

THE PERFECTION OF VIRTUE:  
Quotes on ethics from the Theravada Tradition

The perfection of virtue (*sila*) should be thought about as follows: Even the waters of the Ganges cannot wash away the stain of hatred, yet the water of virtue is able to do so. Even yellow sandalwood cannot cool the fever of lust, yet virtue is able to remove it. Virtue is the unique adornment of good people, surpassing the adornments cherished by average folk, such as necklaces, diadems, and earrings. Virtue should be reflected upon as the basis for rapture and joy; as granting immunity from fear of self-reproach, the reproach of others, punishment, and an evil rebirth; as praised by the wise, as the root-cause for freedom from remorse; as the basis for security.

Virtue surpasses material wealth because thieves cannot confiscate it. Because it enables one to achieve supreme sovereignty over one's own mind, virtue surpasses the sovereignty of warriors, kings and priests.

Virtue surpasses the achievement of beauty for it makes one beautiful even to one's enemies. It cannot be vanquished by the adversities of aging and sickness. Since it is the foundation for states of happiness, virtue surpasses such dwellings as palaces and mansions. In accomplishing the difficult task of self-protection, virtue is superior to troops of elephants, horses, chariots, and infantry, as well as such devices as mantras, spells, and blessings, for it depends on oneself, not on others.

Thus esteeming virtue as the foundation of all achievements – as the soil for the origination of all the Buddha-qualities, the beginning, footing, head, and chief of all the qualities issuing in Buddhahood – one should guard diligently and thoroughly perfect virtue as a hen guards its eggs.

From *A Treatise on the Paramis*  
By Acariya Dhammapala

There are these five gifts, five great gifts - original, long-standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated, unadulterated from the beginning – that are not open to suspicion, will never be open to suspicion, and are not faulted by knowledgeable contemplatives and priests.

Which five? Abstaining from killing, abstaining from taking what is not given, abstaining from sexual misconduct, abstaining from lying, and abstaining from use of intoxicants. In doing so, one gives freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings.

In giving freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to limitless numbers of beings, he gains a share in limitless freedom from danger, freedom from animosity, and freedom from oppression.

(Anguttara Nikaya VII.39)

Monks, a wise person, one of great wisdom, does not intend harm to self, intend harm to others, or intend harm to both self and others. Thinking in this way, such a one intends benefit for self, benefit for others, benefit for both, benefit for the whole world. Thus is one wise and of great wisdom.

(Anguttara Nikaya II, p179)

Do no evil,  
Engage in what is skillful,  
And purify your mind;  
This is the teaching of the Buddhas.

(Dhammapada 183)

[*Definition of right livelihood, the fifth step in the Noble Eightfold Path:*]

Abstaining from livelihoods involving trading in weapons, human beings, meat, intoxicating drinks, and poisons.

(Anguttara Nikaya V.177)

Abandoning false speech,  
 The Buddha refrains from false speech.  
 A truth-speaker,  
 He can be relied on, trustworthy, dependable, non-deceptive.  
 Abandoning malicious speech,  
 The Buddha refrains from repeating what he has heard that harms others.  
 A reconciler of those who are divided,  
 He encourages those who are friends.  
 Rejoicing in peace, loving peace, delighting in peace  
 He speaks words that make for peace.  
 Abandoning harsh speech,  
 The Buddha refrains from it.  
 He speaks what is blameless, pleasing to the ear, agreeable,  
 Reaching the heart, urbane, pleasing and attractive to many.  
 Abandoning idle chatter,  
 He speaks at the right time, what is true and to the point, of the Dharma and discipline.  
 The Buddha is a speaker whose words are to be treasured,  
 Seasonable, reasoned, well-defined, and connected with liberation.

(Digha Nikaya 1.9)

Insignificant  
 is the scent of rosebay or sandalwood.  
 But the scents of virtue and practice are supreme,  
 Traveling even to the gods. (Dhammapada 56)

A deed is good  
 That one doesn't regret having done,  
 That results in joy  
 And delight. (Dhammapada 68)

Better than one hundred years lived  
 With an unsettled [mind],  
 Devoid of virtue  
 Is one day lived  
 Virtuous and absorbed in meditation. (Dhammapada 110)

Evil is done by oneself alone;  
 By oneself is one defiled.  
 Evil is avoided by oneself;  
 By oneself alone is one purified.  
 Purity and impurity depend on oneself;  
 No one can purify another. (Dhammapada 165)