

EDUCATION OF BUDDHISM TO CHILDREN

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Buddhism is a doctrine of truth. It is a way of life which leads to the real understanding of the true facts of our everyday life. It is the only method for eliminating the misery of life by regular and constant practice of self-control which leads to self-enlightenment and to one's deliverance from all sufferings.

Our Great Teacher, Lord Buddha, himself, has taught us the right path to live peacefully and happily and also to let others do the same. He advised us not to believe blindly in others in anything because it is spoken of by many; not to believe in traditions merely because they have been handed down from many generations; not to believe because the written statement of some old sage is produced; not to believe in what they have fancied; or thinking that because it is extraordinary it must have been implanted by a god but to see for our own selves, to examine and to draw our own conclusions in all things.

Ven. K. Dhammananda says in his book 'Why Religion'.

“Many educated and uneducated young people cannot agree with traditions, customs and rituals performed by their parents under the name of religion. Among these practices are certainly some of those which to a modern person seem to be ridiculous and waste of money and therefore cannot be accepted. It is therefore meaningless to force young people to practise such things; and if they are forced to do so, the result will be either they turn away from all religions or give up their parents' religion”.

The same writer says in his book 'Noble Living'.

“How many parents are worrying today due to their children's misbehavior? This, in fact, is due mainly to the unfortunate cause that Buddhist children have no facilities to learn their own religion. So when they grow up some of them embrace other religion, while others will remain without practising any religion. They are the ones who disobey their parents, and give unnecessary trouble to innocent people and endanger the freedom of others. If your children are ungrateful and disobedient to you, who then is to be blamed? It cannot be denied that it is you,

yourselves, who are to be blamed; because you, being parents have neglected proper guidance for your children and therefore, have failed to train them to respect and show gratitude to others. And considering all these, how could you expect your children to be grateful to you?"

For example: We all know that a young growing plant tends to bend at the stem which is its backbone, and if we, the owners do not straighten up the plant by putting a guiding stick into the ground beside it and tie the stem to it, we can never straighten the plant when it is already grown up. I am sure that you, parents will agree that this same principle also applies to growing children.

Now why do parents want to send their children to school when they are of age? Why?.....Because many parents want their children to have proper guidance in gaining academic knowledge hereby enabling them to get a better job so as to earn more money. Parents should not cling too much to the idea that money is the solution to everything. You are giving your children the education they need by sending them to school and that is only one part of your responsibilities you are discharging as being parents. Can any parent be positively certain that from this tender age till they can earn their own living; your children cannot be led astray due to their ignorance by mixing with bad company? If not.....then, why don't you accomplish the other part of your responsibility by giving your children the proper guidance they so greatly need so as to enable them to gain the value of sound religious education in becoming good citizens of the country, to lead a peaceful and happy family life and to have a peaceful atmosphere at home. If only parents take this matter seriously, there won't be a day to shed tears on account of their children going astray.

Ven. Dhammananda also mentioned:-

"The behaviour of young people with or without a religious back-ground is entirely different. The person with a religious education always looks at others with sympathetic feeling which has been implanted in that person's heart, whilst one without a religion is inclined to be more artificial in outlook, giving forced sympathy or kindness for outward show only. Such artificial feelings do not last and the real colour would soon be exposed. The animal nature of such persons can easily be seen in them at any moment if they have had no religious education.

Just as one has to work out one's own salvation, so we Buddhists must develop a Buddhist educational system suitable for our children. The problem, in particular, is: "How best can Buddhist parents teach Buddhism to their own children?" We

need religious education from our infancy in our homes and the education programme depends very much on the age of the child or children. We must not overlook the fact that everything depends on how much parents themselves succeed in understanding the Dhamma in their everyday life, in making Buddhism a living thing, and not just something to talk about.

Smaller children due to their ignorance are often cruel to animals because they do not realize what they are doing. Here, everything depends on the parents noticing such thing early enough and making the children understand what they are doing is wrong. Buddhist parents should be careful that their children avoid all cruelty to animals and should always respect an animal as a living being.

Children will indeed be learning the essentials of religion when they are taught to respect and obey their parents; love their neighbours, tell the truth, be unharmed, not to carry tales and not to take what is not given to them. Children brought up in this manner will have their religion well-established and eventually, when they walk out into the world, the religion in them will act as a shield to protect them in the battle of life.

Like a good scout, children should also be taught to help old men or women to cross a road, rescue kittens or puppies that have fallen into a ditch. There are so many opportunities where even a child can show that he is practising Buddhism in following the examples of his parents.

Children develop the power of doing things by observation to a high degree and imitation is with them an important factor. Hence, the good examples of the parents are the most important part of any education and if parents live in accordance with the teaching of Lord Buddha (Dhamma) this will be the surest guide to children whatever their age.

It is important that every Buddhist household should have a Buddha image or at least a picture of the Enlightened One. It is also a good idea to let each child wear a small image of the Buddha around the neck just like those of Christian children wearing a cross. For Buddhists, Vesak Day can also play an important part in family life. Children always enjoy festivals and there is no reason why Buddhist parents should not celebrate on this day just as Christians are celebrating the Christmas Day. Vesak Day is quite different from an ordinary day, for on this Full Moon Day, our Great Teacher, Lord Buddha, was born, gained enlightenment and passed away.

Some parents give the inexcusable opinion by saying: “Our child can choose his religion later on, just as we did. We have no right to influence it”. It may be too late after the influences of Christianity and materialism have worked on the child unopposed. How can we expect the child to find the way by himself? It is hope that Buddhist parents will realise the dangers of educational indifference towards their children. So all those Buddhist parents who want to see their children treading the path of righteousness should not put off this religious education until later on, otherwise when their children grow up, they may no longer have a free intellectual choice.

Buddhist parents have not merely the right to influence their children in the Buddhist way of thinking, but it is their responsibility and duty to do so. The best gift for this world is the gift of the Dhamma and which parents would take the responsibility for depriving their own children of this gift.