a new relationship conduct themselves when they are serving on courses or staying at the centre?

A: It must be very clear, that a Dhamma land is a Dhamma land. It is not meant for any type of courtship. A relationship in its early stages or later stages makes no difference. If any student, working as a Dhamma worker, due to any reason, finds that he or she is getting attracted towards another person for a relationship or Dhamma partnership, he or she should immediately quit - should not stay at the centre even for the next moment. Have your courtship outside the Dhamma centre. On Dhamma centres, if you are not married, then you have to behave with each other like brothers and sisters. Even a trace of passion arising in the mind of anyone is going to disturb the Dhamma atmosphere of the centre. And this has to be avoided at every cost. This point should be again and

again made clear to every Dhamma worker at every centre, that a Dhamma centre is not a place of courtship. Courtship should be done outside Dhamma centres.

## 9. My Meditation Practice

Q: When I am serving, when should I practise Anapana, when should I practise Vipassana, and when should I practise *mettā*?

A: A good question. You are not in the course. You are serving the course. It is like living in your daily life. You do your daily practice, and you make your decision at that time - whether you should start by practising Anapana, or straightaway start with Vipassana. Or even if starting with Anapana, how long to stay with Anapana. Similarly here also. Again, it is at the discretion of the particular student who is giving service.

If one feels that one's *samādhi* is very weak, and wants to strengthen his or her *samādhi*, then do Anapana for the first three days of sitting, when others are doing the same thing and you are getting those instructions. Nothing wrong in that! And then switch over to Vipassana. But this should be left to each individual student. There is no hard and fast rule that every student should work in this way or that way. The most important thing is that you have to sit. If you are working on a Dhamma land, and you don't meditate two or three hours per day, you are not giving proper service - your vibrations will not be good vibrations of service. So in your own interest and in the interests of the students whom you are serving, it is very essential that you sit.

One difficulty that is noticed sometimes, when there are very few hands - few Dhamma workers - is that they try to follow the schedule of the course. That means when Anapana is given, they try to take Anapana, as if they are taking the course. When Vipassana is given, they sit with closed eyes and try to get Vipassana as if they are in the course. When instructions are given for one hour sittings, they close their eyes and try to work according to the instructions. That is wrong! You are a Dhamma servant here. Many times you have to keep your eyes open and look at others; how they are doing, how they are faring, what difficulty they have got. And you try to take advantage of Anapana, you take advantage of Vipassana being given; you take advantage of the one hour sitting instructions. Of course if there are many Dhamma workers and you divide up your responsibilities, so that one or two male workers, and one or two female workers will keep their eyes open during these periods, then nothing wrong. But when there are few hands, and you just follow the instructions as given to the regular students in the course, you are creating difficulty, because then you won't know what is happening and the teacher cannot awaken you to come and serve him or her, because you are sitting with closed eyes. This should be avoided.

## 10. Discussing Therapies and other Techniques

Q: Sometimes when we are serving the topics of other techniques and therapies come up naturally in conversation.

A: Just like when gossip comes up, you can say 'naturally'. Take out this 'naturally' thing. So many wrong things, when they happen, people say they happen 'naturally'.

Q: Some students find these conversations helpful in clarifying differences between Vipassana and other methods.

A: It may also be helpful in creating confusion. So don't go for all these clarifications.

Q: Why are we asked not to discuss other techniques and therapies?

A: Discuss - outside the centre; but not at the centre, at any cost.

## 11. Workers Giving Students Meditation Advice

Q: If a student is having a storm and the AT is not immediately available, then we as Dhamma workers help the student, by giving meditation instructions, such as: "Use more Anapana and extremities," or "Work in a more relaxed way by lying down or taking a walk".

A: A very risky affair! You must understand that when someone is authorized to give Dhamma - an assistant teacher, junior or senior, or a full-fledged teacher - then the good vibrations around of Dhamma come in contact with this person sitting on the Dhamma seat, and that starts helping the student. A worker is not an authorized teacher. And to play that role under the pretext that: "There's no teacher now; somebody is in trouble, so I better give advice," is a very wrong thing to do. Avoid it! At the most, what you can say is: "Go relax, lie down and relax." This is not a technique. It has nothing to do with the practice. Or: "Go and relax. When the teacher comes, I will ask you to come and see the teacher." Not beyond that. Nothing beyond that. Don't try to give any instructions. There is every possibility that your instructions may create difficulty for the student. Authorization, and getting in contact with the Dhamma vibration is a very important part played by the assistant teachers and senior assistant teachers.

## 12. Appropriate Reading Material

Q: When we are serving courses or staying at centres, we are asked to restrict our reading to materials related to Buddha's teaching or newspapers and magazines. Students often ask why they cannot read things other than these, which they feel are compatible with Vipassana. Can you explain the reason behind this rule?

A: Now, who will have the authority to say that this is compatible and this is not compatible. And you can't expect the assistant teacher to go through all the literature that you bring, and this person will go through all the literature, and say this is compatible and this is not compatible. Go and read all those things outside the centre. Why disturb the atmosphere of the centre. A worker should always keep in mind that he or she is at the centre to help build the good vibration of the centre. If one is not in a position to do that, then better quit. Don't stay. Just accept the fact that: "I am not in a position to stay here, because I want to read this, I want to read that, which might go against the vibration of the centre; and I'm not fit to judge whether it is really good or not good; my teacher has got no time to go through all this. So I'd better read it outside." So leave it! Don't disturb the atmosphere. It is so difficult to build a Dhamma atmosphere if you want it to become so strong, that it will last for centuries, for so many generations. So playing these games under one pretext or the other, is not healthy. Come out of it!



### 13. When I have a Storm

Q: What should I do if I am having a big storm, but I need to finish my responsibility because there is nobody else to do it? As a longer-term worker, if I am really having a hard time, when is it best to meditate more, and when is it best to leave the centre?

A: The assistant teacher on duty will be the best judge to give you guidance. Better meet him, or meet her.

### 14. Reason behind ‘*Sadhu*’ and Bowing

Q: Is there any purpose behind the old students chanting ‘*Sadhu*’ and bowing, or is this just a rite or ritual?

A: It is no rite or ritual. As I said, out of these five extremities, the extremity of the top is an extremity that can receive vibrations. And somebody has expressed *mettā*, by saying: “May all beings be happy!. *“Bhavatu sabba maṅgalaṃ”*. That means one has given a good vibration, a vibration of *mettā*. You bow down and you accept those vibrations at the top of the head. When you say “*Sadhu*,” that is your sympathetic joy, that you feel so joyful. When the teacher or assistant teacher says *“Bhavatu sabba maṅgalaṃ”*, he or she says it with a feeling of joy: “May all beings be happy!” You join in this joy. This is the sympathetic joy with which you say *“Sadhu.”* And accepting good vibrations is in your own interest. You are thirsty, and somebody is giving you water. If you cup your hands, you will get water. If you keep your hands apart, the water will fall down. Bow down - in your own interest. It is no rite or ritual! This is a healthy tradition of the past. Make use of it!

### 15. Practising Yoga

Q: Dhamma workers commonly do not get enough exercise while they’re serving. Is it permissible for them to practise yoga while serving or staying at a centre or course site?

A: Yoga - that means physical exercises - are quite compatible with Vipassana. But we stop them at the centres, because the students will get attracted towards this, and that will become a hindrance. Staying at a centre, if you create any hindrance to the progress of the students, this becomes a very unwholesome action. However, if at any centre, a Dhamma worker has got a separate room, and if one can do yoga exercises in that room without disturbing anybody, there should not be any difficulty. But there again, permission must be taken from the teacher, or assistant teacher who is on duty. Explain, and then if the assistant teacher is satisfied, then nothing wrong. Then only should it be done, otherwise not. Have your walking exercises. Good enough! You should not become a cause of disturbance for the serious meditation of students who have come for 10 days.

### 16. Using Pali and Hindi

Q: Why do you use words from Pali and Hindi from your chanting and discourses, when you are teaching in English?

A: They are so pleasant to me. They are words of the Enlightened Person - Pali especially - and Hindi is my own mother tongue, so I use it. Actually, it is for good vibrations. In English discourses, one becomes a little more cautious to use as little as possible. In Hindi discourses however, they are very helpful - they give so much inspiration because people understand, especially Hindi, so well. And Pali also, which to many people becomes so easy after taking a few courses. For old students, even in the West, they keep on telling me that: "When a Pali verse is recited by you we get such good vibrations with that." Well, a new student might not feel this, because a new student might have aversion as well: "What is being chanted now; what is this; why does it get in the way." Slowly, this person also starts understanding.

The last time all the ten discourses were recorded, these Pali verses were reduced to a minimum - most of them were taken out. Then, a lot of complaints started coming: "What happened to those Pali verses; they were so good for us, so good for us." We cannot please everybody. Some will remain discontented. We have to see how best we can serve. And you have to see how best you can serve as well!

*May all beings be happy!*