

## THE PERFECTION OF TRUTHFULNESS

### *Sacca-parami*

Truthfulness has the characteristic of non-deceptiveness. In speech; its function is to verify in accordance with fact; its manifestation is excellence.... Without truthfulness, virtue and the following perfections are impossible, and there can be no practice in accordance with one's compassionate vows. All evil states have in common the transgression of truth.... With truthfulness as a foundation one is able to purify and fulfill the requisites of enlightenment...All the perfections are grounded in truth, clarified by letting go, intensified by peace, and purified by wisdom.

*A Treatise on the Paramis*  
By Dhammapala

When one is not ashamed of telling a deliberate lie; there is no evil that one would not do.

Majjhima Nikaya 1.415

Whatever tricks, deceits, wiles or subterfuges he has, he shows them as they actually are to the Teacher or to his knowledgeable companions in the holy life, so that the Teacher or his knowledgeable companions in the holy life can try to straighten them out.

Anguttara Nkaya 8.13

### **Angulimala's Statement of Truth**

One day, wandering for alms as monk, Angulimala saw a woman in difficult, painful labor. Seeing this Angulimala, who in the past had no qualms about killing people, thought, "Oh, how much people suffer! How much they suffer!"

Returning from his alms round, Angulimala told the Buddha about the woman having difficult labor. The Buddha said, "Go to her and say, 'Sister, since I was born, I do not recall that I have ever intentionally deprived a living being of life. By this truth, may you be well and may your infant be well!'"

"Venerable sir," said Angulimala, "since I have in fact intentionally killed many people, wouldn't I be telling a deliberate lie?"

The Buddha replied, "In that case, go to the woman and say, 'Sister, since I was born with the noble birth, I do not recall that I have ever intentionally deprived a living being of life. By this truth, may you be well and may your infant be well.'"

Angulimala then returned to the woman and made his statement of truth. With this the baby was born and both mother and child became well.

Majjhima Nikaya 86

### Safeguarding the Truth

Bharadvaja said to the Buddha, "Master Gotama, with regard to the ancient hymns of the brahmins -- passed down orally & included in their canon -- the brahmins have definitely concluded that 'Only this is true; anything else is worthless.' What does Master Gotama have to say to this?"

"Tell me, Bharadvaja, is there among the brahmins even one brahmin who says, 'This I know; this I see; only this is true; anything else is worthless?'"

"No, Master Gotama."

"And has there been among the brahmins even one teacher or teacher's teacher back through seven generations who said, 'This I know; this I see; only this is true; anything else is worthless?'"

"No, Master Gotama."

"And among the brahmin seers of the past, the creators of the hymns, the composers of the hymns -- those ancient hymns, sung, repeated, & collected, which brahmins at present still sing, still chant, repeating what was said, was there even one of these who said, 'This we know; this we see; only this is true; anything else is worthless?'"

"No, Master Gotama."

"So then, Bharadvaja, it seems that there isn't among the brahmins, the brahmins' teachers back seven generations, or the brahmins who created and composed the hymns even one who said, 'This I know; this I see; only this is true; anything else is worthless.' If there were a row of blind men, each holding on to the one in front of him: the first one doesn't see, the middle one doesn't see, the last one doesn't see. In the same way, the statement of the brahmins turns out to be a row of blind men, as it were: the first one doesn't see, the middle one doesn't see, the last one doesn't see. So what do you think, as this is the case, doesn't the conviction of the brahmins turn out to be groundless?"

"It's not only out of conviction, Master Gotama, that the brahmins honor this. They also honor it as unbroken tradition."

"Bharadvaja, first you went by conviction. Now you speak of unbroken tradition. There are five things that can turn out in two ways in the here-&-now. Which five? Conviction, liking, unbroken tradition, reasoning by analogy, & an agreement through pondering views. These are the five things that can turn out in two ways in the here-&-now. Now some things are firmly held in conviction and yet vain, empty, & false. Some things are not firmly held in conviction, and yet they are genuine, factual, & unmistakable. Some things are well-liked ... truly an unbroken tradition ... well-reasoned ... Some things are well-pondered and yet vain, empty, & false. Some things are not well-pondered, and yet they are genuine, factual, & unmistakable. In these cases it isn't proper for a

knowledgeable person who safeguards the truth to come to a definite conclusion, 'Only this is true; anything else is worthless.'

"But to what extent, Master Gotama, is there the safeguarding of the truth? To what extent does one safeguard the truth? We ask Master Gotama about the safeguarding of the truth."

"If a person has conviction, his statement, 'This is my conviction,' safeguards the truth. But he doesn't yet come to the definite conclusion that 'Only this is true; anything else is worthless.' To this extent there is the safeguarding of the truth. To this extent one safeguards the truth. I describe this as the safeguarding of the truth. But it is not yet an awakening to the truth.

"If a person likes something ... holds an unbroken tradition ... has something reasoned through analogy ... has something he agrees to, having pondered views, his statement, 'This is what I agree to, having pondered views,' safeguards the truth. But he doesn't yet come to the definite conclusion that 'Only this is true; anything else is worthless.' To this extent, Bharadvaja, there is the safeguarding of the truth. To this extent one safeguards the truth. I describe this as the safeguarding of the truth. But it is not yet an awakening to the truth."

"Yes, Master Gotama, to this extent there is the safeguarding of the truth. To this extent one safeguards the truth. We regard this as the safeguarding of the truth. But to what extent is there an awakening to the truth? To what extent does one awaken to the truth? We ask Master Gotama about awakening to the truth."

"There is the case, Bharadvaja, where a monk lives in dependence on a certain village. Then a householder goes to him and observes him with regard to three mental qualities -- qualities based on greed, qualities based on aversion, qualities based on delusion: 'Are there in this venerable one any such qualities based on greed that, with his mind overcome by these qualities, he might say, "I know," while not knowing, or say, "I see," while not seeing; or that he might urge another to act in a way that was for his/her long-term harm & pain?' As he observes him, he comes to know, 'There are in this venerable one no such qualities based on greed ... His bodily behavior & verbal behavior are those of one not greedy. And the Dhamma he teaches is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. This Dhamma can't easily be taught by a person who's greedy.

"When, on observing that the monk is purified with regard to qualities based on greed, he next observes him with regard to qualities based on aversion... on delusion: 'Are there in this venerable one any such qualities based on delusion that, with his mind overcome by these qualities, he might say, "I know," while not knowing, or say, "I see," while not seeing; or that he might urge another to act in a way that was for his/her long-term harm & pain?' As he observes him, he comes to know, 'There are in this venerable one no such qualities based on delusion ... His bodily & verbal behavior are those of one not deluded. And the Dhamma he teaches is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, tranquil, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. This Dhamma can't easily be taught by a person who's deluded.

"On observing that the monk is purified with regard to qualities based on delusion, he places conviction in him. With conviction, he visits him & grows close to him. Growing close to him, he lends ear. Lending ear, he hears the Dhamma. Hearing the Dhamma, he remembers it. Remembering it, he comprehends its meaning. Comprehending, he comes to be in agreement with it. Agreeing with it, desire arises. With the arising of desire, he becomes willing. Willing, he contemplates (lit: "weighs," "compares"). Contemplating, he makes an exertion. Exerting himself, he both realizes the ultimate meaning of the truth with his body and sees by penetrating it with discernment.

"To this extent, Bharadvaja, there is an awakening to the truth. To this extent one awakens to the truth. I describe this as an awakening to the truth. But it is not yet the final attainment of the truth."

"Yes, Master Gotama, to this extent there is an awakening to the truth. To this extent one awakens to the truth. We regard this as an awakening to the truth. But to what extent is there the final attainment of the truth? To what extent does one finally attain the truth? We ask Master Gotama about the final attainment of the truth."

"The cultivation, development, & pursuit of those very same qualities: to this extent, Bharadvaja, there is the final attainment of the truth. To this extent one finally attains the truth. I describe this as the final attainment of the truth."

Majjhima Nikaya 95

Sati Center for Buddhist Studies

Introduction to Buddhist Chaplaincy Program

### **Essay on Truthfulness by Bhikkhu Bodhi**

#### **Abstaining from false speech (Speak the Truth)**

*Herein someone avoids false speech and abstains from it. He speaks the truth, is devoted to truth, reliable, worthy of confidence, not a deceiver of people. Being at a meeting, or amongst people, or in the midst of his relatives, or in a society, or in the king's court, and called upon and asked as witness to tell what he knows, he answers, if he knows nothing: "I know nothing," and if he knows, he answers: "I know"; if he has seen nothing, he answers: "I have seen nothing," and if he has seen, he answers: "I have seen." Thus he never knowingly speaks a lie, either for the sake of his own advantage, or for the sake of another person's advantage, or for the sake of any advantage whatsoever.*

Anguttara 10.176

This statement of the Buddha discloses both the negative and the positive sides to the precept. The negative side is abstaining from lying, the positive side speaking the truth. The determinative factor behind the transgression is the intention to deceive. If one speaks something false believing it to be true, there is no breach of the precept as the intention to deceive is absent. Though the deceptive intention is common to all cases of false speech, lies can appear in different guises depending on the motivating root, whether greed, hatred, or delusion. Greed as the chief motive results in the lie aimed at gaining some personal advantage for oneself or for those close to oneself -- material

wealth, position, respect, or admiration. With hatred as the motive, false speech takes the form of the malicious lie, the lie intended to hurt and damage others. When delusion is the principal motive, the result is a less pernicious type of falsehood: the irrational lie, the compulsive lie, the interesting exaggeration, lying for the sake of a joke.

The Buddha's stricture against lying rests upon several reasons. For one thing, lying is disruptive to social cohesion. People can live together in society only in an atmosphere of mutual trust, where they have reason to believe that others will speak the truth; by destroying the grounds for trust and inducing mass suspicion, widespread lying becomes the harbinger signaling the fall from social solidarity to chaos. But lying has other consequences of a deeply personal nature at least equally disastrous. By their very nature lies tend to proliferate. Lying once and finding our word suspect, we feel compelled to lie again to defend our credibility, to paint a consistent picture of events. So the process repeats itself: the lies stretch, multiply, and connect until they lock us into a cage of falsehoods from which it is difficult to escape. The lie is thus a miniature paradigm for the whole process of subjective illusion. In each case the self-assured creator, sucked in by his own deceptions, eventually winds up their victim.

Such considerations probably lie behind the words of counsel the Buddha spoke to his son, the young novice Rahula, soon after the boy was ordained. One day the Buddha came to Rahula, pointed to a bowl with a little bit of water in it, and asked: "Rahula, do you see this bit of water left in the bowl?" Rahula answered: "Yes, sir." "So little, Rahula, is the spiritual achievement of one who is not afraid to speak a deliberate lie." Then the Buddha threw the water away, put the bowl down, and said: "Do you see, Rahula, how that water has been discarded? In the same way one who tells a deliberate lie discards whatever spiritual achievement he has made." Again he asked: "Do you see how this bowl is now empty? In the same way one who has no shame in speaking lies is empty of spiritual achievement." Then the Buddha turned the bowl upside down and said: "Do you see, Rahula, how this bowl has been turned upside down? In the same way one who tells a deliberate lie turns his spiritual achievements upside down and becomes incapable of progress." Therefore, the Buddha concluded, one should not speak a deliberate lie even in jest.

It is said that in the course of his long training for enlightenment over many lives, a bodhisatta can break all the moral precepts except the pledge to speak the truth. The reason for this is very profound, and reveals that the commitment to truth has a significance transcending the domain of ethics and even mental purification, taking us to the domains of knowledge and being. Truthful speech provides, in the sphere of interpersonal communication, a parallel to wisdom in the sphere of private understanding. The two are respectively the outward and inward modalities of the same commitment to what is real. Wisdom consists in the realization of truth, and truth (sacca) is not just a verbal proposition but the nature of things as they are. To realize truth our whole being has to be brought into accord with actuality, with things as they are, which requires that in communications with others we respect things as they are by speaking the truth. Truthful speech establishes a correspondence between our own inner being and the real nature of phenomena, allowing wisdom to rise up and fathom their real nature. Thus, much more

than an ethical principle, devotion to truthful speech is a matter of taking our stand on reality rather than illusion, on the truth grasped by wisdom rather than the fantasies woven by desire.