

THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY OF THE BUDDHISTS

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One of the most important ceremonies of the Buddhists is that of marriage. Although marriage amongst Buddhists is not a sacrament like the Hindu marriage; it does not for that matter occupy a less important position in the life of the Buddhists. In many places the Buddha encouraged the ideal form of marriage and praised the married people; he says that even gods admire him who takes care of his family virtuously. Marriage is a golden link between man and woman for the betterment of socio-religious life. It is a life which, by imposing new obligations on two individuals sharing it, is likely to change society for the better.

Some scholars argue that the Buddhist has got no marriage ceremony of their own and that they follow the Hindu system of marriage. This is not based on factual evidence. There is no doubt that in some places the Buddhists follow the system of marriage from olden times but revolutionary changes were also effected subsequently in the customs, traditions, usages, rituals, rites, motives and importance of the marriage system by the Buddhists. The priests do not play any prominent part in the marriage ceremony of the Buddhists. Usually Buddhist monks do not solemnise the marriage.

But in practice the Buddhist monks are inevitably invited to grace the marriage ceremony and to invoke their blessings. Every Buddhist thinks that marriage ceremony will not be valid unless the monk blesses the bride and the bridegroom before their marriage. So we find it a practice with the Buddhists to invite the monks to give pre-marital blessings. After the administration of the "Tisarana" the monks recite some Sutras.

Unfortunately today many Buddhists neglect to perform such religious services either visiting the Temple or inviting the monks to their homes prior to the weddings. The marriage is the most important event of one's life. Therefore one should not neglect his or her religion on such an important occasion. Polygamy is not unusual among Buddhists. But the husband must obtain the permission of his wife before marrying a second time.

Divorce was allowed, but in practice it was very rare. Both the husband and wife may appeal for divorce if they do not want to live with each other. Unlike the practice among the Hindus early marriage was not encouraged. The marriageable age for the girl has been fixed at sixteen years. The re-marriage of widows was prevalent among the Buddhists. But there are many instances to show that after death of the first husband the widow practised chastity and did not marry again. According to tradition marriage should take place only once in

a life time. So virtuous women never marry again after the death of their husbands. So some husbands also follow the same tradition. But in no circumstance is it compulsory.

It is said that marriage is a social contract for the betterment of human life. Before marriage men and women are free from responsibility. A married couple have to face many responsibilities. Marriage does not mean mere love or enjoyment, but it is associated with so many duties, pleasure and pain, comedy and tragedy, love and compassion. Therefore, a married couple have to build up their own future with much caution and self-restraint. They have little time for enjoyment and have to fulfill never ending duties. Any negligence of duties may involve serious loss and disadvantages.

In order to get some relief from such troubles the Buddha prescribed many rules and regulations for the householder. He says that a householder should be mindful of his duty.

He must observe five precepts and take care of his family virtuously. Husband and wife are equal in worldly affairs. No one is superior to the other. Each will perform his or her own duty. The man will perform his duty as a husband and the woman as a wife. No one will take undue advantage of other. Buddha says that a householder should abstain from killing, lying, stealing and adultery. He must not indulge in intoxicating drinks which involve monetary loss of prestige. He should not associate with bad people and indulge in gambling. He should not go out for an untimely walk. He should not idle. He should not mix with the cheat, the swindler and the dishonest who speak much and do little. He should never lament for the past and expect too much in the future. He should never praise in front and blame at the back.

He should confide in his friends and should not give out the secrets of his friends to others. He should try to do good to his friends. He should boldly face the impending danger and try to avoid the danger which has not yet come. All these rules apply also to the female partner of the household.

A Buddhist householder should never ill-treat his wife. He should use decent language to her. He should trust her and offer her ornaments and garments according to his capacity. He should not be attached to other girls.

The wife also should be respectful to her husband and perform her duties with great care and caution. She should not mix with other men and must show her ability by honouring her husband's relatives.

The ten admonitions given by Dhananjaya Setthi to his daughter Visakha when she was going to her father-in-law's house were: (1) Do not carry indoor fire outside. (2) Do not carry outdoor fire inside. (3) Give only to him who returns. (4) Give not to him who does not return. (5) Give to him who returns and to him

who does not return. (6) Sit happily. (7) Eat happily. (8) Sleep happily. (9) Respect the fire. (10) Honour the household divinity.

The first rule means that a wife should not disclose the private conversation within the house to outsiders. Such a thing may create some trouble in the family administration.

The second rule forbids the wife to convey such kind of conversation from outside to the members of the house.

The third rule advises his wife to render possible help to those who return the borrowed article.

The fourth rule means that a wife should not give loans to those who do not return the borrowed article in due time.

The fifth rule implies that a housewife should be considerate to offer assistance to a person who is unable to repay the debt. She should confer help on him without considering his ability to repay the borrowed article.

The sixth rule means that a wife should not remain seated while she sees her father-in-law, mother-in-law and husband standing.

The seventh rule forbids the wife to take food without serving her father-in-law, mother-in-law and husband. After serving them first she should take her own meal.

The eighth rule indicates that a wife should not sleep before her father-in-law, mother-in-law and husband sleep. She has to perform all the duties which she owes to them before they go to bed.

The ninth rule is that a wife should regard her father-in-law, mother-in-law and husband as a flame of fire. The last one means that a wife should show due respect to family priests. If a monk comes to her house for alms she must offer to him whatever food there is in the house to spare.

These ten admonitions are applicable to all housewives. Any woman who observes these rules may avoid many kinds of family troubles.

The admonitions given by Buddha to the bride who was going to be married at the house of Mendaka Setthi, are as follows

(1) Your well-wisher parents offer you to the hands of the husband. You should rise up early in the morning and perform all the duties till evening. You should not go to bed without finishing your daily duties. Rising early in the morning you should see whether servants are doing their respective duties or not. You should perform also all the household chores with such intelligence and responsibility. You must not speak harsh words to anybody and go to bed before

father-in-law, mother-in-law and husband and you must not eat before them. After meals you should take care of left over foods.

(2) You must show due respect to your husband, preceptor, parents, and family priest and serve the guest with proper seats and drink.

(3) You should be an expert in weaving, spinning, needle works or get it performed by others with much care and caution. You must not be unmindful in doing it.

(4) You should be careful to inspect the works of servants or maid-servants as well as showing them sympathy in times of their sickness and difficulties. You should provide them with proper clothing. If you do not do so it will be difficult for you to hire them in future.

(5) A wife should preserve the husband's property e.g. gold, silver, paddy and other crops etc., with much caution and care. She must not steal or misuse them. She must not drink or be attached to other men.

According to Buddha those who observe these rules will be reborn into the Nirmanarati heaven after the dissolution of the body. That is true in the case of modern wives also.

