

# Dhamma Education to Promote Happiness

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In his first instruction to the monks, the Buddha advised them to travel for the benefit, welfare and happiness of all, for showering forth compassion on gods and men alike. *Lokatthacariya* indicates the sense of moral activities directed and accelerated by moral consciousness for the well-being of the people. Thus the social education in early Buddhist tradition is a psycho-ethical concept initiated for the development of complete harmony within people in society, through a happy and proper balancing of spiritual and material gain.

According to the Buddha, one has to fulfill both aspects of moral precepts (*sila*), refraining and performance (*varitta and caraitta sila*). It means that one does not become a completely good moral person simply by refraining from bad deeds or by not doing anything at all; performing positive good deeds is also necessary. By social action I mean many kinds of actions intended to benefit humankind. This ranges from simple individual acts of charity, teaching and training, to organized kinds of service, and through various kinds of community development and political activity that work towards a better society.

## Ten Bases of Meritorious Deeds

These works for the social welfare manifest in ten ways. These ten are given here are commonly known as the ten bases of meritorious deeds (*punnakiriya vatthu*). It is recommended that these meritorious deeds, called *caritta sila* or social work be performed by every member of the society. The ten ways are as follows:

1. *Dana*: Giving, generosity. “When something is given to some one with moral volition is *dana*. It is the name of moral consciousness associated with *alobha, adosa* and *amoha*.”
2. *Sila*: Morality or good moral conduct.
3. *Bhavana*: Mental development.
4. *Apacayana*: It is the moral act of paying respect to the elders
5. *Veyyavacca*: Helping others.
6. *Pattidana*: Sharing merit.
7. *Pattanumodana*: Rejoicing in other’s merit by saying “Well done!”
8. *Dhamma savana*: Listening well to the Dhamma.
9. *Dhamma desana*: Expounding the Dhamma which promotes wisdom.
10. *Ditthijukamma*: Straightening of one’s view.

“There are, O monks, three bases of meritorious deeds by giving (*dana*), by virtue (*sila*), and by the development of meditation (*bhavana*)”.

From the evidence of the Buddha’s discourses, it is clear that early Buddhists were very much concerned with the creation of social conditions favourable to the individual cultivation of Buddhist values.

The Buddha himself is seen very much particular about rendering service to the sick. He said, “One who wishes to serve me, should serve the sick with sincere devotion.” In our complex society today does this not include the active advancement and the principles of a national health service? Serving the needy is regarded as one of the noble social works. The Buddhist scriptures indicate the general direction of

Buddhist social thinking. The references to social work are numerous in the Pali texts. Giving moral discourses, teaching is, of course, also a form of giving and helping. Teaching the Dhamma is one of the most valuable sources of learning open to all. Inciting others to killing, stealing, telling lie, or harsh speech, etc are regarded as most unsocial deeds. Teaching to refrain from such thing is vocally performed great social work.

The fourfold mental development of *brahmavihara*, namely *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita*, *upekkha* towards all living beings are the teaching which is most valuable. This kind of education can surely help cultivating and developing the mind. It can help in reducing selfishness which is the root of all the problems thus disharmony would be reduced and promote altruism, unity and brotherhood at the same time. This is called *brahmavihara*, the art of the noble living. This can be taken as subject of meditation, at that time it is called *brahmavihara bhavana* “the meditative developments of the sublime states.” Compassion and tolerance combined with wisdom is the key of social well-being. It is the direct correlation between feeling and behaviour. These social emotions are meant to regulate our attitude and physical behaviour towards others in society. It is clear that the Buddha intended to wander forth for the people from the very beginning of his missionary. At the end of the first rainy retreat the Buddha admonished to his first 60 arahant disciples in Varanasi in the Deer Park.

Wander forth, O bhikkhus, for the welfare of many, for the happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare and happiness of devas (deities) and humans. Let not two go the same way. Teach, O bhikkhus, the Dhamma that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end, with the right meaning and phrasing. Reveal the perfectly complete and purified holy life.

This is the Buddha’s idea of educating people to promote social harmony and peace by way of promoting education of the Dhamma. In order to educate people the teaching of the Dhamma is to be implemented in society regularly. Understanding this, the Buddha started his missionary by inculcating the education of the Dhamma and admonished his disciples to do so. Knowing the Dhamma, a person will try to live in accordance with the Dhamma and cause others to live in accordance with the Dhamma. In that way, great social work is done. *Sabba danam dhammdanam jinati*: “the gift of the Dhamma excels all other types of gift”. Much of today’s education emphasize how to make money only, and neglect to teach how to live a life happily and peaceful in accordance with the Dhamma. Then it happened they don’t know how to live a life peacefully.

Winston Churchill once said: “The first duty of a university is to teach wisdom, not trade; character, not technicalities.” Albert Einstein echoed the same tone when he said: “Try not to be a man of success but try to be a man of value.” They both agreed with the Buddha’s social idea. “It was a mission for delivering man from all kinds of suffering (*dukkha*). While its primary interest has been moral and spiritual, it was also related to other aspects of life including the social aspects which are concerned with here.”

However, there are some writers who try to represent the Buddha, as the teacher of *nibbana* only; and who had nothing to do with the mundane affairs of the contemporary society. For example, Dr. Edward J. Thomas observes that: “Buddhism appears first in history as an ascetic movement.” By ascetic movement he means the movement of monastic life, of monks and nuns. Likewise, Dr. Nilinaksha Dutt remarks that Buddhism was never a social movement. This is a gross misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the greatest teacher of humanity.

That the Buddha was more than a teacher of nibbana can be, for instance, understood from that fact when the Buddha appeared in India, the masses were suffering under the oppression of the caste system. The Buddha taught in many ways the removal of the social evils prevalent in the contemporary society. Wherever he went, the people were attracted by his noble personality and discussed the various problems connected with their lives: moral, spiritual, social or even domestic.

The instructions given in such ways by the Buddha and his disciples are invaluable. In the *Suttanipata* alone the *Dhaniya Sutta*, the *Kasibharadvaja Sutta*, the *Parabhava Sutta*, the *Vasala Sutta*, the *Metta Sutta*, the *Alavaka Sutta*, and the *Mangala Sutta* are examples for the instructions regarding the social education of life. There are also many such discourses given on all aspects of life in the *Suttanta Pitaka*.

The idea in Buddhism of serving the needs of the contemporary society was actually made explicit by Bhikkhuni Kundalakesi in her statement:

“I am living on the alms of the people but I owe no debt  
for I preach the Dhamma to the people in return.”

Let's promote the Dhamma to promote happiness!

Let's work together for the welfare of many!