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Moral Shame and Moral Fear

The guardians of the world

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003; rev 2010

1 Guardians of the world

1.1 THE THREE DISCOURSES in this chapter—the **Kaṇha Sutta** (A 2.7), the **Sukka Sutta** (A 2.8) and the **Hiri Ottappa** or **Cariya Sutta** (A 2.9)—form a set: they all are statements on moral shame (*hiri*) and moral fear (*ottappa*).

1.2 MORAL SHAME (*hiri*; Skt *hrī*), is a sense of disgust with bad. The Abhidhamma defines it as a state of “being ashamed of what one ought to be ashamed of, to be ashamed of performing bad and unwholesome deeds” (Pug 24).¹ It is one of the 7 noble treasures (*ariya, dhana*),² that is, the treasures of generosity (*cāga, dhana*): faith, moral conduct, moral shame, moral fear, learning, generosity, wisdom.³

1.3 MORAL FEAR. The term *ottappa* is derived from *apa* + √*TRAP* (to be abashed) [Skt **āpatrapya* > *apatrapā* (Trenckner)]. Andersen suggests that this etymology must be preferred to that of Childers: **autappya* > *uttāpa*, *ut* + √*TAP* (heat) (*Pali Grammar*, 62). Edgerton (BHSD) has *apatrāpya* and the compound *hrīr-apatrāpya* (P *hiri, ottappa*). Moral shame is often paired with **moral fear** (*ottappa*),⁴ and, as the foundation for morality, called “the world-protectors” (*loka, pāla*, A 1:51), since they are the preconditions for a functional society.

1.4 RESPECT. According to the **Visuddhi, magga**, the proximate cause for moral shame is *self-respect*, while for moral fear it is *respect for others*. Out of self-respect (*attāna garu katvā*), one, like the daughter of a good family, rejects bad-doing through moral shame. Out of respect for others (*param garu katvā*), one, like a courtesan, rejects bad-doing through moral fear (Vism 14.142/464 f).

The former is sometimes known as self-regarding moral conduct (motivated by the *shame* a deed entails), while the latter as other-regarding moral conduct (motivated by a healthy *fear* of karmic repercussion or personal accountability).⁵ As such, these two actions are known as *the two bright states that protect the world*, if not for which “one would neither respect one’s mother, nor one’s mother’s sister, nor one’s brother’s wife, nor one’s teacher’s wife” so that we do not behave like animals (A 1:50).⁶

2 Three related suttas

What are briefly stated in the first two discourses—the **Kaṇha Sutta** (A 2.7) and the **Sukka Sutta** (A 2.8)—are fully laid out in the **Hiri Ottappa** or **Cariya Sutta** (A 2.9), which also appears verbatim as the **Sukka Dhamma Sutta** (It 2.5/36 f), the 42nd discourse of the *Iti, vuttaka*.⁷ The **Sukka Dhamma Sutta**, however, besides its characteristic opening (“This was indeed spoken by the Blessed One, spoken by the Arhat [worthy one], thus have I heard”),⁸ also closes with these two verses:

*Yesañ ce hiri, ottappaṃ
sabbadā ca na vijjati
vokkantā sukka, mūlā te
jāti, maraṇa, gāmino*

For those whom moral shame and moral fear
are at all times unknown—
they, turning away from the roots of light,
are those who go to birth and death.

¹ Cf Dhs:R 18 f.

² DA 2:34; ThaA 240; VvA 113.

³ D 3:163, 251; A 4:5; VvA 113; cf A 3:53; Sn 77, 462 (= D 1:168), 719.

⁴ M 1:271; S 2:220; A 2:78; It 34; Tikap 61; J 1:127; Vism 221; DhA 3:73.

⁵ See **Ādhipateyya S** (A 3.40), SD 27.3.

⁶ See **Veḷu, dvāreyya S** (S 55.7/5:352-356) + SD 1.5 (4); (**Abhabba**) **Tayo, dhamma S** (A 10.76/5:144-149) = SD 2.4; **Hiri Ottappa S** or **Cariya S** (A 2.9/1:51) = SD 2.5c. In his tr, Ñāṇamoli renders *hiri* as “conscience,” but apparently mistranslates *ottappati* as “is ashamed” and *ottappa* as “shame,” Vism:Ñ 524 f.

⁷ It 2.5/36 f = SD 72.6.

⁸ *Vuttam h’etaṃ bhagavatā vuttam arahatā ti me sutam.*

*Yesañ ca hiri,ottappam
sadā sammā upaṭṭhitā
virūḷha,brahmacariyā te
santo khīṇa,punabbhavā ti*

But those for whom moral shame and moral fear
are ever always fully founded—
they, prospering in the holy life,
are at peace with rebirth destroyed. (It 2.5/36 f)

And it characteristically closes with “This matter [meaning], too, was spoken by the Blessed One. Thus I have heard.”⁹

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SD 2.5(2a)

Kaṇha Sutta

The Discourse on the Dark | A 2.7/1:51

A 2.1.1.7 = Aṅguttara 2, Duka Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Paṇṇāsaka 1, Kamma, karaṇa Vagga 7
Theme: What are not world-protectors

Bhikshus, there are these two dark states. What are they?
The lack of moral shame and the lack of moral fear.
These, bhikshus, are the two dark states.

— evaṃ —

SD 2.5(2b)

Sukka Sutta

The Discourse on the Bright | A 2.8/1:51

A 2.1.1.8 = Aṅguttara 2, Duka Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Paṇṇāsaka 1, Kammakaraṇa Vagga 8
Theme: What are world-protectors

Bhikshus, there are these two bright states. What are they?
Moral shame and moral fear.
These, bhikshus, are the two bright states.

— evaṃ —

SD 2.5(2c)

Hiri Ottappa Sutta

The Discourse on moral shame and moral fear | A 2.9/1:51

Cariya Sutta The Discourse on Conduct

A 2.1.1.9 = Aṅguttara 2, Duka Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Paṇṇāsaka 1, Kammakaraṇa Vagga 9
Theme: The two qualities that are world-protectors

Bhikshus, there are two bright states¹⁰ that protect the world.
What are the two?
Moral shame and moral fear.
Bhikshus, if these two bright states were not to protect the world, then there would be no mothers, nor mothers’ sisters, nor uncles’ wives, nor teachers’ wives, nor the wives of respected.¹¹ Instead, the world would come to confusion such as there is amongst goats and sheep and fowl and pigs and dogs and jackals.

⁹ *Ayam pi attho vutto bhagavatā, iti me sutan ti.*

¹⁰ “Bright states,” *sukka dhamma*, that is, wholesome conditions. See (Vitthāra) **Kamma S** (A 4.232) = SD 4.13 Intro (2.1).

¹¹ Comy: Of those worthy of respect, such as one’s paternal elder brother (one’s elder uncle), one’s paternal younger brother (one’s younger uncle), and so on (ItA 159). AA is silent.

But, bhikshus, since these two bright states do protect the world, therefore there are seen mothers, mothers' sisters, uncles' wives, teachers' wives and wives of the respected.

— evaṃ —

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