

World Peace Ethics Contest



WORLD-PEC

Warm Hearted Family

A Handbook on How to Care for the Heart of the Family

The Warm Hearted Family



Love... the force behind a family
Togetherness... the source of warmth
Happiness... will surround your family 24 hours a day

This book shares with you many wonderful stories
that you may not have heard of before

Dhamma Talk by
Phrabhavanaviriyakhun
(Phra Phadet Dattajeevo)

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and The Exemplary Youth Development Foundation

The Warm Hearted Family

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Message from The Most Ven. Phrarajbhavanavisudh

On occasion of the Examination Day for the World Peace Ethics Contest 2007

Greetings to all contestants of the World Peace Ethics Contest 2007,

The teachings of the Lord Buddha are supreme and universal spiritual truths which are relevant and easy to put into practice for those of all nationalities, races, creeds and faiths. The more a person puts these teachings into practice, the more benefits will accrue to them and their family – and the more harmony and peace will be brought to society and the world at large.

This World Peace Ethics Contest is the first time an examination of its kind had allowed the general public to test their knowledge of the Buddha's teachings worldwide – nonetheless, I am certain that if contestants take time to reflect on the wisdom contained in the exam texts, it will be of great benefit to all – making your efforts in revision for this examination more than worthwhile – even though we all know that the trophies we are competing for can only go to a few.

As this is the inaugural World Peace Ethics Contest, I regard all of you who have agreed to participate as history-makers in the forging of World Peace in our world – you are pioneers in bringing forth the Ethics of World Peace to the international community – and you are trendsetters at this dawning of the new and brighter age of peace which humankind has awaited for so long. It is this spiritual knowledge that is the trailhead of a new path of hope for each of you and for the world as a whole.

Thus, may all of you be proud of taking an important part in this miraculous new future for the world.

Finally, on this auspicious occasion, I would like to take the opportunity to call upon the spiritual perfections of all the fully-enlightened Buddhas, the Paccekabuddhas and the arahants – past, present and future, the spiritual perfections of the Most Venerable Phramonkolthepmuni (Sodh Candasaro), the late Great Abbot of Wat Paknam and rediscoverer of the Dhammakaya Tradition and the spiritual perfections of Khun Yay Acharn Maharatana Chandra Khonnokyoong – that the combination of all of these spiritual perfections may bring all of you happiness and prosperity in life – that you may achieve success and fulfillment in every good thing that you wish for. May you be endowed with material wealth, retinue, beauty, attainment of the body of Enlightenment of the Buddha and easy mastery of the Dhammakaya Tradition in every lifetime until you can enter upon the Utmost Dhamma.



Preface

The Lord Buddha demonstrated that all the problems in this world originate from the defilements (kilesa) within us.

Similarly, family problems stem from the kilesa that resides in the couple. This starts when these two people, who love one another, decide to live together as husband and wife and agree to start a family.

When two people, who still possess kilesa, decide to cohabitate, they must make adjustments since they are both sharing their positive and negative attributes in that household. If they integrate their positive attributes, their union will be smooth. However, if they integrate their negative attributes their experience may be quite volatile. Then when they have children, no matter how many, their duties will increase. In addition to the responsibilities of being a husband and a wife, they will have the additional responsibilities of being parents.



The presence of the newborn will force the parents to work even harder, so they will have enough to care for the child. The more children they decide to have; the more their responsibilities will increase accordingly.

Kilesa is like a destructive disease that resides in every human mind from the time of birth. Even a one day old infant will have kilesa within. No one knows how the kilesa came to be within us, but it is embedded in every human being, even in our own children.

Whether the children will grow up to be good persons, or not, is dependent on the actions demonstrated by the parents in the process of raising them; by each bite of food, each drop of water and each ounce of milk. These are their methods of demonstrating the correct way to raise a child.

If we raise them properly, their kilesa will diminish, and virtues will develop within them. Then, the world will benefit from their existence. However, if we raise them incorrectly, their kilesa will grow and bad behavior will develop as a result. The world then will suffer from their existence.

The family problems of today will not be going away easily or any time soon. This stems from the parents' inability to control their children and their own kilesa.

In order to develop a warm family, one must have a system to train oneself to control and eliminate the kilesa. These are the three ways:

- 1) Control your kilesa so that your bad behavior does not spread onto other people.
- 2) Share your knowledge, capability and virtues with others.
- 3) Absorb the virtues of others, develop and incorporate these positive qualities within yourself.

This book presents a collection of knowledge, experiences and recommendations, which can be found in the teachings of Buddhism and those handed down to us from our ancestors, as methods that we can incorporate to create a warm and loving family.

The team behind this book hopes that everything found in this book can be a companion in helping every reader achieve success in creating a warm and happy family who supports one another with love and understanding. May everyone have a strong family foundation, complete with knowledge, capability, and virtues that will contribute to only more excellent and virtuous individuals in the generations to follow. They will be the representatives of their parents' knowledge, capability and virtues that will ultimately be useful to themselves and the world.

S. Phongsawasdi
And
The Exemplary Youth
Development Foundation



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May every family that reads this book, have happiness, success, and the resolve to always perform good deeds.

We dedicate the merits accrued through every written word in this book, to our great grandparents (Soon and Huay Phongsawasdi), and to all of our family members that have passed on. Their real life experiences, as illustrated in this book, were our inspiration.

May both of our great grandparents, all family members that have passed on before us, and the many people who have supported this book, receive happiness and success in this and future lives. For as long as we are reborn in the cycle of existence, may we be born with all the requisites needed for the Pursuit of Perfections in every lifetime, so we can defeat Mara, completely eradicate all defilements and enter Nibbana.

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Part One

Building The Family Foundation



Chapter 1

The Heart of the Family



When our hearts cease to function, it means we have passed away from this world. This is the same for the family. If the heart of the family stops functioning, the family has essentially died even if everyone lives in the same house. A strong, warm and healthy family is the highest achievement in a marriage. **But what is most important in setting up a family? It is crucial for two loving people to understand this before they start a family.**

The following subject matter is very important for all families; whoever wants to get married, whoever wants to have children, whoever wants to have a husband or a wife must study these pages to gain a deep understanding. This is because all problems that develop in a family revolve around these issues. If they study this text carefully, they will benefit greatly. But if they lack an understanding of this, they will face many troubles. This knowledge is called, “**Dhamma for Laypersons** (*Gharāvās-dhamma*) : **the Vital Heart of a Stable Family.**’

A Family’s Typical Problems

Before a person gets married, he/she already has a set of imperfections. But when two people form a family, they are unable to avoid conflict arising from these imperfections. Thus, any family who lacks even one element of the Dhamma for Laypersons – the four elements being **truthfulness (*Sacca*)**, **self-control (*Dama*)**, **endurance (*Khanti*)**, and **sacrifice (*Cāga*)** – will certainly experience one or more of four problems:

- 1) **The problem of suspicion.**
- 2) **The problem of foolishness, of not keeping up with the world, people, or surrendering to defilements.**
- 3) **The problem of being tired of each other.**
- 4) **The problem of selfishness.**

It is best not to allow these four major problems to arise in the family. If they begin to materialize, then quickly find a solution so that they do not increase in magnitude. These very problems can escalate to such a degree that they can become persistent and endless.

Problem #1: The problem of suspicion.

In today’s world, although people may be part of the same family, a typical disease that develops is **suspicion**.

It is not only between husband and wife that suspicion increases, and not only among siblings, but there is also suspicion between parents and children. So there is no need to even mention others who are not part of the same bloodline or people who are not in the same family. They don’t have this disease.

The fact is, there are many facets to suspicion. Some suspicions are caused by jealousy, some are because of inequality, some are due to unfairness, and the most dangerous suspicion results from a lack of responsibility.

No matter what the source of suspicion is, the longer family members live with each other, the more suspicion can increase.

Problem #2: The problem of foolishness, of not keeping up with the world, people, and of surrendering to defilements.

This problem occurs when people's intelligence, knowledge and ability are not at the same level. It is called foolishness.

Some people's actions and thoughts cannot keep up with the actions and thoughts of other family members. This will prevent them from being able to keep up with the ever changing world. The major cause of this lag is not due to foolishness per se, but is because other family members are constantly adapting to new situations and those who lag behind refuse to adapt to changes or improve their situations. They stagnate and remain with what they are accustomed to. And the others have a difficult time pulling them along.

These types of people blame their situations on their lack of luck, feelings of inferiority in the family, or they feel hurt that their parents, spouse or children do not love them. This will surely bring disagreement and create family problems.

Problem #3: The problem of being tired of each other.

The problem of being tired of each other can also be referred to as **Being Tired of People**.

A judge in Chiang Mai, Thailand once spoke about a case that took place some time ago concerning a young adult who was under 18 years of age. This young adult had broken the law, and the court sentenced him to juvenile detention for punishment and evaluation. As soon as the court handed down the sentence, the parents began to cry and asked to take him home to train him themselves. No matter how delinquent children are, their parents will always love them and worry about them. They want to take care of and correct their children's behavior by themselves. They don't trust anyone else to take care of their children because they are afraid that no one else can take care of their children as well as they can.

However, today, when young adults break the law and have to go to court, the parents are asked, "Your child broke the law. What do you want to do?"

The parents quickly answer, "It's up to the court. Let the court do what it wants. We are so sick and tired of him. We don't know what to do with him anymore." As one can see, this situation has clearly changed.

In modern day society, there are **people who are tired of their own children**.

Even members of the same family must be careful not to allow tiredness to develop. Within your family, if one member does something wrong and the other family members are tired

of warning that person, tired of teaching that person, or tired of advising that person, it will manifest into a family in which each family member lives on their own in the same house. There will not be any sharing or exchange of good deeds amongst family members. Our good deeds and their good deeds will not increase.

Tiredness towards each other is a sign of a family's inevitable destruction, because it will soon evolve to a point where they will all live apart and no one will be able to warn each other.

When they are unable to warn each other, they will be unable to tolerate one another and then fighting and the exchange of negativity will ensue. Everyone will ultimately end up abusing each other.

The way to stay together as a family unit is to have an open mind and to allow for open dialogue; family members should be able to inform each other from the beginning if they feel that another person's actions are inappropriate. It is better than waiting until you reach the point where you cannot stand each other and trying to talk about it then. That could turn out to be like a volcanic eruption.

Problem #4: The problem of selfishness.

The problem of selfishness can be referred to as being **self-centered**.

Human nature is such that whenever more than three people live together, individual groups will form. Whenever there is a division in that group, for example, due to one person in the group receiving something special, that person must think about the group first. It does not matter if anyone in the group is suffering, because that person will not care. If there is a more serious situation, even siblings will separate from one another because one person's selfishness has already plunged his/her mind into darkness.

When a time arises where one of them has unexpected luck, that person will not want to share this good fortune with anyone in the family. In addition, that person will take advantage of others in the family and so the family will eventually crumble because of one person's self-centeredness. One day, the problem will cause the family's disintegration until the family unit no longer exists.

Dhamma for Laypersons: the Heart of a Stable Family

When a person thinks about selecting a spouse, or thinks about getting married and having a family, one must prepare oneself because nobody can avoid the four Problems previously mentioned.

Although the solution is not simple, that does not mean there is no path to correct and prevent them from occurring. If each person realizes what the heart of the family is and everyone takes the best possible care of the family's heart, the problems will be resolved in the end.

The Lord Buddha gave a Dhamma discourse pertaining to a method that can be utilized as a basis for daily life and a means of establishing a stable family. It is known as “**Dhamma for Laypersons.**” Composed of **four parts**, it is considered to be the **heart of a stable family**:

1. **Truthfulness or *sacca***
2. **Self-control or *dama***
3. **Endurance or *khanti***
4. **Sacrifice or *cāga***

In general, if our hearts are still beating, then we are still alive. But whenever family members possess Dhamma for Laypersons, then the family's heart will continue to beat as well. All the aforementioned problems will not happen at all. There will only be a stable family with warmth and harmony that will increase with each passing day.

Composed of four parts, what is the importance of Dhamma for Laypersons? How does it guide a family to correct and prevent daily family dilemmas?

The Lord Buddha illustrated the answers, which are as follows:

1) Truthfulness or *sacca* will solve the problem of suspicion.

***Sacca* means truthfulness, sincerity and a strong sense of trust towards each other.**

If these words are expressed in this way, some people may not understand the concept clearly. However, if the concept is explained in a way that allows people to put it into practice, **truthfulness means responsibility or the act of being responsible.**

In analyzing how a family operates, each member's sense of responsibility is the most important element. If a family member lacks responsibility, then suspicion among family members will be the immediate result. By the same token, if a person wants to get married, the first characteristic that should be evaluated is the potential spouse's sense of responsibility. The bride and the groom both must recognize if the other is responsible enough to experience a family's life, death, success, and failures.

A person who is truthful exhibits responsibility in these four ways:

1.1) Responsibility in duty and work. This means, no matter what the work is, the amount of work, its ease or difficulty, whether or not the situation is favorable, whether or not the budget is limited, whether or not one has limited assistance, limited time, or limited knowledge, even with all of these factors, a person who is truthful always pays attention to responsibility by successfully completing the task and doing so to the best of his/her ability.

1.2) Responsibility in speech. This means that one's speech must match one's actions and one's actions must match one's speech. It is irresponsible for a person to say s/he did a foot, if that person really did an inch. It is irresponsible for a person to say that he/she did more than a foot, if that person did less than that. One's actions should always be described truthfully in words.

1.3) Responsibility in how friends are made. Friends should be made with sincerity and without hidden agendas. Whatever one must say or whatever warning one must give to a friend, one must be straightforward. One must be sincere. And most importantly, one must not be biased or prejudiced in any of the following four ways: biased because of love, biased because of hatred, biased because of stupidity, or biased because of fear.

1.4) Responsibility in goodness and moral standards. This means that a person should have Dhamma as his/her

foundation. As such, this person will not want to do something that is wrong, that would go against the Precepts, against Dhamma, against the culture, or against the laws of the country. Demonstrating this responsibility will prevent a person from going to prison and Hell, and will open Heaven's door to that person.

Therefore, when this information is analyzed in this fashion, a person who has truthfulness is responsible in his/her work, speech, choice of friends, and has moral principles. Thus, that person thinks, speaks, and acts with sincerity and good intentions so everything is done in the best possible way. This is a way to elevate one's knowledge and ability, and to bring out one's best persona continually.

As our truthfulness can be seen in these four ways, the more we possess, the more responsibility we have. These kind of people can maintain this simple foundation constantly in their minds. **Whatever they do, they will do it to the best of their ability; whatever they say, they will say it as clearly as possible; and their minds will have the most steady moral foundation as possible.**

A truthful person is not only a trustworthy person in the family but is trustworthy with friends as well. The suspicion that friends may have of that person from the past will decrease. But if a person is not truthful, that person will always be greeted with suspicion and distrust. Good people will escape and avoid

involvement with this distrustful person. Good people will not want to befriend dishonest people because they do not want to gain a bad reputation through association.

So if a person in a family does not have truthfulness or a sense of responsibility towards work, speech, personal relationships, goodness and morality, the problem of suspicion will develop. Then how can they live together?

Thus, for a family to have a strong foundation, family members must have **truthfulness or sacca as the first habit.**

2) Self-control or *dama* corrects the problem of foolishness, of not keeping up with people, the world and of surrendering to defilements.

***Dama* means having self control.**

The way to practice **self - control** is to **be alert and to train oneself without exception, by giving oneself more knowledge, ability, and goodness everyday.**

Self - control can also be referred to colloquially as, **“loving to train oneself.”** And sometimes the elders may refer to it as, **“Don’t let yourself be foolish.”**

The way to increase one’s knowledge, ability and goodness in every way is to follow these 4 guidelines:

2.1) You must find a good teacher. That means that regardless of whether a person is interested in a subject or wishes to increase his/her knowledge, that person must find a teacher who has knowledge and ability in that area before doing anything else. Otherwise, there are many opportunities for failure. If a person is truly unable to find the right teacher, at the very least, one should find a teacher who has the most knowledge in the area of interest.

2.2) You must listen to your teacher. That means that you should listen carefully to your teacher. Listen many times over and ask questions until you truly understand. It is important to understand clearly what your teacher is teaching, in theory, method, practice, and so on, as far in-depth as the subject matter reaches.

2.3) You must analyze the teacher’s words. Look at every point that the teacher has explained and analyze it until you truly understand the reasoning for its significance, its practical use, its precautions, its benefits and disadvantages.

2.4) You must follow the teacher’s instructions. That means that after you analyze the material and understand what is correct and proper, you begin to follow and practice those teachings with attention and care. You must not be careless because it may bring damaging results later on.

Those who have full knowledge, ability and goodness must follow only this path in order to train themselves to keep up with the world and its people, and not surrender to defilements.

Surely, if you follow this road, you will have to go against your will, you will need to control your mind, and sometimes you will hurt your mind, just as if you were suffering from a bleeding heart.

The reason that you must control your mind and go against your will is because if a type of training cannot change one's habits, it cannot be considered self-training.

For example, if you are unable to change a habit like snacking, which is not easy to do, or unable to change a habit like sleeping in, using unpleasant words when speaking, or talking back to your parents, you have to find the right method to correct yourself, including training yourself to not be careless. This is not easy to do so. For some of us, it may take our entire lives to correct these bad habits, and we are not even counting the more serious habits of drinking, jealousy and gambling.

Therefore, for a family to have a strong foundation, the family members must have **self - control or dama as the second habit.**

3) Endurance or *khanti* corrects the problems of people being tired of each other.

***Khanti* means endurance.**

Why must we have endurance? We must have endurance because if someone wants to increase goodness within themselves, that person must have endurance to exchange with goodness.

Having been born as humans, what do we have to endure? The answer is there are 4 areas of endurance that are part of our human condition:

3.1) We must endure a natural environment that is not favorable to us, such as the sun's strong rays, heavy wind and rain, etc.

3.2) We must endure suffering, which means, we must endure the unfavorable conditions that our physical body experiences, such as sickness, without creating an uproar or excessive complaints.

3.3) We must endure conflict, which means, we must endure other people.

The truth is that we must accept that we have weaknesses which we have displayed, feelings we have that go against our will, and events that do not go as planned. In particular, when we work quickly, or when we require meticulousness,

there is something that still displeases us.

When we are displeased with ourselves, they are considered weaknesses that have turned into bad habits. And we will notice that we have overlooked so many other points.

There are weaknesses among husbands, wives, and children, plus the weaknesses present in ourselves that we must include. There is no way to avoid conflict.

Therefore, even when a husband and wife who live in the same house are good to each other, they will still have weaknesses. If we think that we are unable to endure this, **please do not have a weak heart and get married.**

But nowadays, although some people may have already gotten married, they like to refer to **individual rights**. After they get married, they still draw up papers, getting ready to separate. This creates the question, “If you didn’t think you would be able to endure each other, why did you get married?”

The elders had a saying regarding a husband and wife, **“It is like tongue and teeth - they always bump into each other.”**

Therefore, it does not matter how good a couple is together because they will inevitably have conflicts. If they think that when they fight with each other, they cannot stand each other, they should not have bothered to marry each other. But if their mind is made up, they can stand their spouse, and

their spouse’s family is willing to give him/her up, they must talk about it and figure out how they can put up with each other. This is better than talking about something else.

The question they have to ask each other is, **“Are you sure that you can tolerate me?”** If we are not sure whether or not we can tolerate each other, then we should not get married. If we do, we will stir up or create bad kamma. So a loving couple will turn into enemies in the future. Should we separate now instead? That is the question that both of you should ask yourselves before you get married.

So instead of asking how many carats there are in the engagement ring, how much money you will get, how many millions you will spend to buy a house, all of those things are unstable, the more important question you should be asking is, **“Are you sure you can tolerate me?”**

If you really think about it, there are many more people, in addition to your spouse, that you must endure, such as the parents, siblings, and relatives from each side. These are people you cannot ignore, and you must endure any potential conflicts throughout your life.

3.4) We must endure defilements or *kilesa*, which means we must endure our own negative behaviors.

Defilements are a dangerous disease of our mind that come attached to us since birth. As the disease advances, it

squeezes us, controls us and wears us down to perform all kinds of bad deeds shamelessly. Then when we perform the bad deed, defilements let us suffer, receive punishments, experience all kinds of distress, which causes us to feel regret and later criticize our actions.

Some people who are unable to withstand the control defilements have on them become people who have a habit of doing bad deeds. In the end, those people will no longer have any goodness within them and may develop addictions along the Roads to Ruin, which are harder to correct.

The **Roads to Ruin or Apāyamukha** are external stimuli that always incite the defilements to advance in our minds until they turn into entrenched bad habits that are very difficult to reverse.

The most dangerous Road to Ruin is **associating with fools**, because fools spread infections of ‘badness,’ without exception, to those around them. The defilements in the mind will control them until they become slaves at performing bad deeds without thinking about the suffering of others. Associating with fools is similar to adding the dangerous infections of the mind to ourselves. Good habits from the past are repeatedly destroyed by defilements, and they will transform into bad habits instead.

Because defilements affect good habits, a family’s

stability and safety depends on our ability to endure defilements by rigorously training ourselves in two areas:

3.4.1. Endurance in controlling bad habits within ourselves to prevent them from influencing others. If they are unable to endure this, then a husband and wife who choose to stay together will develop more bad kamma with each other. That could lead them to commit aggressive acts against each other, break apart their unity, take sides, and exploit one another.

3.4.2. Endurance to resist the temptations of the six Roads to Ruin, which are: Drinking alcohol, enjoying the nightlife, going out to places of entertainment, gambling, associating with fools, and laziness towards work. If one is unable to have the endurance to resist the six Roads to Ruin, the family’s financial situation will fall apart, as it is unable to maintain a stable foundation.

If everyone in the family can train themselves to have endurance in these two areas, then our individual habits will improve. The family’s financial situation will stabilize. Only good people will be in our company and fools will stay away. The Roads to Ruin will be distant from the family.

Therefore, in order to have a stable foundation for the family, family members must have **endurance or khanti as their third habit**.

4) Sacrifice or *cāga* is the means to correct the problem of selfishness.

Charity means sacrifice.

There are 3 types:

1) Sacrifice of material objects

2) Sacrifice of comfort

3) Sacrifice of negative emotions, not keeping them in your mind. It is the basis for preparing one's mind for meditation.

Sacrifice means generosity in living together as a family, placing the well-being of the family ahead of ourselves.

A marriage is dependent upon the sacrifice of two individuals. If there is no sacrifice, then the family can not be supported. If a particular family does not practice sacrifice for the benefit of others in the family, and instead, take advantage of each other, it will be like they are living in a broken home.

The basic sacrifice focuses on one's livelihood, which is of great importance. In particular, the husband and wife must think about the overall happiness of the family more than their individual happiness.

The foundations of livelihood are the **Four Requisites**. However, the most important aspects one must know before allocating funds for the Four Requisites are: One must be able

to distinguish between **what you want** and **what your family needs**.

If you do not know how to distinguish between what you want and what you need, then your family will fall apart more and more every day. In the end there will be a feeling that one side was taken advantage of and the other side was selfish. Family members will end up living separately and they will not care about each other.

For instance, suppose there is a family composed of a husband and a wife, but they do not have any children. Their combined income is limited. Just one bottle of the wife's perfume, and alcohol and wine for the husband reduces their budget for food every month. **The feeling that each person is taken advantage of arises because they cannot distinguish between their individual desires and the needs of the family.**

Expensive perfume is unnecessary and luxurious. Alcohol and wine are one of the Roads to Ruin; they are substances that damage one's health and are of negative value to society. So if both the husband and the wife are unable to deem these expenses as unnecessary, it means that **selfishness will bring damage to the family.**

A marriage is a life of budgets for the individual. One must have a foundation of sacrifice. But if one spends for one's

own personal desires, and the husband and wife do not combine their incomes from the beginning, that means that one is preparing go one's separate way from the start because neither person is thinking of the shared family expenses. So why did you marry?

Whenever you see luxurious items as necessary, the household budget will immediately suffer. That is called selfishness; it also creates many additional problems in the household.

Marriage is not a game that boys and girls play, because as soon as you get married, the responsibility, the change, the endurance, and the sacrifice will immediately follow.

Therefore, a person who is thinking about marriage should be thinking about how prepared one's future spouse is in two ways:

1) Can you depend on your spouse when you are sick or if your life is at stake?

2) Does your spouse have the knowledge, the ability, and a good enough character to support the family so that it is happy and to raise the children to be good people?

These two factors are the basic sacrifices in a family.

Today, people tend to marry more for personal needs rather than considering these two factors. It causes so many

problems after they get married. Some couples will even become abusive and end up killing one another.

Those who have not yet gotten married or are about to get married should carefully consider that when a couple is married, they should be able to depend on each other in sickness and old age. They must be able to care for one another. Marriage, therefore, must depend greatly on individual sacrifice.

Furthermore, when the couple has a child, they must both sacrifice even more, because they have to set aside time for the children. This is what each person must prepare for even before marriage.

People who are prepared for parenthood will analyze themselves in the following ways: We have knowledge, ability, and goodness, which we developed from training ourselves all our lives. Since we must die, when we become elderly, there must be someone to look after us. If we are to marry and have a family, we must use our knowledge, ability, and goodness to raise good children for the world. We can pass on our knowledge and goodness to them so that they can continue to live with strength in this world.

Marriage is not just about sensual pleasure. This does not last. But because most people look for sexual satisfaction, the rate of divorce is high. Sexual satisfaction only exists in the earlier years of marriage.

After one gets married, the foundation of one's life lies in sacrifice for each other. If ever we become selfish towards each other, it will be followed by divorce or murder.

Sacrifice in marriage is sacrifice in order to care for the body and the mind. It is **support for the body and the mind**. And as a result, the marriage will be a happy one.

Caring for each other physically means using the family's income wisely, spending for household necessities, sharing, and sacrificing one's happiness.

Caring for each other mentally means knowing how to be considerate on a daily basis, being able to support others in times of crisis, being able to warn others when they become careless, and being able to be honest at all times.

A couple that can take care of each other physically and mentally in this way will always sacrifice for the benefit of the family, such as with material objects, comfort, and bad moods. A harmonious environment will reside in the family as a result.

Therefore, for a family to have a stable foundation, family members must have **sacrifice as the fourth habit**.

With these four factors of **Dhamma for Laypersons** (*Gharāvās-dhamma*), anyone contemplating finding a spouse, getting married, having a family, or anyone currently having family problems, must have the **Dhamma for Laypersons** as

a foundation. Truthfulness, self-control, endurance, and sacrifice are the heart of the family. It is the vital heart that family members must have with them at all times in order for a family's foundation to be stable from the beginning. Then, all family problems, such as suspicion, not keeping up with the world, not keeping up with people, surrendering to defilements, being tired of each other, and selfishness, will definitely not occur. The heart of the family will then beat continuously and powerfully.



Chapter 2

How to Manage Family Life



The practice of regulating one's emotions prior to getting married is an important foundation of maintaining a marriage. But if both parties never learned to control their emotions in the past, elevating their virtues after they have married would not be possible. Instead, it will turn in a negative direction where both will hurt each other in devastating ways, and in the end, they will no longer be able to withstand each other; divorce seems to be the only solution. So learning to regulate one's emotions prior to marriage is the best way to prevent divorce.

Basic Thoughts Prior to Marriage

The belief that holds true, regardless of how many millions of years have passed, is that once a husband and a wife begin their lives together, it is impossible for them not to

clash with each other, or for them not to clash with their in-laws. No matter what, there is always a chance that this can happen.

The major concern is that, if the couple didn't learn how to regulate their emotions before their marriage, they would not be able to handle their disagreements in a positive manner, causing everyone in the family great distress in every sense of the word and disruption on a regular basis. They will not live a peaceful life.

But if they had both trained themselves well before their marriage, no matter the degree of disagreement, they should be able to withhold their negative emotions and keep it from carrying over to the next day. The family environment will begin with a sense of calm and happiness. The couple will try to discard their bad behaviors and bring out the best in one another. An accepting and positive attitude towards each other will result, thus creating strong bonds within the family and increased prestige in society.

Of course those who are able to control their emotions must have had training before marrying. Our grandparents encountered these issues throughout their lives. They established the following tenets regarding a marriage.

Anyone who can no longer wait to marry must first achieve the following four factors in order to have a successful marriage.

The 4 factors are:

- 1) Must be self-reliant.**
- 2) Must know how to choose the right spouse.**
- 3) Must have a marriage counselor.**
- 4) Must know how to purify the mind.**

Our grandparents insist that anyone getting ready for marriage achieve these four important factors first, so that they can handle all the responsibilities that marriage will bring them. They will know what lies ahead and what the necessary knowledge, abilities, and virtues are to become the finest couple, the best daughter-in-law, the best son-in-law and the best parents for their children. Imparting this knowledge will enhance the couple's skills, ability and virtues so that their marriage unfolds as expected.

The rest of this chapter will explain the rationale supporting each factor and why these four factors are necessary for a successful marriage.

Expectations in Marriage

Our grandparents told us the direct truth regarding the reason people get married, which is that they lack self-confidence; they are not sure if they can stand on their own two feet. When you lack confidence, you must have some

hope that you will find someone else to help you with the many things in life.

There are some who get married because they expect that their spouse will treat them favorably in different ways; and at the same time, they will treat their spouse favorably in return. But what really happens is that their spouses do not treat them in the way they expect at all or are not able to treat them that way 24/7. The ways the spouses are treated veer away from their expectations as well.

Some men get married because they want a beautiful wife. But women can not maintain their beauty 24 hours a day. Physical beauty does not last. If it is only physical attraction that matters, when external beauty subsides, chances that a spouse will be unfaithful are high.

Some people get married because they are infatuated with the other's good behavior. They were mistaken when they thought their spouse would always be polite, but the truth is people can not sustain wonderful manners 24 hours a day.

If the search for a life partner is based on "dependence," whenever they no longer feel secure with one another, they will start fighting or pursue a lawsuit, as we often see. These problems have led to a proverb, **"Faulty expectations bring disappointment."**

The right frame of mind before marriage is, **"I must depend on myself."** In a marriage, there are many aspects which will require the other person to depend on you. In other words, there are more issues that require patience than issues that do not require patience, which will require the knowledge, skills and virtues you developed before the marriage.

Besides, there will be so many new duties that you have never done before, and you never know whether the results will turn out good or bad. This is particularly true of being a parent of a newborn child who cannot depend on itself and must rely on its parents for many needs. In order for the children to grow into independent individuals, parents need to devote plenty of their own knowledge, skills and virtues.

Therefore, it is wrong to hope that you will be able to depend on another person prior to getting married. The fact is the chance that others will rely on you is higher than the chance that you will rely on others.

Self-Dependence

An independent person is a person with knowledge, ability and virtue. In summary, this person must have *Dhamma for Laypersons*.

A person who has the *Dhamma for Laypersons* (*Gharāvās-dhamma*) must display four regular habits:

1. Habit of Responsibility – Whatever the task at hand, he must do it to the best of his ability, in terms of quality, time, budget, and caring for the quality of mind.

2. Habit of self-training and self-improvement – The study and research in various areas to improve one's knowledge, ability, and virtue for continuous progress.

3. Habit of endurance – Whatever the task, he is able to overcome all obstacles until the task is complete, regardless of weather, illness, or conflict, as well as withstanding temptations or infatuations of the mind.

4. Habit of sacrifice and generosity – Whatever the task, the group takes priority over the individual. This includes sacrificing one's own belongings to others who need it most, sacrificing one's convenience and comfort to take on responsibilities that no one else wants to do, and eliminating one's negative emotions to maintain a good family environment. One must sacrifice one's individuality in this way for the betterment of the group and must have acquired these habits at a young age. Otherwise, others will not be able to depend on him.

Only a person who has *Dhamma for Laypersons* or these four good habits can become a self-reliant person, a good shelter for others and a good family leader.

The Four Levels of Beauty

Our grandparents not only taught us how to depend on ourselves, they also taught those who plan on marriage to select the right person to be the mother or father of our children.

Typically, we can only observe physical beauty, not the deep inner beauty of the mind. But our grandparents also taught us to look for the deep inner beauty of the mind. They placed beauty into the following four categories:

1st Level: Beauty of Appearance - This is the beauty of our dress, makeup, lipstick, hairstyle, and apparel in accordance with the times and fashion. It is external beauty that soon will go out of season or will no longer be preferred. This beauty can be purchased or borrowed from others.

2nd Level: Beauty of Body - This is the beauty of the body in terms of our figure, skin, face, hairstyle, fingers, etc. It is individual beauty that can not be purchased or borrowed from others. It does not last and will deteriorate with age. It is not a guarantee of whether a person is good or bad.

3rd Level: Beauty of Manners - This is the beauty of both appropriate speech and action towards others. This includes being courteous, modest, respectful, polite, cheerful and friendly to others. However, if these manners are not truly from their heart, it is considered insincere. There are proverbs

that warn, “**Sweet words are more devastating**” or “**Sweet beginning, bitter ending**” or “**Sweet mouth, sour bottom.**”

4th Level: Beauty of Mind - This is the beauty of the virtue within a person, which can be expressed through the many aspects of all the responsibilities that person has. We can measure how responsible a person is through these three fundamental aspects:

- 1) Use of the four requisites, which are clothing, food, shelter and medicine.
- 2) Daily activities
- 3) Job responsibilities.

By observing a person’s habit through these three aspects, we can evaluate whether a person is quite responsible or negligent. Only a responsible person can have a beautiful mind and morality. This especially applies to a person who possesses *Dhamma for Laypersons*, which is composed of truthfulness, self-discipline, endurance, and sacrifice.

Importance of a Marriage Counselor

The beauty of a person has four levels, but the most difficult level to observe is the Beauty of Mind, since it is all about the morality that a person possesses. To discover that,

we need to rely on persons who have experienced the life of a marriage. In other word, having a family also requires a **teacher** or **coach** who can give advice on various family issues

In the old days, those who wanted to get married would have **an elder** to help them with the proposed marriage. Although their services are still in use today, few people know the true meaning and role of an elder.

“An elder” refers to a person who has a high level of virtue and is well-respected by the community.

A person who becomes an elder must be highly virtuous, which brings them great respect by the majority of the people. They have many virtues because their own marriages embodied the four important factors of a marriage:

- 1) They must truly embrace *Dhamma for Laypersons*, otherwise they will not be a reliable source for themselves and their family.
- 2) They must be able to identify another person’s behavior by observing that person through the consumption of the four requisites, their daily activities and their responsibility on the job. Otherwise, they will not be able to find a suitable spouse with great virtue, one that family members will fully accept and respect.

3) They must have a life teacher or a good counselor advising them on marriage and relationships. Otherwise, it is possible that they will not be able to maintain a long relationship.

4) They must be able to train themselves until they can bring their morals to a higher level. Otherwise, they will lack the knowledge, ability and virtue to handle all the duties that marriage will bring them. They must be able to look after themselves and others at the same time. If their virtue is not high enough, especially in terms of generosity and sacrifice for the greater good, they will not be able to follow through and support their families and future generations, and will not be accepted by society at this level.

The elders have such great virtue and are capable of being reliable advisors to children and future generations because they trained themselves and created a foundation for their families based on the four factors mentioned previously.

Therefore, a family or relationship requires an advisor from the point of spouse selection, the duties of a good spouse, in-laws, parents, and relatives, the duties associated with a successful career, to the many duties that arise in a community. In all of these categories, you must have **an elder** to advise you and point you in the right direction, so that you can always live together as a peaceful family.

Therefore, a marriage cannot be without **an elder, or a highly virtuous adult** who can advise and discipline the husband and wife's behavior. Without "an elder," the family will head in the wrong direction.

Dhamma that Creates a Beautiful Mind

With a thorough understanding of the first three factors, it is time for the marriage to continue on to a higher level of morality with more strength and stability. If the husband and wife lack the morals in being together, they will not be able to sustain the love they have towards each other on a long-term basis, since the heart of the family is based on the foundation of morals embraced by the husband and wife.

We should train ourselves to become independent prior to marriage. Our grandparents introduced Dhamma for Laypersons as a guideline to self-training. Even after we get married and have a family, we still have to practice Dhamma for Laypersons at a higher level. One of the four virtues that a householder will most often exercise and that will have the greatest impact on the family is **endurance (*Khanti*) and sacrifice (*Cāga*)**.

After the wedding, a higher level of **endurance** is required in order to **withstand possible conflicts**. In other

words, it is the ability to have **endurance for others' weaknesses**. Once the couple is married and begins living together, there will be many responsibilities one must undertake for one's spouse and one's relatives. A higher degree of endurance is required at this stage in order for the entire family to make it through.

Sacrifice is needed at a greater level as well, mainly to **eliminate negative emotions**. In other words, it is the need to maintain a calm mind through the **regular practice of meditation** so no distress results from family conflicts. Even if we dislike a member of our spouse's family, we have to learn to live with them so the problem does not develop into ongoing anger within the family. We must discard our tempers, so that fights and vengeance are no longer a possibility.

The level of **sacrifice** when all negative emotions are eliminated from the mind is referred to in Buddhism as, **gentleness or soracca**, which means **the mind refined to a calm state**.

Therefore, in focusing on the refinement of the mind, our grandparents referred only to **endurance** and **gentleness** from Buddhist teachings as the main virtues to help refine the mind. It is also **a way to condense Dhamma for Laypersons to only aspects of mind regulation**.

When a situation arises that requires endurance, we must try to calm our minds as if we have a volcano inside ready to erupt that **we are almost unable to take, but we must be able to endure**.

Gentleness can be explained as the attempt to reduce the heat in the volcano that can cause an eruption at anytime, by using many strategies to ease the mind. But there is no better way to prevent the mind from chaos than by simply **closing the eyes and meditating**, setting all worries aside, stilling the mind and ignoring past conflicts.

When the mind is still, we will not feel the need to endure anything. Our manners and expressions will be as peaceful as the mind, as if nothing had happened. In turn, whomever we encounter will also be calm, as they feel the peace and beauty we maintain in our minds. The calm and peaceful state of mind we share with others will conquer all.

Thus, to elevate our morality to a higher level, we must rely on these two major virtues which are **endurance** and **gentleness**. They are Dhamma that creates a beautiful mind.

Magic Spells to Prevent Divorce

We have learned up to this point that our grandparents continued to discover how to develop **endurance** and

gentleness in their minds. So they converted these virtues into metaphors for practical purposes, which included the following four magic forms of conduct:

Magic Form of Conduct #1: Eyes like the knots of a bamboo tree.

Magic Form of Conduct #2: Ears like handles on a wok.

Magic Form of Conduct #3: Body like a doormat.

Magic Form of Conduct #4: Mind like the earth.

Our grandparents were able to use the environment to illustrate Dhamma, serving as lessons for mind purification. This shows the high level of morality they have. The explanation of each metaphor is as follows:

1) *Eyes like the knots of a bamboo tree*, means we should keep an unshifting gaze. This includes not paying attention to stressful situations and not meddling in the business of others to find fault or cause devastation resulting in later gossip. It will cause our minds to pick up the problems of others and we will never learn how to look for the good in life.

Our grandparents created this metaphor from seeing a **bamboo ladder-pole**.

A bamboo ladder-pole is constructed from a type of forest bamboo. The poles are cut into sections long enough for the feet to step on. It can be tied to a tree as a ladder to

assist with tree climbing. If the branches are too tall, several ladders can be tied together to reach the top.

People who live in fields of sugar-palm trees know the benefit of the bamboo ladder-pole, which can be used as a ladder to climb up very tall palm trees.

To make this type of bamboo ladder-pole, villagers will keep the long bamboo trunk intact by not dividing it at the knot (the bamboo connection). Instead, in-between the knots, they will cut grooves about one foot apart to serve as steps for the ladder. For this reason, the bamboo trunk must have very strong and big knots; otherwise it will not be able to support the climber's weight.

When a villager climbs the sugar-palm tree, he will lean the bamboo ladder-pole against the tree and climb up step by step to the top. If it is a male tree, he will cut the stalks and use a bamboo tube to hold the liquid to make palm sugar. But if it is a female tree, he will pick the fruit, squeeze out its liquid, and mix the liquid with flour to make palm cake to sell as a dessert.

Our grandparents, with minds centered on Dhamma, noticed that the vital part of the bamboo ladder-pole was the quality of the knots (eyes) on the bamboo trunk. The stronger the knots, the safer it will be to climb to reap the benefits of the sugar-palm trees.

Humans also have eyes. We must train our eyes to be like bamboo knots, because the most important aspect of eyesight is, **“Don’t look at things you aren’t supposed to see. Don’t look for trouble. Don’t look at other people’s problems. Don’t look for faults in others. Don’t flutter your eyes so others can follow, because it will shift the trouble from the eyes to your mind and into your home.”**

A person who is able to control where his eyes see will have a mind that is more calm and alert. Whenever he thinks, the thoughts will always be good. Spoken words will be positive, improving the mind which will extend to others.

Anyone who can restrain their eyes as our grandparents advised will see the world optimistically, will not have the pessimistic way of finding faults in others, and will not be the cause of extramarital affairs. Conflicts that arise from the eyes will be avoided and the mind can maintain its calm and peaceful state.

Thus, to control the mind through the eyes by training **the eyes to be like the knots of a bamboo tree** is the way to elevate the mind’s beauty. This is **the first magic form of conduct to prevent divorce**.

2) Ears like handles on a wok means we should only listen to what is appropriate. Do not try to listen for other peoples’ faults or eavesdrop because of your paranoia that someone may be gossiping about you. Do not believe the gossip

of others; be cautious and listen only half-heartedly. Try to change the subject whenever the conversation topic is not worth listening to. We may end up being perceived as foolish, and can form the habit of finding fault and gossiping about others, which is very harmful to our accumulation of virtue.

Our grandparents did not want us looking like fools who do nothing but listen to the faults of others with no chance for progress. Our grandparents cautioned us with a metaphor like, **Ears like handles on a wok, which means listening to valuable messages that increase our knowledge and our virtues.**

When we are in the kitchen, we can clearly see that the handles on a wok are only for holding the wok, and we are to hang it up when finished. It is the same with people’s ears; they are not to be used for listening to gossip, because other people’s troubles have nothing to do with us.

Our ears should only be used for listening to things that bring us wisdom, morals and virtues. **This is the ears’ real purpose.**

Whenever you hear anything, you must decide whether to listen or not. If it is not useful, you must learn to make your ear like a wok handle. Then the problems of others will not get a chance to enter your mind.

When some people learn they are being gossiped about, they become so furious that they could kill the person who started the rumor. But if we know how to turn our ears into a wok handles, those words would have no affect on us. Soon the gossip will blow away with the wind.

Even when we hear some people speak ill of us, we should not take it to heart. Just let them curse. As long as we do not take it to heart, the obscenities will return to the person who started it, because they are the first person to hear their own words.

Our grandparents also remind us that, **even if we do not get angry over these ill words, we should not immediately think we are great. It is greater when a person does not even smile when they are complimented.** They remain serene while they consider the reason for the compliment and if it is rational. This person is truly a special person.

Most people tend to be content and proud when they receive a compliment. For example, a girl is so content and proud when she receives compliments from her boyfriend. She decides to get married just because she was so infatuated by a compliment such as, “My dear, you are so beautiful,” and ends up having a lot of children. If she only remained serene and not so infatuated with the compliment, she could have lived comfortably by herself, without having headaches wondering if her husband is having an affair.

A truly wise person is one who knows what is worth listening to and what is not worth listening to, in order to keep the mind serene.

Therefore, a person who knows how to control the mind by **knowing when to make their ears like wok handles** tends to have a peaceful mind. This is a way to elevate the mind’s beauty. This is **the second magic form of conduct that prevents divorce.**

3) Body like a doormat means dedicating all of one’s energy and dedicating one’s life to performing good deeds with virtuous actions, speech, and thoughts, without attitudes or conditions.

Our grandparents used this metaphor that compares the body to a doormat to teach us; they want to remind us, **whatever task we perform, it must be an honest task. We must perform it using all of our knowledge, ability and virtue. We must not have an attitude or be arrogant. We must not be afraid of hard work and we must be able to dedicate our life to the task to produce the best results.**

Our grandparents also improved their lives by following this principle. Whenever they talk about their success, they can always speak with pride.

For example, whenever they taught their children about the virtues of being honest, and knowing they had always been

honest with every job they did throughout their lives, they could tell their stories proudly:

“Ever since we were young, when we had to get a job, even if it was to empty or to clean the toilets, we would take that job, because it was an honest job. We pretended our bodies were doormats. But if the job was to rob someone, we definitely wouldn’t ever take it. We also rejected any job that involved cheating, deception, or fraud.”

Working to support a family is a heavy responsibility, because every meal is bought with hard-earned money. A person, who works mindfully, never complains or has an attitude, and concentrates on working honestly will be proud that they earned the money to support the family with their energy and with the virtues of honesty. **They will not have any regrets or be blamed at a later time.**

A peaceful mind comes from having an honest job. Although other people might look down on us for having a job with a lower status, we do not have anything to be ashamed of. We should be proud of our honest way of living, like the doormat that only serves to rid the dirt from our shoes without complaint, dislike, or partiality. A person who maintains a serene mind based on their honest living and lack of attitude, **even with a job of lower status, will have grandchildren who are all willing to pay respect to them with pride.**

A person who concentrates on performing good deeds, working honestly, and making their body like a doormat will have a successful and peaceful mind; they will not be jealous of others. Their virtue will elevate and they will be good role models for their grandchildren. Family members will be pleased and proud to be a part of a family that prizes this honest way of living.

Those who focus on performing good deeds, working honestly, being humble **and not setting conditions prior to performing good deeds just like a doormat** will have a more refined and peaceful mind, which is considered to be honorable in a marriage. And they will be good role models for the next generation. This is **the third magic form of conduct that prevents divorce.**

4) *Mind like the earth* means keeping a strong determination when performing the good deeds, without any conditions and unwavering in the face of obstacles.

Our grandparents focused on this Dhamma lesson because they realized that, even though we dedicate all our energy and knowledge to perform good deeds, there are still obstacles that we encounter that are more serious than we can handle. Yet we must learn to handle these situations. In other words, **even if we might not be able to it, we must learn to endure it.**

Base on this truth, whether we are content or not, as humans, we must learn to have calm and unwavering minds, not to be frightened of life's uncertainties, and know how to remain alert, like the earth, which does not flinch at aromatic or smelly things that are thrown on it.

The Lord Buddha once said to Venerable Rahula about the importance of keeping our mind still like the earth:

“If a person pours perfume on the earth, will the earth be happy? No, it will be indifferent. If a person puts a smelly object on it, it isn't sad. It remains indifferent.”

“Rahula, you must control your mind in that manner. No matter what people do to you, do not do anything to them. Concentrate on your Dhamma practice and you will soon be able to rid yourself of defilements.”

This means the more we suffer, the more we need to still our minds. When the mind is calm, no suffering will never ever distort wisdom and peace of mind.

In the same way, the happier we are, the more we need to still our minds. Being filled with happiness will cause us to be negligent and erroneously believe that we are more privileged than others.

So whenever we suffer or are happy, we must keep our minds calm and stable, in order to be ready for the events that follow.

However, our minds tend to be dissimilar to the earth; the mind is more like wax that finds itself very soft, weak and stressed when close to a fire. When facing unexpected suffering, we find we cannot pull ourselves together, and often become hopeless, further increasing our level of suffering. Sometimes, we become cynical with life, thereby bringing more sorrow to ourselves.

People in this situation can feel really hopeless. The distress, torture, and pressure from every direction pile up in their minds, causing seemingly endless suffering. Some people fall sick. Some people can not find a solution and end up committing suicide.

Our grandparents want us to be able to cope with the uncertainty of life that we never knew to expect. They use every possibility as a lesson to train our minds to prepare to accept the truth of any situation we encounter, **because life's certainty is its uncertainty.**

Those who never train themselves to accept the uncertainties of life will not be able to accept unexpected loss. Thus, we should train our minds to be as stable as the earth by realizing, the truth of life is its uncertainty.

When we experience unexpected disappointment, fear, and torture, we should realize the truth in life that nothing lasts forever. Everything arises, exists, and deteriorates. No one can escape this truth of life.

Our grandparents advised that, for the mind to be as stable and solid as the earth, we must first realize that, **in this world, we are subject to both gratification and disappointment; it is a matter of which will come first.**

The Lord Buddha taught the eight factors that cause a human's gratification or disappointment. They are called ***the Eight Worldly Conditions*** (*Loka Dhamma*), which can be divided into two categories: Causes of an **Infatuated Mind** and causes of a **Frightened Mind**.

The infatuated mind wishes to receive what we love and what we like, which includes:

- 1) **Fortune** is the material rewards, such as a house, car, spouse, property and jewelry.
- 2) **Prestige** is rank, status, authority, and power
- 3) **Recognition** is a compliment, praise, or the admiration of the others.
- 4) **Happiness** is the comforts of life, both physically and mentally, joy, cheer, and pleasure.

These are what most people like. If they do not have them they will search for them. When they attain them they will hold onto them. The more they try to hold them, the more anxious they become. The more anxious they become, the more jealous they become. The mind that has these feelings is considered to be an infatuated mind.

The Frightened Mind is fear and anxiety of loss or discontentment, which are:

- 1) **Loss of Fortune** is losing what one already possesses, such as loss of money, a house, a child or a spouse.
- 2) **Loss of Prestige** is loss of authority, rank, or the power to control.
- 3) **Gossiping** is direct or indirect criticism.
- 4) **Suffering** is both mental and physical suffering.

We do not search for these and do not wish to encounter them. Even when they have not arrived, we are afraid that they will soon arrive. When they arrive, we pray for them to leave. After they leave us, we are still afraid that they will return.

Since we encounter the causes of infatuation or fright, our grandparents tried to teach us to be aware of these life truths through meditation practice to still our minds and prevent them from being vulnerable to the Eight Worldly Conditions.

The purpose of meditation practice is to familiarize ourselves with the experience of a calm and peaceful state of mind.

When we face loss of fortune, loss of prestige, criticism, or difficulties, our minds will remain calm, alert, and strong.

When we receive fortune, prestige, recognition or happiness, our minds will remain calm, not overwhelmed or attached.

A person who is aware of suffering and happiness has trained the mind to be as stable and solid as the earth through meditation practice. When the mind is stilled, we become aware that the Eight Worldly Conditions are impermanent. Fortune rises but can turn into loss. Prestige can fluctuate. We must all face praise, gossip or happiness, which will eventually disappear, in accordance with the ***Three Characteristics (tilakkhaṇa)*** :

The Three Characteristics are the characteristics true of everything in this world.

Everything in this world has a value. Gold is valued for its bright shiny color. Diamond is strong. Glass is clear and reflective. Humans have their own minds and thoughts. Whether living or non-living, everything shares these same three characteristics:

1. Impermanence (*aniccatā*): means that life is **impermanent**. We do not remain in the same stage of life. People change over time. How we were yesterday is not the same as how we are today.

2. Suffering (*dukkhatā*) : means the state of **suffering**. In this instance, it does not only refer to sorrow and tears, but also to the inability to remain in the same condition, as it will

soon diminish. Because of uncertainties, change always occurs, and the end of change means that something diminishes. Even the world we live in continues to change and one day, it will come to an end and disappear.

3. Non-self (*anattatā*): means the **soullessness** of everything. It is beyond our control and we cannot withhold it or possess it. For example, we are unable to prevent aging, sickness and death. If we thoroughly examine the body we believe belongs to us, we find there are only blood, tissue, bone, tendons, skin, and other organs that combine together. It is not the real us; it is just a temporary self that will deteriorate over time and will not last forever.

People who are unaware of these *Three Characteristics* will be fascinated with or frightened of the *Eight Worldly Conditions* and will, therefore, be in a state of suffering all the time.

The Lord Buddha understood the truth of everything in this world. He taught meditation so people could learn to still their minds like the earth that is uninfluenced by the *Eight Worldly Conditions*.

Our grandparents always remind us to still our minds like the earth because they were able to see the world through the principles of the *Three Characteristics*. Whether or not we encounter the *8 Worldly Conditions*, we are all subject to these principles. The most important thing in life is that

we must train our minds to be calm and be ever ready for life's uncertainties. If we are well-prepared for the unexpected, we will be able to control our mind to remain alert and be able to live with life's realities. Everyone is subject to *Three Characteristics*, which features the certainty of uncertainty.

Persons who see the truth of life, who try to keep their minds stable and who are influenced by the *Eight Worldly Conditions* – **like the earth that is not impacted by aromatic or smelly objects** – will be able to elevate their virtues to a greater level. This is **the fourth magic form of conduct that prevents divorce.**

Conclusion - The essence of maintaining a marriage is the elevation of virtue within a person, including every family member, by relying on the following four factors:

- 1) Must be self-reliant.**
- 2) Must know how to choose the right spouse.**
- 3) Must have a marriage counselor.**
- 4) Must know how to purify the mind.**

All four Factors are guidelines that our grandparents provided us to elevate our virtues. After a wedding, many obligations and duties await. Although we think can not withstand them, we must learn to withstand them. Unless a person can elevate their virtues to a level that can handle all the duties of marriage, they will not be able to maintain their marriage.

When the couple feels completely satisfied with their marriage, only two issues remain that must be focused on. **First, they must continue to endure anything that comes along. Second, they must remain calm in the face of unexpected circumstances.**

If all members of a family follow these guidelines as provided by our grandparents, family conflicts will never occur. Each person will elevate their mind to a greater level. Divorce will never befall the marriage. Children will have someone to depend on and a good role model of a calm mind. The quality of life will improve socially and economically along with the quality of the mind. If every family in every country can achieve this, it will greatly benefit the quality of the world's people.



Chapter 3

Keeping Love Alive (Cherishing Love)



In the book *Thirty-eight Universal Steps to Eternal Happiness*, compiled for the summer program for ordained monks by the **Venerable Teacher Monk Somchai Tanavuddho**, the subject of cherishing love was discussed. Since husbands and wives should carefully consider this subject, we wish to present a discussion on cherishing love in family matters from a Buddhist perspective.

How to Cherish Love

Living together as husband and wife can be difficult or easy. If one poses a question asking how husband and wife can live together happily, no two answers will be the same. Some will say that it depends on their astrological fate and destiny. Cynics will say that it depends on the size of the dowry.

The Buddha answered this question in one word: benevolence. That is to say mutual benevolence, the practice **the Four Universal Forms of Benevolence** (*Saṅgahavatthu*), promote happiness in living together.

1. Giving (*Dāna*)

Loving and living together require sharing. Everyone should put his or her earnings in the common coffer and share. Not doing so can give rise to suspicion. Where there is no giving, the atmosphere feels very unpleasant. And sharing encompasses sharing of problems too. When one has a problem, the other party should be willing to lend a hand to help.

2. Pleasant speech (*Piyavācā*)

One should be careful when giving advice, being too candid can hurt the other party's ego and give rise to resentment. The rule of thumb is that the pleasant words one used before marriage should continue to be used during marriage.

3. Mutual Benefit (*Atthacariyā*)

Couples can help each other by talking about what is right and what is wrong based on the Dhamma they have studied. They should always continue to acquire knowledge of Dhamma and put it into practice. Generally, when a husband and wife quarrel, each will try to put the blame on the other

party, when in fact they both are guilty of not finding the appropriate way to prevent conflicts.

4. Right Roles (*Samānattatā*)

The husband should be a good father, and the wife should be a good mother. Each should assume responsibilities both inside and outside the house. Only meditation will enable them to fully achieve this goal. Those who have practiced meditation until their thinking is clear will know how to behave. They will not allow outside influences to affect their behavior.

In conclusion, practicing the Four Universal Forms of Benevolence is the same as exercising the Three Basic Meritorious Deeds, which are: Giving – sharing of things

Adherence to Precepts – to improve one's morals, both in speech and in action.

Meditation – meditation clears our mind, and a clear mind opens the door to wisdom, and wisdom shows the way to appropriate actions.

Responsibilities of a Husband and Wife

In order to keep their love alive, a husband and wife should know their responsibilities towards each other thoroughly; these responsibilities are based on the Four Universal Forms of Benevolence.

1. Five Responsibilities of a Husband to His Wife

1.1 Appreciation. The husband should openly respect her as his lawful wedded wife, not furtively keeping her like a mistress. If his wife does something good, praise her. And if she does something bad, warn her, but not in public or in front of other members of the family since this can diminish her status in others' eyes. He should give her some privacy and independence, such as her social life, or spending time with her relatives.

1.2 Disparagement. A husband should not regard his wife as inferior to him, in terms of family status, wealth, or intelligence. He should not undertake any family matter without consulting her. And he must not use physical violence or emotional abuse.

1.3 Faithfulness. He should not be involved with other women as mistresses since this is the worst insult to the wife. The pride of every woman is to have a husband who is faithful to her alone.

1.4 Authority. The husband should give his wife authority to decide on matters inside the family, such as those related to the kitchen. If it is something that his wife cannot handle alone, then he should lend a hand.

1.5 Accessories. It is the nature of women to pay attention to their appearance, and accessorizing themselves

always makes them happy. It even eliminates anger in some women. Therefore, every husband should make an allowance for this tendency.

2. Five Responsibilities of a Wife to Her Husband.

2.1 Housekeeping. A woman should be a good housekeeper, cooking delicious meals and keeping the household clean.

2.2 Thoughtfulness. She should be helpful to her husband's relatives, and be gentle to them verbally.

2.3 Faithfulness. She is always faithful to her husband.

2.4 Frugality. She will not be a squanderer or a penny pincher.

2.5 Diligence. She will work hard to take good care of the house, and will not indulge herself in vices.

In a traditional Thai marriage, when the bride and groom have holy water poured onto their hands by family and friends, they wear connected garlands on their heads which signifies that they will be united for a long, long time. Unfortunately, this symbol is not a guarantee of a harmonious marriage.

The Buddha showed us the way to unity, not with garlands, but with Dhamma, which is benevolence. The presence of Dhamma will be like two loops keeping the couple together until death.

Despite the behavior of one spouse, one should never waver from the Dhamma. Occasionally, the husband may go astray or the wife will resort to frivolous behavior, wasting time and money, leaving the house in shambles. The right way to resolve this conflict is to keep doing good, take good care of the other, and maintaining one's own goodness. Doing so will make the situation improve.



Chapter 4

The Mother of Great Kindness within the House



Buddhism contains teachings on ways to maintain a warm, gentle family that have been used as a reference by people for thousands of years. It is also certain that many modern theories about family dynamics can be found in Buddhist doctrine. Moreover, Buddhist texts contain an even more thorough understanding of family dynamics than today's theories.

The points contained in *Ten Suggestions from a Father to His Daughter on Her Wedding Day* resulted in a daughter becoming an important figure in her husband's family. Her husband, his parents, and his relatives gave her love, respect and kindness. She eventually became known and praised as **The Mother of Great Kindness within the House.**

Who was Lady Visakha?

Visakha, a supreme Upasika [a Buddhist laywoman], was a very important person in Buddhism. She was responsible for the construction of Wat Buppharam, one of many ashrams, a center that helped spread Buddhism throughout India during the time of the Lord Buddha. The temple was built in the town of Savatthi, in the county of Kosol. An enormous fortune was spent to construct a two-level residence that contained 1,000 rooms for the Bhikkhus.

Furthermore, she was also the first person who requested permission from Lord Buddha to offer robes to the Bhikkhus to use during the rainy season retreat. This offering became a tradition that Buddhist devotees maintain to this day.

Visakha was born into a wealthy family in the county of Magadha, the largest county at that time. Her father was named Tanachai.

Once, when his county was in an economic crisis, King Pasantikosol of Kosol made a personal request to King Pimpisan of Magadha that Tanachai become the minister of finance for his county. King Pimpisan consented and Tanachai moved from Magadha to Kosol, bringing his daughter with him.



When they reached Magadha, which was 112 kilometers from the capital of Kosol, Tanachai asked King Pasantikosol, “The city is small and I have a large number of retinue with me. It will be inconvenient to live in the city. I request permission to build a new town in this comfortable part of the county.” The king granted his request and Tanachai developed a new town named Sakethu. This name of this town can be found in Indian history and it still exists today.

Lady Visakha also had a grandfather whose name was Menataka who was one of the richest men in Magadha. Her family had a very important role in the economy of both counties during the time of the Lord Buddha.

Ten Suggestions From a Father to His Daughter on Her Wedding Day

When she came of age Lady Visakha was to be married to the son of another family in Kosol. Her father gave her the following advice.

1. Do not let the internal fire become external. Do not reveal any family problems for the people outside the family to know.

2. Do not let the external fire come within. This means to not bring external problems into the house.

3. Give to those who give to us. If we are capable of helping those who need it, we should. Then, if they are capable, we may rely on their help if we are in need.

4. Do not give to those who give nothing to us. If you are taken advantage of by people to whom you offered assistance, or if they refuse to help you when you are in need, then do not help them again and do not rely on their help in the future.

5. Whether they give or not, be generous to our relatives. If our relatives have fallen on hard times and seek your help, you should help them even though they may never return the things we lend them. They are still our relatives.

6. Make sure that the food is amenable. One should make sure that the meals served to the family are wholesome and that the relatives are taken care of when it comes to food.

7. Find an appropriate place to sit. This means one must know and show the proper level of respect. For example, it would be disrespectful to sit on a higher place than one’s mother-in-law. Showing appropriate respect at the dinner table will allow for a peaceful mealtime.

8. Find an appropriate place to sleep. One should make sure that the sleeping area for each person in the family is appropriate. Be prepared to rise before anyone in the family

The Birth of a Meritorious Person



and to retire after everyone else. Make sure you take care of all business before going to bed so that you will rest peacefully.

9. Be respectful of the fire within. The anger of your in-laws or your husband can be compared to a smoldering fire. While they yell or scold us in anger, be still and do not argue with them. In that situation, angry words will only make the situation worse. It is better to wait when they are no longer angry before gently explaining the situation.

10. Pay homage to the angels. Whenever your husband's relatives or your husband perform a good deed, try to praise them and encourage them so that they will continue their good behavior.

Lady Visakha employed these ten suggestions that her father gave her to win the hearts and affection of her husband, her in-laws, and retainue. It became a tradition for women who were about to get married to study them, even to this day. Any family who has a wife or a daughter-in-law who practices these ten suggestions is said to have **“The Mother of Great Kindness within the House.”** Please help lessen her burdens and take good care of her for the peace and happiness of the children and family in the future.



Everyone feels excited when there is a new addition to the family. Some of these families are so elated they invite monks to receive offerings at their homes for seven days. Some celebrate for seven days and seven nights. While excitement is a natural reaction to an impending birth, it is also an opportunity to reflect upon an important question: even though we are born human and are related to another, what makes us different? What determines our differences?

We are born into the same world, yet we do not know how we came to be. We do not know where our planet is situated in the universe. We do not even know where we will go after we die. Everywhere we turn there are so many questions whose solutions we are still seeking. Why do some people die in their mother's womb while others survive to see the world? Why are some born strong while others are born



with disabilities like deafness or blindness? Why are some people born into a wealthy family while others are born so poor that they cannot even get a drop of their mother's milk? Why are some born into high society while others are not? Why is it possible that while two people who grew up in the same family work the same job and think the same way, one ends up poor while the other becomes rich? And, the most puzzling question of all: why are we born as humans and other living beings are born as animals?

All of these social and physical differences are seen as normal to us, to the point where we rarely acknowledge their existence. However, if we reflect upon them deeply, we realize that they must have a reason for existing. We just do not know where to find those reasons.

If we never know Buddhism, we will never know the answers to these questions. The teachings of Buddhism allow us to see the root causes of these differences and enable us to understand the law that governs the world: The Law of Kamma.

The differences found in life are dependent on the kamma of each individual.

The fact that people all are born humans, but vary in the amount of happiness or Dukkha (suffering) is an indication that the *fruits of kamma exist and their retribution is derived from our previous existences.*

A senior monk once discussed **kamma**:

“The word **kamma** is a neutral word that does not imply good or bad since kamma means **action**. An action always carries a consequence. Why do we feel full? It is because we’ve eaten. If we didn’t eat, we’d be hungry.

In physics, there is the law which states that the energy of an action is equal to the energy of the opposite reaction. Sir Isaac Newton discovered this and termed it the third law of motion. In terms of Dhamma we can say that ***whatever your action, you will experience its consequences in return.***

Scientists discovered this law of the physical world and the world accepted it only a little over 300 years ago. But the Lord Buddha discovered the Law of Kamma and taught it to the world over 2,500 years ago, and what He discovered was much more profound and insightful.

Let’s take abortion as an example. If we look at this situation on the surface, we think that the unborn child did not have a choice. It was the parents’ fault for not wanting to have the child, so they chose abortion. The Lord Buddha taught us not to view any situation superficially. He taught us to look deeper and ask questions. If there were so many potential parents in this world, why did the baby not go to another family, but entered the womb of the woman who would abort it?

The reason is because the unborn child has kamma from

killing animals from a previous life. When it was time for it to be born, due to the retribution from the killing, it was conceived in the womb of a person who also liked to kill animals. The mother and the baby must have an equivalent kamma in order for the child to enter her womb. Otherwise, conception would not have taken place. Once it entered the womb, the mother suffered a morning sickness and may have felt a craving to kill animals. Or she may want to consume fresh blood to reduce the sickness, believing that if she does not, the sickness will not go away.

For others, the circumstances may be even harsher. When the mother experiences morning sickness, she may want to get rid of the unborn child immediately through an abortion. This is the result of a more severe kamma. The consequence of an action is much more complex than what we really see. For instance when there is an increase in the births of people with previous kamma from killing, the resulting build-up of kamma becomes collective and the government of those people passes laws that permit abortion.

When a person with merit enters the womb, how does this affect the mother?

The Lord Buddha explained that when a person with great merit enters the womb, the fruit of his merit will lead to more prosperity for that family. The mother will await her unborn child eagerly. She will make offerings and wish for a blessed

child to be born to her. When someone from a fortunate realm is ready to be reborn, he will choose the best and most generous mother. Once he enters the womb, he brings good fortune to his mother and himself.

The strength of this person's merit is an interesting thing. If the mother suffers from morning sickness, she will not have any relief no matter what she does until she offers alms. This relieves her symptoms instantaneously. This implies that the unborn child, in its previous existence always made **Dana** (donation in the Pali language). The baby's presence influences her to offer alms herself. For a person who loved to chant in a previous existence, when his mother experiences the sickness, he will trigger her to chant in order to gain relief. When the mother chants and meditates, the unborn child will be happy along with her.

The social and physical differences between people in this world result from the past and present kamma. One part of this equation we cannot alter because it is the consequence of an action we have already performed. But we always have a fresh opportunity to create a brighter future for ourselves. The Lord Buddha taught us to refrain from accumulating more bad kamma. The bad kamma that we accumulate today will follow us and its consequences will arise in the future. So, avoid amassing bad kamma, even minor ones. This can only benefit you.

The heart the Buddhism is to avoid doing bad deeds, perform only good deeds, and purify the mind until it is clear and bright. These three actions are good deeds, and performing good deeds results in good kamma that will make us happier. When we perform good deeds, some of the good consequences are immediately expressed in this lifetime while the rest will build the foundations for everlasting happiness in future lifetimes.

For us, since we are already born into this world, we must endure the conditions we find ourselves in. Concentrate on performing more good deeds and do not be influenced by bad thoughts. The technique to keep our minds strong is nothing more than meditation. The more you meditate the more strength you will acquire to perform more good deeds.

When we view the world and understand the effects of kamma, we will be determined to lead our lives truthfully and on the right path. The consequences of kamma are real and they will bear fruit. If we performed good deeds we will receive good consequences. If we performed bad deeds, bad consequences can be expected. The Lord Buddha's teachings are truthful, and they have been examined over many thousands of years. Be aware of the differences that exist among the people of the world. These are the conditions that we were born into and they prove that the consequences from kamma are real. This is why we must focus on doing good deeds."

Teaching Your Unborn Child



The Lord Buddha taught that:

1. It is not the end of all things when we die.
2. When you perform good deeds you will go to Heaven.
3. When you perform bad deeds you will go to hell.
4. When you extinguish all your kilesa (defilements of the mind) you will go to Nibbana.

As we continue in the cycle of birth and rebirth, we must concentrate on eliminating bad deeds and only on accumulating good deeds. Purify your minds as much and as consistently as possible in this lifetime. The merits that we accrue from our good deeds will lead us to be reborn with a healthy physical form, wealth and wisdom. In addition, we will be born into a family that values virtues. This will also provide us with the opportunity to be successful in the present and future lifetimes, until we exhaust all the kilesa.

At the same time, if the parents want to conceive a meritorious child, they, too, must focus on performing good deeds, chant, and meditate until their minds are clear and bright. If they build their own merits, they can receive a meritorious child into their lives who will bring happiness to that family.



Every parent wants their child to be healthy and good. However, there are many parents who do not understand that in order to have a good child they have to practice good behavior and be prepared to become a father and a mother even before they are married. They should not wait to begin after the baby has arrived. By then, they will not be good role models for their child. It is then unlikely that he/she will grow up to be the good child that his/her parents desire. Hence, it is good to introduce the subject of **Transferring Good Behavior to the Baby in the Womb**.

Transferring good behavior to the baby according to Buddhist teachings should be performed even before the baby is born.



Being born a human requires not only the combination of the father's sperm and the mother's egg, but also the spiritual conception of the child in the womb. The tiny being can only begin life in the mother's womb under the condition that it possessed kamma, either merit or demerit, at a level similar to that of his parents at the time of conception.

As a result, if the parents are healthy, good, and kind hearted, there is a good chance that the conception of a child will take place in the mother's womb.

Teaching the baby should begin before pregnancy and it requires the parents to maintain wholesomeness in body, speech and mind. Parents should eliminate all bad behaviors and observe the Five Precepts diligently in preparation for the conception of the child.

At the very least, the new parents must begin training themselves well even before entering the marriage. As soon as they realize that the wife is pregnant, they should try even harder to attend to the fetus. They must become even more attentive to their actions, whether it is walking, moving, consuming food (especially the spicy kind), consuming alcohol of all sorts, taking medicine, or even displaying a **bad temperament**. The parents have to make sure that these things do not affect them because they have a tendency to influence the baby's behavior.

Chinese people understood this well. They even have a fable called “Teaching your Unborn Child” that has been retold continually since ancient times.

During the Cheng Meng Season (a Chinese tradition of ancestral worship), as two sisters were making their way to pay respect at their family’s shrine, they came across a bag of money that had fallen on the side of the road. The delighted younger sister said to her older sister:

“Dear sister, we are so lucky. This surely is our good fortune.”

The older sister replied, “My sweet sister, we cannot keep this fortune.”

“Why not?” the younger sister uttered, bewildered.

The older sister replied, “In the three months that I’ve been pregnant I have taught my child about good virtues. I have taught it to be a person who does not covet anything that is not his. We should wait here for the rightful owner for a little while.”

At the same moment, a woman passing by saw the two sisters picking up the money. She waited on the side before coming over to ask them, “Did you see a money bag?”

The younger sister answered, “It is here.”

The woman spoke with her eyes wide open, “It is my

money that I dropped. Please give it back to me; my mother is waiting to go buy alcohol with that money.”

The older sister then asked her, “When did you drop it?”

The woman avoided the question and said, “Don’t ask me too much.”

At the same time, another woman approached them with the tearful eyes. She asked with a tremble,

“Dear ladies, I was wondering if you’ve seen a bag of money in this area. A little while ago, I was carrying it while I passed by this way to go buy gold and silver paper to bury with my mother’s body, but I dropped it unknowingly.”

When the first woman heard the second woman’s account of the actual event, she stepped away.

Both sisters gave the money bag to the second woman. She was the real owner. She was so impressed and appreciated both sisters.

The two sisters continued walking. The younger sister stated, “Dear sister, you settled the problem superbly. I thought if anyone claimed to be the owner of the money, you would give it to that person immediately.”

The older sister replied, “To help people, you must help them to the very end. Regardless of the work you do, you shall never abandon someone. When you begin to help, you

should continue helping until it is finished. If I gave the money easily to the greedy woman who pretended to be the owner, wouldn't it be simpler to just keep the money? Once we picked it up, we had to locate the real owner. I would like my unborn child to be good, so I have to instruct him while he is still in the womb."

The younger sister nodded admirably.

This fable is included here to show people that teaching a child to be good must begin while he/she is still in the womb. If the mother realizes she's pregnant, but continues to drink alcohol and smoke, and her husband continues to persuade her to think, speak, and do bad deeds, the fetus will become accustomed to these bad things while still in the womb. These behaviors create the possibility of giving birth to a disabled child. However, if both parents try to familiarize the baby with good virtues while in the womb, the family will absolutely achieve the birth of a good person.

Therefore, in order to teach the baby to be a good person, parents must have good lessons to teach their child even before conception. This ensures that the parents will give birth to a good child and raise him/her to be a good individual until the end.



Part Two

Raising Your Children



Chapter 7

Raising Children to Be Smart and Virtuous



Our world seems to become smaller in terms of its interconnectedness. Changes occurring around the world have immediate effects on us socially and economically. The strength of the family, society and the nation depends upon how much knowledge, ability, and virtues parents have in raising smart and virtuous children.

Learning ways to raise smart and virtuous children is an important task that all parents must not neglect. A child who is smart but not wholesome will not survive, and a child who is wholesome but not smart will not endure either. A child must be both in order to be successful and make it in this world.



In some families, we see virtuous parents have intelligent children, but the parents do not know how to raise them. As a result, the children turn out to be troublesome and the parents are puzzled over how they went wrong in the upbringing.

Four Kinds of Families

To raise children to be smart and virtuous, parents must continuously adhere to these two guidelines.

1. Parents must have the knowledge necessary to raise children to be smart and virtuous.

2. Parents must invest time to teach children to be smart and virtuous.

Since different families interpret and implement these two guidelines to various extents, four types of families exist today.

Type I: A family that has time but no knowledge.

Type II: A family that has knowledge but no time.

Type III: A family that has no knowledge or time.

Type IV: A family that has both knowledge and time.

In the first three types of families, children receive very little moral training. Some children come from wealthy

families, have everything they want, but receive little parental supervision. These children have the highest chance of becoming unwholesome.

Children of Type IV families receive continuous knowledge and moral training from their parents. The parents never leave their children to the mercy of nature. Even though they may not be wealthy, their children have the ability to develop a solid future.

Knowledge in Raising Children

There exists a set of basic Buddhist principles on how to raise children to be smart and well behaved. These principles can be found in a book entitled, “How to Raise the Children to Be Good People for the Nation,” written by The Moral Development through Education Foundation. We asked for their permission to share their teachings in this book. The reader may refer to that book if further details are required.

Parents can consider having a baby if they can clearly address these 4 points:

1. What qualities must good children have?
2. How do children form good or bad habits?
3. How can parents successfully cultivate good habits in their children?



4. How does wholesomeness promote intelligence in children?

Parents must be aware of and capable of answering these four questions before having a baby. The answers come from the Lord Buddha’s teachings:

What Qualities do Good Children Have?

Good children must have three characteristics, which are taken from the three supreme characteristics of the Lord Buddha:

1. Wholesome or not being troublesome
(The Lord Buddha’s absolute purity)
2. Smart or not being ignorant
(The Lord Buddha’s supreme wisdom)
3. Demonstrating care towards others
(The Lord Buddha’s ultimate compassion)

Any child who possesses these three characteristics is considered a **Good Child**. This child is then a good vessel for receiving knowledge from teachers and relatives. These characteristics form a platform from which more virtues can develop, similar to rich and fertile soil that allows a plant to develop well.



Where do Children's Habits come from?

After parents learn that good children must not be troublesome, ignorant, or careless towards others, the question now is, how do parents cultivate these traits in their children?

Good qualities are implanted in children through their cultivation of good habits.

Habits are familiarity, or each person's individual behavior. They are developed with repetitive thoughts, speech, and actions. These repetitive activities, in turn, influence how good or bad we are.

If parents allow their children to repeatedly think, speak and act unwholesomely, regardless of the scale, their children will become accustomed to wrongdoing, which cultivates bad habits. Chances are the children will grow into bad individuals.

On the contrary, if parents teach their children to repeatedly engage in wholesome deeds, regardless of the scale, they will become accustomed to doing the right thing until it becomes a habit. And they will become good individuals in the future.

People repeatedly think about, speak about, and act upon three different things:

- 1) The four requisites, which are clothing, food, shelter, and medicine.
- 2) Our assignments
- 3) Our daily routine.

Habits develop from the way we utilize the four requisites. For example, three children who are fed using different routines will develop different habits:

The first child: The mother feeds the child irregularly. The child cries whenever he is hungry and not fed on time. He becomes easily irritated and screams when he needs attention. He will develop a habit of violence and aggression to get what he wants. It is like the parents have a **tiger baby** to raise.

The second child: The mother feeds the child all the time. Even when the child is not hungry, he is fed milk. He becomes obese but happy. However, he will develop a habit of sluggishness and indolence. In this case, the parents have a baby pig to raise.

The third child: the mother feeds the child according to a schedule. The child develops a habit of punctuality and will grow up to be healthy, reasonable, happy, a good decision maker, and will be easy to care for. In this case, the parents have a sage to raise.

Good and bad habits come from the child's repetition of thinking, speaking, and acting. In particular, it is how they

utilize the four requisites, how they work, and how they conduct their daily activities.

Parents can instill wholesomeness, intelligence, and compassion towards others by teaching their children respect, discipline, and endurance, with regards to their use of the four requisites, their assignments, and their daily activities. The child will, in turn, develop good habits (the three characteristics).

Raising a child to be smart

Parents who want their children to be smart can cultivate wisdom by teaching them **respect**. **Respect is a sign of one's appreciation towards the true virtue or benefit of a person or object.**

Wisdom is can be divided into **worldly wisdom and Dhamma wisdom**.

Worldly wisdom is wisdom or knowledge acquired through education. It is required to make a living. However, without morality to curb one's knowledge, children may misuse it. For example, a pharmacist may produce and traffic heroin instead of conducting research for a new medication. Worldly wisdom must work together with Dhamma Wisdom.

Dhamma wisdom is wisdom in deciding what is right or wrong, good or bad, merit or demerit, and appropriate or inappropriate. Children gain this knowledge from Buddhist teachings. In practice, parents must teach them to respect and listen to the elders' words of wisdom and life experiences, and learn about the ever-changing world and people.

Dhamma wisdom comes from seven sources. When one respects these sources, one will gain wisdom:

- 1. Respect for the Lord Buddha.**
- 2. Respect for the Dhamma.**
- 3. Respect for the Sangha (monastic community).**
- 4. Respect for Education.**
- 5. Respect for Meditation.**
- 6. Respect for Non-Recklessness.**
- 7. Respect for Greetings.**

The more parents teach their children to see the virtues of these seven sources, the more Dhamma wisdom their children will gain.

Children are very fortunate if they are born to parents who have studied Dhamma from the seven sources of wisdom and are prepared to pass down this wisdom to their children before they get married. Parents will have a sage as a child. Children will have parents who are capable of teaching them Dhamma wisdom. Future generations will be wholesome and bring prosperity to the family.

Raising a Child to be Wholesome

Wholesome children have parents who have taught them to have discipline in both their worldly lives and in Dhamma. Discipline is taught in conjunction with their use of the four requisites, their assignments, and in their daily routine. Parents must set an example through their own behavior.

The 4 Worldly Disciplines are:

1. Discipline with speech.

To teach a child to have discipline in speech, parents must speak properly (politely, truthfully, and with good intentions). Parents must point out the negative consequences of lying, i.e., it undermines the quality of the mind and causes forgetfulness.

2. Discipline with time.

Teaching a child to have discipline with time is to teach them to wake up, eat, and sleep on time.

Waking up on time means getting up early in the morning to keep a child from sleeping all the time. In particular, if a girl wakes up late, it could break up her marriage in later life.

Eating on time means that a child must eat when a meal is scheduled. If children come down with gastritis, chances are they will have symptoms for the rest of their life, i.e.

they will develop a stomach ache whenever they are under pressure.

Sleeping on time means going to sleep in the early evening. When children go to sleep late, they will not want to get up early. When their parents wake them up, they will bargain for more sleep, starting their day with an argument. They will become deceitful people.

3. Discipline with cleanliness.

Dirty children are not well received in society. Parents have to teach them how to maintain cleanliness, such as how to take a bath by using less water, soap and time, but still turn out clean.

4. Discipline with organization.

Children who lack organizational skills tend to have conflicts when they work with others. They cannot follow outlined procedures or prepare and complete their work, resulting in difficulty of achieving success.

The Dhamma Disciplines are rooted in the Five Precepts:

Children that don't keep the Five Precepts will experience problems in their adult life, such as in their marriage. And if life is unfavorable, they may commit a crime in the future:

1) If they do not keep the first Precept (No taking or harming of life) then: They might commit a murder.

2) If they do not keep the second Precept (No stealing) then: They might engage in corruption.

3) If they do not keep the third Precept (No sexual misconduct) then: They might engage in prostitution.

4) If they do not keep the fourth Precept (No lying, divisive speech, idle chatter, or harsh words) then: They might commit fraud.

5) If they do not keep the fifth Precept (No consumption of intoxicating substances, such as alcohol or drugs) then: They will exacerbate the breadth of the roads to ruins, (*Apāyamukha*), i.e. gambling, alcohol consumption, nightclubbing, etc.

Raising a Child to Show Care towards Others

For children that demonstrate care towards others, they must be taught to take care of themselves. Then, they will be capable of helping others. To achieve this, parents must train children to have **endurance**.

At first glance, it seems like it is enough for children to be wholesome and smart, but the truth is, it is not enough. **When one is born as a human being, one must bring benefit to others as well.**

Let's suppose that we plant a fruit tree. We care for it by watering it, and plowing and fertilizing soil. Ten years pass and it still bears no fruit, so we decide to cut it down.

In comparison, if children do not assist others, no one will want to help them when they are adults. Life will be difficult for them and they will be poor throughout life. When they need help no one will want to help them, because they are careless towards others.

Parents can teach their children to have care for others by teaching them to help themselves by having endurance at four levels:

1) Endurance towards physical hardship. Children will learn to work hard and not be afraid of hard work and physical hardship.

2) Endurance towards pain and suffering. Children will be aware of the need to care for their own health. They will not be deceptive and will never pretend to be sick to get out of school.

3) Endurance towards conflict. Children will learn to be a team player. They will not have an inferiority or a superiority complex. They will not consider themselves equal to adults. They will know their place when interacting with others.

4) Endurance towards the stimulants of defilements (*kilesa*). Children will not become slaves to alcohol and drugs, sexual attraction, money, praise and other problems. These stimulants cause major social problems.

For example, corruption finds its roots in parents who didn't teach their children to endure stimulants of defilements. They didn't instill truthful adages such as, **honesty will always fulfill, dishonesty will only fulfill for a short period.** In addition, they encouraged their children to worship money even though money can't buy everything, i.e. purity of the mind.

When children are taught to choose money over virtue, they grow up to care for nothing but money. It does not matter if they obtained it through corrupt or deceptive means. This hindrance has prevented a nation like Thailand from progressing, even though it has more natural resources than many other countries.

How Virtues can translate into Intelligence for Children

After reading the book, "How to Raise the Children to Be Good People for the Nation," **one can understand how virtues can lead to intelligence in children.**

All children want to be good. Children can be compared to white sheets and their parents are the ones who dye the sheets. If they select the right color and apply the right techniques, then the sheets will be beautiful. But if the sheets are not dyed correctly, they could be considered damaged, useless, and then thrown away. Raising children to be intelligent is much more complicated than the dying of sheets. Mistakes are very difficult to rectify.

People who surround children must set the best example for them:

1. Parents must set a good example for their children to see.
2. Parents must find wholesome friends for them.
3. Parents must find good books for them to read.
4. Parents must bring them to a good teacher.

These people can be fine examples for children in these areas:

1. Proper approach to work.
2. Proper approach to time management.
3. Proper approach to using the four requisites.

They can set an example in these areas because they have these special characteristics:

1) Ability to maintain quality.

A person that maintains quality tries his best to deliver the best results in everything he does. He has a clear understanding of what constitutes high quality and how it can be achieved. When he works, it is to his fullest ability. He is aware of obstacles and problems, and can prevent them.

A person who has no respect for education, other people, or looks for fault in others, will not be able to attain this level of wisdom. No one will want to share anything with him.

However, if children learn about respect at home, and see good examples set by those around them, they will learn to value respect. They will learn what high quality is, a proper approach to work, and will be able to see potential problems. They will be very capable and effective at their work in the same way their role models are.

2) Ability to manage time.

A person who manages his time can lay out a plan for his work. Regardless of the work, he can see all its steps, what should be done first, what should follow, how long each step will take, and how long the entire project will take.

If a person has never taught himself time management, he would not be able to complete the tasks. Those who can manage time know its value. When time passes, it never returns. And good opportunities pass, leaving old age in its place.

Those who cannot manage their time will have habits of doing things to their liking. They will be uncomfortable when given deadlines. Without discipline to manage their time, it will be difficult to complete anything planned.

People who can manage their time have taught and disciplined themselves beforehand. They learned how much time is needed in a basic routine or for a project. They can implement a plan according to a step-by-step process, calculating the required time for accurate completion, and are rarely ever wrong.

Thus, when children receive training in discipline from home and see examples of people who are capable of effective time management, they will become people who appreciate the value of discipline and time management. This is a way to instill a habit of selflessness. And they will be able to follow in the footsteps of their role models.

3) Ability to manage a budget.

A person who can manage a budget is able to plan best for expenditures to yield the highest return with minimal resources.

A person who manages a budget must know what is necessary and what is not. He must not be wasteful with it. This person must first assess if an expense will benefit the

group. He knows that a tight budget will lead to lower quality and over budgeting will lead to wastefulness. He must be honest; corruption for his own or his friends' benefit must not occur.

Organizations that lack people who can manage a budget will have financial problems because of unclear and confusing financial plans. This will bring project setbacks, loss of trust among employees, and eventually a bad reputation.

A person effectively manages a budget because he was taught to endure physical hardship, pain and suffering, conflict, and the stimulants of defilements. With this endurance, he knows to be frugal in his use of the four requisites.

By having endurance and appropriate role models, children will become intelligent with regard to budgets and will follow the footsteps of their role models in the best possible way.

Children can absorb these three characteristics from the good people around them. They will learn skills in quality, time, and budget management. They will effectively complete any assigned projects, using minimal time and resources, which is a great asset in any environment. This is how virtue translates into intelligence; it is through the examples set by people around them.

Conclusion

Parents must pass on knowledge, ability and virtues to their children until the children develop intelligence and virtue that will guide them to lead their lives beautifully and proudly. For parents to successfully pass these qualities to their children, they must:

1) Stay abreast of new information that would assist in their upbringing. They will understand how children develop in modern society and the challenges they face.

2) Keep their children from immorality. Parents must make time to teach their children, to teach them how to use the four requisites, complete their chores, and go about their daily routine. They must also ask teachers, senior relatives, and friends to keep an eye on them, and give them permission to warn their children when they do something wrong.

If parents can do these two things, then children will become accustomed to wholesomeness rather than unwholesomeness. Children will always be surrounded by those who can show them right thought, speech, and action. They will grow up to be smart and virtuous. These two qualities will enable them to rely on themselves and live their lives beautifully.



Chapter 8

Killing with Kindness: Parents Defending Children When They Misbehave



“A parent’s love can harm children.” This sentence may go against the feelings of parents, but in reality there are a lot of children who become bad when their parents defend them when they have done something wrong. Hence, parents or those who want to start a family in the future have very important issues to consider: How do we raise good children and how do we avoid making the mistake of loving our children in the wrong manner where we harm them by defending their wrongdoing?

Do Not Take the Children’s Side When They Have Done Something Wrong

It is a very serious mistake if parents take their children’s side when they have misbehaved or done something wrong.

The children will believe that “when you do something good you will receive good in return” is false; and “when you misbehave you receive good in return” is true. When these children grow up they will tend to continuously do bad things. Their misbehavior will cause endless distress to society.

Parents must acknowledge the consequences of providing misguided support to their children. Do not show children love through indulgence. If they make a mistake, parents must discipline them. It is better for the children to suffer a little now rather than letting them suffer throughout their lives.

Therefore, if parents do not take their children’s side when the children have done wrong, the children will learn that doing good deeds will definitely yield good consequences. If they do bad deeds, they will have to suffer the inevitable unpleasant consequences.

Understand the Parameters in Developing Correct Habits

In order to instill virtues in children, parents must understand that there are two methods for developing habits in children.

The first method is to develop the personality traits based on heredity.

The transfer of personality traits must occur at the very beginning, before the baby’s arrival. In order for a conception to take place, the child must have a combination of good and bad kamma that is comparable to the people who will become his parents.

So, if the parents are healthy, good, and kind-hearted, there is a good chance that the conception of a child will take place in the mother’s womb. Teaching the baby should begin before the pregnancy and it requires the parents to maintain wholesomeness in body, speech and mind. Eliminate all bad behaviors and observe the Five Precepts diligently in preparation for the conception of the child.

At the very least, the new parents must begin training themselves well before entering the marriage. As soon as they realize that the wife is pregnant, they should try even harder to attend to the fetus. They must become even more attentive to their actions, whether it is walking, moving, consuming food, (especially the spicy kind), consuming alcohol of all sorts, taking medicine, or even displaying a **bad temperament**. The parents have to make sure that these things do not affect them because they have a tendency to influence the baby’s behavior.

The second method is to develop the personality traits influenced by the environment or through discipline.

You should start teaching your baby the day he opens his eyes to the world. Do not think that the baby is too young to

learn. Breast feeding on time is another way to teach a baby about punctuality. Changing the diaper immediately when it is wet can build the habit of cleanliness. Finally, speaking with sweet and gentle words will encourage the baby to be courteous.

Do Not Allow Children to Continue Making Mistakes Until They Become Bad Habits

A newborn child is pure like a clean white cloth. So, the baby needs a model for his thoughts, speech and actions. Whatever comes to the baby first, he will use that as his model. Therefore, if the baby receives things that are good, he will have the opportunity to do more good deeds. This solid foundation of what is good can withstand any misconduct that might occur in the later years, thus allowing him to be able to look after himself.

The baby's first few mistakes, which are usually obvious, are easily detected by the parents, prompting them to find a way to correct this behavior immediately. However, parents' ignorance or negligence can allow the baby to become accustomed to that behavior, which can later develop into a bad habit. This habit is repeated because his actions go undetected by an adult. In the end, his good behavior will diminish.

Love Your Children in the Correct Manner

The manner in which we offer our love to children is nothing more than instilling virtues within them in order for them to grow up proud in this world.

The elements of moral conduct that warrant constant emphasis are as follows.

1. Wisdom - Teach children to know about the cause and effect of actions, to be able to examine things, and to maintain their temperament. If the parents are successful, the children will have wisdom and awareness. They will not mistake right from wrong.

2. Discipline - Children must be taught to always be punctual, clean, honest, and have purity in body, speech and mind.

3. Loving Kindness – This can be done by teaching them to love animals and trees, be polite, friendly, and know how to forgive.

When children are instilled with these virtues at an early age, they will be able to absorb other good virtues that their parents and teachers have to offer.

Once parents realize this, if they want to have exceptional children, they must educate themselves first before having

children. They must strictly adhere to the following three virtues: wisdom, discipline and loving kindness. This way, parents will have a chance to conceive a wonderful child. They will be good role models for the child and prevent themselves from harming their children with love.



Chapter 9

The Four Important Roles Parents Must Play in Raising Good Children



All parents wish bright futures for their children. They want to raise well-behaved, respectful and moral children whose comport will help them advance far in society. But in order to lay down the basic foundation for their success, parents must understand their roles in that development. In becoming good role models for their children, parents must understand their children's personalities and be cognizant on how children's attitudes and outlook change according to their age and environment.

When children are young, parents are everything for them. As they grow older, friends will influence their thoughts and attitudes. In the teenage years, parents become less important to them. When they become adults they are independent and must rely on their own intelligence and reasoning. Throughout the children's lives, it is necessary for parents to adjust themselves consistent to their children's perspective.

In addition to being good parents and performing parental duties, they should also assume the following roles:

1. The role of a teacher.

Parents must teach children to discern what is right and wrong, and what they should and should not do. If your child is too young to learn about cause and effect, parents must then be good role models for them. The effort must be gentle and spoken with a warm tone. Do not teach them with a bad temper. Punishment should be utilized only when it is necessary. Cleanliness should be encouraged while the children are still very young by involving them in chores like washing clothes and cleaning. Regular bathing and clean eating habits should be taught early. Do not neglect these lessons or assume that they are insignificant.

Since parents are their children's first teachers, they must instill what is right in their children so that it will be a foundation for their children's good character. As the children grow up, this foundation will help them integrate good behavior into their natural habits. This will automatically steer them away from wrongful behavior.

2. The role of an angelic being.

Parents must have a solid foundation of Dhamma in order to assume this role. They must train their children to love merit and be fearful of sin. This can be accomplished by reading to



them the Jataka (stories of the past lives of the Lord Buddha), making sure they do their chanting before bed, and teaching them how to offer Dana (generosity) through methods such as offering alms to monks every morning. But most importantly, they must refrain from doing bad deeds for fear of the consequences that follow. Children will learn to refrain from bad actions based on their parents' good example.

3. The role of a Brahma.

Parents must give loving kindness to their children by providing love and warmth. If the children make mistakes, parents must teach them about right and wrong and about forgiveness. When they perform good deeds, parents must praise and applaud them. Parents must provide them with an education and nurse them when they are sick. When they are grown and ready to leave the family to start their own lives, parents must accept their independence. We should still offer them advice, be their counsel, and give them encouragement.

Most importantly, parents must be neutral and not take their side if they have done something wrong. If children develop into law-breakers, they must be punished, even if this means jail time. Parents must accept the punishment. Do not demonstrate your love for your children incorrectly by committing perjury. Parents can do as much as they can to help, but do not violate the law of the country.

4. The role of an Arahant.

Parents must practice as high a level of morality as possible so that they are well respected in society, as if they are Arahants of the household. They must be a wise counsel in the family and respected by their children and grandchildren. They must support making merits and the pursuit of the Perfections, maintain dignity, and preserve the family name. All the children in the family will respect and listen to them. The children will be afraid to do wrongful things both in front of and behind their parents' backs.

Once parents are able to practice these four roles perfectly, family life will be joyful. There will be peace of body and mind which can expand from the well-balanced family to society and the country at large.



Raising Our Children to be Good People



In a society saturated with media, many parents are worried that their children will succumb to bad influences. How do we protect our children from those influences and instill conscience and morals in them?

In truth, the answer to this question can be discussed from many aspects, but our ancestors regularly relied upon the following four simple factors to raise good children.

1. Be a good role model for the children to observe.
2. Find good books for the children to read.
3. Find a good teacher to teach the children.
4. Find good friends with whom the children can associate.

Be a good role model for the children to observe

The first factor is the most difficult because many parents do not realize how influential they are to their children. Before we can begin to be good role models, we need to take stock of our good qualities. The Lord Buddha gave us the Five Precepts as an instrument to measure the worthiness of a human being. In today's society many people cannot even maintain the Five Precepts, so how can we be good role models for our children?

If parents come to the conclusion that their children are not as good as they could be, the parents must reflect upon where that bad behavior came from. Children are like clean slates, most of them do not know what is correct. When children speak impolitely, it is because they remembered it from their parents. If we want to train our children to be good people, their parents must create a good moral foundation by teaching them the Five Precepts, and maintaining those precepts to be good role models.

Find good books for the children to read

Our ancestors used to say, "If you love your cows, you must tie them. If you love your children; you must spank them."

But in the present day we say, "If you love your cows, tie them. If you love your children, spend time with them."

Since children read books, we should take great care in selecting them. If they want to read comics or biology, we must read along with them. One problem that we see today is violent video and computer games. We must be vigilant and spend time with our children. We must give them love and affection.

If we say that we do not have the time, then our lives are only half-lived. Our lives were not meant only for working; we must have time for ourselves and our family. We must set aside time to go to the book store with our children, let them select their own books, and observe their behavior from a distance. Sometimes we have to provide them with information to help in the decision-making process. As they grow older your lessons will help them select only good books.

Find a good teacher to teach the children

The subject of teachers is an extremely important one because they are the strongest outside influences that promote virtues in children. Since we are not with the teachers at school all day, we need to be able to assess them. We do not necessarily need a world-renowned school for our children

attend; we just need them to be in a good and positive environment. Being the number one student in class does not mean that student will become the richest person in the world. Knowledge from textbooks needs to be applied.

**Find good friends with whom
the children can associate**

Some parents send their children, when they are still fairly young, overseas to get their Bachelors, Masters or Doctoral degree. Once they return to Thailand they no longer have faith in Buddhism. Instead, they acquire false views from friends they went to school with. And when they work in a Thai environment, they speak without respect to people at work, causing resentment. They do not realize that knowledge from textbooks alone is not enough to ensure success. One must learn to respect and be courteous towards others.

The *Mangala Sutta* (the *Thirty-Eight Blessings of Life* which teaches us about the road to happiness in life) clearly states that you should not associate with fools. You should only associate with the wise. It is obvious that if our children associate with bad people, they too may be influenced to do bad things. This misguided behavior will become more apparent when children no longer live with us. We must be able to recognize the signs and give sound advice. Reprimands

should not be the first and only reaction. Raising children requires us to have tactics and strategy similar to that in business. We are trying to build their capacity to choose and associate with good people.

To prevent children from adopting bad behavior you must establish an environment founded on these four factors. In doing so, they will grow up to be adults who think, speak and act virtuously, leading lives with an ingrained sense of right and wrong.



Teaching Children Frugality to Ensure the Family's Future



Children's future financial security can be measured by their **frugality** and parents can cultivate good economic sense in their children by being frugal themselves.

For children to develop habits of saving, parents must begin when their children are still young by:

1. Teaching children the value of money. When children ask for money, parents must first ask them what they'll do with it and how necessary it is. If children lack a good reason, parents should withhold the money and let them know why. Even if children are unhappy, parents must not waver. Do not give them money just to end your annoyance or your children's tantrums. Do not let children think that money is easy to earn. They must learn that money doesn't grow on

trees, and every single dollar is hard-earned by their parents. Children will then know the value of money and will use it wisely.

2. Teach children not to spend lavishly. Please don't buy anything luxurious or unnecessary for your children. But if you must buy a particular item for them, please purchase the less expensive alternative that is comparable to the more expensive one. Find a way to explain to your children that good things do not necessarily cost more. Teach children to know its value and to use their belongings in a proper manner and to their full extent. You can also teach them how to repair damaged items by themselves so that they can be reused.

3. Teach children to make use of their spare time. Teach children to do things themselves, which will further develop their wisdom. Especially toys, If you let children create their own toys to play with or to assemble their toy parts together, then children will learn to help themselves and they will be proud of their successes, as they will have a higher mental acuity. Furthermore parents should train their children to reduce their allowance expenditures, hence children could learn to save their own money and how to make money themselves..

4. Teach children how to save money. Parents should get children a piggy bank so they can save their leftover allowance. Bring children to the bank to deposit their collected

money into their account. Encourage children to deposit money given to them on special occasions like birthdays, New Year's, etc. Parents should teach children to save this money as part of their education fund. Don't let children think that they can get money so easily or they will not appreciate the value of money.

5. Choose friends for your children that have frugal habits. Parents must find a way to prevent their children from associating with friends who spend money wastefully on luxury items and who do not know the value of money. As for the friend who knows how to save money and helps parents with house chores, you must acquaint your children with them. They will have good influence on one another on several aspects. The most important thing for parents is to keep their children away from bad people and *Apāyamukha* (Roads to Ruin), which are the most serious enemies of saving.

6. Teach children to observe the 8 Precepts on Buddhist Holy Days or on their days off. When children are mature enough, parents should take them to the temple. Instruct children on how to observe the 8 Precepts. The simple lifestyle of taking the precepts will teach them that many things that seem to be necessary are in fact not, i.e. going to see a movie or a show, getting made up with lipstick and makeup, dressing fashionably, etc. After observing the 8 Precepts for a while, they themselves will realize that all of those things are unnecessary. In order to make keeping precepts in children

a reality, parents must set a good example by practicing the 8 Precepts along with them. Keeping the 8 Precepts will help children develop frugality and guide them to wisely use the 4 requisites in the most economical way.

If every family is able to follow these guidelines, its future financial stability will be secured. Children of these families will be able to wisely manage their inheritance, if there is one. Even with no inheritance, children of these families will be able to secure their financial stability by themselves. This is because they have sealed an opening in their pocket by not getting involved with any of the Roads to Ruin (*Apāyamukha*).



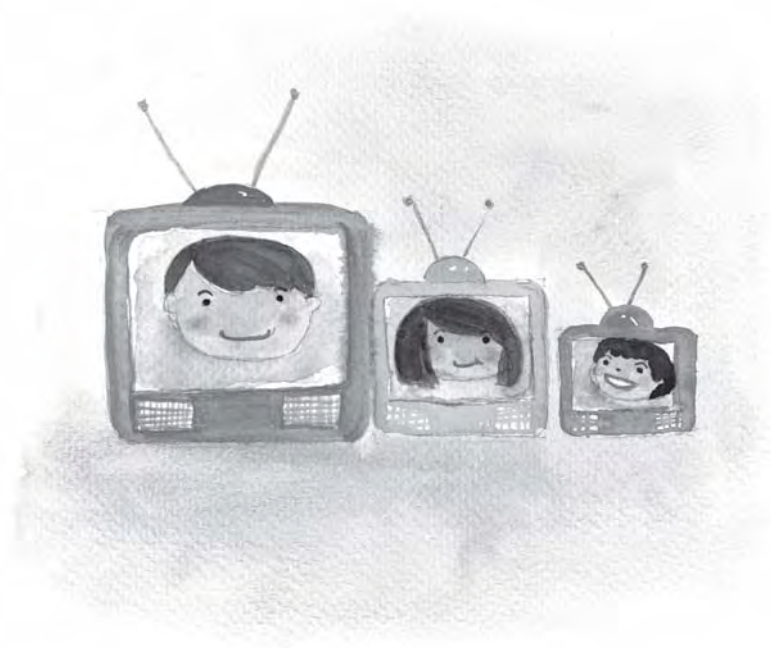
Chapter 12

Dear Father, Please Don't Let Me Become Addicted to Television



One of the concerns facing parents today is not having enough time to spend with their children because almost all of their available time is used to earn a living to support the family. Their solution, sometimes, is to allow their children to spend more time watching television. In other words, they think that **“there’s nothing wrong with letting the television baby sit the children.”**

This unsound solution to a concern has bad consequences because it leaves parents distressed from the changes seen in their children’s behavior. Children are becoming more aggressive, offensive and perverse, and they are using more profanity. These adverse changes in their children’s behavior leave parents quite clueless as to the root cause.



It is often too late when parents finally realize that this behavior stems from letting their children watch inappropriate television programs when they are not yet mature enough to discern right from wrong, good from bad, and appropriate from inappropriate. These children absorb the bad behavior they see and adopt it as their own. Many parents end up miserable once they realize that all of their hard work, in order to give their children everything possible, has been negated and led to the loss of their children's goodness.

Therefore, in order to address and prevent this kind of situation from happening in their own families, parents must consider the follow things:

1. Parents must always keep in mind that, if they do not spend enough time with their children, the children can develop poor judgment since most of the programs they watch revolve around the theme of sex. Children exposed to these programs can become more sexual because they think that the things they see on television are how things really are.

2. Parents should check for television programs that are educational, and allot the appropriate amount of time to watch those programs. It is better still if parents can set rules. There are three principles that can minimize the chances of children absorbing unwholesome influences from television.

Principle 1: Television time must not interfere with school and household chores. Parents must not let children

watch television whenever they want. They must have a set time for homework, reviewing lessons, reading and helping with household chores. Parents must set proper schedules and never allow the children to watch television into the late hours which would result in them not getting sufficient rest. This lack of proper rest can result in the development of bad habits like waking up late, deceitfulness and lying. Children who do not get enough sleep, or do not finish their home work, will not want to go to school. They will lie to their parents about not feeling well, having a headache or a stomachache. Parents may fall for these lies. These children will try to come up with more excuses to get out of going to school.

Principle 2: Television programs must not lack morals. The programs that you allow your children to watch must contain subjects pertaining to moral ideas and practices. Programs that are scary, frightening, sexual, or ones that deal with revenge and killing, should not be allowed.

Principle 3: Television programs must promote morality. Parents should be the ones who determine which television programs their children should watch. Those programs should promote virtues and intellectual development, i.e., programs about sharing, loving kindness and devotion. They can watch programs on science and technology or art and culture, which enable children to learn more about their country, culture and background. This knowledge will serve as a foundation for vision and wisdom in their futures.

In order for children listen to their parents, it is important that parents be good examples themselves. Then the children will obey. If parents are still addicted to television, it will be a large challenge to prevent their children from becoming addicted too. Therefore, between the choices of fostering good habits in children, and watching their favorite television programs, parents should choose the children's best interests as their priority.



Chapter 13

Children Who Are Addicted to the Internet



We live in the era of the information super highway. Children are addicted not only to television, videos and cell phones, but also to the internet. We must accept the fact that these types of media have both pluses and minuses, depending on how they are used. If we do not know how to control them, we, children and adults alike, can become slaves to these things.

When it comes to teenagers, the more parents prohibit them; the more interest it stirs. Parents should allow them to use these media, but they must designate the right time and the right amount of time. For example, they should set a schedule as to when it is time to use the internet, study, and chant and pay homage to the Lord Buddha.

Parents must teach children when to use the internet or to watch television. The key is to not let them sleep late. If the children sleep late, they will not want to get up in the morning, causing parents to have to reprimand them. This can result in exchanges of harsh words, early in the morning, which may teach children that it is acceptable to argue with their parents. It may also lead children to turn to deceit and lies.

Teaching children how to manage their time will encourage them to do well in school. When they grow up, they will be able to manage their time better, be more rational, and not behave negatively in accordance with their moods.

Teaching children to manage their time has helped numerous families rectify the problems of children being addicted to television and the internet.

There was a case involving the family of a respected and beloved English professor whose husband had to continue his studies abroad. Since only she and her children resided in the house, she asked her brother to come stay over and help look after her three children. The children all appeared to be bright, but they did not do well in school. Her brother could not understand why, and he tried to determine the cause. He discovered that it was due to the children staying up late to watch television. He presented his finding to his sister.

Once the cause was determined, the professor established a rule that all televisions were to be off by 9:00 PM, when the news came on. When the rule was observed, all the children were in bed by 9:00 PM. The children had better health. They woke up early in the morning at around 4:30 or 5:00 AM. They got up and studied until it was time to take a shower and get ready for school.

The following semester, all of the professor's children attained better grades in school. The eldest child, who was previously ranked #14 in the class, moved up to #4. The second child, who was ranked #7, jumped up to #2. The youngest child, who was very young, maintained his #1 ranking. The following semester, the middle and eldest children achieved #1 rankings in their classes.

When they graduated from school, all three were ranked #1 in their respective classes.

Setting a scheduled time for studying, sleeping and waking, up will lead to better grades in school and better decision-making in life. Many children may know what is right and wrong, but may not always be able to refrain from performing unwholesome deeds. When these children grow up, they may cause many of the problems we see in society. When they were young, they were never taught to give up things that they liked in order to do the appropriate thing, like stop watching television when it was time for bed.

The families that have house rules, on how children should spend their time, will be able to teach these children at a young age how to make the right decisions and how not to succumb to desires. This development can be a foundation that enables them to make decisions based on thorough and good reasoning, sound principles, accurate information, and systematic examination. They will be smart and virtuous in any kind of work they perform in the future.



Chapter 14

A Daughter Dresses Too Risqué



A government officer once came to a venerable monk at the temple for advice about a problem regarding the way teenagers dress these days.

The officer felt that teenage girls these days dress in a way that reveals too much of their body. This trend coincides with an increase in sex crimes, and the police presently do not know how to address the situation. The venerable monk gave his response, and those who were there listening agreed that his solution was practical and applicable for every family with a young daughter. His words were as follows:

“I don’t agree that the overly provocative dressing by these children is entirely the fault of the fashion industry. Instead I place the blame on parents who neglect their children and teachers who do not properly instruct their students.



“If we look at the problem clearly, we will discover that its origins took root even before these children became teenagers and started to dress provocatively. We can trace it back to when these children were still small, when they were still in kindergarten or elementary school.

“Parents and teachers misunderstood that encouraging creativity and instilling confidence required the children to dance and perform on stage. Practicing the choreography of the dance introduces them to sensuality at a tender age. In addition to dancing, teachers put makeup on them and dressed them in short skirts or clothes that were too revealing before sending them on stage. Parents and teachers commented on how adorable these children were when they saw them perform. To them this seemed like a successful production. Unfortunately the situation they created did not end when the performance ends. After everyone has encouraged the children to dress in revealing clothes and perform sensual dances and praised how they looked, it is no wonder that children do not listen when told they should dress more modestly. They’re so used to dressing in revealing clothes that they no longer feel embarrassed.

“When children are exposed to activities that promote sensuality at such a young age, on whom do we place the blame? We have to blame the parents and teachers who encouraged this behavior. Therefore, if we want to correct

this problem, we must teach them good behavior and how to dress appropriately while they are still young.

“The Lord Buddha said, *‘Do not dress inappropriately.’*”

“Dressing inappropriately means dressing with the hem above the calves and exposing one’s shoulders.

“In the past, parents dressed their daughters with a sarong that went down to their calves from the time that they were little girls. It would become natural and as adults these women dressed modestly. However, if girls are encouraged to wear short skirts at a young age, it is unlikely that they will want to cover themselves with a long skirt when they are older.

“Allowing young children to dress inappropriately is the root cause of the sexualizing of children, and its consequences like child prostitution, that lead to the Roads of Ruin (Apāyamukha).

“If we want to rectify this situation, we must first understand the purposes for wearing clothes.

- 1) To protect oneself from heat and cold.
- 2) To protect oneself from the elements like sunlight, wind, and rain, as well as from insects and small animals.
- 3) To cover the body parts that should not be exposed.

“If parents teach their children about the real purpose for wearing clothes when they are young, their minds will not be fixated on the sensual. Additionally we must protect them further by teaching our children to chant and meditate before they go to bed. Teach them to bow at their parents’ feet before bedtime. If we practice this regularly, we will be able to rectify the problem and raise wonderful, wholesome children.”

The teaching from this venerable monk makes us realize that the problem of children dressing in ways that attract sexual attention will disappear when parents teach them modesty from early childhood. Moreover, it may reduce and eventually eliminate sex crimes against children.





Part Three

Harmony in the Family



Creating Harmony in the Family



Children of broken families often display certain characteristics such as disobedience and negative attitudes. Obviously, that is not something that is desirable. Why did these children's families fall apart and their members go their separate ways? If we do not learn about the real causes, this may happen to our families as well. Children turn out this way when they are not properly taught. Some come from good families, but runaway due to conflicts with their siblings. Some even try to steal their sibling's possessions at the age of only 12 or 13 years old.

A lack of family unity is really at the core of these problems. It all begins when each member has a different schedule resulting in no interactions with each other. As they become more distant, the family eventually falls apart. However, the primary cause of a family's rapid deterioration is the **failure to have dinner together**.

In a large family, members who do not eat dinner together have even more disagreements. Take for an example, if one day a mother cooks a very delicious meal that everyone enjoys, everyone will eat more than their usual portion. If they sit down and have dinner together, the only problem they may encounter is a shortage of food by a few bites per person.

However, if everyone eats at different times, a problem will likely occur. Those eating last may not have enough food to eat. The child is left feeling hurt and neglected. If that child helped out around the house, he/she will feel jealous as well.

The lazy children can usually be found hanging around the kitchen close to dinner time, complimenting their mother on cooking a delicious meal. Even before setting the table, they will take and sample the best parts first. They also tend to be the ones who eat the most, too. These chubby children are adored by the mother because they know what sweet things to say.

Those diligent children whose work usually takes them past dinner time end up being the last ones to eat. They are the most tired, yet they get to eat only the leftovers. Sometimes they end up washing the dishes, too. All this hurts their feelings. The more these situations occur, the more hurt they will feel. Minor disputes with siblings are followed by major arguments. If a sibling happens to break a favorite cup, anger will arise, possibly resulting in a physical altercation.

Parents who do not understand the true causes will just pacify the situation, but this does not address the actual problem. The anger may still linger. If similar incidents occur regularly, parents could misinterpret such situations and blame the misunderstood child. The child may become jealous of his siblings and might run away from home if an opportunity arises.

A minor thing such as not having dinner together as a family could be all it takes to break a family. Parents may be oblivious to rising resentment and conflict. This problem usually occurs in a new family where everyone is busy with their own activities and do not have time for each other. No one knows what could be bothering the other person. Therefore, a family that does not eat together is a red flag that **this family is on the verge of falling apart.**

Eating together allows family members to voice their concerns and to give advice to others because people are often in a better mood when they are full. Parents can use this time to demonstrate good habits and etiquette to their children.

Our ancestors expressed the importance of having at least one daily meal together. Breakfast is difficult since everyone rushes to prepare for work or school. Lunch is impractical because everyone is away from home.

Dinner is an important meal that should be reserved for the family. Missing it would be unfortunate since everyone must tend to their own personal things after dinner. Some will do homework while others watch television. If time is not set aside for dinner to talk or clarify things, unresolved issues may linger and result in arguments.

Some households solve this problem by giving everyone their own television set. In the evenings, everyone eats separately and watches his/her own television set. No one needs to talk to each other because everyone is busy, but there is no warmth in the family.

Another situation that leads to disunity in the family is food preparation. Today's married couple usually argues over it. If they only make an effort to order out, eating while their eyes are glued to the television set, thinking about how the characters on television are much more attractive than our own spouses, their marriage will certainly fall apart.

Married couples should also consider visits to in-laws. Do we accompany our spouse or let them go alone? If they go alone, be prepared for problems in the marriage.

Engaging in activities as a family can build a strong bond. Do not take it lightly because many **broken families have taken it that way.**

In conclusion, creating harmony in a family is easy. It starts with an activity where all members can be involved. Dinner is the easiest and best activity. Or at the very least, family members should come together to talk about various issues, using **Dhamma as their guide.** Talk to each other with reason, even if everyone does not share the same views. Doing things together has benefits that will bring warmth and unity to the whole family.



What Should Parents Do When Their Children Do Not Get Along?



Here is a true story for parents who have not yet begun creating harmony in their families.

There was once a family with three daughters. The oldest daughter was very depressed because her two sisters had not spoken to each other for over two years. They had fought to the point where they did not want to be sisters anymore. The oldest daughter felt so much pain, having to watch this friction in her family on a daily basis.

Sometimes, the two sisters ignored each other as if the other did not exist. At other times it seemed as if they would be enemies for the rest of their lives. The oldest sister repeatedly asked herself, “Is it too late for them to reconcile?” Her parents had already given up.

In the end, she made the decision to ask a respected senior monk at a temple. She told him that her two sisters were still in school. When they graduated and could look after themselves, there would be a slim chance for them to reconcile. She was so anxious and felt terrible having to witness their conflicts every day.

The respected senior monk listened to her problem sympathetically and replied, “Your parents should not have allowed their conflicts to reach this level. If this isn’t resolved now, after they graduate, get jobs and earn a living, they certainly won’t listen to anyone then.”

“I have a personal example I’d like to share with you. I have two older sisters. When I was young, I would sometimes argue with my sisters. But my father would exert immediate control over the situation. And we stopped our arguments right away. My father **prevented conflicts among his children** in the following ways:”

Technique #1: Exercising seniority.

As soon as my father knew that we had argued or fought, he wouldn’t say much. He’d tell us to come see him together. He would point to me, the youngest, and tell me to break off a large stick for whipping.

When I gave my father the stick, he would ask only one short question:

“Did you fight with your sister?”

“Yes, Father,” I would reply.

“Then stand with your arms folded.”

First, he would give the stick to my sister and let her whip me once for not respecting seniority, regardless of who was right or wrong.

Second, he would ask questions about what had happened. If I was in the wrong, my father would make me find another whipping stick. This time, he would whip me because of my wrong doing. If my sister was wrong (I could only daydream about whipping her), my father would point at her to get a new whipping stick. He would whip her himself for bullying her younger brother.

Regardless of who was wrong, I would get the first whipping for disrespecting seniority. So, why would I want argue with my sisters. This practical lesson brought us together to love each other.

Technique #2: Responsibility for Housework

Because our family had a farm, on the weekends, my father would make us work. He would assign us to remove the weeds, clean the lots, dig the dirt, or prepare the lot for planting. It had to be done by dinner, otherwise, we couldn’t eat. So, we cooperated and worked hard to complete the task together.

Being immature and the youngest, I would sometimes go off on my own and not help out.

Why not?

In the mornings, I would shoot at birds and go fishing with my friends. In the afternoon, I would panic when I realized that the task might not be done in time. Oh no! If my sisters couldn't finish it, we all wouldn't have dinner! So, I would rush to help them. In the meantime, I would please my sisters in every way to make sure that they would not report my mischief to our father. I learned how to be nice, polite and say sweet things, while I pitched in. Had I not learned this quickly, we would face these consequences:

1) Dinner would not be served for us that evening. In addition, we would have to finish our tasks at night by lamp-light.

2) If my sisters reported my mischief to my father, I would be the only one punished and whipped. So, I made sure to speak nicely and politely with my sisters to keep them happy.

Quite simply, we had to accept the responsibilities together. If we fought, we wouldn't finish and we'd all be in deep trouble. So, we learned to negotiate and automatically became nice with each other.

The problem with your sisters is that there isn't any housework to be done; your lives are too comfortable. To learn

a lesson, they have to be hungry once in a while; they have to struggle and then help and rely on each other. Too much comfort in your family has led to problems among the children.

In this situation, the damage has been done. I recommend you to leave this task to your parents. As the oldest daughter, you should give them this advice and lend a hand when they need it:

1. Tighten the household budget.

Don't allow for too much cash flow in the household. Don't give these feuding sisters a large allowance. This will force them to help each other.

2. Assign a lot of housework to do together.

Although they are upset and preoccupied, they have to communicate in order to get the job done. The communication will loosen up the tension and ill feelings toward each other. This method yields good results.

3. Discipline is required for young children.

If you have good reason, you don't have to be afraid that your children will run away from home. Young children aren't daring enough. A whipping stick is still necessary for discipline. BUT, parents must know how and when to use it. Parents must teach their children when they whip. The stick is not for beating your child to death!

Remedying the Situation When Neighbors Fight



However, I recommend following the first two pieces of advice first: Your parents should reduce their allowances and have them help each other at tasks. Children won't allow others to take advantage of them. Typically, they won't stay angry at each other for a long period of time. When their pockets are empty, they will have to help each other with work.

If you have hired a maid, she can do the main household chores. However, children should do their own personal chores. They should be responsible for the same assigned tasks. This will give the siblings a chance to openly discuss the way to complete their tasks. This technique must be used when the children are still young. If parents keep spoiling their children, they will grow up to be awful people.”

After listening to the respected senior monk's advice, the oldest sister's face brightened up with hope and a smile. She took the advice home to bring her family back together.

Parents who read this story should instill a feeling of unity in your children by teaching them seniority. When they grow up, they will love and look after each other. If they feel down or fall on rough times, their siblings will not let them suffer. With these good intentions toward each other, parents can be free from worry.



A good environment promotes good habits in children. But if our neighbors argue noisily everyday while using profanity, how can parents remedy this situation? If our children continue to hear these arguments, they could be negatively impacted. This may lead our children to speak impolitely, offensively, and even be rejected by society.

There are two ways to address this situation.

1. Move away.

If parents are able, they should move away; but if they cannot, they must try to endure it. Parents can set good examples for their children by speaking politely with their neighbors. If parents take drastic actions, it may lead to a quarrel or personal injury. Such behavior will only create more problems.



2. Fight with kindness.

If the parents are younger than the neighbors, they should try to be friendlier. The neighbors may become more aware and argue more quietly.

However, if the parents are older, have stable careers, and are well respected in the neighborhood, they need to initiate dialogue with the neighbors. Before engaging in a conversation, the parents must be friendly and well-regarded by their neighbors.

What must you do to be friendly and respected?

1. A likable person is someone who is selfless and giving.

When a person shares his money or possessions with others, he is loved and appreciated. Even for us, when we receive something, we feel appreciated.

If we are able to help, then we should offer our assistance.

Even if we do not know what to offer, we can offer our **support and encouragement** with kind words. Even if we do not have anything to say, we can at least give a smile.

If parents behave appropriately toward their neighbors, they will be loved and respected. Then it may be appropriate for them to remind their neighbors of the neighbors' behavior.

The Lord Buddha taught about the *Four Bases of Social Solidarity* (*sangahavatthu*). **This refers to the principle of aiding people or developing a unified society.** This Dhamma principle consists of:

1) Generosity (*Dāna*) - This means the giving of material things.

2) Kind speech (*Piyavācā*) - This means speaking kindly and truthfully.

3) Useful conduct (*Atthacariyā*) - This means being helpful to others, like helping at work when you can.

4) Even and impartial treatment (*Samānattata*) - This means being consistently friendly to everyone.

If parents are able to practice the Four Bases of Social Solidarity, they will become highly regarded pundits. When there are conflicts, these parents can provide guidance. How they address them depends on the matter at hand. They can find solutions as a team.

2. People who can warn others about their behavior must observe the Precepts.

Only people who observe the Five Precepts are able to approach others about their behavior. When we can genuinely observe the Precepts, have good manners, and understand ethics, we will be capable of approaching and addressing a situation. If parents still lack virtues, then they should not approach others about their behavior.

People must be considerate of their community.

A person can maintain the affection and respect of others in several ways. The most effective way is by giving. When you give with a pure heart, people will love and look upon you with dignity.

The following method has been used in the past with great results. It is very easy. In the morning, grab a broom and sweep the street leading to your house, from beginning to end. Whenever you are home, you must sweep the street. If you are not home, then it is a different story. But try to sweep at least once a week. If you keep doing this, your neighbors will come to know you. They may not love you, but they will not hate you either. This type of giving is called giving with effort.

In the olden days, there were many ways to give. There was one method that everyone practiced, but which we do not see performed much these days. Traditionally, in front of every

home there would be a big water basin with a scooper or a cup next to it. If a passerby was thirsty, he could quench his thirst.

A simple water basin becomes a basin of value, converting plain water into a gesture of kindness.

Therefore, if parents practice giving and observing the Precepts themselves, along with good manners and virtues, then their children will live in a wonderful environment. Then the family will not have to move anywhere.



Chapter 18

Teach Children to Care for Critically Ill Relatives



All those who are living will one day depart from this world, but before they depart, they are usually ill, lying on a hospital bed. Their bodies and organs slowly deteriorate as they are being consumed by different diseases. This causes tremendous pain and suffering. At the same time, the cells in their body slowly die, losing their ability to function. Therefore it is crucial that we learn how to care for those that we love when they are sick.

Caring for these people will teach us to care for their minds, as well, while they fight with pain. By showing our children how to take care of those in poor health, when we pass away, we are assured that they will be able to take care of us.

How should we care for our loved ones when they become critically ill?

There are two components to caring for the ill:

1. Caring for them physically

We must find the best doctors who can provide treatment, depending on our situation and what we can afford.

2. Caring for them emotionally

If the person is about to pass away, it is very important to maintain his/her consciousness. What people's mind are focused on will determine their afterlife, whether they will be destined for heaven or the unfortunate realms.

The Lord Buddha said,

“A cloudy mind before death will lead one to the unfortunate realms (*Duggati*). A clear mind before death will lead one to the fortunate realms (*Sugati*)”.

What is *Sugati* ?

Sugati refers to a happy or fortunate realm. After departing from this world, one will be reborn a human (*Manussaloka*: Earth), an angel (*Devaloka*: Heaven) or a Brahma (*Brahmaloka* : Celestial realm).

What is *Duggati* ?

Dukkhati refers to an unhappy or unfortunate realm. After departing from this world, one will reborn an animal



(*Derajchanpome*: Earth) a hungry ghost, a demon, or a Hell creature (*Pretapume*, *Asurakayapome*, or *Narokkapume*: Hell).

Sugati* and *Duggati are the destinations of those who pass away where they must face the consequences of their actions on Earth. The final destination depends on the state of mind at the last moment, which could be one that is clouded or clear. Monks refer to this as “the War of Existence,” the precarious battle of going to *sugati* or *duggati*.

Regardless of the treatment results, **“The caregiver must care for the patient’s mind so that his or her mind is clear at all times. This will give the patient hope and the courage to fight the disease.”**

There are various ways in which the caregiver can give a patient courage:

1) Keep them away from worries. Do not let them hear about the damage of property, their children’s problems, or anything that might disturb them.

2) Bring their mind to a state of happiness by reminding them of the merits they made. Talk about the meritorious deeds that the patient performed, such as ordaining as a monk, offering the Kathina robes or other robes, providing support to social institutions, or giving aid to other people.

3) Encourage them to perform new merits depending on their capability. Invite them to be generous by offering

alms to monks every day. If they cannot get up, invite the monks to receive alms inside the house. If this is not convenient, allow the patient to make a resolution with the alms, and offer the alms in the patient’s place. When the alms have been offered, tell the patient about it so that they will be delighted.

4) Persuade them to strictly observe the 5 Precepts. They should not kill even an ant or a mosquito.

5) Invite them to meditate. This is very important. You could have the patient listen to a chanting tape or a Dhamma tape by a monk that the patient respects. You can read Dhamma books to the patient. If you can do this every day, the patient might have enough merit to be cured, because the power of the old merit augments the new merit s/he performs. If the patient has no more merits and it is time for him/her to depart, the patient will go to a fortunate realm because **s/he maintained a clear mind** before passing away.

Bringing a patient to this state requires the caregiver to be immersed in merit and to make resolutions (with the power of the past merit the patient made) for the patient’s protection against his/her disease. This will help improve the results of the patient’s treatment.

In conclusion, the final second in a patient’s life is very significant because that is when we can help them win the

“War of Existence.” Winning is accomplished by having a clear mind before departing. This is absolutely necessary.

Therefore, when our relatives are ill, regardless of our closeness to them or the severity of their illness, we should be able to take good care of them physically and psychologically. When our children are mature enough, we should teach them to look after their own health and sympathize with their relatives. Teaching them to care for others will clearly show them the truth about life that everybody must die. Further more, when it is time for us to go, they can help us win the “War of Existence.”



The Unconditional Love of Parents



In the economically driven world in which we live, it is difficult for most parents to find enough time to spend with their children. Sometimes the children are “raised” by the television set or video console as their parents work. They grow up practically without parental guidance or instruction, not knowing the causes and consequences of things, the difference between moral and immoral behavior, or how to temper their emotions. Not knowing the value of having parents, they begin to despise them. They cannot appreciate all the hardships and sacrifices their parents have endured for them. They think that it is their parents’ duty, since they brought them into the world, to raise and give them everything they desire. In the end, it is the parents who feel the heartaches and disappointment.



If their parents are not wealthy enough to satisfy their whims, they disparage them as being lazy. They complain about being embarrassed by their parents' thriftiness. Sometimes, they bully their parents or throw tantrums to get their way. These children are accumulating bad kamma without even realizing it. These problems do not occur only in middle class or poor families, but in wealthy families as well.

Luang Phaw once mentioned a millionaire from the South who came to him with a sullen face, saying, "Please help me. My son is terrible. He coerces us to buy him things, and once we do he doesn't even take care of them. If we say no to him, he curses us. I don't know what to do with him anymore."

Luang Phaw advised, "Since your son has never attended the temple, I am unable to advise too much. If I tell him to come listen to a sermon or to meditate and purify his mind so that he can see for himself his parents' worth, he will refuse even if we paid him. If he is capable of cursing his own parents, why would he listen to someone else?"

"Let's handle it this way. Before returning to the South, take your son to the orphanage in Pakret City, Nonthanburi Province. Give whatever reasons you need to convince him to go. Make sure that he gives dana by offering lunch to the orphans. Maybe this merit will allow him to realize his own good fortune. It might even help turn him around."

Luang Phaw wanted their son to witness what difficulties face children who do not have parents. With his eyes now open, he may change and love and value his parents more from seeing these unfortunate children.

I remember when I was a senior in college and my friends invited me to help bring food to the orphanage at Prakret. There were about 200 or 300 children with only about 20 caretakers at that place. When we arrived at the orphanage, all of the children ran toward us fighting to be picked up. They called the male guests “daddy” and the female guests “mommy,” which made the guests blush. The kids were taught to call everyone that since they did not know who their real parents were.

Three or four children rushed over and hugged us, like little monkeys, telling us that they had never known love and warmth their whole lives. They hurried to grab as many toys and as much food as they could. When we gave them desserts, they fought each other for it. When we handed out dolls, they fought over them.

Since we did not know how many children were at the orphanage, we brought only 40 or 50 dolls. When we handed out the dolls, they fought over each one. One grabbed the neck; another grabbed the arm while someone else went for the leg. Within seconds, the doll was torn to pieces with each one holding different parts. After that, they continued fighting.

When we gave out clothes, the caretakers would take the new clothes to the children wearing the oldest and most tattered clothes. Kids whose clothes were not too worn out did not get any new clothes. They became envious and started pulling the new clothes off the other children who had just put on the new clothes. In the end, the new clothes got ripped and torn and nobody got to wear them.

What we witnessed made us feel sad and heartbroken. These children had a different perspective on life than us. When we were young, we wanted to have lots of friends our age to have fun with. We never thought about our friends fighting or stealing our food or toys because we were always well fed and provided for. Most importantly, we received love and warmth from our parents and relatives. We saw the world in a positive light.

But these orphans could not view things as we did. They did not see the hundreds of other children around them as their friends, but rather as rivals waiting to fight for the things they wanted or the love they needed. The loneliness seen in their eyes broke one’s heart.

Let us think about the way children demand that their parents fulfill their every need while still having the audacity to hurt the parents’ feelings with cruel words. Remember that this is tantamount to killing them with harsh words. Even while these children hurt their mothers and fathers with unkind words,

their parents continue to defend them. Few want to admit that their children are less than angels.

Therefore, I want to leave this thought with every child who is constantly demanding their parents to do things for them. There are orphans who do not even have a mother or a father to love or to care for them. Why are you asking for frivolous things from your own parents who have loved you all this time?



Part Four

The Roads Leading to Ruin



Children Who Are Addicted to Apāyamukha (the Roads to Ruin)



Their love for their children makes parents work hard to earn money, so that they can provide comforts like an education, toys, and clothes for their children, and also so that their children will not be embarrassed by signs of poverty. They love their children blindly and this blindness makes them fail to see that they are devoting all their efforts towards their children's physical growth and comfort while neglecting their equally important emotional and spiritual growth. They are then surprised and saddened when their children are caught doing drugs, drinking alcohol, and otherwise behaving shamefully.

Self-destructive behavior is just as detrimental to a child's future as lack of education or lack of food. If allowed to continue on the Roads to Ruin, or *Apāyamukha*, these children will destroy their own futures.



1. Teach your children. In a household where children have not developed bad behavior, then they should be taught about right and wrong and how to demonstrate self-discipline.

2. Address the problem immediately. If children have already begun self destructive behavior, it must be addressed immediately and decisively.

1. Protecting your children from *Apāyamukha*

There are Buddhist teachings that discuss the roles and responsibilities of parents. If parents hope for their children to have a bright future, and find success in both the professional and personal realms, five criteria need to be met:

- 1) Teach their children to refrain from bad deeds.
- 2) Teach their children to do good deeds.
- 3) Provide education for their children so that they will have knowledge for a career and learn responsibility.
- 4) When the time comes for their children to select a life partner, help them with the process. Explain to them what they need to do to prepare for family life and the responsibilities involved.
- 5) When the time comes, bequeath your wealth and assets to them. Give them their inheritance in order for them to start their own legacy.

Children often encounter problems later in life because the parents did not fulfill these responsibilities.

Why Do Some Children Behave Badly?

Our ancestors provided us with a very interesting answer.

“The parental skills we find today are a cause for concern. Let’s not even worry about their inability to teach their children to avoid bad deeds and only do good deeds because some parents can’t even discern right from wrong, good from bad, and merit from sin. Some are even engaging in bad behavior in front of their children to witness. This is the scariest part of it all.”

Do Not Leave Teaching to Only the Teachers

Our ancestors stated:

“Some parents are capable of separating good from bad, but do not impart that knowledge to their children. Since their love and concern for their children are so great, they can become overprotective. They forbid their children from going anywhere without giving the reasons why.

Parents should realize that they cannot be with their children at all times. One way or another, children will find a way to be independent. Instead of forbidding them from doing something without reason, it would be more beneficial to take the time to teach them about good and bad, right and wrong,

and the reasons we should or should not do something. Teach and encourage them regularly to perform good deeds.

When it comes to their children’s education most parents are fully supportive, but some have too high of an expectation. Our ancestors provided the following thought to consider.

“Some parents push their children into famous and reputable schools in Thailand regardless of high tuition costs. Their only concern is that their children, once enrolled, will become intelligent because of the high caliber of the teachers there.

“I would like to remind you that this way of thinking is flawed, because teaching children to know good from bad and merit from sin are difficult tasks. This subject requires extensive explanation, and it is better suited for instruction on an individual basis or with only two to three children at a time. Parents must explain in such a way that the child can absorb the information. It is too great of an expectation to think that school teachers will be able to teach them these things because teachers already have many students to be responsible for.”

When children are home, parents should first focus on the Lord Buddha’s teachings on moral behavior before proceeding to other topics like selecting a spouse and family inheritance. In the end, when confronted with temptations like clubbing, alcohol and drugs, their children will be able to

make sound judgments whether they should or should not do something.

2. Keeping your children away from *Apāyamukha*.

In the event where the children are already addicted to *Apāyamukha*, the only way to bring them back is by talking to them without ever resorting to anger. Allow the children to come to their own conclusions once they understand your concern is based on your love for them. Often they make choices without understanding why their decisions are wrong. Sometimes they did not even realize that they were worrying or hurting their parents.

There are three major topics that parents need to explain to their children.

1) Teach them that money comes from hard work

A parent can explain that going out at night and carousing with friends is a waste of hard-earned money. People must work hard to purchase necessities like food and shelter and clothing, and parents strive to build a legacy for their children. Wasting that money on a few hours of amusement is like letting one's future evaporate into the air. Explain that not everyone goes out to clubs or consumes alcohol. In fact, there are many

people who engage in more worthy pursuits, like volunteering to help the homeless or reading to the blind. It is certainly much more fulfilling than going out every night.

2) Peer pressure can influence one's behavior

Parents can also explain that young people tend to do foolish things. They are inexperienced at life, and often have an imperfect understanding of right and wrong. They want to try bad things like drugs and alcohol despite knowing the legal consequences and often not knowing the moral consequences. Explain that going out each night with friends like these can lead a good person to temptations that he or she may not be able to resist.

3) Dangerous living has real consequences

Parents can also explain the pitfalls of a dangerous lifestyle. Being around intoxicated people or being intoxicated has so many terrible potential outcomes: getting involved in a brawl, getting arrested, contracting HIV or another disease, or even getting injured or killed. Explain that your children are your most precious treasures and the thought of losing them is a parent's worst nightmare. All parents desire their children to be the best, to live up to their potential, to be someone admired by their peers. They want to see them associated with good people whose example will inspire and improve them.

The Womanizing and Alcoholic Husband



Even before problems arise, if parents discuss these topics with their children, lovingly and rationally, their children will understand the immense love parents have for them. This can be the starting point for them to think and act more responsibly, and to discern good friends from bad associates. They may find more constructive activities to occupy them.

Families already in crisis can still find effective solutions if they remember this: Parents' love for their children is not enough; reason and understanding must accompany it. With hard work parents can regain wayward children, and children can regain honored parents.



A husband who is unfaithful and who drinks alcohol to excess can cause a family to fall apart. How can a marriage be saved from such an individual? Luang Phaw provided an interesting answer to this puzzle.

Choosing One's Life Partner

Luang Phaw explained that in choosing one's life partner, we should observe married couples and analyze their experience. We will find that before the couples were married, both were confident that they selected the life partner who was best suited for them. They imagined that, once married, their life would be blissful. They imagined that any conflict would be minor and resolved amicably, and that they would never abandon each other. However, once they lived together



for some length of time, the initial infatuation dissipated and they saw their husbands and wives sometimes at their worse behavior. Whether this other side of him or her leads to small or large conflicts, there will always be issues to deal with. In the end, the magical happiness they once anticipated from their married life is erased by the reality.

The Lord Buddha gave us criteria for choosing the right person as a life partner. He or she should possess the following four qualities:

- 1) Understanding and confidence in the Law of Kamma
- 2) Observation of the Precepts
- 3) Willingness to help others
- 4) Wisdom to discern between good and bad

These four qualities are essential in developing a solid foundation in one's own life. Therefore one should seek them in one's life partner, too.

Confronting an Adulterous Husband

In the book *Good Question Good Answer* Luang Phaw offers answers concerning family related problems, and he had this to say about dealing with an adulterous husband:

There are two main factors that can lead a man to become adulterous.

1) A husband strays because he lacks something from his wife

Although this is a very difficult task, a wife needs to understand the shortcomings she may have which influenced her husband to cheat. Searching for one's own shortcomings requires us to first calm the mind. There is no better way to attain clarity other than practicing meditation everyday. The smallest flaws of others are perceived as enormous, while we cannot recognize our own huge and appalling flaws. When we close our eyes to meditate, we can only see ourselves. Our flaws will slowly come into view. The calmer our minds become, the more we will see. If we can begin to see our own flaws, a way to remedy them will also emerge.

There is one thing about which I would like to warn the wife who has an adulterous husband: do not resort to black magic or vindictive behavior just to spite him. This is not the solution, and it will only fuel the flames of animosity.

2) A cheating husband may be adulterous by habit

This type is very difficult to remedy, so a spouse can only endure and consider it the sad consequence of not assessing people well and for choosing someone like that as a husband. You can only control your own behavior, and it is best to retain your dignity by not retaliating in kind.

Changing an adulterous husband requires time. Continue to perform good deeds so that he will feel appreciative. Perhaps he will stop his adulterous ways. Even though this may require many years, it is really all that we can do.

Confronting an Alcoholic Husband

Luang Phaw also had recommendations for this situation:

If a wife finds herself married to an alcoholic husband, it requires her to analyze and come to terms with the fact that this may be due to her erroneous choices.

The first choice she made was to marry instead of remaining single.

The second choice she made was to marry a man who drank excessively.

Having an alcoholic father and husband in the household is detrimental to the children. As children they see his drunken and disorderly conduct and become belligerent too. They learn from his example and may grow up to be alcoholics themselves. A wife must correct this tendency in her children as diligently as she can.

The married life is not easy. If you make the wrong choices from the beginning, you will have to deal with the consequences for the rest of your life.

The Roads That Lead to Ruin



Single women please keep in mind that men who are faithful and who abstain from alcohol are hard to find. Therefore, you are better off being single. It is a wiser choice.

According to the Law of Kamma, having an alcoholic spouse indicates that in a past life you approved of drinking and did not discourage people from it. Instead, you served them delicious snacks to go with their alcohol, encouraging them to drink even more. This Kamma led you to be with an alcoholic husband.

If you find yourself in this unfortunate situation, it is important to keep up your spirit. Keep going to the temple and practicing dana and accruing more merits. If you have children, bring them to the temple and make it a part of their lives from the time they are young. Chant and meditate together. Maintain your discipline and theirs too.

We apologize if any reader feels like Luang Phaw is addressing too directly something that may be happening in your own life. The teaching is included here because of a desire to illustrate a possible real-life situation that can occur within a married life for those who are still single. This way, they can approach marriage with their eyes wide open and select their partners carefully and prudently.



Many young recent graduates are usually diligent and focused when they start their first jobs. Some days they even work overtime with the hope of getting a big salary at the end of the month. However, after working many years, instead of an improved financial situation, they have amassed debt. They end up living paycheck to paycheck even though they worked so hard. How do some people manage to squander their own wealth?

Many people who see their friends struggling financially do not know what to say since money is a delicate subject to raise with anyone. Although concerned, they do not know how to help.



I myself encountered this problem and felt the hopelessness. This experience prompted me to go through my notes on the teachings of Luang Phaw.

Luang Phaw said that when he was about 30 years old and not yet ordained, he himself was in financial straits. Although he was making a good salary, he still spent more than he was earning. Unable to rectify the situation, he sought his mother's help. She was able to help him financially. She said to him, "Son, it is not important how much money you earn, it is how much you save. In this world, many people earn a lot but have little or nothing left. At the same time, there are many who earn less but have saved more."

She continued, "Earning a lot but having little left is like using a bamboo basket to collect water. When the basket is submerged it is filled with water, but once you lift the basket up you will have a wet basket and no water.

"However, earning a little but have a lot saved is like using a coconut shell or a bowl to collect water. Although a small vessel, it will carry your water safely."

If a person earns a lot but drinks alcohol, it is like having a leak in your vessel. If you gamble, even when you know you should not, it is yet another kind of leak. Going out to socialize at a bar, or club or to places that you should not go, are also forms of a leak. All of these "leaks" can be called Apāyamukha, or Roads Which Lead to Ruin.

We have learned about the roads leading to ruin numerous times, but we have never implemented the principles to avoid them into our daily lives. When we suffer, we blame society or someone else.

Luang Phaw received a lot of sound advice from his mother that day and was able to change his behavior. He became more prudent with his money and remained out of debt.

Luang Phaw first entered the temple when a friend invited him to go meditate. At that time, he was involved in a conflict with his boss. The night before going to the temple, he drank heavily, and the next morning he was hung over. When he reached the temple his friends asked him to join in the robe offering ceremony, the merit from which would help him at work.

The conflict with his boss was in still fresh in his mind and feeling a little hung over, he retorted, “Merit! I can’t see it helping anyone. I perform merits regularly, but I still have problems with my boss.”

Khun Yay (Khun Yay Ajahn Ubasika Chandra Khonnokyoong) heard about this conversation and asked Luang Phaw to meet with her. She said, “Son, you mentioned that merits cannot help with anything? In a year, how much merit do you perform?”

Luang Phaw replied, “I donate 100 or 200 baht a month, so in one year that is 2,000 or 2500 baht.”

Khun Yay folded her hands together and said, “Very good, please continue doing that.” He thought that their conversation was over, but Khun Yay continued asking questions.

“Son, do you smoke?”

“Yes, I smoke.”

“How much do you spend on cigarettes each year?”

Back then Luang Phaw smoked cigarettes that cost six baht per pack and smoked about 1 pack to 2 packs a day. He answered, “About 3,000 or 4,000 baht a year.”

Khun Yay continued asking, “Do you drink?”

“Yes, I drink.”

“How much do you spend a year drinking alcohol with your friends?”

“Khun Yay, if you multiplied the amount of money spent on cigarettes two or three times, it would equal about 12,000 baht for alcohol.”

“Do you go to clubs with your friends?”

“Yes, I do.”

“How much do you spend in a year going out to clubs?”

“I guess about two or three times the amount spent on liquor.”

“Son, you contribute about 2,000 to 2,500 baht every year to making merit, but at the same time you spend 100,000 baht towards smoking, drinking, and going to clubs. Yet, you complain that merit is not helping you. If you died right now and didn’t go to hell, you could consider yourself lucky. You received degrees from a Thai university and abroad, yet you can’t figure out your own situation logically?”

Once he received the stern reprimand from Khun Yay, he recovered from the hangover and sat there quietly for a while.

Luang Phaw said, “That moment was the push that helped me to quit drinking. Although Khun Yay only spoke a few words, she made me want to come home and smash all the liquor bottles I had. From that moment on, I have never touched alcohol again.”

Once he stopped drinking, he urged his friends to stop too. He told them, “When birthdays come around, we usually think about liquor instead of our mothers. This time, when it is our birthdays we should go thank our mothers and show our gratitude for giving birth to us instead of wasting our money drinking with friends.”

Luang Phaw continues, “If we do not hurry to get off the roads leading to ruin we will be like a thorn to society. We will fall deeper into debt and attract only bad associates.

“If we quit drinking, smoking, and gambling, our immoral peers will disappear. Good people will wish to befriend us. Social deterioration will decrease. And our own finances will be more secure.

“I decided not to drink alcohol and smoke, but to go to the temple and seriously study the Dhamma. I did not waste time trying to reduce my vices a little at a time. I cut them off immediately on that day.

“If I did not have the people I respected most, my mother and Khun Yay, to point out my own faults to me, I would not be here addressing these concerns with everyone today. Go ask your friends **if they have mounting debt because they’ve squandered their hard-earned money on ?**”

To use ones’ money on Apāyamukha is like buying problems into your own life. It will ruin not only your finances but eventually your career and your entire life. If you realize the foolishness of your behavior, you must seek to remedy it. Resolve to abandon Apāyamukha completely today, for if you do not choose to help yourself, no one else will be able to help you either.

Why is Soliciting Prostitute a Sin



At this time, the number of people with AIDS is increasing. One reason for this increase is that most young men believe soliciting a prostitute is not morally wrong because they believe it is not sexual misconduct when it is consensual. One of men's most common flawed ways of thinking is: **“what is wrong with soliciting a prostitute?”**

Buddhism's teachings clearly indicate that the question of whether soliciting a prostitute is wrong is not determined on the grounds of the Precepts (sila), but falls under the concept of the roads leading to ruin (**Apāyamukha**).

“Apay?” means a form of deterioration, disaster or something that does not lead to prosperity.

“Mukha” means face, form or gateway.

So **Apāyamukha** means **a gateway to deterioration, disaster and damage.**

Any man, single or married, who solicits a prostitute, no matter under what circumstances, has an appearance tainted with deterioration, disaster and damage. From this moment on, no matter what he does, people around him will view him with suspicion.

1) Does he have AIDS? Most people know that whenever a person becomes involved with prostitutes, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS inevitably follow him. Also, he will wonder repeatedly if he has contracted AIDS.

2) A good person will view that man as someone who disgraces women.

3) The man is cultivating a bad habit, an attitude of looking down upon women. Once married, he will use this bad habit on his wife.

4) Unnecessary waste of money. We can say that a man is spending money to purchase deterioration, disaster and damage for himself. It would be more beneficial to give the money to his mother so she can make more merit.

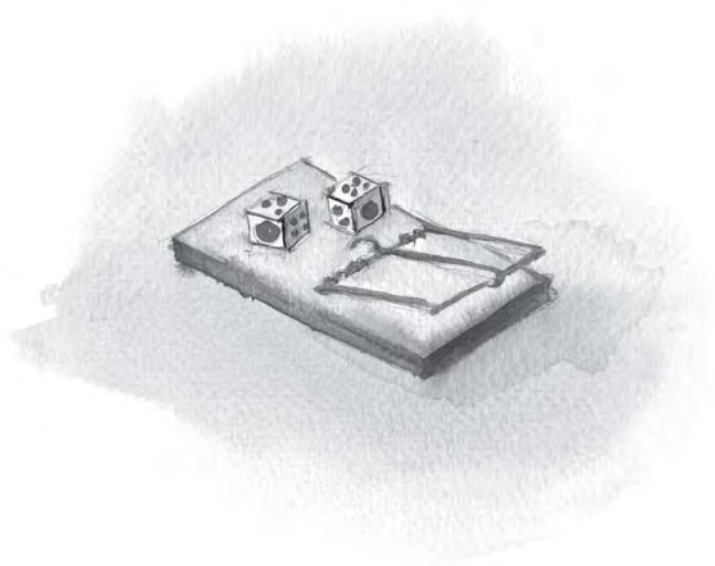
Therefore, monks remind us:

“If you are about to spend money to solicit a prostitute, please think about your mother and how much she endured raising you to this day. Now that her children are able to support themselves, they should give her money to make more merit that will follow her to future lifetimes. There are mothers who raise their children to the point where they use up all their savings and run out of time to accrue more merits for themselves”.

Luang Phaw reminds us that if we continue teaching and educating others, there is hope that rape, sexual misconduct, and killing caused by sexual desires and lusts will decrease substantially. Also the increasing problems from prostitutes and AIDS will disappear from Thailand and the world. The people of Thailand will gain a great deal of merit.



Gambling Never Made Anyone Rich



Even before the first whistle in a soccer match is blown, borrowed money, salaries, school tuition and the allowances of many people, have already been placed on bets at the gambling table. This is a typical scenario that occurs outside of the soccer field, and it has tremendous effects on the whole family.

It is estimated that, on a typical day, the money circulating for bets on a football game is over several million. This is an extremely high figure for a developing country like Thailand.

The bookies brim with joy when they see the figures and how much money they will collect. However, for those who work at an honest living, this way of life is considered to be cold blooded because the bookies are making money from people who do not know how to utilize their money.

These penniless people, who have lost all their money on gambling, will then turn to the bookies for loans. If they cannot come up with the money to repay their debt, they will resort to criminal activities, corruption and prostitution, in order to repay the debt.

The idea of working in an honorable profession disappears from their minds as they bury themselves deeper and deeper in the addiction from gambling. The addiction is difficult to break because the only agenda is to get back the money they lost.

Since we are all Thai, we have to consider the best interventions to help those with this addiction in order to create the best results. There are four things that we should consider:

1) We must not involve ourselves in gambling.

2) We need to prevent our children from becoming gamblers, by explaining to them the harm and danger of gambling.

3) We should not promote or encourage a gambling environment at home, work or school.

4) We should explain to loved-ones the destruction caused by gambling, and how it has never made anyone rich.

Why do gamblers not become rich? It is because gamblers have already destroyed their inner true worth.

1) Gambling destroys one's human quality.

The quality of being a human depends on our level of honesty. The instant we become involved with gambling, deceit automatically arises and honesty is lost. Wherever gambling takes place, deceit will appear. If cheating does not occur while gambling, please understand that it is because the opportunity has not yet arisen.

2) Gambling destroys one's wisdom.

Gamblers who have lost their money will perceive money as a deity that can provide them with everything. They forget that there are many things which money cannot buy. When they have money, they will spend it on useless things, since they do not know how quickly it will switch hands, or when they may lose it to gambling. They become wasteful and do not know the true worth of money. They view money as only a piece of paper. Once they spend it, they crave more money again and again, for the rest of their lives. Instead of using the wisdom they possess in a beneficial way, they use it to devise ways to cheat others.

3) Gambling wastes one's time.

When gamblers gamble, they forget everything. Even when they win, they will forget everything. When they lose, they will try even harder to find ways to get their money back. They will not quit until they do, unless they are forced to quit

because all of their money is lost. When they win, it is never enough. With each passing day, they can lose their jobs and other important things without even realizing it.

4) Gambling destroys one's health.

When they gamble, they neglect and sacrifice their rest and sleep, delay using the restroom, and they eat at odd hours of the day and night. As a result, their health is compromised and disease may result.

As you can see, gambling destroys everything, even one's quality of being a human. Even when they win, they cannot spend it on anything that is beneficial, for long. Thus, they are never rich and cannot find security in life.

Gambling, no matter in what form, is a source of destruction and carelessness. It is best to never get involved.

Therefore, during the frenzied soccer season, we should protect each other and loved-ones from becoming involved in gambling. This requires a group effort in explaining the harmful effects of gambling. Let us spread this from one person to the next. With every sound of the whistle, we can keep our children from becoming slaves to gambling.



Chapter 25

Children Who Want Their Father to Quit Drinking



Many families may have faced the daily problem of seeing their father being drunk and belligerent. Once drunk, the father yells at the neighbors, instigates fights with his wife, and beats his children. This aggravates everyone in the household. However, because of the love and gratitude that they have for their father, the children wish to find a way to help him quit drinking. Unfortunately, the children usually do not know what to do. Therefore, I would like to recommend a method I once used, and that worked for me, which may also be a practical guide to help point these fathers in the right direction.



There was a student who approached Luang Phaw, seeking advice in helping his father to quit drinking, because every time his father was drunk he became violent and would yell at the neighbors. This made the student, and his mother, ashamed and afraid to go outside. This also caused the neighbors to look down on them and be unfriendly.

These concerns drove him to seek counsel with Luang Phaw, whom he respected like his own father. The following advice was given in order to ease this student's distress:

It is unfortunate that your father is heavily addicted to alcohol. It would be easier to speak about this if it were someone other than your own father. Even before you can finish informing him of your concern, he will probably respond by telling you that you should not be telling him this, and that he has raised you since you were little, when your feet were as small as seashells.

Luang Phaw went through this too. Even though I am a Bhikkhu and have taught a great number of people to quit drinking and smoking, it was still difficult when it came to my own family. I would return home and say, "Father, please stop drinking, so that your health can improve. You can use your time to listen to Dhamma, and to meditate." Every time I mentioned this topic I would always get a negative response, but I never gave up.

At that time, my father was seventy years old. I wanted him to chant, meditate and purify his mind, and I hoped that he would accrue as many merits as he could during the latter part of his life, so that he could take those merits with him to his future lives.

When I tried to persuade him to quit drinking, and come to the temple to make merit, he retorted: “That is a great idea. If I started meditating today and drink alcohol while doing it, it might even make my meditation clearer.”

How was I to respond if he replied like that? If I spoke too harshly to him, I would gain bad kamma since he was my father. If I did not warn him, I would not be compensating him for giving me life. I struggled for years before finding a solution.

Finally, I had to use ingenuity to solve this problem. I started by telling my mother not to purchase liquor for him. Since he was unable to bully my mother into buying it, he turned to my sister. Then, I asked my sister not to purchase alcohol for him. When he could not ask his children, he turned to his grandchildren. I then told the grandchildren not to buy any liquor for their grandfather. When the grandchildren refused to do as their grandfather had requested, he complained and scolded them. I told the grandchildren to endure for their grandfather’s sake.

As a last resort, my father then coerced his great grandchildren, who were seven and eight years old, to buy liquor for him. I had to guide and instruct the great grandchildren, using various methods.

The process was like cutting down a tree. We cannot cut at the main root, but must first cut at the branch roots. The main root will eventually die, as its sources of nutrients are severed and eliminated.

Eventually, my father was able to quit drinking because nobody would buy liquor for him, and the liquor store was too far from home for him to go for himself. We were very fortunate. My father passed away at the age of 86. He stopped drinking completely at the age of 80 so he was alcohol-free for only six years before he died.

If you want to help your father quit drinking, you should patiently seek a method that is suitable for him. Don’t give up, not even for one day, and then you will find a way.

Dear respectable readers, now that you have read up to this part, you should realize that it is a difficult task for children who want to help their father to quit drinking. **When teaching adults, we need to make them think. In order to avoid embarrassment, we need to use wisdom to find a way that is appropriate to their personality. We must persevere so that we can lead them away from the unfortunate realms (Abhayabhumi).**

Even the Lord Buddha, once enlightened, did not immediately return to Kapilavatthu City to give a Dhamma talk to his father. He realized that if he had done that, his father would not have listened. Instead, after his enlightenment, Lord Buddha first went to teach the people in the town of Magadha. He wished for his reputation to grow and reach his father, and to have others speak of his goodness. Once his reputation grew, he became confident that his father had complete trust in him.

Even then, the Lord Buddha had to perform a miracle by walking in circles, walking in the air, and triggering a powerful Bokarapotta rain. Those people who wanted to get wet, did, and those who did not want to get wet, did not. It was a heavy rain storm.

After his father and the royal family saw the miracle, they let go of their stubbornness, and demonstrated their respect by paying homage to the Lord Buddha. They listened and believed in his Dhamma, and some eventually attained enlightenment themselves.

The moral of the Lord Buddha story is that, in order for children to be successful in helping their fathers quit drinking, they themselves must be wholesome, and they must be role models that people can respect. Let your father acknowledge that you are smart and proficient, so that he cannot look down upon you. Then, find an appropriate approach that is respectful

of, and suitable for, him. If you succeed, you will also gain tremendous merit from helping him.



Fathers That Children Hate



Sometimes when a father is addicted to the roads to ruin, [*Apāyamukha*] and unable to be the leader of the household, the responsibilities fall upon the mother. If this situation occurs regularly in the family, the children will often feel that their father is taking advantage of their mother. Sometimes this feeling is so fierce that they begin to have hatred for their father. If any family is facing this problem, what would be the correct way for children to rectify the situation?

There once was a boy who came to see Luang Phaw, in order to consult Luang Phaw about his own father.

“Luang Phaw, I feel like my father takes unfair advantage of my mother. He doesn’t care about his children and only looks after himself. He is only concerned about his own wellbeing. During tough times, he lets our mother earn the income to take care of us. He stays home and womanizes with the maid. Will I receive kammic retribution if I hate my father?”

Luang Phaw gave this advice to the boy:

It is already wrong that your father is not being responsible for his duties. Moreover, seeking comfort in life only for him, and womanizing with the maid, breaks the precept of adultery. He is accumulating tremendous bad kamma on his own.

The problems he has with your mother are strictly between the two of them.

Luang Phaw wants to remind you, when you look at your father and mother, please consider this: **Before any living thing is born, it is necessary for it to have a prototype.**

For instance, if we have a piece of clay and a mold to make a cup, we will get a cup when we put the clay in the mold. If we have a mold for a bowl, we will get a bowl. If we have a mold for a Buddha image, and we put clay in the mold, we will have a Buddha image to pay homage to. **This same piece of clay, if used with different molds, will have**

different values. If we have no mold at all, that clay will just be a piece of clay with no additional value.

If people are to be born, they need to have a prototype. If the parents’ prototype is a cow or buffalo, then the child will have to be born as a cow or a buffalo. If the prototype is of a monkey, the child will be a monkey. If the parents’ prototype is a human being, then the child will have to be human, too.

Ask yourself: If one, who is clever from the merits of a past life, were to be born in a monkey’s womb, and cried like a monkey at birth, how much would it be able to do?

Or ask yourself which situation you would rather be in: To be born a human, with parents who do not take care of you, resulting in you growing up in an orphanage; or to be born as a monkey, yet well taken care of until you are grown. Which situation is preferable?

Would you like to be born a monkey? We would not want this because the attributes of a human being are the most suitable for accumulating all forms of merit. We can offer donations [Dana], observe the Precepts [Sila] and practice meditation [Bhavana]. We can perform all those things. When we possess the attributes of an animal, we will not be able to perform meritorious deeds, and possess the higher thinking of a human being.

If you had the attributes of a monkey, made sounds like a monkey, and lived in the forest, you would not be able to perform any good deeds. You would only be as clever as a monkey, and be a monkey leader leading his group as they swing from tree to tree. You would not be able to do much at all.

If you were clever, but with the attributes of a turtle that crawls slowly, what could you do? If you were smart, at most you would be the smartest turtle in the world. However, you would still be just a turtle.

Since you were born a human, whether your parents take care of you or not, you should be grateful to them for providing you with the prototype for a human being. Raising you is extra kindness that you received as a bonus. Moreover, if they left you with an inheritance worth 10, 20 or 100 million baht, it would be added merit. The fact that your parents provided you with the prototype to be a human is beyond anything that you can do to fully repay them. Therefore, do not hate or hurt your parents, because this is bad kamma.

After listening to Luang Phaw discuss this subject, it makes us wonder what would have happened to this child and his family had he not consulted with Luang Phaw.

Quit drinking so you can be a good role model for the children. Making them proud is something that a father

should strive for because every child hopes to have a father who is a good person and not an alcoholic. (this part should not be in this chapter. I will find out why it is here)





Part Five

The Truth of Life



Dad, Why Were We Born?



One day, a family invited guests to their home for a religious rite for the great-grandparent. After the ceremony, when all the guests had left, the son asked the father,

“Dad, since everyone has to die like our great-grandparent, then what is the purpose of life?”

The father, who had acquired knowledge about Buddhism, replied to his beloved son,

“My son, deep down inside, everybody, rich or poor, a commoner or a king, has asked what we are doing here, what the true purpose of life is. And even I used to wonder about that.

This question has prompted me to study Buddhism seriously, **which has given me an understanding of life:**

1. Death is not the end. We still have to be reborn indefinitely, as long as we have not rid ourselves of our defilements.

2. All good deeds and bad deeds have consequences. They can bear fruit in this life or in the next. We can see that some people are born smart, some are not. Some are good looking, and some are not. All these factors are the products of their kamma.

3. Hell and heaven do exist. Hell is punishment for those who have committed sinful deeds, and heaven is the home to those who have performed virtuous deeds.

“And if we look closely at the births of all living creatures, we will see that they are different. Some are born from the **womb**, other species are born from the **egg**, and still others are born from **filthy** water. But there are species which we have not laid eyes on, but we have heard about them: celestial beings and infernal degenerates. They are born fully grown and parent-less, **an autonomous and spontaneous birth**.

“The knowledge of these three subject matters I acquired from Buddhism. They have influenced me to improve myself, to elevate my morals, and to accumulate merit. I am hoping that in my future life, when my merits are perfected, with all

my defilements crushed (exhausted), **I will follow the Lord Buddha into Nibbana.**

“After my studies, the first thing that came to my mind was **how to steer myself, my parents, your mother and all my children away from misdeeds. And furthermore, I wanted to ensure that all of our grandparents would go to heaven.** Once I had set this goal, I took a good look at myself. While I still had to make a living, to provide for your mother and all of you, as well as your grandparents, I sought a way for my family to gain merits at the same time. So I learned more about Buddhism and learned that there was a set of Dhamma specifically for laypersons. There are four virtues, and they are called ***Dhamma for Laypersons (Gharāvās-dhamma)***.

1. Truthfulness (Sacca)

“This first virtue taught me to be sincere, straight-forward, and honest. Remember, son, most people would resort to lying to get off the hook. You must not do that. You should be answerable to your responsibilities, to your profession, punctual with your commitments, and honest to everyone. And most of all you must abide by ethics, such as the Five Precepts. Then you will not be the subject of mistrust. **You will walk proudly with respect all your life, and this is what I have acquired.**

2. Self-improvement (*Dama*)

“The second virtue is to always improve oneself. I kept improving myself professionally. From an ignorant person, I kept advancing myself until I was able to be a good provider, own my own business, become proficient in my career, and keep abreast of people around me and world events. I was able to control myself not to succumb to vices, to refrain from imbibing, smoking, lying and cheating on your mother. **These are the values which I have acquired that lead to wisdom.**

3. Physical and mental endurance (*Khanti*)

“Enduring physical and mental hardships is the third virtue. No matter what the root causes are, I was able to endure physical hardships, weariness, pain, and mistreatment. On top of this, I was able to resist temptations. A monk once said that whoever is able to endure these hardships would be strong, charismatic, and successful. And this is **how I have acquired my wealth.**

4. Elimination of negative emotions and stinginess (*Cāga*)

“The fourth virtue teaches us to rid oneself of bad tempers and stinginess. I always maintain my good mood and try to lend a helping hand to others. These qualities have endeared me to my relatives, neighbors, superiors, and subordinates. And when I started my own business, they were ready to return

the favor and warned me of the pitfalls. This is **how I have acquired my good friends.**

“Adhering to these four virtues has enabled me to advance my career, to elevate my status, to provide for my family, and to take care of your grandparents. And when your great-grandparents were still alive, I made sure that they offered food to the monks every day to ensure their passages to heaven. Now that they are gone, I will keep sending merits to them until I am no longer capable of doing so.

“And if you intend to improve yourself morally, as well as your aptitude, in the way that I have been doing all my life, then you will stop wondering what the purpose of life is. We are here to shut the door to hell, to keep bettering ourselves, and to perform only good deeds, until we are rid of all defilements and finally go to Nibbana.”

After finishing this chapter, what are you going to tell your children?



Young People and the Lord Buddha



In recent years, a new generation of young people has started to wonder why Buddhists highly regard the Lord Buddha to be the greatest sanctuary, although he was only human. To respond to this doubt, there was an examination of this issue and a simple explanation conducive to young people by a senior monk was found.

A true Buddhist has to be a logical person. He is not gullible or easily deluded. So when a person is deciding whom he should choose to be his respected mentor, he should make the attempt to know the history of that person in the following ways:

1. The mentor should have an unambiguous biography. There must be proof of his life history; it can not be vague and unreliable.

2. He must be extremely intelligent, exceptionally virtuous, exceedingly knowledgeable of the truths about life, which is known as enlightenment; and all his knowledge must be acquired through his own endeavors. He will not plagiarize these insights from someone else.

3. All of his teachings, when adhered to, will be beneficial and produce happiness. If not, then those instructions are useless since nobody can benefit from them.

Based on these criteria, one can see why Buddhists highly regard the Lord Buddha to be the greatest refuge of humankind.

1. The Lord Buddha's life is documented. History has clearly recorded His life story including the lives of His parents. He was a prince in a city which still appeared on the map up to modern times.

2. The Lord Buddha toiled to find the truths of life by Himself until He was enlightened. All of His teachings derived from His enlightenment. He did not claim others' teachings as His own, or that He received them from a heavenly being. The Lord Buddha made it clear that He attained enlightenment by Himself. Most of all, He never forced anyone to believe in His teachings.

3. All of the Lord Buddha's Dhamma are universal truths and are therefore timeless. If a person practices Dhamma that the Lord Buddha prescribed, that person will certainly benefit from them. And conversely, if that person commits acts proscribed by Him, s/he will certainly receive dire consequences. His Dhamma are timeless. They were true when He first spoke them; they are still true today. They are not subject to change over time.

In the attempt to enable humankind to benefit from His **Dhamma**, the Lord Buddha endured numerous hardships such as extreme physical exertion, and attempts upon His life. However, they had no effect on his determination. Furthermore, the Lord Buddha was not doing this for personal gain; when offered with valuables, He would emphasize that the merits derived from the offering of valuables were less than putting His Dhamma into practice. This only shows His limitless compassion.

And those who practice His Dhamma conscientiously, whether they are monks or laypeople, can also rid themselves of defilements and attain Nibbana, the immortal happiness, like the Lord Buddha Himself. This is a testament to the Lord Buddha's purity and undefiled quality. **His teachings are rightful, exact and beneficial, and accessible by followers of all religions.** Those who adhere to them will obtain the exact same benefits He obtained, and there have been millions of His followers who have experienced these benefits.

We highly regard the Lord Buddha to be our ultimate refuge without reservation – with the knowledge that He was only human – because of His extreme wisdom, His understanding of how to eliminate the defilements, His superb purity in being able to achieve Nibbana, and His compassion in selflessly devoting His life to showing human beings how to achieve what He achieved. We follow His teachings without hesitation, so that one day we will be able to rid ourselves of all defilements and follow Him into Nibbana.



Chapter 29

Do Good Deeds Always Bring Favorable Outcomes?



Whenever someone is facing a situation which he considers unfair, he will start to think, “**There is no such thing as good deeds always bringing favorable outcomes; bad deeds can also bring favorable outcomes, too.**” The fallacy of this notion stems from the expectation that good deeds will produce immediate outcomes, and the narrow view of someone who is being rewarded for his bad conduct. On the surface, that person may be enjoying the fruits of his bad deeds. But look closely, he is very worried of being attacked or arrested by the police. His gratification is temporary, but his fear stays with him.

It is important to teach our children when they are young to believe that **good deeds always bring favorable outcomes, and vice versa.** Otherwise they will doubt this principle, and may think that doing good is only for fools, a belief to which some adults subscribe.



However, the first step in achieving this goal is to convince the parents that good deeds always bring good outcomes, and vice versa. The following episode should help clarify this principle.

A layperson asked a respected senior monk:

“Venerable One, do good deeds always bring good outcomes? I have seen many friends doing good, but not receiving anything good in return.”

The senior monk answered, “Do not waste your time doubting this Law of Kamma. The Enlightened One had proof of this, thousands of years ago. But there are still so many people, including you, who still have doubts because you are hasty, expecting to see the outcomes immediately, and forgetting about common sense.

“So let me give you an example. If we plant a seedling from a banana tree today, can we expect to eat bananas from that seedling today? No, we have to wait for almost a year, and while waiting, we have to water it, turn over the soil, and take good care of it. Otherwise, after a year, we may end up eating scrawny bananas.

“And if you ask me if we get anything out of it while waiting, the answer is yes. Once we have planted that offshoot, we can take satisfaction in knowing that we have done it at the right time. We can have banana leaves for wrapping desserts,

banana blossoms to eat with condiments. And yet we still have to wait a full year for the fruit.

“The first stage of good deeds: Once we have done something good, no matter if anybody sees it or not, the first thing we get is **self-satisfaction**.

“The second stage of good deeds: When we keep doing good deeds, the second thing we get is the development of an **upright personality**, comparable to getting banana leaves for wrapping desserts.

“The third stage of good deeds: And when we continue doing the good deeds for months or years, the fruit of the good deeds will start to show as **fortune and success**. We will begin to see that our life becomes agreeable, our efforts become fruitful. We feel good about ourselves; this is comparable to enjoying the banana blossoms.

“The fourth stage of good deeds: And if we keep repeating our good deeds, soon we will be placed in **high esteem** by society.

“When we plant the banana offshoot, it takes at least a year before we get to enjoy its fruit. By the same token, it takes time before our good deeds are recognized, so don’t be hasty.

“Most people will expect their good deeds to bear fruit right away, but meanwhile they will try to make offerings to

spirits to make the outcomes of their bad deeds go away. And when somebody else has done something bad, which happens to adversely affect them, they will expect those culprits to be punished immediately.

“Actually these impatient persons expect that only their good deeds will bear fruit immediately, that is, if they give, they expect to be rewarded instantly, and this will make them happy. On the contrary, when they lie, and their teeth happen to fall out instantaneously, they will feel that this is unfair. This is only human, expecting only favorable outcomes. But when it is not instant, they will start to doubt the Law of Kamma.

“So from now on, you should not be hasty and only expect favorable outcomes. You should be impartial. But in order to achieve this, you will need to meditate a lot.”

From what the senior monk has explained, we see that we have to follow through when doing good deeds, that is, **they have to be the right deeds, performed to the fullest extent of our ability, and done in the right measure, for them to be effective**. This is how we can set an example for our children to make them firmly believe that **good deeds will always bring favorable outcomes, and vice versa**.



How Good Deeds Can Bring Good Outcomes



It has always been a challenge to develop human beings to resist the temptations to do bad deeds, and to do good deeds wholeheartedly without any expectation of reward or recognition. If parents can teach their children to be good people through and through, then they will have no worries, for their children will always be on the righteous path, and they will not cause trouble for themselves and others.

However, it is rather difficult to train children to love to do good deeds and hate to do bad deeds, because it is hard to resist temptations. Besides, it is impossible for parents to keep an eye on their children all the time. At some point the children must be able to govern themselves.

But to be able to control their own behavior, they must fully understand the **Law of Kamma**. Then, when there is the opportunity to commit bad deeds, and nobody is watching, they will be able to control their urges. And when occasions for good deeds arise, they will perform them quickly, not caring if anyone is there to offer praise.

How to Teach Children the Law of Kamma

Since the writer's knowledge on this subject is limited, I have researched a book by a respected senior monk, and this is his explanation:

“If you ask me whether it is difficult to make somebody appreciate the Law of Kamma, I will have to say no, it is not, provided you grasp the essence of this law.

First of all, **if you ask anybody if they are sure that good deeds will always bring good outcomes, most of them will say no.**

I started studying Buddhism four to five years before I was ordained. But before that I was not sure that good deeds always brought good results either. Hence, I was not able to control myself. Most people who have doubts about this law do not realize that there are two sets of conditions, namely:

1. The conditions inside oneself
2. The conditions outside oneself



The Conditions Inside

The conditions inside oneself have three parts:

1. Knowing the Objective.

Your effort has to be for the correct objective. Simply put, before plunging into any work, one has to know what the objective of that endeavor is.

And while doing it, one must make a full effort to achieve it. This theory is analogous to washing clothes. Generally, clothes will get most stained around the collar and the cuffs. So if one scrubbed the whole shirt, but not these two areas, is that shirt clean? The answer is no. Since effort was not directed to the right areas, the objective was not met, and that shirt remained dirty.

The failure to meet this objective is like a person who is diligent but ignorant. He can work very hard, but his efforts will achieve little if anything, and sometimes, his efforts can even bring about more problems. To reach the goal, one must be fully aware and understand the objective of that undertaking before getting started.

2. Make a full effort to reach the objective.

One must put a full effort into any project to obtain the best quality outcome.



Knowing the objective of an undertaking is not enough to guarantee the quality of that effort. If a person stops short of a wholehearted attempt, the objective may be realized, but the quality is poor.

Going back to the clothes washing example, we know that we have to pay attention to the collar and the cuffs, and we also know that it will take 30 scrubs to get rid of the stains. Unfortunately, if we stop at just 10 scrubs, the stain will be lessened but that shirt is still not clean. This rule is applicable to any task. Acting with the right objective, but not to the fullest extent, will only bring a second-rate result.

The failure to exert oneself to the limit can be likened to a smart but lazy person. He knows the objective, and he knows what it takes to reach it with flying colors. But halfway through, he will lose motivation and resort to shortcuts. Therefore, knowing the objective and pursuing it to the fullest extent are the only ways to achieve the best result possible. One must not be lazy, procrastinate or be discouraged by obstacles.

3. The third condition is to remember not to overextend oneself.

Acting on the right objective to the fullest extent does not guarantee success. A person should also apply the appropriate degree of effort, meaning not too much and not too little so that the effort does not cause any harm.

Going back to the clothes washing illustration, if we scrub at the right areas, but instead of 30 scrubs, we go overboard and do 100, we may in fact put holes in that shirt.

Another example of how some people can extend themselves too far: They work too hard without getting enough rest until their health is ruined. On top of this, they work on borrowed funds. Their hard work hurts them physically and financially.

Therefore, to achieve the right outcome, we must meet the three criteria: knowing the objective, putting forth the right effort, and realizing the natural limitations.

The Conditions Outside

Even when we have been able to focus on the objective, give it our full effort, and stay within our limitations, there are still two outside conditions which can influence the outcome. They are:

1. Timing

If we plant a banana seedling today, can we expect to eat the banana tomorrow? Naturally no. But if we planted it yesterday, and there is no banana for us to eat today, does that mean that our effort has come to naught? Not exactly. It just means that it may bear fruit someday.

After three or four months, although there is still no banana to consume, there will be banana leaves that we can use for wrapping. After eight or nine months, there is yet no banana to eat, but there will be banana blossoms to eat with condiments. After we have been watering and turning the soil for a year, then we get to enjoy bananas.

A banana plant is one of the easiest plants to grow, and yet it takes 12 months before we get to enjoy the yield. Similarly, favorable outcome of good deeds also take time to come to fruition. So when someone complains that he has pursued the right objective, exerted the fullest effort, and kept within bounds, and yet has not seen the fruit of his good deeds, then he must be told to be patient.

2. Locality

Take for example the banana tree that grows next to a big water jar as opposed to one that grows in a dry area. The one next to the jar will receive water each morning as the landowner wakes up and splashes his face. After each meal, when the dishes get washed, that banana tree receives water. Whenever someone bathes, or the maid washes clothes, whenever the water is dumped on the ground next to the jar, the tree benefits. It will grow faster than others since it happens to be near the water source.

It is the same when we carry out good deeds. If the locality is conducive the outcome will materialize sooner than it would in a less favorable locality.

A word of caution, **we should know the mentality of the people around us.** Initially, they may give us moral support. But once we advance too far and too fast, they may turn antagonistic, and try to bring us down.

So when we are doing something worthy, we have to pay attention to timing and locality, and adjust our actions accordingly. If we believe firmly in the Law of Karma, we will hold ourselves back from doing bad deeds even when nobody is watching, and embrace doing good wholeheartedly at any opportunity.

Why do some people doubt that good deeds will bring good outcomes?

We know that when someone does a good deed while meeting the criteria, good outcomes will be realized. This will encourage him to do more good. On the contrary, if he does something bad even while meeting the three criteria, it is certain that he will receive bad outcomes.

If we look closely, we will realize that we often have not kept full account of the bad deeds which we have committed

in the past. So when we perform good deeds, sometimes we are suddenly hit with the bad outcome. By the same token, sometimes we see somebody doing something bad, but they are hit with windfall. **It looks like bad deed is being rewarded.** Since the outcomes are not instantaneous, some people begin to doubt the effectiveness of the Law of Kamma. This can really mislead anybody into thinking that good deeds do not bring about good outcomes. They may go as far as to abandon any good behavior.

But sooner or later, immoral actions will come to light and get punished whether in this life or the next. The Law of Kamma is universal.

Criteria for Promotion

The concept of having the right objective and exerting a full effort while staying within bounds can be employed when considering a promotion.

For example, a banker was sent anonymous hostile notes by his subordinates. The reason behind this attack was that the subordinates received different levels of promotion: some received one step up, some two, and some three.

This is very human reaction. If none of them had received any promotion there would not be any problem. Antagonism

and jealousy only arise when the rewards are different. Therefore, there must be some clear-cut guidelines for this kind of situation.

The banker asked for the senior monk's advice when he was questioned by the board. The senior monk suggested that he should explain himself as follows:

A particular person did not receive a promotion because he missed the objective. He might have worked hard but achieved nothing. The success of a company does not come from hard work alone. Moreover, missing the objective of any endeavor can bring about monetary loss to the company.

Another employee might have hit the nail on the head, but he did not hammer the nail all the way down. This kind of person did not do anything wrong, but he has nothing to show for his performance. He might have moved forward an inch, but he would brag that he had gone a yard. Therefore, if we have this kind of person as a subordinate, we should be ready to prove his actual accomplishments. It even happened to me once before.

If a person has fulfilled all three requirements, he deserves **a two-leveled promotion.**

For the one who has only stuck to the objective, but failed to carry it through, he only deserves a single-leveled promotion.

Complete Criteria in Giving



And for the one who has missed the objective entirely, he deserves nothing. And let him know that he is lucky to keep his job.

And for those who have worked hard but caused more damage than good, they should be told to work less and think more.

From what I have told you, you may have to modify your efforts to fit with different circumstances. And soon you will find that the Law of Kamma is absolute, and the right action, thorough and not exaggerated, will bring favorable outcomes at the right time and at the right place.”

Conclusion

This teaching by the senior monk should clarify the essence of the Law of Kamma to parents, enabling them to impart this knowledge to their children so that **the children will become righteous wherever they happen to be.**



Today, most people are inclined to put their faith in science above anything else. However, science can only prove what the eyes can see. There are so many things that the eyes cannot see whose existence is unverified by science.

For example, our mind and the physical heart are two different entities. When we feel sad or glad, these feelings are not from the physical heart, but from our ethereal heart. Science still cannot describe what the ethereal heart looks like or where it resides. We do not know where feelings come from; we just know that they are there.



The physical heart is an organ. Nowadays, doctors can stop the beating of the heart while operating on a patient with heart problems and are able to restart the beating once the operation is finished. If the physical heart and the ethereal are the same, the patient would have died. This should prove that the **physical heart** and the **ethereal heart** are two different things.

In the Tripitaka, the Lord Buddha spoke of a number of subjects that were unknown to science at the time. He said thousands of years ago there was more than one universe; actually there are an **infinite number of universes**. Scientists only came to discover this fact a few hundred years ago.

The Lord Buddha had also explored the concept of merit. And it would be deplorable if we rejected this idea outright. We should learn about it with open minds since it directly affects our lives. We cannot see it, but we can feel it within us. We should support Buddhism and study the Tripitaka to enhance our knowledge, and then we would not be labeled as Buddhists only in name.

Based on this belief, the writer has faith in merit and demerit. Unfavorable outcomes are the consequence of bad actions. This is the Law of Kamma. And in times of trouble, we can look for help, not in science, not in economics, and not in politics, but from good kamma to aid us.

In the chapter, “**The Correct Way to Gain Merits**” from the book **Good Question, Good Answer** by Venerable Phrarajabhavanaviriyakhun, the issue of merit was discussed in detail as follows:

*“The Lord Buddha stated that there were three methods of gaining merits, namely through **acts of generosity, adherence to the precepts, and meditation.**”*

1. Generosity. *This is the sharing of useful things with those who are deserving. However, it should not be done to our detriment. Generally, Buddhists are fond of giving to monks and virtuous persons regularly.*

2. Adherence to the precepts. *This means to keep under control our actions and speech so that they do no injure others and us. We should observe at least the Five Precepts. And when the opportunity arises, such as the day before a Buddhist Holy Day, a Buddhist Holy Day, and during weekend retreats, Buddhists can choose to observe the Eight Precepts to gain additional merits. Some people even choose to observe the Eight Precepts one day a week on a regular basis.*

3. Meditation. *This is the way to purify the mind. Study Dhamma and chant to calm and purify the mind every night before bedtime for at least twenty minutes to one hour.*

Some people establish routines to ensure they accumulate these three merits:

-In the morning, I will not eat before I have performed the merit of giving.

-Today, I will not leave the house before I have resolved to observe the precepts.

-Tonight, I will not go to bed before I have recited the mantras and meditated.

*If a person can follow this routine consistently, he can be sure that his life will never lead to despair. The future will be bright. **All three will gradually advance the purification of the mind to a higher level. If our mind is clear and bright, we will feel joyful.** In a happy mindset, we will think right, speak right, and do the right thing.*

As a first step to gain merit, I suggest first practicing generosity.

The Lord Buddha stated that to gain the maximum merit, giving should meet these four criteria, namely:

1. Wholesomeness of the object. *The object to be given must be obtained legitimately and morally, not through fraudulent means.*

2. Upright intention. *The objective of giving is to get rid of miserliness, selfishness, and greediness. It is not done to gain riches, renown, or recognition. The true intent is to share and gain merit. Gaining merit is not greed; it is actually replacing greed with generosity.*

3. Conscientious donor. *The donor should at least abide by the Five Precepts. And it is important that he should be joyful before, during and after the offering, and not feel regret about it.*

4. Virtuous recipient. *If the recipient is an enlightened monk, the merit will be enormous and instantaneous; the effects of that merit will be realized in the present lifetime. But if the recipient monk is not yet enlightened, he should at least be striving towards that goal. If he is a layperson, he should adhere to the precepts.*

In addition to the criteria for giving, the Lord Buddha also provided several illustrations.

Some illustrations that He imparted to the monks confirmed that the outcome of giving depends on the four criteria, and that their effectiveness has to do with how well each of the criteria were met in each instance. The more virtuous the recipient, the more merit as a result. And if the recipient is single-mindedly striving toward enlightenment, the benefit to the generous person will be immense and immediate. I want you to read the Tripitaka, the Suttantapitaka, such as Kuttakanikaya Vimaanvattu, to see if my observation is correct.”

The section from **Good Question, Good Answer** by Venerable Phrabhavanaviriyakhun as quoted in this chapter gives insight and encouragement to readers to make merit and

to cultivate this habit in their own children while the children are young. And at the final hour of our lives, no matter how educated we are or how much money we have, only our spiritual merits can help us.

Merit is not for sale. If you want it, you will have to acquire it yourself through your own actions.



Teaching Children to Live by the Five Precepts



It is not an overstatement to say that teaching children to abide by the Five Precepts is the most important responsibility of their parents; parents owe this to their children and to society. In this respect, they are actually the ones determining the future of their children and the country. **Why is this issue so important?**

Memorizing the Five Precepts but not Abiding by Them

Buddhists are able to recite the Five Precepts, but when asked **the meaning of the word, “precept,”** most of them do not know. Since adults cannot even answer this question, how

can we expect the younger generation to see the importance of observing the precepts? This unfortunate situation has led more people to disregard the precepts until ignorance has become the norm. And when someone does live by the precepts, he is regarded as strange or quaint. This has further reduced the number of people observing the Five Precepts, the moral legacy left by our ancestors.

Since they have received no guidance from home on the Five Precepts, young people are unable to resist the temptations thrown at them by society. This has led to behavioral problems such as brawling, prostitution, fraud, illegal drug use, and so on. Ignorance of the precepts has become the cause of social ills. Parents are ready to point fingers, punish their children and blame society or television, and conclude that the cure must come from someone else.

When these youngsters have been rehabilitated and sent home from juvenile detention, they are still not instructed about the Five Precepts. Consequently, they will fall into the same cycle of bad behavior and even criminal activity. They grow up to be trouble makers and a menace to society.

If we fail to get to the root of the problem, that is, the failure to cultivate the Five Precepts in children, how can we break the cycle of social anguish?

The Five Precepts That Parents Should Know

Teaching their children to abide by the Five Precepts is the utmost important responsibility of parents to help counteract social deterioration. However, before they are capable of doing this, they must know:

1. **What is a precept?**
2. **What do the Five Precepts have to do with human nature?**
3. **Why does the failure to abide by all Five Precepts move a person away from human nature?**

The understanding of these three points will enable parents to instill the Five Precepts in their children.

What is a Precept?

The word **precept** means **nature**. Everything has its own nature. The rain will fall during the rainy season. If it does not, then it is not natural. The horse always stays on its feet even while sleeping. If it lies down then it is sick, and not in its natural state. Therefore, **the real meaning of the word precept is preserving the nature of the human being in oneself and refraining from bringing trouble to oneself and others.**

What is the Nature of Human Beings?

The nature of human beings consists of five characteristics.

1. By nature, humans will not kill.

A human who takes life has deviated from the nature of humankind. He has turned animalistic, like tigers, bears, or crocodiles which have to kill to survive. Therefore, **the first Precept reminds human beings not to kill so as to keep our nature.**

2. By nature, humans will not steal.

It is the nature of animals to fight for and steal food. But people do not have to do that. We are able to produce our own and trade for our sustenance. Hence **the second Precept reminds us not to steal, act corruptly, and embezzle so as to keep our nature.**

3. By nature, humans will not commit adultery.

Animals, which by nature cannot control themselves to be content with one mate, will fight to mate each year with another's partner. Some even fight to the death to satisfy this instinct during the mating season. But it is not human nature to do this; as a being not governed by instincts alone, a person can be content with one spouse. Hence **the third Precept reminds us not to commit adultery in order to maintain our nature.**

4. By nature, humans will not lie.

People should always speak the truth. They should always be honest and sincere to one another. Hence **the fourth Precept reminds us not to lie.**

5. By nature, humans will not consume intoxicants.

Many animals are physically stronger than people, but they lack the faculty to turn their strengths toward meaningful purposes. They possess no conscience and therefore act according to their instincts. For instance, we do not see animals taking care of their parents. But human beings possess a conscience, as revealed by their feelings of gratitude and love towards their parents.

Conscience is enduring. It can withstand starvation, exhaustion, and sickness. But intoxicants such as alcohol and drugs can destroy all these qualities. An intoxicated person is capable of appalling acts, even attacking, harming, or killing his parents. He is devious and is closer to being an animal than a human being. **The Fifth Precept reminds us not to consume intoxicants.**

The Five Precepts are:

1. We shall not kill.
2. We shall not steal.
3. We shall not commit adultery. We should be faithful to our spouse.

4. We shall not lie, utter profanity, speak nonsense, or use divisive words.
5. We shall not consume intoxicants such as addictive drugs and alcohol.

These Precepts are needed to keep peace on earth.

When the Five Precepts are not Observed

The Five Precepts were here even before the birth of the Lord Buddha. He, through the incomparable power of His enlightenment, came to know the existence of the Five Precepts and passed on this knowledge to us. They can also be employed to quantify human behavior, that is:

If we can observe all the Five Precepts, then we are 100% human.

If we can only maintain four, then we are only 80% human, 20% animalistic.

If we can only maintain three, then we are only 60% human, 40% animalistic.

If we can only maintain two, then we are only 40% human, 60% animalistic.

If we can only maintain one, then we are only 20% human, 80% animalistic.

If none of them are observed, that person is no longer a human being. He only exists in human form. He will have no peace, no happiness. He only exists to produce trouble for himself and society. Unfortunately, today, as more and more people deviate from the Five Precepts, not following the Five Precepts has become acceptable. This lack of a moral code has changed a peaceful country into a murderous, fraudulent, adulterous country. Its citizens are dissatisfied and afraid, yet nobody can do anything about it.

If parents do not care to teach their children to abide by the Five Precepts, there is no hope that society will improve. The hope that their children will grow up to be responsible adults is empty. **Teaching children to live their lives everyday by the Five Precepts is the most important responsibility that parents have towards their children to brighten their future and essential to the health, peace, and happiness of society as a whole.**



Making the Five Precepts Easy for Children to Understand



Once, I had the chance to observe a senior monk simplify the Five Precepts for the children. The writer was impressed with the method and would like to pass on this information to parents as a guideline. It was taught in the form of dialogue between the teacher and the children:

The Origin of the Five Precepts

Today, I, as a senior monk, am going to teach you a fundamental and very important aspect of our lives: the Five Precepts.

Nobody knows the origins of the Five Precepts. They existed even before the birth of the Lord Buddha, and He advised that everybody should abide by them.

Do you know what the Five Precepts are?

1. One shall not kill.
2. One shall not steal.
3. One shall not commit adultery.
4. One shall not lie.
5. One shall not consume intoxicants.

I will explain to you how the Five Precepts came into existence. Hopefully when you grow up and begin to get angry at either small or large issues, this knowledge can help you control your temper.

How did the First Precept, one shall not kill, come into existence?

The senior monk : Whom do you love the most?
The children : My mother and father, sir.
The senior monk : Is there anybody you love more than your parents?
The children : Yes, myself, sir.
The senior monk : Yes, that's correct, everybody loves oneself the most. What about fowl? Do they love themselves?
The children : Yes, sir.
The senior monk : Are you sure?

The children : Yes, sir.
The senior monk : How can you be sure? Did they tell you that?
The children : No, they didn't.
The senior monk : Then how do you know they love their lives?
The children : When someone chases them, they run for their lives.
The senior monk : Yes, animals are the same as us. When someone threatens them, they will run for their dear lives. Although they cannot say it, we can tell. But what about other animals, such as pigs and cats, do they love their lives?
The children : Yes sir.
The senior monk : We love our lives, as do the animals, be it birds, or pigs, or cats. There is no one and no animal that does not love his life. Recognizing this fact is how the First Precept originated, that nobody should take life away from another creature, not even those of animals.

How did the Second Precept, one shall not steal, come into existence?

The senior monk : Now I want you to think about what we need to live.

The children : Air, food, and water, sir, as well as medicine, clothing, and a house. We also need money to live.

The senior monk : You are right. Although all of you are in school, your parents have to provide you with

1. Clothing.

2. Food.

3. Shelter.

4. Medicine.

In Buddhist terminology, these are called the Four Basic Necessities, which every human being needs.

On top of these, we have furniture, shoes and so on which we need to make life comfortable. If somebody takes these things away from us, can we survive?

The children : No, we can't.

The senior monk : That's correct. They don't have to kill us, but if they steal or take away these things from us, then we can't survive either. That is how the Second Precept came into existence; it is because we need these possessions to survive.

How did the Third Precept, one shall not commit adultery, come into existence?

If other people do not take our lives or our possessions, we should live a happy life. However, if they take what we love most, which are our husbands, our wives, and our sons and daughters, we will suffer great sadness. This is the idea behind the Third Precept, that no one should take away a loved one from somebody else, and therefore one shall not commit adultery.

How did the Fourth Precept, one shall not lie, come into existence?

Think of all the people you love, your parents, your friends, your brothers and sisters, and your teacher, and imagine if you find out that they are not honest with you. Your reaction would be that you will not love them any longer.

The senior monk : Do you have a brother?

The children : Yes, I do.

The senior monk : If you found out that he lied to you, would you be mad at him?

The children : Yes, I would.

The senior monk : And if you lie to him, do you think he will be mad at you?

The children : Yes, he will.

The senior monk : And have you ever lied to him?

The children : Yes, I have.

The senior monk : Remember this, if you lie to somebody, they will feel less love for you each time, and vice versa. No one likes dishonesty, so you should not lie to anyone. This is how the Fourth Precept came into existence.

How did the Fifth Precept, one shall not consume intoxicants, come into existence?

The Lord Buddha gave us these lines of reasoning to contemplate.

1. Those that do not kill living creatures, be they small or large animals, or other human beings, have already earned the notable merit of giving security to all lives.
2. Those who do not steal have already earned the notable merit of giving security to property.
3. Those who do not commit adultery have already earned the notable merit of providing security to their spouses.
4. And those who do not lie have already earned the notable merit of giving sincerity.

So when we are able to abide by the first Four Precepts, we are earning significant merit of four different kinds. But when it comes to the Fifth Precept, all of you will need to pay more attention to understand the logic behind it.

When a person does not take life, steal, commit adultery, or lie, he must have the conscience to refrain from that behavior. Without his character, this person will not be able to avoid committing those sins.

Our conscience can be very strong, but unfortunately, it can also be enfeebled. For example, a student will have an examination the following day; suddenly, he is overwhelmed with fever. He takes some medicine and feels a little bit better. He is able to bring himself to finish all the lessons needed for the exam. His conscience is strong.

However, within the same person, the unyielding conscience can crumble into dust as soon as he consumes intoxicants such as spirits, beer, amphetamines, and so on. Since the intoxicants can wreck our conscience and lead us to commit sin, we need the Fifth Precept to keep our conscience and our dedication to the other Four Precepts intact.

Let me give you an example: there is a boy about your age whose father, when drunk, is capable of killing the chickens or ducks on their farm. Sometimes, he will spank his son and use profanity. But when he is sober, he is a very good father. So, I want you to remember this, when you grow up, do not drink alcohol or use drugs.

How do you keep the Five Precepts intact?

When I was a student, I started training myself to observe the Five Precepts. This is how I did it.

Before I was ordained, I wore a Buddha image around my neck. Every morning before going to school, I would hold the Buddha image in my hands and pay my respects by chanting:

“Namo tussa bhakavato arahato summa sambuddhassa” three times.

And then I would make my resolve with the Buddha image:

1. Today I will not kill.
2. Today I will not steal.
3. Today I will not commit adultery.
4. Today I will not lie.
5. Today I will not drink alcohol or use drugs.

Once I had done this, then I would leave for school. When I started, sometimes I was able to keep the Five Precepts for the day, but sometimes I couldn't. However, after half a year, I was able to keep all Five Precepts everyday. After I was able to abide by the Five Precepts for six years straight, then I was ordained. Do you think you can do it too? I think you can.



Conclusion

Let me go over the Five Precepts one more time with you.

Why should we not kill? Because everybody loves his life.

Why should we not steal? Because everybody needs possessions to be comfortable. If certain things were taken away from us, we will not be able to survive. Even if we survive, our lives will be full of hardship.

Why should we not commit adultery? Because everybody loves their family and friends.

Why should we not lie? Because every body loves honesty and truthfulness.

Why should we not consume intoxicants? Because it will destroy our conscience. Without our conscience, we would be capable of infringing upon all the other Four Precepts. Therefore, if you want to grow up to be good person, you have to abide by the Five Precepts.

The writer hopes that this account will help parents to teach their children to observe the Five Precepts, so that they grow up to be good people. **The accomplishment we can feel most proud of is to raise our children to be ethical adults.**



Instilling a Love of Meditation in Our Children



Meditation is the most effective way to train the mind to focus. The practice helps to strengthen the mind so that it will not be easily diverted. Children who have been well taught in ethics, but lack training in meditation, are still susceptible to temptations because they lack that extra fortification.

Parents should start to inspire their children to love to meditate from a very young age. When their minds are focused, they will be able to absorb guidance readily. The ethics instilled in them by the parents will flourish and they will be able to deal with uncertainties with clarity.

Yet there are a number of parents who believe that children should be left free to think and that training them to meditate when they are two or three years old is too restrictive. In this regard, there is an explanation by a senior monk on **what effect meditation has on young children:**

“First of all, let me ask you this; is there anybody in this world who does not want to be a good person? No, there is none. Even a robber wants to be good, but unfortunately, he thinks that robbing is a good thing. A person has to comprehend the difference between what is good and what is bad. Without this notion, society will be in chaos.

“All parents want their children to grow up to be good people, but leaving them to their own devices, hoping that they will naturally grow up to be good, is not the right way. Parents will have to set good examples while teaching them, for instance, using polite speech, showing humility, and training them to bow at the feet of their parents and grandparents.

“Initially the children may not understand the reasons they have to be respectful, but at least they are being shown good manners. And when they are old enough to understand, we should explain to them why they should be respectful to parents, grandparents, and teachers. If we do not teach them to bow at their parents’ feet while they are young, they will most likely not do it when they are older. They may know

that it is a good thing to do, but they will be too embarrassed to do it. Some adults who have never been taught to bow at their parents’ feet will feel very uncomfortable to do it, and even the parents are too embarrassed to be bowed to, just because they are not used to it.

“Bowing is a sign of respect, which means that we are aware of the goodness of the persons we bow to. And it has to be deep respect, so much so that we just cannot stay idle without showing our respect for those persons. Recognizing the goodness of those persons, the next thing to do is to observe and imitate them.

“If we have never been trained to bow since we are young, we will grow up with large egos. Some snobbish people can’t even recognize virtue in others.

“These days we can see that lots of people possess this negative attitude, always searching for defects in other people, the students at the teachers, and vice versa, the supervisors at the subordinates, and colleagues amongst each other. The sense of community and harmony deteriorates. The only way to reverse this trend is to teach respect and to see virtues in others.

“Therefore, if we want our children to grow up to be good citizens, the process should start very early. As soon as they learn to talk, they should be taught to say only nice words. Bring them to the temple, and let them learn to meditate by

visualizing the Buddha image. When they grow up, we can be sure that our children, when facing problems, will stay cool, calm and collected.

“Can meditation really change a human being? When we open our eyes, we see other people, but not ourselves. If we want to see ourselves, we have to close our eyes.

“If we know how to meditate, and are able to still our minds, we will know what is right or wrong. Instead of wasting time criticizing others, we will scrutinize ourselves and try to improve our own deficiencies and consequently improve our lives overall.”

The teaching of the senior monk endorses the notion that teaching children to meditate from the time they are young will enable them to focus and train their minds. They will not waver in face of temptations, but stand firm on the strong foundation of morals due to the guidance that they received from their parents.

During this coming summer vacation, introduce your children to meditation by joining the summer Dhamma camps offered by several temples. A strong moral beginning as children will benefit them all their lives.



Chapter 35

Ordaining for One's Parents Brings Merit



In this day and age of ever-present temptations and perpetual pressure to make a living, it is especially rare to find any family with a son who ordains as a Buddhist monk for at least the period of Buddhist Lent. The parents must have accumulated a tremendous amount of virtue. It does not occur often since the first requisite is the willingness of the son. The ordination is not done in exchange for a new car or for monetary gain.

Longing to See Their Son in Saffron Robes

The writer is looking at a poster put out by the Buddhist Society inviting students to ordain during their summer



vacation. The poster shows a mother about sixty years old. She is holding a small lei in her hands; her face is full of joy. Her son, attired in white novice robes, is bowing low at her feet showing deep love and respect for her, and symbolically asking for permission to ordain.

The caption says, **“Ordain while your mother is still alive to show her your gratitude.”**

Any mother who sees this poster will wish that her son will ordain at least once. And any son who sees it will be very motivated to ordain.

The writer has ordained for a number of Buddhist Lents, and I can attest that the joy of ordination is limitless. I have learned that we can be happy without worldly possessions, a space of one square meter for sitting and standing, and two square meters for sleeping. These can give more happiness than millions of Baht. This kind of happiness cannot be bought.

Moreover, it was a double benefit. Initially, my ordination was to show gratitude to my parents. Auspiciously, I discovered the purpose of life.

Obstacles to Ordination

To ordain and to give one’s parents the chance to rejoice in the merits do not occur easily. Ordination is not something

that one can do whenever one wants to. Ordination requires merits accumulated from one's past life, as well as meeting all the qualifications set out in the discipline section of the Tripitaka.

Unfortunately, my father passed away when I was small, so he did not get to see his son in the saffron robes. And I had had two close calls, which almost took my life before my father. The first time was when I was a little over ten years old. As I was daydreaming and pretending to be a sword fighter in a Chinese martial arts movie, I did not see a motorcycle coming because the hat I was wearing was blocking my view. Fortunately, the motorcycle was coming at a slow speed. I was knocked over, but was able to get up and walked away with minor injuries. That was **my first brush with death**.

The second time was when my appendix burst during the night. I was taken to the hospital by my mother and grandmother. However, the doctor did not diagnose me correctly. If there had been an internal infection, my family would be making arrangements for my funeral. I suffered for 15 hours while the doctor treated me for a normal stomachache. Once he found out that my appendix had ruptured, I was immediately operated on.

When I came around from the anesthesia the next morning, still groggy, I saw the fellow in the next bed who had suffered the same case. But he must have it a lot worst

than mine because I saw tubes still draining toxin out of him. I felt lucky. When I turned around, I saw the faces of two elderly ladies with expressions of enormous relief. I thought, "My mother and grandmother must have been here all night watching over me."

I felt right there that these two ladies must have loved me very much. They were the ones who loved me with all their hearts; it was an unselfish love which expected nothing in return. I asked myself if I had done anything to repay their love.

And the answer is....very little. I realized right there that I must not do anything to hurt them if I could help it.

These two close shaves played a major part in spurring me to ordain. I wanted my mother and grandmother to see me in the saffron robes. I wanted to give them the chance to accumulate merits, and I wanted them not to worry about me any longer since I would be educated in Dhamma.

We are Walking to Our Graves

I decided to ordain after I finished college. When I looked at life, everything seems so unpredictable. We might see someone in the morning, but by the evening, he could be dead.

I have seen parents make funeral arrangements for their children, grandparents for their grandchildren. It should not be this way, and I certainly did not want this to happen to me. But since life is so unpredictable, the priority was ordination. Besides, my mother's health was deteriorating; my grandmother was getting very senile, and if I delayed the ordination any longer, they might be too weak to know. I should do it as soon as possible.

And then my decision was swayed. Upon graduation, I was offered a very good job, the workload consumed me, and thoughts of ordination were pushed aside. It must have been my past merit coming to help me, for one day, the senior monk who knew about my earlier intention came to guide me.

His first words were, **“How about ordaining this coming rain retreat?”**

I hesitated for a while, but finally said, “I still have a lot of assignments on hand, I don't think I should leave now.”

As if he had expected my answer, he retorted, **“If you die today, your bosses are not going to care enough to forward you any merit.”**

His reply was like lightning in the dark. It jolted me to think that if I died today, my mother and grandmother would be the only ones who would care enough to share their merits with me. Once this thought flashed in my head, **I instantly resolved to ordain during the rain retreat.**

Merits from Ordination

After my ordination, I learned that Thai people believed that ordination is repaying one's debt of gratitude to one's parents. Yet there were still quite a few Thais who did not subscribe to this conviction. **How could a son be repaying his parents** when he was accepting offerings by himself and performing various virtuous tasks, while his parents were at home? It looked more like he had deserted them. Someone had asked the senior monk the same question, and this was how he explained it.

“Everybody has his own beliefs, but before you believe in anything, you should look at the logic behind it. In Buddhism, we believe that **‘whoever performs good deeds will receive good outcomes, and vice versa. We reap what we have planted.’**

“When a son is ordained, certainly he will receive the merit for trying to purify himself according to the Lord Buddha's teachings. The parents receive a different type of merit: First, they will gain merit for supporting his ordination. Secondly, when their son is a monk, out of concern for him, they will go to the temple to offer food, not only to their son, but other monks as well. Consequently, they will gain merit for generosity. Third, some parents, out of deep concern, will spend more and more time at the temple. While there, they will hear the teachings of the Lord Buddha, making them more

informed of right and wrong. In elevating their moral standards, they will gain more merits. And finally, while at the temple, they will see that other people are observing the precepts and practicing meditation. If they follow this example they, too, will gain merit.

“There is no doubt that parents will be gaining merits of a different nature than their son. However, the merit does not come to them automatically if they sit idly by. There are some monks who have to visit their parents at home to convince them to observe the precepts. If they follow his advice, only then will they gain merits.”

I was very impressed with this explanation. It shows that the ordination of the son will lead to the parents going to the temple and practicing virtues. It also encourages monks to try to convince their parents to accumulate merit.

Ordaining for Loved Ones

These days, in pursuing their goals in life, most men tend to be moving further away from their parents. If this drift continues, chances of ordaining for their mother or father will be slim. To avoid this conflict, **we should ordain for our parents unconditionally to reciprocate their absolute love for us.**

If we take a good look at people’s lives, we will see that we have worked hard for other people, some even harder than we have ever worked for our own parents. If we can give that much to others, why are we unable to give more to our own parents?

This summer will be the ideal time to do it. As a Buddhist scholar wisely put it, **“Every man should be an intellectual in secular affairs, and a sage in Buddhism, so his life will not be wasted.”**





Part Six

The End of One's Life





Although we realize that our lives will not last a thousand years, sometimes we still let ourselves drift down into the stream of worldly pleasures which causes us suffering. Sometimes we do things that bring later regret. Since everyone is counting the days of their lives, some people might have asked themselves, **“How do we live our lives to the fullest and how do we live every minute of our lives with full consciousness?”**

A highly respected monk had a clear answer to this. He always reminds the laypeople who come to make merit at his temple that dealing with life situations is something for which we must prepare ourselves.

“Even though we may dislike difficulties and welcome happiness, there is no way to avoid suffering in our lives because life is a mixture of suffering and happiness. **Instead, we should prepare for the inevitable suffering with a steady mind.**

“Human beings were born with inherent forms of suffering which include aging, sickness and death. Everyday these forms of suffering have adverse effects on our lives to various degrees.

“Instead of realizing and being aware of this suffering, humans blind themselves even further with other trivial things. A person will trouble himself more to fulfill his desires, for example, to have a spouse and children, expecting that these will bring him happiness.

“Other individuals associated with the person having these desires are burdened with the same inherent sufferings (aging, sickness, and death). Thus, once he marries, instead of being happy, he is burdening himself with the natural sufferings of his loved ones, including the suffering that may be caused by having to be separated from them at the end.

“If you are married or have your own children, there is no need to explain the hardships that will come with your responsibilities. Even by remaining single, having to make a living, taking care of one’s parents, a person barely has enough time left for oneself. After being married, one must play the

role of spouse and parent of the children. Each role surely has a tremendous amount of work involved. Thus, everyday, the family life is filled with worry and attachment.

“If you are tactful and articulate, you may be able to find some happiness in a marriage. Yet, one still cannot break free from suffering when death arrives. Being separated from loved ones is inevitable and renders great grief. **If one wants to live a happy life, one must learn to be tolerant and to not burden oneself with unnecessary suffering.**

“Some people may think that this teaching is based on a pessimistic view. But, in truth, **it is a realistic teaching which tells you how to deal with life situations.**

“**The Lord Buddha was able to conquer all these sufferings.** He taught that one can cope with unexpected suffering by mindfully preparing oneself to confront aging, sickness and death, habitually reflecting on the following aspects:

1. Knowing the purpose of life: Knowing that we were not born to live only for enjoyment. In fact, we were born to pursue perfections, to cultivate merit in order to break free from the sufferings of the *samsara* (cycle of life and death) by following in the footsteps of Lord Buddha to reach Nibbana.

2. Self-realization: Habitually reflect on the fact that it is natural for us to die. We have not yet gone beyond dying. We

do not know when we are going to die. We must sooner or later be separated from all loved ones and treasured things.

How can people think about death?

1. Thinking about death with the false view: Thinking that death is inevitable or just waiting for death to come, without cultivating merit or anything good, is a waste of a precious human life.

2. Thinking about death with the right view: Death is unavoidable, therefore, before dying, one must make the most of one's physical existence by cultivating the maximum number of good deeds in order that the accrued merit resulting from those deeds will be carried on to the next life.

All life ends at death. Yet, death could never be the purpose of life. The purpose of life is to cultivate merit and purify oneself from defilements to attain Nibbana. Since defilements still remain, one should never stop doing good deeds until one's last day arrives. This is the best recommendation that we have to offer.

Daily reflection on death and the separation from all loved ones and treasured things helps develop consciousness and progress in meditation. A person who performs this reflection will live his life with prudence and preparation. He tends not to seek any extra attachment to animate or inanimate things,

focusing instead on performing good deeds. He is unafraid of any hardships. He realizes that death is creeping ever closer, like a shadow that has followed him from birth and is ready to attack him in moments of weakness.

3. Cultivating the utmost merit: The objective of life is to live with purpose or meaning. Doing something that cannot be carried over to the next life is not considered truly beneficial.

The Lord Buddha realized that only the results of our deeds will follow us when we die. He taught, **“We are owners of our actions, we are heirs to our kamma, whatever actions we perform, be they good or evil, we will receive their consequences.”**

He taught three principle guidelines on how to live our lives and get the best out of them:

1. Avoid evil deeds: Cast off past bad habits and avoid starting new ones which can increase adverse consequences, to the extent that they will bring us to the unfortunate realms or cause us to miss the path to the heavenly realms and Nibbana.

2. Doing good deeds to the utmost extent: Attempt to perform any good deeds one has never performed and increase the effort devoted to those good deeds that one has already performed in order to gain passage to the heavenly realms and Nibbana while shutting the doorway of hell.

3. Purify the mind: Keep one's mind bright and clear all the time, while inhaling and exhaling. If a person inhales and does not exhale, that person's life will come to an end. Death bears no sign of warning. Therefore, everyone should prepare for death by always keeping a clear mind.

The brightness or cloudiness of one's mind will open the door to heaven or hell for us, respectively.

A bright and clear mind resulting from the recollection of past good deeds will lead you to happiness. The force of good kammic effects based on the good deeds that one has done on earth will open the gateway to a heavenly realm with celestial treasures.

And a cloudy mind resulting from the recollection of past evil deeds will lead a person to the unfortunate realms. The force of bad kammic effects will lead to painful experiences corresponding to that person's actions in his current existence.

These principle guidelines are categorized and elaborated in the Buddhist teaching, the **10 Bases of Meritorious Actions** (*Puññakiriyā-vatthu*), which are shown below:

1. Generosity (*Dānamaya*)

Merit acquired by giving to the appropriate recipient

2. Moral Discipline (*Silamaya*)

Observing moral behavior by restraining one's speech and actions, by not causing turmoil for others

3. Meditation practice (*Bhāvanāmaya*)

Mental development through meditation

4. Humility (*Apacāyanamaya*)

Reverence and humility towards others with virtue

5. Aiding others (*Veyyāvaccamaya*)

Assisting others without breaking the law, tradition, or morals

6. Transferring merit (*Pattidānamaya*)

Sharing merit with others

7. Rejoicing in merit (*Pattānumodanāmaya*)

Rejoicing in others' merit

8. Listening to Dhamma sermons (*Dhammassavanamaya*)

Listening to doctrines or right teachings

9. Giving Dhamma sermons (*Dhammadesanāmaya*)

Teaching the doctrine or showing truth

10. Forming the Right View (*Ditthujukamma*)

Strengthening one's views or forming correct views

“In sum, these ten meritorious actions can be categorized simply into three main groups. They are **generosity** (*Dāna*), **moral discipline** (*Sila*) and **meditation practice** (*Bhāvanā*).

“A person who understands the purpose of life, habitually contemplates the reality of death, and makes an effort to cultivate good deeds will have the right view of the world.

His mind will be unmoved by worldly sufferings. He will also be able to find happiness both in this life and the next.”

All of these teachings given by a respected senior monk remind us that we should not lead our lives carelessly; we should aim to perform good deeds, and we should avoid bad behavior and purify our minds everyday so that our lives are filled with value.

I hope that this message from a respected senior monk, expressed through this book, aids many in preparing themselves to mindfully handle any forms of suffering that life may bring. The value of a person’s life depends on how one spends it in this world in order to gain passage to Nibbana.



Chapter 37

The Last Moment of a Father’s Life



One day, a lady came to seek advice from a respected senior monk about how to care for her dying father; Buddhists consider this an important task of any grateful child. Thus, this knowledge should be learned by everyone who must pay a debt of gratitude to their parents.

The lady said, “When I was 10 years old, my parents got divorced. My mother took care of me. She is a faithful Buddhist who believes in the law of cause and effect. She offers food to the monks every morning. My father has never visited me. Even though I know where he lives, I have never gone to see him. I have only called him a few times.



“Recently, he fell seriously ill and was admitted into a hospital. The doctor said he has cancer and probably won’t have much time to live. My father does not have faith in Buddhism. How can I help him cope with this suffering?
If I make merit on behalf of my father when he is still alive, could this merit help him gain recovery?

The respected senior monk replied, “Before giving care to a dying patient no matter the illness, you must understand one thing that is of utmost importance. It is the state of mind that will determine the destination of his afterlife. So, try not to have him worry about anything.

“The Lord Buddha once said, ‘**A clouded mind leads to an unfavorable realm.**’

“**During the last two months of your father’s life, try your best to have him develop a clear mind.** And making merit is the best way to make the mind bright and clear.

“**If my father does not have faith in Buddhism and I make the merit for him, will he receive the merit?**

“The answer is, he will receive the fruit of the merit only when he rejoices in your merit, and the amount of merit he receives will be less than what he will receive if he makes it himself.

“If a person does not believe in the law of cause and effect, at the time of death when caught by the results of his

bad deeds, in his last moment of life, he will experience great suffering.

“As a daughter, you should stay close to your father. When the chance arises, give your father a Dhamma talk; bring him flowers, candles and incense to pay homage to the Lord Buddha three times a day. In the beginning, he may refuse your proposal. Be patient and keep talking; tell him to pray everyday or as much as he can.

“If his condition does not permit him to sit, he can also pray while laying down. When he used to be strong he may have doubted what you said. But at the last moment when the pain is unbearable for him and you tell him to take refuge in the Triple Gem, he may consider taking your advice.

“Another thing you can do is to prepare alms food (rice, fruit or flower) for him to offer to the monks. Or it would be even better if you can invite the monks to visit his bed to receive his alms offering. If this is not possible, you can also offer alms food somewhere else on his behalf and tell him later in order that he can rejoice in the merit.

“By following this advice, he will struggle less, especially, if he still has some personal merit left to believe you. He will be calmer while struggling with the pain. But if he rejects everything, then you can do nothing but look forward to repaying the debt of gratitude to him in the next lifetime.

“Several years ago, there was someone I knew who was a care-taker of a temple. He suffered diabetes and had to be amputated for that reason. After the operation, everyday at two o’clock he would suffer such an acute pain from his wound that nothing could stop the pain.

“And because he had faith in Buddhism and believed in the Law of Kamma, I visited him and gave him chanting and meditation cassettes. After breakfast, we would tell him to rest. While we turned on the cassette for him to chant, he chanted along until some time past two o’clock and he would forget the pain completely. We did this every day until the wound healed.

“This reminds us that we should learn how to chant and chant habitually. So when we are hit by sickness, we can use chanting to cope with any discomfort. When the mind is concentrated on chanting, it will forget other things. This method has proven to be a successful one.

“Your decision to care for your father during his sickness is the right thing to do. Although he neglected you and your mother, you must know the fact that parents are the people to whom we owe our debts of gratitude to for many reasons.

1. Parents serve as the physical mold. They give us the physical form as a human, suitable for performing meritorious deeds. Although they may have not raised us, we still owe our debt of gratitude to them. If they also bring us up as good

parents, we are overwhelmingly in debt to them.

2. Parents always forgive us without being resentful.

The scolding and punishments they may have given us for doing unacceptable things are out of their deep love and concern for us. It hurts their hearts more than it hurt us when they have to give us a spanking, just as if they were cut with a knife through their hearts. They are the best friends we can ever find in this world and we can trust them wholeheartedly.

3. Our debt of gratitude to our parents is much more than we can repay. We must habitually reflect on our appreciation of our debt of gratitude to them.

These are ways in which children can repay the debt of gratitude they owe to their parents:

1. Caring for them in their old age
2. Carrying on the good name of the family
3. Using the family wealth in a responsible way
4. Continuing the good work for society they have already begun
5. Inspiring them to have faith in the Triple Gem, nurturing them further to be generous and to maintain moral standards, persuading them to listen to spiritual teachings and teaching them how to meditate. All these can help keep them on the path to Nibbana.

“Even when your parents have passed away, your duty as a grateful son or daughter is not finished. Apart from taking responsibility for organizing a fitting funeral, a grateful son and daughter will do meritorious deeds regularly and transfer the merit from their good deeds to their deceased parents.”

I hope you learned from this chapter that while bringing up your own child to be a good person you do not forget to cherish your parents or grandparents. This is the way to give your children examples of how to care for you when you reach old age, especially at your last moment of life. They will know how to make their parents’ minds bright and clear in order for them to have a favorable destiny according to Buddhism. In the end, all of this will return to you.



Parents, Worthy of Our Reverence



In 1999, statistics in Thailand showed that the number of elderly people who are being neglected increased by at least 300,000 per year while retirement homes in Thailand can only accommodate an increase of 200 people per year. This is caused by adult children tiring of their elderly parents and the responsibility of caring for them. The increasing trend of elderly people being placed in retirement homes is quite a disappointment.

In Buddhist teachings, parents are revered as *Arahantas*¹ in the family. They are the first teachers to their children. There is a Thai saying that at the parents' feet are gateways to the heavenly realms. Thai children express their respect and show gratitude to their parents by bowing at their feet. In addition, in their old age, parents should be taken care of by their children. However, nowadays, old parents who are neglected have become a major problem in Thai society where Buddhism is the most common religion.

Our ancestors taught that a person's success depends upon how well he treats his parents to whom he owes his gratitude. Because their kindness is incomparable, **if a person does not realize and appreciate this fact, he will not be gracious to others as well.** Whoever neglects their parents, the gateway to the heavenly realms and prosperity will be shut.

Our ancestors remind us of the following important issue. When we look back to our infancy, we could not help ourselves. But if our parents became tired of us and left us in garbage cans or along the roadside, we could never survive our own. Suppose we were to survive, we may have become homeless children who starved and had no future at all. Therefore, because of their help and acceptance of us into their family, our debt of gratitude to them is incomparable. Their kindness

is beyond what we can repay. Think for a moment: they sometimes starved and sacrificed for us, so we could be fed. They struggled in every way to raise us into grown adults. For this reason, we must repay our debt of gratitude to them as best as we can.

From the aforementioned scenario, if we think about becoming old or being future grandparents, of course, we will become senile and feeble. We may depend on our children for our every movement, even for our trips to the toilet. Our physical bodies will be worn down and this will cause us and our children to feel uneasy. Without gratitude and the true love our children have for us, we may become neglected. However, some are only patiently caring for their parents or grandparents with the expectation of an inheritance. **How can we prevent this problem of ungraciousness to those worthy of our reverence?**

With great vision and wisdom, our ancestors had clear criteria for solving this problem. Primarily, parents must assign their children to be helpers in caring for their grandparents from the time they are little. As a result, they will automatically bear witness to their parents' actions. In later life, they will treat their own parents in the same manner as they did with their grandparents.

Also important, to effectively inculcate gratefulness in children, parents must have them participate in caring for their

¹ The Holy One ; perfected one

grandparents. Moreover, they must extol their grandparents' virtues to their children, both in the grandparents' presence and out of earshot. By setting a good example, children will clearly see and learn from their parents' acts. Then they will know that a grateful person must treat his parents this way.

On the contrary, those who take care of their parents and complain or curse them at the same time – or even worse, directly or indirectly abuse their parents – will have children who mentally record these acts and copy them accordingly. The truth is what goes around comes around. When they reach old age, their child will treat them in the same way as they did with their own parents. They will possess the same feelings that their elderly parents had, which are feelings of hurt from not being loved, of being a burden for the family, of not belonging there, and even of feeling inferior to a house-maid. These negative sensations will hurt their hearts in return because of the bad example they had set for their own children.

Thus, as parents, if you want to be treated well by your children in your later years, you must take good care of your own parents first. At the same time, you must train your children to be good helpers. One day, when they become adults, they will take good care of you as well. You will not be affected or hurt by anything or anyone because your children possess the right understanding of being grateful to you.

Somehow, you have to prepare yourself for old age. Not doing so will bring trouble later because you may be unable to adjust when your physical body becomes weaker. In addition, there may be pressures as a result of your lack of preparation in dealing with these problems.

Now we come to the scheme of how to prepare ourselves to be parents worthy of our children's reverence. First of all, we must know there are two types of elderly people.

The first type of elderly person is called “*A Fruitless Person,*” a person of no avail.

These sorts of elderly people have never succeeded in performing good deeds throughout their lives. For instance, they hardly ever offered alms to monks, observed the precepts, meditated, studied Dhamma or chanted. It seems like they led unworthy lives day by day. These elderly people can be annoying because they lack an understanding of cause and effect or principles of judgment. Their children do not like spending time with them because they create trouble for the family, such as causing the break up between a husband's mother and her daughter-in-law. Their children are rarely the recipient of any virtuous knowledge from them. Consequently, they will become neglected because they never taught their children how to become grateful people.

The second type of elderly person is called “A Fruitful Person,” a philanthropist or altruist.

Throughout their lives, these elderly people have diligently earned their livelihood, and are well prepared for their elderly years so that they can depend on themselves without help from others. Their behavior and manners are well adjusted; they know that they will not be a burden on their children. In terms of religion, they have diligently studied the Buddhist principles by being generous, observing the precepts, and practicing meditation. Furthermore, they have always taught and instilled their children with the correct understanding of life.

The Lord Buddha called these elderly people “**those worthy of their children’s reverence.**” A family with a member like this will possess happiness as if it has “a worthy one in the family.”

These elderly people always followed the principles of leading a simple life which include:

1) Doing one’s best to offer alms. That means they always accrue merit by offering alms to monks every morning in order to accumulate provisions for the next life.

2) Doing one’s best to strictly adhere to the Five Precepts every day. This is especially true of the

fourth precept (not to lie), of which one should be most aware. On the eve of Buddhist holy days and during Buddhist holy days, they will keep the Eight Precepts.² Doing so can reinforce them to lead their lives in a simple way.

3) Doing one’s best to meditate frequently. They meditate in the morning, after lunch, and before bed to keep their mind purified and radiant.

These elderly people behaved well and set good examples for their children. In leisure, they instilled them with a moral education, storytelling, Dhamma-storytelling, and their own life experiences, all of which were valuable and useful for the little ones to follow. These good examples reminded and had an impact on their children, enabling the children to lead their lives in righteous and virtuous ways.

Moreover, these elders will never interfere in their in-laws’ lives. They assume that these adults know how to handle responsibility in a family and to solve problems by themselves. They do not need their parents-in-law to assist in reconcilements. In the end, these adults will take their place and become the next pillar of support for the family.

² To abstain from taking life, taking what is not given, unchastity, false speech, intoxicants causing heedlessness, untimely eating, entertainment and cosmetics, and large luxurious couches or mattresses.

Blessing Our Descendants



Later, when the lives of these elderly people come to an end, their possessions will be given to their children. So, they will allow their adult children to be the caretakers of their fortunes. They are well prepared for their own funerals with accumulated savings and will perform final merit-making before their eternal sleep. After the property has been divided, a sum will be given to their children to care for their own family. These elderly people are leading their lives in a conscious way everyday. When the last day comes, they will look back at their lives and will be proud of what they have accomplished, since their duties are “worthy of their children’s reverence.”

Thus, it can be deduced that the second sorts of elderly people will not be lonely during their final days because they are affectionate, revered by their children, and worthy of others’ time. We can clearly see their knowledge, virtue, wisdom and ability to keep up with life. We can arrange our future by following the second type of elderly person, *“The Fruitful Person.”* It means we should be well prepared before reaching old age. **Thus, from this point on, we should instill ourselves to become those worthy of our children’s reverence.**



When we reach old age, blessing our descendants becomes an important duty among our many obligations. However, our blessings will be revered only if we do it moderately and properly depending on our seniority and qualifications. Studying the criteria of how our ancestors blessed their descendants and instilled them with obedience, raising them to become good citizens is of great benefit to us. Their principles give us clear guidance, which can be adapted to our own situation when we reach old age.



What is a blessing?

Blessing is called *vara* in the Pali language.

The meaning of *vara* is **progress and happiness**.

A blessing means the act of giving the very best.

Therefore, **when the elderly give a blessing to their descendants, it is equivalent to wishing them the very best.**

The Significance of the Blessing

Many may not know that **blessing descendants** has been a tradition of Thai life since ancient times. It is a routine that a family practiced before going to sleep. Parents would bring their children to pay respect to the grandparents every night. Then the grandparents would summarize all the good deeds they had done that day in a blessing for their grandchildren. In doing so, the children would be instilled with morals and would learn from their grandparents' virtues. Such acts transferred good deeds and virtues and the children learned to believe in the Law of Kamma.

In the past, people in Thai society lived more peacefully. They had fewer problems than in today's society because most families engaged in this nightly family routine, creating a harmonious environment.

The elderly represent the heart of the whole family. If their voices that speak of Dhamma, encouragement or caution are absent, it would seem like the family's heart stops functioning. At the same time, the family would not be united. Later, conflict, loneliness, depression, and discouragement would arise in the family. The family's warmth would gradually fall away and then come to an end. Eventually, the only sounds one would hear from the family would be obscenities, quarrels, and the noise produced by alcohol drinking and gambling.

A family that understands the importance of a daily blessing by the elderly will teach their children to be well acquainted with paying homage and asking their parents and grandparents for blessings every night before bed. In cases where the grandparents have passed away, the parents would teach their children to pay respect in front of their grandparents' portraits instead. And they would take on the grandparents' role in bringing up their own virtues and good deeds so they could be good role models for their own children.

Nowadays, such a routine has departed from Thai families; it has become a cause for family problems such as the increasing rate of divorce, the neglect of elderly parents, etc. In addition, some problems are caused by couples who separated themselves from their extended family to become a nuclear family. The only members of the family unit are the parents and children. As a result, the children seldom receive

blessings from their grandparents. When parents fail to realize this and do not take on the grandparents' role for their own children, conflicts consequently arise. Some cases are even worse because individual family members live on their own in the same house. This ruins the relationship between parent and child, while they remain ignorant of the problem's root.

If you are part of a nuclear family that has not practiced this tradition, as parents you must discuss this topic. You should ask yourself questions like, "Do you want your family members to live on their own or do you want to transform your family with the honorable Thai tradition that can bring about family unity?"

When your parents live far from your family, you must take their place. The suggestion is that the mother should bring the children to pay homage to and ask for a blessing from the father, the head of household first; then homage should be paid to the mother. Practicing this before going to sleep creates a warmhearted family. It is a guarantee that your family unity will be stable. When you reach old-age, you will not be neglected because you have taught your adult children to be grateful since their childhood. They have been well acquainted with paying homage and asking for their parents' blessing. And although they are grown, they will still pay respect to you and their grandparents in the same way. They believe that you have been good providers because they have always gained valuable teachings from you.

How does one create the very best in oneself?

The reader can now appreciate the meaning and significance of a “blessing.” **Now we come to the interesting question of how a person can develop his/her best qualities.**

In accordance with Buddhist principles, the human “mind” has characteristics that differ from other living beings in this world. They are:

- 1) The mind can be trained to have a higher quality.
- 2) The mind can be rid of evil.
- 3) The mind can accrue purity.

According to these characteristics, if the human mind accumulates only good deeds, it will become blissful and powerful. On the contrary, if it accumulates only evil deeds, it will become dark and evil. Because each individual is constantly accruing both good and evil deeds, one’s mind is not completely pure or dark. If it is wholly pure, the person would have an afterlife in a heavenly realm or attain enlightenment and enter Nibbāna (Nirvana). If the mind is totally dark, the person would go to a hell realm after death.

Because we have committed both good and evil deeds in our lives, we must correct ourselves by eliminating the evil deeds and by doing our best to perform more good deeds in this life.

The inability to develop the very best in oneself has root causes that can be divided into major three groups which, as a whole, are called **defilements** (*Kilesa*). They are:

1) Greed (or desire) - selfishness, never ending greed, and stinginess.

This includes an adult who is greedy and covets others’ possessions or a child who is selfish and steals others’ belongings.

2) Anger (or hatred) – displeasure, or taken to the extreme, one who is easily offended and causes destruction.

This includes adults who are easily irritated and angered or children who have bad tempers.

3) Ignorance (or delusions) - mistaking the wrong for the right view, and vice versa; mistaking the good for the bad, and vice versa. This ignorance causes one to possess negative thoughts, speech, and conduct.

This includes an adult who is biased, jealous, and likes to gossip about others or a child who takes drugs, intoxicants, or becomes addicted to the chemicals in paint.

These three types of defilements cause one to be incapable of developing the very best in oneself. The more defilements one harbors, the fewer noble qualities one can gain. As a result, no one wants to associate with this type of person or even care for him in sickness.

On the contrary, those who had once been selfish, angry, or jealous, and then reversed their conduct by improving themselves, will possess positive thoughts, speech, and actions. When good deeds are accumulated, bad habits will turn into positive ones and they will be creating more of the very best in themselves. Both adults and children can do this; it just takes determination and conscientious practice.

The way to create the very best in oneself

The Lord Buddha taught the way to create the very best in oneself by eliminating greed, anger, and ignorance through the accumulation of merit. The elements of this way are:

1) Eliminating greed by regular acts of generosity.

A good example can be seen in our ancestors. In those days, our ancestors would rise before dawn, and then wake their family to prepare the alms meal for the monks. The entire family had to get up and contribute. When the monks came to receive the alms offering, the grandparents would lead the children to put the meal offering into the monks' alms-bowls.

After the offering, the grandparents would show their children how to transfer the merit to deceased relatives by pouring the water of dedication. In doing so, the children would be instilled with gratefulness and compassion.

In families who lived far from the temple, and were not part of the route for the monks' alms round, the grandparents would ask their descendants to prepare food to offer to the monks, and they would travel to the temple to offer it there. If they could not travel due to illness, their children would go in their place. Before leaving the house, the grandparents would gather their descendants to make a resolution (wish).

Our ancestors wanted their children to be acquainted with generosity, rather than have minds that were clouded or full of greed. Waking in the early morning to perform a good deed refreshes the mind with this positive act. Life is short and full of uncertainties. Thus, everyone in the family should begin their day with a radiant mind that thinks only about supporting others to do more good deeds such as **offering alms to the monks in the morning.**

We can see that nowadays it is different. Most people today wake up with a thought about getting ahead in their careers, how they can triumph over others. Some have thoughts of deception throughout the entire day. Some always wake up late, unable to keep pace with others. These people do not perform a single good deed throughout their day, in addition to having gotten up late.

When these situations occur, the whole family is affected. When one member takes advantage of others at work, he can do the same to his own family. This situation can worsen when

family members fight over property or money. This causes the decline of the very best in the family and problems can only increase.

Since our ancestors fully understood this fact, they led their descendants to offer alms to the monks every morning. This good deed commences the day. Children who are taught to be giving and supportive of others do not exhibit greed, show jealousy, or exploit others; their minds become positive and radiant from the time the sun rises. Through this means, greed will be completely eliminated. Through generosity, the very best can be created in oneself.

2) Eliminating anger by observing the precepts regularly.

When the grandparents would wake at dawn, prior to preparing the alms meal, it would be their morning routine to gather the family and housemaids to do the morning chanting. After the chanting, they would continue by requesting the five precepts³ in front of the Buddha image (as His representative).

For family members who would wake up 10 minutes late, thereby missing the morning chanting, the grandparents would not allow it to pass; instead, everyone would request the five precepts while they waited for the monks to arrive for the

³ Not to kill living being, not to commit adultery, not to tell lies, not to knowingly consume alcohol or intoxicants.

alms offering. After the alms offering, they would all dedicate the merits they had just performed (alms offering and the intention of keeping the precepts) to their ancestors immediately. Then they would all do the morning chanting together. At this point, we can see that the grandparents tried to instill goodness in the family, not allowing the defilements to succeed.

The family would become acquainted with the intention of keeping the five precepts on a daily basis as a way to develop morality. They would make promises to themselves not to break the five precepts throughout the entire day. Moreover, they would not be ignorant, flirtatious, or cause trouble for others. Although some disagreements may have been unavoidable, no matter how serious the situation became, they would control themselves as best as they could and would reasonably settle the argument. Descendants who are taught well in childhood will not give in to temptations (Roads to Ruin) at all. By observing the five precepts they will live a peaceful life.

On the contrary, today's society is filled with violence. When people are offended by others, they quickly reply with hostility. Their hot tempers are ready to erupt and seek revenge with others at anytime, leading to endless hatred.

With their wisdom and vision, our ancestors deeply understood this truth and its cause and effect. By teaching

their families to have control over themselves at a young age, the grandparents instilled them with generosity through alms offerings to the monks and daily observance of the five precepts. These wholesome deeds transform into a moral foundation and discipline for the children. When they are able to refrain from exploiting themselves and others, through the observance of precepts, the very best can be created in themselves.

3) Eliminating ignorance by regularly practicing meditation.

As our ancestors studied and practiced the Dhamma, they knew that one's mind could be easily trapped by the five forms of sensual desire: visual images, tasty foods, aromatic scents, melodious sounds, and objects soft to the touch. For instance, when one sees a good looking person or an attractive image, tastes delicious food, smells an aromatic scent, hears melodious sounds, and touches soft objects, one will have the desire to possess them.

Being trapped by the channels of the eye, nose, tongue, body and mind, one can easily mistake wrong for right and be convinced to do evil deeds. Later, one will be miserable when the consequences bear fruit.

Training ourselves to be **mindful** will save our minds from being trapped by those channels.

Mindfulness is being aware of what one is doing at the present moment, and being able to differentiate and make a judgment about what is right or wrong, good or bad, wholesome or unwholesome, appropriate or inappropriate. Mindfulness protects one from recklessness.

Our ancestors were well aware of these truths, which is why they taught themselves to be mindful when they were young. **They believed and followed the Lord Buddha's teaching that the temple is a source of moral knowledge for the people.**

The Lord Buddha taught the way to be mindful through a practice called **meditation**.

Meditation is the method to eliminate a wrong view by training one's mind to come to a standstill until it becomes clear, pure, and radiant, enabling one to be firm in righteousness.

Our ancestors had trained themselves to be mindful before they got married; they continued to practice this as part of their routine in their old age. These three practices are:

- 1) Studying Dhamma every day.**
- 2) Teaching Dhamma to their family every day.**
- 3) Practicing meditation every night.**

By **studying Dhamma every day**, our ancestors were always reminded of the Lord Buddha's teaching about never failing to make merit. Because everyone will die someday, the only things that we can bring with us to our next existence are merit (wholesome) and sin (unwholesome). In one's life, if one can accumulate more good deeds, problems can be reduced, and happiness will result. Conversely, if a person accumulates more evil deeds, he would not only have much trouble in life but also unhappiness.

By **teaching Dhamma to their families every day**, our ancestors were able to review the moral principles. When their children were taught morality, they became attached to Dhamma. They also enjoyed spending time with their grandparents because of reminders to do good deeds. In turn, the grandparents became respected by the children as the "perfect ones" in the family.

Practicing meditation every night was equivalent to mindfulness training. When they practiced meditation on a daily basis, their minds became acquainted with peacefulness and clarity, and rarely became sullen. When their minds were always peaceful, they were not easily trapped by the channels of the five sensual desires. They could resist all kinds of temptations or unwholesome deeds.

For this reason, they were constantly mindful and did not indulge. They were clever and understood other people

and their defilements, knowing how to get rid of them. They were a source of wisdom to their family. Anyone who wished to gain the same knowledge was never disappointed; they just had to approach their grandparents to talk with them.

In conclusion, our ancestors were able to create the very best for themselves by eliminating greed, anger, and ignorance, and by practicing generosity, observing the precepts, and practicing meditation. Because they followed the Lord Buddha's teachings, they became respectful, affectionate, and good role models for their families.

Having learned how our ancestors trained themselves to develop the very best for themselves, we can be assured that they were never neglected but were worthy of respect in their family, as the "perfect ones."

How does the very best in oneself make a blessing holy?

When we approach elderly people of virtue and they give us a blessing, we may wonder why we feel a sense of its sacredness. We ask ourselves, **"What does a blessing's sacredness have to do with the very best qualities of the person who gives the blessing?"**

A respected senior monk gave an explanation regarding this matter. He said, **“A blessing’s sacredness”** is dependent upon **“how honest the blessing-giver is towards his virtues.”**

If a blessing-giver is honest towards his virtues, his blessings will be very powerful. However, if a blessing-giver is not honest towards his virtues, his blessings will be less powerful.

He pointed out examples recorded during the Lord Buddha’s time, especially the story of **Venerable Angulimala** (*Ahimsaka*) vividly described in the Buddhist Canon. The respected senior monk illustrated:

“Before Venerable Angulimala ordained, he had been a serial killer. He had killed nearly a thousand people. The last or the 1,000th person he was going to kill was his mother. However, the Lord Buddha foresaw this event, so He blocked him from committing the evil deed. When Venerable Angulimala saw Him, he thought about killing Him as well. Then the Lord Buddha tried to bring his senses back by reminding him of the evil deed in his mind. He gave him a particular sermon on the road side. In the end, Venerable Angulimala had repented and requested ordination as a monk from the Lord Buddha. When he became a monk, he conscientiously practiced Dhamma at His temple.

“As a result of being a famous killer in the past, when he went on his alms round in the morning in the beginning of his

monkhood, he often came back with nothing because the villagers recognized him as the killer. Some ran away from him. Some threw stones at him until he was covered with blood.

“One day, while he was on his alms round, he met a pregnant woman who was nearing full term. As soon as she recognized him, she was overwhelmed with fright and tried to run away until she fell down and scrambled to stand again and again. Eventually, she became exhausted and gaped at him in fear, as if she was dying in front of him.

“Venerable Angulimala really wanted to help her, but what he could do about it? In the end, he gave her a blessing based on his honesty towards his virtues:

“From the point of noble birth in having ordained in the Lord Buddha’s temple, I have never thought of exploiting or harming any living beings. With this truth, may you safely give birth to your child.”

“After his powerful blessing, the woman easily and safely delivered her child. Because the event occurred before Venerable Angulimala attained *Arahantaship* (the perfected one), it can be deduced that the power of the honesty towards his virtues created a holy blessing.

“Hence, the right method of giving a blessing is that it must be dependent on honesty towards the virtues of the blessing-giver.

“For example, if we are certain of our integrity regarding our generosity, we can bless a person in this way:

“With the truth of the alms I have offered to the monks all year long, may you have abundant provisions. Or, based on the truth of offering my possessions to aid the monks, may you also possess wealth.”

The Respected Senior Monk’s Viewpoint

After the clear explanation, the respected senior monk shared his belief that:

“Those who become grandparents or are respected individuals must now prepare for a way to give a powerful blessing, should the occasion arise. Do not disappoint them with a blessing that sounds like they are listening to a parrot.

“If we have not offered alms to the monks yet, we should begin now because this wholesome deed can eliminate our stinginess. If we are easily irritated, strictly observing the precepts can eliminate bad tempers and stubbornness. Those who are still stubborn should study Dhamma and regularly practice meditation in order to develop the very best in themselves.

“However, if we have practiced generosity, observed the precepts, and regularly practiced meditation, we can depend

on these wholesome deeds to create our holy blessing. For instance, you may say that, “May you receive the merits I have done and achieve prosperity, good health, and wisdom.”

“It is not too late for elderly individuals who lack good deeds to develop virtue by chanting the *“Itipiso”* 108 times or meditating all night. When children ask for our blessings the next morning, we will possess at least some good deeds; doing them within one night is better than having nothing to bless them with. But afterwards, we should do it regularly every day. In the end, their lives will be embraced with the very best.”

After studying this subject, readers should understand how to prepare themselves for the last chapter of life. It is like we have to pretend that we are old now in order to develop ourselves. Because when we become old, it is difficult to change our bad habits; so we must improve ourselves by ridding our minds of greed, anger, and ignorance. When the last chapter of life arrives, we will be ready to become a person worthy of respect to our own descendants. **We will be a source of wisdom for them to study and follow.**



Training Oneself in Non-Recklessness by Practicing Austerity (Dhūtaṅga)⁴



Life is full of uncertainties and danger awaits those who are reckless with their lives. The Lord Buddha once said, “**A reckless person is like a dead person.**” Practicing austerity is one of the ways to train oneself to become more careful.

Many may not be aware that throughout the 45 years of the Lord Buddha’s propagation of the Dhamma, he gave a total of 84,000 teachings. All of them can be concluded in one word, **non-recklessness**. This word was in His final sermon to His disciples before entering Nibbana:

⁴ The practice of removing defilements

“Bhikkhus,⁵ my duties that are of benefit and support to you are now complete. I now wish to remind you that the nature of all living creatures is impermanence and degeneration. Thus, you should continue performing your duties with non-recklessness.”

When we possess carefulness, we can easily train ourselves to be righteous and virtuous. When we are reckless, the chances for misconduct through physical, verbal, and mental means will be high. Consequently, our own virtues will automatically decline.

A careful person must train himself to be mindful all the time. As human beings, we have a limited lifespan. We should make the most out of it by diligently accruing wholesome deeds. To train ourselves to be careful is to train ourselves to be constantly immersed in merit. Readers may ask, why?

In Buddhism, each individual performs both good and bad actions throughout his life. However, the manifestation of his kammic fruit will be a function of his state of mind. For example, if his state of mind is filled with evil (he thinks and acts maliciously), his present evil actions will open the doorway for his evil kammic fruit from the past, such as killing animals, to augment his present evil actions and run their course

⁵ Buddhist monks

together. Consequently, he will have a short lifespan in this lifetime because of his past and present evil kammic fruit. Moreover, he will encounter unexpected misery and perhaps miss chances to accrue merit through performing good deeds.

On the contrary, if his state of mind is immersed in merit (he is kind toward others or thinks of his generosity, observance of precepts, and meditation), his present good actions will open the doorway for his good kammic fruit from the past, such as generosity, to work in tandem with the kammic fruit from his present actions. As a result, he is wealthier in this lifetime.

The Lord Buddha understood the truth about the arising of merit, which can be further broken down into three periods according to the state of mind: before, during, and after the generous act. **Before the generous act, one can accrue merit by having a state of mind that is joyful; during the generous act, it should be clear and cheerful; after the generous act, one should recall the generous act on a frequent basis.** One can accrue merit through generosity, precept observance, and meditation practice.

How can one's mind be immersed in merit?

According to our ancestors, one of the ways to achieve a state of mind that is full of merit is to **practice austerity for three to seven days**, which includes practicing generosity,

observing the eight precepts, and meditating. Those who wish to practice must stay at a temple. Accommodations can depend on the geographical conditions where the temples are located and their ability to provide for their students. Dwellings can be in an indoor or outdoor environment, such as a small individual room, a house, or even a long-handed umbrella as an open-air shelter placed in a field for each individual.

Some may have doubts that austere practices can help shape their minds to be immersed in merit or to possess carefulness as their habit. The answer is explained by the same respected senior monk from the previous chapters.

He said to his students who came to practice austerity at his temple:

“Practicing austerity by dwelling in a long-handed umbrella in the field is to follow an example of the monk’s discipline. The Lord Buddha had given rules for practicing austerity because of the two following major points:

- 1) People in this world have the same feelings. For instance, although some are very happy now, they still feel like other people possess much more happiness than they. On the contrary, **when they are unhappy even a bit, they feel like their unhappiness is much more than any others’ in the world.**

2) People cannot differentiate between need and want.

“If we notice, problems, whether serious or not, that occur in our everyday lives have an enormous impact world’s community because people do not differentiate between **need** and **want**.

“Literally, **need** means a lack of something required or necessary; for example, the four basic human needs: food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. These necessities are required in our daily lives.

“**Want** means the desire to have, the wish to have. Beyond the basic human need, it is about the comforts in life that people long for. Commonly, when a person desires something, he thinks that he must have it because it is essential to him.

“A clearer example is when a person already has much clothing packed in his closet; somehow, he thinks he wants to buy more that are in fashion. This points out that he only wants it rather than needs it.

“Another noticeable example is that much merchandise is promoted to shoppers as free gifts. Some buy such merchandise because of the free gift. Eventually, they have collected all sorts of unnecessary items left strewn throughout the house. Because of overspending, the end result is they do not have enough money to care for their family and complain that their revenue and expenses are imbalanced.”

“In order to differentiate between need and want, our ancestors trained themselves by practicing austerity on every Buddhist Holy Day. Many teaching monks say that if a person wants to experience such a practice, you can go to a temple and dwell under a long-handed umbrella for a few nights. Then you will clearly understand what you really need or want in your life. With little space under the long-handed umbrella (with the cloth-net), you bring only what you really need rather than what you want. In addition, if you put more things in it, this little space will be overloaded, and you will not be able to sleep well under the umbrella.”

“Next, the requirement of wearing only white clothes while practicing austerity is to bring about consciousness and heedfulness. Dressed in white, you have to be careful when walking, eating, or even sleeping because it spots easily; and in the meantime, your consciousness develops. Eventually, you will be able to restrain yourself from the habit of a *want*.

“To bring about carefulness in one’s life, it must begin with the three major principles in Buddhism: to avoid bad deeds, to do good deeds, and to purify the mind. If one can completely pursue them, passage to Nibbana is open to him.

“Even if he has practiced them to his fullest in this life but is still unable to achieve it, he must still go on. Finally, there will be a day, a year, or some future lifetime when he embodies all Ten Perfections and attain *Arahantaship* (the perfected one), following the Lord Buddha to Nibbana.”

Based on the teachings of the respected senior monk, it can be concluded that when one practices austerity for at least three to seven days, one can train oneself to be heedful and to immerse the mind in merit. In addition to an escape from chaos, such a practice can provide a peaceful environment both physically and mentally. And in doing so, one can accrue merits in the religious world. Even when returning to the secular world, one will work with a refreshed, joyful, and virtuous mind. A person will perform his job with conscientiousness and carefulness. Problems that arise can be handled thoroughly. He will see the difference and the benefit from each time he practices austerity. Finally, problems that he had in his life will end and be replaced with more prosperity because of his clear and powerful mind that is immersed in merit.

Let’s imagine that if the 60 million people of the Buddhist population in Thailand were to train themselves to be heedful by practicing austerity at the same time, problems in our country would diminish in just one night. Consequently, everyone’s state of mind would become clearer. If every temple across the country were to regularly offer programs for austerity practice to the people, Thailand’s problems would come to an end. When people practice austerity at the temple, we can be sure that they will also take this practice home. Then it will become a habit to meditate at home everyday. In the end, there will be no more problems in their lives.

This is the way of life that our Thai ancestors inherited long ago. However, how their heritages will be revived and supported depends on one major truth: we must be the first one (exemplar) who practices them. Later, we can invite others to join us.

Considering this matter of value, I would like to invite you and your family to practice austerity at any Buddhist centers or temples located in your community. May I rejoice in your merit in advance.



Part Seven

A True Buddhist



When I reviewed my notes from a sermon given by a respected senior monk during my research for this book, I incidentally came upon a valuable message. That is, **“What is the most significant cause of Buddhism’s decline?”**

The respected senior monk said, **“Buddhism never declines by itself; it is people who lessen their faith in Buddhism.”**

“The significant cause for its decline is a **“fool.”**⁶ Fools can be categorized into the *External Fool* and the *Internal Fool*.

⁶ Spiritually defective person



1) **External Fools** include non-Buddhists. They are determined to demolish Buddhism, whether they are of other religious affiliations or not. They typically try to cast aspersions upon Buddhist monks. When given the chance, they distort Buddhist teachings, causing misunderstandings and confusion. There are great numbers of this type of fool, who try to demolish Buddhism in their everyday lives.

2) **Internal Fools** include Buddhists who do not respect the Lord Buddha. They doubt His enlightenment, disrespect His teachings, and disregard the practice of His teachings. They also disrespect the Sangha (monks) who practice righteousness and possess insight. Most importantly, they disrespect the practice of meditation for a peaceful mind. Even when they lack reverence for only part of the Triple Gem,⁷ they become Internal Fools in Buddhism. None of them will ever gain any benefit from being Buddhists.

“When these Internal Fools have been disrespectful to the Triple Gem, it is because they do not appreciate the value of Buddhism. As a result, they won’t be able to guard themselves against External Fools who develop strategies to attack Buddhism. Because of their irreverence towards the Triple Gem, they do not care for studying Buddhism. Unfortunately, they may become tools for the External Fools. For this reason, we should scrutinize ourselves to see if we

⁷ The Lord Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha

are like any of them and if we have performed our duties as true Buddhists yet or not.

A true Buddhist must exhibit the following characteristics:

1) Belief in the Lord Buddha's Enlightenment. It is the belief that He truly existed and possessed full insight, phenomenal knowledge, and the highest moral principles. Therefore, we should have no doubt of His pure and supreme wisdom.

2) Observation of the 5 precepts with purity. At the very least, we should try to observe the 5 precepts to guard ourselves against performing bad deeds.

3) Belief in the Law of Kamma, not in superstitions. We should possess a true understanding of the realities in life. We should be conscious of the effects of kamma: Whoever does good deeds will receive positive kammic effects, and whoever does evil deeds will receive negative kammic effects. Without a doubt, we should do only good deeds with all our might.

4) Not seeking merit outside Buddhism. We should not attempt to join other religious ceremonies in hopes for merit in return. We do not worship pictures of other religions; but, we should not show irreverence to them either. We also should not comment on any of the objects they worship.

Throughout our lives, we must make an effort to support and maintain Buddhism.

5) Intentional purification of the mind. This can be done through the practice of generosity, observance of precepts, and meditation practice, following the right method in Buddhism.

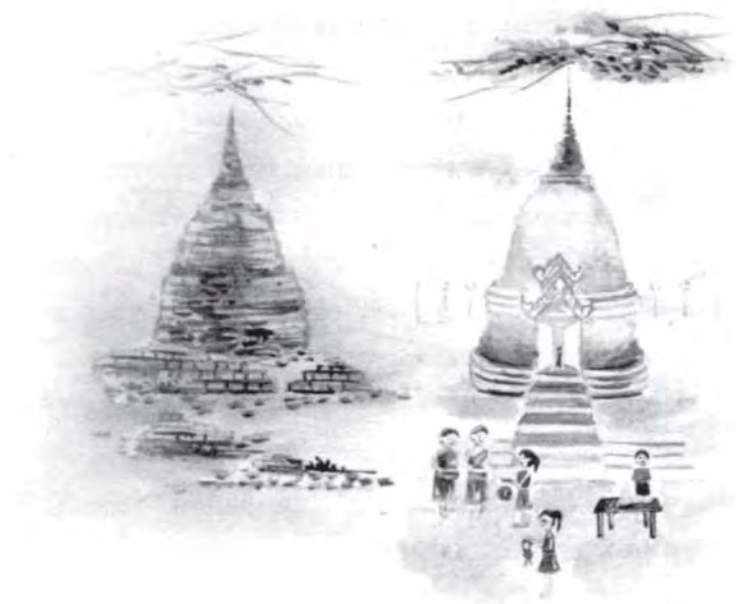
“Why don't we ask ourselves if we have exhibited the characteristics of a true Buddhist yet? If we have not, we should make haste in improving ourselves to meet those goals. As a matter of fact, we should embrace the value of Buddhist birth. If we become true Buddhists, we can prolong Buddhism for many years to come.”

As I finished reading the teachings of the respected senior monk, I decided to share them with my readers. Most importantly, they remind me of what it means to be a true Buddhist, and that I should repay my debt of gratitude to the Lord Buddha.



Chapter 42

Abandoned Temples and Prosperous Temples



In October 1998, an important Buddhist event occurred in Thailand. News had been published about the Dhammakaya Temple. I remember when the Thai economy was in serious decline, the Dhammakaya Temple was being attacked simultaneously from all media fronts. Many critics predicted that this large Temple, with an area over 3,200,000 square meters⁸ or approximately 1,000 acres, would empty very soon. They were certain that it would be the largest amongst the many abandoned temples in Thailand.

⁸ In Thailand, a measurement of land equal to 1,600 rai.

Of course, people closely followed the news about the Temple. After two years, the outcome was the reverse. Unbelievably, the Temple has survived to this day. Many said that in the same period of time, if the Thai government's situation paralleled that of Dhammakaya, it would have collapsed in just a few months. The parliament would certainly have been dissolved, and a new election would have been organized.

However, in the midst of the vicious media attack, people still received leaflets (invitations) from the Dhammakaya Temple to join its Buddhist ceremonies on Buddhist holidays. After the events, the Temple reported that a great number of people, nearly 100,000, attended each of the ceremonies. Although the Temple was rumored, by the media, to have bribed people to join its events, I disagree. With due consideration, I cannot see any possible way that the Temple could have given away such a sum of money to the nearly 100,000 participants for each Buddhist ceremony. If the bribes had been paid, it would have immediately bankrupted the Temple. And significantly, some Temple members are at the top tier of successful business men and women in Thailand. It would be impossible to hire these people to come to the temple. Therefore, we can conclude that the media created their own version of the truth.

While following the news of the Dhammakaya Temple, I also tracked the news concerning the increased number of abandoned temples in Thailand. During those years, a survey found around 8,000 abandoned temples, nearly one-third of the total number of temples (estimated 30,000) throughout the country. If all these temple lands were combined, they would cover approximately 50,000 acres. This raises an obvious question: **“What caused their abandonment?”**

The temples can be grouped into the **old** and the **new** temples. The approximately 30,000 old temples were established by our country's ancestors in an era when the Thai population numbered approximately ten million people. Logically, how many new temples were established in the past 30 years? The fact is that **old temples are being abandoned while new temples have not increased at all.**

In reality, the situation of abandoned temples has not reached its end. There have been growing reports of temple lands being converted into for-profit enterprises. Such transgressions severely contravene Buddhist principles and practices.

Instead of maintaining the old temples of our country's ancestors, some people take advantage of the situation by increasing the numbers of abandoned temples. More importantly, our ancestors constructed them with faith and

hoped that future generations would study Buddhism to gain a correct understanding of the realities of life. Thus, if our ancestors were still alive, we can imagine how they would feel about our careless disregard for the old temples they built.

The large number of old temples being abandoned made me wonder: How much longer will Buddhism survive in Thailand? The situation of abandoned temples and the corrupt attempt by powerful groups to use temple lands for profit provoked my interest in the survival of the Dhammakaya Temple. I am deeply concerned about this Temple. Escaping from such a crisis and the endless attacks it faced for over two years is a miracle. Incredibly, the Temple remained standing in the midst of social pressures and an unfavorable climate, both of which were instigated by the media. Most people have only known or believed one side of the negative news and ignored the whole truth.

How did the Dhammakaya Temple avoid becoming the largest abandoned temple in Thailand?

The Temple's followers practice the core of Buddhist principles in order to protect themselves from harm. Consequently, the Temple escaped the tragedy of abandonment. These Buddhist principles are the key to explaining temple abandonment in Thailand. The Dhammakaya Temple was founded by disciples of the Great Abbot, Luang Phaw Wat Paknam, Venerable

Phramonkolthepmuni.⁹ I finally understand and conclude that the answer is **to hold a high reverence for his teachings.**

There was a monk, a disciple of Luang Phaw Wat Paknam's, who told me that when the Great Abbot was still alive, he taught his followers to build a temple using the **“Three Sacred Formulas.”** Later, Venerable Luang Phaw Dhammajayo, the present Abbot of the Dhammakaya Temple, followed this great teacher's wisdom and successfully built the Temple. While teaching his monks the same sacred formulas, it was also necessary for him to demonstrate and work alongside his monks in order to be a good exemplar.

1) The first sacred formula is *cleanliness*.

Luang Phaw Wat Paknam explained, “When the temple is clean, people who intentionally come to make merit will be assured that every penny of their donations will be spent in the right way.”

“Initially, the donors may have planned to donate 10 baht (less than one US dollar) before coming to the temple. However, when they arrived, every corner looked clean and comfortable for meditation, for walking around, or for relaxation to the point of falling asleep in the temple hall. This display of cleanliness and comfort would impact the amount

⁹ The founder of Dhammakaya Meditation, he rediscovered the technique of meditation which was the original mainstream of Buddhist Practice, knowledge which had disappeared five-hundred years after the Lord Buddha passed to Nibbana.

of their donations, going from 10 to 100 baht. If they had planned to donate 100 baht, they would increase the amount exponentially. Therefore, **cleanliness is the most charming attribute of a temple.**”

“When visitors first arrive at a temple, where is their first stop? It is the restroom, of course! Many often ask when they step into the temple, “Where is the restroom?” They don’t ask, “Where can I find the abbot?” or “Where can I meet the monk who is an expert in the Pali language?” For this reason, it is important to keep the restrooms and other temple facilities spotless. As a matter of fact, everyone who comes to the temple should be responsible for its cleanliness as well.”

“Do not feel disdainful towards cleaning supplies, such as a broom, a rag, a garbage can, etc., as though they are foul objects. If we carefully reflect upon them, they are the **“angels of cleanliness.”** For instance, when the broom is being used to clean the floor, it is mighty, as if it is collecting treasures (donations) for the temple. As mentioned earlier, cleanliness is the most charming attribute of a temple, so these mighty cleaning supplies or “angels of cleanliness,” can increase contributions to support Buddhism.”

“Luang Phaw Wat Paknam continued to say that temples that lack cleanliness, with a messy sanctuary or monastic residences, will turn away donors who support such structures every time they come to make merit. They will think that the

temple does not care to maintain its existing structures. In the future, when the temple solicits contributions for another building or so forth, they may raise the question, “If you aren’t able to keep those old buildings clean, how can you keep the new ones clean?” Of course, the temple will burn with shame.”

“If the temple keeps its areas clean all the time (every corner looks clean and comfortable for meditation, for walks, and even for naps), there is a strong chance that this will influence people to make an offer to the abbot, “Luang Phaw, would you like to construct a new building? Even though, I don’t have enough money, I can urge my friends to do it for you.”

Cleanliness can convince laypeople to become the temple’s good supporters and lead their lives in perpetual virtue. The monks and novice monks will no longer need to go on their alms rounds. As a result, they can spend most of their time studying Buddhist theory and meditation practice. And they will be able to impart this knowledge to the laypeople for their benefit.

When laypeople make contributions, the temple should not hold the money for too long. It should quickly begin the project to which the sponsors donated. The temple has to make the most out of people’s contributions as quickly as possible. It is imperative that the temple follow up on its commitments.

For example, if there were statements about constructing a Dhamma Hall or a monk's shelter soon, then this must happen. In short, the temple must produce results as soon as it can.

Thus, the first sacred formula is *cleanliness*; in other words, "*The Sacred Formula for Treasures*" of Luang Phaw Wat Paknam.

2) The second sacred formula is diligence in teaching.

Luang Phaw Wat Paknam explained that those with faith in Buddhism and the determination to establish and assist a temple must be diligent in studying and teaching Dhamma. Laypeople offer meals to monks at the temple on a daily basis; if the monks do not teach them Dhamma in return, they would feel that they gain nothing when they visit the temple. It is even worse if the monks take the offerings for granted and do not respond. This would raise the question in people's minds of why they are there (at the temple).

It is easy to find an appropriate topic to teach. Clues can be found on people's faces. Typically, people experience a variety of problems in their lives, and often, their suffering appears on their faces. So, the monks must choose the right topic in Dhamma to teach them until they understand and are able to solve their own problems. The monk must instill this right topic of Dhamma into the listener's mind in order to end his misery, like curing an infection with the right medication.

When instilled with the teachings of the Lord Buddha, people will develop faith and be willing to help the monks and novices at the temple. They will then be able to think of their contributions to the temple as '*worldly wealth*,' while what they are given in return is much more than that. They are given '*noble wealth*,' (Dhamma teachings) which can remedy their suffering throughout their lives. This '*noble wealth*' of Dhamma teachings is incomparable.

Therefore, the second sacred formula of *diligence in teaching* is called "*The Sacred Formula for Mobilization*" of Luang Phaw Wat Paknam.

3) The third sacred formula is frequency of meditation practice.

Luang Phaw Wat Paknam explained that the purpose of ordination is an effort to attain Nibbana.¹⁰ Attainment of Nibbana is achieved through frequent meditation practice.

He further expounded that the essence of all of the Lord Buddha's teachings emphasize meditation. As a result, monks must practice it regularly and frequently, in order to bring an end to their defilements. This can only happen when they can see their defilements. They can only see their defilements when they are able to see their own minds. And they can see their

¹⁰ The extinction of all defilements and suffering. Supreme happiness.

minds only when they practice meditation until their minds reach a profound level of peacefulness and becomes so bright that they are able to see their minds through the brightness.

Most people in this world do not see their own minds because they do not practice meditation. As a result, they become easily enslaved to defilements, which can bring endless chaos to the world. When people see the monks' efforts in meditation practice, they will be inspired to do the same.

Whenever people come to make merit, the monks must teach them Dhamma as well as meditation practice. When their minds are pure and tranquil, brightness will arise naturally. The mind's clarity will increase and bring about wholesome thoughts. They will clearly see the wholesome means to perform more merit.

Thus, the third sacred formula is the *frequency of meditation practice* or *“The Sacred Formula for Success”* of Luang Phaw Wat Paknam.

After conversing with the monk, it became clear how the Dhammakaya Temple escaped from such a crisis. Any temple that applies these Three Sacred Formulas of Luang Phaw Wat Paknam will never be abandoned. As a result, many more people will go to make merit and study Dhamma at those temples.

What I gained from my research about the Dhammakaya Temple is that Buddhist males of retirement age should think about ordaining as monks so that they can help revive those abandoned temples. They can apply their life experiences and network to benefit Buddhism by restoring the abandoned temples or providing support to new ones. Then they should manage the temples with the Three Sacred Formulas of Luang Phaw Wat Paknam. In the end, the temples will come to prosper once again. Temples in Thailand will not be in decline, thus prolonging the Buddhist religion.



Solving Buddhism's Crisis



During the past twenty years, when the season of important the Buddhist tradition called the *Kathina*¹¹ Ceremony has approached, news about monks who have violated the monastic discipline have been prominent in the media. This news causes many people to lose their faith in Buddhism and to over-generalize that monks do not deserve their reverence. Moreover, this has a great impact on the more than 300,000 monks and novices around the country.

¹¹ The annual robe-presentation ceremony in the month following the end of Rains Retreat.

When people lose their faith in Buddhism, they do not teach their children to pay respect to the monks. They show no interest in studying Buddhist teachings and stop making merit. All temple activities, events, and ceremonies become paralyzed. The number of Buddhist people declines. However, behind the scenes, this whole situation is brought about by only a few writers, eager to facilitate a decline in Buddhism. **When we hear negative news about monks, as Buddhists, how do we think about it in the right way and what should we do to maintain Buddhism?**

When there are publications about monks who break the monastic discipline (and thus, do not deserve people's respect), adults must teach their children to think about these issues in the right way:

1) When the press publishes articles about monks who break their monastic discipline, we should not rush to believe it. We should use our wisdom based on reason. As a matter of fact, these monks must go through a judicial process conducted by the Sangha Council. We should not get involved. The Sangha Council will punish the monks in accordance with the monastic discipline.

A senior monk once stated that, "Buddhism can be compared to a large pond; whoever reaches it and bathes himself will be clean. However, whoever reaches it and does

not bathe himself will remain unclean. Just like becoming a monk in Buddhism, any monk who intentionally practices meditation will have clean and pure physical, verbal and mental means. Any monk who does not practice meditation will remain impure."

The Lord Buddha established the monastic discipline and the laypeople should have confidence in the Sangha Council to handle these cases (normally, a monk observes 227 precepts, and a layperson keeps only five precepts.) Although the monk went against the monastic discipline (with or without his awareness), the head monk that governs his temple is responsible for his examination. He will comb through all evidence and question all witnesses. It is wrong for laypeople to independently judge a monk according to their own feelings.

If a monk truly violates the monastic discipline, and his actions are so severe to warrant that he disrobe, then he must do so and leave the temple. However, if his actions are not that severe, and result from his carelessness, then he is given a chance to correct himself. If a monk not only breaks the monastic discipline but also the law, both the Sangha Council and the Judiciary are responsible for bringing him to justice.

In brief, if a monk violates the monastic discipline, it is wrong for laypeople to judge him on their own. It is also wrong for the press to publish news based on their own inclinations;

they should keep in mind that the Sangha Council has jurisdiction over a monk's case. When a final judgment is made, people should not criticize or comment on it. If people do, in Buddhism it is considered to be an unwholesome act, whether or not they know it.

2) When negative news about monks is published, do not generalize that all monks in Thailand are troublesome.

No one can keep the press from publishing negative news about monks who go against the monastic discipline. Their profession is to report news to society. However, if a newspaper publishes only negative news about monks, and not news about other monks who have devoted their lives to performing good deeds, this is considered to be bias on their part.

One fact that people tend not to think about is how Buddhism has survived to the present day. Without the many virtuous monks who have prolonged Buddhism, it would have disappeared from Thailand by now. Although monks diligently play a proper role in society today, the media continue to ignore this fact, rarely reporting their good acts. The negative acts by monks seem to be more favored in their articles.

The frequent publication of negative news regarding monks overwhelms the little positive news that is published. Such news causes many people to misunderstand and conclude that most monks engage in misconduct. In particular, whenever

the press severely attacks monks, in which some of the news they report is simply false, this negative portrayal of the monks to the public is swallowed by society. Moreover, the monks are disdained as being a burden on society with people ready to find any mistakes or shortcomings. Publications that lack articles about the many hundreds of thousands of monks who perform good deeds have an impact on people's reduced faith in Buddhism.

Certain senior monks who have led their lives for the benefit of Buddhism and society have been affected by the news. Here is what they said:

“Nowadays, it is very difficult for monks to teach society. Our efforts to teach morality and human decency seem wrong to the media. Why is teaching wrong? It is because our approach is not good enough in the media's perspective. When monks try to advise society, we are condemned that it is not our duty and we should not be involved. However, when we remain silent inside in our temples while a social problem occurs, they criticize us again that we are unworthy of society. As a result, monks are condemned by the media no matter what.”

After listening to these senior monks, we should thoroughly analyze the news we hear. It is very important to differentiate between the actions of one person versus the actions of the entire monastic community. This situation can

be summed up in the following proverb: One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel. If people think this way, they can harm Buddhism unknowingly. This is certainly not the nature of a Buddhist. **Buddhists must consider all aspects, just as the Lord Buddha once said: “Do not believe something without first analyzing all aspects of it.”**

3) One who succeeds in Dhamma must not find fault in monks, but must help to support the spread of Dhamma to the fullest extent.

On this point, I would like to share an example given by a respected senior monk during a lecture he gave to a group of college students.

There was a layperson who read a great deal of negative news about monks, over-generalizing that they all were troublesome. As a result, he raised this concern when he met the respected senior monk:

He said, **“Nowadays, monks do not behave well and do not deserve my reverence. So, I wish to pay respect to only the Lord Buddha and the Dhamma. My question is, “Can I not pay respect to the Sangha?”** His question was sensitive, difficult to answer, and had a potentially broad impact on the Sangha community. If the respected senior monk could not give him the right answer, it was possible that the entire class he was lecturing could lose their faith in the entire Sangha community.

However, the respected senior monk just smiled and answered relaxingly, **“Whoever respects the Dhamma must be a person who dislikes finding faults with others and likes to discover the virtues and goodness of others.”**

“You ask if you can stop paying homage to monks, but continue to respect the Lord Buddha and the Dhamma. The answer is, “No.” When you complain that monks are not good, this shows that you have a habit of criticizing others. It points to your fault-finding, inability to observe, and ease of jumping to conclusions.”

“There are, in fact, nearly 300,000 monks in this country. How many of them have you known or met? I’ll say, 1,000 at most. If that is so, and you find that they have all engaged in misconduct, what about the other nearly 300,000? What are your thoughts on them?”

“You have a habit of finding faults in others; you will never find good monks in this lifetime. You have closed your mind to the point that you cannot see anything good. I think you should learn to see from a different perspective.”

“Why don’t you look inside a temple as though you’re considering a secular school or institute? You will find that people at school can be divided into two groups:

1) A student who seeks knowledge.

2) A teacher who imparts his knowledge.

“Students seek knowledge from schools, colleges or institutes. Do you think they have ever done anything wrong while they were students? Of course, they have. Do we, as adults, take their mishaps seriously? No, we believe they have come to school to learn; so we should forgive their recklessness and misconduct. However, if a teacher behaves inappropriately, students believe he should be condemned. However, in the same manner, there are also two types of monks in a temple:

1) A student monk.

“Student monks come to the temple to learn. Some just ordained two days ago; some have ordained for two months while others have been monks for two years. Undoubtedly, they are still learning and are new to the monastic discipline. As a result, they sometimes act inappropriately but unintentionally. This is common and likely to occur with any student monk. Think for a moment. Should we hold their faults against them?

2) A teacher monk.

“There are over 100,000 teacher monks, residing in temples around the country. It is obvious that without teacher

monks to pass on their knowledge to others and to maintain Buddhism during the era of our country’s ancestors, Buddhism may have disappeared before the present day.”

“It can be noticed that all the teacher monks with good knowledge and good conduct are overwhelmingly busy with their undertakings. It is not in their nature to publicly promote their virtues. Some of these teacher monks practice Dhamma devoutly. Some of them dwell in the forests and appear in the villages from time to time. Some reside in cities to train themselves as well as their students. They never promote their virtues to the media because they are pure and moral. This can be illustrated in a Thai proverb: No sound comes from shaking a full bottle of water. This means a person who is replete with virtue and goodness is never boastful.”

“In secular schools, we can distinguish teachers from students by their age and clothing. However, in the temples, with the same uniform of saffron robes, it is very difficult to distinguish teacher monks from student monks. Therefore, when you have seen a few monks or, at most, 1,000 of them misbehave, you hastily make the decision not to pay respect to the rest of them. You should carefully think this through and ask yourself: “Am I doing the right thing?”

“Next time, when you make a donation to the Sangha, when you do not know who is a teacher monk or student monk, and when you do not know the monks’ levels of virtue, you

should think in this way. As long as the monks do not seriously break the monastic discipline, you should think that you are giving alms to them to replenish their energy for Dhamma study and meditation practice. In the future, when you meet a monk whom you know to be a teacher, you should intentionally make donations as best as you can. Both the giver and receiver will receive the full fruits of merit.

“When you hear of monks who have morality and good conduct, although they may live far away, you should make the effort to see them. Your wish will be fulfilled because they are your best field of merit. If this is not the case, you should be patient and diligently continue in your Dhamma study and meditation practice.”

“You should open your mind limitlessly, and someday you will find a monk who understands you or that you have wished to be your field of merit. Do not hurry to pay homage only to the Lord Buddha and the Dhamma. You must complete the triangle and pay homage to the entire Triple Gem. If you do, you will be capable of reaching the heavenly realms rather than the unfortunate realms, in this life and hereafter, until you reach Nibbana.”

This example as given by the respected senior monk speaks to the third issue. I highly respect this senior monk for his intellect and ability, and in particular, his ability to reverse the crisis in Buddhist faith.

Negative circumstances resulting from carelessly reading negative news

If parents do not teach their children to thoroughly analyze the truth in articles about monks, the children may thoughtlessly believe these articles. This could cause them (and us) to miss out on merit opportunities. When they over-generalize that all monks have fallen off the path of morality, they will make judgments without thorough analysis; all they are seeing is the one-sided news. They may then lose interest in Dhamma study, resulting in a lack of understanding about life. They will not know that we must abide by certain laws that govern the world as well as our lives. This knowledge is taught in Buddhism and enables the student to follow the right path in life.

The rule that governs this world is the Law of Kamma. This means that *‘a good deed yields a good result, and a bad deed yields a bad result.’* The consequences of a good deed are called ‘fruits of merit’ and the consequences of a bad deed are called ‘kammic retribution.’ Basically, one is solely responsible for one’s own actions. Fruits of merit and kammic retribution do not answer to any person’s belief, but they answer to the rules that govern this world.

The rule that governs life is the Law of the Three

Characteristics (*tilakkhana*), consisting of impermanence (*aniccata*), suffering (*dukkhata*), and non-self (*anattata*). This truth stands behind all living beings in this world.

The truths of the Law of Kamma and the Three Characteristics were discovered by the Lord Buddha. Moreover, He discovered how an understanding of these Laws shows the way to achieve the release from suffering.

When children consume news carelessly, they will not only be ignorant of the Lord Buddha's teachings but will also have misconceptions about monks. Moreover, they may disregard the truth of the Law of Kamma. When their misunderstanding reaches this level, even when their parents or grandparents wholeheartedly wish to make merit, we can be sure that their children will be unwilling to support them. The worst-case scenario is when children obstruct others' desire to do good deeds. They think that making merit is a waste and offering alms to monks encourages indolence. This same reasoning is used by those who do not believe in the Law of Kamma.

It is very difficult to persuade the media to increase their news coverage about monks who have devoted their lives to the betterment of society. As parents, we must teach and cultivate our children to carefully evaluate and differentiate between what is right and wrong before coming to conclusions about monks. Do not make a hasty decision. If our children

follow these criteria, as parents, we are guaranteed their support to allow us to make merit during our final days. At the same time, monks and novices will be supported and able to spend their time developing their virtues, bringing benefit to society. We can be sure that Buddhism will be strong and stable in Thailand for many years to come.



The Lord Buddha - The Role Model of Wisdom



Having experienced much in life, we clearly understand the meaning of **vicissitudes**. No one gains merely fortune or misfortune throughout life; life is of both happiness and sorrow. We should bear this in mind: When one is happy, one should not overindulge in one's happiness which may cause others trouble. When one is unhappy, one should not wallow in one's sorrow, but have the courage to face problems and bring them to an end.

Since we must seek refuge in our own wisdom in times of sorrow and happiness, we can appreciate that the Lord Buddha's supreme wisdom (of how to lead one's life) is indeed comparable to none. His pure wisdom teaches us how to lead one's life in the right way. It is the best practice when we face vicissitudes in our lives. His wisdom can truly be a noble model for other teachings in this world for both Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

The cause of life's vicissitudes

Many people do not know the cause of life's vicissitudes. Some believe they are determined by astrology. Some believe they are caused by a god. And others believe they occur because of their own intellect and competence. However, the Lord Buddha discovered the truth about the unavoidable Law of Cause and Effect, which in Buddhism is the **Law of Kamma**. He taught that **whoever performs good or evil deeds will receive the consequences of his/her actions**.

Thus, the Lord Buddha taught that when we encounter difficulties, we should carefully scrutinize them in three ways:

- 1) **As caused by our violation of the precepts in the current lifetime.**
- 2) **As caused by our violation of the precepts in our previous lifetimes.**
- 3) **As caused by our carelessness.**

These three reasons are the main origins of our lives' problems, whether we remember them or not.

For these reasons, when any serious problem occurs, the Lord Buddha taught us not to create more problems for ourselves. We must only observe the precepts as purely as possible.

If we lead our lives in the secular world, we must observe the five precepts. Monks must strictly keep the 227 precepts. Nuns as well as those who reside at temples to assist with Buddhist works must strictly keep the eight precepts. Observance of these precepts will prevent us from creating new problems.

The Lord Buddha taught these precepts so that we could meet the standards of morality. If we do not follow His teachings, it is possible that we will face endless problems. We may be able to solve one problem, but we cannot prevent the next one that occurs. They are never-ending. As soon as we realize a problem has occurred, we should quickly make corrections by observing the five precepts strictly and it will become easier to solve them.

After that we can correct problems that arise according to various circumstances, looking to Buddhist principles for the solution. For instance, if the problem revolves around wealth or monetary gain, it can be solved with generosity. Misunderstandings can be solved by improving ourselves, by

teaching ourselves humility and modesty. There may be times when an apology is required. Some difficulties are caused by our own carelessness, perhaps by damaging others' possessions, which can be solved by proper compensation to the owner.

However, when each problem occurs, we must put it to an end. The first step is to still our mind by practicing meditation until the mind is at ease. Meditation can help us to clearly see the problem. If we are not sure how the problem occurred, we must not jump to conclusions about its resolution. We should remain calm while we figure out the solution. Some problems cannot be solved immediately and require our patience.

The Lord Buddha's Solution

There is a chanting that I have heard monks intone every Sunday when I go to the temple. When temple visitors make their offerings to the monks, they are given a blessing in return. The monks will bless with two or three chantings. There is a chant that begins with the Pali word "*Bahuñ*," which is simply called the "*Bahuñ Chant*." The *Bahuñ Chant* recites the right ways to solve problems as taught by the Lord Buddha. There are eight parts to the chants, although there are seven ways. When the Lord Buddha faced serious problems, He successfully solved each one of them.

1) When the Lord Buddha was confronted by the "*Māra Chief*" (*the Evil One*) and his troops who intended to prevent Him from becoming enlightened, He solved this problem by recalling the strength of his 30 Perfections, which in Pali is, "*The 30 Pāramī*."¹² In this case, He specifically named the '*Pāramī of Generosity*' which had been accumulated throughout His infinite cycles of rebirth and He spread His loving kindness to all beings. In the end, He defeated the "*Māra Chief*." In the same manner, if we encounter immense difficulties, we can address them with **generosity** as well.

2) When the Lord Buddha was confronted by the *Alavakā Giant*, a demon who was easily angered, He conquered his anger with *Khanti* (endurance). For example, He endured whatever the Giant demanded or proposed. In the end, the Giant succumbed to the Lord Buddha's endurance, greatly moderating his stubbornness and harshness towards the Lord Buddha. The Giant thought, although he annoyed Him this much, He was still so patient with him. The Giant developed sympathy, realized what he had done to the Lord Buddha, and in the end initiated a conversation with the Lord Buddha.

Thus, when we face an angry person the best solution we have is endurance.

¹² The spiritual perfections the Lord Buddha had pursued for 20 Asaṅkheyya (infinite time) plus 100,000 kappa (the great world-cycles).

3) When the Lord Buddha was confronted by a furious elephant (similar to a frantic person), His solution was to **spread loving kindness**. In short, when people receive and are moved by loving kindness, their hearts will expand and they will be able to forgive and understand each other.

4) When the Lord Buddha faced *Angulimāla*, a killer who aimed to destroy Him, His solution was to make him surrender by **combining His supernatural powers and a graceful sermon** appropriate to the situation, in order to make *Angulimāla* wholeheartedly believe in His teachings.

In our case, we do not have power like the Lord Buddha's, however if we face a killer, we must depend on the police and **the law**.

5) In one case, the Lord Buddha was accused in public. That day, while He was teaching Dhamma to his followers, a beautiful woman named *Savatthi*, suddenly stood up among the great number of people in the Dhamma Hall and proclaimed to the Lord Buddha that she was pregnant with his child. She said, "Lord Buddha, you keep teaching others, but not our offspring in my womb. What should I do? I'm about to deliver!" The Lord Buddha's solution towards this situation was to **remain calm and silent**.

Such a case is a good example to other venerable monks and respected adults who face the same situation. In some

situations, silence is the best solution, and time will tell. As a matter of fact, there are two subjects to be wary of: sexual conduct and money.

Concerning **sexual conduct**, when venerable monks or adults face charges of inappropriate involvement with another person, 90% of people will unthinkingly believe such accusations. As a result, silence is the best solution, and time will tell. The truth will soon reveal itself to the public.

With regards to money, when monks are falsely accused in financial matters, it is often difficult to know how to dispute such allegations. If a respected adult is wrongly accused of corruption, it is also difficult to discuss such a matter. According to Buddhist principles, there are no fights, no fleeing from the enemy; remaining silent is safer. **Silence, in these cases, does not mean guilt or surrender**. It means you are waiting for the appropriate time to declare your innocence. To elaborate:

'Not fighting' means not accusing one another.

'No fleeing from the enemy' means not surrendering and not confirming the accusation.

The accused person should **continue to perform good deeds** as best as he can. Strict discipline will help to protect him and in the end, he will defeat the situation.

6) When the Lord Buddha faced an expert on debate, He used **His wisdom** to solve this problem. Each of His words possessed truth, correctness, and reason.

7) In one case, Ven. Moggallana,¹³ as the Lord Buddha's representative, suppressed the great serpent, named *Nandopānanda*. *Nandopānanda* possessed the Wrong View and was violently poisonous. Thus, Ven. Moggallana used **supernatural powers** to defeat the stubborn serpent.

8) When the Lord Buddha encountered a being that possessed Wrong View, such as a Brahma, He used a **high level of wisdom in Buddhism** in order to match the Brahma's level and was able to persuade the Brahma to accept the Right View.

“We face less demanding obstacles than the Lord Buddha encountered in His final lifetime. Yet in facing our obstacles, we should follow the footsteps of the Lord Buddha. We must first scrutinize our ability to observe the precepts and make improvements. When we conduct ourselves well, all else that is good will follow.”

Remember, no matter how serious our problems are we must be patient and solve them. Most of our encounters with problems were caused by our unwholesome actions from the past. We should remember that the darker the sky becomes,

the sooner dawn will arrive. **We should look to the Lord Buddha as a role model each time we are discouraged.** We will be inspired to gain the strength, patience, awareness, and wisdom needed to solve problems in the right way. In the end, we will be free from the kammic retribution we now face.



¹³ One of the two chief disciples of the Lord Buddha who excelled all others in psychic powers.

Contributing a Buddha Image - The Body of Enlightenment



Donating a Buddha image for oneself or one's family was a favorite tradition of our ancestors. Wealthier people traveled around the country with the purpose of contributing Buddha images to many temples. They understood the fruits they would gain from this merit.

Nowadays, most people do not understand the true reason behind this tradition. As a result, they do not support their own grandparents' practices. For this reason, the elderly regrettably miss a great opportunity to make significant merit during the final days of their lives. As Buddhists, we should

examine this so that we will not miss the opportunity to do so. We should clearly understand the importance of contributing a Buddha image so that we do not obstruct our grandparents when they wish to perform such great merit. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the benefits that result from such an act of merit.

Our country's ancestors tended to donate Buddha images because they venerated the Lord Buddha's great compassion towards all beings. This would be a way of showing their gratitude towards Him.

In Buddhist history, a person who is determined to become a Buddha (an Enlightened being) in the future, to free people from suffering, exists rarely in this world. This type of person is called a *Bodhisatta*.¹⁴

Bodhisattas who devoted their lives to spiritual perfections and successfully eradicated their defilements were an extremely rare occurrence. Some achieved their goals, and some gave up along the way.

In order to attain Buddhahood, a Bodhisatta must devote his life to virtue. In one of his lifetimes, he must meet a Buddha who would assure him of his future Buddhahood and inform him of the length of time required to attain enlightenment as a Buddha.

The Bodhisatta, who receives confirmation of his future Buddhahood by a Buddha, is called *Niyata-Bodhisatta*, meaning a person who will definitely attain enlightenment and become a Buddha in the future. After being informed by a Buddha, a *Niyata-Bodhisatta* must continue to pursue perfections for at least another four Asaṅkheyya (infinite time) and 100,000 kappa (the cycle of birth and death of the world). This means he must continue in the cycle of existence for an immeasurable amount of time in order to attain Buddhahood. As he approaches this feat, the obstacles become more difficult, requiring the devotion of his entire being to eradicate his impurities and increase his divinity. Since this is extremely difficult, the Lord Buddha once gave the following analogy: *The number of times He donated His eyes to help others in order to become enlightened is greater than all the stars in the sky.*

To devote one's entire being towards reaching enlightenment is rare because of this lengthy process. After becoming enlightened, He will spend the rest of his days spreading His knowledge of the truth (Dhamma) to everyone. Those who follow His teachings and practice Dhamma diligently can attain enlightenment and reach Nibbana. Thus, the people who are born during the Buddha's life and successfully attain enlightenment are highly fortunate.

¹⁴ Candidate for Buddhahood

Those who are not born during the life of a Buddha must seek refuge in the Lord Buddha's teachings, unaware of His appearance.

Our country's ancestors, who experienced and attained high levels of meditation, had both vision and wisdom. They decided to recreate the image of the Lord Buddha from within (the Body of the Enlightenment) as a Buddha statue. The heritage they passed on to us enriches our knowledge of the Lord Buddha's excellent appearance, increasing our faith in Him. This act of contributing to cast a Buddha statue is favorable to many Buddhists around the world.

Because our ancestors were able to see unwavering Dhamma within, their ability to duplicate the flawless Buddha image caused those who saw the image to become joyful and have faith in Him. It inspired them to perform virtuous deeds and practice meditation in order to attain Nibbana like He did.

Thus, the Buddha image a person contributes helps to rid people of their impurities, lust and desire, as well as motivating them to improve the world in which we live.

A contributor of a Buddha image earns the following types of merit:

- 1) The contributor develops increased morality and virtue.
- 2) Because the contribution empowers other individuals

to perform good deeds, the contributor will be revered by both humans and celestial beings in every area he visits.

- 3) Even if the contributor is no longer living and people still seek refuge in the contributed Buddha image, the merit will continue to flow causing others to revere him in his future lifetimes.
- 4) Regardless of the number of rebirths, if the contributor unintentionally has evil thoughts, speech or actions, or experiences problems in life, with the simple recollection of the Buddha image he donated, all non-virtue will be avoided.
- 5) Regardless of the number of rebirths, he will always be born in a land where Buddhism flourishes and will effortlessly attain the Dhammakaya – the Body of Enlightenment.
- 6) While still in *samsāra* (the cycle of death and of birth), he will gain wealth easily. Whatever livelihood he has, as a merchant or a government official, the merit from contributing a Buddha image will support and bless him to be prosperous. In his final life in *samsāra*, he will effortlessly attain enlightenment.

This just a summary of all the benefits the contributor will gain. These are just the fruits of merits that are easily understood. If the reader practices meditation and studies the biography of the Lord Buddha, you will see the innumerable



benefits in contributing for a Buddha image. We now understand why our ancestors focused on this moral contribution.

My own grandmother understood the benefits of contributing a Buddha image, as she donated more than twenty such images and dedicated them to everyone in her family and deceased loved ones, inviting her kin to do the same thing. I know that this great merit she achieved in her old age will ensure she has worthy future. When she passes away, she can depend on the merit she earned, without expecting others to dedicate merits to her after she dies.

I would like to invite anyone who has not yet contributed a Buddha image to do it for your own sake. It will be better if you can contribute one for yourself today rather than later. In today's society, many people have strayed from performing virtuous deeds. As a result, their children will not realize the main purpose in doing good deeds as well. Contributing a Buddha image is one of the noblest deeds that benefits contributors as well as society. If they miss this great opportunity, they may pass up the benefits they can depend on in the afterlife. We should contribute a Buddha image for our own sake. When we near the end of our lives, we will depart in a peaceful manner because we are sure that this great merit will embrace us in the next world.



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www.dhammakaya.or.th/centremain.php



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THAILAND

The temple offers a meditation lesson
in English from 13.30 to 15.00 hours
daily.

It regularly organizes a seven-day
retreat in the northern province of
Chiang Mai, each starting after the
first Sunday of every month.

For more information, please contact
the foundation or visit
www.meditationthai.org

Children of broken families often display certain characteristics such as disobedience and negative attitudes. Obviously, that is not something that is desirable. Why did these children's families fall apart and their members go their separate ways? If we do not learn about the real causes, this may happen to our families as well. Children turn out this way when they are not properly taught. Some come from good families, but runaway due to conflicts with their siblings. Some even try to steal their sibling's possessions at the age of only 12 or 13 years old.

A lack of family unity is really at the core of these problems. It all begins when each member has a different schedule resulting in no interactions with each other. As they become more distant, the family eventually falls apart. However, the primary cause of a family's rapid deterioration is the failure to have dinner together