

The Highest Blessings in Life

Māṅgala Sutta



Sayalay Susilā

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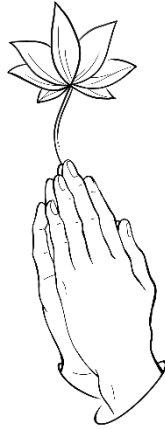
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Namo Tassa Bhagavato

Arahato Sammāsambuddhassa



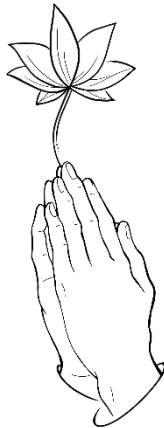
Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
DA	Dīgha Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā
Dhp	Dhammapada
DN	Dīgha Nikāya
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
Sn	Sutta Nipāta
Ud	Udāna
Mv	Mahāvagga
Thag	Theragāthā

*The Buddha's life is bright with great wisdom.
He is an excellent teacher for all disciples
and the foremost in all the three worlds.
The Buddha is the leader of all three worlds
and the greatest sage of gods and humans.
Even the sight of the Buddha is incredible.*

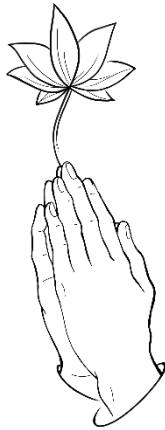
*The Supreme Buddha is like a great king elephant.
He is a great hero.
He is glorious. Having destroyed all taints,
the Buddha lives without taints.
I saw my Great Teacher,
the one who doesn't have any fear at all.*

— Thag 288-289



*It was welcome, not unwelcome,
the advice I got was good.
Of the well-explained teachings,
I arrived at the best.*

— *Theragāthā* 1.9



About the Author



Venerable Sayalay Susīlā is the founder and current Abbess of the Appāmada Vihari Meditation Center (AVMC), in Penang, Malaysia, since 2014.

Sayalay was born in 1963 in Pahang, Malaysia. Sayalay began developing her keen interest in insight

meditation while at the University of Science Malaysia, where she obtained a degree in mass communications in 1987. After graduation, Sayalay worked as a high school teacher for a year and a half. Being increasingly disenchanted with worldly matters and desiring to be dedicated to the practice more than ever, she resigned her post to take up meditation full time for three years.

In 1991, Sayalay ordained as a Theravada Buddhist nun in the Burmese tradition at the age of 28, in Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre, Penang, Malaysia. Six months after her ordination in 1991, she went to Panditarama Monastery in Myanmar, where she practiced intensively for nearly three years under the guidance of the famous meditation master Venerable U Pandita Sayadaw.

In 1994, wishing to cultivate concentration meditation, Sayalay moved to Pa Auk Forest Monastery in Myanmar. She placed herself under the guidance of the renowned monk Venerable Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw, and remained in the forest for 14 years. In addition to an assiduous program of meditation, she also learned the *Abhidhamma*, ancient discourses, and the Pāli language from Pa-Auk Sayadaw. Meanwhile, she became his English-to-Chinese interpreter in Myanmar and abroad.

From 2000, Sayalay started teaching the *Abhidhamma* extensively in various renowned centers internationally,

including those in US and Canada, Malaysia, Australia, Singapore, and Taiwan.

In order to deepen her own understanding of the *Dhamma*, Sayalay also practiced different meditation methods during her stay in Myanmar, including those taught by Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw, Mogok Sayadaw, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, and Goenka. As a result of both her breadth of exposure and depth of practice of various meditation methods, Sayalay has become an unusually accomplished teacher—one who is able to present the subtleties of the Buddha’s teachings in a simple and direct way. In particular, she presents the most profound division of the teaching, the *Abhidhamma*, in a lucid manner grounded not in pedantic philosophy, but in actual meditation experience.

After leaving Myanmar, Sayalay studied and practiced according to the suttas, putting an emphasis on teaching and practicing the *Satipatthāna*, the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

Sayalay has traveled extensively as a meditation and *Abhidhamma* teacher, presenting the *Abhidhamma* and sutta expositions in formal lectures and talks, and has conducted meditation retreats throughout the United States, Canada, Eastern Europe, Russia, Australia, India, China, Indonesia, Singapore, and in her home country of Malaysia. In 2015, Sayalay led the first International

Novitiate Program with Venerable Sanghasena held in Ladakh, the region of the Himalayas of northern India.

Sayalay Susīlā has a unique gift to teach and present the Buddha's teachings with profound depth, vividness, directness, precision, and clarity. Her teaching is very much appreciated by her students globally. As an effectively bilingual speaker in both English and Chinese, Sayalay is uniquely able to expound the Dhamma and teach to a wide global audience. In addition, Sayalay is also fluent in Burmese, Hokkien, and Malay.

Sayalay is the author of many books published in both English and Chinese. Her most well-known English book is *Unravelling the Mysteries of Mind and Body through Abhidhamma* 《揭开身心之奥秘》 (second edition, both Chinese and English).

Other books she has published in English include:

1. The Path to Happiness
2. Contemplation of Feeling
3. Dhamma Essence Series
4. Inner Exploration
5. The Nine Attributes of the Buddha
6. Mindfulness of Breathing
7. Moment-to-Moment Practice
8. Mindfulness, Wise Attention, and Wisdom Training

Her Chinese publications include:

1. *From this Shore to Far Shore*
《从此岸到彼岸》
2. *The Practical Manual of Abhidhamma*
《阿毗达摩实用手册》
3. *Turning the Wheel of the Dhamma*
《正法初现》
4. *The Development of the Faculties*
《根修习经》
5. *The Nine Attributes of the Buddha*
《佛陀的九种德行》
6. *Contemplation of the Mind*
《洞见心之真相: 念处经之心念处》
7. *The Path to Happiness* 《朝向快乐之道》
8. *Dhamma Essence Series* 《佛法精粹》
9. *Mettā Bhavana* 《慈爱禅》
10. *Paṭṭhāna* 《二十四缘发趣论》
11. *Mangala Sutta* 《吉祥人生》
12. *Indriyabhāvanā Sutta* 《根修习经》

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Preface

In the Theravada tradition, the *Maṅgala Sutta* is a very popular discourse, one of 11 “protective chants” or parittas frequently chanted during Buddhist ceremonies as a blessing for the audience. It is also one of the first to be taught to newly ordained monastics residing in a monastery, prior to the other protective chants they memorize and recite.

We may ask, “What is so extraordinary about this sutta?” For devas and human beings who may be wondering: It clarifies any confusion about what a “true blessing” is.

In the teaching of the Buddha, a blessing is not what we may think—the result of superstitious deeds like propitiating gods and spirits, burning joss sticks, wearing protective amulets, performing elaborate religious rites and rituals, or following certain cultural traditions, like the way many Hindus believe bathing in the river Ganges cleanses them of unwholesome kamma or sin.



A true blessing is obtained only by abstaining from unwholesome, unskillful deeds—whether mental, verbal, or physical—and doing what is wholesome, that is, refraining from harming ourselves and others. By walking this path, and thereby purifying our own minds and hearts, we are protected. This is a blessing to ourselves and others.

A conversation between the Buddha, who is often referred to as the Blessed One, and a brahmin makes this clear:

On one occasion the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja was sitting close to the Blessed One. Then he said, “Does Master Gotama go to the river Bāhukā to bathe?”

“Brahmin, why go to the river Bāhukā? What can the river Bāhukā do?”

“Master Gotama, the river Bāhukā is held by many to give liberation; it is held by many to give merit; and many wash away their unwholesome actions (evil deeds) in the river Bāhukā.”

Then the Blessed One addressed the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja in verse:

*“A fool may there forever bathe
Yet will not purify dark deeds....
One pure in heart has evermore
The Feast of Spring, the Holy Day;
One fair in act, one pure in heart
Brings his virtue to perfection.
It is here, brahmin, that you should bathe,
To make yourself a refuge for all beings.
And if you speak no falsehood
Nor work harm for living beings,
Nor takes what is offered not,
With faith and free from avarice,
What need for you to go to Gayā?
For any well will be your Gayā.”*

—Vatthūpama Sutta: The Simile of the Cloth (MN 7)

The Buddha’s explanation is an admonishment to those who seek blessings from outside themselves, say, for example, through superstitious means.

Although the *Maṅgala Sutta*, “The Discourse on Blessings,” was expounded to devas (the shining ones, light beings, gods), it seems to be more suitable for an audience of human beings who seek true blessings and happiness.

In this discourse, the Buddha teaches us to follow virtue in our daily lives, to uphold our responsibilities towards our families, to do our duty towards society, and to cultivate good characteristics. Furthermore, he urges us to surpass simple mundane goals and aim for loftier aspirations—to reach ultimate wisdom and liberation.

There are 38 verses in the *Maṅgala Sutta*. Although many Buddhists chant this discourse regularly and may even memorize it, that does not mean they necessarily understand the profound meaning of the discourse. Thus, they do not derive the full benefits of this sutta.

Back story

In ancient India, people used to explore different teachings to acquire wisdom by gathering together for intellectual debates. Group discussions could last several months before a conclusion was reached.

Once, while discussing the question, “What is the *supreme* blessing?”, people came up with many different answers. Some proposed that hearing words

of blessing, namely about what is “auspicious, happiness, a good omen, delightful, perfect” or “under a lucky star, on the right day, at the right time,” and so on, could bring a blessing. Some proposed that seeing a sacred creature, such as a cow, was a blessing, while the sight of an ominous creature, such as a crow, was a curse. Some said the color white was a symbol of blessing, while others insisted it was the color red. After much debate, no satisfactory answer could be determined.

Ideas about what a blessing is vary among nations because of cultural differences. In Chinese culture, which is often thought to be obsessed with luck, symbols of the dragon or phoenix are considered auspicious, as is the color red. Ancient Chinese believed the color red could expel plagues and other evils, so red cloth, crimson gems, and blood red items were displayed, in the hopes of banishing plagues. The color red is a blessed symbol widely employed in celebrations: red dresses for wedding ceremonies, red lanterns and candles for festival activities, red firecrackers, red paper posted on doors for the Lunar New Year, and so on.

For those in India, the cow is truly sacred and auspicious. According to Vedic and Hindu beliefs, their chief god, Shiva, rides a bull. Cows are not only symbols of reproduction and fecundity but are also

something that sustains the people's livelihoods through agriculture. Cows and bulls roaming freely are often seen in villages in India, because they are considered sacred and therefore hold an elevated position in Indian society.

In ancient Egypt, a fish was a symbol of the divine. In their spiritual belief system, eating fish might bring good fortune. Salted fish became a symbol of prosperity and abundance that could bring about a plentiful harvest in the coming year.

So, as we can see, each ethnic group has its unique beliefs about what a blessing is. Such beliefs come from culture and tradition but have nothing to do with any universal truth.

Whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist, everyone wants to be blessed. Buddhists invite monastics to ceremonies to chant, sprinkle nectar, or distribute amulets, such as red thread bracelets or Buddha and arahant talismans. Some even hold that a chanting ceremony performed over a newly purchased car blesses it and ensures its safety.

Can one really be blessed in this way? Or is it merely our wishful thinking—and our lazy reluctance to make real efforts to perform meritorious deeds (wholesome kamma)—that motivates us?

Some good teachers are disinclined to perform rituals and ceremonies for their disciples. They refrain from giving their students red threads and magic amulets because they know that such practices do not actually bring about blessings or protection.

Instead, they teach their followers the precious Dhamma, the Teachings of the Buddha, to help them establish themselves in right view, for only right view can guide our daily lives to bring us true happiness and supreme blessings.

We should clearly know that blessings are not obtained by praying to God, gods, or Buddhas, nor by performing mere rites and rituals. Blessings only come as the result and fruit (*vipāka* and *phala*) of our own wholesome deeds of body, speech, and mind.

Imagine praying to a Buddha statue, petitioning it for a blessing, or pleading with and paying monastics to offer blessings to us. If that could indeed bring peace of mind and protection or a blessing of any kind, wouldn't the whole world by now be completely free of disasters? Compassionate monastics would not need to be paid; they would be happy to bless the entire world. However, it doesn't work that way.

A true disciple of the Buddha must have the right view with regard to the law of kamma (the deeds we perform motivated and impelled by our intentions). By doing skillful and avoiding unskillful deeds, promoting good

and refraining from harm, we protect ourselves and others and build a harmonious society.

Let's return to the discussion that asked, "What is the *supreme* blessing?" Following that heated debate in the human world, the earthbound devas started to debate it, followed by the celestial devas, who were also intrigued. In the end, word even reached the Plane of Clear-sighted Devas in the Fine Material Sphere, and a shining one there got to thinking and debating, "What is the *supreme* blessing?"

So the discussion echoed from the earth to the heavens. Devas and humans were trying to define and explain "blessings" based on their own experiences and understanding. This was true for everyone except the Buddha's noble (enlightened) disciples. However, the devas and humans could come to no agreement, despite the heated debates taking place here and there.

At that time, Sakka, King of the Devas of the Realm of the Thirty-three, knew that the Blessed One—who is the Knower of Worlds (lokavidū)—was in the human world. He ordered a deva to visit the Blessed One and put the question to him.

The deva prepared and then appeared in Anāthapiṇḍika's Monastery in Jeta's Grove like a flash of lightning. After paying homage to the Buddha, the deva stood respectfully to one side and posed the question to the Blessed One in verse:

*“Blessed One, many devas and human beings
Have been thinking about blessings,
Desiring well-being.*

Tell us, then, what is life’s highest blessing?”

On that occasion, the Buddha expounded this discourse in reply.

This is the back story as to how and why the Blessed One came to teach the *Maṅgala Sutta*, the Discourse on Blessings.

May all be well and happy!

Sayalay Susīlā 2023



Maṅgala Sutta — The Discourse on Blessings

I have heard that at one time the Blessed One was staying in Sāvathī at Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Then a certain deva, in the far extreme of the night, with extreme radiance lighting up the entirety of Jeta's Grove, approached the Blessed One. On approaching, having bowed down to the Blessed One, the deva stood to one side. Standing to one side, the deva addressed him with a verse.

*Many devas and human beings
give thought to blessing,
desiring well-being.
Tell, then, the highest blessing.*

[The Buddha:]

*Not consorting with fools,
consorting with the wise,
paying homage to that worthy of homage:
This is the highest blessing.*

*Living in a suitable location,
having made merit in the past,
directing oneself rightly:*

This is the highest blessing.

*Broad knowledge, skill,
well-trained in discipline,
well-spoken words:*

This is the highest blessing.

*Support for one's parents,
assistance to one's wife and children,
engaging in faultless occupation:*

This is the highest blessing.

*Giving, living in rectitude,
assistance to one's relatives,
deeds that are blameless:*

This is the highest blessing.

*Avoiding, abstaining from evil;
refraining from intoxicants,
being heedful of the qualities of the mind:*

This is the highest blessing.

*Respect, humility,
contentment, gratitude,
hearing the Dhamma on timely occasions:*

This is the highest blessing.

*Patience, compliance,
seeing recluses,
discussing the Dhamma on timely occasions:
This is the highest blessing.*

*Austerity, celibacy,
seeing the noble truths,
realizing nibbāna:
This is the highest blessing.*

*A mind that, when touched
by the ways of the world,
is unshaken, sorrowless, stainless, secure:
This is the highest blessing.*

*Everywhere undefeated
when acting in this way,
people go everywhere in well-being:
This is their highest blessing.*



Explanation of the Essence of Maṅgala Sutta

The *Maṅgala Sutta* begins with the Blessed One (Bhagavā) staying in Sāvattthī at Jeta’s Grove, which is a monastery offered by Anāthapiṇḍika to the Saṅgha. At that time, a deity, having arrived at Jeta’s Grove in the third watch of the night, approached the Blessed One, bowed to him, and said:

*Many devas and human beings
give thought to blessing,
desiring well-being.*

Tell, then, the highest blessing.

The Pāḷi word *maṅgala* has the root *mang*, meaning “lucky” or “auspicious.” According to commentaries and annotations, maṅgala—blessing, means the source of good luck, prosperity, and all achievements (wealth, happiness, success).

*Asevanā ca bālānaṃ, paṇḍitānañca
sevanā;*

*Pūjā ca pūjaneyyānaṃ, etaṃ
maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

**Not consorting with fools,
consorting with the wise, paying
homage to those worthy of
homage: This is the highest
blessing.**



1. Not consorting with fools (Asevanā ca bālānaṃ)

Getting straight to the point, the Buddha states that avoiding fools is the highest blessing. This blessing is unexpected, as the views of the enlightened Buddha and worldly people are poles apart. Worldly people may think that blessings entail having wealth, good reputation, high status, friends, and a happy family. The Buddha, however, pointed out that avoiding fools is the first blessing, more important than any worldly gains.



Before avoiding fools, we must first know who the fools are. If we do not know who the fools are, how can we avoid them? Who do we consider to be fools?

The Buddha said, **“Monks, fools have three characteristics.”**

A foolish person has the three characteristics of greed, hatred, and delusion, which can manifest in that person’s bodily actions, speech, and mental states. The Buddha said that if a person’s body, speech, and mind are full of greed, hatred, and delusion, then this person is a fool. For example, if a person’s bodily actions are inclined towards killing, taking things that are not given, lasciviousness, cruelty, gambling, drunkenness, etc.; if his speech is dishonest, slanderous, and full of idle chatter and gossip; if, when he opens his mouth, it is full of vicious words—upon seeing such a person, we want to stay far away from him.

The mental state of a foolish person also manifests greed, hatred, and delusion. He covets other people’s property or spouse and daughter. Seeing that his friend’s wife is pretty and sexy, he fantasizes about her.

A foolish person is prone to act unskillfully, has no sense of shame and self-restraint, is rude and selfish, and lacks tolerance and compassion. He cannot distinguish between good and evil; he does not know that actions such as killing, taking what isn’t given, and sexual immorality are unskillful deeds, and he induces others to do these things. He may engage in even worse actions such as smuggling, drug trafficking, human trafficking, corruption, or other activities which

endanger others and society as a whole. He does not know that the three poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion are the root causes that drive him to do evil. He acts recklessly, ignores the law of causality, has wrong views, and knows nothing about rebirth in the woeful realms.

Francis Crowley, the infamous and ruthless criminal, had the above characteristics of greed, hatred, and delusion and was the most dangerous criminal New York has ever seen. He would shoot people for a trivial insult (hatred). After being captured, this “Two-Gun Killer” not only did not know how to reflect on what he had done but wrote, “Under my coat is a weary heart, but a kind one—one that would do nobody any harm (delusion).”

However, just before being arrested, Crowley and his girlfriend were driving on a rural road in Long Island to have sex (greed). A police officer pulled him over and said to Crowley, “Please show me your driver’s license.” Crowley did not say a word, but instead took out his pistol and fired wildly, not seeing the value of another person’s life. The innocent officer fell to the ground after being shot. Crowley jumped out of the car, retrieved the revolver from the officer, and fired another shot at the body. Do these actions represent what he himself said: “Under my coat is a weary heart, a kind one—one that would do nobody any harm”?

Crowley was eventually sentenced to death. When he arrived at the electric chair in the execution chamber in Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, New York (a prison for felons in the United States), he did not confess and say, “This is the price for my killing.” On the contrary, he twisted the truth and said, “This is the result of my self-defence.”¹ No matter how miserable Crowley had been or how much of a difficult past he had that could have caused his distorted character, his behaviors exemplified the characteristics of extreme greed, hatred, and delusion.

When we see anyone with the characteristics of greed, hatred, and delusion, we should know that they are fools. We should try to stay away from them so as not to be led to the brink of destruction and depravity. As the Chinese saying goes, a person who associates with fools will become a fool himself. If we associate with fools and we don’t have the right views to know what is right and wrong, we will definitely be influenced by a fool’s words and actions and even imitate their behaviors. For example, if a fool invites us to places of debauchery, we might go along with great interest; if they are fond of drinking alcohol, we might get drunk with them; if they are idlers, gamblers, lustful, extravagant—we may just follow suit. In the long run,

¹ The Weakness of Human Nature, written by Dale Carnegie

we may become addicted to all kinds of bad habits. We may even participate in drug trafficking, murder, assault, and eventually be put into prison. As such, in this life we will end up on the road of no return, and the gates of hell will open for us in our next life.

Maybe we do not follow the actions of the fools, but associating with them can also tarnish our reputation. Suppose we wrap salted fish in a banana leaf—will the smell of salted fish be left on that banana leaf? In the same way, if we associate with fools, our reputation will be like the banana leaf wrapped around salted fish, tainted with pungent odour. Our family may also be affected by this association, and our good friends will stay away from us. Therefore, associating with fools will only bring us disaster.

Good and evil oppose each other. This is an unchanging truth. The bodhisatta knew this truth very well, so in one of his lives, when Sakka, the Lord of the Heaven of the Thirty-three, wanted to reward the bodhisatta for a good deed, the bodhisatta surprisingly did not ask for gold, silver, treasures, and beautiful women—things that ordinary people desire. Such material things are not only impermanent material possessions, they will also make us cling strongly to them, unwilling to let go. Wouldn't this increase our greed, arrogance, and suffering? Instead, the wise bodhisatta chose long-term benefits, saying, **"I hope I don't meet with fools."**

Sakka asked him in surprise, “What's wrong with seeing a fool? Why don't you want to see a fool?”

The bodhisatta replied, **“Fools do not know what good kamma is, and they do evil everywhere. They do not like the truth. If we talk to them about giving, keeping precepts, and being a person with good conduct, they will argue and become angry. They do not know what real goodness is, so it is really a blessing not to meet them!”**

If we can stay away from fools, we can avoid most evils. Isn't this the highest blessing in life?

Venerable Sāriputta, the General of the Dhamma, who is foremost in wisdom, also did not want to meet with fools. He described fools as follows:

*“May I never have anything to do
with an evil wisher,
who is inactive and devoid of energy,
with little learning, disrespectful:
With what in the world would he be concerned?”*

—*Theragāthā, Verse 987*

Even worse, associating with fools may lead us to commit the most unwholesome kamma. In Buddhism, there are five types of weighty kamma, also called the five heinous crimes:

1. Injuring a Buddha
2. Killing an arahant
3. Creating a schism in the Saṅgha
4. Matricide
5. Patricide

Committing any of the above weighty kammās would automatically result in rebirth in the Avīci hell in the next life, to bear endless sufferings. Such kamma also will obstruct our attainment of jhāna and liberation on our spiritual path in this very life.

During the Buddha's time, because of his association with the foolish Devadatta, Prince Ajātasattu committed the weighty kamma of patricide, which filled him with remorse and made it impossible for him to realize nibbāna.

Ajātasattu was the son of King Bimbisāra, who was a stream-enterer and was a very devout disciple of the Buddha. He was also a big supporter of the Saṅgha. Unfortunately, instead of following his father's example, Ajātasattu associated with the notorious Devadatta. Devadatta was jealous of the many offerings and the respect the Buddha received. He had the evil desire to take over the Buddha's position. So he tried to oppose the Buddha through various means and even tried to kill the Buddha several times, but he failed every time. Devadatta wanted to make use of Prince Ajātasattu's status to consolidate his power.

Devadatta said to Ajātasattu, “You must be king, for only by being a king will you have power. If you wait for your father to die before inheriting the throne, it will take too long. You should kill him first.”

Fools will speak such words of discord for their own benefit. If we are also ignorant, unable to distinguish between right and wrong, blinded by our own evil desires and ambitions, we will succumb to such slander and be used by others. This is the law of attraction: evil attracts evil.

Ajātasattu, blinded by his own interests, listened to Devadatta’s slander and put his father in prison without providing him any food. His mother was very sad and often brought food when visiting King Bimbisara. Ajātasattu found out about this and did not allow his mother to bring food during her visits. The queen then smeared her body with honey whenever she visited King Bimbisara, and King Bimbisara licked the honey with his tongue to sustain his life with the sugar in the honey. After Ajātasattu learned about this, he forbade his mother to visit King Bimbisara completely.

In the end, King Bimbisara starved to death. For a stream enterer, a noble one, death is not scary because the doors of the four unwholesome realms are closed forever, and he will be reborn in a human or heavenly realm after death. But for the murderer Ajātasattu, the

gates of hell were open. Because he listened to the words of a fool, he committed the weighty kamma of patricide.

On the day of King Bimbisara's death, Ajātasattu's concubine gave birth to a child. When King Ajātasattu heard that his child was born, he suddenly felt a great sense of joy in being a father. He thought, "My child is born, and I have such a strong feeling of joy. When I was born, would my father have had the same fatherly love for me?"

He went to ask his queen mother, who said to him, "Your father loved you very much. When you were just born, you bit your father's finger until it bled. The ministers invited the fortune-teller to advise whether it was auspicious or inauspicious. The fortune-teller said to your father, 'This child will be your nemesis in the future; you'd better deport him or kill him.' However, your father loved you deeply, he ignored the warning from the fortune-teller and continued to dote on you."

Hearing these words, King Ajātasattu was deeply shaken. He felt sad, remorseful, and guilty for his evil deed of persecuting his father. He immediately ordered that his father be released, but it was too late, as his father had already starved to death. From then on, Ajātasattu was often tormented by unbearable feelings of remorse and regret, and he also had trouble sleeping

and eating. His minister advised him to meet the wise Buddha, hoping that this would relieve his suffering.

When King Ajātasattu arrived at the monastery where the Buddha lived, the environment of the monastery was completely quiet—no sound could be heard at all—and King Ajātasattu felt very scared. When a person has done evil deeds that are utterly devoid of conscience, his heart and mind can no longer be confident and fearless. With a guilty heart, Ajātasattu became suspicious and began to wonder, “Did they set a trap to deal with me?” How paranoid he was!

At that time, all the monks were in the hall listening to the Buddha’s discourse respectfully and attentively without making any sound. The hall was very peaceful and solemn. King Ajātasattu came to the front of the hall and was stunned by this serene scene. He thought, “The Buddha, unarmed, was able to subdue all these beings to such a respectful obedience. But I, who hold the power of life and death over others, do not receive such respect and obedience from the people.”

As such, he developed great reverence and faith for the Buddha. Once faith in the Buddha is there, the Dhamma will flow easily into one’s heart. At that time, the Buddha gave Ajātasattu the discourse called the *Samaññaphala Sutta*. If King Ajātasattu had not killed his father, he would have been able to attain the fruit of stream entry after listening to the sutta. However,

because he had committed the weighty kamma of patricide, which had become an obstacle to his enlightenment, he could not become a noble one. What a pity!

From the story of King Ajātasattu, we can see that avoiding fools is a real blessing.

In the *Cūḷa-puṇṇama Sutta* (MN 110), the Buddha explained that a fool would choose as his friends those who have no virtues—no faith, no shame, and no remorse—and those who are very shallow in knowledge, lazy, and without mindfulness and wisdom. Because of choosing such bad company, a fool’s actions would bring harm to himself, to others, and to both himself and others.

We also need to recognize that not all monastics who wear robes or lay Buddhists who are good at preaching the Dhamma are good teachers; we need to observe their virtues and check whether their behaviors are in accordance with the Dhamma. If answer is NO, then avoid them to ensure your blessing!

Let us direct our minds to avoid fools, so as to obtain this true blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What are the characteristics of a fool?
2. What are the consequences associating with fools?
3. How should you avoid fools?

2. Consorting with the wise (Paṇḍitānañ-ca sevānā)

The second blessing is associating with the wise. For practitioners who want to avoid evil and do good—or even to realize sotāpatti (stream entry) and close the door to the four woeful states of existence forever—associating with the wise is the highest blessing. For our greatest benefit, staying away from fools is not enough. If we do not have right view, not knowing what is good and what is evil, and do not know how to cultivate morality, concentration, and wisdom, then associating with the wise becomes a must. By associating with the wise, we can benefit from emulating their virtues as well as getting their guidance to develop right view and grow in wisdom. In short, by associating with the wise, we become wise. Just like a banana leaf that is used to wrap a jasmine flower, that banana leaf will gain the fragrance from the jasmine. Similarly, by associating with the wise, our name and reputation will spread far and wide, gaining respect and trust from others.

Since it is so important to associate with the wise, we must first know who the wise are. The wise have three characteristics: their bodily actions, speech, and mind have no, or very little, greed, hatred, and delusion. However, recognizing the wise is also dependent on your intelligence.



The wise live moral lives and strictly observe the precepts, whether it is the five precepts², eight precepts³, ten precepts⁴, or the 227 precepts of the bhikkhu. They

² (1) no killing, (2) no stealing, (3) no sexual misconduct, (4) no lying, (5) no intoxicating drinks and drugs

³ (1) no killing, (2) no stealing, (3) no sexual activity, (4) no lying, (5) no intoxicating drinks and drugs, (6) no eating at forbidden hours, (7) no dancing, singing, instrumental music, or unsuitable shows, and no wearing garlands, using scents, and beautifying the body with cosmetics, (8) no lying on high or luxurious sleeping places

⁴ (1) no killing, (2) no stealing, (3) no sexual activity, (4) no lying, (5) no intoxicating drinks and drugs, (6) no eating at forbidden hours, (7) no dancing, singing, instrumental music, unsuitable shows, (8) no wearing garlands, using scents, and beautifying the

have the right view on the law of causality, a sense of shame and fear of wrongdoing, great knowledge in the teaching of Buddha (bahusutta), and they practice concentration and wisdom diligently.

Everyone has shortcomings, but it is most difficult to see one's own flaws. The wise teacher will not hesitate to point out the shortcomings of students for their own benefit. However, for those who are arrogant, not only are they ungrateful when being corrected, they burst into rage out of humiliation. In relation to this, the Buddha taught us:

“One should follow a man of wisdom who rebukes one for one's faults,

as one would follow a guide to some buried treasure.

To one who follows such a wise man,

it will be an advantage and not a disadvantage.”

— *Dhammapada 76-77*

King Ajātasattu was able to move from darkness to light because he had subsequently associated with the wise—the Buddha. He became one of the most devout disciples of the Buddha and helped to set up the First Buddhist Council after the Buddha's passing. Due to

body with cosmetics, (9) no lying on high or luxurious sleeping places, (10) no accepting gold and silver (money).

his continuous accumulation of good kamma, after his death, he was not reborn in Avici hell for killing his own father; instead, he was reborn in a relatively lesser hell.

In the Jātaka tales, there is also a story about how we can avoid evil and do good by associating with the wise:

In a certain country in ancient India, the king liked to eat meat very much, and the people in the palace had to cook meat for him every day. One day, some dogs got into the kitchen and ate all the meat. Unable to replace the meat because it was a holy day when killing was forbidden, the cook was very afraid and at a loss for what to do. In desperation, he took the flesh from a dead human body and cooked it for the king. Perhaps due to a habit in his past lives, the king fell in love with human flesh and, when he found out what it was, he asked his attendants to prepare it for him to eat every day.

The king cannibalized human flesh; what a cruel and sinful act! As the saying goes, “the truth will come to light sooner or later.” The people eventually found out about the king’s cannibalism and, when he insisted he would not give up eating human flesh, they overthrew him.

After the king fled to the forest, he continued to eat human flesh by killing passers-by. Once, as he was being pursued by the guards of a wealthy brahmin he

had abducted, his foot was accidentally pierced by a piece of wood. Severely injured and in agony, he made a wish to the tree god: "If you can cure my injury, I will catch noble princes and sacrifice them as my offering to you!" Soon, his injury was healed. In fact, the wound healed by itself, but because the king was superstitious, he thought that the tree god had helped him, so he kept his promise and began to look for someone with the status of a prince to make a sacrificial offering to the tree god.

One day, he caught a prince who was his old acquaintance. He threw the prince over his shoulder and fled into the forest. The prince had just finished bathing, so his body was still wet, and the water dripped on the cannibal king's back. The cannibal king thought the prince was crying, so he asked, "Are you scared?"

The prince replied, "You know me, and you know that I will never be afraid. But I am worried about one thing—I have promised a brahmin that I would listen to his sermon and reward him with a sum of money. Now that you have captured me, I cannot keep my promise, which I take to heart. Can you let me go back for now? After I fulfill my promise, I will come back to be your sacrificial offering."

The cannibal king laughed loudly and asked, "Why would a person who escaped from death return?"

The prince said, “You and I have known each other for many years. You know I never break my promises.”

At that time, the prince was the Buddha in a previous life as a bodhisatta. All bodhisattas must practice ten paramitas—generosity (dāna), moral conduct (sīla), renunciation (nekkhamma), wisdom (paññā), energy (virīya), patience (khanti), truthfulness (sacca), determination (adhiṭṭhāna), loving-kindness (metta), and equanimity (upekkha). Among the ten paramitas, truthfulness means truthful speech —to never tell a lie.

The cannibal king was still skeptical, but he thought, “Yes! I have known him a long time, and this man has never lied. He will definitely keep his promise. Alright! I will trust him.” Hence, the cannibal king let the bodhisatta go.

The bodhisatta went to listen to the sermon by the brahmin. After the sermon, he rewarded the brahmin with a sum of money and was going to return to the cannibal king. All the prime ministers, ministers, and princesses, who had heard of the bodhisatta’s fate, advised him not to go back, because going back would mean death! The bodhisatta said, “Death is nothing to me. Rather, not being able to keep my promise is repugnant to me— this is the spirit of the truthfulness paramita!” The bodhisatta then left in the direction of the cannibal king.

When the cannibal king let the bodhisatta go, he also initially thought that the bodhisatta would never come back again. Who would come back to die after escaping from death? When he saw the bodhisatta walking towards him fearlessly, he was very shocked! The bodhisatta's fearlessness towards death left a deep impact on the king and shook his heart greatly.

He asked the bodhisatta, "What Dhamma did you learn from the brahmin today? Can you tell me?"

The bodhisatta replied, "Yes, but on one condition. You must promise to give up your habit of cannibalism." The bodhisatta was not thinking about his own safety and begging the king to spare his life. Instead, he wanted to save the king from an unfortunate rebirth.

The cannibal king said, "I gave up being a king to eat human flesh. It is impossible for me to give up cannibalism."

The bodhisatta persuaded him patiently, pointing out the various evil consequences of cannibalism and of harming others. Finally, the king promised to stop his cannibalism. Subsequently, the bodhisatta found a way to let the king return to his former country and become king again. This is the power of avoiding evil and doing good after having associated with the wise. Associating with the wise can change your life and make it better.

This cannibal king was a previous life of Aṅgulimāla, a dreaded bandit during the Buddha's time who was notorious for cutting off a finger from each of his murder victims. The habitual tendencies of previous lives remain intact in one's life-continuum and carry on until the present life, making the mind in this life inclined to perform similar unwholesome acts again. It was not until Aṅgulimāla met the wisest of teachers—the Buddha—that he had the opportunity to realize his mistakes.

At that time, Aṅgulimāla saw the Buddha in the forest. He ran as fast as he could to chase the Buddha, but despite this, he could not catch up with the Buddha. He became tired of chasing, so he shouted to the Buddha, "Stop, ascetic! Stop!" The Buddha stopped and said, "I have stopped, Aṅgulimāla. Now you stop."

This sentence was like a blow to the head—Aṅgulimāla was greatly impacted, as if awakened from a dream, and he understood the meaning of these words, "I have stopped killing, it is you who have not stopped and continue to do evil." He immediately threw away his sword, knelt before the Buddha, and asked the Buddha to allow him to become a monk. Encountering a wise one even for a moment can change a person's destiny. This is why associating with the wise is the highest blessing.

After taking refuge in the Buddha, Aṅgulimāla practiced meditation and kept his precepts diligently. He knew that he had killed many people, and if he did not attain at least stream-entry in this life, he would surely be reborn in hell in his next life. He decided to turn his remorse into a supportive condition for his diligent practice (upanissaya paccaya). Through his intensive meditation, he became an arahant, which is a great blessing after a long string of misfortunes! When one becomes an arahant, birth is ended. Being liberated from the five aggregates, one whose taints are destroyed, who has utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, there is no more becoming. Through association with the Buddha, Aṅgulimāla gave up evil, followed the path of good, and achieved the fruit of arahantship. What a blessing for him!

You may ask: Did the bad kamma Aṅgulimāla performed simply disappear while he was alive? Not so! Due to the bad kamma of killing and cutting off the fingers of others, Aṅgulimāla had to suffer humiliation at the hands of others even after becoming a monk and an arahant. Every time he went on alms round, many villagers threw stones at him. He would often return to the monastery with his head broken and bleeding. The Buddha would encourage him each time, saying,

“Aṅgulimāla! You have to bear with it! Bear with it! The fruit of the kamma that would have burned you in hell for

many years, many hundreds of years, many thousands of years, you are now experiencing in the here and now!"

—MN 86

Aṅgulimāla was originally a murderer, but he was fortunate to meet the Buddha, who transformed him into a sage. Of course, this transformation was done through his own relentless efforts, but association with the Buddha made it possible. Therefore, it is said consorting with the wise is the highest blessing.

Of course, to know whether a person is wise or not, we ourselves must be discerning. Otherwise, how do we know who is wise?

Except for the Buddha and the arahants who have completely eradicated all defilements, every wise person has some shortcomings and imperfections in their personality. So long as their shortcomings do not violate the precepts or moral standards, so long as they can guide us to the perfect and pure Noble Eightfold Path that allows us to establish right thought and right view, they are qualified to be the wise worth associating with.

How important is associating with the wise? Let us see what the Buddha said:

On one occasion ... Venerable Ānanda went to the Blessed One and, on arrival, having bowed down to the Blessed One, sat to one side. As he was sitting there, Venerable Ānanda

said to the Blessed One, “This is half of the holy life, lord: admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie.”

“Don’t say that, Ānanda. Don’t say that. Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, and comrades, he can be expected to develop and pursue the Noble Eightfold Path.”

“...It is in dependence on me as an admirable friend that beings subject to birth have gained release from birth, that beings subject to aging have gained release from aging, that beings subject to death have gained release from death, that beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair have gained release from sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair. It is through this line of reasoning that one may know how admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life.”

—SN 45.2

Here, the Buddha meant that he was an admirable friend because he showed the real path to the end of suffering. But no matter who shows us the Noble Eightfold Path, we ourselves must walk it.

A disciple who wants to be free from life’s suffering must start by avoiding fools and associating with the wise. And how do we go from associating with the wise

to becoming liberated and free? The Buddha gave systematic guidance:

“Monks, I do not say that final knowledge is achieved all at once. Rather, final knowledge is achieved by gradual training, by gradual practice, by gradual progress. And how does there come to be gradual training, gradual practice, gradual progress? There is the case where, when conviction has arisen, one visits [a teacher]. Having visited, one grows close. Having grown close, one lends an ear. Having lent an ear, one hears the Dhamma. Having heard the Dhamma, one remembers it. Remembering, one penetrates the meaning of the teachings. Penetrating the meaning, one comes to an agreement through pondering the teachings. There being an agreement through pondering the teachings, desire arises. When desire has arisen, one is willing. When one is willing, one contemplates. Having contemplated, one makes an exertion. Having made an exertion, one realizes with the body the ultimate truth and, having penetrated it with discernment, sees it.”

— Kitagiri Sutta (MN 70)

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What kind of person is considered wise?
2. What does it mean when the Buddha say that “admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life?”

3. Paying homage to those worthy of homage (Pūjā ca pūjaneyyānaṃ)

The third blessing is “paying homage to those worthy of homage.” Who is worthy of homage? The noble one who has completely eradicated the three poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion is worthy of the highest respect. In the whole world, the Buddha is the best example of who we should pay homage to. Even the gods paid homage to the Buddha when approaching him. Now the Buddha is gone, but living arahants are also worthy of homage. One of the meanings of “arahant” is “killer of the enemies.” They have completely eradicated their inner defilements and will never hurt others. They are the role models for the world.

Other ennobled people—including the anāgāmī, sakadāgāmī, and sotāpanna—are also worthy of respect. In addition, monastics who give up worldly pleasures and practice diligently to abandon internal defilements are worthy of respect, just as are the monastics who arouse our confidence in Buddhism by strictly observing the precepts, being knowledgeable in the suttas, and teaching the Dhamma to the public to increase our wisdom.



Why is it a blessing to pay homage to the noble ones? Here is an example of how the Buddha taught the first five monks after his enlightenment.

After accomplishing Buddhahood, the Buddha wanted to teach the Dhamma to the five monks who had followed him. Previously, these five monks mistakenly believed that Prince Siddhartha had failed in his search for enlightenment, since he had given up asceticism and started eating. When they saw the Buddha approaching, they agreed not to pay homage to him.

After the Buddha arrived, the five monks addressed him as an equal, as “friend.” But the Buddha warned them not to call him “friend,” for he had already obtained the supreme knowledge and had become a

fully self-enlightened Buddha. Ordinary people are not on a par with the Buddha and thus should not address him as a friend — this is disrespectful.

The five monks could not believe that Prince Siddhartha had become a Buddha. At that time, some people thought that desire came from the body, and only through torturing the body could enlightenment be achieved. Since Prince Siddhartha had resumed eating, which was considered a sensual pleasure, he couldn't possibly become a Buddha.

The Buddha then declared three times that he had awakened, and eventually the five monks believed him and prepared a seat to welcome him. They respectfully requested the Buddha to take the seat and pleaded with him to teach them the path to liberation. On this occasion, the Buddha taught the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*. Koṇḍañña, one of the five monks, experienced the Four Noble Truths and became the first student of the Buddha to become ennobled.

Suppose the five monks did not show due respect to the Buddha — would the Buddha teach such people imbued with such pride and arrogance? Surely not. Even if the Buddha was willing to teach, the pure Dhamma would not flow into the hearts of the disrespectful. The Dhamma is not to be spoken to the arrogant. By paying homage to the venerables, we gain the opportunity to

hear and to understand the Dhamma. This is a blessing obtained by paying homage to those worthy of homage.

In the Saṅgha, there are certain rituals to honor the elders. For example, a younger monk (in years in the Saṅgha) must bow three times to an elder monk. The seats are also arranged based on seniority.

Sayalay Susīlā also tries to maintain a humble attitude herself. When a monk comes to her monastery, Sayalay invites him to take a higher seat, then bows three times to him, and will always sit in a position lower than his.

However, not every practitioner understands how to behave humbly. Sayalay remembers one occasion when a group of short-term nuns came to her monastery for a visit. When she approached them, she thought they would follow the etiquette and bow three times to her as a senior nun. However, they were all sitting still in chairs and didn't even bother to stand up to show respect, let alone bow to their elder.

When students are with teachers (in Buddhist society), if the teacher is sitting, students should not stand and speak to the teacher from a higher position but should take a lower position. If the teacher is speaking while standing, students should also stand and not sit comfortably in chairs. At any time when encountering a teacher, students should fold their palms together in front of their chests. These are physical expressions of being respectful.

For lay people, elderly family members should be respected by the younger; wives and husbands should respect each other; good spiritual friends and mentors are also worthy of respect. When elders and teachers see our politeness and gentleness, they will be more willing to guide us. On the contrary, without showing respect to those who should be respected, it is difficult to have the opportunity to be taught.

The Saṅgha chants to praise the lay disciples who respect them: “They honor their mother, their father, monks and brahmins, and the elders of the family. If they perform these wholesome deeds, they will grow in longevity, beauty, happiness, and strength.” That is to say, they can gain four blessings by paying homage: longevity, beauty, happiness, and physical strength. These four blessings are pursued and yearned for by all of us, are they not? Therefore, it is a blessing to pay homage to those worthy of homage.⁵

⁵ In this stanza, the three blessings of “Not consorting with fools, consorting with the wise, paying homage to those worthy of homage” are the conditions that lead to nibbāna and rebirth in happy realms.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Who is worthy of homage?
2. How do you usually pay homage to the Triple Gem and to your elders? On what occasions and in what ways?

*Patirūpa-desa-vāso ca, pubbe ca
katapuññatā;*

*Atta-sammāpaṇidhi ca, etaṃ
maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

**Living in a suitable location,
having made merit in the past,
directing oneself rightly: This is
the highest blessing.**



4. Living in a suitable location (Patirūpa-desa-vāso)

Patirūpa means “proper” or “suitable”; desa is “place” or “region”, which can be a village, town, city, or country; and “vāso” refers to a dwelling of any sentient being. This verse means living in a suitable place.

In order to obtain the three blessings mentioned above, we should choose a suitable place to live. What makes for a suitable place? For a Buddhist, auspicious places are where there are monastics and lay devotees who practice the teaching of the Buddha. Such a residence gives us the opportunity to learn the Dhamma and establish right views. In some Buddhist countries in Southeast Asia, such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, monks give lessons to people on how to live a moral life by restraining themselves from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants. On the first and fifteenth days of each lunar month, people go spend a day or more in the local monasteries, listening to the teaching of the Buddha and cultivating their minds through meditation. The relatively isolated environment in the monasteries can provide lay practitioners with a better opportunity to temporarily avoid worldly pleasures.



Amid the vicissitudes of life, we inevitably encounter much disappointment, distress, and uncertainty. If monastics are living nearby, we would have the opportunity to approach them and get their advice about how to face our difficulties with the right attitude. After listening to the teachings of the Buddha, we can see reality clearly, think rationally, calmly face setbacks or misfortunes, apply wisdom to solve problems in life, and be happier.

If monastics who practice a noble life are within accessible distance, families living in the region have the opportunity to provide alms to them, cultivating

these fields of merit. Lay devotees can provide four requisites—food, accommodation, clothing, and medicine—to support the Saṅgha. They can also come to the monastery to offer service, such as cleaning the pagoda and the meditation hall, helping in the kitchen, and serving at the front desk. Every Buddhist hopes to gain merit through good deeds, so that in the long cycle of saṃsāra, these merits can support and help us to be born in a good realm where Buddha’s teaching flourishes, to meet with wise friends (*kalyāṇa-mittatā*), and to continue on the path.

Some monastics also teach meditation. They can tell us how to practice concentration and insight meditation so that we can have a chance to see the truth of impermanence, suffering, and absence of self. Surely, wholesome deeds such as giving and observing precepts can help us to be reborn in happy realms; however, we must understand that once the result of wholesome kamma is exhausted, we will be reborn into the woeful realms again if unwholesome kamma ripen near death. The cycle of life is continuous suffering without escape from birth, aging, illness, and death. Therefore, practitioners who have already comprehended this will find suitable places to practice meditation, so that they can let go of their craving for sensual pleasure and existence, and free themselves from repeated rebirth.

In Chinese history, there was a great scholar named Mencius. His mother moving them three times to find a suitable place to live is a good example of the importance of finding the right location. When Mencius was a child, he was very mischievous. His mother put a lot of effort into helping him receive a good education and cultivate a good character. First they lived near a cemetery, so young Mencius would play games to do with funerals, kneeling and crying with friends from the neighborhood. Mencius' mother thought this was not appropriate, so she moved them, this time next to a market. At the market, young Mencius played games related to the business of merchants. Mencius' mother realized that this place was also unsuitable for her child, so they moved again, this time near a school. Now Mencius began to behave politely and grew fond of reading books. At this moment, Mencius' mother nodded with satisfaction and said, "This is where my son should live!"

On the other hand, children living in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, are heavily influenced by drug trafficking and the local gangster culture. There are constant shootings and conflicts. If a man doesn't pick up a gun, he could be shot dead. If he chooses to fight, he has a better chance to survive. Therefore, many children from this place embark on a violent path from an early age.

In order to gain blessings and cultivate wisdom, Buddhists should live in a place where there are four groups of people—monks, nuns, male lay devotees, and female lay devotees. A place where noble monastics live is a blessed land. Even if there are no monastics around, if our neighbors are good Buddhists who live a moral life—law-abiding, self-disciplined, and generous—we will also obtain more blessings and happiness in life.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Why should we live in a suitable place?
2. What is considered a suitable place for a Buddhist?
3. How did you choose your current place of residence?
4. Where is your ideal and most auspicious place to live?

5. Having made merit in the past (Pubbe ca katapuññatā)

“Pubbe” means “past”, and “katapuññatā” means “merit made.” The term “having made merit in the past” refers to the practice of good kamma previously in this life or in our past lives. There are ten types of meritorious deeds: giving (dāna), moral conduct (sīla), meditation (bhāvanā), reverence (apacāyana), service (veyyāvacca), dedicating merits (pattidāna), rejoicing in merits (pattānumodana), listening to the Dhamma (dhammasavana), propagating the Dhamma (dhammadesanā), and right view (diṭṭhijjukamma).⁶

To be able to live in a suitable location means we have made merit in the past. Due to the good kamma performed in the past, we are blessed to be born in a place with access to the true Dhamma and wise friends (kalyāṇa-mittatā) to go further on the spiritual path. Thus, the merit made in the past is a blessing.

People who lack the support of wholesome deeds in the past tend to pursue sensory pleasures, worldly reputation, and social status. They usually have no interest in cultivating their own minds. Without the support of merit made in the past, they would face

⁶ For detailed explanation, see Chapter 15: Living in rectitude.

many obstacles in this very life and rarely encounter noble people who can help.

Our teacher, the great Buddha, did not accomplish noble Buddhahood in one lifetime but through countless previous lives practicing the ten perfections (pāramīs).⁷ For the ignorant, saṃsāra is long and full of pain, with no hope for liberation. We are so lucky to have heard the true Dhamma and to know what meritorious deeds are. Do wholesome deeds whenever and wherever you can. Don't hesitate to perform good kamma, for it brings happiness in this life and good fortune in the future.

Merit in the past may also refer to meditation practice, which is one of the ten meritorious deeds. There are two types of meditation: samatha and vipassanā. If we practice samatha meditation by being aware of the breath, as concentration gradually increases, we can attain jhāna. If we can maintain jhāna at the end of our life, we can be reborn in the realm of brahma gods, living solely on the spiritual joy from jhāna, without

⁷ The ten perfections (pāramīs) are the perfections of giving (dāna-pāramī), virtue (sīla-pāramī), renunciation (nekkhamma-pāramī), wisdom (paññā-pāramī), great effort (viriya-pāramī), patience (khanti-pāramī), truthfulness (sacca-pāramī), loving-kindness (mettā-pāramī), resolution (adhiṭṭhāna-pāramī), and equanimity (upekkhā-pāramī).

any physical pain. If we practice vipassanā meditation, contemplating the impermanence, suffering, and not-self nature of the body and mind, we can finally let go of attachment to the body and mind and realize nibbāna—total liberation. In the era of the Buddha, many disciples attained noble paths and fruits upon hearing a short discourse. This is due to the blessing from their meditation practice in previous lives.



For example, Mahākaccāyana gained the title of “the foremost disciple in providing detailed expositions of

[the Buddha's] own brief statements." He gained such a title due to merit made in the past.

During the period of the Padumuttara Buddha over 100,000 kalpas ago, Mahākaccāyana vowed to become a leader in the Saṅgha. At that time, he was born in a wealthy noble family. During a visit to a monastery, he saw a monk who was praised by the Buddha as "the foremost disciple in the ability to provide detailed expositions of [the Buddha's] own brief statements." Mahākaccāyana was deeply touched by the extraordinary praise and thought to himself, "This monk is truly great; that's why the Buddha would praise him so. I wish to achieve the same accomplishment during the lifetime of a future Buddha."

In order to obtain the merit from this noble vow, Mahākaccāyana invited the Buddha to his home to offer him meals. For a whole week, he presented generous offerings to the Buddha and the Saṅgha. On the last day, he bowed to the Buddha's feet and expressed his wish. The Buddha observed the future with his unhindered eye of knowledge and saw that the young man's wish would come true. He told him, "Young man! After 100,000 kalpas, you will become 'the foremost disciple in providing detailed expositions of the Buddha's brief statements' during the period of Gotama Buddha."

According to the sutta, in that life time, Mahākaccāyana also built a pagoda for the Buddha with a stone base

and decorated it with jewels and ornaments. The Buddha said that because of the blessing from his gift, he would become the King of Heaven for 30 kalpas and then return to the human realm to become a rājā cakkavatti, or wheel-turning king who rules over vast area according to the Dhamma. In his last life, he would be reborn into a brahmin family with the name of Kaccāyana, and he would become a disciple of the Buddha as well as an arahant.⁸

In the era of our Buddha, the five monks who were the first to obtain arahantship—Koṇḍañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma, and Assaji—became fully enlightened after hearing the Buddha preach the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* and also had made merit in the past. They all had followed previous Buddhas and practiced meditation diligently until reaching insight knowledge of equanimity about formations (saṅkhārupekkha-ñāṇa), penetrating the not-self nature of the noble truths of suffering and the origin of suffering. This shows the blessing of “having made merit in the past.”

In meditation retreats, some practitioners can obtain jhāna in a short period of time, while others take several

⁸ This story does not imply that one can become an arahant by giving dāna only. One must practice samatha and vipassanā meditation in order to be liberated.

years or decades. This is related to the meritorious deeds they performed in the past.

The meritorious deeds performed in the past will bring many blessings to this life. Those who are generous in the past will be born into a wealthy family; those who are compassionate and good-tempered will be born with beauty; those who do not envy others will be born as influential people; those who do not kill will live a long life. As the Buddha said to Subha, the brahma:

“Student, beings are owners of kammas, heirs of kammas, they have kammas as their progenitor, kammas as their kin, kammas as their homing-place. It is kammas that differentiate beings according to inferiority and superiority.”

—*Cula-kammavibhanga Sutta (MN 135)*

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What are the ten meritorious deeds? What blessings do they bring?
2. How do you practice meritorious deeds in daily life?

6. Directing oneself rightly (Attasammāpaṇidhi)

“Directing oneself rightly” is the aspiration and self-motivation to reach the right goal. The traditional Confucian culture in China places special emphasis on early aspirations in life. Confucius said, “I aspired to learn at fifteen years of age.” Another famous Chinese philosopher Wang Yang Ming also expressed the astonishing goal of “becoming a sage” as a child. Although the final achievements of these outstanding scholars and philosophers are the result of wholehearted dedication and continuous effort, without establishing lofty aspirations in their youth to guide them, they could not have reached such a high level of accomplishment.



As Buddhists, we must direct ourselves rightly. In Buddhism, the most basic right view is correctly understanding the law of kamma, meaning that each of us must bear the consequences of the good and bad kamma we have performed in the past. People with this right view do not rely on blessings from others; they avoid evil and do good. However, despite claiming to be Buddhists, some people worship and pray to gods and ghosts whenever they encounter difficulties in life, especially in the East. Today they may go to a Buddhist temple to worship, tomorrow they may go to an Indian temple to pray. Without directing oneself rightly, people are easily exploited and deceived. With the understanding of the law of kamma, we accept the gains and losses of life as being partly the result of our past kamma.

“Directing oneself rightly” also means establishing and strengthening confidence in the Triple Gem—the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. After taking refuge in the Triple Gem, one should no longer seek blessings from gods because gods are not purified like noble ones. Most gods also suffer from greed, anger, and delusion and are not freed from the cycle of rebirth. Once their good kamma is exhausted, they will be reborn into another realm, either happy or woeful, depending on the ripening of their previous kamma. One of my fellow nuns was a male deva in her past life. In that life, he got very angry due to a betrayal by his

female companion, and his life was immediately cut off. She told me, “I was reborn in the ghost realm, completely dark.”

Directing oneself rightly to avoid evil, do good, and purify oneself should be the goal of all Buddhists. But we must also strive to achieve the goal. Aspiration is important, but it is empty without the diligence and perseverance to put it into action. By directing oneself rightly, we encounter wise friends, walk the right path, and gain blessings life after life.

As for monastics, they set goals of learning (pariyatti), practicing meditation (patipatti), and realization of nibbāna (pativedha). It is also their duty to promote the Dhamma for the benefit of all sentient beings, so that the true Dhamma may last long in this world.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. How do we direct ourselves rightly on our spiritual path?

*Bāhusaccañ-ca sippañ-ca, vinayo ca
susikkhito;*

*Subhāsītā ca yā vācā, etaṃ
maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

**Broad knowledge, skill, well-
trained in discipline, well-spoken
words: This is the highest
blessing.**



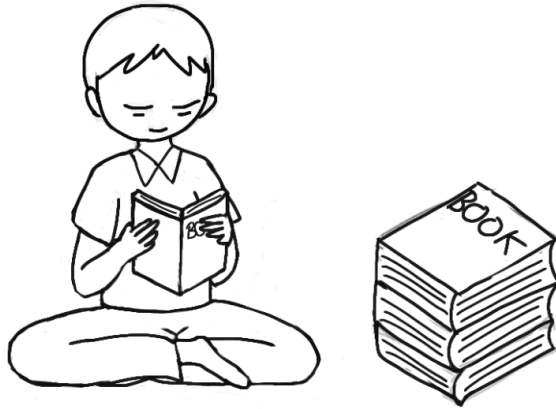
7. Broad knowledge (Bāhusacca)

There are two types of broad knowledge: worldly knowledge and knowledge of the Dhamma. With worldly knowledge, we can make ourselves generalists or specialists and make contributions to society and mankind. However, as Buddhists, we should also strive to study the Dhamma and be as knowledgeable as possible so as to deepen and broaden our understanding of reality.

It is very important to all Buddhists to learn to understand what is wholesome and what is unwholesome and to establish the right view of causality. Without Dhamma knowledge of what is wholesome and unwholesome, how can we abandon evil and do good? Dhamma knowledge serves as guidance for us to walk the path of purification. Learning and practicing are complementary to each other.

The Buddha taught us the three paths to happiness: happiness on earth, happiness in heaven, and the happiness of nibbāna. If we are learned, we will know how to achieve these three kinds of happiness. If we want to be reborn in the human or heavenly realms in the future, we must practice the ten meritorious deeds explained below in Chapter 15. To experience the

happiness of nibbāna, we must cultivate morality, concentration, and wisdom.



Listening to the Dhamma can correct our wrong views and enable us to have broad knowledge. A learned person usually is not a fool; on the contrary, a learned person will have sufficient knowledge and skill to help others to develop in the Dhamma. This is the blessing of broad knowledge.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. In daily life, how do you balance the study of both worldly knowledge and the Dhamma?
2. What are the three kinds of happiness, and how do we achieve them?

8. Skill (Sippaṇ)

Being skilled means mastering a skill as a means of making a living. In the suttas, when someone asks the Buddha how to live this life well, the Buddha gives four recommendations: skill, protection, good knowledge, and a proper occupation.

In human society, we must have some abilities and skills to properly support ourselves and our families. Skilled people are not idle; there is less chance that they will go astray and break the law. This is also a real blessing.



In the Buddha's time, there was a man named Mahādhana. His family was wealthy enough to support him for life, so his parents didn't encourage him to learn any skills, and he grew up without the

ability to make a living for himself. Later, he married an equally wealthy wife, and the combined property of the two families was even more immense, so his wife did not have to learn any skills either. After their parents passed away, the wealthy couple associated with fools and became addicted to gambling, drinking, and extravagant spending. As a result, all the money was spent quickly, and they became broke, down and out, reduced to begging for a living.

One day, the Buddha saw the couple begging for food on the road and smiled. When Venerable Ānanda asked him why he smiled, the Buddha replied that if the couple had practiced the Dhamma when they were young, the husband could have attained the fourth stage of sainthood (arahant) and the wife the third stage of sainthood (anāgāmī). Unfortunately, when they were young, they were ignorant and inexperienced, wasting their precious time. If they had practiced the Dhamma in their middle age, the husband could have attained the third stage of sainthood and the wife the second stage of sainthood (sakadāgāmī), but unfortunately their middle-age years are over, too. Now they are old and frail, and even if the Buddha were to teach them the Dhamma, their minds are not sharp enough to absorb it. What a pity!

The couple failed to practice diligently at a young age to become saints, but if they had at least learned useful

skills, they could have still held on to their property and been the richest couple in the country. But now they have wasted their whole lives, left with nothing, and are cast aside by others. It is a pity!

Some parents dote on their children and allow them to spend money without restraint, resulting in their children doing whatever they want without mastering any skills, let alone the ability to endure hardship. However, the world is impermanent and no wealth lasts forever. Once these children encounter any setbacks and changes in life, they are unable to face these challenges. When they are desperate, they easily go astray. Therefore, having skills and being good at a craft is a blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

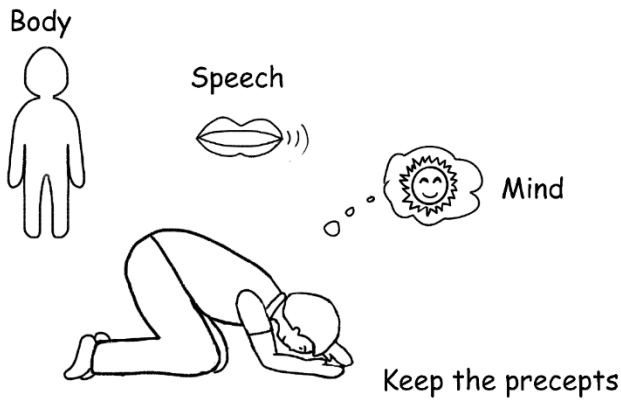
1. What do you understand about the notion of “being skilled”?
2. What blessings can knowledge and skills bring?

9. Well-trained in discipline (Vinayo ca susikkhito)

Discipline (sīla) refers to the code of conduct for lay people and monastics—what to do and what not to do. The commentaries speak of two kinds of discipline: that to be observed by lay people—namely, avoiding the ten types of unwholesome kamma (akusala-kammapatha)—and the code of discipline for monastics, the Pātimokkha.

Lay people should avoid the ten unwholesome actions: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slandering, harsh speech, useless speech, greed, hatred, and wrong views. Sayalay Susīlā thinks that gambling and taking intoxicants should also be added to the list. Gambling is a manifestation of greed, and excessive gambling can lead to ruin. Taking intoxicants can cause heedlessness—also a potential path to ruin. Staying away from the ten unwholesome deeds brings benefits and happiness in this life and in the next life, so it is a blessing to observe these precepts.

A detailed explanation about the precept of refraining from killing can help us fully comprehend this morality training:



As we all know, killing and taking life should not be done; it is wrong. Every living being, no matter how big or small, has the right to live. As long as a person kills intentionally, that person will bear the consequences of killing.

In Nepal, there is an altar where people kill many live animals as sacrifices to the so-called Brahma. The blood of the killed animals has gradually solidified and turned dark black, and over the years the stones around the altar appear dipped in black. These killings are all due to ignorance.

How can we tell whether the crime of killing is established? This mainly depends on the following four points:

1. The target is clear, meaning the killer clearly knows who is to be killed;

2. There is a motive to kill;
3. The act of killing is carried out;
4. The life of the targeted being ends.

Once these four conditions are met, the kamma of killing will be formed.

In addition, the significance of the kamma of killing is affected by several factors: the quantity, size, and type of the being or beings that are killed and the severity of the occurrence. If the target is a virtuous person, such as one's own parents, good teachers, or eminent monks, because of the virtue of the person killed, the kamma of killing will be particularly weighty. If the killing is done with strong hatred and brutal means, the kamma of killing will be heavier. If the killing leads to the deaths of many living beings—such as massacres, the massive killing of livestock in meat factories, or collective fishing activity—the kamma of killing is relatively heavier. If the volume and the weight of the beings killed are large, such as elephants and whales, more effort and time will be expended accordingly, and thus the kamma will be relatively heavier. When the kamma from killing is heavy, it will result in rebirth in the hell realm; when the kamma is of a medium weight, it will result in rebirth in the hungry ghost realm; and a lighter-weight kamma from killing will result in rebirth in the animal realm.

Some people think that keeping the precepts brings many restraints and much inconvenience to their lives. This is a misconception. The precepts are not dogmas or shackles; the noble purpose of the precepts is to guide us to give up unwholesome thoughts, speech, and bodily acts and to refrain from performing unwholesome kamma that can harm ourselves and others. The precepts help us cultivate compassion for others' suffering.

In the *Kanha Jataka* (Ja 440), Sakka, the king of a heavenly realm, was deeply moved by the bodhisatta's perfection and virtue. Sakka came to the bodhisatta and promised to reward him with whatever he wanted. The bodhisatta replied:

"O Sakka, lord of all the world, a choice you bid declare:

No creature be aught harmed for me, O Sakka, anywhere,

Neither in body nor in mind.

This, Sakka, is my prayer."

The bodhisatta's prayers are based on the compassionate spirit of keeping precepts and benefiting all living beings.

Being disciplined in keeping the precepts allows us to always maintain mindfulness, act prudently, be vigilant, exercise self-restraint, not violate or harm others, and benefit others and ourselves. Imagine a person who does not kill, steal, cheat, or rob, who does

not seduce other people's spouses, and who does not get drunk. This leads to living a peaceful and honest life without remorse. In a community made of people with these qualities, community members can always trust and love each other, and harmony is established.

On the contrary, for people who do not keep the precepts and instead do unwholesome deeds like killing, stealing, prostitution, and cheating—no matter where they go, they may appear confident on the outside, but they are really timid on the inside, fearing that their unwholesome deeds will be exposed, that others will take revenge, and that they might be discovered by the police. When they see the shadow of a tree in the middle of the night, they might think it is a victim coming for revenge, and so they live in fear.

In the *Bhayabherava Sutta* (MN 4), the Buddha said to the Brahmin Jāṇussoṇi:

“There are ascetics and brahmins with unpurified conduct of body, speech, and mind who frequent remote lodgings in the wilderness and the forest. Those ascetics and brahmins summon unskillful fear and dread because of these defects in their conduct.”

We must understand that this kind of worry and fear is only the beginning of the suffering that comes from unwholesome deeds. Eventually, crimes are punished by the law, not to mention the unwholesome kamma that will ripen in future lives. To illustrate this, King

Ajātasattu suffered greatly from remorse after killing his father. As a result, he failed to become a stream enterer and was reborn in hell in his next life.

Keeping one's precepts is based on the understanding of the law of kamma, as well as empathy. If we do not want to be killed ourselves, it's easy to understand that all other living beings in the world do not want to be killed either. If we do not like our possessions being stolen, the same goes for others. If we do not like being cheated by others, neither do others like being cheated by us. Having understood the universal needs of all beings, we understand the necessity of keeping the precepts and respecting each other.

Keeping the precepts can also help us to cultivate compassion. Thinking of the pain of those who are killed, robbed, cheated, or betrayed, and the resentment in the hearts of their families, we can restrain ourselves from hurting others, since we do not want the same pain ourselves.

There is a story in the *Dhammapada* commentary about a layman who invited a monk to his house to make offerings every day. One day, there was a golden egg in his house that he was going to take as an offering to the king. While the monk was waiting alone in the hall, suddenly a goose ran in and swallowed the golden egg.

When the layman came back and saw that his golden egg was gone, he asked the monk, “Why did you steal my golden egg? Please give it back to me.”

The monk denied that he had taken the golden egg. The layman said, “Only you and the goose were here. Could it be the goose who stole it? It must be you. Please return it.”

The monk explained many times that he didn’t take it, but the layman would not believe him because there was no one else present except the monk! So he became more and more angry, picked up a stick, and beat the monk violently, trying to force him to hand over the golden egg. The monk was beaten until he bled. The goose smelled the blood and ran into the hall. The layman kicked the goose away in anger, and the poor goose was killed instantly. Seeing this, the monk said to the layman, “Your golden egg was swallowed by that goose.”

Why did the monk choose to be beaten rather than simply telling the truth? Because if he did, the layman would have killed the goose to get the golden egg. The monk did not want the goose to die because of his words—this was his compassion for the goose. The layman erred in distrusting the monk’s strict observance of the precepts, as well as his own bad temper.

In Sri Lanka, there was once a layman who received the five precepts from an elder monk. Afterward, he went to the forest to cut wood and accidentally fell into a cave. There was a python in the cave which immediately entangled him. He drew his knife and was about to kill the python, but he suddenly remembered that he had just received the five precepts that morning. It now seemed wrong to kill the python, so he hesitated.

The python bound the man's body tighter and tighter, and he instinctively raised the knife again, but the power of his intention to keep the precepts made him lower the knife again. In the end, he threw away the knife and made up his mind that he would rather die than break his precepts.

Strangely, after he threw away the knife, the python let him go. This is the power of non-killing and harmlessness. Keeping the precepts rigorously will produce incredible power. This story inspires us to try our best not to break the five precepts. If the precepts are kept pure and perfect, we can face dangerous situations with calmness without fear. Therefore, it is a blessing to be well-trained in discipline.

The essence of mastering discipline is to not harm oneself or others, as taught by the Buddha to Rāhula:

“What do you think, Rāhula? What is the purpose of a mirror?”

“It’s for checking your reflection, sir.”

“In the same way, deeds of body, speech, and mind should be done only after repeated checking.

When you want to act with the body, you should check on that same deed: ‘Does this act with the body that I want to do lead to hurting myself, hurting others, or hurting both? Is it unskillful, with suffering as its outcome and result?’ If, while checking in this way, you know: ‘This act with the body that I want to do leads to hurting myself, hurting others, or hurting both; it’s unskillful, with suffering as its outcome and result,’ then you should definitely not do such a deed. But if, while checking in this way, you know: ‘This act with the body that I want to do doesn’t lead to hurting myself, hurting others, or hurting both; it’s skillful, with happiness as its outcome and result,’ then, Rāhula, you may do such a deed.”

—MN 61

May all of us strictly keep the precepts to protect both ourselves and others.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What are the ten meritorious deeds and the ten unwholesome deeds?
2. How can we tell whether the precept of killing has been violated?
3. Why can keeping precepts bring blessings?

10. Well-spoken words (Subhāsītā ca yā vācā)

Well-spoken words are words that are soft, gentle, and beneficial. In general, people like to hear gentle words rather than harsh words. Therefore, we should restrain from harsh speech so we don't make people feel uncomfortable and cause them to hold grudges against us. If we want to make friends, it is necessary to know how to speak soft, gentle, and beneficial words.



However, well-spoken words should be differentiated from flattering speech. Flattering speech may please people, but it is not beneficial and instead is usually untruthful and insincere, hence should be avoided. Speak truthfully, sincerely, gently, and with compassion for others. Such words are well-spoken and have the power to influence others.

According to the *Sutta Nipata* 3.3, well-spoken words are:

*“The calm say that what is well-spoken is best;
second, that one should say what is just, not unjust;
third, what’s endearing, not unendearing;
fourth, what is true, not false.”*

Well-spoken words are the highest blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What do you think well-spoken words are? Give examples.

*Mātāpitu upatṭhānaṃ, puttadārassa
saṅgaho;*

*Anākulā ca kammantā, etaṃ
maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

**Support for one's parents,
assistance to one's wife and
children, engaging in a faultless
occupation: This is the highest
blessing.**



11. Support for one's parents (Mātāpitu upaṭṭhāna)

Supporting one's parents is highly praised in Eastern cultures. However, in modern society, it seems very difficult to serve one's parents. One mother can raise five children, but five children may not be able to look after their only mother when they grow up.



Here is an inspiring story about how the bodhisatta demonstrated filial piety to his parents.

Venerable Mahakassapa and the bodhisatta were father and son in one of their previous lives. After the bodhisatta was born, the family of three went to live in seclusion in the forest. One day, the parents went out

together to look for fruit. When they came to an anthill, a hidden snake suddenly spewed poisonous smoke and blinded them.

They both knew that this was the result of their unwholesome kamma from their previous lives, so they faced the tragedy calmly. The two of them were doctors in their previous lives, and they deliberately used a potion to blind a patient's eyes for the sake of profit. In the endless cycle of rebirth, sometimes we are born with high moral character, and sometimes we are born very selfish and corrupted. There is no consistency in our behaviors due to the defilements in the mind.

The blind parents groped their way back home. After the bodhisatta learned about the situation, he cried at first, and then he laughed. The parents were puzzled and asked why, and the bodhisatta said, "I cried because I was sad to see you both suffering, and I laughed because I realized that I now have the opportunity to take care of you. You raised me up with love and concern. This is an opportunity for me to look after you instead, so I am very happy."

One day, when the bodhisatta was looking for food in the forest, the king came to hunt. When the king saw the figure of a man, he thought, "I have never seen a person in this forest, could it be a ghost?" Frightened, the king took out his bow and shot him. The bodhisatta fell to the ground, bleeding badly. When the king came

closer, he could see that the bodhisatta looked worried rather than angry. When the king asked him what he was worried about, he said, "Once born, we are bound to die. I am not worried about my own death, but my parents are both blind. If I die, who would take care of them? How can they get food now?"

The king felt very guilty after hearing these words. He thought, "This man has no resentment towards me, nor is he afraid of his own death. Instead, he is concerned about his parents. He is a man of noble character, and I have shot him dead. What a sin!"

The king was touched by the bodhisatta's good virtues and was very sorry for his recklessness. In order to make up for it, he promised to take the bodhisatta's parents to the palace to take care of them. The bodhisatta was very happy when he heard this and died with a smile on his face.

In sutta AN 2.33, the Buddha said:

"I tell you, monks, there are two people who are not easy to repay. Which two? Your mother and father. Even if you were to carry your mother on one shoulder and your father on the other shoulder for 100 years, and were to look after them by anointing, massaging, bathing, and rubbing their limbs, and they were to defecate and urinate right there [on your shoulders], you would not in that way pay or repay your parents. If you were to establish your mother and father in absolute sovereignty over this great earth, abounding in the

seven treasures, you would not in that way pay or repay your parents. Why is that? Mother and father do much for their children. They care for them, they nourish them, and they introduce them to this world. But anyone who rouses his unbelieving mother and father, settles and establishes them in conviction; rouses his unvirtuous mother and father, settles and establishes them in virtue; rouses his stingy mother and father, settles and establishes them in generosity; rouses his foolish mother and father, settles and establishes them in discernment: To this extent one pays and repays one's mother and father."

The Buddha said that it is extremely difficult to repay our parents. The best way to return the kindness of parents is to establish them in faith, virtue, generosity, and wisdom. This was done by Venerable Sāriputta.

Venerable Sāriputta's mother, the wealthy Lady Sāri, was a very blessed woman. All of her seven children were arahants. But, surprisingly, she still worshipped the Brahma god, without knowing the attainments of her offspring. Each time Venerable Sāriputta went to her house on alms round, he was scolded by her, "You worthless child, I have lots of assets you can enjoy — why must you beg for food?" Finally, Venerable Sāriputta decided to stop going to his mother's house to beg for food.

When the time came for Venerable Sāriputta to attain parinibbāna, the complete passing away, he thought of

helping his mother, who still held wrong views. He wanted to repay his mother by guiding her to establish the right view and faith in the Dhamma before he passed away. So he asked the Buddha's permission to attain parinibbāna in his hometown, and the Buddha granted it.

Venerable Sāriputta took his disciples all the way to his hometown. On the way, he first asked his nephew to inform his mother that he was coming back. His mother was overjoyed, thinking that her child was going to leave the monkhood, and she made preparations at home to welcome Venerable Sāriputta. After he got home, Venerable Sāriputta had bad diarrhea. His mother was worried about his condition, so she went to check on him in his room at night.

Suddenly she saw four lights going into the room—she was stunned by the brightness. After the four lights disappeared, a light brighter than the previous four lights went into Venerable Sāriputta's room. Finally, there was another even brighter light that illuminated the whole area as if it were daytime. Confused, she went in and asked her child what the first four lights were. Venerable Sāriputta replied, "These are the Four Great Divine Kings."

"What are the Four Great Divine Kings here for?"

Venerable Sāriputta said, "They want to attend to me because I am soon attaining parinibbāna."

His mother was very surprised and asked, “Then what is the even brighter light?”

“It is Sakka, the king of the devas!”

His mother asked again, “What is the brightest light at the end?”

“That was your own lord and master, Mahābrahmā.” His mother, as a brahmin follower, regarded Mahābrahmā to be the highest god and was greatly shocked.

“Then, are you greater even than my lord Mahābrahmā?”

Venerable Sāriputta said, “Yes, on the day when our master was born, it is said that four Mahābrahmās received the Great Being in a golden net.” Venerable Sāriputta was a very humble person; he attributed all his merits to the Buddha.

After hearing this, Lady Sāri developed strong faith in the Buddha. “If my son’s power is as great as this, what must be the majestic power of my son’s master?” Venerable Sāriputta knew his mother had developed faith in the Buddha and preached the Dhamma to her. At the end of the talk, his mother was firmly established in the fruit of stream entry.

After becoming a sotāpanna, the gate to the four lower realms will be closed forever; that being will never be reborn as a hell being, animal, ghost, or asura. A

sotāpanna has at most seven lives to live before attaining parinibbāna, the complete passing away. Isn't this the highest blessing? Thus, guiding our parents to the Dhamma is a true repayment for our parents' kindness in nurturing us. In this way, supporting our parents becomes the highest blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. How should we pay back our gratitude to our parents for nurturing us?

12. Assistance to one's wife and children (Puttadārassa saṅgaha)

The Buddha didn't suggest that everyone put on a robe. According to the Buddha, taking care of one's wife and children is the responsibility of lay people, and is also one of the highest blessings. All husbands should be loyal, considerate, and respectful to their wives and should not seek pleasure from other women. When a husband takes care of his wife in this way, the wife will reciprocate with the same attitude, and then the family will be harmonious. If the husband is unfaithful, the family will be broken, and the children will not only lose respect for their father but also will imitate his bad behavior, which multiplies the negative consequences.

The most important thing between husband and wife is mutual respect and loyalty. This helps to continuously strengthen the trust between them, allowing them to support each other. As a result, family life becomes more fulfilling, and each family member receives care and support. Together, they experience increasing prosperity and blessings.



In the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31), the Buddha taught the responsibilities and duties of householders towards their children and wives:

Responsibilities of parents towards their children:

1. Discourage them from doing evil.
2. Guide them towards doing good.
3. Provide education and help them develop skills.
4. Assist them in finding a suitable partner.
5. Share their wealth with them at appropriate times.

Obligations of husbands towards their wives:

1. Be respectful.
2. Behave with courtesy.
3. Remain loyal.
4. Give them authority within the household.
5. Offer gifts of adornments (as women enjoy and appreciate beautiful adornments).

Caring for children includes nurturing their virtuous qualities and correcting their mistakes. There is a story in the scriptures that goes like this: There was a hermit who, while passing through a certain place, was ridiculed and mocked by a child. The hermit did not get angry but advised the father to discipline the ill-mannered child. However, the father completely ignored the hermit's advice. Twenty years later, the hermit returned to the same place and saw a young man hanged under a tree, his mother weeping beside him. This young man was the child who had mocked the hermit in the past.

In the *Dhammapada*, there is a story about the skillful guidance given by Anāthapiṇḍika to his rebellious son. Anāthapiṇḍika, a wise elderly man, was well known as one of the Buddha's most loyal and most generous followers. Although his parents and siblings were all noble ones, the young man named Kāla showed no interest in the Dhamma.

The father was compassionate for his son and didn't want him to suffer in the lower realms due to clinging to the wrong views. Knowing that his son was primarily interested in money, he said to him, "If you observe the Eight Precepts at the temple for one day, I will give you one ounce of gold." Kāla happily agreed and went to the temple. Although he observed the Eight

Precepts for the day, his mind was not with the Dhamma.

The father noticed this and on another day said to his son, “Go to the temple today and listen to the Buddha’s teachings. If you can remember them and tell them to me when you come back, I will give you ten ounces of gold.” Now Kāla had to listen attentively to the Buddha’s teachings because there was a reward of ten ounces of gold at stake. With his mind highly concentrated, he finally understood and realized the Dhamma, attaining stream entry just as his father had.

At this point, Kāla felt shameful about his previous behavior and no longer sought gold. The father was surprised and asked why his son, who had always been greedy, no longer wanted money. The Buddha then said to him, “What your son has attained today is more precious than all the wealth of the earth, the heavens, and the realms of the Brahma gods combined.”

*“One who conquers the earth,
Or gains mastery over the heavens,
Or becomes the ruler of all worlds,
Is not as great as one who enters the stream.”*

— *Dhammapada* 178

Therefore, taking care of children involves meeting their needs as they grow up, pointing out their mistakes,

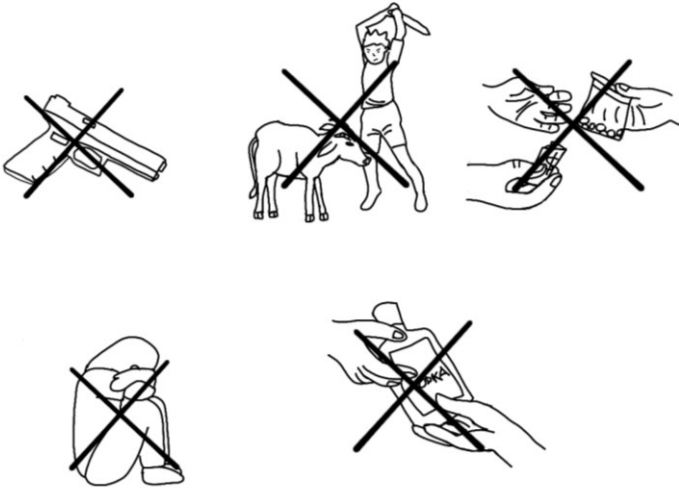
teaching them to stay away from evil, and helping them remove any bad habits they have. It is also important to educate children and teach them a skill, as having a skill is the highest blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What is the right attitude towards one's partner and children?

13. Engaging in a faultless occupation (Anākulā ca kammantā)

Engaging in a faultless occupation means not earning money through illicit schemes, deception, graft, or fraud. For Buddhist practitioners, five types of occupations are highly discouraged, namely trading in weapons, trading in living beings, trading in animals for slaughter, trading in intoxicants, and trading in poisons. As practitioners, we should avoid these occupations to prevent detrimental repercussions to ourselves.



During the time of the Buddha, there was a butcher named Cunda. Despite living near a monastery, he was

born without wisdom and did not learn any Dhamma. His slaughtering method was very cruel. He would pound the pig with a club to tenderize its flesh and then pour boiling water into the pig's mouth. He would then pour the rest of the hot water over the pig's back, which would peel off the pig's skin as it ran off. Seven days before Cunda the butcher passed away, he felt as if his body were on fire, like it was being burned. On all fours, Cunda began to grunt like a pig and was tormented severely for seven days and nights.

This type of kamma is called current life effective kamma (*ditṭha-dhamma-vedanīya kamma*), the kamma that ripens in the present life. Cunda grunted incessantly for seven days and nights, and his neighbors thought he was torturing a pig. After seven days and nights, the butcher visualized the sign of his rebirth destination (*gati-nimitta*), indicating that he would be reborn into a hell realm. The misery of the hell realm is beyond imagination. Hence, butchery is not an auspicious or promising occupation.

If we comprehend the working of kamma and its results in the three periods of time—past, present, and future life—we cannot limit ourselves to short-term benefits but must consider the long-term as well. We need to have blameless occupations that are not harmful to living beings and instead lead to serenity.

In the *Samaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2), wrong livelihood by the monks are listed as: reading marks on the limbs (e.g., palmistry); reading omens and signs; interpreting celestial events such as falling stars or comets; interpreting dreams; reading features of the body (e.g., phrenology); reading marks on cloth gnawed by mice; offering fire oblations, oblations from a ladle, oblations of husks, rice powder, rice grains, ghee, and oil; offering oblations from the mouth; offering blood-sacrifices; making predictions based on the fingertips; geomancy; making predictions for state officials; laying demons in a cemetery; placing spells on spirits; earth-skills, snake-skills, poison-skills, scorpion-skills, crow-skills; predicting life spans; giving protective charms; casting horoscopes; and more. The list goes on and on.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What five occupations are highly discouraged for Buddhist practitioners?
2. What should we consider before taking up an occupation?

*Dānañ-ca dhammacariyā ca,
ñātakānañ-ca saṅgaho;*

*Anavajjāni kammāni, etaṃ
maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

**Giving, righteous conduct,
assistance to one's relatives,**

**deeds that are blameless: This is
the highest blessing.**



14. Giving (Dāna)

Generosity is one of the virtues that all Buddhists are enthusiastic to practice. It means giving and sharing one's own possessions with others. Giving helps to eliminate our attachment to material possessions and liberate the mind from greed and clinging. There are three types of giving: giving material possessions, giving fearlessness, and giving the Dhamma. Giving material possessions includes offering food, transportation, flowers, lamps, and shelter. Giving fearlessness refers to protecting the lives and belongings of others. Giving the Dhamma involves imparting the knowledge of the Buddha's teachings.

To obtain greater rewards from an act of generosity, the giver should cultivate three pure thoughts: happiness before giving, a clear and pure mind while giving, and joy after giving. The recipient should also possess three pure thoughts: freedom from greed or cultivating freedom from greed, freedom from anger or cultivating freedom from anger, and freedom from delusion or cultivating freedom from delusion.

In the *Chaḷaṅgadāna Sutta* (AN 6.37), all these six conditions were fulfilled when Nanda's mother was offering alms to the Buddha's Saṅgha led by Venerables Sāriputta and Mahāmoggallāna. With such pure giving, immeasurable blessings can be attained.



When we engage in giving, we simultaneously cultivate three other virtues: non-greed, non-anger, and non-delusion. How so? First, if you can offer your possessions, it signifies that you are not attached to them. This is an expression of non-greed. Second, when you give your belongings or food to the Saṅgha or any others, it is because you have loving-kindness towards them, or at the very least, you do not harbor aversion. Thus, at the same time, you cultivate non-anger. Finally, when you engage in giving, although you do not expect anything in return, you believe in the law of kamma—good rewards result from wholesome deeds. This is evidence of non-delusion, or wisdom. Every wholesome action leaves kammic energy in our life stream. When the conditions are ripe, our acts of giving

will generate positive kammic results, leading us to be reborn as heavenly beings or in wealthy families.

When engaging in giving, we must adopt the right attitude—be respectful, not arrogant. It is the utmost blessing to have the opportunity to support those monastics who are practicing virtue, concentration, and wisdom. Performing acts of giving with an arrogant attitude will diminish the potential kammic rewards. The more respectful the act of giving, the higher the blessings. In addition, the items given must be obtained rightfully, not through unlawful means.

If one can make offerings in person, without relying on the hands of others, a greater sense of joy will arise. The stronger the sense of joy, the more beneficial the fruition of the merit is. In the time of the Buddha, there was a wealthy man who had the intention to offer alms to five hundred bhikkhus. However, instead of personally making the offerings, he hired another man to serve and attend to the bhikkhus on his behalf.

The hired servant was very happy to have the opportunity to do such a meritorious service, and he performed his duties with utmost delight and enthusiasm. After their deaths, both of them were reborn in heavenly realms. The person who provided the funds was reborn in the lowest heavenly realm of the Four Great Kings, while the servant who exerted effort was reborn in the higher heavenly realm of the

Thirty-Three Gods. Therefore, it is said that when performing acts of goodness, if one does it personally and with a joyful heart, the merit will be greater.

Here is an example of the tremendous fruit that arose from the bodhisatta's personal engagement and joyful giving in support of the paccekabuddhas.

Once, the bodhisatta was leading a life of hardship and poverty as a laborer. On one occasion, he obtained four portions of sour gruel, without salt or vegetables, which he intended to have as his breakfast. However, at that moment, he saw four paccekabuddhas approaching to receive alms. The bodhisatta thought to himself, "My life of poverty must be due to a lack of generosity in previous lives. Rare is the opportunity to offer my support to others. I should give away all the sour gruel, as it will be an unsurpassed field of merit!" Thus, he willingly chose not to feed himself but offered all the sour gruel to the paccekabuddhas. Kneeling before them with great reverence, the bodhisatta humbly requested them to accept his offering. He then prepared four seats and, with the utmost respect, invited the paccekabuddhas to take their places. With his hands holding the gruel, he poured it into their alms bowls, one bowl at a time. The bodhisatta's heart was filled with indescribable joy. For the rest of his life, whenever he recalled this wholesome deed, his heart was filled with delight.

Due to the immense merit of offering alms to the paccekabuddhas, the bodhisatta was reborn as a prince. As a toddler, he acquired the knowledge of recollecting his past lives and could remember the wholesome deeds he had performed. He knew that in his previous life he had offered four bowls of sour gruel to the paccekabuddhas, which resulted in his birth as a prince in this current life.

When his father, the king, passed away, the bodhisatta ascended to the throne. During his coronation, the entire city was adorned in splendor. All the ministers, brahmins, and citizens came with gifts to offer to him. The palace maidens stood in line, ready to serve the king. He married a beautiful and virtuous queen. As he sat on his splendid throne, witnessing the grand and dignified scene, he reflected on the connection between his current auspicious circumstances and his past act of offering the four bowls of sour gruel to the paccekabuddhas. The more he contemplated, the greater his joy became. On that occasion, he sang a song that conveyed the meaning of this connection with the offering to the paccekabuddhas. Over time, this song became well-known throughout the land.

Most people make wishes when they engage in acts of giving, hoping for certain outcomes or benefits. Sayalay Susīlā encourages all of us to aspire to liberation. Before the enlightenment of Gotama Buddha, there were two

brothers who encountered a paccekabuddha coming toward them to collect alms. Coincidentally, both of them had a sugarcane in their possession, and they both offered the sugarcane to the paccekabuddha.

The younger brother made a wish, saying, “May this meritorious deed help me attain nibbāna as early as possible.” The elder brother also made a wish, saying, “May this meritorious deed enable me to enjoy happiness in the human and celestial realms and ultimately attain nibbāna.”

As a result, both of their wishes were fulfilled. The younger brother put forth effort to practice and quickly attained nibbāna, because it was the inclination of his mind. The elder brother, on the other hand, had the desire to enjoy happiness in the human and celestial realms first, so he continued his cycle of rebirths until the time of the Gotama Buddha. It was then that he diligently practiced and attained nibbāna.

Once, the Buddha spoke about five benefits of giving:

“Bhikkhus, there are these five benefits of giving. What five?

A giver, a donor, is dear and agreeable to many people;

Good people associate with them;

They get a good reputation;

They don’t neglect the duties of a layperson;

With the breaking up of the body, after death, they are reborn in a good place, in the heavenly realms."

—AN 5.35

At the time of the Buddha, Visākha, the female lay disciple who was foremost in giving, and Anāthapiṇḍika, the male lay disciple who was foremost in giving, both obtained these five benefits from giving. Known as big supporters and patrons of the Saṅgha, their reputation for generosity was known far and wide, and they were highly esteemed, praised, and beloved by many. As those who delighted in giving, they were truly welcomed by others.

In the same way, in the modern world, there are people like Bill Gates who are renowned for their charitable deeds and philanthropy. Therefore, for those who are skillful in giving, their reputation naturally spreads far and wide, and after the dissolution of the body, they will be reborn in heavenly realms.

Supporting the monastic community through giving is the responsibility of lay people. The flourishing of Buddhism relies on the combined efforts of two groups: the monastic community and the lay community. The monastics renounce worldly affairs and dedicate themselves to studying the scriptures, practicing meditation, and propagating the Dhamma. This provides an opportunity for lay people to learn meditation and hear the teachings. However, the

monastics rely on the support of lay people for their basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. When lay people support and sustain the monastic community, the monastics can focus on their tasks, ensuring the continuity of Buddhism from generation to generation. Therefore, lay people are encouraged to give to fulfill their responsibility as householders.

The Buddha also taught that the wealth of householders should be divided into four parts. The first part is for the expense of daily necessities, the second part is for investment and generating sustainable sources of income, the third part is for saving for emergencies, and the fourth part is for practicing generosity. The Buddha encouraged lay people to allocate a portion of their wealth for giving. Giving brings wealth, good reputation, and loving relationships and leads to a fortunate rebirth in the next life.

Every person is afraid of death. Why? Perhaps because they have not accumulated enough wholesome kamma, thus they lack confidence in a fortunate rebirth and are uncertain about their destination. If we engage in generous giving and accumulate great merit, at the time of death, by reflecting on the acts of generosity we have performed, joy would arise in our mind. This will enable us to be reborn in heavenly realms.

Dhammika, a follower of the Buddha in the city of Sāvattthī, was virtuous and greatly inclined towards giving. When he was approaching death, he saw six divine chariots from six heavenly realms, beautifully decorated, inviting him to be reborn in their realms. Therefore, giving can serve as a support at the time of death, helping us to be reborn in heavenly realms, just as the great benefactors Anāthapiṇḍika and Visākha in the time of the Buddha were reborn in heavenly realms after their passing.

Generosity also brings other benefits. In the *Sīhasenāpatisutta* (AN 7.57), it is recorded that:

One day General Sīha asked the Buddha, “Sir, can you point out a fruit of giving that’s apparent in the present life?”

The Buddha said, “Well then, Sīha, I’ll ask you about this in return, and you can answer as you like. What do you think, Sīha? Consider two people. One is faithless, stingy, miserly, and abusive. The other is a faithful donor who loves charity. Which do you think the perfected ones will show compassion for first?”

“Why would the perfected ones first show compassion for the person who is faithless, stingy, miserly, and abusive? They would show compassion first for the faithful donor who loves charity.”

“Which do you think the perfected ones will first approach?”

“They would first approach the faithful donor who loves charity.”

“Which do you think the perfected ones will receive alms from first?”

“They would receive alms first from the faithful donor who loves charity.”

“Which do you think the perfected ones will teach the Dhamma to first?”

“They would first teach the Dhamma to the faithful donor who loves charity.”

“Which do you think would get a good reputation?”

“The faithful donor who loves charity would get a good reputation.”

“Which do you think would enter any kind of assembly bold and assured, whether it is an assembly of aristocrats, brahmins, householders, or ascetics?”

“How could the person who is faithless, stingy, miserly, and abusive enter any kind of assembly bold and assured, whether it is an assembly of aristocrats, brahmins, householders, or ascetics? The faithful donor who loves charity would enter any kind of assembly bold and assured, whether it is an assembly of aristocrats, brahmins, householders, or ascetics.”

“When their body breaks up, after death, which do you think would be reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm?”

“Why would the person who is faithless, stingy, miserly, and abusive be reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm? The faithful donor who loves charity would, when their body

breaks up, after death, be reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm. ...

“That’s so true, Sīha! That’s so true! When a giver’s body breaks up, after death, they’re reborn in a good place, a heavenly realm.”

Stingy people are unwilling to make even small offerings. They cannot bring themselves to give even a small portion of their wealth, let alone give it all away. At the time of their death, they cling to their possessions, filled with attachment and reluctant to let go. In this way, they will undoubtedly fall into the four woeful states. On the other hand, those who invest in giving will be reborn in fortunate realms.

Therefore, giving is the highest blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What are the three types of giving?
2. What benefits can generosity bring?
3. What kind of giving can bring more satisfactory results?

15. Living in rectitude (Dhammacariyā)

Living in rectitude (dhammacariyā) means a person's behavior should be in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha. Following the right path involves not only observing the five precepts but also practicing various wholesome actions, helping others, and cultivating compassion. According to the commentaries, there are ten types of meritorious deeds to practice:

1. Giving (dāna): As discussed in the previous section, this refers to giving material possessions or offering support to others.
2. Moral conduct (sīla): Observing moral precepts involves refraining from harming others, thereby protecting oneself and others from harm.
3. Meditation (bhāvanā): Meditation can be divided into two categories: samatha (concentration meditation) and vipassanā (insight meditation). Samatha meditation aims to cultivate tranquility and concentration, while vipassanā meditation involves developing wisdom by contemplating the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and impersonal nature of phenomena.
4. Reverence (apacāyana): Showing respect to the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha), parents, teachers, spiritual mentors, and elders. It not only entails behaving and conducting

oneself in accordance with proper etiquette but also cultivating compliance. We will discuss this further in Chapter 28.

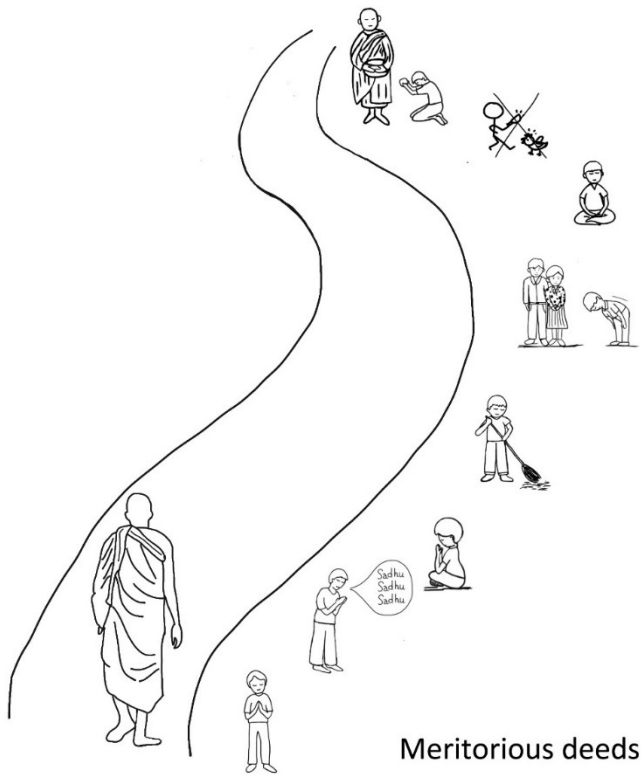
5. Service (veyyāvacca): Contributing time and labor to assist in monastic activities, such as cleaning, maintenance, kitchen work, organizing Dhamma books, and supporting meditation retreats. Service can also extend to volunteering in other welfare organizations, such as hospitals or nursing homes.
6. Dedicating merits (pattidāna): After performing meritorious deeds, dedicate the merits to deceased, hungry ghosts, and all sentient beings. Dedication of merits can enhance one's own merits, just like lighting a candle in a dark room and then using that candle to ignite the candles of other people. The light of your candle does not diminish but instead illuminates the room through the combined radiance of all the candles. Therefore, dedicating merits enhances one's own merits.
7. Rejoicing in merits (pattānumodana): Rejoicing and expressing admiration for the meritorious deeds performed by others. This is the easiest meritorious deed to perform.
8. Listening to the Dhamma (dhammasavana): For more details, please refer to Chapter 26, "Hearing of the Dhamma on timely occasions."

9. Propagating the Dhamma (dhammadesanā): Propagating the Dhamma is the responsibility of the monastic community, as it helps to uphold the longevity of the Buddha’s teachings. Lay practitioners can contribute to the circulation and dissemination of the Dhamma through activities such as assisting in printing, sharing documents, and supporting its propagation.
10. Right view (diṭṭhijjukamma): There are two types of right view. Mundane right view and supramundane right view. Mundane right view involves a correct grasp of the law of kamma, the moral efficacy of action. Its literal name is “right view of the ownership of action” (kammassakata sammaditthi). When a person understands the unwholesome, the root of the unwholesome, the wholesome, and the root of the wholesome, in that way he is one of right view (MN 9). In MN 117, there is an additional list of mundane right view: **“There is what is given, what is offered, what is sacrificed. There are fruits and results of good and bad actions. There is this world and the next world. There is mother and father. There are spontaneously reborn beings; there are contemplatives and brahmins who, faring rightly and practicing rightly, proclaim this world and the next after having directly known**

and realized it for themselves.” Supramundane right view is the view that is noble, without effluents, transcendent, and penetrating into Four Noble Truths directly. Right view is the forerunner and precursor of skillful qualities. Consider a person who has right view, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, concentration, knowledge, and freedom. Whatever bodily, verbal, or mental deeds they undertake in line with that view, their intentions, aims, wishes, and choices all lead to what is likable, desirable, agreeable, beneficial, and pleasant. Why is that? Because their view is good (AN10:104). Relying on the right way leads to success, not failure.

By practicing these ten meritorious deeds, one is following the right path which is the highest blessing.

The Buddha taught: **“Take refuge in yourself, not others.”** Only when we have the intrinsic determination to follow the right path can we conquer evil and be truly kind in words, actions, and thoughts. By following the Buddha’s instructions, we receive many blessings in this life and our wisdom increases. Meanwhile, our good kamma also supports our progress on the path, life after life, until we reach the final destination—nibbāna, where all defilements end.

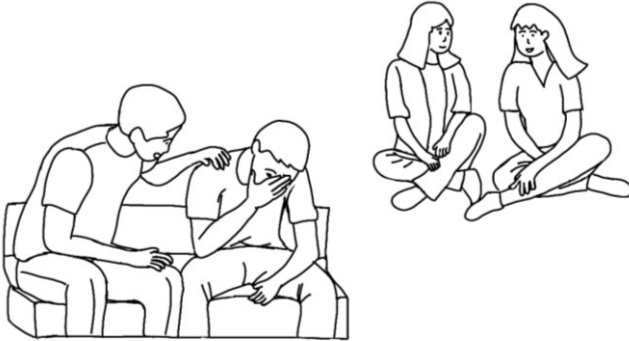


Reflection and Discussion:

1. How can one follow the right path?

16. Assistance to one's relatives (Ñātakānañ-ca saṅgha)

Relatives are those who are part of our family and who are close to us. We should be mutually supportive of each other. Life has ups and downs. When misfortunes strike those closely related to us, when they experience financial loss, or when they feel dejected, we should provide any assistance within our capabilities—it can be in the form of money, food, or accommodations. We can also render appropriate spiritual consolation in a timely manner to relieve their physical and mental suffering.



According to the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31), we should provide five types of service and assistance to our friends and relatives:

1. Giving generously

2. Using polite and pleasant speech
3. Providing different types of assistance
4. Upholding our promises and commitments
5. Treating them impartially (similar to how we treat ourselves)

When you treat friends and relatives as mentioned above, they will repay you in five ways:

1. Protecting you whenever you require it
2. Guarding your possessions when you are vulnerable
3. Providing you with a safe haven when you are in danger
4. Not abandoning you when you are in trouble
5. Helping and respecting your descendants

The Buddha also encountered situations involving his relatives who had previously performed unwholesome activities. Once, the Buddha discovered that the Sakyan clan was on the verge of war with the Koliyans due to the contempt and humiliation experienced by the Koliyan king during his reception in the Sakyan capital of Kapilavatthu. The Koliyans planned to commit genocide and destroy the Sakyans. The Buddha was unable to alter the ultimate effect of kamma, but he still tried three times, intercepting the Koliyan battalion along the road and striving to be the peacemaker by persuading the Koliyans to refrain from starting a war.

The Buddha's action showed his gratitude and benevolence towards his clansmen.

The first time the Koliyan king rode to battle against the Sakyan clan, he saw the Buddha meditating under a dying tree. The Koliyan king disembarked from his chariot and greeted the Buddha, "Lord Buddha, the trees on the other side of the mountain are lush with foliage. It will be shadier; the Blessed One should meditate on the other side. The Blessed One should not sit under this dead tree. The tree branches are withered and cannot block the scorching hot sun—this is not good."

The Buddha replied to the Koliyan king, **"Your Majesty said it rightly. But the shade from clansmen is better than the shade of a tree. Relatives, like the tree shade, can protect our offspring. Hence, the shade from clansmen is better than the shade of a tree."**

The Koliyan king understood the underlying message and immediately ordered his battalion to retreat.

Soon thereafter, when the Koliyan king dispatched his troops a second time, he again encountered the Buddha sitting under the tree. The Koliyan king again withdrew. When the king dispatched his troops a third time and once again encountered the Buddha, the king had no choice but to withdraw a third time. But when the king rode out with his troops a fourth time, the Buddha knew that the effect of kamma could not be avoided, so

he did not intervene, and the Koliyans slaughtered the Sakyan clan. This is vipāka, the ripening of kamma—even the Buddha could not alter the consequences.

The world does not need us to provide material support to those who are affluent, whether they are our relatives or friends. But we can help those who are in need—materially or spiritually. When we do this with no expectation of result or return, our minds will be exuberant, which is a blessing that cannot be bought with any amount of money.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Buddhists need to be compassionate and wise; how can you support your relatives if they are in need?
2. What do you think about the Buddha helping the Sakyan clan by hindering the Koliyan King and his battalion?

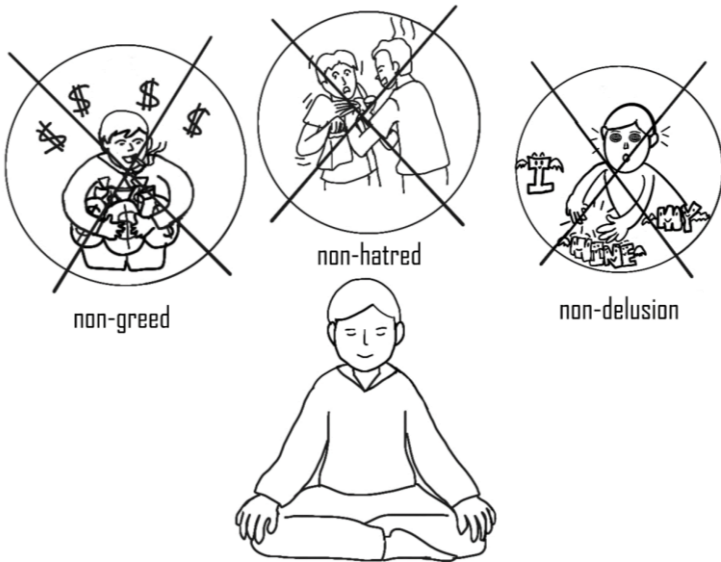
17. Deeds that are blameless (Anavajjāni kammāni)

This blessing is about right conduct, which means observing morality in our thoughts, speech, and bodily actions. This requires us to first understand what constitutes ethical behavior. Through hearing the Dhamma, we learn to discern what is wholesome and what is unwholesome. However, as ordinary beings, we are prone to making mistakes. Therefore, cultivating mindfulness to protect our minds becomes crucially important. Whatever we do, we should strive to maintain mindfulness, clearly knowing our intentions and thoughts.

For example, when greed arises, we call up mindfulness and recognize it as an unwholesome mental state. Then, we contemplate that greed is an unwholesome quality and direct our minds to its cessation. If greed disappears through this contemplation, we will refrain from unwholesome actions and conduct ourselves rightly. With the work of effort, mindfulness, and wisdom, even if unwholesome mental states are not completely gone, their power diminishes.

The same approach applies to dealing with arising aversion, hatred, jealousy, and other afflictions. With mindfulness guarding our minds, we will be protected and will refrain from unskillful kamma such as

slandering, insulting other people, killing, stealing, gambling, drug trafficking, and improper sexual conduct. Such faultless behavior is praised by the wise, avoids bringing shame to oneself and one’s family, does not generate suffering from guilty feelings, and does not violate worldly laws. It brings inner joy, peace, and freedom from remorse, fosters good interpersonal relationships, and makes each day a good day.



To better our conduct, it is essential to allocate some time for meditation practice. The Chinese character for “busy” (忙), when deconstructed, reveals “death of mind” (心亡). Thus a person who is busy engaging in

sensual mundane affairs and has no time for mind development can be perceived as having a dead mind.

Endowed with good deeds, we can encounter virtuous teachers, engage in the practice of the Buddha's teachings, and ultimately experience the happiness of attaining nibbāna, liberating ourselves from the suffering of cyclic existence, encompassing birth, aging, illness, and death. Therefore, conducting oneself rightly is the highest blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What is considered "right conduct"?
2. What actions are considered "wrong" or "incorrect"?

*Āratī viratī pāpā, majjapānā ca
saññāmo;*

*Appamādo ca dhammesu, etaṃ
maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

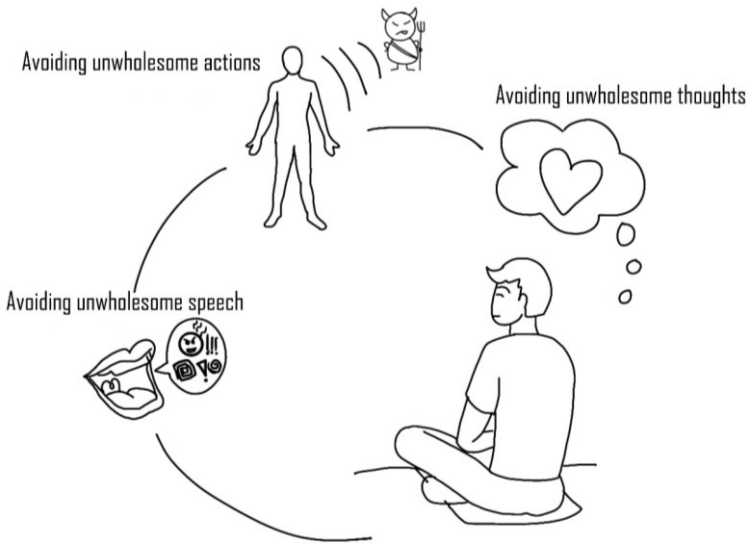
**Avoiding and refraining from evil,
refraining from intoxicants, being
heedful of the qualities of the mind:
this is the highest blessing.**



18-19. Avoiding and refraining from evil (Āratī viratī pāpā)

Pāpā means evil actions and āratī viratī refers to abstaining from evil actions of body, speech, and mind. Āratī and viratī are two types of blessings that have similar meaning in that they both include efforts to break away from unwholesome deeds, but they are not entirely the same. Āratī is avoiding any unwholesome thoughts—not delighting in vile thoughts and staying away from unwholesome thoughts in order to sever them. Viratī is abstaining from unwholesome verbal and bodily actions, including killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, the four types of verbal misconduct, and having an immoral livelihood.

When we realize the misery and harm of unwholesome deeds, the mind will not incline towards evil thoughts and not indulge wicked mind states, and subsequently we will avoid unwholesome thoughts. When the mind is avoiding (āratī) unwholesome thoughts, we will automatically abstain (viratī) from unwholesome deeds and words, because the mind controls the body and speech.



The Buddha mentioned in the *Dhammapada*, verse 1:

*“Mind is the forerunner of all states.
 Mind is chief;
 mind-made are they.
 If one speaks or acts with a wicked mind,
 because of that, suffering follows one,
 even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox.”*

Dhammapada verse 2:

*“Mind is the forerunner of all states.
 Mind is chief;
 mind-made are they.*

*If one speaks or acts with a pure mind,
because of that, happiness follows one,
even as one's shadow that never leaves."*

When we practice āratī and viratī, we have to abstain from any form of unwholesomeness in body, speech, and mind, so as to avoid committing evil kamma. Hence, this is a supreme blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. How do you avoid evil actions? Please share your experiences.

20. Refraining from intoxicants (Majjapānā ca saññamo)

This blessing is also the last precept of the five precepts (*pañcasīla*). Avoiding intoxicants is a precept because intoxicants can influence the mind towards chaos—this includes both alcohol and drug abuse.

A drunk person definitely cannot walk in a straight line. He would stumble around, have slurred speech, and be rambling like a maniac. Apart from that, a drunk person's mind is disoriented, his demeanor is belligerent, and he has a tendency to utter slandering and humiliating speech in the worst situations, possibly getting involved in fighting even to the extent of manslaughter. After he regains his consciousness, the perpetrator would already be in prison, feeling deep remorse over his loss of virtue. As quoted in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, "First you take a drink, then the drink takes a drink, then the drink takes you."

An intoxicated person might also commit impudent actions. They might harass the opposite gender and, in the worst case, commit unlawful sexual assault, ruining others' happiness and tarnishing their own reputation. Drinking or using drugs is not worth the trouble—not only is it detrimental to our health, it also causes inconvenience to family members who have to take care

of the intoxicated person, particularly if the person develops an addiction problem.



Both alcohol and drugs can be very addictive. A person can think they are just having a little fun or enjoying themselves with friends, but find themselves suddenly dependent on this substance to feel good—or even to feel normal and cope with everyday life. Addiction can ruin a person’s life as they spiral down into unwholesome behaviors, and it can ruin the lives of their closest loved ones who are living with the consequences and trying—many times failing—to help the addicted person.

Nowadays in the entertainment industry, there are many drug addicts. The posh and luxurious lifestyle might seem lavish, but actually many celebrities feel anxious and lonely in their daily lives. Many have to rely on intoxicants and sedatives to help them sleep.

The adverse combination of alcohol and sedatives can be lethal—among those who were reported killed in this way are Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston. Youngsters can be ignorant—not realizing that consuming excessive alcohol, especially in conjunction with drugs, can potentially cause sudden death. The exceptionally creative and intelligent Amy Winehouse was a talented English singer and songwriter. She was also reported to struggle with substance abuse and addiction and died of an alcohol overdose at the age of 27.

Because alcohol is legal and accepted in most societies, its danger can be even greater because people think it is safer than drugs. It is widely available and is considered a socially acceptable way to relax. Advertisements for alcohol abound in movies, television, and other media. In fact, it is so commonplace that many people do not even realize it is a drug.

Zhang Fei, a Chinese historical figure from the Three Kingdoms era, was a very courageous major general and was astute in warfare. Unfortunately, he had a bad habit of drinking all night and getting thoroughly inebriated. A disgruntled officer who had been punished by Zhang Fei took his vengeance when Zhang Fei dozed off after again becoming drunk. In this way,

a valiant major general was killed in a drunken state and not on a battlefield.

Alcohol can cause death slowly or quickly. Chronic alcoholism can lead to alcohol poisoning, and excessive alcohol damages the liver. Over time, this can lead to alcohol-related liver disease. Cirrhosis is the final stage of alcohol-related liver disease, usually occurring after many years of heavy drinking. Worldwide, cirrhosis takes approximately 2 million lives annually. Drunk driving can also be lethal, and not just for the person drinking. The loss incurred from drunk driving accidents is incalculable.

Al-Quran, the Muslim holy book, lays down Islamic Law (Shariah) that prohibits all Muslims from consuming any alcohol because it harms one's health, can lead to addiction, and disrupts society. As Buddhists, we also need to observe this precept wisely, to gain the supreme blessings.

Some suggest that drinking can make meals more delectable, or that intoxicants can relieve our sorrows. Some advocate that alcohol or certain drugs can lower our inhibitions and allow us to be more expressive and relaxed. But when we refrain from intoxicants, we are giving ourselves the opportunity to experience life through a different lens—one that is completely unclouded by the warped perspective of intoxication. Our minds can be clear, not only to avoid unwholesome

deeds, but to focus on performing wholesome kamma and walking the path to liberation.

One who has been a lifelong drinker or drug abuser will possibly suffer mental illness in the next life. Therefore, refraining from drinking or taking drugs is a supreme blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Why did the Buddha emphasize to refrain from taking intoxicants?
2. Please explain the impact of drinking or drug abuse.

21. Being heedful of the qualities of the mind (Appamādo ca dhammesu)

Appamāda means being diligent and mindful and not being heedless. Appamādo ca dhammesu reflects steadfastness in practicing the Dhamma, being mindful, clearly comprehending, ardent, and resolute.

Before the Buddha entered into Mahā-parinibbāṇa, he emphasized, in a deafening final message that we should strive:

“Oh, bhikkhus. Conditions are of the nature to vanish. Strive on with diligence.”

We are always busy earning a living, working our fingers to the bone, accumulating endless wealth. We go with the flow of the worldly norm—getting married and growing our families, in the hope that we can rely on our children in old age. We have forgotten that we cannot take anyone and anything for granted, be it our youth, health, or life. All phenomena are changing; humans age and change as time passes. The mundane defilements in our minds—like fear, attachment, vulnerability, anxiety, and irritation—increase day after day. Old age, sickness, and death are approaching—what can be our refuge?

If we realize this salient point and remember to reflect on the ultimate truth—**all conditions will ultimately vanish**—we will not allow ourselves to squander

precious time pursuing material pleasures. Conversely, we will strive diligently in spiritual cultivation, be steadfast in practicing the Dhamma, and make unremitting effort in the cultivation of right mindfulness, right concentration, and wisdom.



First we need effort to cultivate right mindfulness (sammā-sati)⁹, then we foster right concentration (sammā-samādhi) and wisdom (paññā). The Buddha taught us the establishment of mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna) through mindful observance of body,

⁹ Refer to the book from sayalaysusila.net with title *Mindfulness, Wise Attention, and Wisdom Training*.

feelings, mind, and dhammas. Once mindfulness is well established, wisdom develops, penetrates into their arising and ceasing, and the conditions of their arising and ceasing.

According to the commentaries, mindfulness or sati has the characteristic of recognizing the object face to face. So sati is aware of bodily sensation, different feelings whether it is pleasure or pain, as well as numerous wholesome or unwholesome mental states. Let's say when hatred arises, we need effort to mindfully recognize the arising of hatred. Here, sati faces hatred directly and impartially without responding to it. Without react to hatred, the mind is protected. Observing hatred mindfully can mitigate the impact of hatred and further bring cessation to hatred. As mindfulness becomes sharper, wisdom develops, the constant changing, arising, and ceasing of phenomena will manifest themselves.

Through effort, mindfulness, concentration, and diligent contemplation, gradually we will be able to break free from our bondage to suffering.

In order to strive according to the Dhamma, we need to adhere to the following few practices:

1. Recollect daily the virtue of Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha to enhance faith in them.
2. Maintain a daily habit of listening to Dhamma talks. Doing this will make us wise and know the

- way of the practice. Listening to Dhamma talks will also motivate us to make an effort and strive.
3. Contemplate impermanence daily. We can reflect on the uncertainty of life—that only death is certain. Soon, the body will break up, be disposed of on the ground, and decompose, bereft of consciousness like a log. We can also amplify the impermanence contemplation by thinking of our friends and families. Everyone will die—think of relatives and friends who have already passed away. Those living will inevitably die, and, most importantly, we will also die one day, and we should have no qualms about it. Contemplation of impermanence and death can trigger our efforts to strive diligently, practicing in accordance with the Dhamma.
 4. Develop the mind through daily meditation. Meditation can lead to deep concentration, enabling the mind to be at peace and experience tranquility and joy. Right concentration helps to develop wisdom. Wisdom empowers the mind to directly see that “**All conditions are ultimately vanishing**”; this will be our actual realization.
 5. Try to be more mindful in our daily lives, especially the arising of unwholesome mental states. Apply mindfulness and contemplate

vanishing when unwholesome mental states arise.

6. When wisdom develops, wisdom can penetrate **“All conditions are of the nature to vanish,”** then it becomes possible to let go of attachment to anyone and anything, including attachment to our mind and body. Free from attachment and craving, the mind is liberated—this is the ultimate end game for all practitioners.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What types of behavior can be classified as striving diligently to practice the Dhamma?
2. Why do humans incline towards sensual indulgence?
3. How can we tackle the mind’s inclination toward indulgence?

*Gāraṇo ca nivāto ca, santuṭṭhi ca
kataññutā;*

*Kālena dhammassavaṇaṃ, etaṃ
maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

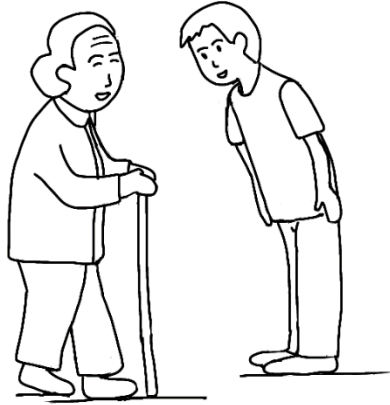
**Respect, humility, contentment,
gratitude, hearing the Dhamma on
timely occasions. This is the
highest blessing.**



22. Respect (*Gāraṇa*)

Buddhists should respect the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha, parents, teachers, wise friends (*kalyāṇa-mitta*), and elders—this is a supreme blessing. Rāhula was the Buddha’s only son; he was the prince. Being the prince and the Buddha’s only son, Rāhula possessed a prestigious status. If he had not gone forth, he would have been the next king. However, he was not arrogant but was a very respectful and polite person. During the era of the Buddha, Rāhula was renowned for his respectful demeanor.

Once, there was a bhikkhu who attempted to test Rāhula’s temperament. He swept trash outside a kuti (small meditation hut). The bhikkhu then pointed to Rāhula and asked, “Rāhula, why did you throw the rubbish here?” If we were accused and treated unjustly, instantly we would deny it by saying, “It wasn’t me, please do not blame others wrongly.” But Rāhula was just a *sāmaṇera*, and he did not want to refute the bhikkhu. In Rāhula’s mind, the bhikkhu was the elder and must be respected. Therefore, Rāhula cleaned up the trash obediently—this is known as respect.



When we are with elders, monastics, and teachers, we need to respectfully accept their advice and feedback on our wrongdoings. There is no reason to defend our self-image, mistakenly believing that the feedback is intended to humiliate us. Likewise, we should avoid arguing with them to protect our fragile ego. If we can follow the example of Rāhula's respectfulness, this will be a supreme blessing for us.

All teachers like respectful students, and teachers are more willing to impart knowledge to respectful students. According to law of kamma, if we are respectful, we will be reborn into a distinguished family. In short, being respectful is a supreme blessing.

Many years ago, Sayalay Susīlā was tending to her sick teacher for three or four months. Being too close to the teacher made her lose respect. One day, being negligent, Sayalay handed medication to her teacher using one hand rather than both hands. It is definitely a rude behavior. Her teacher refused to accept the medication and reminded her, “This is not being respectful to the teacher.” Sayalay felt very shameful of her behavior and immediately kneeled and served the medication with both hands, at the same time asking for forgiveness. After this incident, Sayalay always reminds herself to be respectful to teachers and elders.

Householders who are learning the Dhamma will have many opportunities to approach monastics, teachers, and elders. We must make sure our thoughts and actions are respectful, but at the same time, we must not honor unreasonable requests—for example, if the request is made out of personal interest and greed. Instead, we must use prudent discernment to avoid or decline such a request. For example, a bhikkhu must keep his distance from female lay disciples and cannot have physical bodily contact with them. If you notice a bhikkhu approaching you intentionally in this way, you should not comply with the request. Instead, you must oppose the request and report the inappropriate act so as to stop it from happening and nip the behavior in the bud. Many women allegedly became the victims of sexual abuse or harassment due to their compliance

without proper discernment to the requests of some monastics.

In addition, we need to listen to Dhamma talks respectfully. The Buddha would provide a reminder before beginning to preach, “**Bhikkhus, listen attentively and I will speak.**” The Buddha emphasized paying attention to ensure that we listen respectfully. The mind will be more pliable and receptive with a respectful attitude. During the Buddha’s life, many disciples with sharp faculties listened to a Dhamma talk respectfully, contemplated phenomena according to the Dhamma, and attained fruition instantaneously. However, nowadays, people like to be entertained, and some monastics also try to entertain listeners rather than giving them the core teaching of the Buddha.

Currently, we are too far away from the Buddha’s time, and so it is very rare to find followers with sharp faculties that can immediately penetrate the Dhamma while listening to it. Apart from a lack of respectfulness, mostly our scattered minds are not focused, and instead we are multi-tasking, or we prefer listening to entertaining talk. We just laugh and forget soon! A Dhamma talk will go in one ear and out the other. If we listen to Dhamma talks attentively, we can feel the joy in the Dhamma such that the mind is invariably imbued with it and joy pervades the whole body. With joy, happiness arises, with happiness, concentration. With

concentration, the Dhamma will manifest itself. Therefore, fostering respectfulness is very important.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. How do we show respectfulness towards the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, as well as towards our wise friends (*kalyāṇa-mittā*)?
2. Being respectful can bring what kind of blessings?

23. Humility (Nivāta)

Humility is an important factor during our learning process. This is because a humble person can absorb the teaching effectively. A proud person will think himself superior, and subsequently he will not learn well from others. This is like a full glass of water—there is no room to pour in more water without it overflowing. No teacher will impart Dhamma knowledge to an arrogant student.

Humility means not being conceited about one's social status, elegant appearance, academic qualifications, political influence, knowledge, or meditation practice. Some are born into distinguished or affluent families, but they are not arrogant despite being from families with great political influence. Furthermore, they are also not haughty about a beautiful appearance or academic qualifications.

We should not feel conceited due to social status, appearance, academic qualifications, political influence, knowledge, or meditation practice because all these possessions are temporary. A beautiful appearance will age; social status will change. Some that are born into distinguished and affluent families can experience a change, subsequently falling into an impoverished state. Even the attainment of mental absorption (jhāna) is not constant. Some will fall from first jhāna and be unable

to re-attain the jhānic state. For example, Devadatta attained all the material absorptions (rūpa jhāna) and immaterial absorptions (arūpa jhāna) as well as the psychic powers (abhiññā). Due to Devadatta's evil desire to replace the Buddha, he lost all his jhānas and psychic powers. Hence, the pursuit of outer attainments is not permanent, and we should not be proud about it.



The ancient scholar Laozi shared the ideology of the co-existence of blessing and misfortune when an incident occurs. When we are enjoying our blessings, we have forgotten that imperfections exist in the midst of these blessings. Therefore, we should not get carried away when there are blessings; we must stay alert for imperfections to show themselves at any time. On the

other hand, if others are having hardship and are obviously in an inferior position compared to us, we should not despise them. In the blink of an eye, that person's luck may change and perhaps even overtake ours. Therefore, being a wise person, we must stay neutral regarding any accomplishment and comprehend all phenomena as impermanent.

Our present good results are temporarily maintained by our effort and previous wholesome actions. When the previous good kamma is depleted, the good results will also vanish. If we can habitually reflect on the impermanence of all conditions, this will be effective in preventing us from being conceited.

A humble person does not behave presumptuously. He will not boast and brag about his knowledge, and in particular he will not talk excessively in front of his teachers. He respects others and is amicable, hence he befriends everyone. Conversely, everyone will keep their distance from the haughty, arrogant, conceited person, not to mention how poorly he will be regarded by his teachers. This type of person not only hinders himself but also loses the opportunity to meet good spiritual friends.

According to the *Cūḷa-kammaṅga Sutta* (*The Shorter Exposition of Kamma*, MN 135), some are born in an inferior state of existence. What is the reason? It is due to being obdurate and haughty.

Say a person is obdurate and haughty. He does not pay homage to those who he should pay homage to, or rise up for those who we should rise up for, or give a seat to those who he should give a seat to, or make way for those who he should make way for, or worship those who he should worship, or respect those who he should respect, or revere those who he should revere, or venerate those who he should venerate.

What kind of person should we pay homage to, rise up for, give a seat to, or make way for? Monastics, elders, and esteemed teachers. The obdurate and haughty person is incapable of performing the above mentioned humble and respectable actions.

So, the *Cūḷa-kammaṅga Sutta* mentions that this kind of obdurate and haughty conduct will cause rebirth in one of the four woeful planes. If the person is reborn in the human realm, regardless of location, he will have a low birth.

In the Saṅgha, Venerable Sāriputta set a very good example of being humble. Venerable Sāriputta was the Buddha's chief disciple who was foremost in wisdom. Apart from the Buddha, none of the disciples had a level of wisdom on a par with Venerable Sāriputta. He was so skillful in expounding the Dhamma that he was given the title of "General of the Dhamma" (Dhammasenāpati). He was not arrogant about the accomplishment; on the contrary, he maintained a very

humble demeanor. When it was time for going on alms round, he would fill up the water pots and clean the monastery, being the last person to leave for alms round.

Once, when he was tidying his outer robe, one end of the robe was not aligned. A seven-year-old sāmaṇera spotted it and corrected the Venerable Sāriputta, saying, “Venerable, this outer robe is not decent and presentable.” A more senior bhikkhu being corrected by a seven-year-old sāmaṇera, if not genuinely humble, would feel embarrassed and maybe even irritated. However, Venerable Sāriputta was delighted with the correction by the sāmaṇera. After Venerable Sāriputta rearranged his robes, he put his palms together and told the sāmaṇera, “Teacher, now I wear my robes properly.”

We need to learn from Sāriputta and be humble, accepting advice from others. If our mind is respectful and humble, it is like multiple rivers flowing and merging into the ocean. If all rivers flow towards and create a boundless and immense sea, we will have definitely accomplished something. Hence, being humble is supreme blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. In your opinion, what are examples of the conduct of a humble person?
2. What are the benefits of humility?

24. Contentment (Santutṭhi)

Contentment is being satisfied with one's existing possessions and not coveting items that one does not possess. For example, if we only have a small car but yearn for the kind of luxury car owned by our boss, this is not being contented. When we are not content, we covet enjoyment of material things that we do not possess, and mentally we suffer. A person who does not covet will instead feel the glow of contentment. Contentment makes poor men rich.



Some people will argue that humans make progress due to not being content. Human striving for advancement leads to technological breakthroughs and progress in society; hence, doesn't it make society prosper? There are two sides to every story. For example, humans not being content has led to exploitation and deforestation. The loss of trees and

vegetation has increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and caused climate change. Humans will pay a painful price for this.

While this book was being written in the summer of 2022, heat waves rolled across Europe and America, causing numerous deaths. During the raging plague of the COVID-19 pandemic over the previous two years, millions of lives were ravaged. Shouldn't we heed this as a message and a warning from nature for what humans have been doing to our environment?

Not being contented, humans busily chase after material enjoyment at the expense of spiritual serenity, leading to anxiety and causing imbalances and disharmony in mind and body, which results in diseases such as heart attacks, high blood pressure, depression, and more.

Not being content is actually being covetous. The Buddha said contentment is the greatest wealth. If humans were contented with their own possessions, then we would be the richest beings in the world. There was a lady who complained about her husband being unable to buy her a big house. When this lady witnessed the homeless who have no money and no lodging, she realized she was indeed a very blessed person.

Some toil for their whole lives in exchange for a pigeonhole. Some buy a house, then a car, then invest

in insurance, their children's education, and a whole lot of luxurious items to show off and maintain their pride. All these items are a bottomless pit, bought at the expense of our youth and health. When we possess many material items, ultimately we are enslaved by material possessions, and we become victims of sensual cravings (kāmacchanda). Obviously, this is the outcome of not being content.

It is easy to acquire material items, but it is hard to give them up. Therefore, we should recognize the benefits of being content and live a frugal life, and we will not be led into the hustle and bustle of daily life.

In *Jataka* 323, there is a story about the bodhisatta, who resided in the Himalaya country and fed on wild fruit and roots. He was later invited by the king to reside in his royal garden. The king would visit the bodhisatta daily and provide him with good food. At the end of the rainy season, the bodhisatta was anxious to return to the Himalaya country, but he needed a pair of straw sandals and an umbrella for the journey. He hesitated to request these two trifling items from the king. Twelve years passed. One day, the king granted him permission to ask for anything he wanted, including his own kingdom. The bodhisatta requested only a pair of straw sandals and an umbrella for his journey back to the Himalaya country. Despite not making any

requests—even insignificant ones—the bodddhisatta lived in contentment the whole time.

The Buddha said contentment is the greatest wealth; it is also a supreme blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Do you think contentment will hinder or help a person's progress? Why?
2. How do we nurture contentment?

25. Gratitude (Kataññutā)

Gratitude is a quality highly praised by the Buddha. The Buddha said there were two kinds of people who are rare to encounter. Which two? The first type is one who is working for the benefit of others. The second type is a person who has gratitude. Forgetting the kind assistance others render to us is human nature. Being grateful is uncommon; hence, the Buddha said it is a supreme blessing.



There are many people we should feel grateful for: our parents, teachers, relatives, anyone who has helped us, as well as the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha.

As followers of the Buddha, we benefit greatly from the teaching of the Buddha; thus, we need to be grateful to the Buddha for discovering the path to the deathless. To find the path to the deathless and to become the all-knowing samma-sambuddha, the bodhisatta sacrificed over many lifetimes. After becoming the samma-sambuddha, he relentlessly expounded the Dhamma to humans from all walks of life, steering them to avoid evil and do good, as well as teaching the Four Noble Truths and guiding humans and divine beings to walk the Noble Eightfold Path to free themselves from the suffering inherent in existence.

We should also feel thankful to the monastics for spending their whole lives learning and practicing the teaching of the Buddha and later tirelessly teaching worldlings (puthujjana) about generosity (dāna), morality (sīla), mindfulness (sati), concentration (samādhi), and wisdom (paññā), thus prolonging the Buddha's dispensation. After 2600 years, the Buddhadhamma continues to flourish for the benefit and happiness of all humans, thanks to the contributions of monastics. Being grateful, householders should support monastics in four ways in accordance with the monastic code—by providing them with food, robes, accommodation, and medicine—so they can continue their practice and continue propagating the Dhamma.

We must be thankful to Mother Nature, who provides enough to support all beings. For those who oppose us, we should also learn to forgive and forget; we can be thankful during challenging periods, as these ordeals train our mind, helping us to realize the truth of life.

Having gratitude, we will not complain. If life gives us lemons, we will make lemonade. We will always be happy and feel thankful—should this not be considered a supreme blessing?

Robert Emmons, the world's leading scientific expert on gratitude, has published a book entitled *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*. The author has made a similar observation—that acknowledging the wonderful things in our lives amplifies positive emotions, namely happiness, gratitude, and contentment.

In a gratitude excerpt from *Jataka 429*, the bodhisatta in that life was a bird living in a big tree. When winter approached, the withered leaves fell on the ground, and all the birds flew to other areas for food, leaving this single bird guarding the tree alone. The piercing cold wind blew, and the bird suffered from hunger and cold, but he was reluctant to leave the tree that once provided him shelter. We might think this act is unnecessary, but this is because we don't know how a grateful mind can influence nature and create a miracle.

Because the bird's demeanor was nobler than a human being's, Sakka Devaraja's throne became hot. So he searched for the cause, and when he understood the bird's virtues, he went to the human realm and communicated to the bird using his psychic power. "All the birds have left. Why do you not leave? In this freezing cold winter, staying with the tree will cost your life!"

The bird replied, "When I lived in the tree, it provided me its fruit for food, its twigs for a nest to keep me warm, and a shelter free from wind, rain, and animal attacks. This tree is my home, and I am grateful to it. Now, with winter approaching, the fruit no longer grows and the leaves are withering—all the birds have left and the tree is so lonely! I would keep it company. Despite suffering from starvation and extreme cold, I do it voluntarily."

Sakka Devarāja was so impressed by the gratitude displayed by the bird that he used his psychic power to revitalize the tree so that its fruits started to grow and the twigs and leaves became lush enough to provide food and shelter to the bird. Look! A bird with a grateful mind inspired Sakka Devarāja to provide refuge for him. If we foster such rare gratitude in our own mind, we may also inspire Sakka Devarāja, who is capable of averting danger and resolving crises.

Sayalay Susilā had a student whose boyfriend met with an accident at young age, becoming paralyzed and sterile. The doctor advised her to give him up and find another life partner, as it was impossible for them to have children. The kind student was unwilling to leave her boyfriend at that difficult time. Instead, she moved into the hospital to take care of him. After two years of tender care, her boyfriend gradually recovered, and subsequently they were married. Their married life was not as blessed as a fairy tale—the husband was the chauffeur for a department chief for a period of four to five years. The husband chauffeured his department chief around and participated with him in night clubbing—socializing, drinking alcohol, and gambling—forgetting the second chance that his wife had given him. The worst was that he had many other women outside. Annoyed, the wife requested a divorce. Now, the wife lives a meaningful life in her second marriage. However, the ex-husband was diagnosed with cancer, and his life is in danger. If the ex-husband had been grateful towards his ex-wife, perhaps all this misfortune might not have happened. Therefore, gratitude is a supreme blessing.

We need to nurture our grateful minds daily by reflecting on our many blessings, such as:

Being grateful that we are still living when we wake up and that we can breathe and be healthy.

Being grateful that our families prepare delicacies for us. We always take our families for granted and forget their dedicated efforts, forget their emotions, and forget that we need to smile and express our thankfulness to them.

Being grateful that tutelage is given by our spiritual teachers—guidance in walking the path towards liberation.

Being grateful that our friends provide aid and support during difficult times.

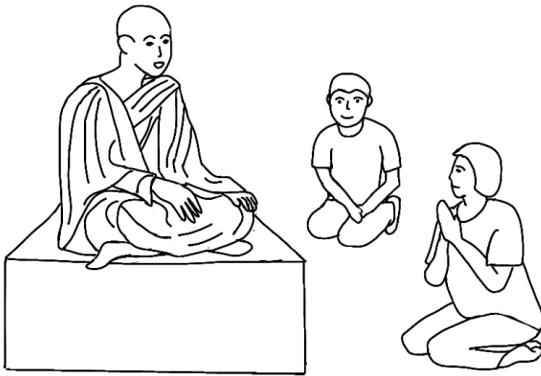
Let's learn to be thankful. Every day, we should develop a grateful mind so that our lives are filled with delight and pleasure, which will also make this world increasingly harmonious and wonderful!

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Reflecting on your life, please share how you treat people that you feel grateful towards.
2. How do we nurture a grateful mind?

26. Hearing the Dhamma on timely occasions (Kālena dhammassavanaṃ)

Life is full of ups and downs. When life does not go well, to prevent mental outbursts and distress, we need to hear the Dhamma regularly and in a timely way. Hearing the Dhamma can calm our stirred minds and steer us towards the right path, keeping us from being led astray.



Here are some timely occasions when it is important that we listen to the Dhamma.

First, during the uposatha days, or the 1st and 15th days of the lunar calendar. In Myanmar and Thailand, lay followers will observe eight precepts four times a

month—on the 1st and 15th, but also on the half-moon days in between. Householders can observe the eight precepts, listen to the Dhamma, and practice meditation in a monastery during these four days. These days are the best times to hear the Dhamma.

The second timely occasion is when our mind inclines to hearing the Dhamma, especially when we're making good progress in meditation, as at this time we can assimilate the Dhamma and realize its essence. Our faith, effort, mindfulness and wisdom will grow by leaps and bounds.

Thirdly, when we're feeling down due to sickness or separation from loved ones, listening to a timely Dhamma talk on suffering, on the realities of life, and on the path leading to liberation will enlighten us and give us hope. Kisā Gotamī's story illustrates one such situation.

Kisā Gotamī was a daughter from a poor household who married a rich merchant's son and bore him a son. However, that child died as soon as he was able to walk. Kisā Gotamī had never seen death before. Therefore, when they came to remove the body for burning, she forbade them to do so. Instead, she placed the dead child on her hip and went from house to house looking for a cure. Everyone thought she was mad, but she went her way, thinking, "Surely I shall find someone who knows of some medicine for my child."

A wise man saw her and told her to visit the Buddha, as he would have the knowledge to cure her child.

So Kisā Gotamī went to the Buddha, paid obeisance to him, stood at his side, and asked him, “Venerable sir, is it true, as men say, that you know how to cure my child?” The Buddha said, **“Yes, get me a pinch of white mustard seed from a house where neither son nor daughter nor any other has yet died.”**

Kisā Gotamī then placed the dead child on her hip, entered the village, stopped at the door of the very first house, and asked, “Have you here any white mustard seed? They say it will cure my child.” When they brought the grains of white mustard seed, she asked, “Friends, in the house where you dwell has anyone yet died?” When they told her there had been death in the house, she gave back the mustard seed.

Going from house to house, she asked for the mustard seed. There was not a single house where she found the mustard seed with the right conditions, and when the evening came, she thought, “Ah! It’s a heavy task I took upon myself. I thought that I alone had lost a child, but in every village the dead are more numerous than the living.” As she reflected, her heart became firm, and she took the child’s body and discarded it in the forest. Then she went to the Buddha, paid homage to him, and stood to one side.

The Buddha said, **“Did you get the pinch of mustard seed?”** “No, I did not, venerable sir. In every village the dead are more numerous than the living.” The Buddha said, **“You imagined vainly that you alone had lost a child. But all living beings are subject to an unchanging law, and it is this: The Prince of Death, like a raging torrent, sweeps away into the sea of ruin all living beings, but still their longings are unfulfilled.”** And instructing her in the Dhamma, he pronounced the following stanza:

*As a mighty flood sweeps away a sleeping village,
death steals away a man
who dotes on children and cattle,
his mind caught up in them.*

—*Dhp* 287

As the Buddha uttered the last part of the stanza, Kisā Gotamī was established in the fruit of stream entry. Kisā Gotamī requested the Buddha to let her go forth, and she obtained acceptance as a nun. Over time and with further instruction from the Buddha, Kisā Gotamī attained arahantship.

When our mind is filled with anguish, timely hearing of the Dhamma can pacify our emotions, allowing the Dhamma to flow into our heart and grow conviction in it. This is a true blessing.

Another example is Yasa, a rich man's son. Yasa was affluent and lived a luxurious life. Each time after he indulged in sensual pleasures, he felt his life was dull and empty. One morning, when Yasa woke up from his sleep before the others in his mansion, he saw his retinue of beautiful dancers fast asleep and looking most unsightly—some with their hair disheveled, some with saliva trickling out from their mouths, and the rest mumbling deliriously.

Perhaps Yasa's wisdom ripened at that time—he felt that householder life was absurdly filthy, and he felt an oppressing revulsion. He felt that his large mansion was like an eerie mortuary, and his retinues of dancers were like corpses lying there. He felt disgusted, oppressed, and depressed and could not endure the feeling even for a moment. Hence, he left his mansion and exclaimed, "Oh! I am depressed. I am in anguish!"

At that time, the Buddha, who possessed psychic powers, was at the Deer Park, seated and waiting for Yasa. The Buddha fully comprehended Yasa's frustration and oppression because the Buddha had also renounced mundane life due to its hollowness.

The Buddha addressed him, **"Yasa, there is no frustration, there is no oppression. Come, Yasa, sit here. I will teach you the good Dhamma leading to nibbāna. You will realize it."**

Yasa was pleased and delighted to hear these inspirational words from the Buddha, like a lost soul that had finally found its direction. He removed his golden footwear from his feet and approached the Buddha, respectfully paying homage and taking his seat in the appropriate place.

The Buddha started to expound the Dhamma to him. First, the Buddha talked on generosity (dāna), morality (sīla), the happy destination of heavenly abodes (sagga), the defects of sensual pleasures (kāmadīnava), the advantages of renunciation (nekkhammānisaṃsa), and more. When the Buddha knew that Yasa's mind had been purified and was malleable enough to receive higher teachings, the Buddha taught Yasa the Four Noble Truths. The eye of wisdom aroused in Yasa, he attained path and fruition of stream entry (sotāpatti magga phala).

When defilements invade the mind, it is time to hear the Dhamma. Sayalay Susīlā had a student who was betrayed by her boyfriend and whose mind was full of resentment. Each time she thought of him, she would be engulfed by the fire of hatred. She described to me that the displeasure felt like a thorn piercing her flesh which could not be removed. Whenever she thought of him, the thorn would stir and aggravate her restless, tormented mind and body, causing insomnia. She was severely afflicted over the span of two years until she

heard me say, “This was just the manifestation of kamma, none to be blamed.” At that particular moment, the light dawned for her, and she was released from her delusion. This was neither his fault nor hers. There was no “he” afflicting pain, nor any “I” enduring the pain—it was merely the working of kamma. Her mind was appeased after hearing my explanation, and the thorn was removed from her mind. She no longer experienced the pain caused by the fire of hatred.

Another timely occasion to hear the Dhamma is when we are near death. At that time, our mind is scattered, terrified, and uncertain of our future destination. The fragile body is also full of pain, like what Anāthapiṇḍika described to Venerable Sāriputta:

“The winds piercing my head are so severe, it feels like a strong man drilling into my head with a sharp point. The pain in my head is so severe, it feels like a strong man tightening a tough leather strap around my head. The winds slicing my belly are so severe, like a deft butcher or their apprentice were slicing open a cow’s belly with a meat cleaver. The burning in my body is so severe, it feels like two strong men grabbing a weaker man by the arms to burn and scorch him on a pit of glowing coals.”

— Anāthapiṇḍikovāda Sutta (MN 143)

At such a time, hearing the Dhamma not only can divert one’s attention from bodily pain and fear, but can also arouse faith and joy in the Dhamma. This in itself is

wholesome kamma. If death takes place at this particular moment, we definitely will have a fortunate rebirth in the human realm or in a heavenly realm. Therefore, timely hearing of the Dhamma is a supreme blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Why is hearing the Dhamma on timely occasions very important?
2. What is considered a timely occasion to hear the Dhamma?
3. Reflect on your attitude when listening to the Dhamma—is there any improvement needed?

*Khantī ca sovacassatā, samaṇānañca
dassanaṃ;*

*Kālena dhammasākacchā, etaṃ
maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

**Patience, compliance, seeing
contemplatives, discussing the
Dhamma on timely occasions: This
is the highest blessing.**



27. Patience (Khantī)

Patience is a very good virtue. Patience means self-control, enduring the pain caused by others without giving in to anger. When others complain about us, slander us, or threaten us, patience keeps us from being resentful, spiteful, and malicious. Living in society requires frequent interaction with others. Each of us comes from a different family background and education. We may think differently and have our own prejudices—these differences may lead to tension and conflict between individuals. Being patient and tolerant without strong opinions shows our real inner strength.



The Chinese character “patience” (忍) is the combination of a knife above a heart, which symbolizes the heart being stabbed with a knife, and yet not giving in to anger. Even if we are not wrong in a situation, we still need to have patience and forbearance without giving in to anger—these are indeed very challenging things to do. At this time, if we can reflect on the law of causality—kamma and its result (vipāka)—and understand that the unpleasant encounter now is the result of past kamma, then we can accept whatever is happening calmly.

When the Buddha was still alive, he was highly esteemed and was often given generous offerings. Some other ascetics were very jealous and hatched a scheme to disgrace and defame the Buddha. They asked a female follower, Sundarī, to discredit the Buddha’s reputation.

To do this, Sundarī dressed up and walked towards Jeta’s Grove holding incense and flowers. When people asked her where she was going, Sundarī would reply, “Why would you want to know where am I going?”

Then Sundarī would stay the night near the monastery in Jeta’s grove. At dawn, she would walk home, pretending that she had spent the night in the monastery. When people asked her where she had slept that night, she would answer, “I was with Buddha Gotama in the Jetavana monastery!”

Those who had unshakeable faith in the Buddha did not believe her evil slander. However, those who did not have faith in the Buddha's attributes started doubting, "Is this incident real?"

The jealous ascetics used this situation to defame the Buddha, saying, "Friends, please see clearly the evil behavior of the monk Gotama."

Many people started to talk about the matter, but the Buddha maintained silence. He patiently put up with the unjust accusation. The Buddha knew this false accusation was the result of his past actions, and no one was to be blamed. The Buddha in his past life was a scoundrel called Munāḷi. Due to association with fools, he verbally abused a paccekabuddha, saying, "This monk is unvirtuous and wicked." Because of this unwholesome verbal misconduct, he suffered many thousands of years in hell. In his last rebirth, the heavy kammic effect was diminished; however, he still experienced the malicious slander caused by Sundarī. Here, we can understand how an ignorant action—even if it was only committed once—can lead to countless unwholesome consequences.

Nevertheless, when the truth about their scheme emerged, those ascetics were punished.

Hence, when we are abused or are treated unjustly, we need to reflect on the law of kamma and its result. Such wise reflection helps us to accept the consequences

patiently and without complaint, without creating new unwholesome kamma associated with anger.

The Buddha taught us,

“Say no harsh words to anyone; for those thus spoken to might retort. Hostile speech is painful, and retaliation may overtake you.

If you are non-reactive, like a broken bell, then you have approached nibbāna, and no conflict can be found in you.”

— Dhammapada 133-134

We can also refer to *Samyutta Nikāya* 11.4: *Vepacitti* to understand the virtue of patience as shown by Sakka, ruler of the gods.

In the heavenly realm, frequent wars between devas (gods) and asuras (demons) took place. The devas were ultimately victorious, and the asuras were defeated. The defeated asuras were captured and brought to the presence of Sakka, ruler of the gods.

Vepacitti, the ruler of the asuras, despite being a bound and defeated general, taunted and humiliated Sakka with insulting and foul language. Sakka, however, was unmoved and merely listened, “staying unperturbed, even while being humiliated.”

Mātali, his charioteer, could not bear the insults and said to Sakka, “My lord, facing such abusive language from the vanquished king of the asuras — are you forbearing out of fear or weakness?”

Sakka answered, “It’s not because of fear and weakness that I am patient with Vepacitti. A sage like me would not engage in combat with a fool.”

Mātali said, “The fool will spew even more if there is no one to restrain him. Therefore, the wise must severely punish and forcefully restrain the fool.”

Sakka answered, “I myself think this alone is the way to restrain the fool: When one knows one’s enemy is angry, one mindfully maintains one’s peace.”

Mātali said, “I see the shortcomings of being patient—if the fool misperceives that the forbearance is due to fear, he would be even more aggressive, just like a bull chasing one who flees.”

Sakka answered, “Disregard what the fool thinks. Of the goals that lead to one’s own good, there is nothing worth more than being patient.”

Even though Sakka was stronger than his enemy, he still endured the criticism—this was possible through the highest patience. Throwing a tantrum at a furious person only provokes him further. On the other hand, if we exert self-control and don’t further infuriate an irate person, we have won a difficult battle. Considering the benefits to both parties, ourselves and the other person, and knowing the other party is furious, we can mindfully maintain calmness—this is not being a coward, but mental cultivation. When we handle disputes with patience, we benefit both parties.

Those that misinterpret Sakka as being a coward do not understand the true Dhamma.

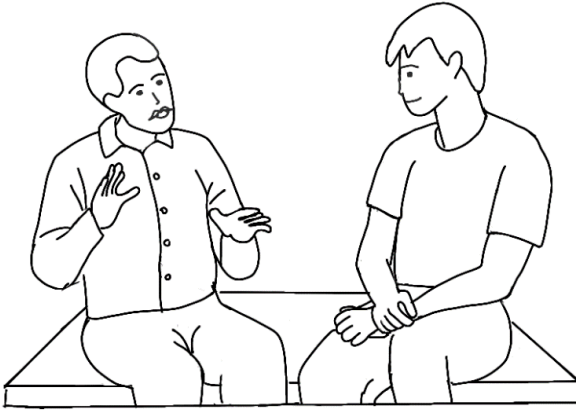
Sakka's forbearance is guided by principle, namely that the patience practiced in this particular scenario benefits himself and others. We must understand that patience is not being submissive to evil. Upholding justice is also a public responsibility — we must confront injustice in a timely manner to avoid fostering a bullying culture.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What is the difference between patience and cowardice?
2. When we encounter humiliation from other(s), the Bible mentions, "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek." There is also an ancient Chinese saying, "Repay resentment with kindness." As a Buddhist, what is your view on how these sayings accord with the Buddha Dhamma?

28. Compliance (Sovacassatā)

In everyday life, we receive guidance and advice from the wise, such as senior family members, mentors, monastics, and wise friends. However, we may not always accept these teachings with a modest attitude. Compliance means to receive these instructions, including criticism, with good will—heartily and humbly.



In the *Anumāna Sutta: Measuring Up* (MN 15), Venerable Mahāmoggallāna specified the qualities of those difficult to teach and the qualities of those easy to teach. He pointed out that those hard to teach do not gain the

trust of their spiritual companions and thus lose the opportunity to be advised and instructed.

“Suppose a mendicant invites other mendicants to admonish them. But they’re hard to admonish, having qualities that make them hard to admonish. They’re impatient, and don’t take instruction respectfully. So their spiritual companions don’t think it’s worth advising and instructing them, and that person doesn’t gain their trust.

And what are the qualities that make them hard to admonish?

Firstly, a mendicant has corrupt wishes, having fallen under the sway of corrupt wishes.

Furthermore, a mendicant glorifies themselves and puts others down ...

They’re irritable, overcome by anger ...

They’re irritable, and hostile due to anger ...

They’re irritable, and stubborn due to anger ...

They’re irritable, and blurt out words bordering on anger ...

When accused, they object to the accuser ...

When accused, they rebuke the accuser ...

When accused, they retort to the accuser ...

When accused, they dodge the issue, distract the discussion with irrelevant points, and display annoyance, hate, and bitterness ...

When accused, they are unable to account for the evidence ...

They are offensive and contemptuous ...

They're jealous and stingy ...

They're devious and deceitful ...

They're obstinate and vain ...

Furthermore, a mendicant is attached to their own views, holding them tight, and refusing to let go. This too is a quality that makes them difficult to admonish.

These are the qualities that make them hard to admonish."

On the other hand, one with the opposite qualities of those cited above is easy to teach, and he gains the trust of his spiritual companions, receives much instruction, and keeps growing in the Dhamma.

As a Chinese saying goes: Those involved in the matter are easily blinded to the truth, and those not involved can see things clearly. When someone compassionate points out your shortcomings directly, do you feel embarrassed and indignant and always try to defend yourself? If you keep doing this, nobody will bother to tell you about your mistakes anymore, for you are behaving like a vase with a hole, incapable of retaining any water poured into it.

Sayalay Susīlā is very thankful to her teacher, who never got offended when Sayalay pointed out his

mistakes, despite his position as an internationally respected teacher. When he pointed out her faults, Sayalay would quickly kneel down and ask for forgiveness. However, many times when Sayalay points out the faults of her students, their egos get wounded and they get very offended. As a result, they stop their service to her and to the meditation center. This has made Sayalay admire her teacher's humility even more!

Let's read one more time the admonishment from the Buddha when someone points out our faults:

*“Regard one who sees your faults
as one who points out hidden treasure.
Stay close to one so wise and astute
who corrects you when you need it.
Associating with such an impartial person
is always for the better and never for the worse.”*

— *Dhammapada* 76

Compliance means to accept criticism calmly, without succumbing to hollow vanity and self-importance. We should be grateful for the types of friends who point out our faults for our own benefit, at the risk of offending us. Thus, the Buddha taught us to associate with those wise ones who point out our faults, for they protect us from engaging in unwholesome deeds.

From the *Kesi Sutta* (AN 4.111), we can see how important compliance is in the Buddha's teaching.

"But sir, the Buddha is the supreme guide for those who wish to train. Just how do you guide a person in training?"

"Kesi, I guide a person in training sometimes gently, sometimes harshly, and sometimes both gently and harshly.

The gentle way is this: 'This is good conduct by way of body, speech, and mind. This is the result of good conduct by way of body, speech, and mind. This is life as a god. This is life as a human.'

The harsh way is this: 'This is bad conduct by way of body, speech, and mind. This is the result of bad conduct by way of body, speech, and mind. This is life in hell. This is life as an animal. This is life as a ghost.'

The both gentle and harsh way is this: 'This is good conduct ... this is bad conduct ...'"

"Sir, what do you do with a person in training who doesn't follow these forms of training?"

"In that case, Kesi, I kill them."

"Sir, it's not appropriate for the Buddha to kill living creatures. And yet you say you kill them."

"It's true, Kesi, it's not appropriate for a Realized One to kill living creatures. But when a person in training doesn't follow any of these forms of training, the Realized One doesn't think they're worth advising or instructing, and neither do their sensible spiritual companions. For it is

killing in the training of the Noble One when the Realized One doesn't think they're worth advising or instructing, and neither do their sensible spiritual companions."

What powerful and alarming advice! Let's hope none of us becomes someone regarded by the wise as unworthy of speaking to and admonishing!

In another example, Venerable Channa once sank to the state of "being totally destroyed."

Channa was a childhood companion of Prince Siddhattha and was the only witness on the night of the prince's great renunciation. After Prince Siddhattha became a fully enlightened Buddha, he revisited his home country, and many royal members from the Sakya clan joined the Saṅgha, including Channa. However, Channa became very conceited because he was the first to serve the prince before his enlightenment. He was arrogant and reluctant to receive teachings from the others, including the chief disciples Venerable Sāriputta and Venerable Mahāmoggallāna. After all, he thought, "I knew the Buddha well before any of them!" He considered himself to be the first lotus in the pond. Due to his arrogance and conceit, he couldn't attain any achievements in the Dhamma even after many years.

Before the Buddha entered parinibbāna, he ordered harsh punishment for Channa, for he knew from his psychic power that only this could help Channa to

abandon self-conceit. So the Blessed One said to Venerable Ānanda, **“After my passing, the monk Channa should be given the brahma penalty.”**

Ānanda asked, “What, lord, is the brahma penalty?”

And the Blessed One replied, **“Channa may say what he wants, Ānanda, but he is not to be spoken to, instructed, or admonished by the monks.”** (DN 16)

After the Buddha’s parinibbāna, this brahma penalty was placed upon Channa. With nobody speaking to him, instructing him, or admonishing him, Channa was like a dead man in the Saṅgha. This aroused a sense of fear and shame in him. He lived alone and practiced diligently but encountered many hindrances, including doubt and confusion towards the doctrine of “not self.” At this stage, he humbly went to seek advice from Venerable Ānanda, who could see that he was no longer conceited and arrogant and was happy to instruct him. Venerable Ānanda taught him the doctrine of dependent origination. Channa continued to practice and eventually became an arahant.

Thus it is the highest blessing if we are compliant and willing to receive instruction and admonishment from the wise.

Rāhula, the Buddha’s only child, can be our role model when it comes to modesty. Born as a prince, after he became a sāmaṇera, Rāhula didn’t have pride and

conceit due to having been royal and noble. He was humble, good mannered, and was always happy to follow the instructions of his preceptor and of the other senior monks. He cherished others' admonishments. Since the day he became ordained, every morning he would grab hold of a handful of sand and throw it in the air with the whisper, "May I receive as many instructions from the Buddha and the other teachers as there are grains of sand!" Rāhula the *sāmaṇera* regarded the instructions from his teachers as treasures—how about us?

However, compliance doesn't mean blind obedience to seniors and authorities. We must learn to discern the unwholesome from the wholesome. If the instruction given conflicts with the true Dhamma, we must say no to it.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. In the *Anumāna Sutta* (MN 15), what qualities of those hard to admonish were described?
2. What is the harm of lacking compliance and modesty?

29. Seeing recluses (Samañānañca dassanaṃ)

Encountering recluses—or those who have renounced the world—is a very high blessing.

Of the four signs that led to Prince Siddhattha's great renunciation, the sight of an old person, a sick person, and a dead person aroused fear and a sense of urgency in him, but it was the sight of the wandering ascetic that sparked hope and inspiration in him. That ascetic was serene, mindful, and very composed. Thus, the prince made up his mind to renounce worldly possessions and live a life of solitude in order to search for the deathless path. Seeing the ascetic was a very good blessing for Prince Siddhattha. Without his great renunciation, a fully self-enlightened Buddha would not have appeared in this world. In that case, every one of us today would not have had the chance to hear the Dhamma of the Four Noble Truths, and we would all be searching blindly in the darkness of ignorance.

Venerable Sāriputta obtained the fruition of sotāpanna (stream entry) after meeting Venerable Assaji. Sāriputta and Moggallāna were good friends, both born to rich families and both very indulgent in sensual pleasures in their youths. They soon realized the unsatisfactoriness and tedium of the sensual world, which cannot provide sustainable happiness. Thus they

left home in search of the true Dhamma that delights the mind.



They first followed a teacher named Sañjaya, but they couldn't reach liberation through his teachings. One day, Sāriputta met a monk named Venerable Assaji. He was struck by the dignified and serene appearance of this ascetic, whom he believed to be a liberated and perfected person. He immediately asked Venerable Assaji to teach him the Dhamma. Then Venerable Assaji uttered the famous stanza on the principle of causality to him.

*“Of causally arisen things,
the Tathāgata has declared their cause,
as well as their ending.*

This is the teaching of the Great Recluse.”

Sāriputta—a man with sharp wisdom—attained stream entry upon hearing this short verse. For a wise person, it is a great blessing to meet a recluse.

The happiness of mind resulting from encountering monastics can also bring many blessings. In the *Dhammapada*, there is a story of the young brahmin Maṭṭhakuṇḍali. His father was very rich but not at all a man of charity, never giving anything to anyone. When Maṭṭhakuṇḍali fell seriously ill, his father was also unwilling to pay a doctor to treat him, until finally Maṭṭhakuṇḍali got so ill that he was about to die. Realizing that his son was dying, his father had the sick young man carried outside, so that people coming to visit would not see the abundance of wealth inside the house.

On that morning, after deep meditation, through his psychic power the Buddha saw the helpless Maṭṭhakuṇḍali. So when entering Sāvathī for alms-food with his disciples, the Buddha stood near the door of Maṭṭhakuṇḍali's home. The young brahmin saw the Buddha, and, although he was too weak to say anything or do anything, the sight of the Buddha still brought him happiness. He died at that moment with a happy, wholesome mind and was immediately reborn in Tāvatiṃsa heaven.

To a mind with faith, the sight of monastics is always an auspicious sign.

Non-Buddhists may not understand why monastics can bring blessings to the world, since they are jobless and don't seem to contribute anything to society. They are simply overlooking the fact that monastics offer much to fulfill people's spiritual needs. They heal the world and guide people in their spiritual growth by teaching the truth about human life and by practicing and teaching meditation.

Nowadays, science has established that many diseases result from an unhappy mind. Dr. Zhong Nanshan, a renowned specialist in respiratory diseases and an influential Chinese public intellectual, has firmly stated publicly that half of our good health comes from mental health, and half of our diseases are mental diseases. By training in mindfulness and meditation, even a beginner meditator can effectively control many negative emotions that cause mental problems—unwholesome mental states such as hatred, jealousy, and greed.

According to Dr. Robert Schneider, Professor of Physiology and Dean of the College of Integrative Medicine at Maharishi University of Management in Iowa, USA, regular meditation practice reduces risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

“My colleagues and I have long been concerned about the high rates of cardiovascular disease in the US that have spread throughout the world. Despite advances in modern medicine, heart attacks and strokes are the leading cause of death globally. One of the reasons for these high rates is the epidemic of stress in modern society. About 30 years ago, I decided to investigate how the mind-body-heart connection could be positively managed with effective stress reduction. The results of a series of well-controlled studies showed that the practice of Transcendental Meditation lowered high blood pressure, reduced insulin resistance, reduced atherosclerosis, and prevented abnormal enlargement of the heart. A landmark study that brought all these findings together followed 200 patients with known heart disease over an average of five years. [It showed] the meditating participants had a 48% lower rate of death, heart attack, and stroke compared to controls.”

Another scientific breakthrough regarding the biological mechanism of meditation is the discovery that the brain produces more alpha waves during meditation. Alpha waves are known to be associated with relaxation and joy. Thus blood circulation, cellular metabolism, and immunity could be improved as a result of meditation.

Eventually, when insight matures through continuous meditation practice, the establishment of the noble path and attainment of noble fruition would eliminate all the defilements, and we can be truly happy and free.

Although it is a blessing to approach monastics, if we do not know how to learn the true Dhamma from them, little benefit is gained.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What experiences have you had in terms of associating with monastics? Did such experiences bring any benefit to you?

30. Discussing the Dhamma on timely occasions (Kālena dhammasākacchā)

It is a blessing to discuss the Dhamma on timely occasions, for this will help us clarify confusion and doubts in order to make progress on the path. For example, when practicing ānāpānasati—mindfulness of breathing—very strong and blinding light may appear, or on other occasions, when concentration increases, one can no longer feel the body. Such extraordinary experiences can cause confusion and doubt. If these issues are not addressed in a timely manner and the mind becomes filled with fear and perplexity, the practitioner may stop meditating. However, if we have the opportunity to consult with those who are wise and experienced whenever we encounter such difficulties, we would be able to understand that all these “strange” experiences are actually good results of practice, and we can happily move on with confidence.



When Sayalay Susīlā was teaching in the USA, a student wrote an email to her to share an experience. When she was practicing concentration meditation many years ago, she saw very bright light and sometimes couldn't feel her body at all. During walking meditation, she felt as if she was walking in the air, as if weightless. She couldn't sleep at night because she was totally awake and alert. She had some experience of "not self" during meditation.

After a few days, she began to feel scared. Not knowing whom to consult, she asked other meditation peers in her area. Since none of them had the same experience, they concluded that her condition was abnormal and that she might have some sort of psychiatric condition.

She eventually became convinced of this and started visiting a psychiatrist.

Eventually, she was hospitalized and had quite a traumatic experience in the hospital. She was a mentally healthy person with good concentration but was being treated as if she were insane. After leaving the hospital, in order to survive in the ego-centered American society, she tried her best to forget the past experience of “not self” and indulged in drug abuse, sex, and all sorts of unwholesome deeds.

After twenty years of this hedonistic lifestyle, she met a monk by chance and told him about her past meditation experience. The monk explained to her that all of those were very good experiences resulting from a concentrated mind. Finally realizing the truth, she tried to practice meditation again but could hardly make any progress. The twenty years she spent engaging in immoral behavior made the situation worse than simply stagnating.

Sayalay couldn't help feeling sympathy for her after reading her letter. How pitiful! If only she had someone to guide her at that time! Here, Sayalay would like to advise all readers—whether you are a monastic or a lay person—please do not instruct or guide others unless you are absolutely an expert in the topic being consulted. As practitioners, we should also learn to be wise and to know who is qualified to answer our

questions. Do not seek advice from inexperienced lay people or monastics. We must know that not all monastics are experts in the suttas and in meditation. Some teachers feel too embarrassed to admit that they do not know the answers to questions from students and therefore say things carelessly. This kind of foolish advice could mislead practitioners and bring much misery to their lives.

When practicing vipassanā meditation, once the meditators obtain the knowledge of arising and passing away (udayabbaya-ñāṇa), they may also see very bright light. Many people might mistakenly believe this is nibbāna if they don't have the experience to know otherwise. Such misunderstanding can be very dangerous, since they would stop practicing, falsely believing that the final goal has already been reached. Therefore, it is highly important to discuss the Dhamma with the wise on timely occasions.

Venerable Anuruddhā successfully abandoned all defilements and became an arahant due to his timely discussion with Venerable Sāriputta, who provided him the guidance he needed.

On that occasion, Venerable Anuruddhā visited Venerable Sāriputta and asked him:

“Here, by means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human, I see the thousand-fold cosmos. And my persistence is aroused and unsluggish. My mindfulness is

established and unmuddled. My body is calm and unaroused. My mind is concentrated and gathered into singleness. And yet my mind is not released from the effluents through lack of clinging.”

Ven. Sāriputta replied: “My friend, when the thought occurs to you, ‘By means of the divine eye, purified and surpassing the human, I see the thousand-fold cosmos,’ that is related to your conceit. When the thought occurs to you, ‘My persistence is aroused and unsluggish. My mindfulness is established and unmuddled. My body is calm and unaroused. My mind is concentrated and gathered into singleness,’ that is related to your restlessness. When the thought occurs to you, ‘And yet my mind is not released from the effluents through lack of clinging,’ that is related to your anxiety. It would be well if—abandoning these three qualities, not attending to these three qualities—you directed your mind to the deathless property [nibbāna].”

—AN 3.130

Having heard Venerable Sāriputta’s advice, Venerable Anuruddhā realized the subtle hindrances that blocked his progress: conceit, restlessness, and remorse. He again resorted to solitude, earnestly applied himself to the removal of those three obstructions, and soon became fully liberated. If he didn’t get this advice from the General of the Dhamma—Venerable Sāriputta—in a timely way, he wouldn’t have been able to detect these obstructions on his path. What a blessing to be able to discuss the Dhamma at the right time!

Reflection and Discussion:

1. In the *Maṅgala Sutta*, the word “timely” appears twice, both in “hearing the Dhamma” and in “discussing the Dhamma.” What are your thoughts on the importance of “timely”?
2. When you need someone to discuss the Dhamma with, whom do you regard as appropriate?

*Tapo ca brahmacariyañca, ariyasaccāna
dassanaṃ;*

*Nibbānasacchikiriya ca, etaṃ
maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

**Austerity, celibacy, seeing the
noble truths, realizing nibbāna:
This is the highest blessing.**



31. Austerity (Tapo)

Tapo can be explained in two ways: self-restraint and diligence. Based on the commentaries, its first implication is the reduction of unwholesome states such as greed and anger through self-restraint; secondly, it implies arousing right effort to eliminate negligence and indolence.

A practitioner needs self-restraint to avoid indulgence in food, sleep, entertainment, socializing, etc., in order to keep strong sensual desire under control. A lay person is advised to keep the eight precepts twice a month and for at least 24 hours each time. Why 24 hours? Because it is easier for us to restrain ourselves from sensual pleasures during the day, while at night, when we are freed from our busy daily schedules, the desire usually gets stronger, and our minds tend to linger on food, entertainment and sex. Whenever defilements arise while following the eight precepts, we can deliberately direct the mind towards brightness and joy by reflecting on the virtues of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. Such skillful mental formations can purify the mind and weaken the taints.



Self-restraint also refers to guarding the sense doors, that is, the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind, since mental defilements arise at the point of contact between the sense doors and sense objects. The Buddha taught his disciples to guard their faculties, which means keeping the mind focused on the chosen meditation object.

There is a story about three monks in the Buddha's time who came to the monastery to practice. The first monk made up his mind to guard his faculties by keeping his mind in the monastery; the second monk further restrained himself by keeping his mind in his room; but the third monk demonstrated the best self-restraint by keeping his mind within himself (his body and mind).

Apart from sensual desire, another defilement we must restrain is anger, for both anger and sensual desire are great hindrances to our practice. Without self-restraint, we are bound to be enslaved by these two enemies.

Another meaning of *tapo* is diligence, using right effort to remove negligence and indolence.

Once upon a time there was a very wealthy man. After he heard the Dhamma, he was very much inspired by the Buddha's teaching on unsatisfactoriness, suffering, and emptiness in the sensual world. He then renounced all his worldly possessions and became a monk in the forest. As a monk, he practiced very diligently. In order to better overcome sloth and torpor at night, he would do walking meditation instead of sitting. After much walking, his feet were bleeding badly, and he couldn't do walking meditation any more. Still, he didn't give up, arousing more effort and continuing to meditate by crawling on his hands and knees. At that time, a hunter passed by and, since he was crawling on the ground on all four limbs in the forest, mistakenly took him for a wild animal. The hunter threw a spear at him, which pierced his upper body. In such extreme pain, this monk still kept on crawling and meditating. This is an example of *tapo*—arousing the inner energy to be highly diligent in our practice.

Therefore, energy and effort are not merely bodily actions; they also refer to the even more powerful

mental energy. Such a powerful mind is fearless towards all pain. It doesn't run away from pain but conquers it by facing it directly.

In order to be fully liberated, we must be willing to make a great deal of effort. An example of this is the bodhisatta's efforts to achieve the full perfection of his virtues (pāramī) to ultimately become a fully enlightened Buddha who could guide all sentient beings to liberation.

The bodhisatta was once born as a strong monkey. One day, a brahmin accidentally fell into a mountain ravine. Hearing the helpless cry from the brahmin, the monkey was determined to save him. He jumped into the valley and carried the brahmin out on his back. Although he was much stronger than any ordinary monkey, carrying a human out of the ravine still challenged his physical limits. He was so fatigued after this effort that he fell asleep.

The brahmin he saved was not a grateful man. Seeing the monkey asleep, he tried to kill the monkey for meat to fill his stomach. The brahmin hit the monkey's head with a big rock, and the monkey woke up from the sharp pain. He realized that the man was trying to kill him and immediately jumped into a tree. Imagine if you were the monkey—what would you do in this case? Surely we would leave this evil man behind and be greatly disappointed. But the bodhisatta didn't hold

any grudge; he only wanted to fulfill his virtues of determination and great effort.

Such was the bodhisatta's thought: "I should save him, since I have already determined to do so. Whatever he does is his own kamma and has nothing to do with me. If I give up on him now, he won't be able to survive in this forest alone, and all my previous effort would be wasted." In order to guide the brahmin out of the forest, the monkey bore the severe pain, jumping from one tree to another and leaving a trail of blood on the ground for the brahmin to follow.

With *tapo*, self-restraint and diligence, we steadily progress on the path; thus it is the highest blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What is the meaning of the word *tapo*?
2. Based on your own experience, how should we practice self-restraint in a proper way?

32. Celibacy (Brahmacariya)

“Brahma” means pure, chaste, or holy; “cariya” is conduct. “Brahmacariya” means living a holy life. Some scholars of Buddhism interpret “brahmacariya” as monastic life or as celibacy. The practice of “brahmacariya” is the path followed by the most committed of Buddhist practitioners. The commentaries explain “brahmacariya” in three aspects.

1. Full abstention from sexual relations.

According to the monastic code, all monastics are required to abstain from all sexual activity.

This rule does not apply to lay people, but lay Buddhists should also live in celibacy on certain occasions, at least on the days of taking eight precepts and on meditation retreats. We may need to battle with sexual desire when it arises; however, as we progress in mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, the desire and passion diminishes. Sexual intercourse slowly loses its attraction, and we can overcome the grip of desire, gaining the joy and benefit of celibacy instead.

2. The practice of the Four Divine Abodes (brahmavihārā): loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuna), altruistic joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā).

A practitioner of the Four Divine Abodes maintains loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity towards all sentient beings at all times. Developing these states to a high degree can reduce the taints in the mind, such as lust, anger, ignorance, conceit, and doubt. One can purify the mind through the practice of the Four Divine Abodes, using all sentient beings in the universe as the meditation object. When practicing, one should radiate loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity to all sentient beings, without limiting them to just one person or one area.

Mettā is goodwill, a way of wishing for others to be well and happy. Mostly we think of mettā as unconditional and universal love—pure love, without expectation from the other party, love that makes no distinction between living beings. One may develop the practice of mettā by sincerely wishing:

“May all living beings be well, happy, and peaceful.”

Compassion (karuna) wishes to alleviate the suffering of others. When one sees others in pain and misery, empathy, sympathy, and the wish to aid them arise in the mind. However, the practice of karuna fails if one starts to grieve and cry with those who are suffering.

Altruistic joy (muditā) is the joy and delight that arise in one’s mind when seeing others’ achievements and

their happiness. One also wishes others' success to grow and not fade away.



Equanimity (upekkhā) is a quality of the mind with a neutral, impartial, and unbiased attitude toward all sentient beings. A mind with upekkhā thinks thus: “I am unable to make other living beings happy or miserable; they reap the fruit of their own kamma. Those with wholesome deeds gain blessings, and those with unwholesome deeds end up living in pain. I cannot resist the law of kamma.” With clear comprehension that all beings inherit their own kamma, the equanimous mind remains detached from worry and clinging. It is completely freed from attachment and hate toward others and is peaceful, calm, and

neutral (however, it is not a state of being indifferent towards others and the world). Of the Four Divine Abodes, the practice of *upekkhā* is the most difficult. Since we are all prone to cling to the beloved and abhor the hated, to stay neutral to both sides is difficult indeed.

3. Development of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path consists of right view, right intention (or right thought), right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. It contains three aspects of training—the trainings of morality, concentration, and wisdom.

The training of morality includes right speech, right action, and right livelihood. By training in morality, such as keeping the five precepts, one suppresses the transgressive defilements.

The training of concentration includes right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. By training in concentration, the mind stops wandering and settles into a peaceful and tranquil state.

The training of wisdom includes right view and right intention. By training in wisdom, we will be able to see the true nature of our body and mind—constantly changing, suffering, diseased, like a dart, insecure, dependently arisen, and devoid of essence. When

wisdom penetrates the truth of the body and mind, clinging is abandoned; once clinging is abandoned, one is liberated, reaching nibbāna.

Since wisdom is the immediate cause for total liberation, it serves as the ultimate goal of our practice, while morality and concentration are the supporting conditions for developing wisdom. Without the aid of morality and concentration, one cannot obtain the highest wisdom.

When we practice the three-fold training of morality, concentration, and wisdom, we are living a holy life (brahmacariya).

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What is the meaning of *brahmacariya*?
2. What is the significance of *brahmacariya* for a lay Buddhist?

33. Seeing the Noble Truths (Ariyasaccāna dassanaṃ)

Suppose someone asks you, “What is the essence of the Buddha’s teaching?” The answer should be: the Four Noble Truths. In DN 16, Buddha said: **“Monks, due to not understanding and not penetrating Four Noble Truths, both you and I have wandered and transmigrated for such a very long time. What four? The noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the origin of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.”** Any followers of the Buddha who are keen to escape from the suffering of continued rebirth must pay heed to what Buddha said above.

What is the noble truth of suffering? In the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma* (SN 56.11), the Buddha taught:

“Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.”

What are the five aggregates subject to clinging? It means the clinging to and grasping of form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—in other

words, the body and the mind. We wrongly perceive the five aggregates—body, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—as permanent, as ease, as happiness, as health, as the self, as belonging to the self. Such perverted perception causes craving and clinging to the five aggregates. Our body and mind are dependently arising and passing away under the duress of impermanence, being oppressed by impermanent, suffering becomes intrinsic nature of five aggregates of clinging.

From the perspective of ultimate truth, our body is made of the four great elements—earth, water, fire, and wind. In the meditation on the four elements, we keep contemplating the characteristics of the four elements in the body, over and over again. In the end, only the four elements are manifesting, while the body begins to lose its solidity. Some may have the experience of the body turning into a pile of foam, made of numerous bubbles constantly arising and passing away. The whole process is devoid of essence, without control. Isn't this a phenomenon of suffering? Hence the Buddha said "the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering."

What is the noble truth of the origin of suffering (the second noble truth)?

The craving that makes for further becoming—accompanied by passion and delight, relishing now here and now there—

i.e., craving for sensual pleasure, craving for becoming, craving for non-becoming.

—SN 56:11

There are three types of craving, with the first being the craving for sensual pleasure. Do we not crave to see beautiful things with our eyes, hear pleasant sounds with our ears, smell delightful scents with our noses, taste delicious flavors with our tongues, and feel soft touch with our bodies? All these are manifestation of craving for sensual pleasure. The second type of craving is the craving for becoming. All worldlings desire longevity and continued becoming, and thus they don't regard the cycle of rebirth as stressful. Many cling to life in the realms of human beings and gods, hoping to be reborn on earth or in heaven in order to keep enjoying their lives. Such hope keeps them motivated to do mundane meritorious deeds. The third type of craving is the craving for non-becoming. This is associated with the wrong view of annihilationism, which holds the view that all is gone after death. These three cravings are the origin of suffering, and they need to be abandoned to end all suffering in the cycle of rebirth.

Is it possible to abandon craving? Surely. When one sees again and again the five aggregates as impermanent, as suffering, as diseased, as a boil, as a dart, as misery, as an affliction, as alien, as falling apart,

as empty, as not-self, one abandons desire and craving for the five aggregates. When the five controlling faculties of faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom are mature and balance, one realizes nibbāna — the destruction of cravings.

And this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: the remainderless fading and cessation, renunciation, relinquishment, release, and letting go of that very craving.

—SN 56:11

When craving—the origin of suffering—comes to an end, suffering ceases completely. Thus it is called the noble truth of the cessation of suffering.

How can we realize the noble truth of the cessation of suffering? We need to develop the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering, the Noble Eightfold path—namely, right view, right intention (or right thought), right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

The Noble Eightfold Path can be divided into three trainings:

1. Training in wisdom (paññā sikkhā) consists of right view and right thought.
2. Training in morality (sīla sikkhā) consists of right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

3. Training in concentration (samādhi sikkhā) consists of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Wisdom Training

Right view is the beginning and the consummation of the path. It is the correct way of looking at life and the world because it sees them as they truly are, rather than the way we want them to be. What we perceive as happiness and having a controller self in life is different from what happiness and self really is. Because our view of the world forms our intentions, speech, and actions, right view is the forerunner of all wholesome kamma.

Right view starts with the understanding of what is wholesome and unwholesome, and their consequences. Most people from Asia, unlike most people from the West, start their practice of the Dhamma with this fundamental right view of kamma and its result. As we take up the path of insight, eventually right view dispels the darkness of ignorance that conceals the three universal marks of existence: impermanence, suffering, and impersonality. This takes into full account the five aggregates of clinging, both internally and externally, together with their causes. We then become disenchanted with the five aggregates and develop a wholesome desire for liberation. Finally,

right view culminates in the complete understanding of the truth of suffering with the abandoning of craving and realization of nibbāna.

Right thought is also known as right intention, right resolve, right aspiration, and right application of mind. It means wholesome application of mind with regard to:

1. Thoughts of renunciation of sensual pleasure
2. Thoughts of non-harming
3. Thoughts of non-cruelty

When we begin to develop the right view in accordance with the true nature of life, it affects our thoughts and thereby our actions in accordance with this new understanding. We willingly give up thoughts of indulgence and misconduct with regard to sensual pleasures by understanding their dangers and faults. Passionate desire breeds fear, discontent, competition, jealousy, and greater lust that ends with more suffering. Through renunciation of unwholesome thought, we become contented, happy, and peaceful. We eagerly wish for others to have the same experience. Naturally, we develop a loving heart that grows boundlessly, extending amity to all beings, wishing all to be happy and peaceful.

Being free from the enslavement of desire, we develop compassion for those who remain ensnared by the net of sensuality, by understanding that they are struggling with suffering in the futile pursuit of sensual pleasures,

and are liable to come to ruin in perdition because of not being exposed to the liberating Dhamma.

Morality Training

Guided by right view, we undertake training in morality, virtue, and ethical conduct consisting of right speech, right action, and right livelihood.

Right speech means abstaining from these four types of false speech:

1. Abstaining from deceit and bearing false witness (telling lies for one's own ends, another's, or for some trifling material advantage) or speaking deceitfully (as detailed at AN 10.206).
2. Abstaining from divisive and malicious words that create discord.
3. Abstaining from harsh speech that offends or hurts others, bordering on anger.
4. Abstaining from gossip or idle chatter that lacks benefit, purpose, or depth.

Right action means acting in a harmless or beneficial way, conscientious for our own benefit as well as that of others. It is of three types:

1. Abstaining from killing or physically assaulting, with the understanding that all beings cherish life and out of consideration for the fact that

what is hateful to us (being harmed or killed) is hateful to others.

2. Abstaining from stealing, understanding that it is unjust and unlawful to forcefully or fraudulently take from others what rightfully belongs to them, just as we do not wish to be separated from what is ours.
3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct, understanding the importance of respecting the dignity and welfare of others, just as we wish our loved ones and ourselves to be free from being violated.

Right livelihood means that we earn our living in a just and harmless way by, at a minimum, abstaining from the following five kinds of businesses:

1. Abstaining from dealing in weapons
2. Abstaining from dealing in slaves
3. Abstaining from dealing in animals for slaughter
4. Abstaining from dealing in poisons
5. Abstaining from dealing in intoxicants

Furthermore, one avoids any occupation that requires a violation of right speech and right action, which would also constitute wrong livelihood.

In brief, training in morality is cultivated with the enlightened view that what is beneficial for others is beneficial for ourselves. The Buddha said that those who love themselves should avoid harming others. We

ourselves do not want to be harmed by others, and in just the same way, others do not want to be harmed by us. This broadmindedness is best cultivated with an understanding that we are the heirs of our kamma (our choices, actions, and volitions). Every volitional action has the latent power to bring about a welcome or unwelcome reaction.

When training in morality is well established, we acquire self-confidence in this life and future lives, through an absence of shame and fear, lack of self-reproach or the reproach of others, an unworried mind, gentleness, and serenity. The Buddha outlines the redounding benefits:

“Virtuous ways of conduct have non-remorse as their benefit and reward; non-remorse has gladness as its benefit and reward ... joy ... serenity ... happiness; happiness has concentration as its benefit and reward; concentration has knowledge and vision of things as they really are as its benefit and reward.” (AN 10)

These benefits come through the cultivation of morality, laying a solid foundation for success in concentration training. As is pointed out in the discourse on the simile of the relay of Chariots:

“Purification of virtue is for the sake of reaching purification of mind.” (MN 24)

Concentration Training

Right effort is a prerequisite for the other factors of the path. In the absence of effort, nothing can be achieved. Right effort means to exert energy in a persistent and consistent (neither straining nor lapsing) manner in order to abandon unskillful actions and unwholesome states, and to arouse skillful actions and wholesome states. These four types of effort are in short:

1. Effort to prevent unarisen unwholesome states
2. Effort to discard arisen unwholesome states
3. Effort to arouse unarisen wholesome states
4. Effort to maintain and bring to perfection arisen wholesome states

Right mindfulness is constantly keeping the mind aware and alert to the phenomena arising in the body and mind. In other words, mindfulness is remembering or not forgetting to practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: contemplation of the body, contemplation of the different types of feelings, contemplation of different states of the mind (such as lustful mind, angry mind, contracted mind, distracted mind, etc.), and contemplation of phenomena (such as the five hindrances, six sense-objects, five aggregates, Four Noble Truths, seven factors of enlightenment, etc.)

Right concentration is collecting or unifying the mind, which means cultivating a state where all mental factors are brought together and intensified by

directing them onto one particular object, such as the breath, continuously for a designated period of time. Right concentration means cultivating the first, second, third, and fourth absorptions. During the practice of right concentration, one needs right effort to constantly remember (right mindfulness) the single object so that the mind “sinks” deeply into it and attains absorption. We can thus see that right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration all tie together to bring about a unified, serene, and temporarily purified mind.

When a mind well trained in concentration and insight reaches the pinnacle of success, right view removes the ignorance that conceals the Four Noble Truths. One sees three common characteristics of phenomena and realizes nibbāna.

When the Noble Eightfold Path is fully developed, wisdom is cultivated to fully know the five aggregates subject to clinging to be suffering; to fully abandon craving, the origin of suffering; and to realize the cessation of suffering—nibbāna. This is seeing the Four Noble Truths.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. What are the Four Noble Truths? What makes them the essence of the Buddha's teaching?
2. At the end of the *Maṅgala Sutta*, the Buddha identified the highest blessing to be total liberation. What do you think about that?

34. Realizing nibbāna (Nibbānasacchikiriya)

Nibbāna is the extinguishment of the fires of lust, anger, and ignorance and the complete freedom from suffering. Once developed, the path of sotāpanna (stream entry) leads to the first experience of nibbāna—knowing the noble truth of suffering, abandoning the noble truth of the origin of suffering, realizing the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and developing the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering. The fruition of sotāpanna takes nibbāna as the object. The path of sotāpanna completely relinquishes identity view¹⁰—the major cause for us to be reborn in the woeful realms. Once identity view is given up, one never falls into the four woeful realms again. Even without diligent practice, one gets reborn a maximum of seven times. Then arahantship path and fruition will be attained, and one is completely freed from the suffering of the cycle of rebirth.

Therefore, realizing nibbāna by development of the path of sotāpanna is the highest blessing.

¹⁰ The path of sotāpanna also abandons attachment to rites and rituals, as well as doubts about the Triple Gem.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Why is realizing nibbāna by development of the path of sotāpanna the highest blessing?

*Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi, cittaṃ
yassa na kampati;
Asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ, etaṃ
maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

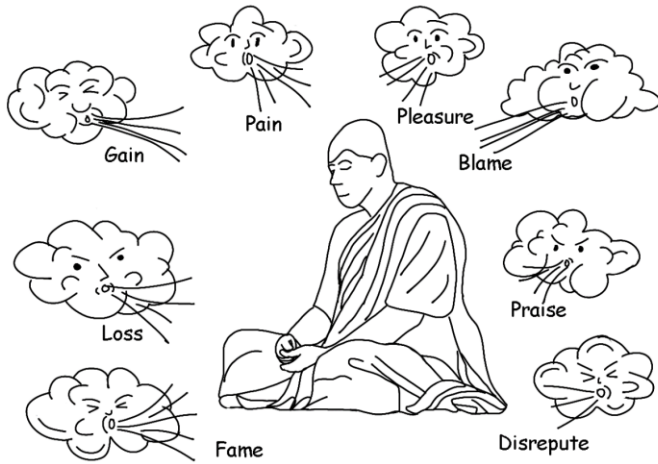
**A mind that, when touched by the
ways of the world, is unshaken,
sorrowless, stainless, secure: This
is the highest blessing.**



35. A mind that, when touched by the ways of the world, is unshaken (Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi, cittaṃ yassa na kampati)

What are the ways of the world? They are the eight worldly conditions. Which eight? Gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, and pleasure and pain. As long as we live in this world, we are bound to meet with the eight worldly conditions. A man may be able to make a fortune in no time, but he can also lose everything overnight. We always feel merry and jolly when gaining riches but moan and cry over losses.

In the mundane world, we regularly deal with other people, and inevitably we will receive both praise and blame. We are elated by compliments and dejected by criticism. We delight in flattering words but hate those who slander us. In this manner, the eight worldly conditions revolve around the world, and the world revolves around these eight worldly conditions.



There is an anecdote about Su Dong-Po, a famous Chinese artist-scholar from the Song Dynasty over a thousand years ago. He was very talented and excelled in literature, calligraphy, and brush painting. He was also very knowledgeable in Buddhist doctrine. He had a good friend—a senior monk named Fo-Yin—with whom he often discussed the Dhamma and art. One day, after a sitting meditation, Su Dong-Po wrote a poem which contained a line that said: “Unshaken by the eight worldly winds, sitting still in the heart of the purple golden lotus.”

Su Dong-Po was highly satisfied with his new poem and desired praise from his good friend. So, he sent a boy servant to deliver the poem in a letter to Fo-Yin, who lived on the other side of the river. After reading

the poem, Fo-Yin smiled, wrote a comment underneath, and asked the servant boy to deliver the letter with his comment.

When Su Dong-Po received the letter back, instead of the compliments he was eagerly expecting, he saw only one word—"bullshit"! He was so annoyed that he immediately crossed the river looking for Fo-Yin for further explanation. By the time he arrived at Fo-Yin's door, Fo-Yin had already left, leaving behind only another line of verse that said: "Unshaken by the eight worldly winds, running across the river for 'bullshit.'"

Our minds are being manipulated by these worldly winds. How come? The Buddha said:

"An unlearned ordinary person encounters gain. They don't reflect: 'I've encountered this gain. It's impermanent, suffering, and perishable.' They don't truly understand it. They encounter loss ... fame ... disgrace ... blame ... praise ... pleasure ... pain. They don't reflect: 'I've encountered this pain. It's impermanent, suffering, and perishable.' They don't truly understand it.

So gain and loss, fame and disgrace, blame and praise, and pleasure and pain occupy their mind. They favor gain and oppose loss. They favor fame and oppose disgrace. They favor praise and oppose blame. They favor pleasure and oppose pain. Being so full of favoring and opposing, they're not freed from rebirth, old age, and death, from sorrow, lamentation,

pain, sadness, and distress. They're not freed from suffering, I say.

A learned noble disciple encounters gain. They reflect: 'I've encountered this gain. It's impermanent, suffering, and perishable.' They truly understand it. They encounter loss ... fame ... disgrace ... blame ... praise ... pleasure ... pain. They reflect: 'I've encountered this pain. It's impermanent, suffering, and perishable.' They truly understand it.

So gain and loss, fame and disgrace, blame and praise, and pleasure and pain don't occupy their mind. They don't favor gain or oppose loss. They don't favor fame or oppose disgrace. They don't favor praise or oppose blame. They don't favor pleasure or oppose pain. Having given up favoring and opposing, they're freed from rebirth, old age, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress. They're freed from suffering, I say. This is the difference between a learned noble disciple and an unlearned ordinary person.

—AN 8.6

During the Buddha's time, a lady once invited Venerable Sāriputta and other monks to her house for alms dāna. When she was preparing the food for the Saṅgha, a servant brought her a message in a note. It brought devastating news: her husband, a general, was ambushed and killed on his way to settle a dispute, together with their twelve sons.

Upon hearing this news that could bring any mother and wife to a state of delirium, she did not panic or cry

out. On the contrary, she contemplated the nature of impermanence of all living beings. Mourning could do nothing to bring the dead back, but would only interfere with the meritorious deed she was doing. Calmly, she folded the note, put it in her pocket, and continued preparing the alms food.

At that time, a maid carrying a bottle of ghee for the Saṅgha accidentally tripped and broke the bottle containing ghee. Trying to comfort the lady and her maid, Venerable Sāriputta said that all things that are of the nature to be damaged are bound to be damaged sooner or later. The brave lady replied, “Venerable Sir, how trivial this damage is. I just received news that my husband was murdered, together with my twelve sons. I have held back my sorrow and continued serving food to the venerables.”

This wise woman did not rebel against stressful situations. She accepted reality with equanimity. Her courage and dignity is a good example of “a mind that, when touched by the ways of the world, is unshaken.”

“Gain and loss, fame and disgrace,

blame and praise, and pleasure and pain.

These qualities among people are impermanent,

transient, and perishable.

An intelligent and mindful person knows these things,

*seeing that they're perishable.
Desirable things don't disturb their mind,
nor are they repelled by the undesirable.
Both favoring and opposing
are cleared and ended, they are no more.
Knowing the stainless, sorrowless state,
they who have gone beyond rebirth
understand rightly."*

—AN 8.6

The Buddha, the teacher of men and gods, a man perfected in knowledge and conduct, was also subject to the eight worldly winds. Once, in a public gathering, a foul woman named Cinca claimed that the Buddha had made her pregnant. The Buddha patiently endured this insult with a smile. In the end, when the pillow Cinca had stuck to her belly fell off accidentally, it was evident that she was lying and that the Buddha was innocent. Cinca hurriedly ran away from the gathering in shame.

On another occasion, when the Buddha was staying in a village with his disciples, another vile man accused the Buddha and his monks of murdering a woman. The ignorant villagers fiercely abused the Buddha and his disciples. The Buddha endured all the insults in silence, but Venerable Ānanda couldn't bear it. He pleaded

with the Buddha to leave the village with his disciples and move to another one. The Buddha asked him:

“Ānanda, what if the people from the other village attack us, too?”

“In that case, Blessed One, we shall move again to the next village.”

“In this case, Ānanda, in the whole of India we won’t be able to find a village to stay in. Be patient and all the insults will come to an end by themselves.”

Sometimes we cannot escape loss, disgrace, censure, and pain. Perhaps the best way to deal with such adverse situations is to train the mind to accept it, tolerate it, and be unshaken by it.

May we all have the blessing of being able to keep the mind equanimous when facing the eight worldly winds of gain, loss, fame, disrepute, blame, praise, pleasure, and pain.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. Su Dong-Po, an intellectual, learned man who was very knowledgeable about the Dhamma, couldn't keep his mind unshaken by the worldly winds. Why? What's your opinion?
2. What can we do to avoid being manipulated by the worldly winds?
3. How do you deal with the adverse conditions in the four pairs worldly winds?

36-38. Sorrowless, stainless, secure (Asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ)

Sorrowless (asokaṃ), stainless (virajaṃ), and secure (khemaṃ) are three similar blessings that are qualities of the arahants. This verse describes the extraordinary mental state of those fully liberated. With all impurity being removed from the mind, an arahant is stainless. He does not worry about gain and loss, fame and defame, and thus is sorrowless. His mind is always serene and peaceful, like the surface of a still pond without any ripples. The eight worldly conditions (lokadhamma) do not shake him. He stands firmly, equanimously, being compassionate but undisturbed. Like a fearless roaring lion, like the wind unconfined by screens, he always faces the world, no matter fair or foul, with unrestrained freedom.

Venerable Upasena was such a role model. At one time the Venerable Sāriputta and Upasena were staying near Rājagaha in the Cool Grove, under the Snake's Hood Grotto. Now at that time a viper fell on Venerable Upasena's body [and bit him]. Sorrowless and calm, without any change of his faculties, he addressed the monks, "Come, reverends, lift this body onto a cot and carry it outside before it's scattered right here like a handful of chaff."

Without seeing any impairment in Venerable Upasena's body or deterioration of his faculties, Venerable Sāriputta was deeply impressed by his lack of sorrow. He was convinced that Venerable Upasena was an arahant who had totally eradicated ego, possessiveness, and the underlying tendency to conceit. (SN 35:69)

In the background story to *Dhammapada* verse 96, there is a story of a sāmaṇera who also showed the extraordinary sorrowless and stainless mental states. When the seven-year-old boy's head was being shaved, the boy had his mind fixed steadfastly on the object of meditation he was given—the parts of the body and their nature of impurity. Due to his sharp faculties, he attained arahantship as soon as his head was shaved. After some time, the sāmaṇera accompanied his preceptor Tissa Thera to go to Sāvattḥī to pay homage to the Buddha.

On the way, they spent the night in a village monastery. According to the monastic rules, a sāmaṇera cannot sleep in the same room as a bhikkhu for three days successively. After three days, the sāmaṇera decided to sit up the whole night meditating beside the bed of his preceptor.

Tissa Thera was also concerned about the monastic rules. In order to suggest to the sāmaṇera that he should leave, Tissa Thera threw a palm-leaf fan at him. The

handle of the fan accidentally hit the sāmaṇera's eye and damaged it. The sāmaṇera covered that eye with one hand and went about his duties, such as getting water for Tissa Thera to wash his face. When the young sāmaṇera offered water with only one hand, Tissa Thera chided him and said that he should offer things with both hands. Only then did the sāmaṇera tell Tissa Thera what had happened. In shock and regret that he had wronged a truly noble person, Tissa Thera made an apology to the sāmaṇera. But the sāmaṇera calmly said to him:

"It was not the fault of yours, nor mine, but the fault of being in the cycle of rebirth."

In the endless cycle of rebirth, no one, including an arahant, can escape the ripening of bad kamma. The sāmaṇera's speech and behavior was a demonstration of the arahants' attitude—being sorrowless, stainless, and equanimous.

Brahmadatta Thera, an arahant, uttered this stanza:

*"For one without anger, tamed, living calmly,
Liberated by right knowledge,
At peace, poised:
Where would anger come from?"*

—*Theragāthā* 6.12, Verse 441

To be secure (khemam) means being sheltered from all danger. Where is there secure shelter? Only in nibbāna—cessation of mind and matter—can one be totally secure, forever sheltered from pain, sorrow, lamentation, aging, sickness, death, and rebirth. “Shelter” is merely a metaphor. Nibbāna is the cessation of all suffering. An arahant has completely uprooted lust, anger, and ignorance and thus will never be reborn in any realms of existence and is freed from the duress of birth, aging, sickness, and death. An arahant is fearless and free from worry at all times.

As ordinary human beings, our minds are filled with fear of losing our possessions—life, youth, health, family, money, property... How precious the arahants’ quality of security is! Therefore, obviously, to be sorrowless (asokaṃ), stainless (virajaṃ), and secure (khemam) is the highest blessing.

Reflection and Discussion:

1. After reading the 38 verses about “the highest blessings” in this book, is there any change in your views with regard to what a blessing is and how to get it?

*Etādisāni katvāna, sabbattha
maparājitā;*

*Sabbattha sotthiṃ gacchanti, taṃ
tesaṃ maṅgalamuttama' nti.*

**Everywhere undefeated when
acting in this way, people go
everywhere in well-being: This is
their highest blessing.**



After expounding the 38 kinds of blessing, the Buddha ended the *Maṅgala Sutta* with the verse above.

If we practice based on these 38 kinds of blessings, we will be undefeated anywhere, anytime. Life will be a meaningful one. We would live a life with the highest blessings.

“Not consorting with fools, consorting with the wise, paying homage to those worthy of homage.” This first verse in the *Maṅgala Sutta* provides sufficient guidance to have an auspicious life. If the remaining blessings are practiced accordingly, we will not have fear, but will be endowed with wisdom, contentment, righteous, and happiness. We will become ones who deserve the respect of others.

May all of us achieve this accomplishment!



Conclusion

All sentient beings desire blessings, but blessings are achieved by noble practice, not by praying or following rites and ritual. As the Buddha said, we are born and supported by our kamma, we are owners of our kamma, and we inherit the results of our own kamma. This is the right view we should first establish.

Based on this right view, a lay Buddhist should actively seek good spiritual friends and associate with the wise. Furthermore, good characteristics such as respect, humility, gratitude, and patience should be cultivated in order to make the mind malleable. Meanwhile, we also need to learn worldly knowledge and skills in order to support ourselves and our families; choose an

appropriate place to live; and look after our families and relatives. In order to protect ourselves and others, we also need to examine our body, speech, and mind regularly, try to do more meritorious deeds, and avoid unwholesome deeds. To take it a step further, we need to be diligent in the Dhamma: first, listen to the Dhamma from the wise by approaching noble monastics more frequently, and secondly, practice the three-fold training of morality, concentration, and wisdom to purify the mind continuously, until wisdom is fully developed. In this way, we can adopt the mindset of being “unshaken by the eight worldly winds” and, most important of all, eventually reach the completely sorrowless and secure state beyond the reach of the world.

“Don’t be disturbed by fortune or misfortune.

Be relaxed, no matter how flowers bloom and wilt.

To be or not to be needs no hard decision.

Whether the clouds are passing high or low,

Let nature take its course.”

—Ancient Chinese poem

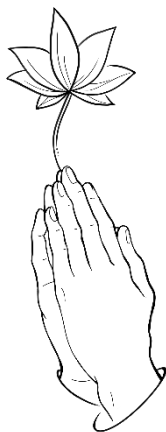
The teaching below from the Buddha can summarize the essence of the *Maṅgala Sutta*:

Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ, Not doing evil deeds,
kusalassa upasampadā; Gathering the wholesome,
Sacitta pariyo dapaṇaṃ, Purifying one's own mind—
etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ. That is the teaching of the
Buddhas.

— *Dhp* 183

**Homage to you, O Buddha, O hero,
freed in every way!
Meditating in the fruits of your practice,
I live without defilements.**

—Thag, Verse 1.47





Sharing of Merits

Let this merit accrue to our teachers, parents and all relatives, all humans, all Brahmas, Sakka, Māra, all devas and nagas of mighty power, Yama, all enemies from previous lives, and all those we are not acquainted with—may all of them be peaceful, joyful, happy, and blessed. May we never associate with fools, life after life, and always associate with the wise, until we are liberated.

May all kalyāṇa-mittatā who took part in this book also be peaceful, joyful, happy, and blessed. May this meritorious deed be a condition for us for the attainment of nibbāna.

May our departed relatives receive this sharing of merit. May they be happy and free from suffering.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Appendix: Maṅgala Sutta Pāli-sikkhā

Evaṃ me sutam: ekaṃ
samayaṃ bhagavā
sāvattthiyaṃ viharati jetavane
anāthapiṇḍikassa ārāme.

I have heard that at one time the
Blessed One was staying in
Savatthi at Jeta's Grove,
Anathapindika's monastery.

Atha kho aññatarā devatā
abhikkantāya rattiya
abhikkantaṇṇā kevala-
kappaṃ jetavanaṃ obhāsetvā
yena bhagavā tenupasaṅkami.

Then a certain deva, in the far
extreme of the night, with
extreme radiance lighting up the
entirety of Jeta's Grove,
approached the Blessed One.

Upasaṅkamtvā bhagavantaṃ
abhivādetvā ekamantaṃ
aṭṭhāsi. Ekamantaṃ ṭhitā kho
sā devatā bhagavantaṃ
gāthāya ajjhabhāsi.

On approaching, having bowed
down to the Blessed One, the
deva stood to one side. Standing
to one side, the deva addressed
him with a verse:

Bahū devā manussā ca,
Maṅgalāni acintayum;
Ākaṅkhamānā sotthānaṃ,
Brūhi maṅgalaṃ-uttamaṃ.

Many devas and human beings
give thought to blessing,
desiring well-being.
Tell, then, the highest blessing.

Asevanā ca bālānaṃ,
Paṇḍitānañ-ca sevanā;
Pūjā ca pūjaneyyānaṃ,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.

Not consorting with fools,
consorting with the wise,
paying homage to those worthy
of homage:

Patirūpa-desa-vāso ca,
Pubbe ca kata-puññatā;
Atta-sammā-pañidhi ca,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.

This is the highest blessing.
Living in a suitable location,
having made merit in the past,
directing oneself rightly:
This is the highest blessing.

Bāhu-saccañ-ca sippañ-ca,
Vinayo ca susikkhito;
Subhāsītā ca yā vācā,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.

Broad knowledge, skill,
well-trained in discipline,
well-spoken words:
This is the highest blessing.

Mātā-pitu upatṭhānaṃ,
Putta-dārassa saṅgaho;
Anākulā ca kammantā,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.

Support for one's parents,
assistance to one's wife and
children,
engaging in faultless
occupation:
This is the highest blessing.

Dānañ-ca dhamma-cariyā ca,
Ñātakānañ-ca saṅgaho;
Anavajjāni kammāni,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.

Giving, living in rectitude,
assistance to one's relatives,
deeds that are blameless:
This is the highest blessing.

Āratī viratī pāpā,
Majja-pānā ca saññaṃ;
Appamādo ca dhammesu,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.

Avoiding, refraining from evil,
refraining from intoxicants,
being heedful of the qualities of
the mind:
This is the highest blessing.

Gāravo ca nivāto ca,
Santuṭṭhi ca katañ-ñutā;
Kālena dhammassavanaṃ,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.

Respect, humility,
contentment, gratitude,
hearing the Dhamma on timely
occasions:
This is the highest blessing.

Khantī ca sovacassatā,
Samaṇānañ-ca dassanaṃ;
Kālena dhamma-sācakchā,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.

Patience, compliance,
seeing recluses,
discussing the Dhamma on
timely occasions:
This is the highest blessing.

Tapo ca brahma-cariyañ-ca,
Ariya-saccāna dassanaṃ;
Nibbāna-sacchikiriyā ca,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.

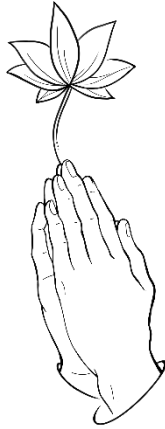
Austerity, celibacy,
seeing the noble truths,
realizing nibbāna:
This is the highest blessing.

Phuṭṭhassa loka-dhammehi,
Cittaṃ yassa na kampaṭi;
Asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ,
Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.

A mind that, when touched
by the ways of the world,
is unshaken, sorrowless,
stainless, secure:
This is the highest blessing.

Etādisāni katvāna,
Sabbattha maparājītā;
Sabbattha sotthiṃ gacchanti,
Taṃ tesamaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ”
nti.

Everywhere undefeated
when acting in this way,
people go everywhere in well-
being:
This is their highest blessing.



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