

A Talk on Intoxicants and Gambling

from the

Goṇasurā Dīpanī

Venerable Ledi Sayādaw

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Edited by
Bhikkhu Pesala

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Editor's Foreword

This is an extract from the Sayādaw's "*Goṇasurā Dīpanī* — A Manual on Cows and Intoxicants." It deals with the evils of gambling, horse-racing, and intoxicants. The section on meat-eating and the mistreatment of cows has been published separately as "Cow Dhamma."

Intoxication is a serious social evil. The fifth Buddhist precept enjoins us to "abstain from intoxicants, which cause heedlessness." Heedlessness (*paṃāda*) is a euphemism for intoxication and sensual indulgence. The Buddha said that while he was a young man he gave up all intoxication: "On seeing an old man, all intoxication with youth vanished from me. On seeing a sick man, all intoxication with health vanished from me. On seeing a dead man, all intoxication with life vanished from me." Even when perfectly sober, most people are intoxicated with sensual pleasures, youth, health, or life, and it is hard for them to realise how they are trapped by death.

In the Noble One's discipline, dancing is likened to madness, singing to lamentation, and laughter to childishness. The excitement prevalent at many sports events is also a kind of intoxication. Would anyone chase a ball around or watch others do it, if not intoxicated in some way? Most sports do not involve evil kamma, but would it not be wiser to redirect those efforts to charity work?

Evil kamma is made whenever one supports and encourages the evil deeds of others. Fox-hunting, fishing, horse-racing, boxing, *etc.*, all encourage violence of one kind or another. Football, rugby, ice-hockey, and other contact sports also involve incidental violence and injury, but that is not their aim, so one will not make evil kamma unless one approves of violent tactics contrary to the spirit of fair play. Racing with vehicles does not intentionally inflict suffering on animals, but it does involve a kind of madness that is remote from nibbāna.

Gambling is motivated by greed and discontent, which means unwholesome kamma. Whatever one can earn by honest labour should be used to provide for one's family or to practise charity. By living within one's means, one will keep out of debt.

To dwell on the evil consequences of intoxicants is barely necessary, for they are well-known. How much better would society be if we campaigned against alcohol consumption as much as we do against

smoking? Instead of talking about legalising the use of marijuana, we should be teaching the next generation that alcohol consumption is socially unacceptable. How many riots, assaults, and accidents have been fuelled by alcohol? What would the cost savings be to the NHS if we could reduce alcohol consumption by half? How many hours of police time are wasted on incidents involving football louts, midnight revelers, and drunken drivers? What is the financial and social cost of drug abuse? How many working hours are lost due to hangovers?

True Buddhists are Teetotallers, who abhor violence, noise, and passion. They would applaud the spirit expressed in the *Desiderata*:-

“Go placidly amid the noise and haste,
and remember what peace there may be in silence.”

“Avoid loud and aggressive people,
they are vexations to the spirit.”

Buddhists are peace-loving and non-violent. As the Sayādaw points out, one makes bad kamma in four ways: doing it oneself, urging others to do it, approving of it, or speaking in praise of it. Cruel sports such as fox-hunting, bull-fighting, and game-shooting are totally unacceptable to Buddhists. They should all be made illegal, since they involve gross and needless cruelty to animals.

Horse-racing is less cruel, but it should be strictly regulated to reduce injury and cruelty. Whips should be banned, and the height of fences should be reduced, to reduce the danger to the horses. Wild horses run flat-out only to avoid death from predators.

Sports such as boxing and professional wrestling condone violence. Most Buddhists would regard such sports as coarse and uncivilised. Sumo wrestling, Kendo, T'ai Chi Chuan, and Judo are more civilised combat sports that originated in Buddhist countries. Martial arts for self-defence can teach youngsters how to curb and channel their aggression, without encouraging violence.

The portrayal of violence in films or on TV means unwholesome kamma for those involved in producing it, and for those who enjoy watching it. The portrayal of immorality, sex, and violence are

undoubtedly a bad influence, and we humans are much more impressionable than we will ever admit. If we were not, advertisers would soon go out of business.

The [Asch Experiment](#) was conducted on students of psychology — intelligent young adults, whom one might expect would not be too impressionable. All of the students, except for the test subjects, were secretly told to speak the truth at first, but later to lie, when asked which of a series of lines drawn on a card shown by the tester was longest. The camera recording the experiment showed that the test subjects at first answered truthfully, but became increasingly embarrassed when their answers conflicted with the rest of the group, and later lied to avoid being the 'odd-man-out.' This experiment proved that intelligent people can easily be coerced into doing what is immoral, stupid, or wrong, simply by exerting a little peer pressure. Commercial pressures, subversive literature, political 'spin,' and media 'hype,' have conspired to undermine spiritual values in the modern world.

I would say that to reverse this trend is now impossible, not only in the west, but also in Buddhist countries. The only remedy is to question traditional practices, and to pursue a resolute solitary course, guided by Buddhist principles and enlightened meditation teachers.

Wise people should protect their spiritual well-being. They should make a careful study of the Buddha's teachings and, having understood the true Dhamma, they should practise insight meditation intensively. Constant, uninterrupted mindfulness is the only way to escape from preconceived notions formed by innate delusion, and reinforced by cultural conditioning. The Buddha had to reinterpret and overturn the traditional beliefs of his time, which were hardened by centuries of tradition.

Human nature has not changed since the Buddha's time. Traditionalists still emphasise customs that have little to do with the way to nibbāna, and neglect to practise insight meditation. That is why we can still find the ugly face of casteism and racial prejudice in Buddhist countries. In spite of the Buddha's compassionate teaching, human rights abuses, corruption, and nepotism are widespread in the Buddhist countries of Asia. America and the United Kingdom are

popular destinations for migrants, in spite of social problems, because of their good record on human rights, open democracy, and social and religious freedoms.

We can expel intoxication, transcend superstition, overcome doubt, and enter the way to liberation, only if we cultivate knowledge and wisdom.

Bhikkhu Pesala

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A Talk on Intoxicants and Gambling

I will teach about abstinence from alcoholic drink and drugs. In the Book of the Eights of the Gradual Sayings, the Buddha teaches:

“Monks, drinking intoxicants, if done frequently or habitually, leads to rebirth in hell, rebirth as an animal or as a hungry ghost. At the very least, the result of this evil deed when born as a human being is that one becomes a mad person.”¹

Taking intoxicants, being unwholesome kamma, has two evil consequences: unfortunate rebirth in the future, and bad consequences in the present life. This means suffering in hell and long term bad effects in the present life. So the effect of taking intoxicants or drugs is serious as it leads to the four states of misery: hell, animals, ghosts, and demons. The present evil effect, among others, is at least becoming mad. Among the consequences of insanity are neurosis, paranoia, schizophrenia, psychosis, etc. So the present results are also serious, just like future miserable rebirths.

Why do intoxicants cause rebirth in hell in future lives? The reason is that drinking alcohol and taking drugs promotes fresh evil kamma. Evil kamma leads to hell. Moreover, the doors of opportunity are opened by these evil deeds for past evil kammas to give their appropriate effects. Thus one suffers in hell. Please note that everyone has done evil deeds in their previous existences so, at present, wholesome deeds should be done.

New Evil Kamma

Taking intoxicants and mind-altering drugs means making fresh evil kamma because it promotes greed, hatred, and delusion. It also supports wrong views, which urge one to do new evil kammas. The five hindrances — lust, anger, dullness, restlessness, and doubt — are sustained and developed. Intoxicants damage genes and chromosomes. They also burn the mind and consciousness. So taking intoxicants

¹ A.iv.247, Duccaritavipāka Sutta. “*Surāmerayapānaṃ, bhikkhave, āseviṭaṃ bhāviṭaṃ bahulikataṃ nirayaśaṃvattanikaṃ tiracchānāyoniśaṃvattanikaṃ pettivisayaśaṃvattanikaṃ. Yo sabbalahuso surāmerayapānassa vipāko, manussabhūtaṃ ummattakaśaṃvattaniko hoti*”ti.

affects the mental realm, which has profound significance. Evil bodily and vocal acts follow as a result of drunkenness. Killing, lying, abusing, etc., are the usual results of taking alcohol.

Drunkards always do bodily, vocal, and mental misdeeds, which are the ten evil kammās. So taking alcohol multiplies daily the seeds of future suffering in hell, and the burden of evil and guilt. There is little doubt that a drunkard will be reborn in one of the lower realms after death, since he or she accumulates evil kamma daily. He or she is demented in the present life, and does other serious unwholesome kamma in future lives. Counteractive kamma of this type leads to suffering in the lower realms. The burden of evil kamma is heavy as the wrong-doing is serious, and present evil begets future evil too.

Past Evil Deeds

Everyone has done many kinds of evils in past lives while wandering in the rounds of existence, as one seldom hears the true Dhamma. These precious chances are very rare. Meeting Noble Ones is very rare, possible only once in a thousand or ten thousand existences. In past lives one did various evils and misdeeds in thought, speech, and deed. Lives of crime, guilt, and evil lead to the realms of suffering. The likelihood of this result is increased by drinking alcohol. The breaking of this moral precept means supporting other past evil deeds that one has already done. Past evil deeds resemble robbers and murderers who stay near a village to commit crimes. Transgression of this precept gives impetus to evil deeds: past, present, or future. So the evil kamma of taking alcohol resembles receivers of stolen goods who live in the village. Robbers get their chance due to the receivers of stolen goods. Villages are destroyed by them.

Likewise, as long as the evil of taking intoxicants remains, there will be chances for the previous evil deeds to mature. People have to take rebirth in various hells when past misdeeds mature. Everyone has also done some good deeds in their past lives, but these good deeds have no chance to mature due to the present evil kamma. If one dies without abandoning this evil, one will not escape from the results of the past evil kamma. Certainly one will

suffer in hell. In this sense, drinking alcohol certainly brings about hell in the next life. Because serious past evil karmas get a chance to give their results, one reaches Roruva hell. In Roruva are two hells: Jālaroruva and Dhūmaroruva.

Jālaroruva is the fourth of eight great hells for serious crimes. It is beneath this earth and is just like a deep, wide cave of molten iron. Gamblers and drunkards suffer in this hell after their death. Their bodies resemble mountains. Their sense-doors look like streams. Streams of hot iron enter their mouths, noses, and ears. Their bodies are scorched by burning hot liquids without let up. For one hundred thousand years or more they have to endure intense suffering. No chance of happiness exists. So those who take alcohol must know about this danger. They should heed the Buddha's warning.

Dhūmaroruva exists beneath Jālaroruva. It looks like a great cave with a molten iron base. Those who indulge in drugs, heroin, marijuana, hashish, cocaine, *etc.*, after their death, reach this hell. Their bodies look like mountains. Their eyes, ears, and nose resemble running streams. Hot and acrid smoke enters through the nine orifices to the interior of the body. They suffer this torture for at least one hundred thousand years. Bodily and mental pain are so intense that it defies description. Addicts should fear this danger and reform their behaviour.

The Present Suffering

Now I will explain the suffering prevailing in the present life. All Buddhists, seeing the woes and dangers of *saṃsāra* with foresight, have to rely on almsgiving, observance of moral precepts, and mental discipline. For what benefits? In this era, five Buddhas teach the true Dhamma. Four Buddhas have already appeared. In the future, Metteyya Buddha will be the last to attain supreme wisdom and teach the Dhamma. After that there will be many eras without any Buddhas or their teaching. To pay respects to the coming Metteyya in this world and gain the path, its fruition, and nibbāna, everyone should perform charitable deeds, observe moral precepts, and practise meditation. These good supportive karmas will result in seeing Metteyya Buddha.

After Metteyya Buddha's era, the world will be engulfed in a long era of darkness when no true teaching is available for liberation. Drug addicts, being deluded, will not be able to see Metteyya Buddha.

A further explanation will be given. Drugs cause madness and phobia. They destroy the healthy state of mind. They give false peace to some extent, but their side-effects do serious harm to the mind and body. Addicts' bodies are full of toxins, and deteriorate physically. Mentally, the effects of drugs make the mind vulnerable to evil forces. The mind is clouded by drugs, so it inclines toward sensual pleasures and wrong views.

Those who take alcohol and drugs, become mentally disturbed. Addicts become dependent on alcohol and drugs for mental peace, and cannot bear to be without them. When they fail to get them, their minds yearn for more. Their befuddled minds long for these poisons. Even if alcoholics and drug addicts perform some meritorious deeds, they cannot attain pure deeds and pure results because of their weak minds. Even past good deeds become weak and their effects diminish. Although meritorious deeds normally produce good results a thousandfold, they cannot fulfil their potential due to this mental impurity.

Drinking Intoxicants

If one takes alcohol, the mind is always clouded by bad thoughts. Even a good person's mind changes. The madness of intoxication corrupts the heart. A civilised state of mind is impossible as drunkenness wreaks havoc. Only one thought can exist in the mental process at any one time. Memories of good deeds done previously cannot enter the mind process. Every time alcohol is taken, positive thoughts are lost. The mind is permeated with confusion, negligence, heedlessness, and coarseness leading to various evil deeds. This state of mind overwhelms and inhibits past good deeds, which cannot produce any good results.

The Weakening of Character

Bad behaviour weakens good character. Alcohol drives away pure thoughts one has accumulated. At present too it causes madness by

disrupting rational thinking. So the Pāli text proclaims the present bad effect with the words “*Ummattaka saṃvattaniko.*” The minimum effect of habitual drinking is to become confused or deluded. What is more serious, besides a confused mind, is that taking alcohol prevents good rebirths in human and divine worlds. This evil is a serious unwholesome kamma that causes rebirth in the wombs of savages. One has to dwell in uncivilised places due to one’s indulgence. Even if, due to some good kamma, they reach the realm of deities, habitual drinkers are mad gods, cruel gods, devilish gods, or inferior gods.

Cruel Gods

Who are the cruel gods? In this world are demons, hungry ghosts, and inferior earth-bound deities. Spirits and demons live on islands, in wildernesses, and other remote places. Since drunkards and habitual drinkers are reborn in such existences, they undergo rebirths in the states of loss due to further bad kamma. Plainly, they will not meet Metteyya Buddha to hear the true Dhamma. Those who do not abstain from alcohol, even though they call themselves Buddhists, wander on in a series of low existences due to the inexorable Law of Kamma.

The Reformation of Character

For the rehabilitation of addicts and habitual drinkers I will show how to eradicate bad kamma. This cure is available during the Buddha’s dispensation.

First, one must undertake the precept to practise restraint from intoxicants as follows: “*Surā-meraya-majja-pamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi.*” Every day this precept must be recited and observed carefully. It is good to repeat it many times every day to remind oneself of the importance of abstinence from alcohol and drugs. A moral attitude appears in the mind.

Next, one should learn by heart the nine chapters of the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*. One should discuss the contents, factors, and meaning of this brief *Abhidhamma* Manual. If you find it hard to memorise the entire book, at least the first three chapters must be recited daily. Those who can, should memorise the sixth to eighth

chapters. Everyone should be able to memorise the [Summary of Conditional Relations](#) (*Paccayaniddeso*) so that the power of Conditional Relations overwhelms the body and mind for the attainment of good. The purpose is to get concentration and purity of conduct, purging alcohol and drugs in the noble endeavour.¹

These two noble efforts must be practised till death because past bad deeds (taking drinks and drugs) will be erased and purified completely by the power of the Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha or Conditional Relations. The mind is permeated with the sublime and potent Abhidhamma recitations and reflections. Unwholesome states are totally eradicated through concentrated effort and recitation of the Dhamma, just as water purifies dirt. Why is it so effective and potent? The transgression of the precepts by taking alcohol and drugs is not a basic evil leading to hell. It is just a secondary evil, a misdeed that allows other evils to occur. Because it is just a supportive bad kamma, not a basic evil leading to rebirth in the lower realms, it can be expunged by wholesome deeds. One is able to escape fairly easily from the future consequences and present suffering of this evil deed.

The Evils of Horse-racing and Gambling

Many countries allow horse-racing, camel-racing, dog-racing, and so on. These race courses are centres for gambling. The jockeys who ride in such races should take heed of the following Pāḷi Text:

“Friend, I saw a hungry ghost when I descended from the Gijjhakūṭa mountain. This flying ghost bore sharp, thorny hairs. Many thorns, like iron spikes, penetrated his body. They assailed his body, piercing him repeatedly. So this hungry ghost screamed aloud due to the pain. Oh monks! This victim is receiving the due result of his kamma. In the past life he drove draught animals without mercy. He struck them with whips

¹ If one finds it hard to memorize the Abhidhamma, one can learn any other text that one likes such as the Maṅgala Sutta, or the meditation on loving-kindness. If the mind is very weak due to prolonged alcohol abuse, it would be sufficient to study and memorize a single verse, which one should recite repeatedly for half an hour or so. When one has learnt it by heart, the meaning of each word should be learnt too, then reflected on deeply as one recites it. Positive thoughts are powerful wholesome kamma that mitigate the effects of evil kamma. (ed.)

and spikes when he drove carts. So he is now suffering as a result. That person, when he was about to die, saw rebirth signs of pointed spears, iron sticks, thorny sticks. When he passed away he was reborn as a hungry ghost with thorny, sharp-pointed hairs on the body.” (*Pārājika Aṭṭhakathā*)

So jockeys competing in horse-races, camel-races, equestrian sports, etc., should heed the Buddha’s warning. Kamma has its just results. Drivers and riders must suffer for their evil deeds, either here or hereafter.

Gamblers and Spectators

In every evil deed, four factors incur guilt and blame. In the Book of Tens, four factors are mentioned for each of the ten evil deeds such as killing sentient beings:

*“Attanā ca pāṇātīpātī hoti, parañca pāṇātīpāte samādapeti, pāṇātīpāte ca samanuiṅṅo hoti, pāṇātīpātassa ca vaṇṇaṃ bhāsati.”*¹

1. He does the misdeed himself.
2. He helps or urges others to do it.
3. He allows it to happen or approves of it.
4. He speaks in praise of it.

These four persons share the guilt and blame, and the corresponding consequences.

Those who harm animals, either in competitive sports or in transportation, make evil kamma. Gamblers belong to three of the four above-mentioned categories. All Buddhists should shun the ten evil kammās, such as killing, stealing, etc. Each evil has four factors. Spectators who consent to or approve of cruel and harsh treatment of animals, suffer in hell or are reborn as hungry ghosts. Many such cases are mentioned in the Pāli texts. So spectators and gamblers should avoid all four factors of evil deeds by controlling the body and mind. Gamblers must give up the evil deed of betting that encourages, supports, and condones evil deeds done by others.

¹ A v 305

