

BUDDHISM IN EVERYDAY LIFE

By Andrew Scott (Sri Lanka)

The Voice of Buddhism is aware that we are constantly reaching new readers who know very little about Buddhism and occasionally we print articles which will be of interest and value to those who are as yet unfamiliar with the deeper aspects of the Buddha's Teachings. We are also aware that many readers, especially in countries where there is no Buddhist culture as such, would like to know how to live as good Buddhists on a day-to-day basis. We are grateful to the writer of this article for supplying such a need.

Andrew Scott hails from Kandy, Sri Lanka and is a prolific writer on Buddhism and Buddhist topics to national and international magazines. His literary contributions to the cause of Buddhism have been much discussed in academic circles.

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Buddhism, the message of the Buddha, delivered over 2,500 years back, has now penetrated even into the remotest corners of the world and the modern world views it with deeper understanding, attaching a great meaning to it. Some call it a religion. Others call it a philosophy. Some others think of it as both a religion and a philosophy. However, the most appropriate meaning to attach to it is that Buddhism is a way of life where the Buddha always emphasised the practical aspect of his great teaching.

We are fortunate to be Buddhists as the Buddhist way of life is the most simple and the easiest to follow. However, it is saddening that many are unaware of how they would lead a true Buddhist way of life and sometimes even devout Buddhists tend to forget the correct Buddhist way of life.

For one to lead a correct Buddhist way of life one should follow accepted Buddhist cultural practices which is a unique feature in the philosophy of a religion with depth and understanding. And important feature in Buddhism is that Buddhist culture has penetrated into every aspect of our life and we need the guidance of our religion for our everyday life. As practising Buddhists we should keep in mind the day to day accepted religious observances and practices which will bring peace, happiness and ultimate salvation.

There is no doubt that the Buddha Dhamma occupies an exalted place in a true Buddhist life forming an important phase in our daily lives. For a Buddhist it is a very admirable habit to rise early in the morning so that he could attend to his toilet quietly and still have a few minutes left to be spent in one's shrine-room

and to contemplate before a Buddha statue or even a Buddha picture. If one recites the five precepts and determines to live up to them each day there is no doubt that he has begun the day well. There are some Buddhists who are particular to read a passage of a Dhamma book before starting the day's work and this is a very good way of beginning one's day.

Today, especially in the mornings, most of us have to rush through our activities and it seems that one cannot spare very much time for religious observances in the mornings. But even in this situation anyone can start the day contemplating some Buddhist thoughts; one could mentally recollect the words of homage, refuge, precepts and worship. It is in this fashion that a true Buddhist should mindfully start his day filled with noble thoughts of the Dhamma and determined to spend the day in the true Buddhist tradition. Thus, following the practical way of the Dhamma we must try to free ourselves of all thoughts of worry, hurry, irritation and impatience and Buddhists must always try to radiate *metta* or goodwill towards all around them. It must be realized that time spent in this manner will not have a tiring effect and even at the end of the day one would feel fresh, calm and serene to successfully handle more and more work.

Today many of us, both Buddhist and non-Buddhists, are used to spending a greatest part of our leisure time in idle gossip and engaging in other anti-social habits such as consuming liquor, going to clubs and wasting time in unwholesome pursuits. This is harmful to both the progress of the individual as well as the progress of the society in which he lives. Everyone living according to the Buddha Dhamma should shun unprofitable gossip and instead should engage themselves in thoughts of goodwill and joy and should take special care to bestow a calming effect on the environment in which they live.

After a day's hard work we should relax. But even in relaxation one could think of the Buddha Dhamma and its serene effects on humanity. For instance, when we observe the beautiful colours and the many shapes of clouds in the evening sky and then when we see, in a few minutes, the magnificent colours change, the shapes disfiguring and disappearing, we can apply the thoughts of *Anicca*, *Dukka* and *Anatta*. The same principle can be applied to every change in life.

To a Buddhist, meditation provides an effective antidote to the stress and strain of the modern world beset with numerous economic, social and cultural problems. At least a few minutes from one's day should be set aside for meditation which bears a tremendous influence on those who practise it regularly. Even when tired of some activities such as walking, reading or writing one can turn to meditation to regain mental calmness, peace and joy.

Even young children should be nurtured in the good traditions of the Buddha Dhamma. Children brought up in such a religious atmosphere will grow up with a deep veneration for the Buddha Dhamma and the Sangha. A home where the parents and the elders are truly religious sets a noble example to the

children and such a home built up on a solid religious foundation will be a happy home.

If all Buddhists apply the Dhamma to our everyday life we can create an integrated society which will be a solace to the entire world. It is really sorrowful that some Buddhists think of the Buddha Dhamma only when having a religious ceremony or a *Dana* (offering food and other requisites to the monks) or when confronted with some difficulty such as the death of a dear one or when a serious misfortune befalls.

A true Buddhist will be serene at all times and will not be disturbed by petty worldly things. Buddhists who frequently meditate on the transitory nature of all things around us will always bear lightly the misfortunes and frustrations that visit us at some time or the other in the lives of everyone.

Let us also think about some other simple ways of practising Buddhism in our daily lives. It is appropriate for all Buddhists to have a Buddha image or a picture of the Buddha in their homes, of course not as an ornamental showpiece, as is the case in many homes, but as an object of inspiration and veneration. The serene figure of the Buddha, an emblem of loving kindness, purity and perfection, will serve as a great source of inspiration and will help us to surmount all difficulties and worries.

An important Buddhist practice should be to send young children to systematically organized religious classes conducted in the temples. From youth, all should be trained to actively participate in the temple ceremonies, specially on full-moon *Poya* (religious) days. A most desirable and meritorious act is to observe the Eight Precepts during the *Poya* days. The entire *Poya* day should be devoted to religious matters such as meditation, religious discussion, reading of religious books and helping the needy.

In celebrating family and social festivals too, Buddhists should remember to conduct themselves according to the Buddhist principles. They should make it a point to conduct these activities in a dignified manner in keeping with the principles of cultures Buddhists and even on such occasions Buddhists should refrain from all intoxicants and any form of vile amusement. It is good to remember that in organizing any function Buddhist should take care not to cause any nuisance to the others.

In life we are always amidst death, a sad and solemn occasion. The elaborate and expensive funeral rites which are carried out at certain Buddhist funerals are not Buddhist practices at all. According to Buddhist practices funeral rites should be solemn and simple. Thus, even at death, un-Buddhistic rites should never be adhered to and instead Buddhist practice should be perpetuated. According to Buddhist practices Buddhist monks are invited to the house of the deceased or to the cemetery to carry out a simple religious ceremony. Many

pose the question whether, according to Buddhist rites, a deceased person should be buried or cremated. Buddhism is flexible on this issue and the choice of whatever method is left entirely to the last wish of the deceased or, more frequently, is carried out at the direction of the next of kin.

It is a good Buddhist practice to refrain from erecting expensive pandals and other decorations during various religious festivals such as Vesak. Instead, this money could be harnessed to better use by donating it to some religious or charitable organization which could use that money meaningfully.

All are aware that giving Dana is the foundation of Buddhism and *Dhamma Dana* (lit. 'the gift of truth' i.e. the spreading of the Teaching) is pre-eminent among them. Today throughout the world the value of Dhamma Dana is being increasingly appreciated and to a world lacking in the fundamental of serene living, a world intoxicated with a passion for power and a greed for money, Dhamma Dana is something so worthwhile to be reckoned with.

If the Buddha Dhamma is given the foremost place in our everyday lives and if it is practised daily our living will become more meaningful and there will be happiness and harmony in the world which is now divided into several explosive factions.