

# 38

## Buddhist Wisdoms

*A Practical Handbook for Achieving Success,  
Happiness and Prosperity*







# 38

## Buddhist Wisdoms

Based on *Mangala Sutta*,  
the Discourse on Blessings



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## GENUINE VICTORY

In our tumultuous world today in which everyone is affected by wars, economic turmoil, political conflict, family crisis, and the breakdown in human values, we direly need sensible and practical guidance to help us weather these storms. There can be no peace or economic prosperity without moral and intellectual concord among mankind. There can be no real love in human relationships so long as the fires of hatred, dishonesty, anger and greed fiercely burn in the human heart.

Like war, peace has to be won. *38 Buddhist Wisdoms* shows the way to do it. It shows the way of genuine victory through non-violence and real love. Rather than conquering thousands and millions in battle, the Buddha teaches the conquest of self through self-culture, self-control and mental development.

## MANGALA SUTTA

*38 Buddhist Wisdoms* is based on the *Mangala Sutta*, the Discourse on Blessings, the most popular and widely practiced Discourse cherished by Buddhists throughout the world. It is a comprehensive summary of Buddhist ethics and practical wisdoms, an excellent guide for reaching even the highest goal.

*38 Buddhist Wisdoms* forms a complete body of the knowledge of Buddhism that is easy to apply to everyday life. The ideals set forth in this book are practical and timeless. Following these ideals will ensure success in every level: physically, intellectually, vocationally, socially, morally, materially and spiritually.

This is the place to start if you wish to know Buddhism in its most complete and practical form.

***This book will indeed change your life!***



*His Most Venerable Phrarajbhavanajarn*

*38 Buddhist Wisdoms* is edited and transcribed from eighty hours of recorded Dharma lectures given in Thai by His Most Venerable Phrarajbhavanajarn, Vice Abbot of Wat Phra Dhammakaya, to university students in Thailand over a span of ten years. These lectures are some of the most elaborate and complete presentations of *Mangala Sutta*, the Discourse on Blessings, found anywhere.

This book is written for the modern reader. It is presented in a short and concise but comprehensive format using simple language that is easy to read, easy to understand, avoiding religious and technical terms whenever possible. Readers will find this book not only informative, but also enlightening. Having this book in your possession is in itself a blessing.

*May the fruit of your merit bring you abundant success and prosperity in this world and the next.*

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

For those of you who have no prior knowledge of Buddhism and Eastern culture, we recommend that you get acquainted with the essential elements that form the fundamentals of Buddhist practice. It is also helpful for you to become familiarized with some of the widely used Buddhist terms that appear throughout this book. A comprehensive presentation of these essential elements and Buddhist terms are outlined in the pages that follow.

Buddhism has two scriptural languages: Pali and Sanskrit. The original Buddhist scriptures were written in Pali. Pali texts are used in Theravada school of Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism is practiced in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Laos and Cambodia, and, to a lesser degree, in China, Vietnam, and Malaysia. Buddhist scriptures in Sanskrit were translated from the Pali language. Sanskrit texts are used in Mahayana school of Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism is practiced in China, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam.

Buddhist terms used in this Book are based on Pali, except the words that have already found their way into the English dictionary, such as Dharma (Pali, *Dhamma*), Karma (Pali, *Kamma*) and Nirvana (Pali, *Nibbāna*).

‘The religion in the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity.

Buddhism answers this description.’

***Albert Einstein***

## WHAT IS BUDDHISM?

Buddhism is a religion based on the Teachings of the Buddha who lived in India more than 2,600 years ago. The essence of Buddhism is freedom from suffering.

Buddhism is a practical and broad-minded religion. It is not a religion based on blind faith, superstition, guilt or fear, but is based on the experience of all things natural and spiritual. The Buddha encourages one to be neutral, not to believe or disbelieve until something is proven to be true or false. Buddhism encourages self-reliance and self-liberation through good deeds. Although Buddhism is one of the world's oldest religions, its principles and teachings are still modern and practical in all situations.

Buddhism acknowledges that dissatisfaction and suffering are a part of life. It addresses the nature of suffering and its causes (the Four Noble Truths) while exploring ways in which one can eliminate suffering from life (the Noble Eightfold Path) in order to achieve Nirvana, the state of ultimate happiness.

Buddhism discusses the Law of Karma. According to this law no one can salvage us from our sins, nor can anyone pass his sins to us. An action, good or bad, produces a result. Good actions produce good results, and bad actions produce bad results. A person is directly responsible for his or her own deeds and is also the direct recipient of their karma.

Another aspect of Buddhism is 'samsara', the cycle of rebirth. Samsara is governed by the Law of Karma. A person who performs good deeds in this life will be reborn in a happy realm in the next life. A person who performs evil deeds in this life will be reborn in an

unhappy realm in the next life. Happy realms consist of heavens and the state of being human. Unhappy realms consist of hells, the state of being a demon, the state of being a hungry ghost (*preta*), and the state of being an animal. The destination and quality of rebirth is based on the quality of deeds.

The only way to end the rebirth cycle is for a person to tenaciously perform good deeds and build perfect virtues (*pārami*) until he or she reaches Nirvana.

Buddhism is a religion of peace, harmony and loving kindness. Buddhists have never gone to war in the name of religion.

***To refrain from all evil  
To do what is good  
To purify the mind***

***These are the Teachings of the Buddha***



## WHO IS THE BUDDHA?

The name Buddha is a generic name or title, not a proper name, meaning “awakened,” thus “enlightened.”

Gotama was the Buddha, the historical founder of Buddhism whose teachings, the Dharma, form its core. The historical Buddha was born in 623 B.C. as Prince Siddhattha Gotama in Lumbini Park at Kapilavatthu, on the Indian border of present day Nepal. He was the son of King Suddhodana and Queen Maya who lived in the kingdom of the Sakyans, a tribe of the Aryan race that lived in the North of India.

At age 16 Prince Siddhattha married Princess Yashodhara who gave birth to their only son, Rahula. At the age of 29 Siddhattha renounced worldly life and left the palace to find an answer to the problem of suffering and a path to liberation from cyclic existence. Siddhattha attained Enlightenment and became a Buddha at the age of 35. He spent forty-five years wandering up and down the Ganges Valley propagating the doctrine that he founded and establishing the Sangha, the Order of Buddhist monks, which still exists today. The Buddha died at age 80 in the year 543 B.C. in Kushinagara, not far from his birthplace at Lumbini.

Besides the fully-enlightened Buddha who teaches Dharma to the world (*Samma-Sambuddha*) there is the ‘Private Buddha’ (*Pacceka-Buddha*), who is enlightened but does not teach. Buddhas appear at vast intervals of time. There are countless number of past, present and future Buddhas. Anyone can become a Buddha if he or she pursues all the virtues to perfection, although this may take innumerable lifetimes to accomplish.

# BUDDHIST WORLDVIEW

Buddhists accept the view of the Universe that time is not linear but circular. Consequently, the Universe is not created out of nothing at a particular point, nor will it be completely destroyed at another. It has always existed and will always exist. In the meantime, however, it goes through endless cycles of creation and destruction, creation and destruction, over and over and over.

All beings born into this cyclic universe are the result of a preceding cause or willed action (Karma). This is the doctrine of creation by causes. In turn, when any being dies, he, she, or it creates the causes for the birth of a new being. This is not precisely reincarnation or transmigration, for it is not exactly the same being that commutes from body to body down through the procession of the ages. The appropriate word to describe this process is 'rebirth'.

Rebirth, therefore, is a process of endless and uncontrollable circulation through a variety of mostly unpleasant situations.

## THE LAW OF KARMA

Buddhism discusses the Law of Karma, also known as the Law of Cause and Effect. According to this law no one can salvage us from our sins, nor can anyone pass his sins to us. An action, good or bad, produces a result. Good actions produce good results, and bad actions produce bad results. A person is directly responsible for his or her own deeds and is also the direct recipient of their Karma.

The word karma comes from the Pali term '*kamma*', meaning action or doing. Any kind of intentional action whether mental, verbal or physical is regarded as karma. Involuntary, unintentional, or unconscious actions do not constitute karma.

## **SAMSARA – CYCLE OF REBIRTH**

Another aspect of Buddhism is 'samsara', the cycle of rebirth. The term samsara has been translated as 'eternal wandering,' 'cyclic existence,' and 'ocean of suffering.' According to the Buddha, the beginning point of samsara is not evident, just as there is no beginning point to a circle. All beings have been suffering in samsara for an unimaginable length of time, and they continue to do so until the attainment of Nirvana. The only way to escape the cycle of rebirth is through Enlightenment.

## **NIRVANA**

Nirvana is the transcendental state of ultimate happiness, the highest spiritual attainment. This is not the sense-based happiness of everyday life, nor is it the concept of heaven as interpreted by Western culture. It is an enduring, transcendental happiness integral to the calmness attained through Enlightenment. Once a person has attained Nirvana, he has reached the end of the cycle of rebirth.

## **HAPPY REALMS**

Happy realms consist of heavens and the state of being human. A person who lives a life of good conduct will be reborn in a happy realm. There are altogether sixteen levels of heaven.

## **UNHAPPY REALMS**

Unhappy realms consist of hells, the state of being a demon, the state of being a hungry ghost, and the state of being an animal. A person who lives a life of evil conduct will be reborn in an unhappy realm.

# FUNDAMENTALS OF BUDDHISM

## FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

Realized by the Buddha during his Enlightenment, The Four Noble Truths became the foundation for Buddhism. It explains that suffering is a part of all unenlightened beings; that the origin of suffering arises from attachment to desire or craving, that suffering ceases when attachment to desire ceases, and that freedom from suffering is possible through the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path.

## SUFFERING

The meaning of suffering in Buddhism is often misunderstood by the West. The English word 'suffering' is loosely translated from the Pali word 'dukkha'. 'Dukkha' covers the whole spectrum of psycho-emotional states, from a mild sense that things are not quite right to intense physical and mental pain. It may also be taken to mean that there is no lasting peace or rest in life; that we are forever under pressure and subject to disruption. Thus, impermanence and change are also a form of suffering. Since nothing lasts forever and everything is subject to change, people themselves create this suffering by trying to cling on to worldly pleasures.

It is a common misconception that Buddhists believe that life is all suffering. This misconception will be removed once a person has a chance to understand the deeper meaning of Buddhism.

## NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

The Noble Eightfold Path is the Path to end all suffering, leading to enlightenment. It consists of Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

## **RIGHT VIEW**

Right View can also be translated as “right perspective”, “right outlook” or “right understanding”. It is the correct way of looking at life, nature, and the world as they really are. In general, Right View consists of the understanding that the Law of Karma exists, generosity is virtuous and should be practiced, virtuous people are worthy of respect, hospitality is good, parents are worthy of our gratitude, there is life after death, heavens and hells exist, and Enlightenment is attainable. An understanding of Right View will inspire a person to lead a virtuous life leading to freedom from suffering.

## **DHARMA**

Dharma has multiple meanings. There is no equivalent single word translation for dharma in western languages. In Buddhism dharma means the Truth, the way of nature, the way that things really are, ultimate reality, cosmic law and order, righteous conduct, path of righteousness, the law of righteousness, the right way of living, and the Teachings of the Buddha.

## **BUDDHIST CONDUCT**

Buddhists follow three basic practices: to do good, to avoid bad, and to purify the mind. Good deeds are achieved through acts of generosity and loving-kindness. Bad deeds can be avoided through observation of moral conducts known as Precepts. Cultivation of the mind is achieved through meditation.

## **PRECEPTS**

Precepts are the guiding principles that form the framework of Buddhist ethical conduct and the baseline of one’s virtue. A person should at least practice the Five Precepts, which consist of not killing any living beings (including animals and insects), not stealing,

not committing sexual misconduct, not lying, and not consuming intoxicating substances (drugs, alcohol, cigarettes).

## **MEDITATION**

Meditation is a means of mental development and cultivation. It is through meditation that our mind is trained, refined, and perfected. A mind that is restless is like stirred water sullied by impurities, losing its clear-seeing quality. Meditation stabilizes the mind and elevates its quality, giving rise to mindfulness and wisdom. Meditation can be practiced by a lay person for the benefit of a happy life, as well as by a monastic for the attainment of liberation. Meditation is universal. It is not only for Buddhists but for people of all faiths.

## **SUCCESS**

Life in this world is very short compared to life in the afterlife realms. An average human life span is 75 years on Earth. Life in the afterworld is much longer. One day of life in heaven or in hell is equivalent to hundreds or thousands of years on earth, and in some cases even more. A wise and prudent person is mindful of this fact. He or she realizes that worldly wealth is short-lived and spiritual wealth lasts much longer. A wise person therefore does his or her best to cultivate as much virtue and merit as possible to build a successful spiritual future.

Success in Buddhism is defined in three levels: success in this life (material success), success in future lives (spiritual success), and the ultimate success (Nirvana).

# WISDOM

## Don't Associate with Fools



*He who lies down with dogs will rise up with fleas.*

Everyone born into the world has the best intentions to live a decent life. Why do some fail? Even a criminal doesn't particularly want to live his life dishonestly. But why does he end up making a mess of his life?

The answer is: because of the lack of good discretion.

Discretion is the basic understanding by which we judge each experience and situation in the world to know whether it is likely to be beneficial or harmful. Discretion is a personal quality we acquire

through our own experiences as well as through influences from others. We call those who influence us to conduct our lives in a beneficial way ‘virtuous friends’. Those who influence us to conduct our lives in a destructive way, we call them ‘evil friends’ . . . . or simply ‘fools’.

## **WHAT IS A FOOL?**

A ‘fool’ is someone wicked, weak, or feeble in a moral sense. He is morally underdeveloped and sees things in a distorted way. His discretion is faulty and his judgment flawed. He has no sense of shame or fear of doing wrong, and he takes no responsibility for his actions.

A fool and a wise person see things differently. As an example, a wise person sees an alcoholic drink as evil because it damages the quality of the mind and leads to chaos and destruction. A fool sees it as a “cool” substance that promotes friendship and bonding. A wise person sees gambling as a bad habit that leads to ruin. A fool sees it as an exciting form of entertainment.

A fool has the tendency to take shortcuts in order to get what he wants. He will use whatever means available to him without consideration for the damage done to others. Lying, cheating, stealing or breaking the law is not his concern as long as he fulfills his means. To a fool, personal gain is more important than ethics. Associating with such a person can bring only misfortune to your life.

## **HOW TO RECOGNIZE A FOOL?**

You can’t tell a fool by his education or background. He can be a professor, a minister, a doctor, or a lawyer. He can be someone close to you (such as your parent or relative) or a complete stranger. Education, intelligence, career success, and high social standing have nothing to do with whether a person is good or bad. A person

with a Ph.D. can still be a fool if his discretion is faulty. He may apply his mastery of knowledge or science for dishonest purposes, such as making harmful drugs or weapons.

You can recognize a fool by the peculiar way he thinks, speaks and acts. Generosity, hospitality, loyalty and gratitude are foreign to him. A fool is ready to lie at any time. He likes to speak faults of others but seldom admits the faults of his own, and he gets angry when being criticized. He is boastful but jealous when someone is ahead of him. He likes to cause disharmony among people. He is prone to using foul or insulting language. He says whatever he likes without consideration for usefulness or the feelings of others. A fool has no problem breaking any moral precepts. He has no shame or fear of wrongdoing and feels no regret or remorse for his bad action. If you meet someone who has all or even some of these characteristics you know you have made the acquaintance of a fool.

### **WRONG VIEW**

Fools assume the wrong view about life and the ways of the world. They believe that:

- Good and bad actions have no consequences – in other words, the Law of Karma doesn't exist.
- There is no life after death, or heaven or hell – this belief causes a fool to take no responsibility in his action, thinking that it will all end after he dies.
- Generosity is not virtuous and brings no benefit – this attitude gives rise to selfishness and greed.
- A child does not owe gratitude to his parents – any person who does not recognize the virtues of his parents is incapable of seeing the good in others.
- It is unnecessary to honor people worthy of honor – this attitude leads to egoism and the lack of humility.

- Hospitality is unnecessary – hospitality is an act of kindness; those who lack it tend to be the uncaring type.
- Monastics are unable to purify themselves of all defilements; Enlightenment is not attainable – the lack of faith deprives the fool of his own potential for spiritual attainment.

Because of a misguided attitude, a fool goes about his life making mistakes and committing all sorts of wrongdoings. The bad karma he has created for himself due to his wrongdoings will eventually drive him to an unhappy destination.

### **AVOID FOOLS AT ALL COSTS**

The challenge of growing up is intensified if one is not careful about choosing the right company. The worst problem for children in this current time is exposure to drugs, alcohol and violent activities. This is largely due to negative influence from bad company. Their bad influence will cause you to conduct your life in a ruinous manner similar to theirs. The more you associate with fools, the more you will downgrade yourself. You will attract misfortune to yourself as well as those around you. You will lose not only your credibility and good name but also your entire future. If you become a fool yourself and continue to follow the wrong path, your afterlife destination is bound to be an unpleasant one. The only exception is when you associate with a fool for the sake of helping the person.

### **HOW TO INSULATE YOURSELF FROM FOOLS**

Avoid activities that may cause you to become a fool yourself. Abstain from all kinds of misbehaviors no matter how small. Practice charitable giving to form a habit of generosity and the ability to overcome selfishness and greed. Observe moral precepts by not killing any living beings, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, lying, and indulging in any form of intoxicating substances. These

things will elevate your human quality and help you establish yourself in the right way.

Other things you can do:

- Cultivating the quality of your mind through meditation and listening to Dharma teaching.
- Beginning to do good deeds from this point forward.
- Abstaining from recalling or reminding yourself of past mistakes and wrongdoings. Count them as lessons learned and not to be repeated.
- Staying away from any forms of negative influences, including books, television shows, movies, entertainments, and any activities that display indecent conducts. Instead, seek positive influences through associating with virtuous people, reading about them, and acquiring Dharma knowledge.

By so doing, you will close the doors to any bad elements that may downgrade the quality of your mind and open the doors to positive elements that allow you to have good discretion and good conduct.

If you find yourself having to live or work among fools, make sure you have good self-control and are immune to the negative influence of bad company. You may associate with fools only when you're sure that your good influence is flowing to them, instead of the other way around.

*Avoiding bad company is the first step to progress.*

# WISDOM

## Associate with the Wise

---

# 2



*Wisdom shines forth in conduct.*

Being wise is not the same as being educated. A wise person can be someone who is highly educated or one with no formal education at all. Education, social standing and economic success have nothing to do with whether a person is wise or foolish. One who has no formal education, or who is poor, can still be a wise person. Some people believe they can obtain wisdom and become wise simply by graduating from a reputable university. If they earn a degree, enter business, and are successful, they think they will earn praise and respect. But if that is the case, then why are many jails in this world full of people with degrees and highly successful careers?

The answer is clear: they only possess worldly wisdom, but they lack spiritual wisdom. Worldly wisdom may help you keep your stomach full, but it does not guarantee that it will keep you out of jail or guide you through life without exposure to moral dangers. Spiritual wisdom is the wisdom that allows you not only to profit in this life but also in life hereafter. Not only will spiritual wisdom keep you out of jail, but it will also keep you out of unfortunate afterlife destination. To succeed in this world as well as the next, you must possess both the worldly wisdom and the spiritual wisdom.

### **DEFINITION OF THE WISE**

The wise individual is someone whose mind is refined and cultivated. He is trustworthy and morally sound. The way to recognize a wise person is by the quality of his thinking, his speech and his actions. The wise person is one who applies intelligence and wisdom in his daily life. His discretion is sound and his conduct unblemished. He can tell right from wrong, good from bad. A wise person is the complete opposite of a fool.

Contrary to the misguided attitude of a fool, a wise person possesses the Right View—the correct way of looking at life, nature, and the world as they really are. In general, Right View consists of the following perception:

- Good and bad actions have consequences; the Law of Karma exists
- There is life after death; heavens and hells exist
- Generosity is virtuous and should be practiced
- A child has a debt of gratitude to his parents
- It is necessary to honor people worthy of honor
- Hospitality is good and should be practiced
- Monastics are able to purify themselves of all defilements; Enlightenment is attainable

A wise person practices a high standard of morality. He follows the basic performance of good deeds through charitable giving, upholding moral precepts, and cultivating his mind through meditation. He gives support to others and influences others to do good deeds. He fulfills moral precepts by not killing any living beings, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, lying, or engaging in any form of intoxication. He avoids doing anything that causes harm and suffering to others, and he takes full responsibility for everything that he does.

The wise person knows that the mind is the source of all wisdoms and all actions. He keeps his mind unaffected by mental impurities such as greed, hatred and delusion. He cultivates spiritual development through Dharma learning, Dharma practice, and meditation.

A person could be physically handicapped, under-privileged or even illiterate, but if his mind is habitually pure and virtuous, he is a wise person.

## **PRACTICAL WISDOMS OF THE WISE**

The wise recognizes that comfort in one's old age must come from hard work in one's prime. In the pursuit of success and happiness in this life, the wise person adopts the following virtues known as the Four Foundations of Success:

- *Diligent acquisition*: not being lazy in earning a living, in acquiring knowledge, in creating and preserving wealth
- *Stewardship*: saving and protecting one's earnings and possessions
- *Associating with the wise*: learning from people who are wiser and better
- *Using earnings to support oneself in a modest way*: not to be extravagant in spending

In short, the wise person works hard for his money, protects it, surrounds himself with good people, and saves his money for a rainy day.

To assure himself of a happy future in this life and the next, the wise individual observes basic moral conducts known as the Five Precepts, which consist of the following:

- Not killing any living beings
- Not stealing
- Not committing sexual misconduct
- Not lying
- Not consuming alcohol or any form of addictive substances

Keeping these Five Precepts is the first step toward a happy afterlife destination.

## **VIRTUES OF THE WISE**

The wise person embraces loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy (moral support instead of envy), and equanimity (impartiality, neutrality) as his virtues. He is mindful of the fact that suffering is a part of all unenlightened beings, and that the causes of suffering are due to desire, craving and attachment to worldly pleasure. He is aware that freedom from suffering can be achieved through the Noble Eightfold Path—the path leading to Nirvana, and that Nirvana is not beyond a person's means to attain.

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of the following virtues:

- Right View – view and wisdom in accordance with truths
- Right Thought – to think without selfishness, hatred or cruelty

- Right Speech – to speak without falsehood and malice
- Right Action – to act with kindness, honesty, and non-violence
- Right Livelihood – to pursue a life free from greed and exploitation
- Right Effort – effort to do good and avoid bad
- Right Mindfulness – to be aware of the consequences of one's personal actions
- Right Concentration – to cultivate the mind in the proper way

### **WHY SHOULD YOU ASSOCIATE WITH THE WISE?**

The wise provide good influence to everyone around them. They are your true friends who bring out the best in you. They protect and guide you in the right path and never abandon you in times of trouble. By associating with the wise, their wisdom and virtues will brush off on you, making you a more endearing person. You will gain spiritual wisdom which will give you strength in the face of adversity. Your faith that good actions lead to success and prosperity will give you unwavering confidence in your journey toward the eternal happiness. You will be invulnerable in the face of obstacles, failure and defeat. Associating with the wise is auspicious indeed.

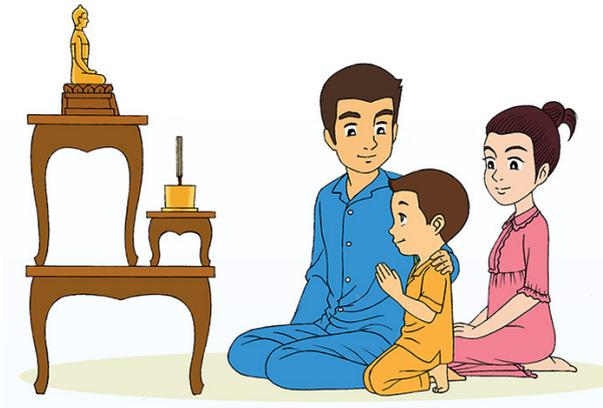
*Build yourself with good qualities by learning from people who are better, smarter and wiser than you.*

# WISDOM

## Honor the Worthy

---

# 3



*The good that men do lives after them.*

The practice of honoring or paying respect to the worthy is an attitude of looking for the positive aspects of a person and an effort to instill yourself with those good virtues. It helps shape the quality of your mind to a higher level.

Some people don't like to show respect, or to express reverence, even when it is quite proper to do so. Such people suffer from false pride. Respectful people are not like this. They don't let pride get in the way of progress. They know how to instill themselves with the greater knowledge, wisdom and virtues from people who are better and wiser than them.

## **WHO ARE YOUR ROLE MODELS?**

When you are a child and the horizons of your experience do not extend beyond the walls of your house, maybe your parents represent all that you want to achieve in your life. But as you grow older, your horizons begin to extend beyond the home, and your concept of role models may change drastically. If you are fortunate, you may be exposed to good role models and adopt their ideals as your own. But if you are less fortunate, you may be exposed to the wrong kind of role models.

Who is the hero of your heart? Which celebrity do you dream of emulating? Look at some of the role model celebrities set for the youths of today and you can imagine

some of the problems facing our impressionable youths. Many people don't have the ability to distinguish between the creative and destructive aspects of someone's behavior. Therefore, when you're starting out on your sojourn of spiritual discovery, it's better to choose a role model that you can rely upon as an exemplar in all aspects of life. If you can choose a reliable role model for yourself, you will accelerate your acquisition of the Right View and wisdom, and become less vulnerable to the influence of fools.

## **WHO ARE WORTHY OF HONOR AND RESPECT?**

Virtuous people, people who have made beneficial contributions to mankind such as the Buddha, monks, holy persons, your parents, your teachers, and those who are of great assistance to you in life, are all worthy of your respect and honor. Monarchs and leaders of nations who are righteous, good employers, and good people in general also deserve your respect. Pictures, objects and places related to virtuous people (such as images of the Buddha or the parents, chanting books, the four holy sites connected with the life of the Buddha) are also worthy of respect because they serve to

remind you of their virtues and their beneficial contribution to society and the world.

## **WHO ARE NOT WORTHY OF HONOR AND RESPECT?**

In general, people who don't live a life of virtue are not worthy of respect. You should not respect fools and people of immoral character regardless of how famous or powerful they may be. Objects related to them, such as their pictures, their belongings, or their teachings, are not to be idolized. Objects that are inauspicious, such as pictures of sex symbols, movie stars, singers or athletes, whose morality is questionable, are not to be respected.

Buddhism advises against superstition and blind faith. Blind faith is not the characteristic of a wise person. The use of lucky charms and other superstitious objects should be avoided. Putting these objects in a position of respect or worship is a sign of ignorance. Objects of superstition, such as an animal, a rock, a tree, a mountain, a river, etc., are not worthy of respect.

## **HOW TO EXPRESS RESPECT**

Respect can be expressed through the channels of body, speech and mind. Physical salutations such as bowing, putting your palms together, kneeling, sitting politely, standing up to greet, giving a good seat to the person, are forms of respect expressed through the body.

Paying respect through speech can be expressed through verbal greetings, chanting, or singing of praises towards the respected one.

Paying respect through the channel of the mind can be in the form of contemplation of the moral character and virtues of the person you respect, and the practice and spreading of the person's virtue and teachings.

The highest form of respect, however, is to carry out your conduct in accordance with the advice or teachings of those who you respect. Be mindful of certain physical gestures that are considered rude by some cultures, such as pointing your feet at the person, or mimicking or mocking the person. Often, what is considered respectful in one culture may be considered disrespectful in other cultures. It is important to be aware of the social norms of the culture in which you're operating and to follow them.

### **WHY SHOULD YOU EXPRESS RESPECT?**

Regularly paying respect or homage to the worthy helps you become more mindful and appreciative of the goodness of others. It instills in you the ability to absorb the greater knowledge, wisdom and virtues from people who are better and wiser than you. It elevates the quality of your mind and helps you become more humble, polite and endearing as a person.

*Humility is a noble attribute of the wise.*

# WISDOM

## Live in an Amenable Location

# 4



*A tree planted in a fertile soil grows big and tall.  
A tree planted in a barren soil grows lean and small.*

The word 'location' here has a broad meaning, but in general it means a place, an area, a locality, a region or a country.

An amenable location is a place that is conducive to success in the specific things that you set out to do. If you are a fisherman, then the locality is near the ocean. If you are a merchant, then the locality is in a busy marketplace where people come to shop. If you are a soldier, then the locality is where victory in battles can be assured.

However, favorable locality alone is not enough to guarantee success. It also requires other favorable conditions. People need a good environment to grow. Even if you are placed in a favorable location, without the help and support of people and facilities around you, you could find yourself in a precarious position. You could be a PhD with a high IQ, or a master architect, or an ingenious businessman, but if you are marooned on a deserted island with no opportunity to apply your knowledge or knowhow, all your good education and expertise would go to waste.

There are four elements that make a location suitable: amenable environment, amenable food, amenable people, and amenable Dharma.

### **AMENABLE ENVIRONMENT**

An amenable environment could mean a place that is conducive to making a decent living as well as developing good mental culture. Such a place should have an agreeable climate, suitable terrain, freedom from natural disasters, and access to transportation and telecommunication systems. It should also have a plentiful supply of food, drinking water, be near a school or a place of worship, and a health care facility. There should also be a good social support system available.

### **AMENABLE FOOD**

Food has its place of importance in our lives. At a national level, having an amenable food supply means being able to produce enough food to take care of the populace without having to rely on imports from other countries. At a personal level, it is convenient to be located near a market where you can buy food. To prevent from running out of food during shortage seasons, it is wise to have a small garden of your own that produces vegetables used around the kitchen. This will come handy in times of need.

For as long as we are human, we will always be picky about the food we eat and its taste. Don't underestimate the importance of palatable food. A good cook is the heart of a successful kitchen. You should have access to a good cook, or learn to become one yourself.

## **AMENABLE PEOPLE**

People have a great impact on your life. Even if the general characteristics of a location are less than desirable, if the place is inhabited by agreeable people, the drawbacks of the location are compensated. On the contrary, even if you live in a nice house in a good area but the neighbors are quarrelsome or are troublemakers, you will not find peace in your environment. People in your family, your neighborhood, your work place, your community and your country should be conducive to your growth.

For a country to be successful, its population must be one that is industrious and law-abiding. A good society should have no criminals and troublemakers. This can only happen if the people are honest, responsible for their own livelihood, and are respectful of one another. A well-functioning society should also have people in various professions that are useful to the welfare and growth of that society. Doctors are needed to take care of people when they are sick. Merchants are needed to promote commerce, which is a source of economical wealth. Financiers and economists are needed to fuel the economy and to manage it. Monks and spiritual teachers are needed to give moral guidance to the people.

It is easier to achieve success in a country whose economy is healthy and its people are employed. A society that is economically sound is better-equipped to provide all the necessary means for success. When you don't have to worry about survival, you have a better frame of mind to pursue spiritual growth. It is difficult to produce amenable people in a society where people are preoccupied with

poverty and survival. Crime is more rampant in such societies. Also, for a country to be successful, it has to be led by leaders who are righteous and just, where the air is not charged with hatred and mutual suspicion, and where freedom of thought and speech are not suppressed.

Within a family, leaders of the household must be earnest in making an honest living. Alcoholism, gambling and domestic violence should not be present in the household. Children should be obedient to their parents (who do the right things). Students should be diligent in their studies. In this way, members of the family and the community can become amenable to one another.

### **AMENABLE DHARMA**

Dharma is the law of ethics that guides a person to proper conduct and the right way of living. Without Dharma, a society will lack a good moral foundation to guide its people and will eventually breakdown. The first moral value in a society is the culture of respect. People must respect one another in order for the society to function harmoniously. Violence and crime happen because people fail to respect the rights and welfare of others.

A country should be guided by governing principles of law and order that are equitable and fair to all of its citizens regardless of gender, age, ethnicity and faith. Its culture and tradition should be one that is based on morality and ethics. But the laws of a nation can only govern the actions of the body and speech of its people, not the mind. Since the mind controls all thoughts, actions and speech, it is important for a person to have a good quality of mind. Society needs people with healthy minds. Dharma shapes the civilization of the mind, which in turn shapes the civilization of the people. A society without Dharma is a society that is destined to fail.

Education is a tool that separates a civilized nation from a barbaric one. Moral education must exist alongside traditional education. Worldly knowledge helps one to succeed in this life, but spiritual knowledge prepares one to be successful both in this life as well as the next. Most religions do not prepare the people to succeed in future lives. For this reason, it is beneficial to live in a place where Buddhism is available.

### **CHOOSING A SUITABLE LOCATION FOR YOUR NEW HOME**

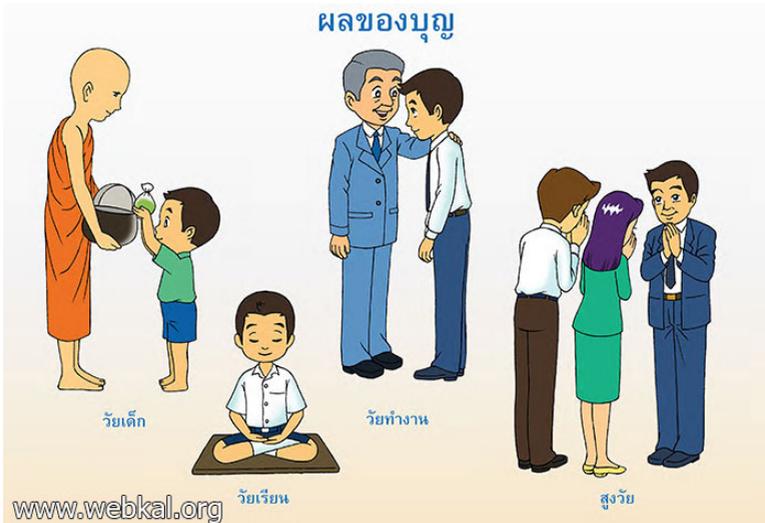
On a personal level, when choosing a location for your new home, it is beneficial to apply the amenable aspects of the location into consideration. Look at the neighborhood whether it has amenable facilities such as running water, electricity, telephone line, Internet connection, food markets, shops, etc. (some under-developed countries don't have all of these facilities). It should not be too close to slums, gambling houses, adult entertainment, or places where crime is rampant. Instead, choose the location where respectable people or people of good conduct live. As for the house itself, it should be one that is comfortable, secure in construction, tidy and clean in appearance, and properly maintained. Having a few trees in the yard will also be beneficial.

*The most ideal amenable location is one that gives you a better chance for success in both the material world and the spiritual.*

# WISDOM

## Having Done Meritorious Deeds in the Past

# 5



*In the end, it is the force of merit that frees you from suffering.*

Everybody wants to be rich, beautiful and smart. Nobody wants to be poor, ugly and dumb. But how come some people are born lucky and others are not? The answer is 'merit', or the lack of it.

### WHAT IS MERIT?

Merit (*puñña*) can be interpreted as virtue, goodness, happiness, pureness, fullness, karmically wholesome action, all of which result in good karma.

Merit is the product of good deeds. It is a form of positive energy that is created whenever a good deed is performed. Merit is the force that causes one to be pretty, smart, rich, famous, or fortunate, whichever the case may be. It is due to merit that one has the ability to accumulate knowledge, wisdom, social status and financial success. Merit is the basis for all wealth, health and happiness.

Merit acts like a wish-fulfilling instrument that turns your wishes into reality. Merit behaves like a magnet that attracts good people and good things to your life. If you have done good deeds in the past life, you will find yourself in a happy situation in the present life and in life hereafter.

Merit belongs exclusively to one who possesses it. It is the property of the person, is a part of that person, and stays with that person wherever he or she may be, in this life or the next. Merit cannot be transferred, taken or shared by others.

Different types of good deeds bring different types of good results. For example, if you have done plenty of charitable giving in your past life, you will end up being a well-to-do person in your present life. And if you have done plenty of charitable giving in your present life, you will become a well-to-do person in your future life. The more good deeds you have done, the better off you will be.

## **DEMERIT**

The opposite of merit is demerit (sometimes referred to as 'sin'). Demerit is the product of bad deeds. Bad deeds give rise to bad karma. Demerit is a negative energy that is created whenever a bad deed is performed. If you have done bad deeds in the past life, you will suffer bad consequences in the present life and in future life. Examples of bad deeds are killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, lying, indulging in drugs and alcohol, (violation of the basic Five Precepts) and causing harm or suffering to other living beings.

Certain types of bad deeds also bring certain types of bad results. For example, if you were selfish, stingy and mean in your past life, you will be poor and miserable in your present life. If you have killed or tortured people or animals in your past life, you will be born with physical problems and sickness in this life, and so on. And if you have committed these bad deeds in the present life, you will suffer similar bad consequences in your future life.

## **MERIT POWER**

Merit has a positive effect on the mind. The mind is the origin of all actions, good or bad. It is the source of all success and failure. A good, clear mind gives rise to good thoughts, good speech and good conduct. On the contrary, bad thoughts, false speech and bad deeds are all created by a poor quality of mind. Merit has the ability to purify the mind and improves its overall quality. A mind that is pure and healthy is stable and alert, and is free from worries and negative thoughts that make you unhappy. Thus, a healthy mind is a happy mind. A person with a happy mind is a happy person. Happiness comes from the good result of merit.

Your thought, speech and action are controlled by your mind. A wholesome mind leads to wholesome thought, action and speech. Your personality and expressions reflect what is in your mind. When you are content and happy, you project a cheerful, positive and pleasing demeanor that is appealing to people. When you are gloomy, pessimistic or angry, you project a negative outlook that dispels others. No one wants to be near someone who is angry or hateful. When you are happy and content with yourself, you project a personality of self-confidence and social grace. For this reason, merit can indeed change your personality to be more pleasing and likeable.

Merit brings satisfaction and happiness to one who performs it. Notice how you feel a wave of joy when you make a charitable contribution or help someone in need or give money to the poor? Merit makes your heart full.

Merit protects you from physical dangers in precarious situations, such as during an accident or a natural disaster. It is also due to merit that you possess good physical appearance and strength.

## **NEVER LET MERIT RUN OUT**

Think of merit like money in your bank account. It can be accumulated as well as used up. It can grow if you keep putting new merit into your account. It can also be depleted if you keep using the existing merit but not adding new merit to it. To keep merit from running out you must keep rebuilding and accruing new merit. New merit can be accumulated through acts of good deed, such as charitable giving, helping others, fulfilling moral precepts, giving beneficial knowledge and service to others, and mental cultivation through meditation.

Having made merit in the past is like having put away money into your savings account over the years. These savings are handy at the times of need. The “past” encompasses distant past which includes all of your previous existences, and near past which is counted from the time you were born in this present lifetime right up to as recent as a few minutes ago.

## **HOW TO BUILD UP MERITS**

There are ten ways in which merits can be accumulated:

1. Charitable giving
2. Upholding moral precepts
3. Meditating
4. Receiving Dharma teaching
5. Giving Dharma knowledge
6. Helping others
7. Being respectful
8. Rejoicing in the merits of others

- 9. Extending merits to others
- 10. Cultivating Right View

## **GOOD KARMA VS. BAD KARMA**

Both good deeds and bad deeds are governed by the Law of Karma. You are responsible for your own actions, good or bad. Good deeds give rise to good karma—the cause of all good things that happen to you, and bad deeds give rise to bad karma—the cause of all bad things that happen to you. For whatever deeds you have done, you will bear the consequences. Each specific type of deed brings specific consequences. The result of your karma makes you who you are.

Here are some examples of cause and consequence according to the Law of Karma:

### ***Cause***

Not killing people or animals  
 Killing people or animals  
 Kindness to living beings  
 Cruelty to living beings  
 Being kind, loving  
 Being unkind, hateful  
 Being generous  
 Being stingy, selfish  
 Meditation, mental development  
 Intoxication

### ***Consequence***

Long life  
 Short life  
 Good health  
 Ill health  
 Beauty  
 Ugliness  
 Wealth, good fortune  
 Poverty, misfortune  
 Intelligence, wisdom  
 Ignorance, being stupid,  
 having mental illnesses

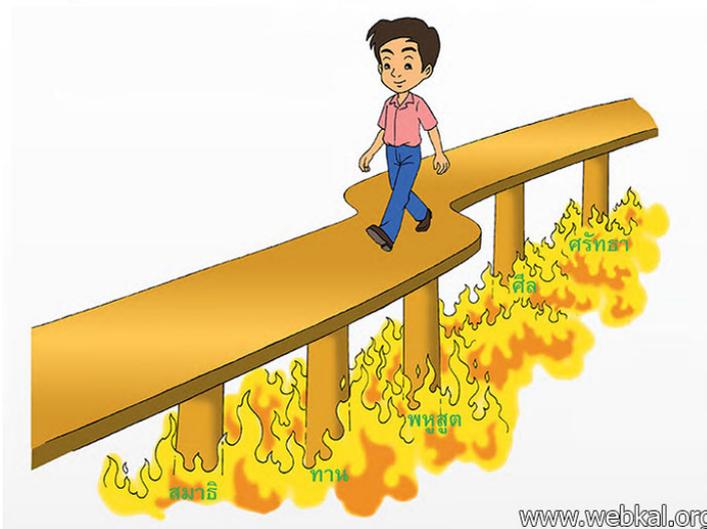
*You are what you have done.*

# WISDOM

# 6

## Establish Yourself in a Proper Way

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*A ship without a captain gets lost in the ocean.  
A life without a purpose finds no destination.*

What is your goal in life?

If you ask ten people, you may get ten different answers. Some want to be doctors. Others want to be movie stars, musicians, painters, football players, etc. Different people have different goals and aspirations. And, almost without exception, everyone wants to be rich and famous. But how many people are fully content when they get what they want? Being rich and famous doesn't guarantee happiness. There are many rich people in this world who are miserable.

Most of us don't have any idea why we are born and what our true purpose is in life. We are so preoccupied with making a living and raising a family that we think achieving material wealth and success is all that life is about. If this is the case, then our life is no different than that of a squirrel, a bird or a bee, whose preoccupation is to look for food from sunup to sundown. Is this all there is to life?

So what really is the true purpose of your life? Unless you come across Buddhism and benefit from the teachings of the Buddha, you may still be wandering around seeking the right answer. It is short-sighted for you to spend your entire life chasing after material success and worldly happiness without consideration for spiritual development that leads to freedom from suffering.

Whether or not you realize it, the ultimate purpose of one's life is to cultivate perfect virtues and to achieve spiritual attainment leading to Nirvana.

Once you know the true purpose of your life, you can plan your future accordingly. A wise person is cognizant of the fact that success comes in three levels: success in this life (material success), success in future lives (spiritual success), and the ultimate success (Nirvana).

## **SUCCESS IN THIS LIFE**

Self-sufficiency is the first step towards establishing yourself in a proper way and a means to reap benefits for the present life. Strive to make an earnest living and maintain a lifestyle that allows you to perform good deeds without obstacles. Avoid any professions that are illegal and unethical. Protect and preserve what you earn. Use your money wisely, don't incur any debts, and save some for the future. Avoid being frivolous and extravagant. Avoid any activities that lead to ruin, such as drinking alcohol or taking drugs, roaming around at inappropriate times, frequenting inappropriate places, gambling, associating with evil companions, and being lazy.

Until you're able to stand on your own two feet and support yourself financially without having to rely on others, you have not achieved success in this life.

## **SUCCESS IN FUTURE LIFE**

Life in this world is awfully short compared to life in the afterworld. Your goal after leaving this world is to end up in a happy realm and eventually reach Nirvana. Merit and demerit are the only things that you can take with you after you leave this world. Merit is your "fuel" for this happy journey and your ticket to success. However, this "fuel" can also run out unless you continually replenish it with new merits. Merit can be made abundant through performance of as many good deeds as possible.

If you strive to do only good deeds in this life, you will be assured of a happy realm in your future life. If you have done more bad deeds than good deeds in this life, you will be driven to the realm of suffering in your future life.

## **ULTIMATE SUCCESS**

All human beings are born with mental impurities consisting of greed, hatred and ignorance. As long as you possess defilements you will be bound to remain in the cycle of rebirth, which is full of dissatisfaction and suffering. Once you rid yourself of defilements, you will be liberated from this vicious cycle.

Overcoming defilements is not an easy task. To do so you must live a life of purity and cultivate virtues until these virtues are perfected. You must adopt Right View, uphold moral precepts, perform charitable giving, seek both worldly and spiritual knowledge, and purify your mind through meditation. With a mind that is refined and cultivated, you will be able to control the quality of your thinking, speech and

action. You will be well-equipped spiritually and be safe and peaceful in all situations. The virtues that you continue to build will eventually get you to your final goal of eternal happiness.

*You are your own sanctuary.  
Make it safe and secure.*

# WISDOM

## Acquire Proper Knowledge

# 7



*Knowledge is the weapon against ignorance.*

Be a learned person. The best security that one can have in this world is a reserve of knowledge, experience and ability. To succeed in life, one must equip oneself with the proper knowledge and skills to deal with the various issues and changing circumstances in life.

Be skilled in knowledge. Knowledge is something you learn from those who know—knowledge taught by your parents, your teachers, your mentors, or anyone who knows more than you. Individuals who are skilled in knowledge are called scholars. An ideal scholar is one who not only is wise in the acquisition of knowledge but also wise in

the application of that knowledge. Knowledge applied to a good use can be beneficial, but the same knowledge applied to a wrongful use can be detrimental. Knowledge in chemistry, for example, can be beneficial if it is used to develop a cure for cancer or heart disease. But knowledge in chemistry when used to produce heroine or bombs can be devastating.

Those who are interested only in academic learning but are lacking in moral behavior can never gain the love and respect of others. Knowledge in the hands of a fool can be a dangerous thing if he lacks ethical considerations. For this reason, moral education needs to go hand-in-hand with traditional education.

### **THREE TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE**

Knowledge comes in three forms:

- *Theoretical knowledge.* This includes knowledge learned from classrooms, lectures and text books.
- *Hands-on knowledge.* This is the knowledge gained from actual experience that has been evaluated and reflected upon, tested and applied. This type of knowledge is practical and useful to one's welfare. Even if you are the world's best professor, your learned knowledge can only reach this level.
- *Insight and wisdom.* This is a higher sort of knowledge that gives you understanding into deeper or more challenging truths. Such knowledge does not come from text books, but from consciousness and intuition gained through a mind that is refined and cultivated. It is a higher knowledge that enables you to probe deeper into the root of problems and allows you to find solutions. This kind of knowledge comes from a tranquil mind which is trained through meditation.

## COMPLETE KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge can be made perfect or complete if one possesses the following:

- *Knowledge in depth* – knowing deep into the sources and origins of matters according to worldly wisdom as well as spiritual wisdom.
- *Knowledge in breadth* – knowing a broad range of things that are useful for everyday life. For example, if you have studied science, you still need to know about the arts. Otherwise, you will not understand how to communicate emotions, feelings and ideas with others. You can be the best engineer in the world, but if you have no gift for communicating with people, you will be just a boring person in the eyes of others.
- *Thorough knowledge* – not only should you know your own narrow subject, but you should also know the connections it has with other subjects. For example, an architect should know something about engineering and structure; an accountant should know something about law and taxes; a landscape artist should know something about plants; an IT professional should have knowledge about various software and applications, etc. Knowledge of subjects related to your fields of work is necessary to have if you wish to excel in your particular work or industry.
- *Far-sighted knowledge* – knowing how one thing can lead to other things. Having the ability to speculate the future based on past patterns; for example, too much spending may lead to deficits; gambling may lead to crime; alcoholism may lead to liver failure, etc.

## **A LEARNED PERSON IS NOT NECESSARILY A WISE PERSON**

We call someone who is well-trained in knowledge a learned person or a scholar. Everyone can be a learned one, but not everyone can be smart or wise. Good education may make someone knowledgeable, but his knowledge may only be in theory. It takes more than education to make someone smart or wise. A wise person may not have the most formal education, but he knows how to use what he knows and apply to good use as well as to further his virtues. He is one who is smarter in the long run.

## **HOW TO BE A GOOD LEARNER**

He who is wise is one who learns from everyone. To be a successful learner you should have the ability to listen well, remember well, think well, and relate well. Laziness, drowsiness, childishness, doubts, vanity, lack of focus, lack of self-confidence, and lack of firmness of purpose are obstacles that impede learning.

Keep your mind alert and aware. Stay away from mind-altering substances such as drugs and alcohol. Give more importance to intellectual wisdom than material wealth or vanity. Don't be obsessed with appearance or spend your time uselessly. A mind is a terrible thing to waste.

## **KNOWLEDGE IS GOLDEN**

Obviously, everyone knows that it is better to be well-educated than to be uneducated, and to have a college degree is better than to have a high school diploma. That is why people go to school and spend many years of their lives training to become educated people. Good education is a ticket to career success.

Strive to acquire as much knowledge as you can. No one is too old to learn. The most deluded people are those who choose to stop learning or ignore what they already know. People who have a good education and knowledge have a better chance in life. They are more likely to succeed and prosper. Knowledge will afford them with better qualifications and an ability to lead others as well. People with good educational backgrounds are highly adaptable.

*Knowledge is your perpetual asset.  
No one can take this asset away from you.*

# WISDOM

Be Artistic

# 8



*A scholar is smart in learning; an artist is smart in doing.*

Many people confuse knowledge with ability. Knowledge is something you acquire through learning, but ability is the skill you gain through practice. Almost everybody can acquire knowledge, but not everyone can turn knowledge into good, practical use.

A professor may be an expert in the subjects that he teaches, but he may be completely helpless in the real world when he tries to put his knowledge into practice. Knowledge doesn't guarantee success. To succeed, you must know how to turn theoretical knowledge into practical use.

Be creative in whatever you do. Turn ordinary work into extraordinary performance, a masterpiece. Adopt an attitude that everything

you do must be 'better than best'. It is this attitude that makes an ordinary person extraordinary. This is artfulness in application.

### **BE BETTER THAN BEST**

We all have heard of Pele, Magic Johnson, and Tiger Woods. What made Pele so special in soccer, Magic Johnson in basketball, and Tiger Woods in golf?

They all have one thing in common: the attitude of wanting to be the best in their fields. To be the best, they must work harder and train harder than their competitors. They must master their skills and keep refining and perfecting them. This requires an uncompromising discipline and the determination to overcome all barriers. To be the best, you must think like the best, work like the best, and win like the best.

Just the skill of kicking a football, or shooting hoops, or hitting a golf ball (which is something everyone can do) can turn into mega fortunes for these champions. This is not a fluke. It is the result of their discipline, their artistry in what they do, and their unwavering determination for success. Even a game for fun can be made into a serious profession if one is artistic and skilled enough to make the difference.

### **ARTFULNESS IN APPLICATION – TURNING KNOWLEDGE INTO ABILITY**

The person who is artistic is one who knows how to apply knowledge into practical and beneficial use. There is a success story about a woman in Thailand who loved to cook. She enjoyed cooking so much that she started a small food stand as a hobby, selling street food to passerby. She mastered the art of her cooking so well that her little food stand soon became very popular. Customers from all around came to eat her food and the number of customers kept growing. Before long, her little food stand became a real restaurant.

Today, her restaurant is one of the most successful and well-known restaurants in Thailand, with several restaurant locations in Thailand and other countries—and it all began as a mere hobby. The love for cooking done with artistry has turned a little hobby into a major business enterprise.

## **WHAT CONSTITUTES ARTISTRY?**

Refinement and perfection that is put into the work, value that is added, creativity that is enhanced, and quality that stands out are factors that contribute to artistry. Also, for an artistic work to have a lasting impact on the public at large, it should be able to stand on its own merit without having to rely on exploitation of unwholesome emotions such as sensual desire, hatred or ill will.

## **ATTRIBUTES OF AN ARTISTIC PERSON**

If you want to transform your academic knowledge into artful application, the following qualities must be present:

- Believe in what you do. You have to feel good about what you do, or you won't do it with enthusiasm and confidence. It is more rewarding to choose a career that is moral and beneficial than one that is unethical or dishonorable.
- Not breaking good moral conduct. Avoid any activities that are indecent or cause harm or suffering to others.
- Avoid arrogance and boastfulness. No one wants to accept someone who is boastful as an apprentice. No one likes people who are arrogant. Arrogance will alienate you from your peers.
- Avoid laziness. If you have only knowledge but are too lazy to do anything with it, all you will end up with is knowledge and no performance. You must work hard to acquire, to improve upon, and to perfect your skills.

- Cultivate wisdom. Wisdom is the combination of knowledge, understanding and experience. Be observant. Seek out the good and useful characteristics of the things around you. Benefit from new knowledge, new techniques and new methods. Keep your eyes open for quicker, smarter, more efficient and more cost-effective ways of doing things.
- Apprentice yourself to an expert. Seek out a master in the field that you go after and apprentice with him or her. Learn the skills from the person.
- Cultivate your mind. Systematic thinking and observation can be developed through a mind that is well-trained. Meditation is the most effective way to refine and train the mind. Creativity comes to a mind that is bright and clear.
- Maintain good health. Don't bring unnecessary harm to your body or physical health. Without good health, your body and your mind will not function at full potential.

Think like an artist. Treat everything you do as if it's a work of art. Turn the mundane into the exceptional. Create a beauty out of everything you do.

## **BENEFITS**

By being artistic you will become more skillful than others in what you do. Your work will make the difference and will separate you from the ordinary. You will be sought after by others. Success in your career will be assured, and you will have the ability to make a good living. The higher standards that you set for your work can become an important contribution to the progress and culture of your society and the world.

*Anything worth doing is worth doing well.*

# WISDOM

## Be Well-Trained in Discipline

# 9



*Doing well by doing good.*

Discipline is a willpower and behavior that leads to goodness. There are two types of discipline that a person abides by: worldly discipline and spiritual discipline.

Worldly discipline incorporates such things as the law of a country, rules and regulations of an institution or a work place, and customs or traditions practiced in a community. The purpose of worldly discipline is to maintain uniformity and harmony in a society so that its people can live and function in a peaceful and orderly manner without violating the rights of one another.

Spiritual discipline incorporates moral codes of conduct, such as the Christian Ten Commandments, the Islamic Koran law, and the Buddhist Five Precepts.

## **PRECEPTS**

Buddhists develop self-discipline by following the codes of moral conduct known as Precepts. The Pali word for Precepts is 'sila', which means 'the norm'. Precepts are the norm that distinguishes men from savages or from animals.

Humans are expected to be civilized and kind in nature. Unlike animals, it is not the normal nature of humans to kill or to steal for food, or to be indiscriminate in their mating habits. On the other hand, it is the normal nature of (most) animals to fight or steal for food, and to mate indiscriminately in their reproduction processes. So, whenever a man kills, steals, or commits adultery, he is adopting an animal nature and degrading his human quality.

Precepts are the norm that guides a person to be civilized and righteous. To preserve the human quality, a person must observe the Precepts. Buddhist Precepts are divided into two groups, one for householders, and one for monastics.

## **DISCIPLINE FOR HOUSEHOLDERS**

The Buddha gave us a simple set of rules to follow, which consist of Ten Unwholesome Actions that should be avoided and Ten Wholesome Actions that should be practiced.

The Ten Unwholesome Actions, or bad actions to be avoided, are killing, stealing, adultery, lying, gossiping, unkind speech, idle chatter, thinking of taking possessions of others', vengefulness and having wrong view.

The Ten Wholesome Actions, or good actions to practice, are the opposite of the above. As long as we follow these rules we will be free from moral dangers.

The core practice for all Buddhist householders' moral conduct is the Five Precepts. For some Buddhists who wish to intensify self-purification, they practice the Eight Precepts, the expansion of the Five Precepts.

## **THE FIVE PRECEPTS**

The Five Precepts are the fundamental bedrock of all morality. They are the basic set of discipline advocated for every Buddhist and are intended to be kept on a daily basis. The Five Precepts consist of the following basic rules of practice:

1. Not killing living beings
2. Not stealing
3. Not committing sexual misconduct
4. Not lying
5. Not consuming alcohol or other intoxicating substances

By practicing the Five Precepts, you can prevent yourself from committing many kinds of wrongdoing which are the roots of suffering.

## **KARMIC CONSEQUENCES FOR VIOLATING THE FIVE PRECEPTS**

Not all killings are equal in the sense of karmic consequences. The killing of humans is the most serious violation and receives the worst retribution. As for the killing of animals, the degree of seriousness and the resulting retribution are based on the size of the animal (in

general, the larger the size the more serious the retribution), the usefulness of the animal, the amount of effort put into the killing, and the intention and cruelty involved in the killing.

Stealing is the act of taking possession of something without permission from the owner. Cheating, forgery, plagiarism, taking bribes, corruption, and fraud all fall under the category of stealing. The degree of seriousness of the offence and the resulting retribution are based on the value of the object (the higher the value the more serious the retribution), the size of the object, the debt of gratitude owed to the victim, the degree of the intention to steal, and the amount of effort put into the stealing.

Sexual misconduct includes adultery, engaging in sexual activities with a forbidden person (such as a monk, a nun, a blood relative, or an under-aged person), or any sexual acts that cause suffering or unhappiness to others. The degree of seriousness and the resulting retribution depend on the strength of intention, the amount of effort used, whether it is by force or by consent, and the debt of gratitude owed to the victim.

Lying is the act of speaking something that is not true. The degree of seriousness and the resulting retribution of lying depend on how damaging the lie is to the victim, the strength of intention behind the lie, the effort put into the act of lying, and the debt of gratitude owed to the victim.

Alcohol (beer, wine, whiskey) and any mind-altering substances, such as heroin, cocaine, marijuana, opium and tobacco, are all intoxicants that should be avoided. Mind-altering substances are harmful not only to your physical health but also to your spiritual well-being. They destroy your sense of good judgment and awareness. The mind is mankind's most valuable faculty. Doing anything to damage the quality of your mind is bringing danger upon yourself in the worst way. Alcoholism and drug abuse give rise to many other forms of misdeeds.

## THE EIGHT PRECEPTS

The Eight Precepts are intended to be kept by Buddhist householders during times of intensified training (especially on meditation retreats) or for self-purification on a periodic basis or during Buddhist holy days (observance days), at home or in a monastery. The goal is to cleanse the defiled mind, resulting in inner calm and joy. On this day, lay disciples and monks intensify their practice, deepen their knowledge, and express communal commitment through millennia-old acts of lay-monastic reciprocity.

The Eight Precepts consist of the following rules of training:

1. Not killing living beings
2. Not stealing
3. Not engaging in any sexual activities (even with own spouse)
4. Not lying
5. Not consuming alcohol or other intoxicating substances
6. Not taking meals between midday and dawn
7. Not singing, dancing, playing music, attending entertainment performances, wearing perfume, using cosmetics and decorative accessories, and to be immodest in the way of dress or behavior
8. Not indulging in indolent sleeping habits that may lead to sensuality or laziness (such as sleeping on high, soft, luxurious beds)

The purposes of the last three additional rules are to deter any sexual inclination which may impede one's ability to purify the mind.

To achieve superior self-discipline, a lay person is encouraged to keep the Five Precepts on a daily basis, the Eight Precepts on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, and meditate and listen to Dharma teachings on a regular basis.

## **DISCIPLINE FOR MONASTICS**

The aim for monastic practice is to overcome the weaknesses in one's character and to eradicate defilements. This is an extraordinary task that requires infinite wisdom and forbearance. Infinite wisdom comes from mindfulness that can only be acquired through intense self-discipline, total commitment and sacrifice.

A novice monk practices the Ten Precepts. A fully ordained monk practices 227 Precepts.

### **THE TEN PRECEPTS**

Ten Precepts consist of the following rules of training:

1. Not killing living beings
2. Not stealing
3. Not engaging in unchaste activities (sensuality, sexuality, lust).
4. Not lying
5. Not consuming alcohol and any intoxicating substances
6. Not taking meals between midday and dawn
7. Refraining from singing, dancing, playing music, or attending entertainment performances
8. Refraining from wearing perfume, cosmetics and decorative accessories
9. Refraining from indolent sitting and sleeping habits (sitting on highly cushioned chairs, or sleeping on luxurious, soft beds)
10. Refraining from accepting and dealing with money

These rules of training are observed by Buddhist novice monks on a daily basis.

## THE 227 PRECEPTS

In keeping with their aim to reach the end of defilements within the shortest possible time, a fully ordained Buddhist monk follows an intensive set of discipline known as the 227 Precepts, which are to be kept on a daily basis.

Monastic Discipline is divided into four components: restraint according to monastic conduct, restraint of the senses, purity of livelihood, and the practice of moderation (e.g., eat to live, not live to eat).

The purposes of monastic discipline are to establish good moral foundation for ordained monks, provide peace and happiness for the monastic community, protect monks from defilements, provide stability to the monkhood, gain faith and respect of the public, and to preserve the longevity of Buddhism.

*To succeed in this world and the next, one needs to embrace both worldly and spiritual disciplines.*

# WISDOM

Speak Kindly

# 10



*Hurt someone physically and the pain may last a day.  
Hurt someone verbally and the pain may last a lifetime.  
Such is the power of speech.*

The power of speech is indeed remarkable. Leaders of nations can talk their countries into war, or out of it, through the power of their speech. You can influence more people with words than with actions. Your speech can have the power to change someone's life. If you choose your speech correctly you will do good for yourself and others. Choose your speech wrongly, and you will bring hardship to everyone, including yourself.

In a moral sense, your speech has more potential to cause karmic consequences than does your physical action or thought. You can indeed do many more good deeds with your speech than with your actions; or if you make the mistake of doing evil, you can do much more evil with your speech than with your body. This is why the art of speaking is so important for you to master.

Verbal communication plays a big part in human development. Good communication skills are an important part of human relations. If you know how to communicate with people in a nice, pleasant, and useful manner, you will win more friends and make fewer enemies. It is important for you to know how to use your verbal communication in a way that is beneficial to yourself and to others. This is what pleasant speech is about.

### **WHAT IS PLEASANT SPEECH?**

For speech to be pleasant, it must have the quality of truth, politeness, kindness and usefulness, and should be spoken at the right place and at the right time. The words and manner of communication should be filtered to be decent, civilized and good before they are allowed to escape your lips. You should refrain from speech that can cause pain to others or create disharmony. These include lying, slander, malicious language, idle gossip, misrepresentation, and threat. The words spoken should be good and endearing in every aspect and from every viewpoint. They must benefit both the speaker and the listener.

### **WHEN NOT TO SPEAK**

Not everyone is receptive to your words even when they are expressed in a pleasant way. Some people will not open their hearts or their minds if they are egocentric, or are consumed by hatred or vengeance, or have a mental block on you or the subject you are speaking about. Trying to speak to this type of person is like playing flute to a water buffalo. They will turn a deaf ear on your conversation

no matter how beneficial. For verbal communication to be effective, the speaker, the listener and the subject under discussion must be compatible, and the speaker should know how to pick the right occasion to speak.

If you find yourself having to criticize or reprimand someone, do it in a tactful manner. Never criticize out of anger. Give praise before you criticize. One piece of criticism may require three pieces of praise to balance up the good feeling lost.

### **WHAT NOT TO SAY**

If you have nothing good to say, don't say it. Saying too much could put you in jeopardy. It is unwise to say something just for the sake of saying it without consideration for substance and credibility. This manner of speech makes you appear unintelligent.

There are some topics that should be avoided even if they may sound nice to the listener. These includes topics that are true but not useful or are unkind (Joe takes bribes; Jane has an affair); topics that are truthful and useful but offensive to the person; topics that are not true, not useful and are unkind; and topics that are true and pleasing to the person but not useful.

A meaningful speech is one that is true, useful and kind.

### **HOW TO BE AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR**

It is good practice to look for the good in others instead of finding faults. You may notice the weaknesses of others; take notice of them but don't use them as the subject of conversation. If you are always immersed in the good deeds of others you will develop the habit of seeing the positive side of people instead of the negative. We feel warm and secure around a person who is nice, polite, and truthful. It is not hard to see why people with pleasant speech succeed in life more than those without.

People in leadership roles, especially those in politics, should be well-trained in verbal communication. Here are some beneficial guidelines:

- Accept the viewpoints of others. Be a good listener. Don't reject others' viewpoints prematurely. Give them the chance to say what they have to say. You can form your response more effectively if you know how the other person thinks.
- When it is your turn to speak, speak in a way that is clear and compelling, the way that makes the people want to listen. Solidify your speech and stay on course. Don't go astray or deviate from the main issues.
- Know your subject well and stay within its framework. Remember the facts and details of everything you have to say, and have a good understanding of the details.
- Concentrate on issues that are useful and beneficial. Cut out issues that are frivolous.
- Avoid arguments and conflicts.

## **BENEFITS**

A person who is truthful and has a habit of speaking kindly will enjoy many auspicious things in life. His words will be believed and respected, and his presence welcomed. He will do well in anything that has to do with verbal communication (e.g., salesmanship, public relations, public speaking). Generosity and affection from others will be extended to him, making his path to success easier to be attained.

*Your speech has the power to affect people's lives.  
Choose it wisely.*

# WISDOM

## Support Your Parents

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# 11



*“If we were to use Mount Sumeru as our pen and all the water of the ocean as our ink, even if we were to write the virtues of our parents in the sky until there were no place left to write, the mountain were worn down and the seawater dry, we would still not have reached an end of our parents’ virtues.” .... The Buddha*

Of all the love and kindness in this world, nothing could exceed the love and kindness parents have for their children. Parents will do everything in their power to make their children healthy, happy, smart and successful, even if they have to work themselves to

death. Poor parents would rather put themselves in debt than to see their children suffer. Even the toughest and most insensitive man and woman will manage to find the most tender and unlimited love for their own children.

Your parents are the most venerable human beings worthy of your love, respect and gratitude. There is no one in this world you owe your debt of gratitude to as much as your parents. It is your duty and obligation to look after them and care for them the best way you know how. Taking care of your parents is the most fundamental virtue that a person must perform. If you meet someone who neglects his parents, you can be sure that he is unlikely to have any interest in helping anyone else. A person without gratitude is not a good person.

### **WHAT HAVE YOUR PARENTS DONE FOR YOU?**

First and foremost, your parents are responsible for having given you the gift of life. Don't go thinking that to be born human is an automatic entitlement. For every human born to this world, there are thousands that are born as animals, fish or insects. Look around your surroundings and you will be clear on this fact. To be born human is a rare privilege indeed. You are fortunate to have been brought into this world by your parents. This virtue alone is worthy of your deepest gratitude.

Parents are your saints and guardian angels. They are the first to protect and care for you before anyone else. They provide you with food, shelter, clothing, education and medical care, and they support you in every way they know how. Most parents will sacrifice everything for the sake of their children.

In addition to giving you life, protecting you from dangers, caring for you, and bringing you up in this world, your parents are also your first teachers. They teach you everything, from learning how to walk, talk, bathe, and eat, to having good manners and good behaviors.

If you compare man with animals, there is no comparable animal which takes so long or expends so much effort in the care of its young as a human. Keeping you healthy and educated is not the only responsibility your parents have to shoulder. Even your own basis of moral understanding has to come from your parents. They keep an eye on your friends, find you the best schools, choose the best books for you to read, and correct you when you do unacceptable things. They teach you the virtues of life and cultivate you to become a good and responsible person. Even after you have become adults with independent means, your parents are still there for you to give moral support and guidance. At the time of their death, they make sure that their accumulated wealth is passed on to you.

### **DUTIES TO YOUR PARENTS**

It is said that a mother can take care of ten children, but sometimes ten children can't take care of one mother. Are you one of these children?

All parents expect their children to be good human beings and to succeed in life. They expect their children to look after them in their old age, perpetuate the good work for society they have already started, carry on the good name of the family, use the family wealth in a responsible way, and perform funeral rites for them when they pass away. It is your noble duty to fulfill their expectations.

Aside from taking good care of your parents, you must behave morally towards them, show good manners and respect to them, make them happy and avoid things that you know annoy them. If you can alleviate stressful duties which might fall upon your parents, you can help them enjoy the last years of their life better. Help preserve their well-earned dignity.

On the spiritual side, you should see to it that your parents lead a moral life. Inspire them to have faith in the Triple Gem, the three things that Buddhists take refuge in and look toward for guidance, consisting of

the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha (community of Buddhist monks and nuns). Encourage them to practice generosity, uphold moral precepts, listen to Dharma teachings, and cultivate their mind through meditation. This way, your parents can reap benefits in this life as well as the next.

Apart from taking responsibility for organizing a fitting funeral, Buddhist sons and daughters will do meritorious deeds regularly and dedicate the merit from their good deeds for the benefit of their deceased parents. Also, in many Buddhist countries, it is a tradition for a son to ordain temporarily as a monk (age twenty or older) or a novice monk (younger than twenty) as a way to repay the debt of gratitude to his parents. This is considered the highest virtue a son can perform for his parents.

Remember, you are a reflection of your parents and the way they have brought you up. It is your duty to conduct your life in a proper and honorable way worthy of their good name.

## **VIRTUE OF GRATITUDE**

Acts of gratitude towards parents are the highest virtue a son or daughter can perform. Gratitude to parents is cherished by all religions. Your acts of gratitude towards your parents will bring auspicious things to your life. You will gain respect and admiration from those around you. Your good examples will be noticed by your children and will form praiseworthy behaviors for them. You will be the pride of your family. You will enjoy a happy and harmonious life for yourself and your family. At the time of death you will be assured of a heavenly destination.

*Ones who are grateful to their parents, who take good care of them, who fulfill their duties toward them, are protected by divine beings.*

# WISDOM 12

## Care for Your Children

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*The ultimate satisfaction for any parent  
is to bring good offspring into the world.*

Of all the things that bring satisfaction to people, nothing beats having brought up a son or daughter to do good deeds in our place and to continue our family legacy. On the other hand, there is nothing more heartbreaking than bringing up a son or daughter who makes a mess out of his or her life.

## **PHYSICAL AND MENTAL PREPARATION**

Bringing up a good child requires a great deal of patience, hard work and sacrifice. In general, it is thought that physical preparation alone is enough for bringing a healthy child into the world. Indeed, a child born to parents who are physically fit will be fit physically. However, if they are to be mentally and spiritually balanced too, parents must be suitably prepared in the mental and spiritual qualities as well.

The knowledge which Buddhism gives to would-be parents goes far beyond the frontiers of modern medical science. According to Buddhist teachings, each and every creature has its own individual karma—storehouse of potential results of good and bad deeds performed in the past. In the rebirth cycle, karma acts as a selective process that matches the soon-to-be-born being to the parents who possess similar or compatible karma type. For example, an unborn soul who has been a drunk or an intoxicated human in its previous life will be driven by its negative karma to be born into the family of parents who are alcoholics or intoxicated. A child with this kind of karma is likely to be mentally ill, unintelligent or developmentally disabled. This is one good reason why an expecting mother should never drink alcohol.

If the would-be parents wish to give birth to a high-quality human being, they should make themselves sound physically, mentally and verbally, and to cultivate their mind through regular practice of meditation.

## **FROM CONCEPTION TO BIRTH**

Care of the unborn child from the time of conception is an implicit part of the art of motherhood. During pregnancy, the mother assumes the most important role in the care of the unborn child. She has to take good care of herself physically and mentally throughout forty weeks of pregnancy. She should undergo regular

medical checkups; watch what she eats; avoid illicit drugs, alcohol and tobacco; and keep a good mental attitude.

Modern medical science has shown that the embryo is sensitive to its mother's moods and emotions. Indeed, during the time of being carried in the womb, the child is in the process of character formation. The art of having a good child is acknowledged these days not to be merely a matter of genetic engineering but of the suitability of the intra-uterine environment created by the mother during pregnancy. Consideration of physical health alone is not sufficient. The mother needs to be spiritually healthy as well so that the child to be born is perfect in mind as well as body.

It is important to begin raising one's child from the time of conception. For this reason, the pregnant mother should attempt to keep her mind cheerful, stable and undisturbed during the time of pregnancy. The child whose mother is thinking positively and is cheerful during pregnancy is likely to be a cheerful and positive-thinking person like her. If a child is born into the womb of a mother who often quarrels, the child is likely to be morose and non-cheerful by nature.

Parents who are careful and wise in the support of their child during pregnancy will gain a child who is altruistic and intelligent. In addition, the care taken by the mother during pregnancy will be transformed into the child's love and respect for his parents.

Even the attitude of the father has an influence on the well-being of the baby in the womb of his wife. The father will have to work harder when his wife is pregnant, helping her with the heavy work she would normally do herself, and being careful not to create situations that are going to irritate or upset the serenity of the mother.

## FROM BIRTH TO ADULTHOOD

There are five primary duties for the parents in bringing up a child:

- Not allowing your child to do anything evil
- Teaching your child to be established in virtue
- Seeing that your child is properly educated
- Guiding your child in the selection of a spouse
- Passing on your inheritance to your child

### ***Not allowing your child to do anything evil***

Whether someone turns out to be a good or bad person depends greatly on his or her environment and the teachings he or she receives. The first and most immediate environment to the child is his or her parents. Thus the first thing you must do in order to teach your child to do no evil is to avoid speaking or doing anything evil in the presence of the child. Don't allow objects for doing evil, such as weapons, pornographic material, liquor bottles, beer or wine brewing kits, and gambling tables into the house right from the time your first child is born. Set good examples by letting your child get used to seeing your constant acts of good deeds, such as charitable giving, upholding moral precepts, chanting and meditation.

Develop a close relationship with your child and be well-acquainted even with the child's friends. This is to make sure that your child is not associating with friends who are going to influence him or her in a damaging way. One good practice is to have a family tradition of eating together at least once a day where all the family members come together. This will give you the opportunity to notice the signs of guilt on your child's face when the child has done something wrong. The first time the child does something wrong his or her expression of guilt will be most noticeable.

Some children are easy to teach, but there are also some who will take no notice of you no matter how many times you warn them of their misbehavior. In this case they may need to be reprimanded in a harsh way. Otherwise, they will be spoiled and will continue the bad habit as adults. However, if you need to punish your child you should give consideration to what long-term effects the punishment will have on the child. The proper approach is to teach the child the shame of wrongdoing and the fear of the consequences of doing wrong. This will serve as a moral check-and-balance for the child.

### ***Teaching your child to be established in virtue***

The requisites needed for the development of a child's good character are knowledge and understanding of spiritual values. Spiritual insight needs to come through direct personal experience. It is the job of the parents to make the right spiritual experience available to the child and to stimulate the child's interest and participation in moral education. Parents should expose their child to the concept of Right View from an early age. They should also teach the basic behaviors for table manners, sleeping habit and work discipline. From its early years, a child should be expected to make a contribution to the work of the household. If the child is waited upon hand and foot and has too much time on his or her hands, the child may end up being an irresponsible and weak person.

### ***Seeing that your child is properly educated***

Education is the gateway to knowledge and wisdom for your child. If a child has the chance for a full education his success in life is reasonably assured. Thus parents should instill the love of education and reading in the child. However, a child cannot live by education alone. He or she must have time to play and be exposed to an experience out of life and society in order to fully develop into well-rounded capabilities.

You should also encourage your child to take an interest in reading books on subjects that are beneficial. It is up to you to find ways to make useful books interesting to the child. One technique is to get the child to read such books aloud to you.

You should notice if your child is gifted in any particular way or has any special interest. Support him in the things that take his interest. This will help make his success come easier. Choosing to do the things that one enjoys is a form of happiness.

Choose good teachers for your child. Let him study both secular and spiritual subjects. Secular subjects help your child develop knowledge and skills to cope with worldly matters. Spiritual knowledge helps him to be resilient towards problems and obstacles, and makes him a stronger person. Introduce moral precepts to your child from an early age.

It may seem trivial or overzealous to worry about so many aspects of a child's environment and development. But it should be noted that a child left to his own ways has a slim chance of developing into a well-balanced adult. Just as a child left alone will choose junk food rather than a nutritious one, a child left to choose his own sources of knowledge without any guidelines may develop a flawed character.

### ***Guiding your child's marriage***

The happiness of a married life is miniscule when it is compared to the complexity and suffering that family life brings. Marriage, unfortunately, comes with great responsibilities, challenges, and even hardship. A young person with little life experience is unaware of this challenge and is vulnerable to making mistakes when choosing a life partner. It is helpful for parents to make their child aware of the burden and hardship associated with a family life, and to guide him or her on how to choose the right partner.

The role of parents in being involved in the selection of spouses for their children is seen as an unnecessary intervention by many modern societies. But the choice of a marriage partner is a very serious decision to make, and ideally, should be assisted by someone with a great deal of worldly experience.

Young people in love tend to see the world through rose-tinted spectacles. They are ruled by feeling and emotion rather than wisdom. A wrong choice of a marriage partner can ruin one's life and one's family. Divorces and broken families are so commonplace in our current societies. This is why proper guidance and advice from parents are necessary.

### ***Passing on inheritance to your child***

It is hardly surprising that the parent-child relationship in the western countries is lacking in generosity. This could be contributed to the fact that parents don't want to become a burden to their children. This attitude gives rise to the value in society where sons and daughters are not expected to look after their parents in the parents' old age, and in turn, they too should also not be expected to come asking for money from the parents after they have become adults. Another reason many children never considered looking after their parents in their old age is because they never saw their parents look after their grandparents.

By contrast, parents in most Buddhist countries have an unerring sense of generosity towards their offspring regardless of the offspring's age, marital status and position. These parents will never turn their offspring away empty-handed.

Looking after their parents when those parents are old also gives some meaning to the parental duty of passing on their legacy to their children before they die. Thus, an important way of training one's children to look after their parents in old age is to let the children

see their parents taking care of their grandparents. This experience will help them be better sons and daughters worthy of receiving inheritance.

## **TIPS ON RAISING CHILDREN THE RIGHT WAY**

Here are some practical guidelines:

- Give love and warmth to your child. No matter how busy you are you must find personal time to spend with your child.
- Love your child but don't spoil the child. Don't let too much love get in the way of discipline.
- Don't overlook your duty of being a teacher to your child.
- Be flexible and lenient in your relationship with your child.
- Reprimand your child when the child does something wrong, but don't do it with anger. Praise the child when the child does something right. Give encouragement.
- Train your child to work at an early age. Don't let the child sit idle or waste time. Don't help the child do what a child of his or her age is able to do, or the child will be weak and helpless. Develop self-confidence in the child. Teach the child self-reliance.
- Give your child the knowledge of Dharma. Food, clothing, shelter and medicine are not enough to raise your child; you should also train your child in moral values.

*The first and most immediate environment to a child is his parents.  
Make this environment worthy of a good child.*

# WISDOM 13

## Cherish Your Spouse

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*A broken marriage can turn the best of lovers  
into the worst of enemies.*

For Westerners, marriage has traditionally been portrayed as the high point of happiness in life. Most people believe that a person's life is not complete until he or she is married. The average person is unable to resist the temptation of having a husband or a wife, but the hard part is what to do to keep one's married life going well so that the marriage can be long-lasting.

The joy of marriage is miniscule and short-lived when compared to the suffering that a person may endure in married life. This may

sound like a gloomy view toward marriage, but examples of broken marriages and broken families are too common to be ignored. Most people realize this negative aspect of marriage only when they are already married and find themselves saddled for the rest of their lives with the more detestable side of their partner. When a marriage is broken, everyone in the family suffers, especially the children. We have a responsibility to preserve the stability of our marriage and to provide a happy home for our family.

Buddhism encourages a spiritual aim in life. Life as a couple always leads to compromises in the intensity to which one can cultivate ultimate peace and happiness and the freedom to follow one's spiritual goal. Buddhism does not decry marriage, but it does not support sexual relations between partners who take no responsibility for one another. Buddhism prohibits abortion but does not prohibit contraception.

## **SEVEN TYPES OF SPOUSE**

Finding the right marriage partner is not an easy task. There are seven types of spouse identified by the Buddha. If you are already married, ask yourself which of the following types you have worked yourself into.

1. *A spouse like an enemy.* Such a spouse is partial to violence and brutality. There is no sympathy, compassion or gratitude toward the partner. Only after they have been together for a while does the true personality of the partner manifest itself. Marrying to such a spouse is like living with an enemy.
2. *A spouse like a robber.* This spouse is a reckless spender who has no sense of responsibility and accountability when it comes to your money. He or she will drain away your wealth or even run up debts for you to repay. Marrying to such a spouse is like living with a robber.

3. *A spouse like a boss.* This spouse treats you like an inferior subject and acts like a boss to you. He or she will belittle you in front of others without regards for your honor, dignity and feelings. It's hard to find happiness in such an environment.
4. *A spouse like a mother.* This is the best kind of spouse to have. The love and compassion from this spouse is unconditional. No matter what position in life you may find yourself in, positive or unfortunate, rich or poor, healthy or sick, this spouse will stand by you and will look after you with the same care as a mother would look after her own child.
5. *A spouse like a younger sibling.* This is also a good kind of spouse. This spouse acts like a younger sibling to you and look up to you as an elder brother or sister. He or she will be loyal and loving to you like brother and sister. Relationship with such a partner will be good.
6. *A spouse like a friend.* This type of couple usually began their relationship as friends or classmates. They have many things in common and are compatible with each other in values, belief systems and intellect. Because of this commonality and good understanding of each other, the two of you will get along well and will have a harmonious marriage.
7. *A spouse like a servant.* This type of spouse tends to behave like a servant to you and will allow himself or herself to be dominated by you. This could be due to inferior education, background or status. This spouse is a faithful type who will perform his or her duty as a good spouse, and will not harbor resentment even after being mistreated.

Living together with the first three types of couple is like being in hell while you are still alive. Because of all the terrible things that the husband and wife have done to each other, the bad karma they have created for themselves will almost certainly drive them into an unhappy state after they pass away.

## HOW TO CULTIVATE A LASTING MARRIAGE

Conflicts cannot be avoided in a marriage. But it helps if the couple communicates and deals with each other through rationality and understanding instead of emotion. Be forgiving. Don't be overly stubborn or unwilling to compromise.

An ideal couple should be compatible in their ways of thinking. They should have similar belief systems, moral values, intellect and wisdom. To ensure a lasting marriage, the husband and wife should embrace the following practices:

- *Sharing.* Be generous to one another. The incomes of both husband and wife should be combined and shared by the family, not separated. The husband and wife should share both the good and the bad. Without sharing life is futile like a desert.
- *Endearing speech.* Speak to one another with kind words. Even criticism should be given in a way that doesn't hurt the other's feelings. Speak to each other nicely, the same way it was done during dating. Give moral support and encouragement instead of blame. Bring out the best of each other instead of talking down.
- *Being useful to one another.* When a conflict arises in the marriage, there is a great temptation to put all the blame on the other partner instead of taking mutual responsibility. Look for the goodness of one another instead of finding fault. Share knowledge and wisdom with each other. Seek the wisdom of Dharma. If both are sensitive to the virtue of Dharma, they will tend to deal with the problem in a more compassionate way.
- *Behaving correctly according to one's role and responsibility.* Know each other's role and responsibility within and outside the family and perform them accordingly. Focus on positivity and good feelings rather than negativity. Be willing to make sacrifices for the sake of harmony and happiness in the family.

## DUTIES OF A HUSBAND TO HIS WIFE

- *To show her respect.* Once a man is married he should be willing to show his wife off in public instead of keeping her in secret. The marriage should be legally registered. Avoid criticizing the wife in public or in front of the children. Respect her as a person and give her freedom in her personal life. Be happy to let her spend time with her friends and relatives.
- *To not look down on her.* A husband should never look down upon his wife, even if she may come from a lower social standing or educational background. He should respect her opinion, and consult her in matters that relate to the household. He should never abuse her physically or mentally.
- *To be faithful.* A virtuous husband should never be unfaithful to his wife. He should never involve in adultery or extra-marital love affair. Adultery brings down the reputation and honor of the family. It is the biggest cause of divorce.
- *To give her authority in managing the household.* The husband should give his wife the responsibility as well as authority in looking after the household. He should not interfere with how she manages the kitchen or the household (except in the cases where the wife is incapable or lacks good judgment).
- *To bring gifts to her from time to time.* It is the nature of a woman to be particular about beauty and dress. Gifts of clothing or jewelry from the husband bring fresh air to the marriage. They can improve the relationship between the couple. Such gestures can even help mend a damaged marriage.

## DUTIES OF A WIFE TO HER HUSBAND

- *Take good care of the household.* Keep the house nice, clean, orderly and peaceful. Make the house a happy, cozy place—a “home-sweet-home”. Make the food palatable and nourishing. Look after the children physically and mentally.

- *Take good care of the in-laws.* Treat the in-laws and relatives of the husband with generosity and respect. Speak to them with endearing speech and kind words. Help them as often as you can.
- *Not to be unfaithful.* Be true and loyal to your husband. Do not engage in adultery or an extra-marital love affair.
- *Take good care of the family's wealth.* Spend money wisely. Don't be extravagant or overly stingy. (This practice should be observed by both husband and wife.)
- *Be diligent. Don't spend time uselessly.* See to it that the duties for the household are carried out.

### **AN ANCIENT ADVICE TO A NEW BRIDE**

On the day of Visaka's wedding (a legendary benefactor of the Buddha), her millionaire father, Dhananjaya, gave her the following ten-point advice on how to be a good wife:

1. *Don't let the fire inside go outside* – don't show your dirty laundry in public; keep the affairs of the family within the household.
2. *Don't let the fire outside come inside* – don't bring problems or gossips from outside into the house.
3. *Give to those who give to us* – help those who have helped you in the past.
4. *Don't give to those who don't give to us* – don't lend money or belongings to people who refused to help you in the past even though it was within their capacity to do so.
5. *Whether they give to us or not, give to them anyway* – whether they have helped you in the past or not, if they are your relatives and have fallen on hard times, you should help them.

6. *Sit with peace* – a wife should know a relative level of respect due to others; for example, it is inappropriate to sit in a position that shows lack of respect to the husband's parents.
7. *Eat with peace* – make sure the meals served to your family are nutritious; provide food for the in-laws with special care.
8. *Sleep with peace* – see to it that the sleeping place of everyone in the family is restful; make sure the work gets done before going to bed; be the first to get up and the last to retire.
9. *Preserve the fire* – “fire” in this case refers to anger; if the in-laws or the husband is in an angry mood, keep your silence and don't talk back at them; let the anger calm down before you attempt to explain your position.
10. *Respect the angels* – “angels” in this case refer to the parents of the husband. Treat the in-laws with respect.

A successful marriage depends on mutual affection, respect and support for one another.

*An ideal spouse is one with compatible ways of thinking and belief systems.*

# WISDOM 14

## Don't Leave Your Work Undone

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*A winner always gets things done.*

*A loser never finishes anything.*

Some people never fail to deliver work on time; others are always behind schedule. Why?

It is because of procrastination. Procrastination is the biggest reason why things don't get done. People procrastinate for a number of reasons. But whatever the reasons, procrastination will limit your ability to achieve success in any undertaking. Even if you are someone who has the best of education and experience, you will make no impact on your work if you never get around to doing it.

Some people consistently produce work of superior quality; others always end up with shoddy work. What makes them different?

Attitude is one factor. Self-respect is another. If you have the attitude that whatever you do must be better than best, and you have a good reputation to keep up to, you would never let a shoddy work come out of your production.

## FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF SUCCESS

For a task to be successful the following ingredients must be present:

- **Inspiration** – to have enthusiasm and love for one's work. You have to like what you do in order to do it well. Find out what suits your sentiment. If you are excited about your work you will not mind working long hours or staying late. No one has to motivate you to do what you enjoy doing. In this case, work is like play or therapy. One of the reasons many people don't thrive in their work is because they are trapped in the work that they don't enjoy. If you have to drag yourself to go to work every day, maybe it's time to make a change.
- **Effort** – industry, diligence, patience, commitment, endurance, willingness to work hard and to never give up. The harder you work the easier it becomes, and the "luckier" you get. The reason a gold miner finally hits gold is because he keeps digging and never quits. If you work hard you will eventually succeed. The opposite of effort is laziness. Lazy people will make excuses to avoid work—too hot, too cold, too early, too late, too hungry, too full, too tired, too sleepy, etc. Laziness is an obstacle that blocks success. You will never find lazy people among those who are successful.

- **Attention** – concentration, mindfulness, consciousness, alertness, attentiveness, awareness, consideration, and care. Be alert, aware and awake. Focus on the task at hand. Concentrate on the work you do and don't get distracted. Mistakes are made when people are not paying attention. Accidents happen when you are careless.
- **Examination** – understanding, thoughtfulness, observation, investigation, analysis and evaluation.

Develop the ability to observe, analyze, evaluate, and apply with intelligence. Work smart. Look for better and more efficient ways of doing things. Examine and evaluate your own performance. Strive for better results and productivity.

## **SUCCESS IN A WORKPLACE**

Work gets done faster and with better results when employers and employees work in synchrony.

A capable employer should know the abilities as well as the limitations of his employees. Work assignments and compensations should be given according to the employee's ability and performance. Employees should have access to good welfare and days off. Bonuses and rewards should be made available for jobs well done. Employees will perform better if they are treated well.

As for the part of the employee, he or she should make efforts to arrive at work early and leave late. A good employee is one who is honest, hardworking, who produces good results, and who speaks well of his or her employer. He or she should strive for excellence in his or her work and constantly seek to improve his or her performance.

Good harmony and profits come to a workplace where employers and employees work well together.

## **GETTING THINGS DONE**

The habit of getting things done well and on time will make you a winner in everything you do. You'll gain a good reputation, and your work will be sought after by others. As a result, you'll be successful in your profession and able to generate wealth with ease. Your good discipline and habit will become beneficial examples for your family and everyone around you.

*Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.  
If you have something to do, do it now.*

# WISDOM

Be Generous

# 15



*Generosity is the beginning point of all goodness.  
It is a weapon against greed.*

They say poverty is the source of many miseries. When you're poor, it is hard to think of anything but survival. Poverty deprives individuals of the ability to fully perform good deeds. Poverty may even compel someone to violate moral precepts in order to survive—such as killing animals for food, stealing money to buy medicines, lying to get out of trouble, and so on.

According to the Law of Karma, if we provide for the happiness of others through our generosity, we will in turn be provided for in our

own happiness and convenience. Generosity is the stepping stone that gets us out of poverty. The more we give, the more we will receive according to this Law.

One might argue that this concept is contradictory to practical logic. How can one be expected to be generous when one has nothing to give? This may be true if merit is measured by monetary value of the object of giving alone. But this is not the way it works. The degree of merit gained also has to do with the purity of intention, the amount of effort given, and the worth of the gift relative to the financial condition of the giver. A gift of \$10 from a poor farmer when done with the purity of kindness and strength of intention could be worth more in merit than a \$100 from a rich man with lesser purity and intention.

## **WHAT TO GIVE**

Giving can be in material forms, such as money, food and clothing; or in non-material forms, such as charitable services, Dharma knowledge, and caring for someone. Forgiveness is also a form of charity.

Not all objects of giving produces the same merit result. Giving food to a person gains greater merit than giving to an animal. Giving help to a virtuous person produces greater merit than giving help to a dishonest person. Giving in hope of getting something in return, giving out of fear, giving to procure future favors, or giving to gain popularity are the forms of giving that produce limited merit. Giving Dharma knowledge is considered the most meritorious form of giving. The wisdom of Dharma helps a person conduct life in the most beneficial way. Unlike other forms of gift which can break down or reduce in value, Dharma is a spiritual wealth that is durable and remains with the person indefinitely.

The most common objects worthy of giving are the four basic necessities, namely, food, shelter, clothing and medicine. Objects

that are detrimental to one's physical and mental wellbeing are to be avoided. These include all intoxicants, weapons, poisons, pornographic materials, sexual companions, and certain forms of entertainment that corrupt the quality of mind.

## HOW TO GIVE

Not all giving is equal in benefit. Maximum merits are gained when the following factors are present:

- *The object is pure.* The object of giving must be obtained through honest means (not from stealing, cheating or corruption).
- *The intention is pure.* Giving for the sake of giving or generosity, not to show off or gain favor.
- *The recipient is pure.* Giving a donation to a holy man or a person of virtue gains more merit than giving to a criminal; giving food to a human being gains greater merit than giving to an animal.
- *The giver is pure.* The more purity of mind and conduct the giver possesses, the more merit he or she will gain.

To reap maximum benefits the act of giving has to be performed wholeheartedly with pure intention, not reluctantly or with regret. The giver should be in a state of mind that is filled with joy, before, during and after the giving. While performing almsgiving, it is beneficial to make a wish or resolution as a way to focus your mind on reaching your desirable goals, such as good health, good wealth, happiness, and freedom from defilements. When the merit gives its fruit it will be in the way that fulfills the wish. Another way of gaining merit is to rejoice in other people's meritorious deeds. This is a way of expressing appreciation and encouragement to doers of good deeds.

The following are examples of karmic fruits of merit from giving:

<b><i>What you give</i></b>	<b><i>What you get</i></b>
Food	long life, good health, physical strength
Clothing	good complexion, beauty, good status
Shelter	good living condition, nice home
Knowledge	intelligence, wisdom
Life (setting animals free)	long life, freedom from illness
Forgiveness	kindness from others

### **WHY SHOULD YOU GIVE?**

Generosity is the foundation of goodness in the human race. It fosters loving-kindness, sympathy and compassion. The practice of generosity helps a person to be free from attachment, greed, selfishness, jealousy and ill will. It clears the way for doing other forms of virtue with ease. If more people were accustomed to giving there would be less cheating, stealing, robbery and crime in our societies.

The merit resulting from giving is a force that attracts wealth. The more you give the more wealth you attract. This is an established belief according to the Law of Karma.

*No matter how many material possessions  
you may have accumulated,  
you can take none of them with you after you leave this world.*

# WISDOM 16

## Be Righteous in Conduct

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*Though one should conquer a million men in the battlefield, yet he, indeed, is the noblest victor who has conquered himself.*

Freedom from suffering is the ultimate goal of all Buddhists. All teachings of the Buddha lead to this goal. Buddhism encourages self-reliance and self-liberation instead of relying on a higher being to take us there. Whether you will have success or failure, it depends on your own actions, not by the will of a higher being or anyone else.

All actions, good or bad, begin with the mind. The mind is the origin of all thoughts. It is the mind that governs your speech and action. A

positive state of mind gives rise to good thoughts, good speech and good conduct. Ill-will, false speech and bad actions are all caused by the state of mind that is defiled. To control our behavior we must first control our mind.

## **PURIFICATION**

Purification in Buddhism is rather unique in comparison with other religions. In Christianity, if a Catholic breaks a commandment, he is required by his religion to confess to a priest in church. In that way he can absolve his sins. In Hinduism, it is believed that they can rinse away their sins by bathing in the Ganges River on full moon days.

Buddhists don't believe that 'sin' is something that can be washed away, forgiven, or removed through a religious ritual. You can wash your mouth out a hundred times a day, but it doesn't get rid of the evil effects of the bad speech that comes from your mouth. You can wash yourself in the river a hundred times a day, but it doesn't get rid of the evil effects of the bad actions your body has done. You can confess as many times as you want, but it doesn't remove the pain from the wounds you have inflicted upon your victims.

Buddhists believe that 'sin' is caused by defilements in the mind which lead to bad deeds. The means for purification, therefore, has to begin with cleansing the mind from all defilements. Although you can't wash away the effect of your 'sin', or bad karma, you can dilute or lighten its effect through performance of good deeds. Start your life afresh by doing as many good deeds as you can and avoid committing anymore bad deeds. The positive results of the new good deeds that you do (good karma) will override the negative results of the bad deeds (bad karma) that you have done in the past. In other words, the negative energy is neutralized by the positive energy.

To explain this point with an analogy, imagine that ‘sin’ (bad karma) is salt, and ‘merit’ (good karma) is water. Both the salt (sin) and the water (merit) are mixed together in a container—just as our lives contain both sin and merit. The more fresh water you add, the less salty the water will taste. If you add enough fresh water to the container the salty taste will disappear altogether. Is the salt still there? The answer is yes, but it has been diluted to the point where you can’t taste it anymore. In other words, the more good deeds you perform the less bad karmic consequence you will suffer.

Another way to lessen the effect of bad karma is through mental cultivation by means of meditation. This method will be discussed in detail in *Wisdom 31*.

## HOW TO DEVELOP RIGHTEOUS CONDUCT

Behave in accordance with the principles of good deeds in all aspects of your life. Don’t allow desire and prejudice to interfere with what you know is good and fair. Here are some guidelines on how to develop righteous conduct:

- Follow the ‘*Tenfold Path of Wholesomeness*’ by not killing, stealing, committing sexual misconduct, lying, slandering, speaking foul language, engaging in useless chatters, envying, being vengeful, and having false view.
- Practice the ‘*Five Dharma Virtues*’ consisting of compassion, generosity, truthfulness, mindfulness, and contentment with one’s spouse.
- Respect the human dignity of everyone through avoidance of bias and prejudice. Bias comes in many forms: bias due to love, bias due to hatred, bias due to ignorance, and bias due to fear. All forms of bias trample the dignity of the innocent and impede one’s ability to be just and fair. Any person who is a victim of bias cannot help but feel resentful.

- Avoid any temptations that lead to ruin, such as intoxication, roaming around at inappropriate time, attending shows and festivities that downgrade the quality of mind, gambling, associating with bad company, and laziness.
- Strive to fulfill your duties toward everyone around you starting with your parents, your spouse and your children, your teachers, your students, your friends, your employers, your employees, your monastic community and the public at large.
- Those in the position of power (from managers to leaders of countries) should practice the '*Ten Virtues of Leaders*' consisting of charity, morality, self-sacrifice, honesty, kindness, gentleness, austerity, non-violence, forbearance, and righteousness.

Be mindful of the fact that the success or failure of your Dharma practice can be affected by your environment, the people around you, and the requirement of your work or profession. If you happen to be a fisherman or a butcher, your profession requires that you have to kill fish or animals for a living. If you work in a restaurant, you may have to sell beer, wine or liquor. And, if you work in a casino or a night club, you will have to engage in businesses that promote ruinous habits.

Try to avoid placing yourself in a position that exposes you to the risk of violating the basic principles of good deeds. The harm is far greater than the gain.

*You are what you do.*

# WISDOM

## Help Your Extended Family

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# 17



*Standing isolated and alone,  
even the king of trees cannot survive every storm.*

All of the trees that stand together in the forest will help each other, mutually giving shelter from the gales and storms, sun and rain. By offering each other shelter, each tree is protected from being uprooted.

A lone pine cannot survive in strong wind without shelter. In the same way, a person alone cannot make it without the help and support of others. No matter how strong and able a person may be, if he tries to go alone in this chaotic world without the help of friends and relatives, he will eventually crumble and fall. It is wise for us to build a dependable circle of friends and family that we

can depend on in times of need so we don't end up like a lone tree standing isolated in the forest. We should offer each other shelter by extending generosity toward everyone around us, especially our own extended family. The more generosity we extend to others the more good treatment we will receive in return.

### **WHO IS YOUR EXTENDED FAMILY?**

An extended family is made up of blood relatives (the family we are born into), plus the family we choose (those we consider our true friends). For someone to be counted as a part of an extended family there must be a close relationship between the parties. One way to find out whether someone is truly a part of your extended family is by looking at the person's pattern of behavior toward you. A friend who sticks by you during the good times as well as the bad and is always around to help could be considered your extended family, whereas a blood relative who never keeps in touch may not. Your extended family may also include people who look after you in a spiritual way, such as your spiritual teachers and members of your congregation who are close to you.

### **TURNING FAMILY INTO FRIENDS AND FRIENDS INTO FAMILY**

Helping one's extended family is an act of generosity and love. It is another means for merit making and accumulation of good karma. Your generosity to others will attract good people to your life. But to be able to help others you must first be able to help yourself and able to stand on your own two feet. You should be capable of taking care of your own parents, your own offspring and your own spouse before taking care of others.

There are many ways you can give support to your extended family. You can help them with money or gifts, lend helpful services, give guidance, or become a refuge for them. But the most valuable form of help you can give anyone is the gift of Dharma. In this case, you are giving them something that has a lasting value—a spiritual wealth that will benefit them in this life as well as the next.

## **WHO SHOULD YOU HELP?**

Not everyone is worthy of your help. It is not fruitful to help someone who is lazy or unwilling to help himself, or someone who always stays in trouble. From time to time members of your extended family may come asking favors from you that make you uncomfortable. A favor given to someone who does not deserve it could be seen as favoritism or bias. Giving a job or a promotion to a relative instead of to someone more qualified is a form of nepotism which is detrimental to the spirit of an organization. Paying money to a government employee in order to express appreciation for his service could be labeled as bribing. Good discretion should be applied to avoid negative repercussion. Make sure your action does not compromise your integrity and sense of fairness.

In general, those who are worthy of your help are ones who are responsible, hardworking, respectful, well-behaved, and who stay out of trouble.

## **WHEN SHOULD YOU HELP?**

There are certain occasions where it is particularly important to give help to your extended family. Such occasions are: when they are ill, when they are affected by natural disasters, when they fall on hard times and are without refuge, when they need to set themselves up in life but are too poor to do so, when they lack the necessary equipment to pursue a livelihood, when they lack transportation, when they are unjustly accused of wrongdoing, and when they need help in special occasions such as sponsoring a wedding, an ordination, or a funeral.

## **HOW SHOULD YOU HELP?**

There are four ways in which you can express your generosity and support to your extended family. We call these the '*Four Bases of Sympathy*', which consist of:

- Giving or lending money or objects that are useful
- Giving moral support through kind speech and loving-kindness
- Giving useful service
- Giving courtesy and compassion, e.g., treating the seniors with respect, treating the juniors with kindness and affection, and not abandoning them

## **WHAT DO YOU GAIN FROM HELPING OTHERS?**

Most people are grateful by nature. People you have helped will remember the good that you have done for them and will want to reciprocate. The more people you have helped the larger the circle of support you will build for yourself. Even if you're not particularly outstanding in any respect, if you have a good circle of support, you will be able to overcome many difficulties that cross your path. Helping one another is the basis of harmony and unity in society.

Connection is a powerful tool in business and in politics. They say it's not what you know but who you know that counts. People who are well-connected have a much better chance in life and in their career paths. By helping others you're building a network of people that forms your connection and circle of support. The more people you help the bigger your circle of support.

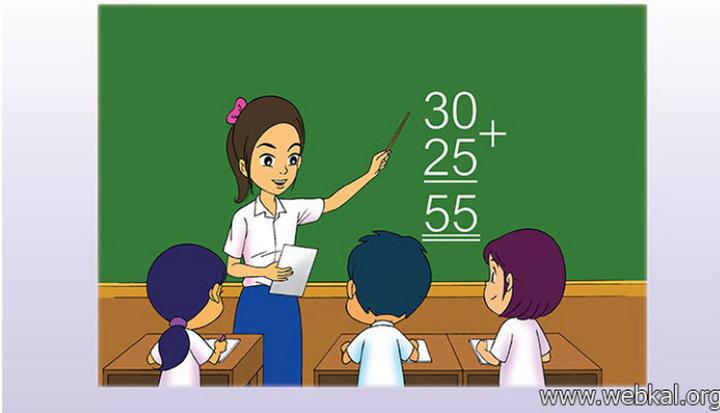
On the spiritual side, helping your extended family is a meritorious deed that gives rise to good karma. The fruit of merit from this good deed will enable you to have numerous friends, relatives and supporters in every lifetime.

*The more help you give others  
the more good treatment you will receive in return.*

# WISDOM 18

## Choose Blameless Occupation

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*Material possessions will count for nothing when you are dead.  
You can't take your money with you to the grave.*

Making a lot of money is not the only objective for work. We can never be happy if our work is unethical or causes suffering to others. An ideal type of work is one that conforms to good ethical and moral norms and is beneficial to society. It should not be the type of work that infringes upon the right and safety of others, or causes hardship to people, other living beings or the environment. In choosing a profession, our decisions should be based on what is right and what is good for everyone including ourselves.

## RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

Work that is blameless in nature is one that does not break the law, the tradition, the moral precepts, and the Dharma.

- *Does not break the law.* The work must not be illegal. Buddhism teaches us to be good citizens. It is our responsibility to know the law of the land we live in and to respect it.
- *Does not break with tradition.* Tradition is a set of customs or practices that have been established and observed by a community or a society. Different cultures have different traditions for different things, from the clothes we wear to the food we eat to the way we address each other. It is wise for us to know these local customs. Some activity may not be in violation of the law, but may be unacceptable to local customs. Unfortunately, not all traditions are practical or morally sound. Some cultures don't respect women; some believe in racial discrimination; and some don't respect human rights (or animal rights). These traditions are not the ones to follow.
- *Does not break the Five Precepts.* Don't engage in work that involves killing (abortion, slaughter house, dealing in weapons, selling insecticides), stealing (counterfeiting, infringing intellectual properties, corruption), sexual service (prostitution, pornography, night clubs), lying (false advertising, cheating), and dealing in alcohol or other forms of intoxicants (cigarettes included). Selling alcohol or cigarettes to people may not violate the law or even the customs, but it violates the Precepts. Engaging in these kinds of activities will attract negative karmic retributions.
- *Does not break with Dharma.* We know that it's not good to break the law, the Precepts, or the traditions. But there are some activities that violate none of these, but they violate the law of righteousness. For example, not saving a drowning person does not break the law or the Precepts, but it is

morally wrong because it lacks human compassion. Working as a dealer in a casino does not violate the law or Precepts but it promotes ruinous habits.

It is wise to choose a profession that makes you feel good morally.

## **WRONG LIVELIHOOD**

They say the love of money is the root of all evil. Some people will do anything for money without consideration of the consequences. Unfortunately, choosing a livelihood that is unwholesome could cost you a lot more than money.

The following are occupations that should be avoided regardless of how lucrative they are:

- *Dealing in weapons.* Weapons are tools for killing. Selling weapons is tantamount to promoting killing, which is in violation of the very fundamental code of human conduct prohibited by most religions. Trading in weapons makes you see the world in a cold and inhumane way.
- *Dealing in human beings.* Buying and selling humans as slaves, for labor, or for sexual services is prohibited. Taking on such an occupation violates the rights and dignity of other human beings. Making a living on the misery of other people is the worst kind of livelihood.
- *Dealing in flesh.* This includes the rearing of live animals or buying or selling animals to be slaughtered. Most people see animals with affection, but people who engage in animal trading or slaughterhouse activities have lost such compassion.
- *Dealing in poisons.* Poisons (including pesticides and insecticides) are made to kill lives. Killings of any kind give root to bad karma. In addition, people who work in this trade are bound to expose themselves to toxic substances that cause cancer and respiratory diseases. Insecticides left at home also pose hazardous risks for the owner.

- *Dealing in alcohol and other intoxicants.* Alcoholism has destroyed many lives and families. Alcohol is the cause of many problems in societies everywhere. It is also the cause of many illnesses and bad health. Drunkenness destroys a person's integrity and reputation. Selling alcohol to someone is tantamount to handing him disaster. We should feel compassion for such a person.

Anyone who is involved in any of these five wrongful livelihoods is endangering his or her own spiritual well-being. Regardless of how much money you can make, it is not worth the danger and retribution from the bad karma that you will endure at the end. If you are presently involved in any of these professions, you should consider changing it.

*Better be safe than sorry.*

# WISDOM

Do No Evil

# 19



*There is no place beyond the reach of the consequence of evil.*

Some people have tendencies to do only good deeds, while others always commit wrongdoings. What makes them different?

You can trace the root of their behaviors to one source: the mind. The mind is the origin of all actions, good and bad. Good actions arise from the states of mind that are positive and wholesome. All negative actions arise from states of mind that are negative or defiled. A defiled mind loses the ability to see things clearly for what is right or what is wrong. Greed, hatred and ignorance are products of a defiled mind and are the three most common causes

of wrongdoings. Greed drives people to cheat, steal and lie. Hatred causes ill will and violence. Ignorance causes people to be unaware that these wrongdoings are bad. Other elements that contribute to the negative states of mind are vengefulness, envy, lack of fear or shame of wrongdoings, and false view. Conceit, miserliness, irritability, gloominess, doubt and anxiety also contribute to the negative states of mind although to a lesser degree.

### **WHAT IS EVIL?**

Evil is commonly referred to as 'sin'. Ideas of 'sin' in different religions could not be more dissimilar. In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, sin arises whenever you disobey the wishes of the Creator. If you don't believe in the teachings of your religion, then that is a sin. There is also a belief that sins can be shared or transmitted from one person to another. Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit and so committed the primordial sin, the sin was passed down to all subsequent generations to the present day. All mankind has to suffer this sin as a result.

The Buddhist viewpoint is different. 'Sin' can only be carried by the person who commits it. It cannot be shared or passed on to someone else. If you don't commit a wrongdoing, then you don't suffer the consequences associated with that wrongdoing. The consequence of your action is yours alone. As an analogy: if a father eats a meal, only the father will be full, his children won't. If he kills a man, only he will go to jail, not his children or anyone else. Each person is responsible for his or her own deeds. You reap what you sow. This is the viewpoint of Buddhism.

### **'SIN'**

The usage of the word 'sin' can be inappropriate or misleading when one attempts to discuss Buddhism, as its concept and meaning have already been ingrained in the mind of a westerner as something everyone is born with. The more appropriate word

for 'sin' in Buddhism is 'evil' or 'demerit'. The meaning of 'evil' is derived from the Pali word 'pāpa'. The implication of the word pāpa is one of 'malfunction', i.e., malfunctioning of the mind. When the mind malfunctions, it takes on the unpleasant qualities of cruelty, wickedness, and indecency.

Evil is produced by action of the body, speech and mind. Killing, stealing and sexual misconduct are acts of the body. Lying, slandering, harsh language and idle chattering are acts of speech. Jealousy, vengeful thinking and ill-will are acts of the mind.

## **REDEMPTION**

Redemption is another area of difference between Buddhism and other religions. Hindus believe that they can wash away their sins by bathing in the Ganges River. In a Christian baptism, water is used to wash away the "original sin". Catholics believe they can redeem their sins by making confessions to a priest.

Buddhists don't believe in these practices. The concept of redemption in Buddhism is totally different. Buddhists believe that 'sin' is the resulting product of bad deeds by the person who commits it. Whenever a bad deed is committed, a negative energy in the form of bad karma (a.k.a. sin) occurs. The opposite of sin is merit or virtue. Merit is the resulting product of good deeds. Whenever a good deed is performed, the positive energy in the form of good karma occurs. Good karma and bad karma are opposite forces competing with one another (merit vs. sin). When your merit is more than your sin, positive things happen. When your sin is more than your merit, negative things happen. This is a natural phenomenon. There are no supernatural forces involved.

Buddhists' way of redemption is through accumulation of merit. The more merit you have, the less effective your demerit (sin) will become. Merit is like the water that dilutes away 'sin' (see *Wisdom 16*).

How then do you acquire merits? You can acquire merits in three ways: to do good, to avoid bad, and to purify the mind. You ‘do good’ by practicing generosity, ‘avoid bad’ by observing moral precepts and avoiding all evil actions, and purify your mind through meditation.

### **EVIL ACTIONS TO BE AVOIDED**

The following are ‘*Ten Evil Actions*’ to be avoided:

1. Killing
2. Stealing
3. Sexual misconduct
4. Lying
5. Slandering
6. Harsh speech
7. Idle chatter
8. Greed
9. Vengefulness
10. False view

### ***HIRI-OTTAPA* -- FEAR AND SHAME OF WRONGDOING**

Believing in the Law of Karma is an effective means to help you avoid wrongdoing because you know you can’t escape the consequence of bad deeds. Even if no one is aware of your bad deeds, there is always the Law of Karma that will follow you like a shadow.

Those who believe in the Law of Karma will adopt a virtue called ‘*Hiri-Ottappa*’—shame and fear of wrongdoing. *Hiri* and *Ottapa* are

Pali words. *Hiri* means shame of wrongdoing. *Ottapa* means fear of the consequence of wrongdoing. *Hiri-Ottapa* is the virtue that serves as a moral check-and-balance for a person. It guides the conscience of a person to be mindful of his or her every action.

### **AVOIDING EVIL**

Before you're about to commit a wrongful action, ask yourself whether that action violates your *Hiri-Ottapa*, or moral conscience. Consider whether the action would downgrade your human quality, your family's goodwill, your maturity, your wisdom, the good teachings you have received, and the merit you have accumulated. Think about its consequences whether it will bring you future regrets, criticisms, karmic retribution, and the suffering in the hell realms. Let your *Hiri-Ottapa* and your moral conscience be your guide.

*Illness of the body affects only one person.  
Illness of the mind affects many.*

# WISDOM 20

Say No to Alcohol  
and Drugs

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*Thoroughly drunk, a person knows nothing  
but must suffer when he wakes.*

*Partly drunk a person becomes capable of actions  
which he would be ashamed to do while sober.*

Alcohol in the West is a substance primarily associated with relaxation and celebration. Most westerners would shy from any hint that alcohol is an agent of destruction. Wine has even been incorporated into the most sacred of Christian ceremonies—the Mass. To some, alcohol is often an avenue of escape for the dark and difficult things of life. Because of its long history of acceptance alcohol remains deeply rooted in the Western idea of respectability.

## ORIGIN OF ALCOHOL - A JĀTAKA TALE

There is an interesting tale about the origin of alcohol as told in the *Khumbha Jātaka*. (Jātaka is a voluminous body of literature native to India concerning the previous births of the Buddha.)

Long ago, before alcohol was produced commercially, it was made by accident, faraway, deep in a forest in Kasi in ancient India.

In the forest there was a certain tree with a cleft between its branches. Rainwater collected in the cleft. Fruit such as myrobalans (berries) and peppercorns from the surrounding trees fell in the water. At the foot of the tree was a rice plant, and the birds in the forest would collect the rice seeds and perch to eat them on the bough of the tree. Some of the seeds fell in the water in the cleft of the tree too. The water, the fruit, and the rice in the tree cleft were warmed by the heat of the sun until it fermented into alcohol, changing its color, taste and smell.

The smell attracted the birds. Some of them drank it, mistaking it for water. After only a sip, the birds would fall out of the tree unconscious. The pile of birds under the tree did not escape the eye of a forester named Sura who happened to be passing by. He watched as the birds continued to fall out of the tree one by one. In fact, the birds were drowsy, and when they eventually woke up, they could fly away.

Sura was curious and imagined that there must be something special up the tree. He climbed the tree and found the special liquid in the cleft with a tempting aroma. He took a sip of the fermented liquid. By the time he had climbed down the tree he started to feel dazed. He then roasted the birds and climbed up the tree to get more of the liquid to drink. The liquid tasted even better with the roasted birds. The effect of the alcohol made him feel like singing

and dancing all by himself in the forest. 'What an incredible drink,' he thought to himself.

Sura got hooked on this "magical" drink. He fantasized that if he could find a way to brew this liquid on a large scale and sell it to the people of the village nearby he would be rich. Finally, he figured out a way to brew the liquid in large quantities. It didn't take him long before he got the people in the village addicted to his drink. Unfortunately, the more the people drank, the less inclined they felt to work for a living. They would be drunk all day not knowing their head from their tail.

Soon, the entire village went bankrupt because the people were too intoxicated to work. Sura moved on to another village to find new customers. The same thing happened. Once the people were intoxicated they would abandon their work and, eventually, the village went bankrupt. In the end, the whole kingdom was in financial ruin.

Sura then moved on to another kingdom. The same thing happened there too, so he moved on to yet another kingdom, the Kingdom of Savatthi.

The news of this "magical" drink reached King Sabbamitta of Savatthi. He heard that this drink could do wonders for the drinker. Anyone who drank it would soon forget his hardship and would journey into the dream world. So when Sura approached him, the king was so eager that he ordered 500 barrels of the alcohol with the idea of selling it to his people for profit. The future of Savatthi was about to turn into disaster.

The impending doom caused the seat of the throne of Indra, Lord of the Devas, to heat up. (Indra, sometimes called Sakka, is the king of the gods of the Tavatimsa, the second heaven in Buddhist cosmology. Legend has it that whenever big troubles were about to happen to righteous people in the human world, the seat of the throne of Indra became heated.) Indra realized that if this major

kingdom got addicted to alcohol in the same way as the lesser kingdoms before it, alcohol would spread unabated throughout the subcontinent.

So Indra decided to intervene. One day Indra appeared to King Sabbamitta in the guise of a Brahmin holding a gold pot floating in the air before the throne. The king marveled, "O Brahmin! How come you can float in the air like that? You are surely no ordinary being! What is that you hold in your hand?"

The Brahmin replied:

*"This is the magic pot. In this pot is a fluid which is exceptionally delicious. Anyone who drinks this fluid will be so drunk he could fall head first in a pond, abandon his reason, sing in the street, run around naked and encourage his friends to do the same. He will be shameless, singing raucously, walking back and forth all night, each friend taking it in turn to see the other's home. He will fall asleep so drunk that he won't even notice his house burning down around him.*

*Anyone who drinks this won't care if he is eating dog food off the floor, or going around clumsily, dressing unsuitably in public, vomiting in the street or sleeping face down in his own vomit. Some have delusions of their own grandeur, or become hideously aggressive.*

*Drinking such a fluid can kill you. It will consume all your wealth if you drink it. It will make you so shameless that you won't think twice about insulting your parents, flirting with your daughter-in-law, shouting at your in-laws, or having an affair with the maid. You will be capable of all these things if you drink this fluid.*

*You will think nothing of harming a clergy, getting in arguments and fighting. Children will have no respect for their elders; adults will squabble, chatter aimlessly and tell lies. When they drink this they*

*will forget to do the work they promised. The intelligent are reduced to fools. People forget to eat and nourish themselves properly, and fall asleep in inappropriate places.*

*Anyone who drinks this fluid is like a person who has drunk poison. If your princes drink this they will elope with the court dancers. Even angels who drink this fluid fall out of heaven and become asura (a lower class of deity).*

*This gold pot contains no butter, cheese, or honey. It contains the fluid with all the side-effects I have been speaking of.*

*Does Your Majesty want some?"*

Perplexed and alarmed, the king replied, "I would not touch it with a barge pole, let alone drink it."

## **ALCOHOL**

Almost every family has a tragic story to tell about their relationship with alcohol. Alcohol consumption contributes to over 100,000 deaths each year in the United States alone. As many as 12,000 children born annually to drinking mothers develop mental and physical deficiencies as a result of exposure to alcohol while in the womb.

Alcohol has the power to transform people's personalities in the worst ways. It is the one single reason that causes a person to break all the Five Precepts. If you drink, you say more than what you mean to, what you wouldn't consider saying when you're sober. If you have some latent adulterous tendencies, they will manifest themselves when you are drunk. If you have tendencies to steal then you will find it hard to keep your hands to yourself when you're drunk. If you're normally bad-tempered, when you're drunk you'll be uninhibited in your violence.

Alcohol is considered an evil substance by many religions. Some religions go as far as banning the usage of alcohol as medicine, antiseptic, or to clean a wound. Buddhism, however, allows alcohol to be used for medical purposes.

## **CIGARETTES**

It is said that a drug addict begins his tragic journey with an innocent puff of a cigarette. It is this first puff that leads to the second, the third, the fourth, and the one-thousandth. Before he realizes it, he is addicted. Some smokers are so oblivious to their smoking habit that they don't realize they are addicted—there was a comical case of a smoker who said to his doctor: “Don't worry, doc, I've been smoking everyday for the past twenty-five years, see, I'm still not addicted!”

## **HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?**

Just as a single match can burn down an entire house, even a little alcohol can cause a lapse of mindfulness that may ruin one's whole life.

Western folks are so accustomed to drinking that they see nothing wrong with having a glass of beer or two in a social setting. Some people think that a moderate consumption of alcohol is harmless and should be allowed. Some even insist that a glass of wine a day can be good for your heart. Whether this is true or not is not the issue. The issue is that all alcoholics begin their tragic journey to addiction with the first harmless glass!

## **DANGERS**

Consumption of alcohol brings many hazards. Not only does it waste money, but it also weakens your intellect and takes away the quality of your mind. It makes you vulnerable to sickness, causes indecent exposure, shamelessness and loss of good name, and it increases aggressiveness and tendency for violence.

On the issue of health, it is a well established medical fact that alcohol can cause damage to the brain. The prolonged use of this substance can result in mental dysfunction and mental illnesses. People with mental illnesses are prohibited by health professionals from consuming alcohol.

Alcoholism gives root to negative karma. You may wonder why some people are born mute, intellectually disabled, or with mental illnesses. According to the Law of Karma, this is the result of negative karmic consequence due to drunkenness in a previous existence.

## **JUST SAY NO!**

The first step to giving up drinking is to recognize the catastrophic effect that alcohol can cause. Then make a determination to give up the habit. Develop a strong mental attitude and discipline to follow through with your plan. Keep all alcoholic objects and paraphernalia away from sight. Stay away from drinking buddies or anything that reminds you of alcohol. But the most important thing of all is self-control.

*The mind is the most valuable faculty of a person.  
Strive to keep it free from intoxicants.*

# WISDOM 21

## Don't Be Reckless in Dharma

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*Impermanent are all created things.*

We humans are reckless by nature. The things that we're most reckless about:

Our time – thinking that it's still abundant

Our age – thinking that we're still young

Our health – thinking that we won't be ill

Our longevity – thinking that we'll live long

Our knowledge – thinking that we know enough

Our skills – thinking that we're already good at what we do

Our spirituality – thinking that we have enough spiritual wisdom

Recklessness is the cause of many failures. We take things for granted and are ill-prepared when facing unexpected change in life.

### **FAILING TO PREPARE IS PREPARING TO FAIL**

Don't let recklessness become a habit and allow it to hinder your sense of preparedness.

Time and tide wait for no man. Days and nights pass by quickly. With each sunset your life becomes one day shorter. Time wasted is life wasted. Never let any day go by without doing something meaningful for your life. Ask what you have done for yourself. What do you want for your future? Are you conducting your life in a way that fulfills your goals? What should you strive for? What should you refrain from? Have you done anything to improve your spiritual wellbeing? Finish what you set out to do now before you're too old to do it. Don't wait till tomorrow, for tomorrow may never come.

Don't take your youth for granted thinking that you're still young. Old age, sickness and death exempt no one. You're getting older every day. There is no way to predict when something bad might happen to your health. Ask yourself: if I die tomorrow, have I done enough good deeds to warrant that I won't end up in an unhappy destination?

The knowledge and skills you possess today can quickly become obsolete tomorrow if you fail to keep up with new knowledge, new technologies, or fail to improve your skills. The world never stops moving ahead, if you don't move with the world you'll be left behind. Keep up with your peers. Keep up with your competitors. Keep up with the world.

Don't be reckless with your spirituality, thinking spirituality is only for the devout. Success in worldly achievements only takes care of you in this life. To take care of you both in this life and the next, you need to cultivate your mind through meditation and seek spiritual

wisdom through Dharma to fortify your moral strengths and to prevent yourself from stepping onto the wrong path. Without a good quality of mind and the wisdom of Dharma, you may not know how to cultivate virtues the right way or proceed more quickly toward personal liberation.

Forewarned is forearmed. Once you recognize that your time is short, your health is vulnerable and death could come upon you without warning, you'll be mindful not to waste your time or your energy on meaningless pursuits.

### **NON-RECKLESSNESS IN DHARMA**

In the practical sense, non-recklessness in Dharma means leading your life with mindfulness—to be careful in the way you think, speak and act, not to fall into anything unwholesome, not to miss an opportunity to perform good deeds or to progress in life, and to be conscious at all times about your responsibility.

Dharma encompasses the Truth, the way of nature, the right way of living, righteous conduct, the law of righteousness, and the Teachings of the Buddha. Dharma helps you see things the way they really are. It replaces your delusion with correct understanding and wisdom. By embracing Dharma in your daily life, you become happier, more peaceful, more trusting and more at ease with yourself. A person who lives in accordance with the Dharma proceeds more quickly toward personal liberation and ultimate happiness.

### **DEVELOP MINDFULNESS**

Mindfulness is the virtue that governs the behavior of your mind, keeping your mind in a state of attentive awareness and alertness, not to let it wander or allow it to fall into negative states. The practice of mindfulness results in the arising of wisdom and understanding. It allows the mind to have full comprehension of the realities of things and it broadens your sense of understanding and compassion.

Mindfulness acts as a stone pillar that holds your mind in one place, not letting it go astray or out of control. Mindfulness acts as a gatekeeper for your mind. It alerts you to be wary of anything unusual or suspicious and keeps away senses that are undesirable. It acts as a ship rudder for your mind, steering you in the right direction. Mindfulness acts as a rein upon your mind, restraining you from wrongdoing and inspiring you to be conscientious of your responsibility. It motivates you to persist with your tasks and instills in you the quality of thoroughness in your habit. It safeguards your emotion, not letting it flow with negative thoughts and ruinous temptations. If your mindfulness is weak, you'll be vulnerable to unwholesome thoughts, speech and action, resulting in negative karma.

## **HOW TO CULTIVATE MINDFULNESS**

An effective way to develop mindfulness is through regular practice of meditation. Meditation is a means of mental development and cultivation. It is through meditation that your mind is trained, refined, and perfected. Meditation can help you develop a keen sense of perception and awareness. You'll become more alert and mindful of everything around. Your body and your mind will become more in sync with one another. You'll become more focused and less distracted. Your concentration and memory will improve resulting in better performance in school and at work. You'll have improved capability to understand and comprehend matters that are complicated. Meditation will improve your physical and mental wellbeing.

Develop a habit of awareness in matters dealing with your spirituality, not allowing yourself to fall into an unwholesome path. Before you do something ask yourself whether the thing that you're about to do is meritorious or sinful. Choose to do only the things that are meritorious and avoid the things that are sinful.

Another way to develop mindfulness is to be cognizant of the fact that nothing lasts forever and everything is subject to change. Realize that birth leads to aging, sickness and death, and suffering is a part of life. Reflect on the immense suffering in the hell realms to remind you not to fall into evil ways. This doesn't mean that you should take a negative view on life, but it is a way to keep you in an alert and prepared state.

## **BENEFITS**

Through regular practice of mindfulness in your everyday life you'll achieve a keen sense of perception and awareness which will benefit you in your work and your everyday life. You'll be conscientious of your action and your responsibility and be able to persist in your task. You'll be in control of your thought, speech and action, not allowing anything unwholesome to affect them. You'll conduct your life in a wise and prudent manner and will not be exposed to anything that gives rise to bad karma. As a result you will become more peaceful and happy as a person. The virtue you have accumulated for yourself will assure you of a happy rebirth.

*Strive on with awareness.*

# WISDOM

## Develop the Virtue of Respect

# 22

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*Anyone, even an uneducated person,  
can teach us something valuable.*

Respect is an important quality in any relationship. Without respect, a wife and husband will not get along, a home will be full of quarrels, a school will become like a circus, and a society will be in disarray. People must respect one another in order for the society to function harmoniously. Violence and crime happen because people fail to respect the rights and welfare of one another.

## **VIRTUE OF RESPECT**

No two people are equal in the extent to which they perpetuate knowledge, experience and wisdom. By being respectful, it opens ways for you to see and learn from the good qualities in people. If you're able to focus on the good aspects of others, you'll find fulfillment and happiness wherever you go. People will welcome you with open arms. But if you're the egocentric type who is blind to the goodness in others, you'll create a barrier for yourself that prevents you from progress. Your false sense of self-importance will bring out other negative traits in you, such as selfishness, jealousy and the willingness to get ahead at the expense of others. This will hurt you in the long run.

Respect is the lubricant in the student-teacher relationship that allows knowledge to flow. The relationship between masters and students plays an important role in the preservation of knowledge. Without respect, knowledge can suffer because neither students nor teachers are willing to go out of their way to help one another. For a master to be willing to pass on his knowledge to a student without reservation, he must see that his student is worthy of his knowledge. This worthiness comes in the form of respect: respect for the teacher as well as respect for the knowledge.

The act of showing respect is a way of recognizing and expressing sincere appreciation for the good qualities and worthiness of others and the willingness to see yourself in a lower position to those who have superior qualities than you. It is a way to foster good human relations and preserve a noble tradition. Showing respect helps one become more humble and less egotistical.

### **WHO IS WORTHY OF RESPECT?**

Any persons who lead a virtuous life or who have positive influences over your own wellbeing are worthy of your respect. All parents are worthy of respect. In general, younger people should respect older

people, younger siblings should respect older siblings, students should respect teachers, employees should respect employers, and so on. But be mindful of the conduct of the people who are to be respected. Even if they're superior to you in position or status, if their conduct is unwholesome, you can respect them but not follow their ways. It is also important to note that respect should not be one-sided. Mutual respect for one another is a good virtue.

Buddhists have a high reverence for the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Objects that symbolize the Buddha's virtues, such as Buddha images, Buddhist temples, pagodas enshrining the Buddha's relics, and the Four Holy Sites of Buddhism (the places at which the Buddha was born, enlightened, gave his first sermon, and passed away) are revered by all Buddhists. The Buddha is revered for his perfect purity, compassion and wisdom, and for his unparalleled contribution to mankind. The Dharma represents the Buddha's teachings. The Sangha is the monastic community of Buddhist monks who teach Dharma to the world, who preserve the Buddhist religion. Anything related to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are worthy of respect.

Any activities or practices that enhance your knowledge, wisdom and virtue should be respected. These include education, mental development, non-recklessness, hospitality, generosity and moral pursuits.

## **HOW TO EXPRESS RESPECT**

Respect is expressed through proper bodily behavior, speech, and mental attitude. Ways of paying respect differ from custom to custom, but in general it encompasses the following gestures: prostrating, bowing, joining palms or holding of one's hands, standing up to greet, clearing the way for the person to pass, offering a seat, offering refreshments, giving salutation, and speaking in a polite way.

Respect expressed out of genuine and sincere appreciation is more meaningful than one expressed out of necessity or formality. Respect from a child to his parents, a student to his teachers, a layperson to a monk, are examples of respect based on genuine and sincere appreciation for the goodness of the persons receiving it. Some forms of respect, such as a soldier saluting an officer, a servant bowing to a master, are done out of necessity due to regulation, formality or fear. This form of respect carries very little virtue.

### **WHY SHOULD ONE PAY RESPECT?**

The act of paying respect not only is a way of maintaining good tradition, but it also fosters good human relations, group harmony and unity. It helps to cultivate proper attitude. The habit of paying respect will develop in you the willingness to see the good qualities in others thereby opening your mind to accepting better knowledge, wisdom and experience through their good examples.

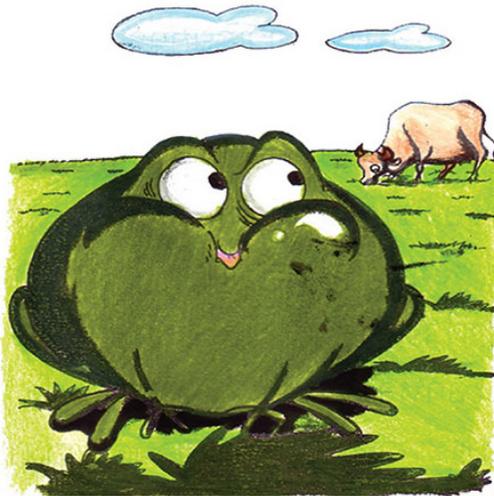
Respectful people are synonymous with humble people. People who are humble don't have a false sense of pride or ego which deters them from their own progress. Respect is the lubricant that smooths a relationship. You receive better reception and cooperation from people when you show them respect. People who are respectful are welcomed in all places.

*Respect is a virtue that gives rise to good karma.*

# WISDOM

Be Humble

# 23



*A tree that bends with the wind survives the storm.*

*A tree that stands unyielding breaks in two.*

The notion of self-importance has caused many conflicts to arise in our world. Prejudice, racial conflicts, and nationalism all arise from the notion of one's superiority over others ("My country is better than your country," "My race is better than your race," "My religion is better than your religion," "My team is better than your team," etc.). They are the destructive force that drives people to suppress one another.

## **PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**

Everyone has pride. Even people with no education and no money have pride. Unfortunately, pride can be a dangerous thing if it's not channeled correctly. False pride makes way for self-importance and self-superiority. Some people have a false sense of self-importance that it makes them become big-headed and will not bow to others. This type of people is blind to the good qualities of others. They see only others' faults and shortcomings, and they dislike others getting ahead of them. Such people suffer every day because everything irritates them.

Self-pride, self-importance and self-superiority are a form of delusion that makes people perceive themselves to be better than all others. Some people born in the aristocracy tell themselves that the average man in the street can never be their equal. Rich people have tendencies to look down upon the poor. Higher educated people look down upon the less educated. This is especially true in the countries where materialism prevails. Measuring superiority through material achievement is shortsighted and unwise.

No one should think that he or she knows it all and others know less. People who perceive themselves to be better or smarter than others project an air of pomposity and arrogance in their demeanor. The way they look at people, the way they talk to people, and the way they act are always condescending. Such demeanor drives people away.

Even when you have reached the top, don't think that you're the only one up there. Above the sky, there is more sky, as the Chinese would say. There will always be someone better and greater than you. It is a bad idea to look down on people or treat people in an inferior way. Because you're rich today doesn't mean that you'll be rich the rest of your life. Be nice to people on your way up because you'll meet them on your way down. One day the person you look down upon could be the one that comes to your rescue.

## **VIRTUE OF HUMILITY**

Humility is a quality that makes a person gentle, polite and modest. Like the stalk of wheat full of grains that bows low, a humble person stays low-keyed and inconspicuous. Although full of knowledge and ability, a humble person does not express superiority over others. Instead, he or she accepts criticism and advice from others readily. Such a person is easy to be trained and pleasant to associate with.

People cannot succeed in this world without the help and support of others. Humility makes you endearing as a person. If you're humble you'll make more friends and fewer enemies. No one likes people who are pompous or arrogant. Arrogant people get little sympathy from others when they get in trouble. Humble people, on the other hand, gain affection and cooperation from everyone.

In the end, humility will help clear the way for your success. An unyielding tree is the one that breaks in the storm.

## **HOW TO DEVELOP HUMILITY**

Begin with the recognition that false pride and self-importance can get you nowhere. Don't think that you know it all and others know less. Even when you have reached the top you should never look down on others or treat others in an inferior way. Just because you're successful doesn't mean that you won't need help from others. Realize that no one, even you yourself, likes people who are pompous and arrogant. If you wish to gain affection and support from others, act in a way that is pleasing to everyone.

Overcome the notion of self-importance. You don't need to advertise your own greatness. Let your virtue speak for itself, like a diamond that maintains its luster. Sooner or later people will find out your distinction. Adopt the practice of kind and generous behavior. See beyond the imperfections of others and look for their good aspects. Chances are, you'll learn a few good things from them.

Be sensitive to the feelings of others. Be sensitive to how you project yourself to be perceived by others. Are you dressing too lavishly for your position? Should you drive a Mercedes to work when your boss is driving a Toyota? Are you making your superior lose face because of the way you express your opinion? Use common sense. Do what is right and appropriate. Don't get yourself in trouble because you overstep your bounds or put other people in an awkward position. If you do things without consideration for the feelings of others you'll end up making fewer friends and more enemies.

*The fool who knows that he is a fool  
is for that very reason a wise man.*

# WISDOM

Be Content

# 24



*Blessed are they who expect nothing,  
for they shall not be disappointed.*

There was an interesting true story told by a former Minister of Trade in Thailand some years ago. Every morning, this Minister would drive his car to work passing a narrow street in front of his house. Every morning, he would run into an old beggar who was begging on the same spot for the past many years and the Minister would stop to give him some coins. On one particular morning, he stopped to give the old beggar some coins as he always did each morning.

But that morning there were no coins in his pocket; the smallest denomination he could find was a 100 Baht bill (\$5 equivalence). Not wanting to disappoint the beggar, the Minister handed him the 100 Baht bill.

The beggar couldn't believe his eyes. With uncontrollable excitement he held the 100 Baht bill between his shaking hands, raised his joined hands high above his head in the gesture of veneration, and bowed and bowed repeatedly at the Minister while uttering these words of gratitude to him: "Oh my dear man, you're such a kind soul. No one has ever given me this much money in my entire life of begging. You've made my day! May your kindness bring you and your family great happiness, great health and great prosperity for years and years to come. Your generosity has made today the happiest day of my life. I shall never forget this day." And he kept thanking him again and again.

The same afternoon that day, a friend of the Minister, owner of a local bank, came to visit him at the office. His face looked tormented. The Minister had never seen his friend looking so disturbed before, so he asked him what was wrong. Shaking his head in disgust, the banker said, "This is a depressing time for me. I'm so distraught I haven't been able to sleep all week." And he went on, "My son and daughter-in-law should have listened to me instead of acting against my advice and ended up in such a bad situation." Curious, the Minister asked his friend, "What did they do?"

The banker explained, "Earlier this year, I saw a strong indication there was going to be a severe shortage of silver worldwide and the price would skyrocket within the next few months. I told my son and daughter-in-law to hurry up and import as much silver from overseas as possible and stockpile it, then unload it when the price went up. Doing according to my advice they would have easily pocketed a net profit of \$6 million. Instead, they waited two months. By then, other speculators had time to act. By losing this two months' window they were only able to make \$3.5 million profit instead of \$6 million. Had

they listened to me and did what I told them to do they would not have missed the additional profit of \$2.5 million.” The banker was clearly distressed as he told his story.

The Minister was perplexed. Still fresh in his mind he remembered how ecstatic the old beggar was that morning when he gave him the equivalence of a \$5 bill. It was the “happiest day of his life”. Here, this rich banker friend of his was completely bent out of shape and couldn’t even sleep for an entire week because his family only made a profit of \$3.5 million. What a big contrast. How much is enough? What is wrong with this world, he thought to himself. That day the Minister witnessed a simple truth of life: how greed can indeed rob a man of his happiness.

### **WHO IS RICH? HE THAT IS CONTENT.**

Some people are never content with what they have. The word “enough” is unknown to them. For these people, the more possessions they have, the more they want. Even when they are more than comfortable in their own lifestyle, they will still crave more. Can they ever find happiness? Is there an end to their craving?

Everybody wants more. Even animals want more. Notice the habits of a mangy, starving dog. If you give him a bowl of rice, even with a tiny piece of meat in it, he’ll be jumping with joy. Feeding him the same way for a few days, but when there is no meat in his bowl, he’ll start to refuse food. Giving him better food, in no time he’ll be climbing on your table competing for your dinner. This is a natural habit of animals. People are not much different.

As long as we are humans we will always be ruled by our desires: to have, to own, to belong. But because the extent of human desires can be so vast and endless, it is impossible to satisfy all of them. When our desires are not met we end up with dissatisfaction and suffering, a self-inflicted one.

Most of us are discontent with our own conditions. There are always reasons to desire more. Societies have conditioned us to comparing and “keeping up with the Joneses”. Our modern consumer society has energetically aroused our desire and yearning to want more. Have you ever thought of having a better car, a newer cell phone, a bigger house, a better job, a more attractive spouse?

How many meals can you eat a day? How much clothes can you wear at once? How many cars can you drive on each trip? How many beds can you sleep on each night? The truth is you can only eat one meal at a time, drive one car at a time, and live in one house at a time. Is there a point in having so much food if it’s going to make you sick, or so many homes, so many cars, so many businesses, etc., if all they do is give you more headaches and worries? Stop for a moment and ask yourself whether more possessions will really bring you more happiness.

### **AMBITION VS. GREED**

To be content doesn’t mean you can’t be ambitious. Ambition is a good thing if it is pursued in a constructive way and not in the way of greed. There’s nothing wrong with wanting to be the wealthiest man in the neighborhood, or to win the Olympics, if such ambition is pursued in an honest way. But it is wrong if you have to cheat or steal in order to get rich, or to use enhancement drugs in order to win the gold medal. Over-ambition can turn an honest man into a dishonest one.

We all want the good and better things in life. Who doesn’t want a nice home, a nice car and a nice job? In fact, everyone should make effort to obtain what is necessary for a happy life. An ambition fulfilled in the rightful way, not at the expense of others, is admirable. But ambition pursued without regard for ethics and the law or the suffering of others is harmful. Be mindful, whatever ambition you may have, that it is realistic and not beyond your reach. Otherwise, you’ll end up with unnecessary anguish and grief.

Take a case of a young man wanting to own a Mercedes. First he sees someone driving it and he is captivated. "If only I could own one," he fantasizes, "my status would change." Then he becomes obsessed. But he has neither the cash nor the means to afford it. So he starts saving money, cutting back on everything else, and looks forward to the day that he can afford one. If he's an honest man he'll keep saving and perhaps finding a second job to supplement his income. If he is less honest, he may give way to unscrupulous means, including cheating, stealing or involving in corruption.

If you really want to own a Mercedes and you save up your salary to buy it, that is not greed. But if you want something so bad that you have to cheat, steal or hurt someone, then you have given way to greed. Greed can turn an honest man into a fraudulent one. For some people, their greed is so strong that they're prepared to violate any law or cause suffering to anyone.

Don't allow greed to overcome your morality. Make sure that whatever ambition you may have doesn't come at the cost of your happiness or your integrity.

## **THE ART OF HAPPINESS**

Contentment implies acceptance of conditions and situations with equanimity and without complaint. Contentment is the same as satisfaction. One who is content is one who stops wanting more. He is satisfied.

Unfortunately, contentment is not something easy to achieve. Because there is no perfection in life, one always find reasons to be dissatisfied with what one has, or has not. There are many things in life that is not changeable, for example, the color of your skin, your nationality, your appearance, members of your family. Longing to change things that cannot be changed can bring you nothing but misery.

Learn to live with what you have. Live in accordance with your means. Make the best of your situation. Apply wisdom, mindfulness and positivity in your way of thinking. Think of all the good things and the wonderful people that surround your life instead of all the bad things or the bad people that make you unhappy. If you look hard enough you'll find the positive side of everything.

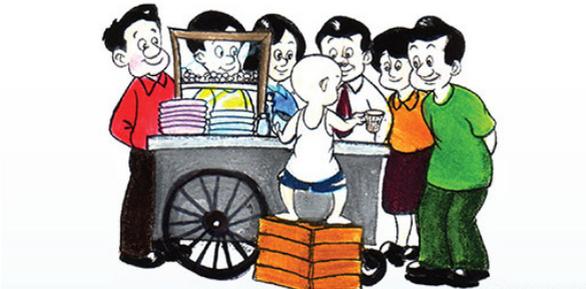
Life is never perfect. It is up to you whether you let the imperfect side of life overcome your happiness, or make the best of what you have. Always think in positive terms. Think, for example, that you may not be wealthy but you're healthy and happy; you may not be pretty but you're intelligent; you may not make a lot of money but you're happy in your work; you may have a small car but it saves a lot of gas, etc. Compare with those who are less fortunate and you'll realize that your situation isn't so bad after all. Find the positive aspect of everything in your life and you will find contentment.

*The things that you always want  
may not be the things that you always need.  
When you have found contentment in your life  
you have found happiness.*

# WISDOM

Have Gratitude

# 25



*Gratitude is the parent of all virtues.*

Clouds gather and produce rains to feed the rivers and the oceans of the world. If the rivers and the oceans fail to reciprocate and stop letting their water evaporate back to the clouds, soon there will be no more rain to nourish the world, and all living beings will perish. Likewise, if the people of the world only know how to take and not to give back—that is, if they lack gratitude, sooner or later there'll be no more kindness and generosity to spread around, and life will be dry like a desert.

## VIRTUE OF GRATITUDE

Gratitude is the quality of recognizing and appreciating the good and the favors that others have done for you. Without this quality, a person forgets about his parents, his teachers, his friends, and anyone who has done him well. Such a person has no kindness in his heart. They say people who lack gratitude are worse than some animals, for even dogs have gratitude toward their owners.

People with good character not only recognize and appreciate the favors received from others, but they also repay their debt of gratitude to them. Ungrateful people are not like this. Even if you have done them favors, they would not recognize the good that you have done for them. Because of their thankless nature, they have difficulty integrating in society.

If you find someone who has neglected his or her own parents, you can be sure that this person is no good. If the person is incapable of recognizing the good of his or her own parents, how can he or she recognize the good of anyone else? Such a person should not be employed by you or accepted into your household as a family member. If your own children have such a tendency, you must re-educate them as soon as possible before this negative trait becomes deeply ingrained in them.

Those who are righteous are likely to have a greater sense of gratitude in all areas of life. Grateful people are more appreciative towards the world in general. They tend to see the good in people instead of the bad. Grateful people have a high sense of loyalty, a quality that everyone values. Gratitude is also a catalyst that gives rise to other higher virtues. For this reason, gratitude is praised by all religions.

## WHO IS WORTHY OF GRATITUDE?

Anybody who has done you favors or given you benefits in any way is worthy of your gratitude. Of all the people in this world there is no one you owe your debt of gratitude to more than your parents. Aside from giving you life, they are the first to protect and care for you before anyone else. They provide you with food, shelter, clothing, education and medical care, and they support you in every way they know how. The fact that you survived until today is due to the kindness and generosity of your parents toward you.

The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are worthy of your gratitude. Without the Buddha you would not have learned about the truth of life, the Law of Karma, merit and demerit, and the path to freedom from suffering. Without the Dharma you would not know how to pursue virtues and to reap benefits for this life and the next. Without the Sangha you would have no one to teach you the Dharma and to be your spiritual guide. The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are your highest refuge.

Your relatives, your teachers, your employers, and leaders of country who are virtuous are worthy of your gratitude. Your relatives give you love and affection, your teachers give you knowledge, your employers give you a livelihood, and leaders of your country give you security and welfare.

Some animals are worthy of your gratitude if these animals have served you well. Beasts of burden that plough your land or draw your carts, dogs that watch your home, and any animals that give you useful service or help you make a living, are examples of animals that are worthy of your gratitude.

Some inanimate objects are also worthy of your gratitude if these objects have benefited you in some way, such as educational materials, Dharma books, tools for making a living, etc.

How about your merit? Is it something that you should have gratitude toward? The answer is a big “yes”. It is because of merit that you are born human instead of non-human, healthy instead of handicapped, educated instead of uneducated, well provided for instead of deprived. Unless you’re exposed to Buddhism you’ll not realize this fact. But how do you show your gratitude toward your merit since it is something intangible? You do so by not letting your merit run out and not allowing demerit or bad karma to enter your life. Keep accumulating new merits through performance of charitable giving, upholding moral precepts and practicing meditation.

Even your own body is worthy of your gratitude. Without your body, you would have no means of pursuing virtues and accumulating merits. Honor your body by keeping it healthy, not damaging it through intoxication, not using it to harm others or to do bad deeds. Instead, use your body to perform beneficial deeds for yourself and others; use it to earn an honest living, help others, and fulfill your spiritual goals.

### **REPAYING A DEBT OF GRATITUDE**

How do you measure the value of benefits someone has given you? Sometimes it is impossible to put a price on a favor you have received. If you’re dying and someone donates a bottle of blood to save your life, how much is that bottle of blood worth? How much is a glass of water worth if you’re about to die of thirst? You cannot put a price on the milk from your mother’s breast. Without that milk you would not have lived more than a few days. For some things like this you’ll never be able to fully repay the debt of gratitude you owe.

Always repay your debt of gratitude without waiting to be asked to do so. It is dignified to repay your debt of gratitude regardless of how big or how small the favors given you. Don’t set a limit as to how much or how long you should continue to repay your gratitude, even if it means doing it for a lifetime. The more you’re able to repay

someone's gratitude the better you'll feel, and the more merit you'll have created for yourself.

Conversely, if you are the one who has done someone favors, never ask for the favors to be returned to you. If you do so, you'll undermine your own nobility. Goodness has to come from a heart that is unselfish.

*Be grateful for people who have done you well.*

# WISDOM 26

Listen to Dharma  
on a Regular Basis

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*Dharma is a tonic that can heal many mental pains.*

Most people don't realize the need to listen to Dharma until they run into some kind of suffering. But listening to Dharma can do a lot more good for you than simply healing your mental pains. Listening to Dharma helps you to elevate the quality of your mind and increase your wisdom. It awakens you to the reality of life. It gives you a better understanding of things that are meaningful for your life. It increases your mindfulness and it frees you from doubts that hamper progress.

## WHEN SHOULD YOU LISTEN TO DHARMA?

You should listen to Dharma on a regular basis. Most religions give sermons to their congregations at seven-day intervals and on special religious occasions—Muslims on Fridays, Jews on Saturdays, Christians on Sundays, Buddhists on Sundays. Why do all major religions have seven-day intervals for giving religious teachings? The reason is that most teachings usually stay fresh in our minds for no more than seven days. After that they begin to wear off. Most people have so many other things on their mind that distract them from religious concern that they tend to go back to their old bad habits after only a few days. It is thus a good practice to refresh their spiritual awareness and “reboot” their good habits every seven days.

Buddhists also listen to Dharma on Buddhist holy days and religious days. Buddhist holy days usually take place on full-moon days, new-moon days and half-moon days. Such days are about seven days apart.

Listening to Dharma is particularly important when you’re emotionally troubled. When you’re sad and lonely, when you’re depressed, when you’re angry and vengeful, when evil thoughts and lustful feelings have invaded your mind, when you have doubts, when you think of doing something evil, when you think of hurting someone, when you think of hurting yourself—these are the times that you should listen to Dharma. Listening to Dharma when you’re emotionally distressed can bring back your mindfulness and prevent you from doing something destructive (such as committing suicide or hurting someone).

Dharma can uplift your spirit and make you feel better. Listening to Dharma during a critical illness can also be beneficial. It helps you realize the inevitability of aging, sickness and death, and that suffering is a part of life. Buddhists believe a person’s state of mind at the time of death plays a big part in conditioning the quality of

one's rebirth. If the state of mind of the person at the time of death is radiant he or she will have a happy rebirth, whereas if the state of mind of the person is gloomy at the time of death he or she will be drawn toward an unhappy rebirth. Hearing Dharma (or chanting) at the time of one's death is thus a blessing because it can help calm the person's mind and steer him or her away from negative thoughts.

Hearing Dharma is a rare opportunity especially if you live in a country where Buddhism is not prevalent. It is not an everyday event that you come upon individuals who are well versed in the teachings of the Buddha. So whenever there is a Dharma sermon given by a Buddhist monk or a knowledgeable Dharma teacher in your area you should make an effort to not miss the opportunity to attend.

Listening to Dharma is a positive occasion. You'll find that every time you listen to Dharma, your spirit is uplifted and your day seems to go more peacefully. You don't have to wait until there is a Buddhist monk around to listen to Dharma. You can listen to Dharma any time you feel like it—through a layperson, from a CD, a cassette tape, YouTube, or the Internet.

Don't wait until you see dukkha (suffering) before you see Dharma.

### **ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD DHARMA TEACHER**

A good Dharma teacher is one who has a real understanding of his subject matter. He explains the Dharma sequentially from simple to profound, in a clear and inspiring manner, earning both the interest and attention of his audience. He researches his subject matter well and delivers it in a clear and cohesive manner, not a convoluted one. His teaching is supported by reason and logic, and he brings an air of credibility with him. He has the interest of the audience at heart, and is not doing it for prestige, reward, or expecting something in return. He will perform his best for the audience whether there are many attendants or only a few. He will not use the occasion to make

himself look good or to demean others, and he will not talk badly about other religions. He is one who practices what he preaches.

### **ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD DHARMA LISTENER**

A good Dharma listener is one who shows due respect to the Dharma teacher as well as paying full attention to his teaching. He doesn't behave in a way that is impolite, such as talking or falling asleep during the session, or being rude in class. He doesn't look down on the qualification or the age of the teacher, or underestimate the importance of the Dharma topic being given. He examines the teaching from various angles. Even if he may not fully grasp the meanings of certain scriptural terms he still would embrace them, knowing that they will one day become meaningful.

A good Dharma listener not only absorbs the content of the teaching and its wisdom but also applies it in his daily practice. In this way, he reaps the full benefits of hearing the Dharma.

### **WHAT DO YOU GAIN FROM LISTENING TO DHARMA?**

The first objective in listening to Dharma is to instill faith and confidence in the Triple Gem. Without a foundation of faith, it is unlikely that you will see the value of the teachings to the extent that you will reflect on and benefit from them. The second objective is to wake you up to the reality of life and stimulate you to practice the discipline so that you can bring better meaning and benefit to your life.

On a preliminary level, Dharma helps you understand the truth of life and see the world the way it really is. It helps you become a better and happier person, have fewer worries, and be easier to get along with. On a deeper level, it helps you overcome defilements and clear the path for your ultimate happiness: Nirvana.

There are 84,000 Dharma articles in the Tipitaka, the Buddhist Scripture. All Dharma topics give rise to spiritual wisdom. Every Dharma topic has the potential of helping you reach the ultimate goal of Nirvana. The subject matter of Dharma ranges from preliminary to profound. How much or how little you gain depends on how deep or how shallow you penetrate their meaning and wisdom. The deeper you understand its meaning and wisdom, the more effectively you can apply it to your specific pursuit. Take something as basic as the Five Precepts; they can be applied in your day-to-day life for a peaceful existence, or they can be used as a foundation for reaching the highest goal of Nirvana.

*In the end it is Dharma that frees you from suffering.*

# WISDOM

Develop the Virtue  
of Patience

# 27



*Next to wisdom, there is no virtue greater than patience.*

Patience is the foundation for all goodness. Without patience wisdom cannot develop. Without patience loving-kindness will not be complete. Without patience all other disciplines will fail.

## WHAT IS PATIENCE?

The Pali word for 'patience' is 'khanti', the practice of exercising forbearance, self-restraint and forgiveness toward behavior or situations that might or might not necessarily deserve it.

Patience means maintaining calm and composure under any physical and mental condition, not giving in to hardship, anger, irritation and ill will; not having the desire to get even or to harm others when mistreated. In the practical sense, patience implies fortitude in doing good deeds, abstention from doing evil, and preservation of the quality of mind to never be downbeat. The mind of a person who has developed the virtue of patience is one that is radiant and calm despite difficulties facing him or her. He or she doesn't complain or place blame on others for any of his or her unfavorable conditions.

There are four kinds of patience you must learn to master: ability to endure unfavorable natural conditions, such as working under harsh weather conditions; ability to endure physical suffering, such as pain and discomfort caused by illnesses; ability to endure mental torment, such as unpleasant treatment from others; and abilities to endure destructive temptations, such as drinking, gambling, corruption, and sexual indulgence.

### **DO YOU GIVE UP EASILY?**

Are you the type that gets going when the going gets tough? Or are you the "cry baby" that gives up at the first sign of difficulty? Some people are known to quit their jobs because they can't handle criticism from co-workers. Some wives leave their husbands because they can't put up with their mothers-in-law. Some churchgoers quit their congregation because someone in their church says the wrong thing to them. These people lack endurance and patience. People who are not tough enough to get going when the going gets tough will never reach their apex in life.

Some people are able to endure natural and physical hardships, but are vulnerable to weakness of the senses. They are the type that gives in to smoking, drinking, gambling, over-indulges in food and physical comfort, and is willing to commit adultery. Some have the ability to control anger and hatred but are vulnerable to praise and flattery. They are the type that fall victim to manipulation.

Without the foundation of patience, a person will have a hard time prevailing in life.

## **HOW TO DEVELOP PATIENCE**

Never give in to anything inappropriate. Use wisdom and good discretion in everything you do. Reflect on your human quality, and don't be willing to compromise on your good conscience.

Avoid anger. Anger is a destructive emotion that is hard to overcome. When you're angry, you lose your composure and the ability to control your behavior. To possess the virtue of patience means being without any kind of anger, hatred or aversion towards anyone. If you have even a minimal amount of anger, you cannot completely love or be agreeable with anyone.

Practice meditation. Meditation is a form of mental cultivation which gives rise to wisdom, which in turn gives rise to patience. Wisdom is sustained by patience, and vice versa. Patience and meditation are complementary virtues. In fact, all goodness is sustained by meditation because everything begins with the mind, and meditation is a way of purifying the mind. The practice of meditation itself is an example of patience at work—to be able to sit still for an extended period of time requires a great degree of patience indeed.

Look at the bright side of things before you become discouraged. Remind yourself that things could be worse. Develop strength to withstand criticism, mistreatment and prejudice. Practice endurance in the face of injustice. Turn a blind eye to provocation and insult. Adopt the policy of not fighting back but also not running away. Fighting back could make things worse, but running away could imply admission of fault. Instead, remain steadfast and let your patience prevail.

## **HOW DOES THE VIRTUE OF PATIENCE BENEFIT YOU?**

Hardly any task comes without obstacles. No matter what task you undertake, your success relies not only upon your level of wisdom, but also your patience to apply your wisdom to its intended conclusion. The maxim, 'when the going gets tough the tough get going', is a good one to follow. To win you have to be tough. Patience is the virtue that allows you to persist in your tasks. Instead of seeing obstacles with trepidation but with patience you welcome them as challenges—thus every success, both in spiritual and worldly ways, is a monument to the virtue of patience.

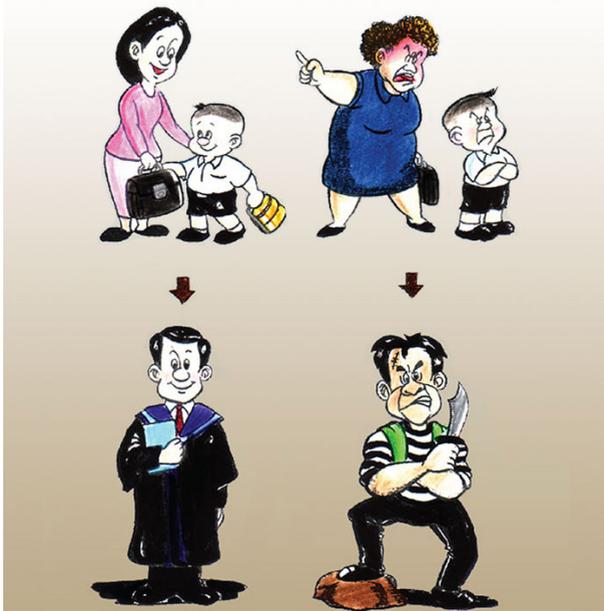
Patience is one of the greatest virtues second only to wisdom. Indeed, patience makes every virtue grow. Once you have developed the virtue of patience, you'll have the strength to cut out the roots of evil, and be able to practice goodness without giving in to obstacles. As a result, you'll have an endearing personality free from conflict, be able to gain support from others, establish yourself successfully at every level, able to foster peace and harmony for yourself and your community, and be able to bring benefits to the masses. Look at Gandhi and what he has done—it was due to his virtue of patience that helped gain independence for India.

*Patience is a virtue leading to Buddhahood.*

# WISDOM 28

Be Willing to Listen to  
Advice from Others

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*A fish living in water doesn't notice the water.*

*A person so used to his faults doesn't notice his faults.*

They say he who never made a mistake never made anything. Easily seen are the faults of others but not one's own. Without someone to point out your mistakes, you may never know you have them.

One who has the genuine desire to learn and to improve oneself must be willing to receive criticism and advice from others and also be willing to be corrected. To be amenable to advice requires one to

have three other qualities: patience, humility and gratitude—patience to endure one's own resistance, humility to accept guidance, and gratitude for the person giving advice.

Everyone is born with the seeds of stubbornness and ego. Some people can tolerate any kind of physical and mental hardship, but when it comes to receiving a piece of criticism or advice from someone, they can't take it. It affects their ego. Ego can be a dangerous thing, for it gives rise to self-delusion, stubbornness and unwillingness to take advice from others.

Stubbornness, strongheadedness, pigheadedness, unyieldingness, unreasonableness, narrow-mindedness, closed-mindedness, inflexibility, and inability to accept criticism or advice from others are obstacles that prevent one from progress. By not being open to criticism, you close the door to useful advice, not allowing wisdom to enter.

## **STUBBORNNESS**

There are two types of stubborn people: one because of stupidity; the other because of having a false view.

Some people are highly educated, but can't survive in the real world. These are the people who are intelligent but not smart-smart in the ways of the world. Because of their scholastic achievements, they think they know everything and they won't take advice from anyone. As a result, no one cares to point out their shortcomings to them or give them advice.

Those who have false views—views that deviate from reality, are extremely hard to teach. They are closed-minded and will refuse to listen to different ideas or rationality. Many conflicts exist in this world because radical people, people who are fixed in their belief systems, fail to accept anyone else's views. They stubbornly take on this attitude: "I've already made up my mind, don't confuse me with facts."

## MARKS OF THE STUBBORN

Stubborn people come in all forms. The roots of their stubbornness and their expressed behaviors can be observed in the following ways:

- Brushing off the person who gives advice
- Snapping or answering back in a way that hurts the person's feelings
- Changing the subject to evade the issue
- Suspicious of the person's intent; finding fault of the person; hiding own faults
- Being secretive of own mistakes, not wanting others to know
- Being ungrateful, not wanting to owe debt of gratitude to others
- Like to talk back and have the last word
- Like to argue; having excuses for everything
- Jealous and selfish, not wanting others to be superior
- Being boasters, braggers, thinking they're too good to be given advice
- Having views that deviate from reality
- Being arrogant and closed-minded
- Having indecent or immoral intent; determined to do evil
- Being self-deluded, thinking they're better than others
- Irritable by nature; easily angered
- Being vengeful and unforgiving
- Reacting negatively to advice; unable to control anger when being told mistakes

Stubbornness is a mark of immaturity. People who're not amenable to advice from others are ones who have not yet developed the virtues of patience and humility. Some people are willing to tolerate criticism from superiors, or even peers, but find it hard to tolerate criticism from subordinates or those who are younger or lower in status.

Who is the most stubborn person you know? If you want to meet this person, go find a mirror and look in it. The person you see there is the one!

## **HOW TO DEAL WITH STUBBORN PEOPLE**

There are ways to interact with stubborn people. Find out the temperament of people to whom you give advice. Recognize the nature of their stubbornness. Adapt your approach according to their nature and temperament.

- Those who are stubborn through ignorance prefer to be told what to do straight up without the need for lengthy explanation or reasoning; they wouldn't have the depth to understand it anyway.
- Those who are stubborn due to preconceived views would not react well to direct orders without hearing reasons and rationality.
- Those who are intelligent but lack the common sense will not take guidance easily; they think they know it all. With these people, you'll have to coerce them by pointing out all the merit and the benefits of the task and let them make their own choices.
- For those who are moderately stubborn, all you'll have to do is give them a hint and they'll get it.
- For those who are hopelessly stubborn, you may have no choice but to give them harsh treatment like threatening to cut their pay or excommunicate them from others.

## HOW TO BE AMENABLE TO ADVICE

Listen to criticism and advice willingly. Don't resist or turn a deaf ear. Don't evade the issue or try to find fault. Don't retort or talk back, or retaliate with sarcasm.

Don't turn a cold shoulder to the person who gives you advice. Don't make excuses or try to rebuke. Instead of feeling offended, accept the criticism and express your gratitude for being told so. Realize that it is not easy for someone to want to risk getting you upset by pointing out your fault unless the person means you well. Respect the advice, appreciate the good intention, and be grateful to the person. Realize the harm you bring to yourself by your stubbornness. You close the door to useful advice and block your own way to progress when you refuse to listen to advice from well-intentioned people.

Open opportunity for others to point out your shortcomings so you'll know where to improve. Within your own family, invite family members to point out your weaknesses even from younger family members or your own children.

Meditate regularly. Meditation will brighten your mind and help you reflect wisely on the advice given to you by others. You will gain the calmness and insight that allows you to see your own shortcomings and the willingness to make changes.

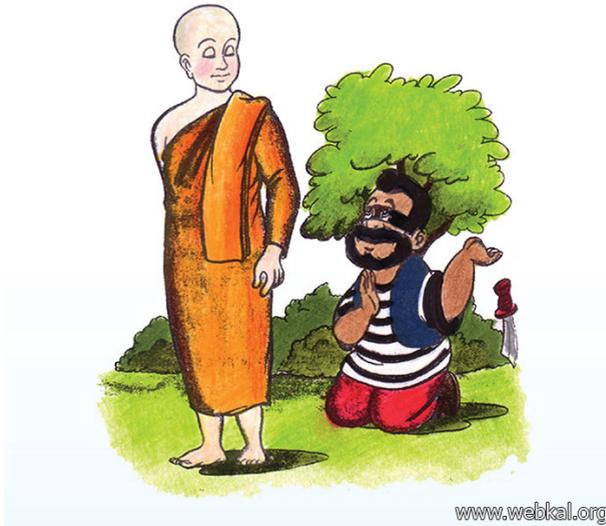
By being amenable to criticism and advice, you gain compassion and willingness from others to offer advice that can help you. You will have more knowledge and wisdom, and be able to correct your weaknesses. As a result, you'll become wiser and smarter and achieve greater progress in life.

*One who points out your weakness points the way to treasure.*

# WISDOM

## See a True Monk

# 29



*There is no better company than holy persons.*

Not all monks are created equal. Just because a person shaves his head and dons robes doesn't automatically make him a 'true monk'. Simply seeing a monk pass by the door is not really a blessing. In order to gain the full benefit of the sight of a true monk, it is important not only to literally "see" him but to recognize his virtues, to hear his teachings, to reflect on his teachings, to follow his good examples, and to apply his virtues in your daily life.

For an ordained person to be called a true monk, he should be one who is peaceful in action, speech and mind, and be of no

danger to anyone. He should be polite and courteous. None of his actions should be provocative. He cannot carry weapons, pick fights with others, speak unkindly, engage in politics, or even walk in a demonstration. He must not kill any living beings. He does not steal, engage in unchaste activities, lie, smoke cigarettes, consume intoxicating substances, or take meals between midday and dawn. He must have good restraint of the senses, not to be vulnerable to temptations, and he should never lose his temper. He must refrain from singing, dancing, playing music, attending entertainment performances, or wearing perfume, cosmetics and decorative accessories.

### **DEFINITION OF A TRUE MONK**

A monk is an ordained person who has gone forth in life giving up every kind of attachment including his home, his family and all material possessions. A 'true monk' is an ordained bhikkhu who lives a pure livelihood, who practices the 'Dharma of a Peaceful One' taught by the Buddha. He is endowed with mindfulness and contentment, having no further craving in his mind and is not caught up in sensual pleasures. He lives by the monastic code of conduct, studies the scriptures, cultivates his mind through meditation, and performs daily chanting. He practices austerities to reduce the level of bad habits in the mind. He has overcome greed, hatred and ignorance. He is able to overcome hindrances that impede the calming of mind and has achieved a high degree of meditative attainment. His happiness comes entirely from spiritual sources.

Such bhikkhu is called 'samana' in Pali. Samana means one who has renounced the worldly life and seeks the path of enlightenment. A samana is not just an ordinary recluse, but one who is truly peaceful and tranquil through development of higher qualities, higher moral training, and higher wisdom. A samana has a kind of magnetic, vibrational influence upon others. When you see and hear a person who is truly a samana, it has a positive impact on you. The Buddha himself was a samana.

Bhikkhus who possess the characteristics of a samana are worthy of the respect and support.

### **GREETING A TRUE MONK**

It is a customary practice for Buddhists to greet a monk by kneeling before him and joining the palms of their hands together in a gesture of respect. If this is not practical or convenient, at least greet him with a respectful gesture or bow your head, or make way for him to pass. If you should have the opportunity to invite a monk to your home, the appropriate way to extend your hospitality would be to look upon him with respect, prepare a seat for him, offer him refreshment or requisites, and converse the Dharma with him. Treating a worthy monk in this manner can only bring you good karma. Buddhists believe merits gained from acts of respect and hospitality toward a true monk give rise to wisdom, honor, prosperity and a good rebirth.

### **'FALSE' MONKS**

A monk who is ordained in spite of lacking faith in the Monastic Discipline and who has no intention to train himself as a true monk is not worthy of respect. There are some people who ordain simply to run away from their worldly problems or to avoid the hard work of earning a living. You can identify these unworthy monks by the laxity in their conducts, such as distorting the teachings of Buddhism, claiming they have attained the stages of sainthood, performing black arts, telling fortunes or selling charms, accumulating excessive possessions, going to places of entertainment, watching shows on TV, taking an evening meal, telling lies, causing disharmony in the community, or taking alcohol or illicit drugs. Any one of these behaviors is sufficient to suspect whether such monk is a true one. This kind of monk gives a bad name to Buddhism and undermines the faith and confidence of Buddhists in general.

There are also some newly ordained monks and novices who are not yet well-trained in the monastic discipline and practice. These are trainee monks and novices. They wear the same robes as any ordinary monk and, therefore, are not distinguishable by their appearance from other well-trained monks. These trainee monks and novices may have genuine intentions to become true monks, but they have not yet overcome their weaknesses. It does take time for a newly ordained monk or novice to master his monastic discipline and self-development in order to reach a high level of purity. In cases where you see monks doing unsuitable things, such as competing for alms food, chances are these are just trainees.

There are, however, many monks in the monastic community who are genuinely virtuous and earnest in their monastic practice and character. Seeing such monks and spending time with them can be truly beneficial.

### **WHY IS IT A BLESSING TO SEE A TRUE MONK?**

The impression of the things that you see can have either a positive or negative impact on your mind. If you see a fire blazing violently in the forest or a city, you feel heat in your heart. If you see the north or south poles covered with ice, or a freezing snowy landscape, you feel coolness in your heart. If you see a killer in a movie with blood in his hands, you feel disturbed. If you see a meditator with his or her eyes closed sitting unmoved in deep meditation, you may feel calm. We compare the samana with the coolness of the snow and calmness of the meditator.

Seeing and associating with a true monk is indeed a blessing. There is no better company than a holy person whose very presence spreads a purifying aura and inspires a constructive approach to your problems. Such company is an antidote to evil ways of life. By associating with a true monk, you will gain a deeper knowledge

into the meaning of the Dharma you have not yet experienced for yourself. You will learn from his good example and benefit from his virtue and wisdom. His positive influences can help overcome shortcomings and weaknesses that may exist within you.

*True happiness comes from spiritual sources.*

# WISDOM

Discuss Dharma  
Regularly

# 30

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*A single sentence of Dharma, correctly understood,  
can produce immense benefit.*

Listening to a Dharma talk requires patience and an open mind. Dharma teachings tend to remind people of their own shortcomings and make them feel awkward or embarrassed. Many people can talk all day and all night about gatherings or having fun, but if they have to engage in Dharma discussions, they feel as though they are being tortured.

## **PURPOSES AND BENEFITS OF DHARMA DISCUSSIONS**

Dharma discussion is aimed at increasing the wits and wisdom of the participants. The objectives are to gain new knowledge, to deepen existing knowledge, to overcome doubts, to correct mistaken views, to cultivate purity of mind, to reinforce confidence in doing good deeds, and to gain merit. Dharma helps one understand the truth of nature and the need to perform good deeds. Dharma discussion gives rise to wisdom.

Those who engage in Dharma discussions regularly benefit from these objectives.

## **GIVING A DHARMA TALK**

Giving Dharma talk can be challenging. We must be sensitive to the disposition and needs of the listener and take some of the responsibility for what we teach. There are certain skills involved in giving a good Dharma talk. Giving Dharma talk as a way of teaching requires different approaches for different people. Some people need to be taught using a gentle approach by elaborating on the meaning of good behavior and the wholesome fruits of such good behavior. Some need to be taught sternly by elaborating the meaning of evil and the unwholesome retribution of such evil behavior. Some need to be taught by a combination of both. And there are some who cannot be taught or helped through any of these means. In such cases there is no use giving them further Dharma teachings until they are able to open their minds.

Giving a Dharma talk is not like just having a chat. You need to be well-prepared and also be artful in the ways you present your views. Here are some practical guidelines:

- Keep your Precepts pure. If you are a householder you should keep at least the Five Precepts. Don't delude yourself into thinking that you will be able to discuss the Dharma if you cannot even manage to keep the basic Five Precepts. It is not a good idea to discuss Dharma when you or your participants are under the influence of alcohol.
- Meditate regularly. It is advisable to meditate before a Dharma session. In this way your mind will be sufficiently refined to deal with subtle matters.
- Dress politely. Avoid clothes that are too brightly colored, provocative, tight-fitting, dirty, stained or torn.
- Maintain good manners at all times.
- Use endearing speech. Be tactful. Avoid provocative words. Do not boast, exaggerate, or make unnecessary claims. Admit the limits of what you know.
- Don't reject a Dharma point outright even when it may sound contradicting to you. Seek to further your own understanding and interpretation. Dharma is subtle and profound. It requires an equally subtle mind to fully perceive.
- Avoid using divisive language. Instead, try to promote harmony.
- Avoid expressing anger when confronted by differences of opinion.
- Avoid seeking fame for yourself, or defaming others.
- Aim for the discussion to benefit everyone.
- Avoid letting the conversation drift off topic, become redundant, or go on for too long. Otherwise everyone will be bored.

Don't forget that Dharma discussions are designed to bring forth wisdom for everyone.

## **DHARMA DEBATE**

Dharma debate requires more skill than giving a Dharma talk. One must have good knowledge of the topic in debate and the ability to 'think on one's feet' when dealing with unexpected questions or opposing views. Some people ask questions in order to test your knowledge. It requires you to be tactful when dealing with these kinds of questions. Some questions require answers that are beyond the depth of the questioner to perceive. In such cases it may be better to not offer any answers (such as talking about the details of meditative attainment when the questioner has never even meditated before).

Choosing the wrong people to engage in a Dharma discussion can be disastrous. An ideal participant should be one who is open-minded, peaceful and patient; one who is able to comprehend profound matters, open to advice and criticism, and who does not engage in unreasonable conversations. Talks of trivial matters should be avoided.

The subject of conversation should be suited to the participants. If you seek to gain knowledge on the Scripture, you should choose people who are well versed in the subject of Scripture. If you are going to discuss meditation, then it should be a discussion between those who have gotten down to the practice for themselves.

To gain maximum benefit, those in discussion should share the goal of furthering their knowledge of Dharma and apply it in practice. Knowledge can be of no use if one does not put it into action.

## **DHARMA DISCUSSION AMONGST FAMILY MEMBERS**

Nowadays, the opportunity to discuss Dharma between family members is becoming more and more scarce. In many households both the husband and wife have to earn a living outside the home,

and by the time they get home after work it is quite late. Children often have to feed themselves or eat alone without their parents. Also, families tend to spend too much time watching TV rather than on Dharma wisdom.

If parents value the future of their children, they should spend more time with them and instill them with virtues. Otherwise, their children can be susceptible to bad influences. The extra money you can earn for your children by working late is no substitute for the time you will miss teaching virtues to your children. No money in the world can take away your suffering when your child is destroyed by drug addiction!

No matter how busy you are, you must find a way to spend time with your children every day. The best time to do this is when all members of the family are present to have a meal together at dinner time. By dining together, you will have a chance to observe your children and find out what they have done. If a child has done something wrong for the first time, you will notice the tell-tale signs of the child's misbehavior and be able to address it. If, however, you fail to catch it when the child has done something wrong for the first and second time, you will never be able to catch it again, because by then the child will have gotten so good at hiding it.

*The gift of Dharma excels all gifts.*

# WISDOM

## Practice Austerities

# 31



*Burning defilements with the fire of austerities.*

Human beings consist of a body and mind. When something is wrong with your body, you'll know it because of the symptoms you feel. But when something is wrong with your mind, you may not be aware of it.

An illness of the body may affect only one person, but an illness of the mind affects many. Illnesses of the body are often caused by bacteria, viruses, or dysfunction of certain body organs, which are not difficult to detect and diagnose. Illnesses of the mind are not so easy to detect. Unlike a bacteria or virus which can be detected

through a microscope or laboratory work, the thing that causes an illness of the mind cannot be seen by the human eye, microscope or X-ray equipment. No medical doctor can prescribe a cure for it.

In its natural condition, the mind is pure, luminous and full of wonderful qualities, not vulnerable to negative emotions. But due to being sullied by impurities the mind loses its natural quality. What causes the mind to be unhealthy is due to “defilements”—mental impurities that contaminate the mind.

### **DEFILEMENTS**

Known as “*kilesa*” in Pali, defilements are destructive emotions that cloud the mind, causing it to lose its natural quality. Defilements are made up of three negative emotions: greed, hatred and ignorance, all of which are the basis for all unwholesome actions. They are the root of suffering. States of mind such as anxiety, fear, anger, jealousy, worldly desire, depression, vengefulness, ill will, misguided ambition, laziness, delusion, conceit, wrong views, doubt, torpor, restlessness, shamelessness, and attachment all contribute to an impure mind.

Defilements in the mind are like the residues of ingrained bad habits. They are the things which cause us to act upon our emotions rather than our common sense or intelligence, thereby hindering us from our gain of higher knowledge and wisdom.

### **REMOVING DEFILEMENTS FROM THE MIND**

We have become so used to our own defilements, like fish are used to water, that we don't know they exist, or we even take them for granted. Defilements are something that cannot be seen by the human eye, a microscope, or any medical tools. Most religions have no idea of how to remove impurities from the mind. Some religions believe that defilements reside in the body, and so they can be

washed away with some holy water. Unfortunately, such beliefs are not based on practical wisdom. According to Buddhism, the right way to remove defilements from the mind is through the practice of austerities.

## **AUSTERITIES PRACTICE**

The word “austerities” is translated from the Pali word ‘tapa’ which means “to give heat”: giving heat to burn away impurities. Once defilements are burned away from the mind, what remains is a mind that is unblemished. Such a mind is pure and wise, not weakened by greed, hatred and ignorance. It is like heating up crude ore to extract its metal that can be used for something useful; or it is like mining gold. When you remove all the impurities or other minerals from the gold, what remains is nothing but pure gold. Such austerities should not be confused with the self-mortification practices in Brahminism, which the Buddha himself had practiced and later rejected.

## **COMBATING DEFILEMENTS**

Each type of defilement calls for a specific austerity treatment method, similar to taking specific medicine to cure a specific disease. Here are some examples:

1. Practice generosity to overcome stinginess.
2. Practice kindness to overcome hatred.
3. Observe the Eight Precepts to overcome sensuality.
4. Practice meditation to overcome ignorance.
5. Eat to live, don't live to eat, to overcome excessive appetites.
6. Take a dhutanga retreat to overcome your attachment to comfort and luxury. Dhutanga is an ascetic practice, living in seclusion without having permanent shelter. Its aims are to assist in living the holy life free from attachments, and to deepen the practice of meditation.

7. Practice restraint of the senses to overcome temptations brought about by the six sense doors: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought.
8. Develop self-discipline to overcome laziness and a lack of responsibility.
9. Perform good deeds to overcome evil.
10. Avoid and abandon all bad deeds to overcome unwholesome habits.

*Defilements are obstacles to enlightenment.  
Once defilements are eradicated,  
the roots of suffering are removed  
and the path to enlightenment is cleared.*

# WISDOM

Live a Holy Life

# 32



*The first step to achieving a holy life is abstention from sexual indulgence. Practice celibacy.*

The Pali word referring to the practice of celibacy is ‘*Brahma-cariya*’, translated directly as ‘Brahma-faring’ or ‘holy life’, or, more mundanely, as ‘celibacy’ or ‘chastity’. In the sense of practice, it means conducting oneself like a Brahma—by fulfilling all virtues and cultivating the quality of mind until there are no defilements remaining. The goal is to elevate the state of mind and the resulting behavior for ultimate liberation.

## **PERIL OF SENSUALITY**

The biggest obstacle preventing the mind from elevating to a higher state is attachment to sensual pleasure. Thus, the first step to achieving a holy life is abstention from sexual indulgence. Pleasure derived from sexual indulgence comes with many impediments. At its most basic, it causes the mind to lose its purity. It is difficult to achieve a calm state of mind in meditation when your mind is preoccupied with family life, love affairs or sexual relationships.

To many, marriage may seem like a good life goal, but the joy of marriage is miniscule when compared to the hardship and suffering that a person may endure in married life. Having a family means taking on more responsibility and having less freedom. When a marriage is broken, everyone in the family suffers, especially the children. A divorce can turn the best of lovers into the worst of enemies. Also, the task of raising an offspring can be overwhelming. If you wish for a freer and more independent lifestyle, it is wise to avoid the bondage of married life.

## **CELIBACY AS A WAY OF LIBERATION**

The ultimate goal of all people is to free themselves from suffering and attain Nirvana. To achieve this goal, one must pave the way toward spiritual fulfillment. The first step is to free oneself from attachment to sensuality and by adopting the right practices according to the Noble Eightfold Path, the Path leading to liberation.

The most basic form of celibacy practice is to observe the Five Precepts, especially the precept concerning sexual misconduct. On a higher level, one may observe the Eight Precepts and abstain from any sexual activities altogether. If you are not yet married you may want to consider staying unmarried for good. A mind attached to sensuality is never free. An unmarried person is free like a bird. Once married, you're like a chained puppy.

The ultimate practice of celibacy is to be ordained as a Buddhist monk if you are a male. Ordination can be short-term, lasting only a few weeks to a few months, or it can be for the entire life. A fully ordained monk follows an intensive set of Monastic Discipline known as the 227 Precepts. The aim is to overcome the weaknesses in one's character and to eradicate defilements. If you are a woman, you may observe the Eight Precepts on a regular basis, or be ordained as a Buddhist nun. Buddhist nuns also observe the Eight Precepts. Ordination can be for a temporary period or for life. Although it is not absolutely necessary to retire to solitude and lead the life of an ascetic to realize the ultimate goal of liberation, the life of an ordained monk or nun no doubt expedites and facilitates spiritual progress.

### **FOUR PLANES OF MIND**

Buddhism is one religion that puts a great deal of importance on the subject of the mind. A great depth of knowledge on this subject is available for anyone to explore. Having proper knowledge and understanding of the characteristics and nature of the mind, how it functions, and the way it affects the way we think, act and speak, is essential for helping to reach our goal of spiritual attainment. The key to gaining liberation of our being is to gain liberation of the mind. This is only possible when our mind is elevated to the highest level, or plane.

The quality of our mind comes in four levels, or planes:

‘*Sensual Plane*’ – the plane where most people's minds are still attached to the temptation of sensual pleasures. Sensual pleasure can mean sexual pleasure or pleasure of the five senses (sight, sound, taste, smell, touch).

‘*Form Plane*’ – the state of mind of those who have practiced meditation reaching a level of attainment known as ‘Form Absorption’ (*rūpa-jhāna*). This is the state where one finds greater bliss and satisfaction from the practice of meditation than the mundane pleasure of the senses. Such a person will no longer have interest in sensual indulgence.

‘*Non-form Plane*’ – the higher plane of mind surpassing the level of Form Absorption in meditation. This is the state of meditative attainment known as ‘Non-form Absorption’ (*arūpa-jhāna*). Those reaching this state of mind find even greater bliss than Form Absorption.

‘*Supramundane Plane*’ – the transcendental state of mind beyond the reach of worldly circumstances (gain or loss, honor and dishonor, happiness and misery, praise and blame, etc.). This is the state where one finds the most complete and perfect form of happiness. At its most advanced it includes the plane of mind of an arahant, or saint, who has come to an end of defilements. This is the ultimate state of mind that all of us should aspire to achieve.

## **CORRELATION BETWEEN PLANES OF MIND AND SPHERES OF EXISTENCE**

What we do habitually leads to our habitual state of mind and our habitual state of mind will lead to our next state of existence, or rebirth. Quality of mind is dependent on the degree to which the mind is refined and purified. The more refined and purified the mind, the higher plane of mind and higher state of existence, or rebirth, it reaches. This is acquired through constant practice of mental cultivation, or meditation.

According to the Buddhist worldview the universe consists of three major spheres of existence: the Sensual Sphere, the Form Sphere (also called ‘Sphere of Form’, or ‘Fine-material Sphere’), and the Non-form Sphere (also called ‘Immaterial Sphere’).

The Sensual Sphere is the state of existence inhabited by humans, animals, hell- beings and angels. The inhabitants of this sphere are dominated by desires of the senses.

If we can escape the Sensual Sphere, we enter upon the Form Sphere, otherwise known as 'Form-brahma world' (*rūpa-brahma*), the dwelling place of 'Form- brahmas', the higher form of celestial beings.

If we can improve the quality of our mind even further we will reach a more subtle and refined sphere known as Non-form Sphere, the dwelling place of 'Non-form- brahmas' (*arūpa-brahma*), the highest form of celestial beings.

All Brahmas have their origins from humans who, while living on earth, have cultivated a series of virtues called the 'Divine States of Mind', known in Pali as '*Brahmavihara*'. *Brahmavihara* (literarily means "abodes of Brahma") consists of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy (joy in the accomplishments of others), and equanimity (learning to accept loss and gain, praise and scorn, sorrow and happiness with detachment). These virtues are antidotes to negative mental states such as greed, ill will, vengefulness, jealousy and pride. Cultivation of these virtues along with regular practice of meditation can elevate one's plane of mind from mundane to transcendental, thereby helping one to reach the goal of spiritual fulfillment and liberation.

*The key to gaining liberation of our being is  
to gain liberation of the mind.*

# WISDOM

## See the Four Noble Truths

# 33



*We are so used to suffering that we don't realize its presence,  
just as fish so used to water don't notice the water.*

Buddhism is not concerned with who made the world or proving the existence of God or gods. Rather, its focus is on the down-to-earth reality of life—that all existence is subject to suffering. At first glance this may seem like a pessimistic viewpoint, but Buddhism is neither pessimistic nor optimistic; it is realistic. Buddhism stresses suffering because suffering is problematical, whereas happiness is not.

## ***DUKKHA, THE TRUTH OF SUFFERING***

The meaning of suffering in Buddhism is often misunderstood in the West. The English word 'suffering' is loosely translated from the Pali word 'dukkha', but dukkha has a wide range of meanings and connotations. Dukkha covers the whole spectrum of psycho-emotional states, from a mild sense that things are not quite right to physical and mental pain. As a feeling, the word dukkha means "that which is difficult to be endured". Dukkha can mean unsatisfactoriness, unpleasant physical or mental experiences, feeling of physical or mental pain, incapability of satisfying, and inability to bear or withstand. It may also be taken to mean that there is no lasting peace or rest in life; that we are forever under pressure and subject to disruption. Thus, impermanence and change are also a form of suffering. Since nothing lasts forever and everything is subject to change, people themselves create this suffering by trying to cling on to worldly pleasures.

Suffering comes in two forms: inevitable suffering and transient suffering. Inevitable suffering is the form of suffering that no one is exempt from. Birth, aging, sickness and death belong in this category. Transient suffering is caused by the mind that is lacking in quality. However, this form of suffering can be avoided or controlled. Sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, hurt feelings, exposure to hateful things, separation from loved ones or possessions, and disappointment, belong in this category.

Some of you may wonder why birth is seen as suffering. After all, many cultures see birth as an occasion for celebration. Birth is a form of suffering because it is the root cause of many hardships that are associated with human existence. Birth leads to old age, sickness, and death, all of which are painful and undesirable. If birth is happiness, why then does a baby have to cry at the top of his lungs the moment he comes out of his mother's womb? The entire process of birth is painful for the baby (and the mother) but we don't realize it. The ultimate goal of man is freedom from suffering. This goal can be realized only if one is freed from the cycle of birth and death.

Since all created things are subject to decay and dissolution, clinging to things that are impermanent can only lead to suffering. Not getting what one desires is suffering. Not being able to get rid of what one does not desire is also suffering. Many things contribute to suffering, including the opposite of all that we mentally embrace in terms of well-being: disharmony, dissatisfaction, discontent, discomfort, irritation, friction, and the awareness of incompleteness or insufficiency.

Normally, the enjoyment of sensual pleasures is the highest and only happiness of the average person, but this happiness is illusory and temporary. True and lasting happiness can only be found within and is not to be defined in terms of wealth, power, honors or conquests. If such worldly possessions are forcibly or unjustly obtained, or are misdirected or even viewed with attachment, they become a source of pain and sorrow for the possessors.

It is a common misconception that Buddhists believe that life is all suffering. This misconception will be removed once a person has a chance to understand the deeper meaning of Buddhism.

## **THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS**

The Four Noble Truths are the universal truths that have existed since the beginning of time. The Buddha discovered these truths and taught them to the world. They are the foundations of all Buddhist teachings.

The Pali term for Noble Truths is '*Ariya Sacca*'. '*Ariya*' means 'noble' or 'holy'. '*Sacca*' means 'that which is (in accordance with reality)'. *Sacca* is typically translated as 'truth', something that does not and cannot change with time. '*Ariya Sacca*' can be translated as 'the Noble Truths', 'the nobles' truths', 'the truths of the nobles', 'the truths for nobles', 'the truths possessed by the nobles', or 'the truths that make one noble'.

## THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS CONSIST OF:

1. *The Truth of Suffering* – The first Truth reveals that worldly existence is fundamentally unsatisfactory and that all forms of existence are subject to suffering. To elaborate, all conditional phenomena and experiences are not ultimately satisfying; many things contribute to suffering, including aging, sickness, death, pain, discomfort, impermanence, transiency, unsatisfactoriness, union with what is displeasing, separation from what is pleasing, and not getting what one wants. In brief, anything subject to attachment is suffering. This Truth is to be analyzed, scrutinized and examined in order to lead to a proper understanding of oneself and one's existence. Without this understanding it is unlikely that one will find solutions to the problem of suffering.
2. *The Truth of Origin of Suffering* – The second Truth reveals that suffering is caused by attachment to desires and craving: craving sensual pleasures, craving material existence, craving non-material existence, craving to be or to become, craving not to be or not to become, desire for what is pleasurable, and aversion to what is not pleasurable. Wherever in the world there are delightful and pleasurable things, this desire arises and takes root. Delightful and pleasurable things that come in contact through eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind; visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily impressions, and mind objects that are delightful and pleasurable; consciousness, sense impression, feelings born of sense impression, perception, will, craving, thinking, and reflecting that are delightful and pleasurable, all give rise to craving. This Truth is concerned with a destructive force latent in us all, for as long as one is entangled by craving one remains in suffering.
3. *The Truth of Cessation of Suffering* – The third Truth reveals that suffering ceases when craving and clinging cease. The way that craving can be extinguished is by eradicating the defilements in the mind. Putting an end to this craving and

clinging also means that dissatisfaction and rebirth can no longer arise. This is the state of ultimate happiness: Nirvana. Nirvana can be achieved in this life itself by the total eradication of all forms of craving and attachments.

4. *The Truth of Freedom from Suffering* – The fourth Truth reveals that freedom from suffering is attainable through the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, the Path leading to Nirvana.

These four truths can be compared with treating illnesses in conventional medicine. Following a medical pattern, a disease is identified, its cause diagnosed, a remedy is declared to exist, and then that remedy is prescribed. The Buddha is likened to a physician who diagnoses and treats the illness.

Knowledge of the Four Noble Truths may be intellectual (mundane) or by way of realization (supramundane). As mundane knowledge, the Four Noble Truths are generally perceived as separate events; nevertheless their understanding helps to dispel certain prejudices and false beliefs. In the supramundane stage all the four truths are simultaneously realized. Whoever recognizes suffering also realizes its origin, its cessation and the path to its cessation. The supramundane stage can only be realized through meditative attainment. Once realized, the person will become invulnerable to the influence of defilements, reaching a holy state of mind and eventual liberation.

Those who recognize the existence of suffering, its cause, its remedy, and its cessation have fathomed the Four Noble Truths.

## **NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH**

The Noble Eightfold Path, also known as the Middle Way, is the Path to end all suffering. All eight elements of the Path begin with the word 'Right' (*sammā*), indicating the sense of wholesome, wise, ideal, or skillful way. The Path consists of:

1. *Right View (sammā-ditthi)* – also known as right understanding, right perspective, right outlook; the view and wisdom in accordance with Truth. It is the right way of looking at life, nature, and the world as they really are. It involves the understanding with reference to the human existence, moral law of karma, merit and demerit, the three characteristics of life (impermanence, suffering, and non-self), defilements (greed, hatred, and delusion), and the Four Noble Truths. The purpose of Right View is to clear one's path of misunderstanding, confusion, and deluded thinking, and inspire one to lead a virtuous life. Right understanding is the keynote of Buddhism.
2. *Right Thought (sammā-sankappa)* – also known as right intention, right resolve, right conception, and right aspiration. It involves a mind free of whatever qualities that are wrong and immoral, such as lust, ill-will, hatred, selfishness and cruelty; to think toward non-attachment, renunciation, loving-kindness and harmlessness, as opposed to selfishness, ill-will, and cruelty; and to consider the plight of others with sympathy and understanding.
3. *Right Speech (sammā-vaca)* – to speak the truth, to speak in a way that is polite, pleasing, affectionate, kind, beneficial, harmonious, and with good intention; to abstain from lying, false speech, divisive speech, abusive language, harsh language, unkind words, tale-bearing, foolish babble, idle chatter, and saying things that are unbeneficial, unkind, or hurtful to others.
4. *Right Action (sammā-kammanta)* – also called right conduct: good conduct earned by not taking life, not stealing or taking what is not given, not committing sexual misconduct, not taking intoxicants; to be morally upright in one's activities, not acting in ways that would be corrupt or bring harm to oneself or others.
5. *Right Livelihood (sammā-ajiva)* – to practice honest and wholesome professions; to acquire wealth through honest and

ethical means; to avoid occupations that involve cheating on others or causing harm or suffering to anyone. Choose a work or profession that is morally satisfying or fulfilling, something that makes you “sleep well at night”. Any work that benefits others and does not violate moral precepts is right livelihood. Any work that involves killing or causing misery to others, such as trading in weapons, in poisons, in intoxicants, raising animals for their flesh or slaughter, or human trafficking, should be avoided. Some professions may be legal and acceptable to society, but if they violate moral precepts or the law of karma, they should be avoided.

6. *Right Effort (sammā-vayama)* – also translated as right endeavor, right diligence. It is the effort to do good and avoid bad; to prevent new evil from entering one’s mind; to remove all evil that is present; to develop and maintain wholesome conduct; to avoid and overcome unwholesome things; to suppress all evil thoughts; and to cultivate virtues that lead to enlightenment.
7. *Right Mindfulness (sammā-sati)* – also translated as right awareness and right attention: to be conscious of one’s own thought, action and speech; to have control of the senses; to act with clear comprehension; to keep one’s mind alert to phenomena that affect the body and mind, putting away greed and distress with reference to the world; not to act or speak due to inattention or forgetfulness; to remain focused on the body, on the feelings, on the mind, and on mental qualities; not to allow oneself to be overcome by discontent, fear, anxiety, physical and mental pain; and to be aware of the consequence of one’s own action. In the practice of right mindfulness, the mind is trained to be open, quiet, and alert, and contemplating on the present.
8. *Right Concentration (sammā-samadhi)* – also known as right meditation: to cultivate the mind in the proper way, to practice the right method of meditation. The goal is to reach a state

of meditative absorption, known in Pali as ‘*jhāna*’, leading to eventual attainment. As such, the practitioner concentrates on an object of attention until reaching full concentration and a state of meditative absorption. Traditionally, the practice of one-pointed concentration, known in Pali as ‘*samādhi*’, can be developed through mindfulness of breathing, through visual objects, and through repetition of a mantra. *Jhāna* is used to suppress the five hindrances in meditation (sensual desire, ill-will, boredom, restlessness, worry, doubt) in order to enter into *samādhi*, or perfect concentration. *Jhanā* is an instrument used for developing wisdom by cultivating insight and by using it to examine the true nature of phenomena with direct cognition. This leads to cutting off the defilements, realizing the Dharma and, finally, to self-awakening. During the practice of right concentration, the practitioner will need to investigate and verify his or her right view. In the process right knowledge will arise, followed by right liberation. Any singleness of mind equipped with these seven factors—right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, and right mindfulness—is called right concentration.

All eight steps of the Path should be practiced simultaneously.

Buddhism is based on personal experience. True wisdom can be acquired by practice only. Instead of beliefs and dogmas, the importance of practice is emphasized. The validity of Buddhist teachings can be practiced and verified by experience. Rational understanding is encouraged, not blind faith.

*“Suffering I teach—and the way out of suffering”.... The Buddha*

# WISDOM

Reach for Nirvana

# 34



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*When the fires of attachment,  
aversion and ignorance are extinguished,  
liberation from rebirth is attained – Nirvana.*

The ultimate purpose of man is to be free from suffering, to attain Nirvana.

Nirvana has been a subject of debate for millennia. The main point of debate concerns the characteristics of Nirvana whether it is of the nature of 'self' ('*attā*', existing entity), or 'non-self' ('*anattā*',

non-existing entity). This issue has been with us throughout the history of the development of Buddhism. Even in the present day, there are academic scholars of the West and the East who are still debating this issue.

Unlike the subjects of mundane nature where people can see, touch or feel, Nirvana is something non-concrete that no ordinary person (except arahants or those who have reached a high level of meditative attainment) has ever seen, touched, felt or experienced. Some even go as far as saying Nirvana is something beyond the power of mind to know and words to tell. This is essentially true, since words cannot express what the mind doesn't know. The exact nature of experience cannot be expressed through words or communication. This is true of all experiences, whether it be the experience of tasting a chili, a durian (unique fruit found in Southeast Asia), or your first swim in the ocean. It is simply not possible to accurately describe to someone who has never eaten one or done it. We find ourselves confronted with a similar problem when we try to describe Nirvana.

Nirvana is a supramundane state that cannot be expressed by words and is beyond space and time. To understand what Nirvana is really like, you have to experience it yourself, just as to know what durian is really like, you must eat it. Similarly, we have to experience the end of suffering for ourselves to understand Nirvana.

## WHAT IS NIRVANA?

*“The extinction of greed, the extinction of hate, the extinction of delusion: this indeed is called Nirvana.” .... The Buddha*

The word ‘Nirvana’ (Pali, *Nibbāna*) has a myriad of meanings. Nirvana can be translated as ‘extinguishing’, or it can mean ‘escape’. Where Nirvana means ‘extinguishing’ it means the extinguishing of defilements or of suffering. Where Nirvana means ‘escape’ it

means escaping from the prisons of the three spheres of existence (comprising the whole universe: the Sensual Sphere, Form Sphere and Formless Sphere (see Wisdom 32)).

Nirvana cannot be grasped via sense experience or by the mind operating in terms of its usual conceptual categories; it certainly cannot be described in words. To do so would be like trying to describe the color red to a blind person. It lies wholly outside of our normal field of experience. One classic misconception is to see Nirvana as some kind of nothingness. Another misconception is to imagine Nirvana as a heaven where all good Buddhists go. It is universally agreed, however, that Nirvana is the state of ultimate happiness, the supreme bliss, where no suffering can reach. It also means the happy condition of enlightenment, the “place” where Buddhas and arahants go to partake of eternal bliss after they pass away. On the mundane level, it can mean the state of mind in which desires, defilements and craving are extinct. From a metaphysical standpoint Nirvana is complete deliverance from suffering. From a psychological standpoint Nirvana is the eradication of egoism. From an ethical standpoint Nirvana is the destruction of lust, hatred and ignorance.

There are two types of Nirvana: Nirvana in this lifetime and Nirvana after death.

***Nirvana in this lifetime*** : This is the Nirvana that can be experienced while one is still alive. In other words, we don't have to die first and be reborn to attain it. In this form of Nirvana the physical life of a person continues, but the state of mind is free of defilements or mental impurities. This Nirvana is attainable through meditative experience when we have purified our mind from all defilements and reached a transcendental state of absorption. This is a meditative state known as attainment of Buddhahood or Body of Enlightenment (Dhammakaya).

***Nirvana after death:*** This is the dimension or “place” where those who have freed their minds of all defilements can go to partake of eternal bliss after they pass away. This takes place at the death of one who has completely extinguished all defilements, such as a Buddha or an arahant, where the last remains of physical life (aggregates) vanish, and no further rebirth takes place. This Nirvana is outside the three spheres of existence and is transcendental.

Without understanding the above distinctions, the more you read about Nirvana in the textbooks, the more confused you will become. Most textbooks are based on interpretation of older texts rather than on experience. Those who interpret from the scriptures but who have not practiced meditation can bring nothing but more confusion to the subject. In your pursuit of perpetual happiness, you should not be too concerned about the technical interpretation of the meaning and characteristics of Nirvana. Rather, you should put the importance into the practice.

### **DO YOU HAVE TO BE A BUDDHIST TO REACH NIRVANA?**

Nirvana is not reserved exclusively for Buddhists. The practice to reach Nirvana is within everyone’s capability. Anyone with the right understanding, right knowledge and right practice can get there. Nirvana is not produced but is attained. It could be attained in this life itself. Countless individuals, past and present, have attained Nirvana.

Nirvana constitutes the highest and most ultimate goal of man’s aspirations. Buddhism begins with the Buddha’s Enlightenment and ends with man’s. The purpose of Buddhism is to attain enlightenment for oneself and all creation. Anyone who has cultivated as many good deeds as the Buddha or the arahants can, like them, enter upon Nirvana. It is not necessary to retire to solitude and lead the life of an ascetic to realize Nirvana.

## HOW TO ATTAIN NIRVANA

Nirvana is not a myth. Attaining Nirvana is within everyone's reach. The principles for attaining Nirvana boil down to three basic practices brought to perfection: morality, mental development, and wisdom. Keep your precepts pure to restrain defilements from getting out of control. Meditate until you reach a transcendental state of mind free from all impurities. Cultivate wisdom until you achieve penetrating insight into the reality of life.

As part of the requisite, the truths of suffering are to be fully understood, the craving and defilements which originate suffering are to be abandoned, and the Noble Eightfold Path is to be developed. The eight components of the Noble Eightfold Path—right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness—are to be practiced simultaneously, and perfectly. These components are designed to uproot defilements which are the roots of suffering.

Meditation and the Noble Eightfold Path go hand in hand. When your meditation is practiced to perfection, the Noble Eightfold Path will be fully perceived. And when the Noble Eightfold Path is fully developed, your meditation attainment will become realizable. Practice meditation until you reach a supreme state of absorption known as attainment of Buddhahood or Dhammakaya. Dhammakaya, otherwise known as Body of Enlightenment, is the spiritual essence that exists in all beings. Through the divine eye of Dhammakaya you will be able to “see” the Four Noble Truths and the Path that leads to the end of suffering. Cultivate your virtues until they are brought to perfection. When all this is done, Nirvana will be within your reach.

*“O Monks! There is that dimension where there is neither earth,  
nor water, nor fire, nor wind; neither dimension of the infinitude  
of space, nor dimension of the infinitude of consciousness,  
nor dimension of nothingness,  
nor dimension of neither perception nor non-perception;  
neither this world, nor the next world, nor sun, nor moon.  
And there, I say, there is neither coming, nor going, nor stasis;  
neither passing away nor arising;  
without stance (standing, walking, sleeping),  
without foundation, without mental object.  
This, just this, is the end of suffering.”*

### **The Buddha**



common events that can happen to anyone. They are the episodes in life which we would rather avoid but must get through.

### **THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF EXISTENCE**

Everything in the world has its own characteristics. Heat, for instance, is a characteristic of fire but not of water. The heat of fire is natural to fire and is connected with fire. We can understand that fire is hot and potentially dangerous. It can burn and destroy property. Yet fire can also be useful. We can use fire to cook our food or to warm our bodies. The characteristic of heat tells us something about fire, what fire is, and what to do with fire.

Other examples: gold has the characteristic that when it is pure, it will have a yellow color and will shine; iron is a hard metal but it rusts easily; mercury is a fluid metal that is heavy, etc. These are the specific qualities of certain materials.

People also have their own characteristics: they can move, think, speak, and feel. However, for all their differences, everything in the world—material objects, living beings, and mental phenomena—share three common characteristics: impermanence, suffering, and not-self. These are known as the ‘Three Characteristics of Existence’.

### **IMPERMANENCE**

All conditioned phenomena, be they material or mental, are impermanent and subject to change. No things persist in the same way but vanish and dissolve from moment to moment. Anything that comes into existence will eventually go out of existence. Our bodies, our homes, our environments, our finances, prices of goods, the stock market, governments—anything and everything—never remains in the same state.

Sometimes we think that material things are unchanging, but this is not the case. Look at everything around you and compare them to how they were a few years or even a few days ago and you'll notice the difference. Our possessions are also impermanent. All the things that we dearly love—our homes, our automobiles, our clothes—are impermanent. They will all decay and eventually be destroyed.

If you look at the pictures of yourself from when you were little to the time you became a teenager, to the present moment, you will see how drastically you have physically changed. Our mental states are also impermanent. They change from moment to moment. At one moment we are happy, and at another moment sad. Our relationships with others, including our own family, are marked by impermanence. Friends become enemies; enemies become friends, etc. This is true of everything: people, material objects, natural phenomena. People get old. Metal rusts. Paint blisters. Cloth frays. All natural phenomena, even those that appear to be the most durable, even the solar system itself, will one day decline and cease to exist. There is degradation and deterioration built into everything around us.

Understanding impermanence is understanding the truth about the nature of things. It is an antidote to attachment.

## **SUFFERING**

There is no lasting peace or rest in life. Because it is the nature of things to have degradation and deterioration built in to their existence, all things are a potential cause for suffering because they are incapable of giving lasting satisfaction. If you expect things to remain the same you're bound to be disappointed. Failing to understand that youth, beauty, health, possessions, power, prestige, pleasant experiences, and life itself are impermanent, we crave them and cling to them. Yet because they are impermanent by nature, they never stay with us for long. When this happens, suffering happens.

Clinging to things that are impermanent gives rise to suffering. This does not include only material things, but also things of emotional nature, such as love, longing, and relationships. Our happiness is unreliable because it is usually based on material and emotional things that don't last.

### **NOT-SELF**

All things perceived by the senses (including the mental sense) are not really "I", "me", or "mine". There is no lasting essence, only illusion of the existence of a self. Neither within the bodily and mental phenomena of existence could be regarded as a self-existing real ego-entity, soul, or any other abiding substance.

Nothing in the world has implicit identity. Take a look at a meditation mat. It is a meditation mat only after several components are put together to form its shape. If you were to take it apart, you'll be left with a pile of cloth, fiber, threads, etc. There is no particular part which makes it a 'mat'. If you look at it with a microscope all you can see is a collection of cells. In the same way people look at their own bodies and they say "This is me"; "This is what makes me who I am". But if they look closely they will find that their bodies are just a collection of organs, bones, tissues and nerves. After they die their bodies will breakdown and disintegrate into the various parts. There is no particular part which makes them who they are.

Another aspect of 'not-self' is that nothing is under our control. Even if you don't want to look old, you cannot stop your body from aging. You can't command your skin not to wrinkle, or your hair not to turn grey or fall out. Likewise, you can't tell your car not to break down, or your house not to fall apart. No one can stop this process.

Impermanence is directly related to the characteristic of not-self. Understanding impermanence is a key to understanding not-self, impersonality, or insubstantiality.

You may wonder how one can deny the self. After all, we do say, “I am speaking” or “I am walking,” “I am called so and so” or “I am the father (or the son) of such and such person.” How can we deny the reality of that “I”?

The Buddha used the examples of a chariot and a forest to explain the relation between the name or term “I” and the components of personal experience. The term “chariot” is simply a convenient name for a collection of parts that are assembled in a particular way. The wheels are not the chariot, nor is the axle, nor is the carriage, and so forth. Similarly, a single tree is not a forest, nor is a number of trees. Yet there is no forest apart from individual trees, so the term “forest” is just a convenient name for a collection of trees.

The “self” is just a convenient name for a collection of aggregates and attributes. There is no self, no soul, no essence, no core of personal experience apart from the ever-changing, interdependent, impermanent physical and mental factors of personal experience, such as our feelings, ideas, habits, and attitudes.

The following analysis will help you understand that the self is nowhere to be found either in the body or the mind:

(1) The body is not the self, for if the body were the self, the self would be permanent, would not be subject to change, decay, destruction, and death. Hence the body cannot be the self. (2) The self does not possess the body, in the sense that I possess a car or a television, because the self cannot control the body. The body falls ill, gets tired and old against our wishes. The body has an appearance which often does not agree with our wishes. Hence in no way does the self possess the body. (3) The self does not exist in the body. If we search our bodies from the tops of our heads to the tips of our toes, we would not locate the self anywhere. The self is not in the bone or in the blood, in the marrow or in the hair or spittle. The self is nowhere to be found within the body. (4) The body does not exist in the self. For the body to exist in the self, the self would have to be

found apart from the body and mind, but the self is nowhere to be found.

In the same way, (1) the mind is not the self because, like the body, the mind is subject to constant change and it is constantly agitated. The mind is happy one moment and unhappy the next. Hence the mind is not the self because the mind is constantly changing. (2) The self does not possess the mind because the mind becomes excited or depressed against our wishes. Although we know that certain thoughts are wholesome and certain thoughts unwholesome, the mind pursues unwholesome thoughts and is indifferent toward wholesome thoughts. Hence the self does not possess the mind because the mind acts independently of the self. (3) The self does not exist in the mind. No matter how carefully we search the contents of our minds, no matter how carefully we search our feelings, ideas, and inclinations, we can find the self nowhere in the mind and the mental states. (4) The mind does not exist in the self either because, again, the self would have to exist apart from the mind and body, but such a self is nowhere to be found.

Once we identify, imagine, or conceive of ourselves as an entity, we immediately create a schism, a separation between ourselves and the people and things around us. As long as we cling to the self, we will always have to defend ourselves, our prestige, opinions, and even our statements. But once we give up the belief in an independent and permanent self, we will be able to relate to other people and situations without paranoia. We will be able to act more freely, more spontaneously, and more creatively. Understanding not-self is an aid to living.

These three characteristics, impermanence, suffering, and not-self, are shared by all things. They are the basic features common to everything, from microbe to man, from the simplest sensations to the thoughts of a creative genius. Understanding the three characteristics is part of the contents of wisdom. Life can be correctly understood only if these three basic facts are understood.

## WORLDLY CIRCUMSTANCES

When ordinary people encounter changing circumstances in the world, their states of mind go up and down like a roller coaster. They are elated when coming upon desirable things and dispirited when facing undesirable consequences.

The following are eight worldly circumstances that touch everyone's life:

- ***Gain of Wealth*** — anything which we gain or which comes to us as profit, such as possession of houses, lands, properties, money, jewelry, or a spouse
- ***Gain of Honor*** — anything that increases our prestige, such as a promotion, a good position in life, being accorded with more powers or authority
- ***Praise*** — anything that makes us feel good about ourselves, such as receiving compliments, acclamation, flattery or tribute
- ***Happiness*** — anything that brings satisfaction, gratification, contentment and comfort to our lives
- ***Loss of Wealth*** — losing what you used to have or own, such as your spouse, your children, your property, your land, your business
- ***Loss of Honor*** — losing your prestige, such as having your powers or authority withdrawn, getting a demotion or being fired
- ***Blame*** — being accused or criticized for your faults
- ***Suffering*** — undergoing physical or mental pain; enduring hardship or misfortune

When we've achieved some condition that makes us feel whole and complete, we want everything to stay exactly as it is. The

deeper our attachment to whatever provides us with this sense of completeness, the greater our fear of losing it and the more brutal our pain if we do lose it. We spend a good part of our lives worrying about how to gain wealth, honor, praise and happiness. Once we have gotten them, we are possessive of them and worry that we will lose them. If we lose them, we spend years lamenting their loss. If you allow fluctuating circumstances to dictate your mood the quality of your mind will suffer. Attachment to what is impermanent, transitory, illusory, and beyond your control can bring nothing but disappointments to your life.

### **HOW TO BECOME INVULNERABLE TO WORLDLY CIRCUMSTANCES**

Realize that there is no lasting peace or rest in life because nothing is permanent and everything is subject to change. Acknowledge that suffering is the nature of all things, that there is no lasting essence, or identity, or a 'self' to cling on to, and that the changing circumstances of the world is out of your control. Clear comprehension of impermanence, suffering and not-self will bring to you a saner outlook on life. By comprehending it will free you from unrealistic expectations, bestow acceptance of failure and suffering, and protect you against deluded assumptions and beliefs. By seeing this, detachment will grow, and greater freedom will entail.

Train your mind to be steadfast and strong. Don't let your emotion rule. Examine every situation objectively with a calm temperament and equanimity. When coming upon good fortune, don't be carried away thinking that your fortune will last forever. Realize that wealth, honor, praise and happiness have impermanence and suffering built into them and are thus subject to change. When facing misfortune, don't be overcome by the feeling of loss. Examine your hardship objectively with detachment like a doctor examining someone else's pain. Then you'll see that, like everything else in the world which does not remain the same forever, so, too, does your hardship.

Hope for the best and prepare for the worst. Don't think that you are the only one suffering. Disappointments and setbacks are normal occurrences in life that everyone has to experience from time to time.

Cultivate your mind through meditation. Mental cultivation is an effective means to gain wisdom and clarity. Once clarity of mind is achieved, you will see life the way it really is, and once your mind is cultivated to the supreme state of purity like that of the arahants', you will find peace and happiness within yourself and will no longer be vulnerable to fluctuating circumstances of the world.

*Just as a mountain of solid rock remains unshaken by the wind,  
so does the mind of the steadfast remains unshaken  
by worldly circumstances.*

# WISDOM

Be Free from Sorrow

# 36



*Where there is love there is sorrow.*

The word 'sorrow' is a term which refers to the suffering state of a mind that is filled with sadness and pain. A mind of sorrow is dry like a parched land, withered like a dead leaf.

## **TALE OF FRIGHTENING TIGERS**

Once upon a time, there was an old Chinese monk who built a temple deep in the forest at the top of the mountains. The monk had stayed inside the temple he had built without going anywhere else

for almost his entire life. One day, the monk found an orphaned boy in the forest. The monk took the child back with him to the temple and brought him up until he became a teenager. The boy and the monk spent most of their lives in the temple. The only contact they had with the outside world was when they had monks come visit them from other temples. All his life, the boy could not remember having met anyone else but monks.

One day, the monk needed to run some errands in the nearby town and he needed to take the boy along to help carry things. The day before they had to make the journey, the monk gave the boy a warning: "There is a type of animal that lives in the town that is very frightening. The animal looks just like you, but it has long hair, red cheeks and red lips. Such animals have strange effeminate habits. Whatever you do, don't get close to any of these animals. They are worse than tigers! If you don't follow my advice, you will never get back to our temple alive. Keep your distance."

The two of them went into town and the town was full of the sort of tigers that the monk had warned him of. The boy looked at the 'tigers' but he didn't find them at all frightening. In fact, they looked quite pleasing to him. Whenever the monk was not watching him, he would stare at every 'tiger' that passed. On the way back to the temple, the boy was no longer his usual cheerful self, but hung his head with a sad look on his face, dragged his feet as if there was no energy left in them, and would hardly speak at all. The monk asked him, "Is anything wrong?"

The boy replied, "I am thinking about tigers".

The monk thought to himself, "Here we go again—after bringing up the boy the whole of his life in seclusion, he is still making the same mistake as the rest of them!"

Struck by love, the boy could hardly enjoy his life any more.

## **LOVE AND SORROW**

Love is one of the most powerful human emotions. People in love are not always in control of their minds. Love can bring an overpowering sensation of happiness and joy to a person. It can also cause unbearable pain and sorrow. Loving someone and being loved in return is a wonderful feeling. Loving someone and not being loved in return can be heartbreaking. Losing someone (or something) you love, separation from a loved one, or failure to fulfill one's desire, can result in unbearable sorrow.

Sorrow is a miserable kind of feeling that happens when we lose someone or something that is dear to us. The main cause of sorrow comes from possessive love. Possessive love is not the same as compassion, a selfless form of love based on kindness and generosity; but it is love of a selfish nature. Selfish love refers to an emotion of a strong attachment, such as longing for intimacy, craving for possession, or attraction to a member of the opposite sex. Possessive love doesn't just refer to people but to anything that you become emotionally attached—whether it be your house, your car, or your cat. Anything that has to do with possessive love is like a thorn that one day will prick at you and cause you pain.

## **LOVE IS LIKE A MONKEY TRAP**

In the olden days, hunters had an ingenious way of catching monkeys. They would leave a piece of wood covered in powerful glue made out of tree sap. The glue-covered wood would be placed next to a fruit tree. A monkey eating the fruit would accidentally touch the sticky wood and its hand would get stuck firmly to the wood. Next it would try to pull the wood off using its other hand; but the other hand would get stuck to the wood as well. Accordingly, it would try to kick its hands free with one foot; but its foot would get stuck to the wood. Of course, it would try to kick its hands free with the other foot; but its other foot would get stuck to the wood as well.

There was only one more thing it could do: to try to bite itself free. It would try to bite the wood, but its mouth would then get stuck to the wood. Finally, it would roll around in a ball on the ground and wait for the hunter to come and collect it.

When talking of falling in love, people are no more sensible than monkeys that are trapped by the hunter's glue. The expression on the face of the trapped monkey and the expression on the face of a jilted lover are exactly the same: they look depressed and hopeless.

Like being stuck to the hunter's glue, once the mind has attached itself to possessive love, it can no longer get itself free. In such a state of mind, any day you don't get a glimpse of your lover, you feel that you have no appetite. Even to hear their voice on the telephone, to see a glimpse of their face, or to catch sight of their house can help to satisfy you. If they love you in return, the anguish is not so bad. But what if they don't love you in return? Or what if they start out by loving you and later change their minds, or love someone else, or die? It is at this point that the mind will become so tormented that it feels like being torn in two.

## **CLOSING THE DOORS TO SORROW**

We cannot escape the eight worldly circumstances described in Wisdom 35—but sorrow is something we can choose to avoid. Most sorrows in the world are brought about because of the love and attachment we have for physical things—be it our body, the people we love, our pets, or our belongings. Once you free yourself from attachment to physical things you are free from sorrow. What can you do though, if you still feel the need to love something or someone? Here are some suggestions:

- *Distinguish between possessive love and selfless love.* This doesn't mean that you cannot express affection for people or things you like, but it means you should not allow your affection to turn into possessive love or obsession.

- *Love yourself.* This is not about egoism or selfishness, or being cold or heartless towards others. Love yourself in the sense that you don't let your emotion of love bring suffering to yourself, or cause you to do things that jeopardize your own wellbeing or moral integrity.
- *Meditate regularly.* Meditation helps you become constantly mindful of your own senses. The more you meditate the more steadfast your mind will become, and the less vulnerable you will be toward passion of the senses.
- *Cultivate moral discipline.* Keep your precepts pure. Observe the Eight Precepts on a regular basis if you can. The Eight Precepts is a good antidote against passion of the senses. The best protection, however, is to embrace celibacy, or become a monk.
- *Reflect on the Three Characteristics of Existence* to be reminded that all things, including love and relationships, are subject to impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality.
- *Meditate on death.* Remind yourself of the inevitability of death. Everyone born into this world is subject to aging, sickness and death. Buddhists remind themselves of this fact through daily chanting of this verse: "We are of a nature to age, we have not gone beyond aging; we are of a nature to sickness, we have not gone beyond sickness; we are of a nature to die, we have not gone beyond dying."

### **“WHAT’S THE POINT OF CRYING?”**

Once in ancient India there lived a farmer who had a wife, a young son, a young daughter, and a servant. One day, the farmer was ploughing in a field together with his son, who was weeding and burning the weeds. The bonfire caused the smoke to get into the burrow of a poisonous snake. The snake got out and bit the son, killing him.

Normally, a father would cry at the death of his son. But this is no ordinary farmer. He was a wise one who understood the reality of life. He saw that there was nothing he could do to bring the son back, so he continued ploughing. A neighbor passed by. The farmer told the neighbor to give the news to his family. Upon hearing the news all in the house came rushing to the field and saw the son lying dead. Like the farmer, none of them shed any tears, but helped to cremate the son. As they were cremating, an old Brahmin appeared from nowhere and asked, “Whose body is this you are cremating?”

“My son’s,” replied the farmer.

“Normally a father must cry at the death of his son—or at least his mother or sister or servant must cry. How come none of you are crying?” asked the Brahmin.

“We have our reasons for not crying,” explained the farmer. “When the life of someone’s body is expended, it is like a snake which must shed off an old skin. My son will have another life ahead of him. If he has been good he will have a good rebirth. If he has done evil he will have an unfortunate rebirth. Even if I were to cry, it would make no difference to his afterlife destination. What’s the point of crying?”

The mother said, “When my son was born, no one invited him. When he left us, he didn’t say farewell. He has gone in the same manner that he came. Even if I were to cry, my son would have no way of knowing. This is the reality. What’s the point of crying?”

The little sister said, “If I were to cry it would just spoil my looks, or even make me ill. It would then increase the worries of my family. No one is going to be any happier by my crying. What’s the point of crying?”

The servant said, “You cannot pick up the pieces of a broken pot and make it what it used to be. In the same way, it is no use crying over a dead body. My crying would not bring the son back. What’s the point of crying?”

## LIFE WITHOUT SORROW

To detach from love seems like an indifferent approach to life. One would argue: "How can life be complete without love and family?" But if you decide to live a life without sorrow, you need to steer away from things that are potential causes for sorrow. Most sorrows in this world are caused by possessive love. The more you love, the more you suffer; the less you love, the less you suffer. If you love nothing and no-one, you suffer none.

Is it possible to live a life without sorrow?

It is possible if you train your mind to become invulnerable to worldly desires and attachments. Sorrowlessness is a characteristic of one whose state of mind has reached Nirvana, free from passion. The ultimate way to protect your mind against sorrow is to strive to attain Nirvana. Nirvana is the state of ultimate happiness that no suffering and sorrow can reach.

*"Throughout this round of existences,  
the amount of tears you have shed on  
account of the death of sons, husbands,  
parents and brothers is incalculable."*

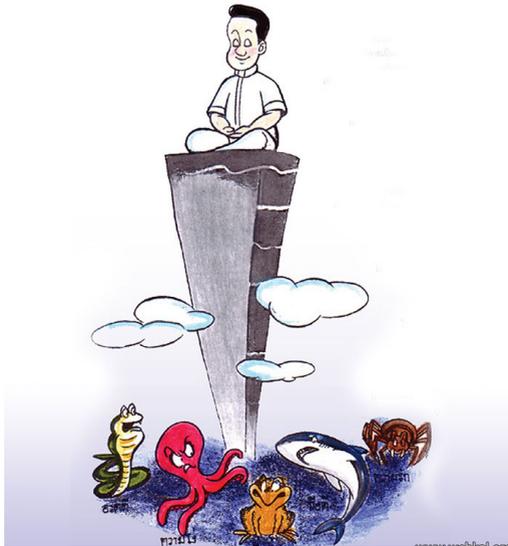
.... The Buddha

# WISDOM

## Be Free from Subtle Defilements

# 37

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*All humans are born with impurities in the mind.*

The mind by nature is pure and radiant. It is however tarnished by unwholesome visiting forces known as 'defilements' (kilesa). Defilements are negative emotions or mental afflictions which cloud the mind and manifest in unwholesome actions. They can be likened to bacteria or viruses in the body.

## **DEFILEMENTS**

Defilements, like litter, have gross and subtle forms. Gross litter (such as waste and debris) is easy to notice while subtle litter (such as fine dust) is difficult to detect. Likewise, gross defilements are easy to identify, while subtle defilements are not. Subtle defilements can be compared to fine dust that clings to the surface of a mirror. It is so small that it cannot be seen with normal eyesight. You only notice such dust when you wipe the mirror. Subtle defilements are so obscure that you hardly know that they exist. Even when you encounter them, you may still not realize that they are defilements. For as long as subtle defilements are still present, they will penetrate, encapsulate and infiltrate the mind, causing it to lose its radiance and purity. But once defilements have been completely uprooted, they can no longer hold their sway over the functioning of the mind.

Defilements can manifest at three levels : low level—latent like sediment waiting to be stirred up; medium level—arising only in the mind; and coarse level—showing up in the form of unwholesome actions. In order to reach the ultimate goal of liberation, it is necessary that defilements of all levels are uprooted to the point that they can never return. The mind free of subtle defilements is free of all levels of defilements. Such a mind is pure and chaste and is radiant like the quality of mind of an arahant.

## **THREE UNWHOLESOME ROOTS**

Greed, hatred, and delusion are the mother of all defilements. They are the roots of all evil. All negative predispositions are produced on the basis of these three.

### **GREED**

Desires, craving, greediness, stinginess, covetousness, overindulgence; all stem from the defilement of greed. In approximate order of decreasing seriousness, greed comes in the following varieties:

1. *Desiring things in a dishonest way:* This is when greed gets so out of hand that it overcomes your sense of morality and good judgment. Instead of using honest means to gain objects of your desire, you prefer to resort to dishonest means. Example: You have the ability to pay for something, but instead of paying for it with your rightful earnings you prefer to cheat, steal, or apply violence to get what you want.
2. *Open covetousness:* This is the desire for something so strong that you can no longer keep it to yourself or conceal your interest and are willing to resort to unscrupulous means to get what you want.
3. *Discrete covetousness:* You have a strong desire to take possession of something that belongs to others but not so strong that you're unable to keep this desire to yourself.
4. *Resorting to unscrupulous means to satisfy your desire:* This sort of greed doesn't go as far as stealing, but it means willingness to compromise your integrity or sense of morality to get what you want. It's like someone who wants to get rich and will do any sort of work to achieve this end even if it means selling drugs, taking bribes, or going into prostitution.
5. *Wanting more than your fair share:* This is when your greed overtakes your consideration for others. It's a form of selfishness. Example: There is barely enough food on the table for the party, but you grab most of the food for yourself; or you share a taxi with others but are not willing to share the fare; or you're a partner in business who will take your share of profit but are not willing to come up with your share of expenses.
6. *Sensuous craving:* Attachment to pleasurable sense-objects; to be attracted obsessively to someone or something. This is not an offense if it is done without violating any laws or morals, but it is a form of defilement because attachment to sensuality can slow your spiritual progress or lead to future suffering.

7. *Deviousness*: This is when you desire to get something from someone but lack the courage or are too embarrassed to ask for it directly, and you resort to a cunning or artful way of getting it. This is not cheating or lying or something unethical, but it is not forthright behavior.
8. *Grasping for the Sensual Realms*: This is when you still have an attachment to sensual pleasures. This attachment will inhibit your spiritual progress and prevent you from being reborn beyond the sensual realms.
9. *Grasping for the Realms of Form*: When you meditate to the degree that you attain the first absorption, or higher, and experience an unprecedented pleasure, happiness, and quietude, you think that this is the ultimate state of sainthood, so you hold on to this experience. This stops you from trying to make any further advancement. Your spiritual progress gets stuck at this level and you lose sight of your long-term goal.
10. *Grasping for the Formless Realms*: When you meditate to the degree that you attain the Formless Absorption and experience even greater bliss than that of the Form Absorption, you become attracted to this blissful state and are not trying to go any further. You're so close to reaching the final state of attainment, yet your spiritual progress ends at this level. This is a phenomenon that happens to many monks and dedicated meditators who are at the threshold of Nirvana but failing to reach it.

## **HATRED**

Hatred, the second unwholesome root, gives rise to all kinds and degrees of aversion. Ill will, anger, irritation, annoyance, animosity, thoughts or expression of aggression towards others, all stem from the defilement of hatred. In approximate order of decreasing seriousness, hatred comes in the following varieties:

1. *Vengefulness and ill will*: This is hostility, antagonism, spitefulness, holding grudges, resentment, vindictiveness, aggression, and animosity. It is the malicious wish to destroy someone or something so strong that if you don't succeed in destroying them today, you will make sure you succeed on a future occasion. Compared to water in a kettle, it is like the water boiling so violently that it is about to spit itself out of the kettle and scald the people nearby.
2. *Directed Anger*: This is anger of a destructive kind, with the thought of harming or doing damage to someone or something. It is like water at a rolling boil.
3. *Undirected Anger*: This is the sort of anger not directed at anyone, for no one is to blame for causing it. Example: biting your own tongue when you're eating, or inadvertently stubbing your toe. You're angry, but it's just a feeling, not amounting to enmity towards anyone. This is like the fizz of water that is starting to simmer.
4. *Irritability*: This is the feeling of annoyance or irritation in your mind when something is not going your way. Example: you want to sit for meditation and someone has the radio turned up loud. You're not angry but irritated. Although this kind of irritability may be of negligible harm, it should be subdued because it has the potential to develop into full-fledged anger.
5. *Dislike*: This is the feeling of apprehension and unease. Example: you have a slight difference in taste from another person but have to share in the same project or activity or working in the same workspace with that person. You would rather not have to work with or be alongside the person. If you still have such a feeling, your mind is under the sway of the subtle defilements.

## DELUSION

Delusion, the third of the unwholesome roots, is a fundamental ignorance of the nature of reality. It is a sort of blindness of the mind which obstructs your knowledge and understanding of the difference between right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and the spiritual values in life which are essential for everyone to know. This is a form of knowledge that does not depend on your level of education but depends on your attitude towards the world. In approximate order of decreasing seriousness, delusion comes in the following varieties:

1. *Wrong View*: This is the most serious form of delusion. It is the view or belief that is contrary to truth. Examples: believing that good is evil or that evil is good, that one's own action has no consequence, that there is no merit and demerit or life after death, or that we owe no debt of gratitude towards our parents. Wrong view is the root of many problems and conflicts within the world. Many people commit bad actions, because they don't know that their actions are wrong.
2. *Misconception*: This is a form of delusion which obstructs your understanding of the difference between right and wrong.
3. *Self-illusion*: An illusion of individualism — the view that there exists an unchanging entity, a permanent soul; having an inflated opinion of oneself and a disrespectful attitude toward others; believing that you are more important and superior to others. Such view leads to egoism, false pride and prejudice, a negative mental state that leads to suffering. This false view will be removed once you have reached meditative attainment to the point of seeing your transcendental inner-self.
4. *Skeptical doubt*: This is the kind of befuddled thinking or doubt that hinders your spiritual progress. Examples: doubting whether meditation really works; whether your teacher is qualified; whether merit, demerit and the law of karma really exist; whether it is really possible to become enlightened, etc.

5. *Adherence to mere rites and rituals*: Being caught up in superstitions, wrongful rites and rituals. Some people believe that eating certain kinds of food or taking a bath in some sacred river will gain them salvation. Some go to fortune tellers and soothsayers to relieve their bad karma. Some practice animal sacrifice, spirit worship, or believe that certain objects such as a mountain, a tree, a rock, or certain animals, are their refuge. In truth, none of these can be seen as a refuge from suffering.
6. *Conceit*: There is conceit or pride when you consider yourself important. There are three ways in which you may be conceited about yourself: assuming yourself to be of the same status as others; assuming yourself to be of lower status (inferiority complex); assuming yourself to be of higher status (superiority complex) or thinking you have achievements when you have achieved nothing. In fact, all three are wrong. Instead of comparing yourself with others, you should compare yourself today with how you were yesterday or last week and make an effort to improve yourself.
7. *Restlessness*: This is a mental state associated with unwholesome consciousness. It is the restlessness of mind, the sort that you experience in meditation when you try to still your mind but your mind wanders everywhere. Restlessness is characterized by disquietude like water whipped by the wind.
8. *Ignorance*: This is the fundamental misunderstanding of true nature of reality, the lack of true knowledge of the facts of existence, the unwillingness or failure to see or understand the facts of life as they really are. It is symbolized by a person who is blind or wearing a blindfold.

## **FETTERS**

Human beings are heavily burdened by fetters (*samyojana*) they have created for themselves. Egoistic tendencies worked by the forces of greed, hatred and delusion bring about these fet-

ters. Bound by self-created fetters, human beings suffer repeated difficulties, hardships and miseries. The following are ten fetters, a form of subtle defilements that tie one to samsara:

1. *Self-illusion, false view about individuality*
2. *Skeptical doubt*
3. *Adherence to mere rites and rituals*
4. *Sensuous cravings*
5. *Ill will*
6. *Grasping for Realms of Form*
7. *Grasping for Formless Realms*
8. *Conceit*
9. *Restlessness*
10. *Ignorance*

Fetters span multiple lifetimes and are difficult to remove. Once uprooted, the minds are permanently radiant, pure like the minds of the arahants. Cutting through fetters enables one to attain Nirvana.

### **DEGREE OF SERIOUSNESS**

Desire has the characteristics of not being very damaging but requiring a long time to recover from its negative effects. As a clear example, think how long it takes to recover from a broken heart.

Anger is very damaging but it doesn't take long to recover from it. The grasp of anger is usually short-lived. However, under the sway of hatred, there is no end to the violence and cruelty one can do.

Ignorance has the character of being very damaging, and it also takes a long time to remedy. The most frightening thing about ignorance is that we don't know that we don't know. If you do something without understanding it, you have a tendency to keep on doing that thing and committing the same mistakes endlessly.

## **OVERCOMING THE SUBTLE DEFILEMENTS**

For most people, these mental taints are so subtle that they may feel that it doesn't really matter whether they are there or not. Although the subtle defilements may seem harmless on the surface, they are like tiny bacteria which, if let alone, can contaminate the whole body. We cannot afford to overlook even the smallest of defilements. It is like a tiny spark that causes the whole city block to burn down in flames. The best security is for us to uproot all of them and make sure they don't grow back.

The following are counter measures you can use to overcome defilements:

<b><i>Defilements</i></b>	<b><i>Counter Measures</i></b>
Greed, stinginess	generosity, charitable giving, contentment
Anger, ill will	compassion, goodwill, patience, loving-kindness
Ignorance	mental cultivation, development of wisdom, Dharma study
Sensual craving	restraint of the senses, celibacy, observing the Eight Precepts, meditate on loathsomeness
Conceit	humility, respect, not finding fault with others

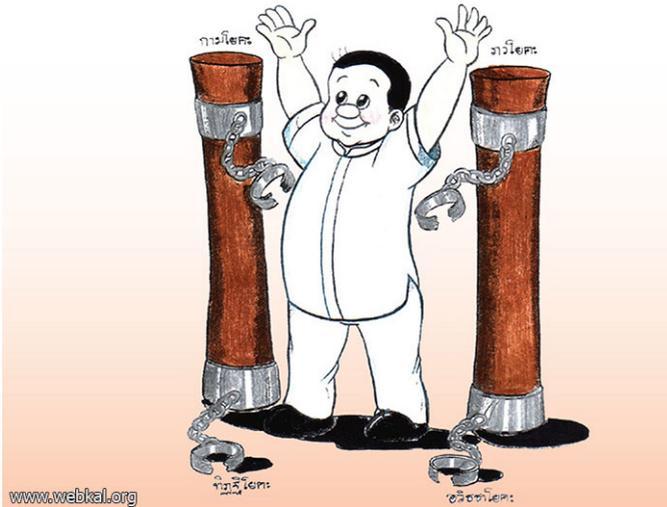
Remove the darkness of your mind with the light of Dharma. Cultivate all the virtues taught in this book—from avoiding fools to associating with the wise, to acquiring proper knowledge, to developing the habits of generosity, patience and respect. Practice meditation on a daily basis. Meditation and morality practice lead to self-control, purification, and enlightenment.

*By oneself is one defiled; by oneself is one purified.*

# WISDOM

Strive for  
the Blissful Mind

# 38



*Like the traveler journeying through darkness,  
our journey to Nirvana is laden with dangers.*

For as long as the night is dark, the traveler has no idea what dangers may lurk in the dark. Because he can't see he doesn't know. Because he doesn't know he fears. Even a prick from the thorn of a bush frightens him. He thinks he has been bitten by a snake.

## **THE DARKNESS OF UNKNOWING**

Our mind also has a kind of darkness. It is the darkness of unknowing, of ignorance. This darkness blocks our ability to see reality and bars us from wisdom. Because we can't see, we don't know. And because we don't know we assume. And our assumptions are usually wrong, for they're not based on true knowledge. Questions such as "why were we born", "where have we come from", "when will we die", "where do we go after death", elude us. Until the light of wisdom is brought in to illuminate our mind, we will continue to tread our journey in darkness, like a blind man not knowing which way is north or south, east or west.

Wherever there is darkness, there is also danger. The dangers facing us are two-fold: dangers from within and dangers from outside. Dangers from within are dangers that are built in to our existence, which no one can avoid. Birth, old age, sickness and death are such dangers. With birth comes aging. Old age leads to sickness and death. No one likes old age and sickness, and everyone fears death. Dangers from outside are brought about by the people around us (e.g., fools, false friends, abusive or exploitative spouses, troublesome offspring, bad neighbors), by natural disasters, and by karmic retribution from our own evil deeds which follow us like shadows.

## **SHACKLES THAT BIND US TO SAMSARA**

The reason why we are surrounded by suffering and why we cannot break free of suffering is because we are imprisoned within the confinement of samsara, bound by shackles (yoga) of our own making. As long as these shackles are not broken loose, we will continue to be bound to samsara and subject ourselves to the cycle of birth and death. The following are the four shackles that tie us to samsara:

- *Shackle of sense desire*: As long as we're still attracted to pleasures of the senses, e.g., hearing beautiful music, tasting delicious food, wearing fashionable clothes, seeing beautiful images, or filling our house with possessions, this shackle will bind us tightly to the sensual sphere.
- *Shackle of absorptions*: As long as we're clinging to our meditative states at the levels of form-absorption and formless-absorption (which are not ultimate, as they fall short of enlightenment), this shackle will bind us to the Brahma realms of existence, not letting us go beyond. Because of this attachment, we arrive at the threshold of Nirvana but are unable to reach it.
- *Shackle of false views*: These are the views that contradict truth. Examples: believing that good and bad actions have no consequences; there is no heaven or hell or life after death; generosity is not virtuous and brings no benefit; a child does not owe gratitude to his parents; enlightenment is not attainable. Such views deprive us of our own potential for spiritual attainment.
- *Shackle of ignorance*: This is the fundamental misunderstanding of the true nature of reality. It is the delusion that obstructs wisdom necessary for attaining enlightenment.

These shackles keep us bound to the endless cycle of rebirths. They prevent us from accessing the wisdoms that liberate us from suffering. Bound by these shackles, we suffer repeated difficulties, hardships and miseries, which rob us of self-confidence and courage. The result is our mindless dependence on prayers and priests, rites and rituals, sacrifices and sacraments, speculations and the supernatural—instead of wisdom. These shackles will be removed once enlightenment is attained.

## **ACHIEVING THE BLISSFUL MIND**

When the mind is fully purified and cultivated, reaching a transcendental meditative state, it becomes utterly blissful and secure. The mind in such state is purified of passion, free from sensuality, sheltered from worries, and invulnerable to worldly circumstances. Such a mind is calm and serene, peaceful and tranquil. This is the blissful state of mind of the arahant.

The word ‘bliss’ in Pali (*khema*) goes deeper than simply happiness. It encompasses the feelings of safety, security, peace, tranquility, freedom, well-being, and joy. The blissful mind symbolizes the sense of relief and liberation which arises when one has overcome the influence of all fetters. It is the state of mind where suffering can no longer reach. As a result of enlightenment the mind gains extraordinary mental powers and transcendental knowledge so far-reaching that no form of delusion can obscure its intuition, insight and wisdom. For those who have attained complete enlightenment, all four forms of shackles have been shaken loose. The mind is thus free, blissful and secure.

## **MENTAL POWERS AND SUPERNORMAL INSIGHTS**

The true nature of mind is pure, luminous, blissful, and full of wonderful qualities. But due to being obscured by defilements over many lifetimes, the mind loses its natural quality. Through right practice and perfection in mental cultivation, the mind can be restored to its original quality—though this requires a great deal of discipline and devotion. Such a mind has the powers and abilities so remarkable that they are beyond the perception of an average person.

Through one-pointed concentration (*samādhi*), when the mind reaches a highly developed state of meditative consciousness, or absorption (*jhāna*), it gives rise to extraordinary mental powers and supernormal insights (*abbhiññā*) known as ‘Higher Knowledge’.

Higher Knowledge accessible by the blissful mind includes ‘Threefold Supra-knowledge’, ‘Eightfold Supra-normal Knowledge’, ‘Sixfold Mental Powers’, and ‘Fourfold Analytical Insights’.

- *Threefold Supra-knowledge (Tē-Vijjā)*: penetrating insight acquired during the final stages of enlightenment. It comprises of the knowledge of one’s previous existences, the knowledge of passing away and arising of beings according to their own good and bad actions (karma), and the knowledge of the destruction of all mental intoxicants.
- *Eightfold Supra-normal Knowledge (Attha-Vijjā)*: consisting of intuitive insight, mind-made magical power, miraculous powers (e.g., ability to walk on water, float in the air, transforming shapes, making oneself invisible), supra-normal hearing (divine ear; able to hear sounds not audible to others), ability to penetrate the minds of others, ability to recall former existences, seeing the arising and passing away of other beings according to their karma, and knowledge of the destruction of all mental intoxicants.
- *Sixfold Mental Powers (Chalabhiñña)*: mental powers consisting the ability to perform magical powers, having supra-normal hearing, ability to penetrate the minds of others, ability to remember one’s own former existences, knowledge of the decease and rebirth of beings, and knowledge of the destruction of all mental intoxicants.
- *Fourfold Analytical Insight (Patisambhida)*: mental abilities concerned with analytical knowledge of Truth (Dharma). Such knowledge includes analytic insight into consequences, analytic insight into causes, analytic insight into language (knowing human and animal communication), and analytic insight into wit (quick-wittedness, cleverness, quickness of mind). They are attained by those who have reached an end of defilements.

The above may sound far-fetched to the uninitiated. But supernormal activities and miracles generated by the power of the mind are something that have been documented throughout time. They are the byproducts of mind training and meditation. Although they are indicative of superior spiritual progress, they should not be exploited for personal gain. Instead, they should serve as vehicles for acquiring deeper knowledge and wisdom not accessible through ordinary means. Knowledge of one's previous existences, for instance, helps to explain the process of rebirth and the consequences of one's past actions. Knowledge of the destruction of mental intoxicants helps to eradicate defilements and free one from suffering. Such knowledge can be accessed only through the mind that is pure and peaceful.

### **FREEDOM FROM SUFFERING**

We all desire to live peacefully and happily with our loved ones, surrounded by amusement and pleasures, but if by some misfortune the wicked world runs counter to our ambitions and desires, then sorrow inevitably becomes ours. One in sorrow craves to be happy, and the so-called happy craves to be happier still. Worldly happiness is merely the gratification of some desire. When one desire is fulfilled, another desire arises. So insatiate is worldly happiness.

Because there is no perfection in life, one always finds reasons to be dissatisfied with what one has, or doesn't have. One should learn how to make the best of one's situation and find contentment in one's life. One who is content is one who stops wanting more. When you have found contentment in your life you have found happiness.

More often than not, we are compelled to face the unpleasant circumstances of life that we detest. As long as we are born into this world, we can't escape suffering. Because nothing is permanent and everything is subject to change, there is no lasting peace or rest in life. Clinging to things that are impermanent can only bring suffering. Understanding impermanence and learning how to live with it is an antidote to attachment.

Nothing that contributes to our success—wealth, family, career, or any other achievement—serves any purpose if it fails to make us happy. The Buddha enumerates four kinds of happiness for a layperson. They are the happiness of possession; enjoyment of such possessions; not falling into debt; and leading a blameless life. But, of all the happiness in this world, nothing exceeds the bliss of Nirvana.

One who attains Nirvana is one who has reached the end of suffering.

### **PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT**

The ultimate goal of man is to attain Enlightenment. Until the ultimate goal is achieved, we are expected to lead a noble and useful life.

Knowing that life is precious to all, we extend compassion and loving-kindness towards every living being, even to the tiniest creature that crawls at our feet. We refrain from killing or causing harm to any living being. We conduct our lives with honesty, integrity and trustworthiness. We abstain from stealing and sexual misconduct. We avoid false speech, malicious language, slander and useless babble. And we speak only what is kind, helpful and true. As certain drinks and drugs promote heedlessness and mental distraction, we avoid consuming intoxicating substances. Instead, we strive to cultivate heedfulness and clarity of vision. These fundamental principles of regulated behavior are essential to one who treads the Path to Nirvana. Observing them means smooth and steady progress along the Path. Violating them means obstacles and failure.

Following the footsteps of the Buddha, we pursue spiritual perfection by cultivating the Ten Transcendental Virtues (*pāramis*) consisting of generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity. These virtues, when perfected, lead to Buddhahood. We follow

the Noble Eightfold Path, the Path to Enlightenment, by adopting right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Cultivate your mind through meditation. It is through meditation that the Buddha attained Supreme Enlightenment.

Practice all of the Wisdoms taught in this book—from avoiding fools to associating with the wise, to establishing yourself in a proper way, to looking after your parents and family, to developing the virtue of patience, gratitude, and contentment, to fulfilling a life of purity, free from defilements. Step by step, you will advance further and further toward the final destination, Nirvana.

Strive on with diligence.

### **FINAL VICTORY**

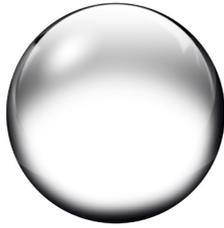
Like war, peace has to be won. Rather than conquering thousands and millions in battle, the Buddha teaches the conquest of self through self-culture, self-control, and mental development. Instead of fighting other men, we fight with ourselves. Instead of killing people, we kill defilements. Instead of using guns and ammunition to destroy enemies, we use morality, mental cultivation, and wisdom to destroy the greed, hatred and ignorance that reside in the mind. Of all the peace in the world, nothing exceeds inner peace.

With malice toward none, with charity for all, genuine victory is won.

After the long and treacherous journey, the traveler finally reaches his destination—safe and sound. The load is taken off his back. He is relieved. His mind is immersed in the supreme bliss of Nirvana. Indeed he lives happily in the midst of worried people.

*The happy pilgrim now stands on heights more than celestial,  
far removed from passions and the defilements of the world,  
experiencing the unutterable bliss of Nirvana.*









### **Based on Mangala Sutta, the Discourse on Blessings**

38 Buddhist Wisdoms forms a complete body of the knowledge of Buddhism that is easy to apply to everyday life. The ideals set forth in this book are practical and timeless. Following these ideals will ensure success in every level: physically, intellectually, vocationally, socially, morally, materially and spiritually.

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