

Human Values, Human Worth

Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa's Dhamma Talk given on the 11th of July, 1976

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Dhamma is something very profound. If the world didn't have Dhamma as water to put out its fires, it would be a very difficult place – an impossible place – to live. Dhamma is something for the heart to hold to, something that nourishes and enables people to be good and to find peace. The religion, the aspect of Dhamma we can describe to one another, is simply the good and right teaching of the Buddha, which can guide the society and nation as well as individuals, our families and ourselves. It's thus like a factory unequalled in producing good and noble qualities in the hearts of people at large.

Any home, any family, any individual without religion, without moral virtue to protect and train the heart, is sure to be constantly troubled and restless with never any sense of well-being and equilibrium at all. Quarrels tend to flare up in families like this, between husband and wife, and then on out into society – the neighbourhood and the workplace. Our inability to get along with one another comes, for the most part, from our going against the principles of morality – what is correct, noble and good.

In particular, when a husband and wife have trouble getting along with each other, it's because one or the other of them has gone beyond the bounds of two principles taught by the Buddha: contentment with one's belongings while not infringing on those of others, and fewness of wants. In other words, if you have one, don't try to have two, because once you have two, they're bound to become arch-rivals.

What sort of 'fewness of wants' do we mean here? I remember several years back, on the front pages of the newspapers – and it was really disturbing to see – one of the top officials of the government made an announcement telling monks that the two principles of contentment and fewness of wants shouldn't be taught to people at large because both of these principles were acting as a dead-weight on the nation's economy, which the government was trying to develop at the time. According to him, these two principles were at odds with economic prosperity. This was many years back, but I haven't forgotten it – because it was something hard to forget, and disturbing as well. Actually, these two

principles don't mean at all what he thought they did. They're principles that people in general, lay as well as ordained, should put into practice in line with their position in life. There's no word, no phrase of the Dhamma at odds with the progress of the world. In fact, the Dhamma gives the world nothing but support and protection.

For a monk – a son of the Buddha – these two principles mean that he shouldn't be greedy for the four necessities of life: 1.) *Clothing, which comes from the generosity of people at large*; 2.) *Food. No matter what kind of food it is, a monk can't acquire it on his own. He has to depend on others to look after his needs in this area, from the day of his ordination to his last day as a monk*; 3.) *Shelter*; and 4.) *Medicine*.

All of these things come from the good faith of people in general, which is why a monk shouldn't be greedy for them, because that would go against the basic principles of the Dhamma taught by the Buddha. A monk should be modest in his needs. This is the proper way for him to act – in keeping with the fact that he has to depend on other people to look after his needs – so that he won't be too great a burden on people of good faith. A monk shouldn't clutter himself up with concerns for physical necessities, which are simply means to keep the body going so that he can perform his duties as a contemplative with ease.

As for lay people, the principle of fewness of wants means being content with one's family. One husband should have one wife. One wife should have one husband. One husband should have only one wife – not two or three, which would be a fire spreading to consume himself and his family. This is what it means to have fewness of wants – not being greedy for thrills that would stoke fire in the family and not dabbling in the many desires that added together wage war with one another.

A husband and wife should be honest with each other. Loyal and committed. Faithful to each other at all times and in all places, with no secrets from each other – open and above-board with each other with pure and loyal hearts. If one of them has to work outside the home or be away for the night, he or she should go with a clean heart and clean hands, and come back without the blemish of any stains. If one of them has to go away on business, no matter how near or far, it should be done in such a way that the one at home needn't worry or be troubled that the one going away is doing anything wrong by demolishing the principle of fewness of wants and sleeping with someone outside the legitimate account. Worries like this are worse than a hundred spirits returning from the dead to grab a person's entrails and squeeze them to bits. If a husband or wife must go away for a long time, it should be for reasons that aim at maintaining the family in happiness and joy.

When a husband and wife are faithful to each other in this way, then no matter where either of them goes, neither of them suffers from any worries or distrust. They live together smoothly and happily to the end of their lives because the important principle is that their hearts are honest and loyal to each other. Even if there may be times when they have barely enough to scrape by, that isn't important. The important point lies in their being honest, faithful, and committed to each other. A family of this sort may be rich or poor, but the happiness, security, and trust it's members feel for one another give them the stability and solidarity that everyone hopes for. This is called fewness of wants in the marriage relationship: *One husband. One wife. No outside involvements.* Even though other men and women fill the world, we don't get involved. This is fewness of wants for lay people.

If this principle of fewness of wants were to be erased from the world, human beings would know no bounds, and we wouldn't be any different from . . . Have you ever seen them? Here in the Northeast they get going in August and September, but in the Central Plains it's usually November, barking and howling like crazy. There's no telling which one is which one's husband and which one is which one's wife. They bite one another to shreds. Have you ever seen them, every August and September? When they really get going they run everywhere, all over the place, with no sense of day and night, home or away, no concern for whether or not they get fed. They go after each other worse than when they're rabid. If we human beings were to let ourselves run loose like that, we'd cause even worse damage than they do because we have guns and weapons to shoot and kill one another, thanks to the fact that we're smarter than they are. The world would be a shambles, and there wouldn't be enough room for us all in the prisons. This is the harm that comes from letting oneself go under the unruly power of sexual lust. There'd be no such word as 'enough', and no doubt but that dogs in heat would be no match for us.

Dogs have no sense of limits when lust takes over. They can go anywhere at all with no fear of death, no concern for hunger or thirst at all. They run wild, without a thought for their owners. At most, they may stop by their homes for a moment. If anyone feeds them in time, they eat. If not, they're off and running. And look at them. What do they look like at times like this? Ears torn, mouths torn, legs torn, stomachs ripped open in some cases, all from the fights they get into. Some of them die, some of them go crazy, some of them never return home.

When animals get going like this under the power of lust, this is the sort of harm it leads to. And even with them, it's nothing pretty to look

at because it's so different from their normal nature. When the season comes, males and females go running wild after one another. The fires of lust and anger get burning together and can consume everything. This is what happens when animals know no bounds, that is, when their lust knows no limits. They suffer so much pain, so much distress when the disease of lust flares up – so much so that some of them die or are crippled for life.

If we human beings didn't have the Dhamma of fewness of wants as brakes on our wheels for our own safety's sake, we'd know no limits in following our instincts either. We'd cause much more harm and destruction to one another than animals do, because of our intelligence. If we're intelligent in the right way, it's an honour and a benefit to ourselves, our family and nation, but this human intelligence of ours is something that lends itself to all sorts of uses, and for the most part, if our minds are low, it becomes a tool for doing a great deal of evil. It's because of our intelligence that we human beings can do one another so much harm.

This is why we need moral virtue as a guide, as protection, so that we can live together happily and in peace. Between husbands and wives this means being faithful to each other. Don't go looking for scraps and leftovers like our friends in August and September. That's not the sort of policy that human beings – who know enough to have a sense of right and wrong, good and bad – should put into practice. Otherwise we'll destroy, or at the very least reduce, the honour of our human status. Worse than that, we'll ruin ourselves to the point of having absolutely no worth.

To give in to the moods of our inner fires, looking for scraps and leftovers in bars, night clubs, massage parlours, and other places catering to this sort of thing, is to destroy our inner virtue as human beings step by step, because it's nothing more than the policy of animals who know no bounds of good and evil and know only how to get carried away with their passion and bite one another to shreds. For this reason, it's a policy we human beings shouldn't put into practice – and especially when we're married, because it goes against the secure bounds of the family we've established in line with the recognised universal principles of moral human beings.

To go out of bounds in this way would do such damage to a spouse's heart that no treatment could cure the sorrow and bring the heart back to normal. So husbands and wives who cherish each other's worth shouldn't do this sort of thing. The way love can turn to hatred, and spouses can become enemies, is all due to our disobeying the principle of fewness of wants. To lack this principle is to lack an important guarantee for the family's well-being.

This principle of fewness of wants isn't really a minor principle. It's one by which a husband and wife can keep a firm and stable hold on each other's hearts throughout time, one by which they can be loyal to each other in a way that will never fade. The money the family earns will all flow together into one place, and not go leaking out to feed the vultures and crows. No matter how much is spent, every penny, every cent goes toward the family's well-being, instead of leaking out through the destructive force of sensual greed. This way the wealth gained by the family is something peaceful. Its expenditure is reasonable and beneficial to the husband, wife, and children, so that it's a thing of value and a cause of joy to its owners.

This is why the Buddha teaches us to train our hearts in the way of the Dhamma. The heart is very important. A stable heart means stable wealth. If the heart is unstable, our wealth is unstable as well. It will leak away day and night, because the heart creates the leak and can't keep hold of anything at all. When a water jar is still good, it can serve its full purpose. The minute it begins to crack, its usefulness is reduced; and when it breaks, there's no further use for it. The same holds true with a marriage. One's spouse is very important. There is no greater foundation for the wealth, security and happiness of the family than when both sides are honest, loyal, and faithful to each other. So I ask that you put these principles into practice in yourselves, your families, and your work so that they lead you to lasting happiness and peace. Don't let yourselves stray from the principles of moral virtue that protect and maintain your own inner worth, together with your families' peace and contentment.

The defilement (*kilesa*) of sexual craving, if left to itself, knows virtually no limits or sense of reason. As the Buddha has said: "There is no river equal to craving." Rivers, seas, and oceans, no matter how vast and deep, still have their banks, their shores, their islands and sandbars, but sensual craving has no limits, no islands or banks, no means for keeping itself within the bounds of moderation and propriety at all. It flows day and night, flooding its banks in the heart at all times. If we didn't have the teachings of moral virtue as a levee to keep it in check, the world would be in a total chaos due to the pull of craving and jealousy. If we were to let sexual desire run wild, we'd be much more fierce than our friends in August and September, wiping one another out under the influence of sexual desire. On top of that, we'd make such a display of our stupidity that we'd be the laughingstock of the animal kingdom. So for the sake of maintaining our honour as human beings and so that we won't be fools in the eyes of our fellow animals, we must hold to moral

virtue as our guide in knowing the proper bounds for our conduct as it affects both ourselves and our families.

Moral virtue means what is noble and good. It's a quality that gives security and stability to the world, a quality that the world has wanted all along. It's one of the highest forms of nourishment for the heart. It's the aspect of reason that guarantees the correctness of our behaviour; a quality in which the beings of the world place their trust and that no one criticises – for it lies beyond criticism. That's moral virtue, in other words, the principles of reason. Suppose we earn five dollars. However many dollars we spend, we spend them reasonably, not wastefully. If we earn one dollar, a hundred, a thousand, a million, we use reason in deciding how to spend and save our earnings so that we can benefit from them in line with their worth, in line with the fact that they have value in meeting our needs and providing for our happiness.

But if the heart leaks, if it lacks principles, our earnings will vanish like water from a leaky pot. No matter how much we earn, it'll all be wasted. Here I'm not talking about spending our wealth in ways that are useful and good. That's not called being wasteful. I'm talking about spending it in ways that serve no real purpose, in ways that can actually harm its owner. Wealth spent in these ways becomes poison, a means for ruining its foolish owner in a way that is really a shame. People like this can't get any real use out of their wealth, simply because they lack the moral virtue that would ensure their security and that of their belongings. As a result, they bring disaster on themselves, their possessions, and everything else that gives them happiness.

This is why moral virtue is very crucial to have. A family with moral virtue as its guide and protection is secure. Its members can talk to one another. They aren't stubborn and wilful, and instead are willing to listen to one another's reasons for the smooth and proper course of their work and the other aspects of their life together. Even just the five precepts, if they hold to them, are enough to bring peace in the family. The five precepts are like an overcoat to protect us from the cold, an umbrella to protect us from the rain, a safe to protect our valuables – the hearts of the family members, and especially the husband and wife – to keep them from being damaged or destroyed by the unbounded force of desire.

The first precept, against killing living beings: The lives of all living beings – ours or anyone else's – are of equal worth. Each animal's life is of equal worth with the life of a human being, for if life is taken away from an animal, it can no longer be an animal. If life is taken away from a person, he or she can no longer be a person. In other words, the continuity of

the animal's being or of the person's being is broken right then in just the same way. This is why we're taught not to destroy one another's lives, because to do so is to destroy absolutely the value of one another's being. Death is a fear striking deeper than any other fear into the heart of each animal and every person. This is why the Buddha teaches us to keep our hands off the lives of our fellow living beings.

The second precept against stealing: To steal, to take things that haven't been given by their owner, is to mistreat not only the owners' belongings, but also his or her heart. This is a very great evil, and so it's something we shouldn't do.

When we talk of other people's belongings, even a single needle counts as a belonging. These are things of value – both the belonging and the owner's heart. Every person cherishes his or her belongings. If the belonging is stolen, the owner is bound to feel hurt. The heart is the important factor here, more important than the actual belonging. To lose something through theft feels very different from having willingly given it away. The feelings of regret, added to the desire for revenge, can lead people to kill one another, even over a single needle. This issue of ownership is something very large and important for each person, which is why we're taught not to steal, because it has a devastating effect on the owner's heart – and that's a serious matter.

The act of stealing and the act of voluntary giving are two very different things. If it's a question of voluntary giving, any amount is easy to part with. Not to mention a needle, we can be happy even when giving things away by the hundreds, thousands, or millions. The person giving is happy and cheerful, the person receiving is pleased no end, and both sides are blessed, as has always been the case when the people of the world aid and assist one another.

The Dhamma treats all hearts as equals. It holds that each being's heart is of value to that being, which is why it teaches us not to mistreat the hearts of others by taking their lives, stealing their belongings, having illicit sex with their spouses or children – because all of these things have their owner: *the heart of a living being, which is a very serious matter.* No good is accomplished by stealing the goods and provoking the hearts of others in this way, because once the heart is provoked, it can be more violent than anything else. The murders that get committed everywhere have a sense of indignation, of having been wronged, as their motivating force. This is why the Buddha teaches us to follow moral virtue as a way of showing respect for one another's hearts and belongings.

What this means is that we shouldn't abuse one another's hearts by doing anything immoral. For example, to kill a person is to devastate

that person's heart and body, and has a devastating effect on others, that is people close to that person who are still alive will want to seek revenge. This person dies, but those people still live, and we end up seeking revenge against each other back and forth in an endless cycle for aeons and aeons.

The third precept against illicit sex: All parents love their children; all husbands love their wives; all wives love their husbands. In any family, there is no greater love than that between the husband and wife. The husband and wife stake their lives on each other as if they were parts of the same body. There is no greater love in the family than his for her or hers for him. Their love is great and so is their sense of attachment and possessiveness. There is no other belonging that either of them cherishes nearly as much. If either of them is unfaithful or untrue to the other, looking for scraps and leftovers outside like a hungry mongrel, the other will feel more sorrow and disappointment than words can describe. The only comparison is that it's like having one's chest slashed open and one's heart ripped out and scattered all over the place – even though one hasn't yet died. How much will the wronged spouse suffer? This is something we can all answer without fear of error.

If any of you are thinking of mistreating your spouses in this way, I ask that you first take a good long look at the teachings of the religion – the foremost Dhamma of the foremost Teacher – to see what kind of teachings they are, what kind of teacher he was, and why great sages honour and revere him so highly. As for the defilements, and sexual desire in particular, *are there any sages who honour and revere them as anything special?* So why is it that we honour and revere and like them so much?

If you start weighing things like this, you'll be able to resist and avoid these defilements to at least some extent. At the very least you'll be one of the more civilised members of the circle of those who still have defilements in their hearts. Your spouse will be able to sleep peacefully, secure and proud, instead of swallowing tears of misery – which is the direction the world is heedlessly rushing everywhere you look. You're lay people. You have sharper eyes than the old monk sitting before you here saying this with his eyes and ears closed, so surely you've seen what I'm talking about.

For the sake of mutual honour and smooth relations between husband and wife, there are some duties in the family where he should be in charge, and which she shouldn't interfere with unless he asks for her help. There are other duties where she should be in charge, and which he shouldn't interfere with unless she asks for his help. Each should

let the other be in charge of whatever the other is best at. Each should honour and show deference to the other and not curse the other or cast aspersions on his or her parents or family. Always show respect when you speak of your spouse's family. Never speak of them with contempt. Even though there may be times when your opinions conflict, keep the issue between just the two of you. Don't go dragging in each other's family background, for that would be to show contempt for your spouse's heart in a way that can't be forgotten, and can lead to a split in the family – something neither of you wants.

If any differences of opinion come between you, don't be quick to feel anger or hatred. Think of the past, before you were married, and of how much you suffered from fear that your engagement would fall through. On top of that, think of all the trouble your families were put to as well. Now that you *are* married, in line with your hopes, you should care for your union to see that it lasts as long as you both are alive.

In becoming husband and wife, you willingly gave your lives to each other. If any issue arises between the two of you, think of it as teeth biting the tongue – they lie close together, so it's only normal that they should get in each others' way now and then. Both of you share responsibility for each other, so you should regard your stability together as more important than the small matters that come between you which can hurt your relationship.

Always remember that both of you have left your parents and now each of you holds to the other as parent, friend, and life-mate. Whatever you do, think of the heart of your owner – that is, the wife is the owner of the husband, and the husband owner of the wife – and don't do anything that would hurt your owner's feelings. Anything without an owner to look after it, no matter what, tends not to be safe, so always think of your owner. Don't be heedless or lax in your behaviour, and your family will then be stable and secure.

All of this is part of the principle of fewness of wants. If you take this principle to heart, you can go wherever you like with a clear heart – whether your work keeps you at home or takes you away – for each of you can trust the other. The earnings you gain can provide for the family's happiness because you go in all honesty and work in all honesty for the sake of the family's well-being, contentment and peace.

Even if the family is lacking in some things – in line with the principle of impermanence¹ – it's not nearly as serious as when a husband or wife starts looking outside. That's something very destructive. If a family has this sort of thing lurking inside it, then even if it has millions

¹ Impermanence is one of the three characteristics of all things in the universe. This means that they all arise and cease and are subject to change.

in the bank, it won't be able to find any happiness. But a family that lives by the principle of fewness of wants – keeping your husband in mind, keeping your wife in mind, keeping in mind what belongs to you and what belongs to others, without overstepping your bounds – is sure to be happy and at peace. Even if some things may be lacking at times, the family can live in contentment.

The important factor in our lives as human beings is the family and the relationship between husband and wife. If this is sound, then when children are born they won't bear the emotional scars of having their parents fight over the issues that arise when one of them goes out of bounds. When parents argue over other things – a lack of this or that or whatever – it's not too serious and can be taken as normal. But quarrelling over this sort of issue is very serious and embarrasses everyone in the family. So for this reason you should always be very strict with yourself in this matter. Don't let yourself be heedless or lax in your behaviour.

As for quarrelling about other matters, you should be careful about that too. When parents quarrel for any reason, the children can't look one another in the face. When they go to school or out with their friends, they can't look their friends in the face, because of their embarrassment.

The fourth precept, against lying: Why did the Buddha teach us not to lie? Let's think about it. Is there anything good about lying? Suppose everyone in the country, everyone in the world, lied to one another whenever they met. Wherever you'd go, there'd be nothing but lies. You wouldn't be able to get any truth or honesty out of anyone at all. If this were the case how could we human beings live with one another? It'd be impossible. If we couldn't get any truth or honesty from one another, we wouldn't be able to live together. So in order that friends, husbands, wives, parents, children, and people throughout society can live together and trust one another, we need to hold to honesty and truthfulness as a basic principle in all our dealings. The nation will then have a strong foundation.

Here I'm giving just a short explanation of the fourth precept so that you will see how great the value of truthfulness is. The fact that the people of the world can live together is because of truthfulness, and not because of lies and dishonesty. Lies are very destructive to the world. People who hope for one another's well-being should be entirely honest and truthful in their dealings. Lies are like disembodied spirits that deceive people and eat away at the nation. This is why the society of good people despises those who tell lies and does its best to keep them out of its midst. The only people who like lying are those who harvest their crops from the hearts and livers of others, in other words, those who

make their living by fraud and deceit. Lying is thus a means of livelihood only for evil people and is of absolutely no use to good people. This is why the Buddha taught us not to lie, because lies are like executioners waiting to torture people and bring them to a bad end.

The fifth precept, against drinking alcohol: What is alcohol? Alcohol here refers to any intoxicant. It changes the person who takes it from a full human being to one with something lacking. The more we take it, the more we're lacking, to the point where we become raving lunatics.

When we were newly born, our parents never gave us alcohol to drink. They gave us only good things like food to eat and mother's milk – good, pure things extracted from her blood – to drink. We were able to grow because of our mother's milk and the other good, nutritious food our parents gave us until we grew to adulthood. But after having grown up on good nutritious food, we then take alcohol and other intoxicants to poison and drug ourselves. Exactly where this adds to the value and honour of our status as human beings is something I have yet to see.

Think about this for a minute: Suppose that all of us sitting here were drunk, from old Grandfather Boowa on down. Suppose we were all roaring drunk, sprawled all over the roadsides. Everywhere you went, there'd be people defecating and urinating in their pants all over the place, with no sense of shame or embarrassment in line with ordinary human manners. Could you stand to look at it? If alcohol were really good, as people like to pretend it is, wouldn't then good people express their admiration for drunkards sprawled all over the roadsides, their urine and excrement covering themselves and their surroundings? "These drunkards are really outstanding, aren't they? They don't have to look for a place to defecate. They can do it right in their pants. Ordinary people can't do that. These drunkards are really extraordinary, aren't they?" Would they ever say anything like this?

Suppose that wherever you went there were drunk people all over the roadside. Could you bear to look at it? With drunk people – in other words, crazy people – everywhere, who could stand it? Where would you get any good people willing to come and look at the crazy people all over the nation? There'd be no more value left to human beings. There'd be nothing but crazy people filling the country. Is this the way alcohol is good? It's good only for making people crazy. There's nothing good about the alcohol itself, so where are the crazy people who drink it going to get anything good from it? Who would want to live in this world if there were nothing but people crazy from drinking, sprawled all over the place, staking out their claims on every roadside.

This is why the Buddha cautioned us against drinking alcohol. *He didn't want people all over the nation to be crazy, ruining their good manners as human beings and ruining their work.* A drunk person is no different from a dead person. He can't do any work – aside from boasting. He damages his intelligence and finds it easy to do anything at all with no sense of conscience or deference, no fear of evil or the results of *kamma*², no respect for people or places at all. He can go anywhere and say anything with no sense of shame or embarrassment. He can speak without stopping from dawn to dusk – that's a drunk person. He talks endlessly, going around in circles, boring his listeners to death. After a while, "Well, it's time to get going." Then he starts talking again. Then, "Well, I guess I'd better be going." Then he starts talking again. He goes on and on like this all day long – "I guess I'd better be going," all day long, but he never goes – that's a drunk person. He speaks without any purpose, any aim, any substance, any concern for whether what he says is good or bad, right or wrong. He can keep babbling endlessly, without any sense of the time of day. *That's drunkenness – no mindfulness, no restraint at all.* A person at his stupidest is a drunk person, but he's the one who boasts most of his cleverness. A drunk person is nothing but a crazy person, which is why alcohol is called 'crazy water'. Whoever wants to be a decent human being should refrain from it. There's nothing good about alcohol, so as good people how can we pretend that bad things – things that make us dizzy and drunk – can make us good in any way?

This has been just a short explanation of the five precepts, from the one against killing to the one against taking intoxicants. These precepts are called the principles of morality – principles for human beings, beings who are endowed with a high status, the status that comes with intelligence. To be an intelligent human being means to be clever in maintaining one's moral virtue, not clever in taking intoxicants, creating animosity, or abusing other people. People of that sort aren't called intelligent. They're called fools.

The teachings of the Buddha are accurate, correct, and appropriate for human beings to put into practice in line with their position in life. There's nothing in the principles of the Dhamma to act as a dead-weight on the progress of the world. In fact, the world is what acts as a dead-weight on the Dhamma, destroying it without any real sense of conscience. If we act like this, all we lack is tails. Otherwise they could call us dogs. Even without tails they can still call us dogs when we act so dissolute that we outstrip the world. If we go out and try to snatch tails from dogs, we should watch out – they might bite us.

² *Kamma* – actions done with intention by way of body, speech or mind which have a moral content of good, bad, or neutral. All such actions bring back a corresponding result, that is, good actions bring good results in the future, bad actions bring bad results.

We've gotten way out of bounds. We say we've progressed, that we're advanced and civilised, but if we get so reckless and carried away with the world that we don't give a thought to what's reasonable, noble, or right, then the material progress of the world will simply become a fire with which we burn one another and we won't have a world left to live in. We can't pretend that we're dogs, because we have no tails; if we try to snatch their tails from them, they'll bite us. This is what it means to be a fake human being. This is what we fake human beings are like. If we try to pretend that we're genuine human beings, we don't have any moral virtue to our name. We don't have any manners good enough to fit in with our status as human beings. If we try to pretend that we're animals, we don't have any tails. These are the sorts of difficulties we get ourselves into, the damage we do to ourselves and the common good if we go against the teachings of the religion. And this is why the practice of the Dhamma is fitting for our true status as human beings – because the Buddha taught the religion to the human race.

nisamma karaḍāy seyyo:

“Before you do anything, reflect on whether it's right or wrong.” Don't act simply on your moods or desires. Moods and desires have no true standards. Desire: You can desire everything. Even when you've eaten your fill, you can still want more. Your desires are hungry – hungry all the time. That's desire. It has no standards or limits at all. The Buddha calls this the lower side of the mind.

This is why you need to use Dhamma to contemplate 'desire' and take it apart to see what it wants. If, on reflection, you see that what it wants is reasonable, only then should you go ahead and act on it. But if it wants to eat and, after you've eaten, it still wants more, then ask it: “*What more do you want to eat? The sky? Nobody in the world eats sky. Whatever people eat, you've already eaten. You've had enough already, so what more do you want?*” When your desires are stubborn, you really have to come down hard on them like this if you want to be a good person of moderate wants.

We have to teach ourselves, to force ourselves to stay within limits and restrictions, for our desires and moods if left to themselves know no limits. If we act simply in line with our desires, the human race will degenerate, so we need the principles of moral virtue as our guide. The teachings of the religion are an important means for putting ourselves in order as good people living in happiness and peace. If you lack moral virtue, then even if you search for happiness until the day you die you'll never find it. Instead, you'll find nothing but suffering and discontent.

What's right and appropriate, no matter who you are, is to put the teachings of the religion into practice. To lack Dhamma – in other words,

to lack goodness and virtue – is to lack the tools you need to find happiness.

The world is becoming more and more troubled day by day because we lack moral virtue in our hearts and actions. All we see is the world acting as a dead-weight on moral virtue, trampling it to bits. Don't go thinking that moral virtue is a dead-weight on the world. Moral virtue has never harmed the world in any way. Actually, the world tramples all over moral virtue and destroys it, leaving us empty-handed, without any guide. We then end up destroying one another in a way that's really appalling. So I ask that you see both the harm that comes from a lack of moral virtue and the value of putting moral virtue into practice. You yourself will prosper, your family will prosper and the nation will prosper because you have the Dhamma as your shield and protection.

Our value and worth as human beings comes from our morality, our virtue, and our behaviour, you know. It doesn't come from our skin and flesh the way it does with animals. When animals such as fish and crabs die, you can take their flesh to market and come back with money in your pockets; but try taking the flesh of a dead person to market and see what happens. Everyone in the market will scatter in an uproar from fear of the dead. Since when has our human worth lain with our skin and flesh? It lies with our behaviour, our manners and hearts that have moral virtue as their guide and adornment. People with moral virtue are people of value. Wherever they live, everything is at peace and at ease.

If we human beings have moral virtue as our adornment, we're attractive in a way that never loses its appeal, no matter how old we get. We have value because of our virtue. If moral virtue is lacking in the family, the family will tend to become more and more troubled. If virtue is very much lacking, the family will be very much troubled; and if it's completely lacking, the whole family will be destroyed.

This should be enough explanation for the moment. I ask that you contemplate what I've said and put it into practice so as to rid yourselves of the dangers that have been threatening you and your families, so that you can instead meet with nothing but happiness and peace. Be intent on treating one another well – and especially between husbands and wives, *I ask that you treat your spouse as having equal worth with yourself*. Don't try to debase you spouse's value and exalt your own through the power of your moods. To do so is simply to trample all over each other, and isn't at all the proper or right thing to do. Treat yourselves as having equal value, both in moral terms and in terms of the family. Your family will then prosper and be happy.