

BUDDHIST ETHICS

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In analysing the above concept I think it would be useful to examine as to who a Buddhist is. Those who believe that the Lord Buddha is their Sole Religious Teacher and those who seek refuge in Him are termed Buddhists. Likewise the adherents of Jesus Christ are called Christians, the followers of Siva are known as Saivas and those who believe in Prophet Mohammed are termed Mohammedans. Although those who take refuge in the Buddha are generally known as Buddhists a real Buddhist is one who faithfully adheres to the Buddha's doctrine and takes refuge in the Triple Gem in order to escape from suffering resulting in the cycle of births (Samsara). Thus those who follow Buddhism are Buddhists and the doctrine propagated by the Buddha is Buddhism. Belief is faith. Reverence is not faith but a series of actions based on belief.

There are certain rules which should be observed by Buddhists only and these are known as Buddhist ethics. This is a very wide subject and I shall endeavour to give here only a brief description. There are those things that should be practised (caritabbam - carittam) and there are those that should be avoided (vajjetabbam varittam). These are the very things that some religious teachers have laid down as to be gathered (Upadeya) and to be discarded (Heya).

The term Buddhists include monks (Bhikkhus) nuns (Bhikkhunis) male lay disciples (Upasakas) and female lay disciples (Upasikas). The first and the second categories refer to the clergy while the third and the fourth mean laity.

The code of conduct to discipline the clergy and the laity are to be found in the Patimokkha and the Sigalovada Sutta respectively. Therefore Patimokkha is known as discipline for the clergy while the Sigalovada Sutta is called discipline for the laity. Those who translated the Sigalovada Sutta of the Digha Nikaya into English have referred to it as the Manual of Buddhist Ethics. Although the facts regarding the discipline for the clergy and the laity have been dealt with separately it has to be accepted when taken in common, a large volume of things under the subject Buddhist code of Ethics is included in the Sigalovada Sutta. It is because the term Buddhist denotes the above mentioned four categories. The clergy are disciplined through the Precepts for the novices (Samanera Sila) upwards while the laities are disciplined from the Five Precepts onwards.

As laid down in the Sigalovada Sutta a person desirous of progress in both worlds should avoid the four defilements, four wrong courses, the six entrances to hell (14 in all) and should perform the sixty one (61) duties such as attendance on parents etc. the total of both categories being seventy five (75).

Next these things are one by one briefly explained. Those actions that defile a person are called four defilements (Karma klesa). They are (1) Destroying of life (2) Taking what is not given (3) Indulging in unlawful sexual intercourse (4) Littering which is untrue. The first human quality should be to abstain from destroying of life (Manussa dhamma nama dasakusala dhamma patha — Commentary to Maha Simhanada Sutta). Harming of living beings is a mean act committed by animals and is improper for the human beings to indulge in it. The noble will never commit such acts even at the cost of their lives. It is the same with regard to others such as taking what is not given.

'Agati' means reaching the wrong course and people commit wrong course of actions through avarice (lobha) hatred (krodha) fear (bhaya) and ignorance (moha). The fame of a person who commits these four wrong courses of actions declines like the waning moon. It is illustrated in this stanza:

“Chanda dosa bhaya moha yodhammam ativattati,
Nihiyati tassa yaso - kala pakkheva candima.”

The Buddha has declared six sources for the destruction of wealth. They are

- (1) Use of liquor
- (2) Promenading of public streets at unseasonable hours
- (3) Frequenting of places of dancing, singing, instrumental music and such like
- (4) Indulgence in gambling
- (5) Association of unrighteous friends
- (6) Addiction to indolence.

It is stated in the Parabhava Sutta that a person who indulges in gambling etc. is at the door of his downfall.

“Itthi dhutto sura dhutto akkha dhutto ca yo naro,
Laddham laddham vinaseti tam parabbava to mukham” (Parabhava Sutta)

Besides the already stated ones to be avoided in this article there are sixty one (61) duties that should be performed.

They are five duties of parents, five duties of children, five duties of pupils, five duties of teachers, five duties of a husband, five duties of a wife, five duties of friends either way, five duties of a master, five duties of a servant, five duties of the laity, and six duties of monks.

Thus a layman has to perform fifty five (55) duties while a monk is expected to perform six duties likewise.

The parents who are known as the direction East are also known by such names as 'Maha Brahma'. 'Purvadeva' 'Purvacarya' and 'Ahuneyya' .
"Brahmati matapitaro pubbacariyo ti vuccati" (Anguttara Nikaya)

The Buddha, noblest of the noble began with the duties of children towards their parents when he preached the sixty one (61) of them to Sigala. The five duties of children towards their parents are:

- (1) They should support and protect them and supply their wants
- (2) They should perform the duties devolving upon their parents
- (3) They should maintain the good name of the family
- (4) They should endeavour to be worthy of their inheritance
- (5) They should do meritorious deeds and share the merits once they are dead and gone (by charity and deeds of merit)

In these five ways parents should discharge their obligations towards their children.

- (1) They should restrain their children from committing vice
- (2) They should establish them in virtuous deeds
- (3) They should give them proper education and prepare them for some profession
- (4) They should arrange suitable marriages for them when they come of age
- (5) They should give them their inheritance at the proper time

In five ways a pupil should honour his teachers namely:

- (1) He should arise from his seat on seeing the teacher
- (2) He should attend on him
- (3) He should listen to him with confidence
- (4) He should serve him and supply his wants
- (5) He should learn the lessons with earnestness and diligence

In five ways a teacher should show his affection to his pupils, namely:

- (1) He should discipline them properly
- (2) He should impart knowledge well
- (3) He should teach all that he has learnt
- (4) He should speak well of pupils' virtues and attainments to his friends
- (5) He should protect them in his locality

In five ways a husband should show his love to his wife, namely:

- (1) He should use kind and respectful words
- (2) He should refrain from using reproachful language towards her
- (3) He should be devoted to her
- (4) He should entrust all his wealth to her custody
- (5) He should provide her with garments and ornaments

The wife should show her affection to the husband in the following five ways.

- (1) She should manage the domestic affairs in an orderly and tidy way
- (2) She should generously treat the associates
- (3) She should be faithful to him
- (4) She should carefully look after the wealth of the husband
- (5) She should perform all her duties diligently and skillfully.

In five ways a house-holder becomes a good and worthy friend, namely:

- (1) By being generous (i.e. offering presents etc.)
- (2) By being courteous in speech and actions
- (3) By conducting himself towards his welfare
- (4) By thinking of them as equanimous as himself
- (5) By being as good as his word

In five ways the friend thus ministered to should show his regard for him, namely:

- (1) Watching over him when he is off his guard
- (2) By safeguarding his property when he is negligent
- (3) By rendering him assistance when calamity threatens him
- (4) By not forsaking him when in adversity
- (5) By showing kind consideration to his family and descendants

In five ways a master should look to the welfare of his servants, namely:

- (1) By assigning them with work proportionate to their physical and mental capacity
- (2) By giving them suitable food and wages
- (3) By looking after them when they are sick
- (4) By sharing delicacies with them
- (5) By allowing them leisure and granting them leave at times.

Servants thus looked after by their master owe five duties to him, namely:

- (1) They should awake from sleep before the master
- (2) They should sleep after the master had retired for the night
- (3) They should accept only what is given
- (4) They should attend to the duties properly
- (5) They should extol the virtues of the master

The layman serves his spiritual teachers in five ways, namely:

- (1) By affectionate acts
- (2) By affectionate words
- (3) By affectionate thoughts
- (4) By offering them a cordial welcome
- (5) By supplying them their material needs

The spiritual masters respond to the good conduct of the laymen in six ways, namely

- (1) They should restrain them from committing sin,
- (2) They should induce them in virtue
- (3) They should show loving kindness to them
- (4) They should declare unto them teachings unheard before
- (5) They should dispel doubts of teaching already heard
- (6) They should point out unto them the path leading to heaven

By practising the Buddhist ethics stated herein it behoves to achieve progress and welfare of both worlds.