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Summary

A short article discussing the precept to abstain from killing.

Abstain From Killing

by Ven. Dr. Prajna Nandasri

The Buddha introduced the moral precepts for mollifying the physical, vocal and mental actions and for pure life of the persons. Precepts in Buddhism are an important object that are to be practised in daily life. It is also a part of the spiritual achievement. Of these precepts, abstaining from killing is the first one, the Buddha set it up at the beginning to emphasise its importance, considering the social conditions of the times.

Society in those days was not very conscious in this matter. People had the habit of killing animals for the various purposes. Some tribes were professional hunters of animals and even Kings often went to hunt deer (mrigaya) in the forest. It was considered an enjoyable pastime.

Kutadanta, a prominent Brahmin of Magadha, had no son. With a view to obtaining a son, he observed the ceremonial sacrifice of goats to please his tutelary gods. The Buddha, on the way of His alms, entered the house of Kutadanta who, at first, was displeased with the Buddha. The Buddha advised him, "It is a useless sacrifice Kutadanta, killing a number of innocent goats yields no benefit to either. Killing of animals is a sinful act, by which, you cannot achieve your desired goal. Abstain from killing and devote yourself to good deeds is the best way of living by which you may obtain what you wish". Hearing the Buddha, he was very pleased to give up killing forever. After all, he obtained a son.

Killing of beings is a heinous action that breeds suffering in this life and life to come. Life is mortal. All wish long life. Death is inevitable to all. Killing before the normal death of a being is the action against the law of nature. Hence, it is a sin. Moreover, killing of animals is not an offence in the eyes of Law. To preserve some particular precious animals from becoming extinct, the Government has created "The Reserve Forests" to save them. Killing is an impure action. It effects the peace of mind, shortens life, life of constant illness, grief out of separation from the loved, and constant fear. Thus, abstain from killing means one's assurance to save the living beings. To enlighten the people, the Buddha said, Life is dear to all, all fear death, comparing others life with one's own, one should not indulge to kill others".

To prevent the intention of killing, the Buddha introduced the method of Loving-kindness (Metta) that has incomparable effects on the mind of lovers and the loved. It includes oneself and others, from the largest to the minutest creatures living in this world. Even, those who are in their mother's womb, are the subject of loving-kindness. Extending it towards all beings, one loves oneself. One who loves oneself, cannot commit killing of any being because all beings are dear to one. Another example is available in the Karaniya Metta Sutta is that, "Just as a mother loves and sacrifices her life for her only son, so the Buddha said, "love all beings without making any discrimination ".

Greed, ill-will and ignorance are the three roots of all immoral actions. Killing is generally performed with ill-will and ignorance. Volition plays the vital role in this context. There are five conditions of killing. A being, conscious of a living being, intention to kill, effort to kill, and death occurs. When these five conditions or any one of them are absent, there is no killing of being held. Life is considered to be a precious object, but is subject to decay, disease and death. To be a perfect person is the motto of life. To achieve that, life should be sinless, stainless and passionless in all respects. Such is the life of a rational being. They are wise, self-respected and free from doing any wrong. For such people life is always blissful. Observing the precepts of abstaining from killing, we can make our homes an abode of peace and happiness, and thus, make the world a happier place to live in.

Ven. Dr. Prajna Nandasri