

Remorse and Confession in the Spiritual Community

By *Subhuti*

From Sila to Samadhi

One of the first things we learn about Buddhism is that it is a spiritual path consisting of three great stages or phases, namely morality, concentration and wisdom. The Dharma tells us that if we are ethically pure, the practice of meditation will lead us upwards through a sequence of higher states of consciousness; and that these states can then be used as the basis for a profound, liberating understanding of reality.

Many practitioners of the Dharma, if asked to review their spiritual progress in terms of the Threefold Way, would probably say that they are still mainly concerned with making the transition from morality to concentration. Many of them know from experience that higher states of consciousness are a reality – are 'there' to be attained. It is quite common at least to glimpse such states in our meditation – especially when we are enjoying the supportive conditions of a retreat. Actually being able to dwell in these states at will is, however, a much more difficult task. How then *do* we make the step from sila to samadhi?

Some of the reasons for the difficulty involved are circumstantial. Many of us lead busy and demanding lives, and can't devote to meditation anything like the time that rapid progress would seem to require. However, time is not the only issue here. My work for the Order brings me into intimate contact with a very large number of Order members and Mitras in both India and the West, so I have quite a good sense of the sorts of spiritual problems people have, and how they try to deal with them. Generally speaking, the experience has convinced me that the task of making the transition from morality to concentration is not simply a question of having more time to meditate. It is also a question of *knowing how* to practise effectively. As members of a new spiritual Movement, we are all in the process of learning a great deal about this.

We will only experience samadhi to the extent that we have a strong foundation in sila. When we review our own behaviour in the light of the precepts, we may not notice much that seems seriously wrong. Consequently, we don't keep thinking very deeply or for very long about sila. Yet the logic of the Threefold Way suggests (and my own experience tends to confirm) that, if we find our progress in meditation is frustratingly slow, it may be because we have not given sufficient attention to sila. We need to look again both at what sila is and at how to practise it.

For sila *is* a practice and we should regard it as such, just as we regard meditation. In relation to our practice of sila, we should have the same kind of expectations that we have of meditation, namely that it will be a progressive experience, in which we sense a gradual deepening and refinement. Indeed, we should have this expectation more strongly with regard to sila than meditation, because we are hardly likely to get much sense of progress in our meditation unless we first find it in our sila.

My own understanding of how to do this has recently been greatly illuminated by my encounter with two important texts. One is Sangharakshita's *Know Your Mind*. The other is the

Bodhisattvabhumi (or 'Stages of the Bodhisattva's Path') by Asanga, the great Buddhist teacher born in the fourth century CE. In the latter work, the chapter on the Bodhisattva's ethics was especially valuable. Over the course of the last two years, I have had the opportunity to lead study on these texts, both in the UK and in India. My repeated encounter with the Dharma, as embodied in them, has led me to a much deeper appreciation of what is entailed in the *practice* of sila. Nor was I the only one to benefit: it became clear that the Order members who participated in the study groups also found the experience extremely useful. I became convinced that the ideas embodied in these works should be discussed widely throughout the Order, and that it would also be fruitful to share something of them with the wider Movement. Hence this article.

Traditional Buddhist psychology analyses the human mind by classifying 'mental events'. The most important distinction in the whole system is between mental events that are skilful (or positive) and those that are unskilful. The system that Bhante discusses in *Know Your Mind* lists eleven *positive* mental events. In this article, I am going to focus on the first three of these, because they provide the key to all the others. In Sanskrit, these three are *sraddha* ('faith'), *hri* ('shame') and *apatrapya* ('shame through respect of the wise'). The English translations are of course approximate, and the real meanings of the three terms are amongst the things I hope to clarify in this article.

Dimensions of Sraddha

Sraddha is the most fundamental of the three. Of course, sraddha does not mean religious 'belief' as generally understood in the west. Sraddha is our spontaneous response to the spiritual Truth, in whatever form it presents itself to us. As such, it is the motive force of the act of going for Refuge to the Three Jewels. But what sort of 'mental event' is it exactly? How do we know if we experience it?

Asanga offers an analysis that is very relevant to this question. He distinguishes three aspects or phases of sraddha. Firstly, faith takes the form of *conviction*. You become *convinced*, for example, that the Dharma is true. It appears to you to be an honest, accurate and profound account of reality. Similarly, faith in the Buddha begins when we become *convinced* – perhaps from the evidence of the suttas – that the Buddha was a profoundly wise and good human being. Such *conviction* is the cognitive or intellectual aspect of faith, and it is indispensable. Secondly, sraddha involves an *attraction* to the Truth we perceive. This is the *affective* (i.e. 'emotional') dimension of sraddha. We can compare the feeling involved to aesthetic appreciation. The term 'aesthetic' is not ideal but it does at least point towards the nature of the affective side of sraddha: a delighted fascination for something seen as *beautiful*. Thirdly, from this attraction comes a decision to move closer to the object of sraddha, and even to unite oneself with it. Here, an *affect* becomes a *volition*, or (less technically) the feeling of attraction passes over into will and action. These three aspects of sraddha are sometimes termed *lucid faith* (the conviction), *serene faith* (the attraction) and *longing faith* (the volitional aspect).

An important aspect of *longing faith* is the sense that the longing *can* be fulfilled, that is, a *confidence* that one is, in fact, able to close the gap between oneself and the object of sraddha. 'Confidence' is, of course, one of the possible English translations of sraddha, one that modern translators, understandably keen to avoid Christian overtones, often prefer as an alternative to

‘faith’. This brings us to one of the commonest problems that people have with *sraddha*. It seems that the lack of such confidence in one’s ability to ‘close the gap’ is an aspect of *sraddha* that many of us find problematic. Despite what you might think, this is not a particularly modern problem. It is discussed in the traditional sources. What *is* often different nowadays is our attitude to the problem. We tend to view this lack of confidence rather sympathetically in terms of psychological difficulties, lack of self-esteem, and so on. However, the old texts generally see it – rather disconcertingly – as a form of *laziness*.

According to the Buddhist tradition, *laziness* has three forms. There is *laziness* as everyone understands it – ‘the *laziness* that takes delight in lying down and not getting up’. Then there is the *laziness* that consists of yielding to unskilful impulses when we should resist them. But there is also the *laziness* of *despondency*. This is the state of mind in which we tell ourselves, ‘Poor me! What can I do? Not only do I lack *x*, but I also lack *y* and *z*. I’m just not up to it. Ah well, there it is’. This attitude leads to (or rationalises) the giving up of all effort. The tradition unequivocally regards this as a form of *laziness*: an unwillingness to put forth the *virya*, or spiritual energy, that is needed to close the gap between ourselves and our Ideal. It is important to distinguish this attitude from the objective self-criticism that is informed by faith and which leads (as we shall see) to confession. But before moving on to discuss confession, we need to look still deeper into *sraddha*.

I suspect that, too often, we tend to think of *sraddha* only in its *affective* aspect, and to have an unrealistic idea of how strong that should be. We look for a sort of exhilarating fizz of inspiration, filling our consciousness. But that is not its only or even its most characteristic mode. Faith is not always an ‘obvious’ experience. It can be present as something embedded in our assumptions and behaviour, something that is too close to be seen clearly. Sometimes, in moods of critical self-examination, we ask ourselves, ‘What do I really want? What am I really interested in? What really inspires me?’ It may appear to us at such moments that the answer is *not* the Three Jewels. And this can easily make us disheartened, especially if we have been trying to practise the Dharma for a long time. But when this happens, instead of getting despondent, we could try saying to ourselves, ‘Yet, the Dharma does seem true and profound to me. Not only that, but I am still here, still practising after (however many) years. And if I am here, that can only be because in some sense I want to be here. There must surely be some faith in that.’ In other words, we can try to recognise the strength of the *cognitive* and *volitional* aspects of our *sraddha*, instead of dwelling too much on the apparent weakness of the *affective* aspect.

Sraddha is often a subterranean power, rather than the operatic thrill we imagine it to be. It is most clearly visible in our fundamental orientation in life, which, in turn, manifests mainly in *what we choose to do with* our life. I remember an experience that was helpful to me in formulating this realisation. I woke up one night with a sense of having had a significant dream, but not being able to get hold of any remnant of the dream, except the echoing words ‘feelings deeper than I can feel’. I found the experience strange but I realised that in some way it was connected with *sraddha*, and that it pointed to the idea that faith was a sort of underlying orientation, something that might not always manifest itself dramatically in terms of inspired moods or intense feelings of devotion.

Of course, such devotional moods and feelings *are also* important as expressions of *sraddha*, and we can cultivate *sraddha* by practices that stimulate them, such as *puja*. However, my point is that such ‘islands’ of conscious inspiration may be more like the highest peaks of a mountain range

emerging from a deep sea. *Only* the highest peaks become visible above the water, but even when nothing breaks the surface, there may be substantial masses not far below, which (stretching the metaphor a bit) are exerting a strong but hidden pull on the course we take.

This sort of perspective can console us for those times when our spiritual life seems relatively uninspired. But of course, we will still want something more. Is there any other means by which we can have a more direct, conscious *sense* of *sraddha*, apart from the occasional uplift of a puja or an inspired meditation? I think there is. And in fact this other means is, I believe, the more fundamental way of contacting and experiencing our faith. It is the experience of *remorse* and *confession*.

The basic manifestation of our *sraddha* is a desire to be ethically pure in our actions of body, speech and mind. The *spiritual* impulse is, at first, mainly an *ethical* impulse. It is in the realisation that we have fallen short in our ethical behaviour – and we are bound to fall short, frequently – that we feel the power of our faith. In other words, we experience our *sraddha* consciously when it runs up against the opposing force of our greed, hatred and delusion. Remorse is the pain generated by this collision of forces.

The function of pain is to warn us of a danger. Remorse warns us that we need to acknowledge a fault, in order to purify ourselves of it, and so remove an obstruction to the gathering momentum of *sraddha*. In that act of acknowledgement and purification, we can find a sense of liberation and enlargement that bears a relation to the positive feelings experienced in devotion or meditation.

The Four Aspects of Confession

In the early Buddhist scriptures, we often find the Buddha receiving a monk's confession with words like these from the discourse to Bhaddali:

“Surely, Bhaddali, a transgression overcame you... But since you see your transgression as such and make amends in accordance with the Dhamma, we forgive you. For it is growth in the Noble One's Discipline when one sees one's transgression as such and makes amends in accordance with the Dhamma by undertaking restraint for the future.”

- (M 65, Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation)

The words used here constitute a formula, and this fact suggests that they were felt to crystallise certain important ideas. From them we can draw out four aspects of confession. The four are: (i) *seeing a fault as such*, (ii) *actually confessing it*, (iii) *making amends*, and (iv) *making a resolution not to repeat the fault* (or “undertaking restraint for the future”). Something needs to be said about each of these. I will comment on the last two points first.

‘Making amends’ – the third aspect of confession – refers to the fact that any genuine confession must entail a desire to *put right*, as far as possible, whatever wrong or suffering has been caused by one's unskilful action. Obviously, this may require some action in addition to the confession itself. For example, let's imagine that Order member A confesses to B his fault in having spoken harshly to C.

The confession is not really effective until A has also fully *apologised to C* for his harsh words.

Of course, making amends may require us to do a lot more than just swallowing our pride and offering an apology. We have to take full responsibility for the consequences of our unskilful action. Imagine – to take a rather extreme example – a situation in which someone, in a fit of temper, assaults somebody else, and injures that person so much that the victim requires medical treatment, even hospitalisation, loses time at work, and so on. And let's further suppose that this event does not take place here in the UK, where we have the welfare state to sort out the consequences of such messes, but in another country, among poor people who have no free medical care or insurance. The guilty party might confess it, but he also has a responsibility not just to apologise, but to *do* something – to meet the medical expenses, to make up for the lost income, and so on. It may require the penitent to give up a lot of time and energy to earn the money to do so, which may be extremely inconvenient. But without a willingness to make good any damage done, a confession cannot be regarded as wholly sincere, as the confessor would not have faced up fully to the consequences of his action.

Such making amends deals with the consequences of the present fault. But any effective process of confession must also look to the future. Genuine confession is based on the will to *be rid of* the fault, to expel it from one's being, because one has recognised it as unskilful and incompatible with one's spiritual goals. Logically, then, one's will to be rid of the fault is a desire to expel it not just for the moment, but *permanently*. This brings us to the fourth aspect of confession – making a resolution not to repeat the fault.

Sometimes, perhaps, making a resolution not to repeat a fault is a simple matter of making a firm decision. But we must guard against our own naivete. It is easy to overestimate our ability to stop an unskilful tendency by a simple act of will. Many of our breaches of the precepts consist in habitual weaknesses and, by definition, habits are ingrained tendencies that are hard to change. The precepts of speech and mind can present particularly difficult challenges here, because speech is more difficult to control than bodily action, and states of mind are even more so.

However, the difficulty involved does not mean that we cannot work on changing our habits. Usually it should be possible at least to start forming some *strategy* that will help us to do so. In order to do this we may need to reflect carefully on all the causes and conditions that led us to the fault. The problem needs to be broken down into its component parts. The initial strategy for avoiding repetition of a fault will often include simply *avoiding certain conditions* that tend to give rise to such an act. Ultimately, of course, one wants to attain a state of such mental purity that, whatever the conditions, one doesn't respond unskilfully. But we need to be realistic and accept that most of us don't yet have the degree of mindfulness necessary to remain skilful in all situations. For that reason, the basic strategy for avoiding any ethical failing to which we are prone is to do our best to keep away from circumstances that tend to elicit our unskilful response. Naivete in such matters very easily leads to further moral lapses and these in turn lead to despondency – which is, as we have seen, a sort of slide into moral 'laziness'.

In this whole process of analysis of the problem and formulation of a strategy, the help of our spiritual friends is likely to be vital. For Order members, chapters can play a vital role in confession, as I shall show later on.

Remorse and the Education of the 'Natural' Conscience

But now I want to go back to the first aspect of confession: *seeing the fault as such*. This is the inward dimension of confession and is of fundamental importance. We must not be misled by the word *seeing*. In order really to see the fault, we must not only 'see' it (which might imply no more than a detached, abstract awareness that an action was technically 'against the rules') but also *feel* it to be a fault. In other words there must be *remorse*. I think that sometimes, when we make a confession, this feeling element is missing or weak. This does not mean we are insincere. We know that what we have done is wrong, because the precepts say so, and we have a sort of general faith in the Dharma and hence in the precepts. But we may not actually feel that much remorse. Somehow, we just can't take it that seriously.

But our spiritual practice should be causing us to develop an increasingly delicate ethical sensitivity. It is especially likely to do so if we make confession a regular part of that practice. This makes us more capable of remorse. One consequence of growing ethical sensitivity is that we will act more skilfully, but at the same time, our 'standards' will go up. In other words, as we leave behind our grosser unskilful tendencies, we simultaneously start to feel remorse in relation to subtler ones, which previously we would scarcely have recognised as such, or dismissed as insignificant, or recognised only in the abstract, unfeelingly. In this way, we escape from our vicious circles and enter a virtuous spiral, propelled upwards by skilful use of remorse

What then is remorse? The Sanskrit word is *kaukrtya*. This is the same word that is normally translated as 'anxiety' in the list of the five hindrances to meditation. 'Restlessness and anxiety' or 'flurry and worry' are common renderings of *auddhatya kaukrtya*, but actually, neither 'anxiety' nor 'worry' is strictly accurate as a translation of *kaukrtya*. The Sanskrit word has two parts: *kau* means 'wrong', while *krtya* is like the past participle of a verb meaning to 'to do', so the literal translation of *kaukrtya* is 'wrong done'. It thus refers quite directly to our sense of having done something wrong, (or having neglected to do something right). The experience of *kaukrtya* certainly involves a cognitive or thinking aspect, but the word basically indicates a *feeling*, specifically a painful feeling of regret and shame for something done or left undone.

Kaukrtya is a spontaneous or 'natural' mental event. Of course, it can be strengthened or weakened by other conditions, but the capacity for *kaukrtya* is part of being human. This has profound implications, for it means that our consciousness has an intrinsic moral dimension. We have a sense of doing wrong that is not wholly dependent on our upbringing or education or even upon a process of reasoning. It functions as an intuition, springing directly from our awareness of ourselves (with our desires, our experience of pain, and so on) and of others, whom we recognise as essentially like ourselves. Doing wrong thus goes directly against something in the nature of the mind. The same idea is present in the Pali word for 'mindfulness': *sati*. The *Pali Text Society Dictionary* gives 'conscience' as one of the meanings of *sati*. So *conscience* is part of *consciousness*, as is suggested in English by the etymological connection of the two words.

Buddhist morality bases itself on this faculty and this is one of the ways in which it must be classified as a 'natural' system of ethics. It is not founded on learning externally derived rules. There *are* precepts, of course, but precepts do not *generate* our moral sense. They only *educate* it

(in the word's root sense of 'lead out'). Such education is necessary because, although innate, our ethical impulses are not usually the strongest we possess. They compete with others and they can also get obscured or distorted by the various forms of conditioning – cultural, social and psychological – that we all undergo. Worse, our ethical instincts can be blunted or even suppressed when we allow unskilful tendencies to develop. Our moral intuition is thus a potentiality. Its actual manifestation waxes and wanes according to the choices we make and the conditions we find (or put) ourselves in.

Most of us know this from our own experience. When we are on a retreat, meditating, absorbing the Dharma, perhaps spending a lot of time in silence, we become much more sensitive and our actions start to reflect the great ethical principles of metta, generosity, contentment and so on. We usually carry something of this state away from the retreat, but back in the hurly-burly of everyday life, surrounded by distractions, we soon start to lose the spiritual 'edge' we acquire on retreat. After only a few days, our actions of body, speech and mind start to coarsen. Before long, we are quickly forgetting or even not noticing the little unskilful acts that we are committing and so have no chance of confessing them.

But however valuable such retreats and peaceful conditions may be, the most direct and effective way of strengthening and educating this basic ethical sense is through the practice of confession, which enables it to function sensitively, whether or not we are on retreat. As we have seen, the Buddha himself vouched very explicitly for the importance of confession, telling Bhaddali and many others that confession '... is growth in the Noble one's discipline'. The Noble ones are of course those who are Enlightened, and the Pali word for 'growth' is, like ours, the same one that denotes what living things – such as crops – do. In other words it means the process of increase or expansion, of upward movement towards the light, and organic unfolding towards completeness or maturity. Confession of faults is a practice that leads to Enlightenment. Growth of *conscience* is literally growth of *consciousness*.

The Varieties of Remorse

Kaukrtya is a complex mental state that takes a variety of forms. According to the Buddhist scholastic tradition, it is 'morally undistributed'. In other words, it can be ethically skilful or unskilful or neutral. Its moral status depends on exactly what sort of kaukrtya it is. This is a problem for us because we need to be able to distinguish skilful kaukrtya from other kinds. It seems to me that we can divide kaukrtya into three categories (just like faith and laziness!). It can be *ethical*, or *functional* or *neurotic*. I have already said something about ethical kaukrtya, so now I need to explain what I mean by the other two kinds.

Functional kaukrtya is the sort of feeling that you have when you wake up at night and think, 'Did I lock the back door before I went to bed? I don't think I did. How could I have been so careless?' Now of course, it is possible to argue that there *is* some ethical element in this sort of feeling, because lack of mindfulness can become negligence, and negligence can cause harm to others. Nevertheless, we would not, on the whole, consider this kind of 'doing wrong' to be a *moral* misdeed. It does not involve any intention to cause harm, or to take advantage of anyone.

Functional kaukrtya is a mental alarm bell that goes off to warn us that we have omitted to do

something that needs to be done, or done something that will have unfortunate results, in purely practical terms. One can respond to it in either of two ways. We can just recognise it, and take appropriate action to remedy the situation. The other possibility is that one has the feeling but fails to identify what it is about, or to do anything to put it right. Consequently, the nagging feeling persists as what we call anxiety. Of course, it may be pushed into the back of the mind to some extent. However it then becomes a sort of troublesome background noise of one's consciousness, creating an obscure feeling of unease or tension. The way to deal with the problem is quite simple, although not necessarily easy. You firstly have to recognise that you are experiencing *kaukrtya*, then identify what the cause is, then decide what you can do about it, and finally do it. The last two stages may, in some cases, amount to the realisation that there is in fact *nothing* that you can do, so you might as well relax. For example, there is no point in worrying about the safety of air travel when the plane you are in has already left the ground. The functional kind of *kaukrtya* is morally neutral, although it can become an obstacle to our spiritual progress when it leads to an underlying state of anxiety that hinders our meditation.

The other non-ethical kind of *kaukrtya* is what I term neurotic (or *false*) remorse. It is important to understand this because it *resembles* our natural moral sense but is actually its near enemy. Behind this kind of remorse lies fear of punishment, or of losing love or acceptance or status. Of course, this kind of false remorse often has its roots in our conditioning (especially in the family relationships that we experienced in early childhood) or in our religious background. Theistic religions, including Hinduism, have always tried to compel believers to follow their social code by the threat of punishment.

For many people, a belief in divine punishment or reward is integral to their sense of the meaning of religion. For instance, on a recent journey to India, I met a Sri Lankan Muslim while I was waiting for a connection at Kuwait airport. He was a nice chap and we got talking. When he heard I was a Buddhist, he started asking me about the violent things that he had seen some Buddhist monks doing in Sri Lanka. I had to agree with him and say, 'Yes, it's terrible', because I knew about them too. He went on to ask, 'Well, what is there that guarantees morality in Buddhism?' So I tried to explain about Buddhist ethics, but he could only comment, 'Well, that's not enough is it? Who is going to refrain from doing bad things, or care about doing good, if there is no punishment for evil?' To him it seemed obvious that, if people did not believe there was an all-powerful God waiting to fry them if they stepped out of line, they would throw all moral restraint to the winds.

This attitude is found in all theistic religions. In a sense, it is found in Buddhist societies too, although it does not really fit in with the Buddhist view of things. Bhante has often commented that the gory detail in which some Buddhists speak about the torments of hell is really a means of social control, comparable to similar talk in the theistic religious traditions. It seems that most societies have considered it necessary to *frighten* the mass of people into morality (or at least into docility). I doubt whether such terror tactics are beneficial or even effective, but this is not the place to explore that question. The point is that this fear of a *punishing power* has got nothing to do with Buddhist morality as such. We should recognise that some of the difficulties that we typically face in our spiritual lives come from our inability to distinguish remorse from its near enemy, namely the fear of losing love and acceptance, or of being punished (or some poisonous brew concocted from the two).

One way in which such fear harms us is through seeking to escape it in the wrong way. In trying to get free from the cowed state of dependence arising from our conditioning, we can go too far and start to distrust *all* feelings of remorse. We may even try to rid ourselves of skilful remorse. Following this logic, we can, if we are not careful, end up doing something immoral for apparently moral reasons – justifying acts of moral rebellion on the grounds that we are breaking free from our conditioning. A lot of unskilful behaviour gets justified on the grounds of 'authenticity' or 'spontaneity'. A concern to be authentic or spontaneous can be valid of course, but I suspect that sometimes it is a smokescreen for moral laziness, shielding various moral weaknesses such as drug taking, sexual misconduct, harsh speech, or almost any breach of the precepts. Perhaps most of the unskilful things that get done behind this smokescreen are not too serious. Mostly they are just crude. Nevertheless, they can hamper our spiritual progress significantly.

The first step to clarifying this or any confusion about the value of remorse is to understand that there are several kinds of *kaukrtya*, as I have explained, and that one of them is actually skilful. Obviously the three different kinds of remorse require a different response. We should aim to clear up functional remorse in a functional way, as and when it arises. As for false or neurotic remorse, we need to learn to identify it and gradually free ourselves from it, without reacting against it indiscriminately in the name of authenticity. *Ethical* remorse is an expression of *sraddha* and we need to cultivate it.

The Guardians of the World

Ethical remorse has two aspects, and consideration of these brings us back to our starting point. The two aspects are, in fact, the second and third of the first three positive mental events (the first, you remember, was *sraddha*). We now come to *hri*, and *apatrapya*.

Hri is remorse arising from the recognition that one has fallen short in relation to one's own, independent sense of right and wrong. *Apatrapya* is similar to *hri* but it arises when, in our imagination, we view our unskilful action through the eyes of someone we deeply respect. Thus, for *apatrapya* to exist, there must be someone whom we admire and look up to because he or she is a good, moral person. The strength of the feeling of *apatrapya* will obviously depend on (among other things) the degree to which we actually know such an individual personally. The better we know them, the more acute will be our sense of their goodness, and hence the more powerful the feeling of *apatrapya* when we do wrong. *Apatrapya* is therefore likely to be felt by those who have close spiritual friends.

It is not that we fear that they would be angry or withdraw love from us. Such a fear would constitute the intrusion of false remorse. We might even know that they would show compassion for us. Nevertheless, our unskilful actions make us feel unworthy of them, and so put a distance between us and them. Of course, *apatrapya* may get muddled up with social conformity and the desire for approval from authority figures. This is a real problem, especially in social contexts where strict conformity to the norms of the group is enforced. But real *apatrapya* is based on *sraddha*, and is not the same as fear of punishment or of losing someone's love, even though it may be muddled up with such feelings in the same person.

The feelings of hri or apatrapya are positive but painful. Indeed, they can be very painful if our ethical breach is serious. The feelings may therefore be difficult to confront and acknowledge. But if we try to deny them, they will be driven inwards and produce despondency and self-loathing. Then, paradoxically, they can lead us into further unskilful behaviour, especially if, denying a fault in ourselves, we start to see it in other people and dislike them for it. This makes it all the more important to face up to hri and apatrapya and give them their proper expression through confession.

I have been speaking of hri and apatrapya as two forms of the actual *feeling* of remorse or kaukrtya. However, we can also think of them as the *faculties* that guard us against things that *would cause* the arising of that feeling. They are our ethical antennae, so to speak, which warn us of the potential for remorse in any unskilful action we find ourselves contemplating. It is in this sense that they are called the *lokapalas* or 'guardians of the world'. By guarding the human mind against actions that would cause remorse, they guard the world from harm.

The suppression or denial of hri or apatrapya is known as *ahrikya* and *anapatrapya*. Ahrikya is literally 'shamelessness'. The word does not, however, suggest the complete *absence* of conscience but rather the *suppression* of an existing moral intuition. Sometimes, we feel a twinge of conscience about doing something unskilful, but refuse to acknowledge it, and instead indulge the unskilful impulse. Ahrikya is thus a sort of shrugging off of shame. Every unskilful act has an element of ahrikya as part of its accompanying mental state. Anapatrapya is the same thing in relation to those we respect. Sometimes we know, in acting unskilfully, that we are estranging ourselves from friends that we love and respect, but we do it anyway, perhaps even flaunting the unskilful act, as for example in boasting about getting drunk to someone who we know will find it painful to hear it. In general, the flaunting of unskilfulness is quite a strong feature of modern culture. It flows, I think, from the modern reaction to false remorse and the consequent desire to throw off a moral system based on fear and guilt. But of course, it does not lead to any real liberation from fear but only to confusion and a coarsening of the moral sensibility.

Through my study of such texts as *Know your Mind* and the *Bodhisattvabhumi*, I began to realise the importance of hri and apatrapya, and to see that I needed to become more mindful of them in my own day to day life. Indeed, it became clear to me that not only mindfulness, but also an active and systematic effort to *cultivate* them was called for, as the basis of producing other positive mental events.

It also dawned on me that apatrapya, rather than hri, was in the first instance the key to further spiritual progress. I noticed that my own moral sense was not strong enough to uproot certain kinds of habitual behaviour, but if my spiritual friends became aware of it, I could work on it more effectively. Of course, this was a bit humiliating, because one likes to think that one is motivated from within. But I saw that the primacy of apatrapya constituted an important psychological and spiritual truth, something crucial to spiritual progress. I recognised that, hitherto, I had not given sufficient attention to this fact. But in the *Bodhisattvabhumi*, Asanga explicitly puts apatrapya first, in the sense that it is more powerful than hri. Apatrapya is more valuable at first because our sense of the Good tends to become clearer and stronger in our response to our mature spiritual friends than it can be in isolation. I think this remains true until we have attained quite a high level of spiritual maturity.

The cultivation of apatrapya does not mean losing psychological autonomy, or living one's spiritual life vicariously. At bottom, of course, hri and apatrapya are the same thing. They are both branches on the trunk of sraddha, which is rooted in the perception of reality. Sraddha perceives, however dimly, the *truth* of the human condition and - as part of that - what is *truly good*. So by nurturing apatrapya in our hearts, we are - far from falling into a state of psychological dependence on others - actually developing a stronger connection with reality, and so becoming more 'real' ourselves, and hence stronger and more independent.

Apatrapya is easily brought to bear on what we do publicly, because our spiritual friends may witness such public actions, or come to hear of them. However, apatrapya can have an even deeper positive effect on us if we use it as a tool for transforming what I call the *morality of the private moment*. I am not only referring here to mental states - although that is part of it - but also to all those actions that we conceal from others - or at least from our spiritual friends. Our private moments may not contain anything very terrible, but often they do conceal things that slow down or obstruct our spiritual progress in ways we don't fully recognise.

When we are alone, or think we are, we tend to feel free to indulge any of a potentially infinite range of unskilful impulses. This might include anything from neurotic eating to reading our roommate's letters without his permission. Sometimes the action itself may not be the real moral issue as much as the habit of concealment that shrouds it. Most of us have our strategies for hiding some aspect of our behaviour from the attention of our friends and even from our own full reflective scrutiny. It might be by secrecy, or by contriving things so that nobody asks us questions about certain topics, or by telling half-truths. By the habitual practice of confession with our spiritual friends, we can bring the light of apatrapya to shine on the morality of the private moment. We thereby start dismantling many barriers that restrain our 'growth in the Noble Ones' Discipline'.

Remorse and Confession as Part of the Spiral Path

A strange and paradoxical fact about ethical remorse is that both the presence and the absence of it are positive mental events. Its presence is a manifestation of the primary positive event, namely sraddha. It is the sign that our sraddha is strong enough to strike sparks from its repeated collisions with our negative tendencies. Yet the absence of ethical kaukrtya - that is, genuine freedom from it (not just the deadening or denial of it) is also highly positive, in that it indicates a very high level of ethical purity. It means that our negative tendencies have been largely destroyed by the repeated impacts of faith. Presumably even in this state, the absence of remorse is not total, since absolute skilfulness is only attained with full Enlightenment. However, any remorse that does arise is likely to be in relation to minor and subtle ethical failings, and to be resolved very quickly.

The lucid and happy state that arises when one has purified one's consciousness ethically is known as *pamojja* (Sanskrit *pramodya*), which means 'delight'. In *The Three Jewels*, Bhante describes this as 'the feeling experienced on becoming aware that one has nothing with which to reproach oneself as to morals'. It is characterised, he tells us, by 'a sense of unity, harmony and integration'. Pamojja is the key to the question that I set myself at the start of this enquiry, the question of how to make the transition from the first to the second great stage of the Threefold Way of Morality, Concentration and Wisdom. The link between Morality and Concentration can be understood in

terms of the cultivation of pamojja. This can be made even clearer by reference to the spiral path of the positive *nidanas* or 'links'.

Most of us are familiar with the sequence of positive *nidanas* that starts with *dukkha* – the awareness of suffering and the unsatisfactory nature of mundane existence. *Sraddha* arises in dependence on this awareness. The third stage, in this version of the *nidanas* is pamojja, which arises on the basis of *sraddha*. Pamojja is of vital importance, because from it emerge, in sequence, the mental factors that are integral to the experience of the *dhyanas*, firstly *piti* (joy or rapture), *passadhi* (calmness, tranquillity, or serenity), and *sukha* (bliss). All these culminate in that total, relaxed, one-pointed concentration of the mind that is called *samadhi*, which, of course, is the foundation of Transcendental realisation.

However, without some understanding of the area I am exploring in this paper, the transition from *sraddha* to pamojja is bound to seem a leap. How exactly does one get from faith to delight? The precise relationship between the two is drawn out a little more in another, less well-known version of the positive *nidanas*. This version starts with *sila*, which, of course, is 'ethics' or '(skilful) behaviour'. Then, in dependence on the practice of *sila* there arises *avipatisara*, which means 'freedom from remorse'. Thirdly, from *avipatisara*, comes pamojja. It seems that, in this list, pamojja (in the sense explained by Bhante in the quotation above) has been sub-divided into two aspects, namely *avipatisara* and pamojja itself. Presumably, in this context, *avipatisara* is the cause, while pamojja is the effect. Or perhaps we could interpret it by saying that *avipatisara* denotes the *fact* of freedom, and pamojja expresses the way it *feels*.

If we synthesise the two versions of the *nidana* sequence, we get the sequence: *dukkha, sraddha, sila, avipatisara, pamojja*. The two 'new' links - *sila* and *avipatisara* – represent the whole territory under discussion in this article. To recapitulate, we can say that *sraddha* gives rise to *sila*, i.e. to a strong ethical awareness, constituted by the faculties of *hri* and *apatrapya*. Through the exercise of these faculties (and taking the precepts as our guiding principles, of course) we become more and more receptive to the experience of ethical *kaukrtya* or remorse. We use *kaukrtya* to recognise our unskilfulness and purify ourselves of it through the practice of confession. By this practice we progressively eliminate ever more subtle forms of unskilfulness, until we gradually reach a state in which remorse itself is also eliminated, or rather arises in only minor forms and then is quickly resolved. As a result, a sense of freedom (*avipatisara*) starts to arise, which gradually intensifies into delight (*pamojja*). This in turn functions as the basis for higher states of consciousness.

Once we have effectively gone for Refuge what comes next? There is an important sense in which *pamojja* should be the immediate spiritual goal, because if we can develop pamojja to any significant degree, we will find that we can open the doorway to higher meditative states much more easily and regularly. And *sila* (meaning the process summarised in the last paragraph) is the vessel in which we can make the journey from *sraddha* to pamojja.

Avipatisara is not just a sense of freedom but also a sense of *confidence*. If you feel ethically innocent it gives you great confidence. The more deeply you feel that innocence and clarity of conscience, the more confident you are. As I have already remarked, one often hears people complaining about lack of confidence. They recognise it as a problem but tend to approach it in narrowly psychological terms through working on their self-esteem and so on. However useful this

may be in some cases, I think they could often gain even more by thinking in terms of developing avipatisara and pamojja through the approach I have described here. The traditional Buddhist methods for dealing with despondency or lack of confidence consist in performing meritorious actions (including performing puja and making offerings) and *ethical purification by means of confession*.

The Buddha himself embodied confidence to a remarkable degree. He was able to stand up in any assembly and (in the traditional metaphor) roar his 'lion's roar' – his *sinhanada*. In any situation, he could speak fearlessly, appropriately, lucidly and with a calm but ringing conviction. The basis of this confidence – the first of the 'four confidences' possessed by the Buddha – was his knowledge that he *had done nothing that anyone could rightly reproach him for*. Freedom from remorse is the root of confidence in every sense of the word, from mundane social self-assurance to spiritual certitude.

The practice of confession

I have said quite a lot about three of the four aspects of confession, namely *making amends*, *undertaking restraint*, and *seeing the fault as such*. One might wonder whether the remaining aspect – actually confessing – is strictly necessary. Some people might argue that, if we do the other three, then everything essential has been done. Why should it be necessary to communicate one's acknowledgement of the fault in words to someone else?

We must remember, however, that the positive mental events or nidanas that I have been discussing – remorse, hri, apatrapya, avipatisara and pamojja – all ultimately flow from sraddha, and are aspects of going for Refuge. Our ethical life is an aspect of our Going for Refuge, and our going for Refuge is much more than just a private taste or interest, pursued in isolation. By its very nature it has an aspect of communication. It is inseparable from spiritual friendship and the spiritual community. As members of the spiritual community, we are trying to build intimate spiritual friendships on the basis of shared ideals.

Viewed as an aspect of the *Path*, spiritual friendship means that one wants to help one's friends to progress in their spiritual lives, and to be helped by them similarly in one's own. Moral transparency is essential to such mutual moral help. Viewed as an aspect of the *Goal* (that is, of Enlightenment), spiritual friendship implies breaking down the barriers that separate 'self' from 'other'. Consequently, secrets and private concerns can, as a general rule, have no place in our relations with our spiritual friends, especially with our closest friends and in relation to ethical matters. To have such secrets would contradict the foundation on which the friendship is based. We aim, like Anuruddha and his friends, to be 'of one mind'.

Confession is therefore part of the shared moral and spiritual enterprise of going for Refuge. In addition to this, the inner process of *seeing the fault as such* only finds completion in actual confession. This is the concomitant of a larger psychological truth, namely that our thoughts do not become fully crystallised until they are communicated. In order to communicate them we have to give them a definite shape, which they cannot have before utterance. It is only in the process of confession that the nature of the fault and our attitude towards it finally become fully clear, even to

our own view. By being shared with another person, our thoughts and feelings enter the objective world, whereas, if left unspoken, they remain to some extent undetermined – tentative and provisional.

For communication to take place, something must not only be uttered but also be *heard* by someone else. We only feel that we have communicated something if we sense that the other person has not just ‘heard’ our words with bodily ears, but also sympathetically understood and accepted them. For this reason, it is meaningless to confess to someone who does not share our spiritual and ethical perspective, however intimate we might be with that person in other ways. Mostly, he or she would just laugh and say, ‘Don’t be so hard on yourself!’ The only people who can really *receive* our confessions are our spiritual friends – people practising with us in the same spiritual context and sharing the same ethical perspective. And even among these, it is only with those who have a certain degree of commitment and maturity that one can be confident that a genuine context for confession exists.

For effective confession, there must be effective going for Refuge. This means that, in the FWBO, confession as a regular part of one's spiritual practice is appropriate for Order members. This is why, some years ago, we introduced the practice of confession as part of the ordination course. Naturally, if others want to experiment with it, they are welcome to try, especially those who are seeking ordination.

For Order members, the natural context for the practice of confession is the chapter. The chapter is the basic unit of the Order. Weekly chapter meetings are meant to provide a regular context in which Order members meet and communicate with one another *as Order members*. Sradha is the common factor that unites the members of a chapter, and it should therefore be the basis of communication in chapter meetings. There are, of course, many ways in which sradha can be communicated, but as I have tried to show, the primary natural expression of sradha is through a heightened ethical sense and the experience of *kaukrtya*. It would therefore be strange if confession was not a significant element of the life of a chapter.

I have spoken of the need to ‘shine the light of *apatrapya*’ on the morality of the private moment. *Apatrapya* is ‘shame through respect of the wise’. Members of a chapter may all be at a similar level of maturity, but they all have their special strengths. By sharing insights, a chapter can *collectively* function like a ‘wiser’ spiritual friend to each individual member. Some while ago, I decided to use my own chapter in this way as a means to achieving greater clarity and progress in my own ethical life, by means of confession. In addition, my friend Sona and I agreed to supplement this by making daily confessions to each other. Naturally, when one starts to open up the secrets of one’s private moments in this way, one has to struggle with the resistance caused by feelings of embarrassment. But the results are immensely rewarding in many ways. Breaking through this embarrassment also allows one to enter into a much deeper trust and intimacy with one’s spiritual friends.

Earlier, I stressed the importance of *making amends* and *undertaking restraint for the future*, as integral parts of confession. With regard to both of these things, the chapter can play an important role in helping its members to make effective confessions. Where relevant, for example, the chapter can ask, ‘Have you done anything about the consequences of what you said or did? Is there

something that needs to be done to put right any harm that was caused?' Similarly, the chapter can help the individual Order member to analyse the conditions that lead to any serious or recurring ethical failing, to work out a strategy for avoiding its repetition, and subsequently to review the outcome of that strategy.

Participating in this process is the responsibility of each member of a chapter, both as someone who confesses and as someone who receives the confessions of other members. Indeed, it is a kind of duty, albeit a self-chosen duty, of course, flowing from one's own *Going for Refuge*: a duty not only to confess but also to help others make effective confessions. If the members of a chapter really take on this responsibility, individually and collectively, then I think the results will soon become apparent to them all. Everyone in the chapter will gradually start to feel a sense of making progress morally, a sense of taking steps forward – small perhaps, but perceptible and cumulatively significant – in their spiritual lives.