

# **Siam Saamtri**

## **A Buddhist System of Thai Education**

Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya

(P. A. Payutto)

### **Siam Saamtri School**

A Buddhist System of Education

40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Published in Homage to the Buddha

# สยามสามไตร

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## **Siam Saamtri**

### **A Buddhist System of Thai Education**

by Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (P. A. Payutto)

translated by Robin Moore

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## Anumodanā

At the commencement of the 2008 academic year, when Siam Saamtri School began to use its new name, members of the school administration explained how the name 'Siam Saamtri' conveys the principles and objectives lying at the core of the school's curriculum and development goals. These endeavours resulted in the publication of this eponymous book in 2009.

Siam Saamtri School later wished to share the principles contained in this book to a wider audience. For this purpose, they received the cooperation by Mr. Robin Moore to translate the book into English.

The English translation has now been completed, and on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Siam Saamtri School it will be distributed as part of the celebrations in 2021.

I wish to express my appreciation to Siam Saamtri School and to Mr. Robin Moore for their generous and wholesome efforts culminating in this 'gift of the Dhamma' (*dhamma-dāna*). This book will help to advance the field of education and propagate the Buddha's teachings, benefiting both students of Buddhism and members of the general public. May this gift of the Dhamma accomplish its objectives, thus promoting virtue and understanding and generating long-lasting wellbeing for all.

Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (P. A. Payutto)  
28 August 2020

## Preface

The seeds of this book were sown in late 2006 when Siam Saamtri School began the process of choosing its new name.<sup>1</sup> Members of the school came across a book of mine called *Saamtri*,<sup>2</sup> and liking this title, they suggested combining it with the term 'Siam'.<sup>3</sup>

The name seemed apt. 'Saamtri' conveys the essential principles of the Buddhist teachings and it also captures the essence of education. 'Siam', which is another name for the nation of Thailand, can be translated in a way consonant with the Dhamma,<sup>4</sup> fitting well with the term Saamtri. Finally, it was unanimously agreed to use the name Siam Saamtri for the school.

The purpose of this new name was not only to be pleasing to the ear, but to cast light on the gist of education, both theoretical and practical. In the autumn of 2007, administrators, teachers and parents associated with the school visited Wat Nyanavesakavan in order to discuss the Dhamma and listen to the interpretation of the name 'Siam Saamtri'. As a result, they had an occasion to increase their knowledge of Buddhist principles pertaining to the fundamentals of education and were able to consider practical ways to achieve their pedagogical goals.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: at that time Nue Noy Kindergarten and Baan Phut Primary School were merging and moving to a new location. The school administrators were looking for a new name for this combined school.

<sup>2</sup> Originally published in 2001. [Trans.: alternative English title: *The Triple Triad*. The terms 'Saamtri' and 'Siam' will be explained at more length below.]

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: to avoid confusion, note that the name of the school 'Siam Saamtri' is also the title of this book.

<sup>4</sup> Trans.: Dhamma/Dharma: the Buddha's teachings.

Approximately six months later, on Visākha Pūjā,<sup>1</sup> marking the formal naming ceremony of the school and the commencement of the 2008 academic year,<sup>2</sup> we had another meeting, during which we discussed the progression of the work undertaken at the school, from the preparation of teachers up to achieving the true objective of education: of bringing about wellbeing for individuals, society and all of humankind.

These two meetings comprise the source of this book, which is divided accordingly into two parts:

Part 1 focuses on theory. It begins with a short definition of the term ‘Siam’ followed by an explanation of ‘Saamtri’ (‘triple triad’), representing three key Buddhist teachings, namely: the Three Jewels (*tiratana*), the Three Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*), and the Three Trainings (*tisikkhā*), respectively.<sup>3</sup>

Buddhism views human beings as requiring training and cultivation. In other words, excellence and nobility is achieved by way of learning. The very aim of the Buddhist teachings is to bring about this excellence, which is intimately connected with wellbeing and happiness. Hence, all of the key Buddhist teachings inherently pertain to education.

It is not within the scope of this book to elaborate on the numerous subsidiary teachings related to study and practice found throughout the scriptures. Instead, the focus is on the chief, overarching teachings, presenting a broad and fundamental system of human development. In particular, the book highlights those aspects of the teachings linked to practice and training in the

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the full-moon of May; the most important Buddhist holiday, celebrating the birth, enlightenment, and passing away of the Buddha.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: in Thailand, the school year is divided into two semesters. The first begins in the beginning of May and ends in October; the second begins in November and ends in March.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: all of these terms will be explained in depth below.

modern age, providing a clearer view of methods to be applied for success in education.

It is fair to say that an understanding of these three key teachings is the basis or wellspring for any stable system of human development. This is because they plumb the profound truths of the world and of human life. The stronger our foundation of knowledge of these truths is, the more effective we will be at fulfilling our aims and objectives in the context of Buddhist education.

Part 2 focuses on practice. It describes principles of education that are based on a solid foundation of wisdom: an understanding of key teachings and truths inherent in nature. If we are endowed with a proper perspective, we can rest assured that our educational work will be on the right track and that it will bear fruit for individuals, communities, and for the world at large, including the natural environment.

Education is not restricted to rote learning in the classroom, nor is it solely comprised of teachings and recreation offered at school. Indeed, all of life and the entire planet is a place of study—a training ground—for children to learn. School is simply a microcosm of this. If we can assist children in developing their senses, cultivating a healthy relationship to the environment, improving social skills, and refining emotional and cognitive intelligence, whereby they participate in organizing their communities, building stable societies, and acquiring tools for tackling problems facing their culture, they will steer the world in a direction of true peace and prosperity.

Part II proposes an educational methodology revealing the Buddhist approach to beneficial human development, social improvement, and environmental conservation.

Apart from these two main sections, there is also an appendix titled 'Guidelines for Buddhists'. Although this appendix may appear brief, it is of particular significance, as it summarizes the

key principles and practices for Buddhists. One can say that this appendix is a summary of the material contained in this book, linking parts 1 and 2. It can be used as the starting point for drawing upon the conceptual groundwork outlined in Part 1, arranging it into a practical framework for real life, elaborated upon in Part 2.

The appendix ‘Guidelines for Buddhists’ acts as a form of pledge, whereby we can be confident that the principles outlined in Part 1 are applied and the practical measures described in Part 2 are initiated and brought to completion. By adhering to these guidelines, Buddhist education for true development is guaranteed to manifest and flourish.

Now that we have cast light on the principles inherent in the name Siam Saamtri, let them resemble the dawn heralding the imminent rising of the sun, which in turn casts its radiance throughout the world.

With friendship provided by parents, teachers and administrators, may the students at Siam Saamtri advance on the Buddhist path of education, thus reaching maturity and inner fulfilment. May they be skilled and steadfast in making constructive contributions in the classroom, assisting one another and enjoying a shared happiness. And may they conduct their own lives and help guide the lives of others in a wholesome direction leading to sustainable peace and wellbeing.

Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (P. A. Payutto)<sup>1</sup>  
29 April 2010

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: at the time of writing this preface the author’s ecclesiastical title was Phra Brahmaganabhorn.





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# **A Buddhist System of Thai Education**

## **Crisis in Education – Crisis of Civilization**

For a long time, indeed for decades, I have heard complaints and worrying reports, both from ordinary laypeople and from leaders in official circles, that the quality of Thai education is poor and that the academic aptitude of Thai students is gradually deteriorating. It is fair to say that Thai education is facing a crisis.

These reports refer primarily to children at school. Yet they are valid even if we take a wider perspective. Our present era, the age of IT, is often lauded as particularly advanced or civilized. The expectation has been that our almost unlimited access to information and the abundant opportunities for learning even beyond the period of formal education will inevitably lead to a wise and accomplished society.

As it turns out, however, these expectations have not come to pass. Information technology in Thai society seems to be used in most part to pander to people's baser desires.

Thai people remain in the position of being impressionable consumers rather than innovative producers. On the whole, they prefer to indulge in the fruits of technological progress rather than be at its cutting-edge. As a result, technology often undermines rather than empowers them.

Thailand is thus faced with a wider crisis surrounding the integrity of its citizens. At the same time, it is being swept along by the tide of modern global development which is facing its own impasse and can be fairly designated as the Age of Unsustainable

Development. Humanity is presently imperilled by dire environmental problems. The natural environment has been so damaged and depleted that we are on the brink of complete annihilation.

Many of these problems stem from a prevalent view that has driven material progress in the West, namely that nature must be conquered. This view is accompanied by the notions that human beings are separate from nature and that nature is an adversary.

The belief that nature must be conquered has contributed to the crises inherent in unsustainable development. This notion underpins economic activity whereby natural resources are exploited for producing abundant consumer items to gratify people's desires. Such an economic model caters to sense pleasure, rather than giving priority to people's quality of life and self-improvement.

An economic model catering to sense pleasure is built on the one-dimensional premise that human happiness is contingent on consuming material things. The more one consumes, it is claimed, the happier one becomes.

In effect, such a system of economics renders human happiness dependent on the plundering of natural resources. Economic growth in the modern era is thus characterized by environmental destruction.

If people are primarily geared towards consumerism—to seeking and maximizing sense pleasure—it stands to reason that they will vie for happiness, say by competing for natural resources. Besides aggravating environmental problems, this behaviour also leads to increased social conflict, including quarrels, coercion, and outright war—both cold and conventional.

Although people caught up in consumerism do indeed experience pleasure from sense contact, they are engulfed by environmental and social conflict of their own making. Deep down, their hearts are void of true peace and happiness.

When people sense this outer conflict, they often feel confused and unsettled, which then results in inner conflict. And when this inner conflict grows more intense, people increasingly seek out sense gratification in order to fill the vacuum inside and cover up the absence of genuine happiness, thus exacerbating their problems.

The crisis of personal integrity triggered by consumerism is not limited to Thailand; it is having an impact on other societies as well. Underlying this crisis—on a more subtle and precarious level—are issues pertaining to people’s basic views and understanding which affect human civilization as a whole.

Many of the most acute global problems are caused by human beings themselves, stemming from their deep-seated prejudices and distorted views. People’s views on life and the world around them, along with corresponding behaviour, are supported on a foundation of understanding. It is our understanding that guides, defines, and adjusts our views and beliefs.

Take the simple example of rainfall. If one doesn’t know that rainclouds are formed by water evaporating from the heated surface of oceans, for example, one may believe that rain spouts forth from the mouths of divine serpents.<sup>1</sup> But when one understands the dynamics of raincloud formation, these primitive views and beliefs are dispelled.

Ironically, it is often the case that wrong views and misguided aspirations of highly educated people generate more severe consequences for society. In any case, prejudices, wrong views, extreme ideologies, and so on, are a powerful force behind people’s wilful actions, which can lead to a booming economy but also to mishaps and disaster.

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<sup>1</sup> Nāga. [Trans.: sometimes translated as ‘dragon’. Nāgas have held significance in the mythological traditions of many South and Southeast Asian cultures.]

## The Rising & Ebbing of Modern Science

For much of this recent era, the assertion that nature must be conquered through delving into its mysteries and controlling it according to our desires has been the driving force behind scientific progress. Modern science has been the basis for technological advances underpinning industrial growth, which in turn has been the catalyst for economic prosperity enabling people to acquire an abundance of consumer items and to live in comfort.

Modern science, however, only acknowledges and investigates the material world, neglecting altogether the ‘immaterial world’<sup>1</sup>—the domain of mind and consciousness. Ever since the Scientific Revolution (beginning in approximately 1543 CE) it has played a dominant role in the development of human civilization, acting as a frame of reference and an authority for determining the truth of phenomena.

At the onset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, momentous changes occurred in the domain of science, ushering in a second Scientific Revolution, shaking people’s confidence in the scientific establishment. We could say that science was demystified. The birth of ‘new physics’, in particular, brought about a radical shift in how scientists viewed and understood the truth of phenomena: of human beings, nature, and the world. Earlier scientific methods of inquiry and analysis were suddenly seen as fallible. The reductionism and mechanistic views of Newton (and Descartes) were turned on their heads.

Here are a couple of quotes from leading scientists from that time describing this radical transformation:

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<sup>1</sup> *Nāma-dhamma*.



Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington:

*We have learned that the exploration of the external world by the methods of the physical sciences leads not to concrete reality but to a shadow world of symbols.*<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Sir James Jeans commented:

*The most outstanding achievement of twentieth-century physics is not the theory of relativity with its welding together of space and time, or the theory of quanta with its present apparent negation of the laws of causation, or the dissection of the atom with the resultant discovery that things are not what they seem; it is the general recognition that we are not yet in contact with ultimate reality.*<sup>2</sup>

Later, the doctrine of holism gained ascendancy. People began to use such terms as ‘holistic’, ‘systems thinking’, ‘integrity’, ‘harmony’, ‘equilibrium’, and so on.

These profound advances in science brought about primarily by discoveries in physics coincided with a time when adverse side-effects of applied science, technology, and industry began to manifest—despite the fact that the fruits of science, in particular consumable goods, were highly prized by the majority of people. (Most of these adverse effects came about from the field of chemistry combined with biology.) Before long, ominous and alarming news reports were circulated.

One well-known story in Thailand is that of the pink pill chloramphenicol, which was first produced in 1949. It was seen as a miracle drug and was sold all over the country. Soon people began to die from an unknown cause. It turned out that this medicine inhibited blood production in bone marrow.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nature of the Physical World* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> *The Mysterious Universe* (Cambridge University Press, 1931), p. 111. Contemporary scientists, e.g. Stephen Hawking, have made similar observations.

<sup>3</sup> Bone marrow suppression.

Similar predicaments resulted from other chemicals, including: DDT, whose use was very widespread; thalidomide; and CFC (chlorofluorocarbon), which was used for a long time before people discovered that it was creating holes in the ozone layer.

Eventually, many people who had enthusiastically used chemical products in homes, kitchens, hospitals, and public areas, trusting in their marvellous efficacy, changed their attitude. They began to feel cautious and suspicious; many tried to avoid using these products or stopped using them altogether, fearing dangers posed to health and the environment.

As the sway science had over people began to weaken and the trust in the scientific establishment began to wane, various forms of spirituality, including mysticism, theosophy, astrology, and so on, grew in popularity. During the earlier passion—even craze—for science (namely, ‘scientism’), many of these teachings already existed but believers were often ridiculed and practised them in secret. Now, however, these teachings are considered respectable and even fashionable.

It is worrisome to see how human beings haven’t really evolved. Although we call ourselves ‘cultured’ and ‘developed’, people generally just swing from one extreme to another. When scientific materialism loses favour (mind you, the craving for material objects never loses favour; if anything it grows more intense), spiritualism captures people’s interest and is deemed superior.

Fifty years ago the terms *samādhi*, *vipassanā*, *samatha*, and *kammaṭṭhāna* had faded into obscurity.<sup>1</sup> They were considered quaint anachronisms or they were even looked down upon with derision. Now, however, they are seen as part of key Buddhist terminology and spoken of with high regard.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: ‘concentration’, ‘insight’, ‘calm’, and ‘meditation’, respectively. The author is talking about Thai society.

The heart of science is studying and understanding the truths of nature.<sup>1</sup> Science as we know it, however, is focused exclusively on matter—on the material world—and it is externalized as applied science, technology, and industry (based on the notion that nature must be conquered). As time has passed, many people understand science to be antithetical to or dismissive of nature; at the very least it has become divorced from nature.

Conventional science has lost much of its prestige, and many of its dualistic or disconnected theories are now criticized. There is an increased interest in holistic systems that take the mind into account and function in harmony with nature. Former practices are being revived, for instance traditional Thai massage and herbal medicine.

New terminology has been coined, for example: ‘Thai wisdom’, ‘folk wisdom’, ‘traditional Thai medicine’, and so on. (Although it’s hard to say how much traditional knowledge has been lost through neglect over the centuries.)

Ancient wisdom from the Orient, say from China and India, has also become popular. Such expressions as ‘holistic medicine’ and ‘alternative medicine’ are often linked to Chinese medicine, yoga, Ayurveda, and so forth.

## **Education: Following the Status Quo or Blazing a New Trail?**

Ideally, education provides people with the skills to foster goodness and wellbeing in society, to solve problems, and to lead human civilization in a wholesome direction. Education should

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the Thai word for ‘science’ is ‘vitayasahṭ’ (วิทยาศาสตร์), originating from the Sanskrit *vidyā* (‘knowledge’) & *śāstra* (‘branch of study’, ‘teaching’). The Pali equivalents are *vijjā* & *sattha*.

not merely be a conveyor belt ‘manufacturing’ people in order to cater to the desires of society at large. Nor should it simply be a vocational training, enabling people to make a living. Rather, it must guide people to a virtuous and sustainable goal.

If individuals or societies are proceeding along a wrong path, education should lead the way in finding solutions and steering people in a positive direction by developing their skills and capabilities. Education should not simply be an exercise in social servility, submitting to the status quo, or in providing enough consumer items for survival. Instead, people should become capable leaders helping to foster long-lasting, noble values in society.

In Thailand, for the most part, we now use a Western model of education. Although many Western educators advocate creative pedagogical theories, when it comes to practical application, they still emphasize generating various kinds of ‘human resources’ in order to serve social and economic demands.

We can observe that education in the West often aims to meet two targets: first, to maintain the status quo, and second, to develop accomplished, outstanding individuals who can improve society. It happens frequently, however, that countries adopting this twofold model can only meet the first target.

Even when education as defined by contemporary Western culture is able to develop accomplished, resourceful individuals, if people still embrace the notion of placing themselves in opposition to nature, view truth only from a materialistic perspective, and consider happiness primarily in the context of seeking pleasurable sense objects, society will eventually fall into an extreme and lead humanity to the brink of disaster.

Many people in the West, or those living under the sway of modern culture, realize that there are serious faults in the Western way of thinking and are frightened about the possible

destruction of the human race. Although they search for a solution, for the most part they have not discovered one.

It is worrisome how easily people fall into extremes. Take the example of the counterculture of the 1960's. When people realized that their society was divorced from and antagonistic to nature, they chose a life of abandon; they chose to be 'one with nature'. (Many people even thought that this way of life is the path of Buddhism, when in fact it is simply another excessive form of behaviour.) When they saw the adverse effects of a competitive society, they decided to reject social rules and conventions. (Here too, many thought that this rejection accords with Buddhism, when in fact it is simply an extreme reaction.)

Although education is an integral part of society, and plays a vital role in social guidance and improvement, if a large portion of the population embraces flawed notions and beliefs, it will be hard-pressed to have any positive impact. It will be powerless to penetrate and shift people's basic views and understanding. If a system of education conflicts with people's general ideas, it will usually end up buffeted by social pressure and capitulating to the status quo.

## **The Waxing & Waning of Child-Centred Education**

Historically, one important pedagogy has been 'child-centred education', which developed alongside 'progressive education' (sometimes these two terms are combined as 'child-centred progressive education'). Although this system of education has its origins in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe, it was developed and given clear shape at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, inspired by the pioneering efforts of John Dewey.

Child-centred progressive education has lived up to its name, offering many creative ideas and useful guidelines, but it has also come under harsh criticism.

Indeed, the essential principles of child-centred education are at odds with basic American values.<sup>1</sup> American culture praises a competitive spirit and considers mutual competition to lie at the heart of progress and success. People are encouraged to compete in order to build strength of character.

The competitive ideal is an intimate part of American history and permeates its culture, beginning with the basic doctrines of individualism and capitalism. These doctrines were later combined with Social Darwinism resulting in ‘unrestricted competition’: the conviction that people should be left entirely to their own devices, regardless of how weak or unfortunate they may be. It is better to let people hit rock bottom than to prop them up. Only then will one create elite individuals and organizations.

Another early American practice was ‘frontier expansion’. Four hundred years ago, settlers fleeing from Europe landed on the Atlantic shores and carved out a nation for themselves, seeking out their fortune by venturing West. For three hundred years, averaging about 10 miles per year, they were able to conquer the entire continent, spanning 3,000 miles to the Pacific Ocean. (This practice stands in stark contrast to the Thai maxim: ‘The rivers teem with fish, the paddies abound in rice’, the meaning of which is: ‘It is comfortable here; stray not.’)

Added to these doctrines and practices is the aforementioned belief that nature must be vanquished. People have been taught that wealth, success, and personal gratification are achieved by first undertaking experiments and then devising various means and instruments for harnessing the power of nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: here I use the word ‘American’ to refer to the United States.

All of these notions galvanize and harden Americans, instilling in them the pioneering and competitive spirit which have been core principles for establishing economic prosperity.

Child-centred education, however, which is part of a progressive movement, emphasizes cooperation and, as the name implies, gives chief importance to the welfare of children.

Opponents of this pedagogy, that is, traditionalists or conservatives, emphasize competition, and give chief importance to preserving traditional values and institutions pertaining to moral codes, schooling, personal aptitude, and so on. They assert that children should conform to these social standards and they believe that child-centred progressive education makes children idle and weak: academically, disciplinarily, and character-wise.

There are also many educators who feel that both the progressives and the traditionalists represent extremes, and that one should carefully select only those positive elements offered by both parties.

Even if some people felt that child-centred education makes children weak, there was room for optimism as it was understood that overall American social conditioning plays a more influential role in shaping children than formal education itself. As fundamental American values strengthen—even harden—children, preparing them for a highly stressful society, it was recognized that this form of progressive education had a softening and relaxing effect, thus striking a balance.

Child-centred education flourished in the United States for more than half a century, but then, almost overnight, the mood changed.

Towards the end of 1957 the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik I, the first artificial earth satellite, thus becoming the pioneers of the Space Age. This event brought about a sense of inferiority in the United States.

Ashamed and discouraged, many Americans began criticising their national education system. They blamed child-centred education for the country's poor academic standing, poor work performance, and lagging technology, preventing America from keep up with the Soviets. They demanded a complete overhaul of the education system.

Out of disgust, they abandoned child-centred progressive education and turned to 'teacher- and subject-centred education', a traditional form of education meant to accelerate academic study and intellectual discipline, thus allowing the Americans to vie with the Soviet Union for global dominance.

More than two decades later, in the 1980's, Americans became aware that teacher- and subject-centred education was causing children to feel stressed and alienated. Eventually, they turned away from this method and redirected their attention to child-centred education.

To quote American scholars: 'Such conservative and progressive ideas ... the fortunes of the two perspectives tend to wax and wane in accordance with the times.'<sup>1</sup>

## **Global Education for Redeeming Human Civilization**

The term 'civilization' can be defined as the combined fruits of human evolution and development, passed down by individuals from generation to generation.<sup>2</sup> Yet this term means far more than the collection of diverse goods and articles invented by human beings over the centuries. More importantly, it refers to an interrelated web of social factors based on accumulated knowledge, along with a set of beliefs and practices used as a motivation and guide for fulfilling shared aspirations.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Teacher education', *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: the word 'culture' could be used here as an alternative to 'civilization'.



Education is one the key factors making up civilization. It helps develop people's understanding and it forges their ideas, beliefs, goals, and so on.

In today's modern global civilization, which in recent history has held much of the world in its sway, education has often served the sole function of transmitting outdated forms of knowledge conforming to beliefs and practices observed in the past (for example the notion that nature must be conquered). Pupils who pass through such systems of education often come out with the same ideas as when they entered or their outlook on the world is simply reinforced.

There are many excellent educational methodologies. Although from a broader perspective, they are all subsidiary factors within a wider network, they are powerful and can shape the trajectory of human civilization.

If a particular society or culture is founded on distorted understanding and wrong views, although its educational system may be able to produce competent and intelligent graduates, these individuals will only hasten and augment the harm and damage created for everyone.

It is not the responsibility of genuine education to conform to anyone's beliefs or standards, either societal or global. Education must have wisdom as its mainstay. We must be aware of the predominant views and beliefs in society, and then help people to develop those that are virtuous and skilful, and which bring about lasting peace and happiness for all human beings.

People all over the world, including contemporary scholars, are becoming increasingly alarmed by the serious dangers (environmental crises included) stemming from misguided cultural beliefs and values. Both the dangers and their causes can be summarized under different headings, namely:

- **Nature:** people see themselves as separate from nature; they see nature as an adversary; they think that nature must be vanquished.

- **Society:** people strive to gain the upper hand; they exploit and manipulate one another, busily scrambling for personal gain.
- **Goal of life:** people expect to find true and lasting happiness by maximizing sense pleasure.
- **Mind:** people feel lonely, miserable, and stressed.

Although many people on the planet are aware of these problems, and understand their causes, they cannot yet discern an escape. They know that certain ways of thinking are mistaken and unhealthy, but they haven't yet discovered a reliable, correct alternative.

The world needs a universal set of guidelines for education based on an understanding of truth in line with natural laws. Buddhism has inherited precisely such a system which is available for people's consideration. It is ready to be used for working out solutions to global problems and for establishing genuine benefit for all alike.

When people realize that this inherited set of guidelines attends to and resolves human dilemmas effectively, they can apply it in a way that bears fruit and fulfils their aspirations.

Buddhism offers constructive guidelines for human development in line with the law of causality and as part of an integrated, harmonious whole. These guidelines are able to redeem human civilization—presently in a state of degradation and decline—restoring it to splendour.

## **Buddhist Education: A Clear Hope for the World**

People in the modern era have attained tremendous prosperity. Although we can say that we have achieved a certain apex of civilization, our progress has also generated all sorts of problems accompanied by a wide range of suffering and distress.

Despite sewing the seeds for suffering, however, our progress has generally not given us the tools to escape from it.

The dilemmas facing humanity at this time exist as three interlocking circles, summarized under the following headings:

- **Personal:** mental suffering and anguish. A relatively coarse example of such suffering is stress, which has become a massive problem for people in today's world.
- **Social:** unhealthy relationships cause suffering on a social scale manifesting as violence and oppression.
- **Environmental:** this heading refers particularly to a disturbance of ecosystems which has grown so severe as to threaten the survival of the human race. It is generally accepted that environmental problems stem from misguided beliefs entrenched in modern culture, namely that human beings are inherently divorced from nature and that nature is an adversary that must be controlled in order to serve people's interests.

To solve these dilemmas, human civilization requires a fresh paradigm. It requires a 'middle way': a teaching based on the understanding that everything in nature, including human beings, exists as an interrelated, interdependent web or network.

Granted, human beings are unique within this network as we are capable of advanced learning. Through training and education, we can develop in respect to three chief qualities:<sup>1</sup>

- **Conduct:** mature people develop healthy interpersonal relationships.
- **Mind:** they cultivate wholesome mind states.
- **Wisdom:** they develop an understanding of the interdependency of nature along with an insight into how the web of nature can function in harmony.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: these three qualities comprise the Threefold Training, which will be discussed at length below.

When people advance in education and grow in virtue, they become more skilled at living in harmony with the entire dynamic of nature. They find it increasingly easy to be happy within themselves and to share happiness with others. In addition, they foster a relationship to the environment conducive to living together in a peaceful world.

Such is the path whereby people develop into ‘human beings’, ‘virtuous beings’, and eventually into ‘enlightened beings’.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, we cannot really speak of human civilisation until people have evolved into enlightened beings, or at the very least until a large number of the population are grounded in virtue.

If people still march to the beat of progress subject to the notion that nature must be subdued and conquered, the term ‘civilization’ will be meaningless. Today’s problems clearly indicate that our current progress is destroying the environment. Our modern civilization is alienated from nature and detrimental to the planet. It is not true to its name—it is far from being ‘civilized’.

Buddhism offers an alternative basis of understanding and a new outlook on life that can change the course of human development from one of vying with nature to one of being an integral and supportive part of it, fostering both a happy personal life and a harmonious social life.

By following the Buddhist path we can create a true civilization, summed up by the caption: ‘A noble life, a healthy society, and a delightful natural environment.’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Manussa, kalyāṇa-puggala* (or *dhammika-puggala*), and *ariya-puggala*, respectively. [As will be discussed later in the book, a ‘human being’ keeps the five precepts and a ‘virtuous being’ develops the ten forms of righteous conduct. An ‘enlightened being’ has attained one of the four stages of enlightenment.]

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: this has become one of the author’s staple phrases. The subtitle of one of his recent books is: ‘Noble Life - Healthy Society - Delightful Nature’. See: *Prelude to Buddhaddhamma*, © 2017, English edition.

A Buddhist education is based on an understanding that human beings are part of an interconnected web of nature, and it encourages people to grow in virtue, mental aptitude, and inner freedom. The result is that people maintain personal wellbeing, provide compassionate assistance to others, and care for the external environment.

Such an integrated education in which the Threefold Training brings about a consummation of the Fourfold Development offers truly reliable means for solving human problems in all their complexity: personal, social and environmental.<sup>1</sup> In sum, Buddhist education outlines a path leading to the cessation of suffering.

For this mode of education to proceed harmoniously, we must take all related factors into consideration. Although people and nature have their own distinctive characteristics and requirements, by acknowledging these differences we can generate true wellbeing at all levels.

There are many other ways to describe Buddhist education, for example: it is balanced (it is a ‘middle way’; it does not fall into an extreme); it accords with nature (but it is not a reckless abandon to nature); it is objective and all-encompassing (it is not biased); it is progressive (it is not passive); and it urges consistent effort to improve oneself.

Because Buddhist education is based on right view and correct understanding, it is perfectly acceptable for us to draw upon and incorporate any other wholesome and useful pedagogical ideas, methods, and techniques.

As mentioned earlier, although an educational system may produce high calibre graduates, if these people use their skills and intelligence to feed wrong views and false notions, they may end

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: both the Threefold Training and the Fourfold Development will be discussed in depth below.

up wreaking havoc on society. Yet the opposite is also true: if for instance a Buddhist education produces accomplished individuals upholding right view, they can do an immense amount of good.

The important task here is to know how to implement a Buddhist approach to education. With wise implementation, the clarity and coherence inherent in the Buddha's teachings can help illumine the world.

## **True Education & Inherent Happiness**

The accumulated crises facing us today—individual, social, and environmental—are so grave and acute that they imperil the very survival of the human race. If we are not careful, the world will end up destroyed.

It is clear that many of the most dire problems are created by human beings themselves. There are numerous factors involved in this process, but one issue that should be clarified by education is our relationship to happiness.

In today's world many people feel deprived or devoid of happiness and thus run about in pursuit of it. Yet this pursuit is tied up with competition. When one person obtains pleasure, it often means that others must miss out. One person's happiness comes at the expense of another's. Or on a more extreme level, one person's happiness entails the suffering of others.

Searching outside of oneself for happiness necessarily brings about conflict. By relying solely on this kind of happiness, there will be no end to social problems.

If people receive a skilful education, not only will their understanding of the world be deepened, their quality of happiness will also be refined. At the very least, they will advance beyond a competitive form of happiness to a shared happiness:

when one is happy, others are also happy. Parents are a good example of the latter as they experience happiness when they see their children happy.

A healthy and civilized world is marked by this characteristic: it is a world in which people share their happiness. Even if the majority of people pursue sense gratification, they don't do so at the expense of others.

In the present age, society is stuck in a quagmire because most people are caught up in competitive pleasure-seeking. With such a state of affairs, mutual exploitation almost becomes obligatory. The attempt to solve problems is then merely a form of consolation.

Buddhist education thus emphasizes a cultivation and refinement of happiness, whereby people learn to share their joy and wellbeing. 'When I am happy, you are happy. The happier I am, the happier others are. The happier others are, the happier I am.' Practising in this way, the improvement of society is guaranteed.

As we can witness in the world today, if people are incapable of such cultivation, society will take an opposite turn. When one person or group of people obtains pleasure or happiness, others must go without or they must suffer. These circumstances lead to conflict and misery.

With the current scramble for pleasure and mutual exploitation, a prediction for humanity's future is relatively sure: present turmoil and unrest will only continue.

Over the centuries, people have invented all sorts of instruments, mechanisms, tools, and so on, resulting in so-called 'growth' and 'progress'. Yet the progress of one group of people has often spelled the destruction of another. The history of human civilization is thus full of conquest, persecution, and slaughter, whether it be big fish eating little fish or a full-on clash of titans.

Moreover, periods of growth and prosperity have often resulted in a depletion of natural resources and a destruction of the natural environment. Eventually, this environmental damage has led to the misery, privation, and demise of those societies. Throughout history, numerous human civilizations have thus flourished and then fallen into ruin.

With the onset of widespread globalization, conflicts and bloodshed began to escalate to the point of triggering two world wars. It is obvious that if a third world war is set in motion, the human race will most likely perish and the planet will be laid to waste.

In terms of globalization, it is not only technological advances and material progress that affect everyone around the world. Conflicts, crises, disease, and so on, also spread quickly and have an immediate global impact. And in present-day circumstances, what stands out the most are the severe dangers threatening the human race.

At first there was great excitement about entering the Age of Globalization. Now, however, people are beginning to realize that it is primarily human misfortune and distress that have become pandemic. For many people their happiness is limited to fleeting and superficial forms of amusement and recreation, similar to applying cosmetics to the face.

The reason we are in this predicament is because most people are devoted solely to their own pleasure and success, and to that of their associates. They may even define civilization as the necessary misfortune of others, whether this be a subjugation of other people or a ransack of nature. Yet they neglect to build up the lifeblood of civilization, which resides in the hearts of each one of us.

People claim to be cosmopolitan, sophisticated, masters over nature. But many people still live by the law of the jungle; there is nothing cultured or civilized about them. Savages and barbarians



simply follow impulses of greed and aggression. Although we have progressed to the Age of IT, many people are still stuck in these base mind states.

We have reached a point where human civilization is feeding off itself. If it continues in the same direction, there will only be one end: annihilation.

It is time for us to redeem human civilization. This next generation of students is assigned the task of steering society in a new direction. Education can no longer be used to simply prop up an outdated set of cultural values. We must help create wise and capable people who can orient society in a new, more sustainable way.

Globalization is a part of modern reality. Our fortunes, both good and bad, are intertwined. We must abandon so-called 'progress' built on the suffering of others and the destruction of the environment. Instead, we must teach people how to create prosperity and foster happiness that can be shared by all. A system of education fully equipped with the Threefold Training can accomplish this goal.

## **Lasting Peace by Way of a Thai Buddhist Education**

For a long time, people across the globe have been talking about establishing true democracy. It has got to the point where many people speak of democracy not only as a system of government, but as a way of life.

A great deal of emphasis has been put on promoting democracy and improving public participation. One former president of the United States mentioned in a special message to the Congress: 'Public participation in the process of government is

the essence of democracy.<sup>1</sup> I have heard that recently in Thailand there has also been much discussion about public participation.

Public participation in government, however, is often just a formality; sometimes it is only a sham or a ruse. Going through the motions of public participation does not guarantee that a true democracy will be established or that we have really arrived at the essence of democracy.

People's Democracy advocates participation in the form of wealth distribution.<sup>2</sup> Over the years, disputes have broken out amongst its followers around the concepts of a wealth distribution and power distribution. If we are not careful, these disputes can lead to extreme ideologies.

Indeed, a healthy society is endowed with all sorts of public participation encompassing such areas as: expressing opinions, voting, public services, access to public property, shared use of resources, and so forth. Also of importance are the factors of shared opportunity and shared understanding.

The difficulty is that in many cases there exists only pseudo public participation. The proponents of such participation often have a hidden agenda: their primary objective is actually profit and gain. The end result is a society still caught in a vortex of competition, abuse, and distress.

Public participation in government must be linked with other aspects of society: consensual decision-making, shared ownership, shared earnings, shared opportunity, shared understanding, and ultimately, shared happiness. And each of these forms of participation must be conducive to education, promoting a cultivation of happiness suitable to each person's degree of maturity.

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<sup>1</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, 25 May 1967.

<sup>2</sup> This political system is an offshoot of Communism.

An authentic democracy goes beyond a focus on gain and acquisition. It must also encourage taking part in giving and sharing in order to improve society, whereby people are inclined to give material possessions, offer cooperation, provide emotional support, and share knowledge.

Genuine public participation in government occurs when people participate fully in society: physically, emotionally, and mentally. At such a stage one can speak of a shared fortune.

Today we live in the Age of Information Technology. If technology is used to best serve and support an education comprised of the Threefold Training, democracy will achieve its objective, enabling citizens to participate in government and in a truly democratic way of life.

We are charged with the task of creating a new kind of human being. This endeavour will not resemble a form of genetic engineering whereby we create people who simply toe the line, conforming to the beliefs and practices of a corrupt set of conventions, and who are often capable of causing serious harm for everyone. Truly civilized persons are shaped by way of a complete education which instils wisdom and right view in students and lays a groundwork for building a balanced and harmonious society.

Although many cultures have ended up causing adverse effects for the planet, still, their progress came about in large part due to industriousness and innovation. In present times, we have inherited a wide range of technological advances that can be used for beneficial purposes, including amplifying our senses, increasing production, and processing an almost inconceivable amount of data in a split second across the globe.

If we can turn over a new leaf and adjust our mindset, our timing will be fortuitous. We already have these technological advances at our disposal so we should use them to our advantage in bringing about true growth and prosperity. When members of

the new generation set out to act in accord with right view, they will have immediate access to these instruments and tools, and can use them to build a society of cooperation, in which both material resources and knowledge are shared.

The key to this process is education—setting people on the right track. As a result we will develop a new calibre of human being and alter the course of human civilization.

Instead of churning out students committed to survival of the fittest and savvy at seeking out sense pleasure, people will be skilled at making others happy. They will use and improve technology in business and manufacturing for the collective benefit of all.

In this globalized Era of Information Technology abounding in a wealth of knowledge, we must teach people the skills for applying technological resources for the genuine cultivation of wisdom. As a result, people will not be captivated, consumed, or preyed upon by instruments of technology. They will become free and find it easier to abide in happiness regardless of external circumstances. They will use technology as it is meant to be used, that is, to promote global happiness and prosperity.

A Buddhist education—formulated as the Threefold Training—can successfully unify and secure a globalized civilization. If people earnestly engage in the Threefold Training, the world will be peaceful and harmonious.

We will be astounded when we realize how education can foster goodness, excellence, joy, and outstanding expertise. Students can develop skills that benefit both themselves and society, whereby everyone functions in a balanced and coordinated way.

Nowadays, in educational circles, terms such as ‘systematic’, ‘holistic’, and ‘integrated’ tend to be spoken with solemnity and reverence, even though upon further inspection many of the

pedagogical techniques are actually lacking in integrity, holism, balance, harmony, and authenticity. Buddhist education, however, is worthy of these labels.

When we trust the integrity of the Threefold Training, we will gain firm confidence in what we call a ‘Buddhist education’, recognizing that it generates enduring health, serenity, and happiness for individuals, society, and the world at large. It is my wish that you all gain such confidence.

Indeed, it is my conviction that you already have this confidence and that you are resolute and determined to savour victory and success. I don’t mean the ordinary kind of success implying failure, loss, and hardship for others, but rather a fulfilment of this teaching based on the Threefold Training, bearing fruit as virtue, dignity, and wellbeing for all.



# Siam Saamtri<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Today's theme will revolve around the meaning and implications of the two words 'Siam' and 'Saamtri', which together have been chosen as the new name for your school.

This name was not chosen simply for the sake of convenience. Consideration has also been given to choosing a name instilled with meaning and relating to key Buddhist principles. Ideally, you will also be able to embody these principles in practice.

'Saamtri' happens to be the title of one my books published about 5-6 years ago.<sup>2</sup> When some teachers mentioned that they had seen this name on a book cover, I remembered that the term Saamtri encompasses the key teachings of the Buddha. The teachers then told me that one individual had suggested prefixing the term with 'Siam'.<sup>3</sup> Knowing that it was important for everyone

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<sup>1</sup> A talk given to teachers, parents, administrators, and benefactors of Siam Saamtri School (Nue Noy Kindergarten and Baan Phut Primary School) when they came to pay respects to Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (P. A. Payutto) at Wat Nyanavesakavan on 5 November 2009. [At that time, Phra Payutto's ecclesiastical title was Phra Brahmaguna bhorn.]

<sup>2</sup> The book *Saamtri* originated from a Dhamma talk given by Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (P. A. Payutto) at the Uposatha hall of the Thai monastery in Los Angeles on 23 May 1992. [At that time Phra Payutto was known as Phra Debvedi.] Afterwards, the Bodhi Dharma Society LA asked to publish it. It was first printed on 1 July 2001 under the title 'สามต' ('The Triple T's', i.e. *tiratana*, *tilakkhaṇa* & *tisikkhā*). For the second printing, in 2007, it was decided to use the complete title สามไตร ('Saamtri').

<sup>3</sup> The person who suggested the term 'Siam' was M.L. Pagamal Kasemsri, headmistress of the school. Her intentions were thus: 'To rekindle a sense of the supreme dignity inherent in Thai people (according to one definition of the term 'Siam').'

to be happy with the name, I asked, and was told that either Saamtri or Siam Saamtri would be fine.

So which name to choose? I thought that if the term ‘Siam’ were to be added, then it should have some Dhamma meaning. It shouldn’t simply refer to the country of Thailand. I therefore did some research on this term and eventually discovered the material that I will now discuss at more length.



Part I

# **Fundamentals**



# Chapter 1

## Siam Paired with Saamtri

### Definition of Siam

It is commonly known that Siam is another name for Thailand. The definition of this term in the Royal Institute Dictionary<sup>1</sup> is as follows:<sup>2</sup>

*Sayām, sayāma, [Siam]: n. a name formerly used for the country of Thailand and given official status during the reign of King Rama IV. Later, on 24 June 1939, the name of the country was officially changed to Thailand.*

This definition shows that the name Siam has been used for a long time. As for the name ‘Thailand’, I won’t elaborate here on the origin of this term.<sup>3</sup>

Now let us examine the linguistic makeup of *sayāma*. Technically speaking, it is comprised of the two words *sa* and *yāma*.

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<sup>1</sup> พจนานุกรม ฉบับราชบัณฑิตยสถาน.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: note that the term ‘Siam’ is a phonetic spelling. In the Pali language it is spelled *sayāma*. The Thai pronunciation of this word (สยาม) is very similar to the English, i.e. ‘sayahm’ (although it contains intonations).

<sup>3</sup> In Thailand, the word ‘sayahm’ (Siam/*sayāma*) is now closely aligned to the word ‘Thai’. [Trans.: the connection of ‘Thailand’ with the word ‘Thai’ (ไทย), meaning ‘free’ or ‘free man’, is not known with certainty.]

The prefix *sa-* comes from the word *saha*, meaning ‘with’, ‘together with’ (alternatively, ‘endowed with’, ‘having’).<sup>1</sup> According to the principles of Pali grammar, when *saha* is used in conjunction with another word, it is abbreviated to *sa*. Hence *sayāma*.

This abbreviation occurs frequently in Pali. Take the example of the verses from the morning chanting, beginning with: ‘*Yo so tathāgato....*’ Towards the end of this stanza, following on from ‘*Itipi so...*’, is the passage: ‘*So imaṃ lokaṃ sadevakaṃ samārakaṃ sabrahmakaṃ sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiṃ paṇaṃ sadevamanussaṃ....*’ Here we see the repeated usage of the prefix *sa-*, the same as in *sayāma*.

In the term *sadevakaṃ*, *sa-* (or *saha*) is combined with *deva* (‘celestial being’). (The *-ka* at the end is a simple Pali suffix.)<sup>2</sup> This term thus means ‘together with devas’, ‘including a host of devas’, ‘along with devas’.

Likewise: *samārakaṃ*—‘along with Māra’;<sup>3</sup> *sabrahmakaṃ*—‘along with Brahma’;<sup>4</sup> *sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiṃ*—‘along with a congregation of renunciants and brahmins’. These terms are followed by the keyword *paṇaṃ*, which means ‘world of living beings’, ‘humankind’, ‘generation’, indicating the main subject of this clause, which can be translated as ‘this generation accompanied by devas, Māra, Brahma, renunciants and brahmins’.<sup>5</sup> Here we can see the prolific use of the prefix *sa-*.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the Indo-European root *sa* is the origin of many English words, including ‘same’ and ‘similar’.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: in Sanskrit this is called a *taddhita* affix, i.e. a suffix forming a noun from another noun.

<sup>3</sup> Trans: ‘Evil One’, ‘Tempter’; a deity ruling over the highest sense-sphere heaven realm, i.e. Paranimmitavasavattī. He obstructs people, preventing them from escaping the sphere of sensuality, over which he holds sway.

<sup>4</sup> Trans.: common spelling = Brahma; Pali spelling = *Brahmā*. In Buddhist cosmology, there are twenty different Brahma realms, the highest of all the celestial realms. The third such realm (counting from the bottom) is the abode of the Mahā Brahmās; when the term *Brahmā* is used in the singular it usually refers to one of the gods abiding in this realm.

<sup>5</sup> The final word *sadevamanussaṃ* (‘together with devas and human beings’) simply acts as a summary.

*Sayāma* is thus defined as ‘together with *yāma*’. What is the definition of *yāma*? *Yāma* means ‘self-restraint’, ‘self-control’, ‘self-discipline’.

This term *yāma* is found frequently in the compound *saññama*,<sup>1</sup> which has the same meaning of ‘self-restraint’ or ‘self-control’. The Maṅgala Sutta, for example, contains the verse: *Majjapānā ca saññamo*.<sup>2</sup> Those of you who know the chanting may be able to figure out the meaning, that it refers to refraining from intoxicants. Many Buddhists are therefore already familiar with the word *yāma* in another guise.

A closely related word, which is a synonym of *yāma* and *sañyama*, is *saṃvara*, which can be defined as ‘restraint’, ‘caution’, or ‘constraint’.

As cited a moment ago, a good example of self-restraint and self-discipline is the passage *majjapānā ca saññamo*, namely, to refrain from intoxicating beverages and similar forms of addictive substances. To practise such restraint requires fortitude and inner strength.

In the scriptures, the concept of self-restraint is normally used in relation to society in order to help prevent mutual violation and transgression. The emphasis is on refraining from oppressing or harming other people. There are many reasons why people give rise to social conflict and strife, thus bring about the need for *saññama* (or *sañyama*). Occasionally these two terms are used as a substitute for *sīla* (‘moral conduct’). This is because those people who can maintain moral conduct must be endowed with self-restraint; they must be skilled in self-discipline.

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<sup>1</sup> Or *sañyama*. According to Pali grammar, *yama* can be lengthened to *yāma*. *Yāma* and *sañyama* thus have the same meaning. [Trans.: to avoid confusion, note that here another Pali prefix is used: *sañ-*, implying conjunction and completeness.]

<sup>2</sup> Also spelled: *Majjapānā ca sañyamo*.

In some sutta verses, the Buddha uses the terms *saññama* or *sañyama* in place of *sīla*. Later texts explain that these terms are synonymous. And as I said earlier, these terms were primarily used in a social context, underscoring restraint and a refraining from transgression, exploitation, harm, harassment, theft, deceit, and so on.

## The Critical Need for Restraint in the Present Age

I feel it is crucial for people in the present time to exercise restraint—*saññama*, *sañyama*, or *yāma*—but not only in a social context. The emphasis now should also be on restraint in the context of people’s individual lives.

The implications of the verse *majjapānā ca saññamo* in the Maṅgala Sutta, on refraining from intoxicating beverages, enter into the domain of a person’s individual life. It pertains in part to non-self-harming. Of course its meaning extends further, in so far as intoxicants can lead to a lapse of mindfulness and to harming others.

In modern times, the world is faced with a severe lack of self-restraint. You may have heard of the expression ‘diseases of civilization’ (or ‘diseases of affluence’). People today like to regard themselves as highly sophisticated and cultured. Yet, they are often encumbered by these diseases linked with the way they live their lives.

One such disease of affluence is spiralling obesity. A little more than ten years ago, while travelling in the United States, I was accompanied by a Thai doctor who had spent nearly five decades in America working in government service. During that time I had to visit the hospital where I was able to observe patients along with their relatives. Seeing such an abundance of overweight people,

I asked my companion about this matter. From his experience he remarked that about 60% of the American population is overweight.<sup>1</sup>

Just two days ago, a friend who had lived in America for many years came to the monastery. He had recently been back there for a visit and said that the number of overweight people appears to have increased to 80%.<sup>2</sup>

Obesity has become a global problem. About 4-5 years ago, when I went to have kidney stones removed, the surgeon who performed the operation had recently returned from America. He went to study the work being conducted there to deal with obesity. Thai doctors are trying to prepare themselves for this disease; they do not want to be caught off-guard. Obesity is becoming an increasingly serious public health problem worldwide and will surely affect Thailand before long.

What methods are used to treat obesity? One method used is to remove part of the stomach, reducing it greatly in size.<sup>3</sup> The aforementioned surgeon told me that there have been new breakthroughs in treatment. Rather than removing part of the stomach, they divide it into a small upper pouch and a larger 'remnant' pouch, restricting the amount of food that can be eaten.<sup>4</sup> When food fills the small pouch, the person feels sated. This is a slightly better solution.

Although people are aware of the severity of this illness, instead of getting to the root of it, they make intensive efforts to brush it aside by using various medical procedures, like performing surgery.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: in the year 2000 approximately 30% of adults in the United States suffered from obesity and about 5% from severe obesity.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: In the National Center for Health Statistics update for 2018, statistics on severe obesity among US adults had climbed to 9.2% while the total obesity prevalence had reached 42.4%.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: sleeve gastrectomy.

<sup>4</sup> Trans.: gastric bypass surgery. Here, the small intestine is rerouted to this small stomach pouch.

The prevalence of obesity and invasive treatments for it indicate a lack of self-restraint and an inability to properly address people's underlying mental problems. How much food a person eats is obviously a personal matter. Self-control here means that one eats only what is enough; one eats in moderation. The predicament we are facing is that most people are being held captive by their desires, resulting in a lack of self-discipline. Finding ways to deal with this disease is of vital concern.

This is one example revealing the need for self-control. People in the present age are able to control and manage all sorts of things, for example they have become very accomplished at harnessing the powers of nature. But when it comes to managing and mastering themselves, they are found lacking. This shows the paramount importance of restraint in the present day, which extends not only to refraining from oppressing others, but also includes freeing oneself from self-harm and self-violence.

## **From Self-Restraint to Siam**

Restraint is not limited to refraining from harming oneself and other people. It also extends to refraining from harming and exploiting the natural environment.

Damage and destruction of the environment have reached critical proportions. The tipping point in the United States began in around 1960. This does not mean that serious environmental problems didn't already exist; people simply became aware of them. Americans at that time started to realize that ecosystems were being degraded, pollution was soaring, and natural resources were dwindling. The situation urgently needed to be remedied. Many people around the world began to wake up to the crisis, to the extent that every twenty years international symposiums were organized to discuss these matters. Yet every time the participants met, they could only come to the conclusion that the problems were getting



worse. Although different countries were making efforts to rectify the situation, few lasting solutions have been found.

The reason why people have been unable to successfully repair environmental damage is precisely because they lack this quality of restraint; they lack self-control, self-discipline, and inner fortitude. They are accustomed to having things their own way, caught up in heedlessness and self-centredness.

What can be done so that people don't simply follow their whims when it comes to relating to nature, greedily using up natural resources for industrial use? Although most people are aware that there is a problem, we haven't been able to collectively rectify it.

Actually, we don't need to look far from home. We are probably all well aware that Thailand has dire environmental problems which we haven't been able to successfully address. We will run out of time if we cannot instil this principle of restraint—of *yāma*—in the Thai people. If we can collectively develop this quality, however, we will be deserving of the title 'Siam'—of being a people endowed with restraint, possessing self-control and self-mastery. If we can embody the true meaning of Siam, then we will be able to solve our environmental problems, along with a whole range of other problems—personal and social.

The discussion of Siam is relevant to the present age. We should consider how we can develop this vital factor of restraint. Regardless of being Thai, American, or of any other nationality, if people can incorporate this protective principle into their lives, they will be able to solve the problems of obesity, environmental degradation, high levels of pollution, and so on. Yet, if we fail at this, we shall remain stuck with our backs against the wall.

To summarize, 'Siam' comes from the Pali word *sayāma*, which contains the prefix *sa-*, meaning 'together with' or 'endowed with'. Although it is an alternative name for Thailand, it can also be defined as 'one who is self-restrained' or 'one skilled in self-discipline'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: here the author has expanded the meaning of *sayāma* from the quality of restraint to a person endowed with restraint.

## Saamtri Encompasses Buddhism in Its Entirety

We can now turn our attention to the meaning of ‘Saamtri’, namely, ‘the three triads’.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the Buddha’s key teachings begin with the prefix *ti-* because they contain a threefold classification. The prefix *ti-* is common in the Pali language, even when referring to material things. For instance, the personal belongings of a monk begin with the ‘set of three robes’ (*ticīvara*), and the main body of scripture containing the Dhammavinaya is known as the Tipiṭaka (‘three baskets’, ‘three divisions’).

This term Saamtri incorporates three of the most important Buddhist teachings or principles, namely:

**1. Three Jewels** (*tiratana*; Triple Gem): the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

**2. Three Characteristics** (*tilakkhaṇa*): this teaching pertains to laws of nature, and is one of the keystones of Buddhism. The aim of someone developing insight,<sup>2</sup> for instance, is to see clearly into these aspects of reality, to realize these truths. If someone has thoroughly comprehended the three characteristics,<sup>3</sup> it implies that they have attained the fruit of arahantship and become an adept in the Buddha’s teachings.<sup>4</sup> These three characteristics are

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: ‘Saam’ (สาม; pronounced ‘sahm’) in Thai means ‘three’; ‘tri’ (ตรี; as in the English word ‘try’) likewise means ‘three’. The Thai word ตรี comes from the Sanskrit *traya* (or *tri*); in Pali this is rendered as *tayo* or *ti* (base of numeral three in compounds).

<sup>2</sup> *Vipassanā*.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: to avoid an excess use of capitalization, I use the lowercase to refer to the ‘three characteristics’ as laws of nature, and only capitalize this term when it specifically refers to a formal teaching by the Buddha.

<sup>4</sup> Trans.: the Thai word ‘jop’ is also used in the context of education and graduation. This phrase could colloquially be translated as: ‘one who has passed the final exam’. More frequently this concept is rendered as: ‘finished ones spiritual work’. Arahantship is perfect and complete enlightenment.

often listed as *anicca*, *dukkha* & *anattā*,<sup>1</sup> although technically speaking the correct grammatical usage is *aniccatā*, *dukkhatā*, & *anattatā*.

Allow me to say more on the suffix *-tā*. In Pali grammar this term is called a ‘paccaya’.<sup>2</sup> The word *anicca* is an adjective and translates as ‘impermanent’. If one wishes to turn this into a noun, one normally adds the term *bhāva*,<sup>3</sup> resulting in *anicca-bhāva*, which translates as ‘impermanence’. But for practical purposes this word is a bit long. What can be done to shorten it while still preserving its original meaning? In Pali grammar there is a method to do this, namely, by adding the suffix *-tā*, which has the same meaning as *bhāva*. *Anicca-bhāva* thus becomes *aniccatā*.

Just as *anicca-bhāva* becomes *aniccatā*, so too, *dukkha-bhāva* becomes *dukkhatā* and *anatta-bhāva* becomes *anattatā*.

In sum, the three characteristics are truths in line with natural laws.

**3. Three Trainings** (*tisikkhā*; Threefold Training):<sup>4</sup> This term refers to *sīla* (moral conduct), *samādhi* (concentration; mental collectedness), and *paññā* (wisdom). The original technical terms for these three trainings are *adhisīla-sikkhā*, *adhicitta-sikkhā*, and *adhipaññā-sikkhā*,<sup>5</sup> but for simplicity’s sake they can be referred to as *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: in Thai they are pronounced/spelled *aniccam*, *dukkham* & *anattā*. These three terms can be translated as ‘impermanent’, ‘subject to stress’ (‘not durable’), and ‘not-self’, respectively. As nouns (*aniccatā*, *dukkhatā* & *anattatā*) they can be defined as impermanence, unendurability, and selflessness.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: a grammatical suffix to roots.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: ‘state’, ‘condition’, ‘-ness’, ‘-ence’.

<sup>4</sup> Trans.: can also be spelled *tisso sikkhā* or *sikkhāttaya*. [Trans.: the term *sikkhā* (Thai: ‘seuksah’—ศึกษา) plays a pivotal role in this book. Although *sikkhā* is often translated as ‘study’, and can even be rendered as ‘education’, the English word ‘training’ is more accurate. The important point here is that this term encompasses both study & practice, that is, it encompasses the standard educational process of acquiring, accumulating, and recollecting information, but also includes the practical integration, application, and exercise of what one has learned.]

<sup>5</sup> Trans.: ‘training in higher virtue’, ‘training in higher mind’, and ‘training in higher wisdom’, respectively.

As a Buddhist school, the Threefold Training constitutes your core. It is at the Threefold Training that we arrive at practical application, whereby these three factors are integrated into our lives and into the cultivation of human beings, which we can define simply as ‘education’. Theory is transformed into practice. Having said this, true education is only possible when it is also established on a foundation of the former two teachings.

True education must be grounded on the first teaching of the Three Jewels, beginning with the Buddha, who discovered and realized ultimate truth—the Dhamma. He set down the system of the Threefold Training for us to practise, so that we may live our lives in harmony with this truth. Upright and sincere practice leads to ever increasing happiness and prosperity, whereby we eventually join the noble assembly of awakened beings, referred to as the Sangha.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, an engagement with the three trainings entails an inherent and natural connection to the Three Jewels—the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha.

Likewise, we must be grounded in the teaching on the Three Characteristics. The Buddha’s discovery and realization of ultimate truth pertains directly to the Three Characteristics, which form the platform and foundation for the Threefold Training. For human beings to reach genuine success in any endeavour, especially in the domain of education and self-improvement, they must be firmly grounded in and conversant with natural truths. They must act in harmony with nature, within the confines of natural laws. If we attempt to educate and develop people without conforming to natural laws, our endeavours will never be truly effective. For this reason, we must gain an understanding of natural laws—of nature—and learn how to act accordingly.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: in the Pali Canon, the word *saṅgha* has two meanings: 1) *ariya-saṅgha*: the community of enlightened beings (divided into four levels of awakening); and 2) *bhikkhu-saṅgha* & *bhikkhuni-saṅgha*: the monastic community.

Indeed, these three characteristics of nature promote, even demand, that education proceeds along the line of the three trainings. The reason that the Buddha set down this training is precisely because he realized these three truths of nature. The Threefold Training is thus firmly established upon the teaching of the Three Characteristics.

Let us look at a simple example. Because all things transform in line with causes and conditions, it is possible for change to occur in our lives, both on the mental and physical levels. Our minds and our bodies are subject to change. We have inherited a system of training intended to adjust and regulate the process of change, guiding it in a wholesome direction. If things were not subject to the law of impermanence, how could personal growth and development occur? The Threefold Training would consequently be null and void.

If we simply allow impermanence to follow its own natural course, it is most likely that our process of personal change will take a turn for the worse. But when we have acquired an understanding of the three characteristics which is directly associated with the law of conditionality, we protect ourselves from adverse causes and conditions.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, we learn to cultivate those favourable causes and conditions leading to progress and development. In sum, personal adaptation, transformation, and growth are only possible because of the dynamics of impermanence.

For wise individuals, impermanence helps them to engage with natural laws in a productive and advantageous way. The benefits of skilful engagement with and clear insight into the natural laws outlined in the teaching on the Three Characteristics have a transformative power. People increasingly live a good and noble life, up to the extent of attaining complete enlightenment. A realization of the three characteristics brings about spiritual deliverance.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: for more on the 'law of conditionality', see the beginning of chapter 3 on impermanence.

In sum, these three teachings are interconnected.

Let's return to the two words of your school. 'Siam' can either refer to the nation of Thailand, or it can be defined as 'one possessing self-restraint', 'one skilled in self-discipline', or 'one endowed with self-mastery'. 'Saamtri' refers to the three key teachings described just now.

The combination of 'Siam' and 'Saamtri' can thus be interpreted in different ways:

First, considering that Siam is a name for Thailand, one can translate Siam Saamtri as the 'Triple Triad of the Siamese' or 'Thai People and the Triple Triad'. These are just examples. In such translations, however, the two words are distinct from one another.

Second, by following the definition of Siam as 'possessing self-control', 'skilled in self-discipline', or 'endowed with self-mastery', one can translate these two terms as 'the three triads of one possessing self-restraint', 'the three triads of one possessing self-discipline', 'self-restraint within the parameters of the triple triads', or 'self-mastery based on the triple triads'.

Using the second interpretation, we can come up with a definition in line with the Dhamma, that is, we should nurture an environment whereby people develop self-restraint by applying the triad of cardinal Buddhist teachings. This definition is very broad. It covers such subjects as which circumstances require self-restraint, what measures can be taken to develop such restraint, and what practical applications do these initially theoretical teachings result in.

# **Chapter 2**

## **Guiding Triad**

### **Linking the Three Triads**

As alluded to earlier, if one completes the study and realization of the three triads, it can be said that one has earned a true 'doctorate' in Buddhism; one has completed one's spiritual work; one has done what had to be done. Although we do not have time to examine all of these teachings in depth, we can at least gain a clearer understanding of which principles should be emphasized for practical application and applied to education.

Although the Threefold Training is most directly connected to the practice of education, we must be able to draw upon the first two teachings accurately and correctly. Moreover, we need to understand the areas of overlap between these three teachings, each one of which is vast and comprehensive. It is fair to say that the teaching on the Triple Gem already encompasses Buddhism in its entirety. In other words, we should focus on those aspects of these three teachings that are part of a uniform whole rather than those distinct from one another.

## Clear Discernment of the Three Jewels

As the name implies, the three ‘jewels’ refer to qualities that are truly valuable and auspicious, qualities that bring about excellence to our lives. In the Tipiṭaka,<sup>1</sup> the Three Jewels (or Triple Gem) are most often encountered in the Buddha’s words referring to faith (*saddhā*) which appear in two formats:

First, the Triple Gem can be incorporated into a single definition of faith, that is, ‘faith in the Buddha’s wisdom and awakening’.<sup>2</sup> This form of faith is used to describe the attributes of a specific individual—a monk or an enlightened disciple for example<sup>3</sup>—and is usually followed by an elucidation of the Buddha’s virtues.<sup>4</sup> This is the most common format.

Second, the Buddha described the kind of faith that is ‘*aveccapāsāda*’, that is, ‘unshakeable faith’ in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.<sup>5</sup> This is one of the attributes of awakened disciples, from stream-enterers upwards.<sup>6</sup> Here, the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are all mentioned, as can be seen in the chanting: ‘*Itipi so bhagavā ... svākkhāto dhammo ... supaṭipanno saṅgho...*’<sup>7</sup>

The most common format is to incorporate the Triple Gem into the single term *tathāgatabodhi-saddhā*: faith in the Buddha’s wisdom and awakening. This term represents or encompasses all three factors. Alternatively, in the second format, a clear distinction is made between the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: Sanskrit: Tripiṭaka; the Buddhist scriptures; the Pali Canon.

<sup>2</sup> *Tathāgatabodhi-saddhā*. [Trans.: Tathāgata is an epithet of the Buddha.]

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: ‘especially when describing the faith of a noble disciple before the realization of stream-entry’. See: *Buddhadhamma* p. 616 (English edition).

<sup>4</sup> *Buddha-guṇa*.

<sup>5</sup> Trans.: can also be translated as ‘perfect faith’ or ‘absolute confidence’.

<sup>6</sup> Trans.: stream-entry is the first of four stages of enlightenment.

<sup>7</sup> Trans.: ‘He is indeed the Blessed One ... Well-expounded is the Dhamma ... the Sangha who have practised well....’ (Contained in the chant titled ‘Tiratanānūsaraṇapāṭha’—Passages on the Recollection of the Three Treasures.)



The important point here is how we can practically integrate a devotion to the Triple Gem with education. Without such devotion, people often become discouraged and end up devising vague notions and unfocused approaches to education.

Many of you are familiar with the morning and evening chanting which enumerates the nine virtues of the Buddha, the six virtues of the Dhamma, and the nine virtues of the Sangha.<sup>1</sup> It can happen, however, that people get caught up in the details of the specific virtues, and fail to consider how the Triple Gem and the various associated virtues are pointing to practical matters—to tasks that we should undertake. If people lack this consideration, it is likely that they will remain confused and wander about aimlessly, regardless of how much chanting they do.

Having said this, chanting is a skilful exercise. It is a means for cultivating wholesome states and can be accompanied by joy. It makes the mind bright. Yet chanting is a supplementary or supportive activity. We should clearly grasp the essential principles contained in the chanting and integrate them into our daily lives.

If we can distill the Buddha's key teachings on faith, then we will hone in on this specific concept of 'faith in the Buddha's wisdom and awakening', and it will become the centre point from which our practice progresses.

On a rudimentary level the term *tathāgatabodhi-saddhā* can be interpreted as: 'I believe that the Buddha was really enlightened, that he realized ultimate truth and imparted it to us. If we apply his teachings, we too can realize the fruits of practice.' If we lack such a fundamental degree of faith, why would we take any interest in the Buddha's teachings? We would most likely have no inclination to study them, and would make no headway or progress. But because we have confidence that the Buddha awakened to ultimate truth, we feel empowered to study and practise accordingly.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: these will be described below.

There is, however, another significant interpretation of the term *tathāgatabodhi-saddhā*. The term *tathāgata* refers to the Buddha as a representative of all humankind; it points to the basic nature of humanity.<sup>1</sup> On a fundamental level, the Buddha was a human being. Drawing upon innate human attributes, he developed the perfections (*pāramī*)—spiritual virtues—in particular the peerless virtue of wisdom which enables human beings to gain insight into the true nature of all phenomena. The Buddha cultivated wisdom until he penetrated the truth of all things and realized enlightenment. His wisdom blossomed into awakened wisdom. When wisdom (*paññā*) is perfected, it becomes ‘awakened wisdom’ (*bodhi*).<sup>2</sup>

Awakened wisdom enables a person to become an awakened being (*buddha*). *Bodhi* and *buddha* share the same root. In other words, *bodhi* is the supreme knowledge of a Buddha or the knowledge that brings about Buddhahood.

All human beings have this potential and capability to develop themselves into Buddhas. When we cultivate wisdom to the level of awakened wisdom, we become Buddhas.

The Buddha occasionally referred to arahant disciples as ‘Buddhas’. Although they are ‘secondary Buddhas’ (*anubuddha*; ‘Buddhas following after’) rather than ‘fully self-enlightened Buddhas’ (*sammāsambuddha*), they are Buddhas nonetheless.

Within the process of cultivating wisdom to this crowning degree, other supportive factors related to moral conduct (*sīla*) and mental steadfastness (*citta*) must also be developed and brought to completion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Trans: although the word *tathāgata* is an epithet of the Buddha, it can be defined in different ways. A simple translation is ‘one who realizes the truth’, thus referring to all Buddhas or to all fully awakened beings.

<sup>2</sup> The supreme knowledge of awakening.

<sup>3</sup> Trans: in this context, the word *citta* (‘mind’, ‘focused attention’) refers to a broader definition of *samādhi* than the more limited definition of ‘concentration’.

As those with faith in the Buddha's wisdom and awakening—in him having cultivated the innate human quality of wisdom to the level of awakened wisdom—we can reflect: 'I too am a human being. I too am endowed with a starting capital of wisdom. I have inherited the human potential to become a Buddha.'

There are two facets to faith in the Buddha's wisdom and awakening: first, we recognize how precious the Buddha's enlightenment is, and we are therefore encouraged to study and practise his teachings; and second, we gain confidence in developing our own potential: we firmly believe that we too are capable of bringing about supreme realization. If we had no confidence or trust in our own potential, what would be the purpose of engaging in spiritual practice?

This single term *tathāgatabodhi-saddhā* thus embodies two meanings: first, a faith and trust in the Buddha; and second, a conviction that we ourselves are endowed with similar spiritual potential.

## **Arriving at a Unified Education**

Our discussion now brings us to another vital Buddhist principle pertaining directly to education, namely that of training and self-development, which in Pali is known as *sikkhā*. Although the Buddha gave great import to this principle, describing it on numerous occasions, most Buddhists overlook it. To understand it correctly, we must see it in relation to the Three Jewels, beginning with the first 'Jewel': the Buddha. From here, we can gradually expand our investigation.

For greater clarity, let us look at some of the Buddha's words:

*In what way has the Blessed One achieved self-mastery?<sup>1</sup> The Blessed One has fully developed the body, virtuous conduct, mind, and wisdom.<sup>2</sup>*

*Although a human being, the Awakened One is self-tamed, with heart well-trained. He is venerated even by the devas.<sup>3</sup>*

*Amongst human beings, one who is trained stands supreme.<sup>4</sup>*

*One fully accomplished in knowledge and conduct is best among devas and humans.<sup>5</sup>*

These verses apply directly to the quality of faith. Faith is the starting point, providing us with courage to undergo training and confidence to engage in practice. As mentioned earlier, faith in the Buddha's wisdom and enlightenment spurs us on to study and practise the Buddha's teachings.

These verses are also connected to the virtues of the Buddha,<sup>6</sup> in particular the attribute: 'perfect in knowledge and conduct', highlighted in the verse: 'One fully accomplished in knowledge and conduct is best among devas and humans.'

Note that the terms *bhāvitatta* and *attadanta* have the same meanings.<sup>7</sup> *Bhāvita* is a past participle related to the noun *bhāvanā*, meaning 'cultivation', 'development'.<sup>8</sup> *Danta* is a past participle

<sup>1</sup> *Bhāvitatta*: 'one who is fully developed'.

<sup>2</sup> *Kathaṃ bhagavā bhāvitatto bhagavā bhāvitakāyo bhāvitasīlo bhāvitacitto bhāvitapañño*. Nd2. 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Manussabhūtaṃ sambuddhaṃ attadanto samāhitaṃ devāpi taṃ manussanti*. A. III. 346. [Trans.: note that these verses are attributed to Ven. Udāyī.]

<sup>4</sup> *Danto seṭṭho manussesu*. Dh. verse 321.

<sup>5</sup> *Vijjācaraṇasampanno so seṭṭho devamanūse*. S. II. 284.

<sup>6</sup> *Buddha-guṇa*. [Trans.: the nine virtues/attributes in full: 1) worthy; accomplished (*araham*); 2) fully self-enlightened (*sammāsambuddho*); 3) perfect in knowledge and conduct (*vijjācaraṇasampanno*); 4) sublime; well-farer (*sugato*); 5) knower of the worlds (*loka vidū*); 6) incomparable leader of persons to be trained; 7) teacher of gods and humans; 8) awakened (*buddho*); 9) blessed (*bhagavā*).]

<sup>7</sup> *Bhāvitatta* (*bhāvita* + *atta*: 'well-trained', 'fully developed'); *attadanta* (*atta* + *danta*: 'well-trained', 'well-tamed'). [Trans.: they can both be translated as 'attained to self-mastery'. *Attaṃ* (*atta* in compounds) = 'self', 'oneself'.]

<sup>8</sup> Trans.: verb = *bhāveti*.

related to the noun *dama*, meaning ‘training’, ‘discipline’, ‘taming’.<sup>1</sup> The terms *bhāvanā* and *dama* correspond to the term *sikkhā*. In many circumstances, these three key terms are synonymous and can be used interchangeably.

One who is fully developed is a *bhāvitatta*. One who is fully trained is an *attadanta*. One who has completed his or her studies is called an *asekha* (or *asekkha*), namely: ‘one requiring no training’, ‘one beyond training’, an ‘adept’. All three of these words refer to arahants, beings who have completely finished their study, training, and practice.

The term *sikkhā* refers to ‘training’, ‘study’, ‘lesson’, ‘instruction’, or ‘education’. A ‘trainee’, someone still undergoing training, is called a *sekha* (or *sekkha*),<sup>2</sup> referring in particular to stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*), once-returners (*sakadāgāmi*), and non-returners (*anāgāmi*). When these individuals have completed their training, that is, they have attained arahantship, they are referred to as ‘adepts’ (*asekha*).<sup>3</sup>

To sum up, the words *dama*, *sikkhā*, and *bhāvanā*, are synonymous.

It may seem difficult to get your head around this foreign terminology (here from the Pali language). But do not worry about these technicalities; I have simply mentioned them to support understanding.

So what is the true objective of ‘faith in the Buddha’s wisdom and enlightenment’? The answer is to engage in self-restraint (*dama*), to be well-restrained (*danta*), to engage in spiritual development (*bhāvanā*), to gain self-mastery (*bhāvita*), to engage in training (*sikkhā*)—to become a trainee (*sekha*) in order to become an adept (*asekha*).

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: verb = *dameti*.

<sup>2</sup> The term *sekha* is derived from the root *sikkh* and related to *sikkhā*.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: the four stages of enlightenment: stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and arahantship.

## The First Jewel Generating Enthusiasm for Study

Education begins with a conviction that human beings are responsive to and capable of training and development. We all have the potential to learn, hone skills, and evolve to the point of distinction and excellence. Hence the frequently reiterated teaching in Buddhism that human beings must be educated and trained. Moreover, excellence is achieved by way of such education, training, and practice.

It is an unreasonable and overly simplistic claim that human beings are categorically superior to other animals. Instead, we should say that humans are outstanding by way of training, or that humans achieve preeminence by way of training. Not only do we possess the capacity for training and development, but it is training that makes life meaningful.

Other animals rely almost entirely on instinct; they generally only learn new skills for the sake of survival. They are incapable of achieving higher degrees of excellence or cultivating unique attributes. On the whole, they die at the same level of competence at which they were born.

Although some animals can be taught new skills—for instance elephants can learn to haul logs and monkeys to perform circus tricks—their capacity to learn is limited. This differs from human beings, whose potential for learning is boundless.

We thus begin our educational work with this key principle of *tathāgatabodhi-saddhā*, which encapsulates the Triple Gem and is connected to a conviction in the human potential for training and cultivation up to supreme excellence and nobility.

This faith and conviction becomes an anchor and support for the mind. People endowed with faith have focus, direction, and energy. Faith in the human potential, including the potential to

become fully enlightened—to become a Buddha—generates enthusiasm for learning and mobilizes the educational process.

This principle of *tathāgatabodhi-saddhā* has been presented here to help prevent an overly vague and generalized description of the Buddha. Buddhists like to recite the nine attributes of the Buddha, but often neglect to integrate them into their lives and link them to personal responsibility. The reason the Buddha taught these nine attributes was for us to apply them and follow his example. If we can summon this awareness of our personal potential, we can be said to have generated a true appreciation of education.

### Duo/Triad of Attributes Leading the Way

When we have established a proper relationship to the attributes of the Buddha, we are ready to expand on this set of principles.

Our focus of faith is made more potent and clear when we have a source of inspiration. This is especially true at preliminary stages of education. Children, for example, are greatly assisted by finding and emulating role models.

The teaching on the ninefold virtues of the Buddha can appear quite expansive and complex. These nine virtues are inspirational when chanted, but their meaning is profound and difficult to fathom. Many people will have trouble even memorizing them. For this reason, it is useful to initially adopt one of the abridged sets of virtues, and then, when prepared, we can return to this collection of nine.

A concise threefold set of the Buddha's virtues, familiar to many Buddhists, is as follows:

1. **Virtue of wisdom** (*paññā-guṇa*).
2. **Virtue of purity** (*visuddhi-guṇa*).
3. **Virtue of compassion** (*karuṇā-guṇa*).

Owing to these three virtues, the Buddha is considered sublime, worthy of our worship and veneration. These virtues deserve our respect and emulation. They are ideals for us to aspire to. We should cultivate them and bring them to perfection.<sup>1</sup>

This self-cultivation by upholding exemplary behaviour can be considered a second stage, following on from the first stage, namely, the belief in human potential for training and development. The content of this training is precisely the cultivation of these three virtues.

There is an even shorter set of the Buddha's virtues, containing only two factors, namely:

**1. Accomplishment of personal welfare:**<sup>2</sup> the Buddha developed the perfections (*pāramī*), brought all spiritual qualities—of moral conduct, concentration and wisdom—to completion, arrived at the supreme goal, and realized knowledge, liberation, purity, peace, Nibbāna.

**2. Practice for the welfare of others:**<sup>3</sup> the Buddha performed wholesome deeds for the good of others. Both by himself and by sending out his disciples near and far, he proclaimed the Dhamma so that people acquired knowledge, conducted themselves virtuously, and lived with integrity, and so that Buddhism would spread far and wide for the welfare and happiness of the manyfolk, for the compassionate assistance of the world.

The first factor highlights wisdom, enabling the fulfilment of self-reliance<sup>4</sup> and Buddhahood.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This concise set of three virtues is discussed in the book *Saamtri* (Thai edition; 2<sup>nd</sup> printing, 2006; from p. 13 onwards).

<sup>2</sup> *Attattha-sampatti*, which can be abbreviated to *atta-sampatti*. [Trans.: also known as *attahita-sampatti*.]

<sup>3</sup> *Parattha-ṭṭapatti*. [Trans.: also known as *parahita-ṭṭapatti*.]

<sup>4</sup> *Atta-nātha*.

<sup>5</sup> *Buddha-bhāva*.



The second factor highlights compassion, facilitating the fulfilment of the Buddha's acts of service<sup>1</sup> and being the Protector of the World.<sup>2</sup>

This twofold set of the Buddha's virtues has its source in ancient scriptures, where it appears frequently and is used as a direct synopsis of the ninefold set of virtues.<sup>3</sup>

This concise set of two attributes is an appropriate starting point for study as it refers to both people's individual lives and their external relationships (to society and the natural environment). It can be used as a comprehensive framework for education. Besides summarizing the ninefold set of virtues, it also incorporates the threefold set: the virtue of wisdom is the primary factor for reaching the accomplishment of personal welfare; the virtue of purity is in itself the accomplishment of personal welfare; and the virtue of compassion lies at the core of practice for the welfare of others.

There are two related points to mention here:

First, in the expression 'personal welfare', the actual benefit is not limited to acquiring pleasant consumer items and material objects. Such things as food, clothing, furnishings and appliances, and even media news and information, are merely things that we make use of to give us strength and energy. What is really beneficial is physical and mental wellbeing along with such qualities as mindfulness and wisdom.

Sometimes we consume things recklessly. Instead of receiving their genuine benefit, they end up causing us harm. This kind of consumption is unprofitable and wasteful.

Second, the two factors of accomplishment of personal welfare and practice for the welfare of others are interconnected.

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<sup>1</sup> *Buddha-kicca*.

<sup>2</sup> *Loka-nātha*.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: see: *Dīghanikāya Aṭṭhakathā Ṭīkā* (DAṬ. I. 8) and the *Visuddhimagga Mahāṭīkā*.

For example, the more we develop our wisdom and understanding, the more effectively we can help others. Conversely, the more we help others or assist society, the further we advance in wisdom and understanding, regardless of whether people appreciate our efforts and reciprocate in kind.

## The Second Jewel Understanding the Subject of Study

The second jewel is the Dhamma. Many people, when they hear the word ‘Dhamma’, think of the chant beginning with: *Svākkhāto...*, describing the six attributes of the Dhamma.<sup>1</sup> Yet, just like with the Buddha, if one fails to understand the essential meaning of this word, it can cause confusion.

Following on from our discussion of the Buddha and his attributes, we can define the Dhamma as the truth of nature, which when realized, leads to Buddhahood.

The Buddha affirmed the human potential for realizing supreme awakening, and he appealed to us to engage in training—to study and practice—in order to reach this goal. We may ask: ‘What needs to be studied and practised?’ The answer is: ‘the Dhamma’. We must understand the laws of nature and conduct ourselves in harmony with them.

We can become Buddhas by understanding and practising in accord with Dhamma: by realizing the Dhamma. This is what is meant by awakening to the Dhamma or attaining Buddhahood.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: *dhamma-guṇa*: 1) *svākkhāto* (the Dhamma is well-proclaimed); 2) *sanditṭhiko* (to be seen for oneself); 3) *akāliko* (timeless); 4) *ehi-passiko* (inviting to come and see); 5) *opanayiko* (to be brought within and realized); 6) *paccattaṃ veditaṅṅha viññūhi* (to be experienced individually by the wise).

The Buddha asserted that, whether a Tathāgata arises or not, the Dhamma is autonomous and timeless. He referred to it as an ‘absolute truth’,<sup>1</sup> a ‘certainty of nature’,<sup>2</sup> and a ‘cosmic law’.<sup>3</sup> After discovering this truth, he revealed it to others.

To summarize:

- The Dhamma is the truth existing in line with natural laws.
- When we practise in harmony with the Dhamma we realize Buddhahood.

Regardless of what aspect of nature we study, if our process of training is upright and correct, we can be said to be studying and practising the Dhamma. And if we bring these studies to completion, that is, if we align ourselves with the truth, we become a ‘Buddha’.

There are thus two stages to this discussion:

First, the Dhamma is an independently existing truth; it is autonomous; it is a cosmic law.

Second, we interact with the Dhamma by understanding it; by understanding the laws of nature. For instance, we can understand the dynamics of conditionality giving rise to a particular outcome; if we desire such an outcome, then we must act in conformity with the relevant laws of nature.

Regardless of whether one examines laws of physics analyzed by modern science, or one examines the truth of the mind as described in Buddhism, it is imperative to understand the relevant laws of nature. Equipped with such knowledge, we can then use it to our advantage, live a life of integrity, and succeed in all of our endeavours.

The same process holds true when drawing upon scientific knowledge to produce technological innovations. Here, the first

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<sup>1</sup> *Dhamma-dhātu*.

<sup>2</sup> *Dhamma-niyāma*.

<sup>3</sup> *Dhammatā*.

stage of understanding is to have insight into laws of nature. The second stage is then to apply this insight in order to create things and to solve problems. This two-stage process pertains to both external and internal conditions. When applied to our minds—the internal world—we can develop all the way to becoming Buddhas.

The students visiting today can reflect on this. All of our deliberate actions require some form of understanding, and they must accord with laws of nature. Is this correct or not?

In relation to our bodies, if we desire good health, we must know what to eat, how much to eat, and how to exercise. In terms of the mind, if we wish to become more intelligent, we must have a thirst for knowledge; we should read, listen, and gather information; we require mindfulness, concentration, and wise reflection. And in terms of external activities, for instance learning how to swim or cook, we must learn the relevant skills and procedures. We must train regularly in order to become accomplished and proficient.

It is possible to achieve a sublime level of self-mastery: to understand and live in harmony with truth and to align ourselves perfectly with causes and conditions. Here, one has finished one's training and education; one has done all that needs to be done. Another word for the Dhamma is 'perfection'; perfection is found at the Dhamma.<sup>1</sup>

The Buddha urged us to study and practise the Dhamma. Besides this, what else is there of any value in life?

The Dhamma is the second jewel. Anyone who abides in the Dhamma—who realizes and conforms to the truth—dwells in perfect ease and happiness, utterly fulfilled.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the root of Dhamma is  $\sqrt{dhar}$  (Sk.: *dhri*), meaning 'bearing', 'supporting', and by correlation 'powerful', 'able'. I have opted for the word 'perfection' here, although the author's original could also be translated as 'accomplishment', 'completion', 'fulfilment' or 'proficiency'.

## The Third Jewel

### A Supportive Environment for Training

The third jewel is the Sangha. Most of us are familiar with the nine attributes of the Sangha mentioned in the chanting.<sup>1</sup> Rather than go into the particulars of these attributes, it is perhaps more useful to focus on the essential meaning of the term ‘Sangha’.

Often, the Sangha is defined as those ordained individuals who have transmitted the Buddha’s teachings over the centuries and up to the modern era. If that is the correct definition, then what about the monastic community established by the Buddha during his lifetime? Was it their duty to pass down the teachings to later generations? Indeed, the first generation of monks and nuns were not primarily charged with this responsibility; they simply listened to the Dhamma firsthand from the Buddha and put it into practice. This being so, there must be another distinctive meaning of the term ‘Sangha’.

It is true that one attribute of the Sangha is to preserve, protect, and transmit the Buddha’s teachings. If it were not for the monastic community, it is most likely that the Dhamma would have vanished by now. Yet, looking at this subject from another perspective, we can examine the Buddha’s objective for establishing the Sangha.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: *saṅgha-guṇa*: 1) *supaṭiṭṭhāna* (practised well); 2) *ujjupāṭiṭṭhāna* (practised directly; of upright conduct); 3) *nīyapāṭiṭṭhāna* (practised insightfully; of right conduct); 4) *sāmicipāṭiṭṭhāna* (practise with integrity; of proper conduct); 5) *āhuneyyo* (worthy of gifts); 6) *pāhuneyyo* (worthy of hospitality); 7) *dakkhineyyo* (worthy of offerings); 8) *añjalikaraṇiyyo* (worthy of respect); 9) *anuttaraṃ puññakkhettaṃ lokassa* (the incomparable field of merit for the world).

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: note the venerable author’s definition of the Sangha in *Buddhadhamma* (p. 511 of the English version): ‘These four pairs of noble beings are known as the *sāvaka-saṅgha*, the disciples of the Buddha who are considered exemplary human beings and comprise one of the three “jewels” (*ratana*) in Buddhism.’

These noble awakened persons (*sāvaka-saṅgha*; *ariya-saṅgha*) are not restricted to the monastic order; indeed, many of them are laypeople. Normally, I use the lowercase ‘sangha’ to refer to the monastic community, and the uppercase ‘Sangha’ for the assembly of awakened disciples. Here, however, the author is defining the third ‘Jewel’ in a more conventional sense, as the monastic community. I therefore stick to the uppercase ‘Sangha’, in the same sense as the English word ‘Order’.

Strictly speaking, rather than ‘establishing’ the monastic community, the Buddha ‘supervised’ or ‘guided’ it. This is because the monastic community originated from various faithful individuals who approached the Buddha and asked to live with him in order to hear his teachings and undertake training. The Buddha thus attended to and regulated this community as it began to grow, creating a structure, way of life, and environment most conducive to engaging in the Threefold Training. In other words, he provided an opportunity for people to develop themselves into similarly realizing Buddhahood.

These individuals who gained faith after listening to the Buddha’s teachings and went forth into the homeless life can be separated into different categories. Some of them asked to live in close proximity with the Buddha in order to deepen their understanding and pursue their training. Others wished to return to their native lands to practise what they had learned, but due to various obstacles chose to remain with the Buddha. Still others became enlightened and offered their assistance to the Buddha. They thus formed a community that was called the ‘Sangha’, consisting of people who were beginning their training, those who were deepening their training, and others who had completed their training. As a result, the Buddha established a formal system of training for this community.

Although the monastic community at the time of the Buddha contained fully awakened individuals, the majority of members were still in training. For this reason, the Buddha nurtured the most favourable conditions, including a way of life, social environment, system of managing communal affairs, and so forth, for undertaking and promulgating the Threefold Training.

All members of this community shared a single goal and followed the same system of training. Some of the individuals were still beginners, while others had realized various stages of awakening all the way to arahantship. Hence, the community’s most valuable asset was the individual members themselves. Each member

played a part in providing mutual support and encouragement within this process of training.

Those individuals who had entered the Order earlier or who had attained higher states of realization became teachers<sup>1</sup> and preceptors.<sup>2</sup> In other words, they became ‘virtuous friends’ (*kalyāṇamitta*), answering questions and offering advice and guidance. Indeed, all of the members acted as virtuous friends for one another by discussing the Dhamma, exchanging knowledge, and so on. The monastic order is thus a community of friendship, whereby each person promotes the optimum conditions for all members to engage in spiritual cultivation.

The purpose and objective of the monastic community is thus to create a conducive setting for spiritual practice. Such a setting includes solitude and a delightful natural environment. In particular, the Sangha is comprised of individuals supporting one another in the Threefold Training.

For it to be a conducive medium for training, the monastic community requires a social discipline. The Buddha therefore set down a code of discipline known as the Vinaya, which is established on the vital principle of social harmony.<sup>3</sup> The Buddha repeatedly highlighted this principle, thus enjoining each individual to support all other members.

How does social harmony act as a basis for the Vinaya? And reciprocally, how does the Vinaya maintain and preserve harmony?

In a healthy community, individual members feel mutual love, goodwill, and trust; they wish to assist one another and to cooperate. They do not harbour suspicion or get caught up in disputes and conflict; instead, they empower one another. This is the definition of social harmony.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ācariya*. [Trans.: in English, the corresponding transliteration from the Thai—‘Ajahn’—has become common.]

<sup>2</sup> *Upajjhāya*.

<sup>3</sup> *Sāmaggī*.

A harmonious community fosters a cheerful and refreshing atmosphere whereby each individual is free to attend to his or her own responsibilities beginning with a cultivation of the Threefold Training. In respect to meditation, the mind in such an environment becomes easily calm and concentrated. It is for this reason that the structure of the Vinaya gives such great importance to harmony and concord. As mentioned earlier, this is a reciprocal relationship: social harmony underpins the Vinaya, and the structure of the Vinaya safeguards harmony.

Within the context of the monastic community, each individual practises self-restraint and upholds a skilful way of life. At the same time, everyone lives harmoniously in a spirit of friendship. This creates an even more supportive set of conditions, enabling each person to fulfil his or her own responsibilities and engage in spiritual practice with optimal results.

The Sangha is thus a community of concord, discipline, and friendship, comprised of individuals engaged in spiritual cultivation as well as those who have completely finished all that needs to be done.

Those individuals who have completed their spiritual training are adepts:<sup>1</sup> arahants. Those who have realized intermediate stages of awakening are called ‘trainees’.<sup>2</sup> And those who have more recently begun the training are ordinary, unawakened beings.<sup>3</sup>

To sum up, there are four attributes to the Sangha:

1. The community contains individuals who have completed their spiritual training as well as those who are still engaged in training.
2. It is a community based on friendship.

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<sup>1</sup> *Asekha*.

<sup>2</sup> *Sekha*.

<sup>3</sup> *Puthujjana*.



3. It is grounded in harmony and concord.

4. It has a code of discipline that regulates behaviour, communal activities, interactions within and outside the community, and so forth. The Vinaya fosters conditions most favourable to training, and it supports and safeguards communal harmony.

These are the marks of a healthy community. It is fair to say that any school—any educational institution—should hold up these four attributes as an archetype and standard.

The Sangha is a model community established by the Buddha with a clear aim and purpose. It has a code of conduct governing livelihood, communal activities, and even the natural environment—promoting quiet, peaceful and refreshing settings. Each member of the community contributes to the spiritual cultivation of everyone else. All of these conditions are conducive to arriving at the goal of spiritual training. In our educational organizations, we must similarly forge an environment and manage all affairs so that they are favourable for everyone involved to realize shared goals and aspirations.

To sum up, the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha are all directly related to education.



# Chapter 3

## Triad of Discernment

### Impermanence: Lifting the Veil

We now come to the Three Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*). Here, I won't elaborate on these three laws of nature—*aniccatā*, *dukkhatā* and *anattatā*. Instead, we can examine how a knowledge of these truths is advantageous and valuable.

The first law—on impermanence—is helpful for discerning certain aspects of reality and coming to terms with them. It is particularly useful for developing acceptance and letting go. Thai people are skilled at applying this principle. There is even a Thai idiom: 'Make peace with impermanence,'<sup>1</sup> which is used in times of separation and loss. By recognizing the transitoriness of all things, one is able to let go.

The terms 'letting go' and 'non-attachment' are most often used in relation to impermanence. Of the three characteristics of impermanence, unendurability, and selflessness,<sup>2</sup> Thai people are most familiar with the first. It is common for them to say: 'Alas, all is fleeting. What arises must pass away. Things come and go. That's the way things are. Don't suffer over them.' They use this

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: ปลงอนิจจัง.

<sup>2</sup> *Aniccatā*, *dukkhatā*, & *anattatā*. [Trans.: the most common translations for *dukkhatā* are 'suffering' and 'unsatisfactoriness'. On why I have chosen 'unendurability' see below under the section titled 'Dukkhatā & Skilful Life Management'.]

means of contemplation to reconcile themselves with change and recover from grief and distress.

Applying impermanence in this manner is fine, yet people sometimes use this method too much. They should be reminded not to limit themselves to this form of contemplation by adopting other methods as well.

To provide another perspective, let us examine a vital teaching by the Buddha, namely his final words<sup>1</sup> before his passing away:

*Vayadhammā saṅkhārā appamādena sampādetha.*

‘All conditioned things are of a nature to decay; bring heedfulness to perfection.’<sup>2</sup>

Here, the first clause points to the truth of impermanence, that all things are fleeting and subject to dissolution and decay. The second clause describes a proper relationship to impermanence, that is, how we can benefit from it by acting heedfully and diligently.

For ordinary, unenlightened people, the Buddha emphasized the relationship to impermanence outlined in the second clause. This is because the majority of people are heedless and negligent; they are liable to procrastinate, coast along, and let things slide. This interpretation of impermanence urges us to make haste in our training and practice, and to promptly attend to all of our responsibilities.<sup>3</sup>

In what way does impermanence act as a spur and catalyst? Everything, both material and immaterial, physical and mental, is subject to change. For this reason, our lives can take a turn for the

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<sup>1</sup> *Pacchīma-vācā; pacchīma-ovāda.*

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: e.g.: D. II. 120. [Trans.: alternatively: ‘...strive to attain the goal by diligence.’]

<sup>3</sup> Arahants abide in constant heedfulness and vigilance. [Trans.: note that it is possible for awakened beings below the stage of arahant to be neglectful by ceasing to make further effort.]

worse or for the better; they can regress or evolve. If things were static and immobile, one's life would stand still and remain the same. But because they are impermanent, we are able to develop and grow. If we are remiss, however, we squander this opportunity as change is relentless. The result is that we decline. Therefore, we must be diligent, hastening to take this opportunity and initiate positive growth.

Impermanence provides the initial spark for wisdom, prompting us to recognize a relatively conspicuous truth, namely, that all things are transient: they arise and pass away. This knowledge, however, is still not enough. We must investigate deeper, that is, we must know the circumstances affecting change, beginning with an understanding that change is not arbitrary. Rather, it occurs dependent on causes and conditions. Things improve or worsen due to relevant causes and conditions. If we are skilled and discerning, we attend to things precisely at these causes and conditions.<sup>1</sup>

If we generate those conditions leading to growth, the process of change is positive; if we generate detrimental conditions, the process is harmful. Therefore, we should study and examine which conditions need to be altered, prevented, fostered, and so forth. We then attend to them accordingly. Moreover, we should not delay; we only have a limited number of opportunities.

It is for this reason that the Buddha gave such importance to the principle of heedfulness (*appamāda*).

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: 'causes & conditions' = *hetu-paccaya*. One of the reasons this compound is used is to combat the wrong view of 'single causality'—that a single cause leads to a single result. An example often cited in this context is that of planting a tree. Although one may have put a seed in the ground, many other conditions (e.g. sunlight, water, fertilizer, etc.) play a role in enabling the seed to develop into a tree. For brevity's sake, there are times in the text when I use the terms 'cause', 'condition', 'causality', 'conditionality', etc. on their own, but, unless otherwise specified, these terms should be seen as referring to *hetu-paccaya*.

## Letting Go vs. Letting Things Slide

As mentioned earlier, the benefits of understanding impermanence include the ability to cope with change skilfully and to let go. We realize that we cannot always get what we want. Things must proceed according to laws of nature; they don't necessarily follow our desires. This letting go is equivalent to accepting things as they are: making peace with impermanence and relinquishing unrealistic desires. We discover an inner freedom and a relief from suffering.

Many people, however, after letting go, become neglectful. They let things slide which is a form of heedlessness (*pamāda*). Those things that need to be attended to and rectified remain ignored and unfinished. This can be very harmful, conforming to the maxim: 'Heedlessness is the path to death.'<sup>1</sup> Instead of being positive, letting go here becomes destructive. We must therefore be careful and vigilant by understanding these dynamics accurately and acting correctly.

To use colloquial language, it is fine to let go, but don't let things slide. Emotionally, we let go, but wisdom remains circumspect. The mind stays free and unburdened as it passes the responsibility for engagement on to the faculty of wisdom.<sup>2</sup> This accords with the Buddha's exhortation to live one's life with wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

Here we can return to the Buddha's final words describing a complementary twofold understanding:

- First, one understands the truth of impermanence. This understanding enables the mind to be released from a feeling of

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<sup>1</sup> *Pamādo maccuno padaṃ*; Dh. verse. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: there is a common distinction in Buddhism between *citta* (mind; state of mind; heart; emotional body; mental composure) and *paññā* (wisdom; intelligent reasoning; cognitive process; circumspection; insight; knowledge). A synonym for *paññā* is *nāṇa* (although the definition of the latter term tends to be more restricted).

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: 'Life with wisdom is the supreme life' (*paññājīviṃ jīvitamāhu seṭṭham*): Sn. 32.

affliction. In short, it enables letting go—a state of mind whereby one is reconciled to change.

- Second, one investigates deeper into the dynamics of impermanence. Here, wisdom, with the help of mindfulness, takes over. For instance, one discerns the causes and conditions, both favourable and adverse, affecting change, and one recognizes what needs to be done in order to manage or improve circumstances. This is not neglect; rather, it is an active engagement. (From here one may advance to further levels, for example setting down methods and strategies for reaching desired goals, but that goes beyond the scope of this talk.) At this second stage, one applies an understanding of impermanence consistent with diligence and heedfulness.

The Buddha repeatedly linked the truth of impermanence to heedfulness, highlighting this essential connection and encapsulated by his final teaching: ‘All conditioned things are of a nature to decay; bring heedfulness to perfection.’

This final teaching can be summarized as follows: ‘All things are impermanent: we should not be complacent. Pleasant, desirable things that we currently experience may become otherwise. Unpleasant, unwanted things may come to pass. Myriad causes play a role in this dynamic of flux. When things change, if we are caught unprepared, heedless and complacent, unskilled at dealing with the process, we will be in trouble. The Buddha therefore urged us to not be careless. We must seek out knowledge to continually prevent decline and foster growth.’

## Genuine Education Is Grounded in Truth

The emphasis on heedfulness is used for balance. Without this principle, people may use the reflection on impermanence merely to console themselves, which is a form of resignation. This can even turn into neglect and passivity, which is opposite to the goal encouraged by the Buddha. His teachings on impermanence focused on vigilance and diligence.

Some people follow this line of thinking: ‘Everything changes. When things take a turn for the worse, they will soon improve on their own; and when things prosper, there will inevitably come a time of decline.’ If unchecked, this kind of thinking turns into a doctrine of non-causality, of which there are different branches, including fatalism, a doctrine of inaction, and accidentalism, all of which are forms of wrong view.<sup>1</sup> In the scriptures, they are called ‘sectarian tenets’.<sup>2</sup>

Change is neither arbitrary nor predestined. There is no set rule that prosperity must lead to decline, or vice versa. If one gets stuck in these sorts of views, one will end up simply waiting around for good or bad fortune to turn up out of the blue. This is both heedless and mistaken behaviour.

With sufficient understanding, in times of prosperity we are able to ward off the causes for decline. More than that: we can direct the trajectory of change to increase such prosperity. Whether prosperity leads to decline or to further prosperity, or whether decline leads to prosperity or to further decline, all of these scenarios are expressions of change. Nothing remains constant. And all these changes, both positive and negative, are dependent on causes and conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> *Micchā-ditṭhi*.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: teachings espoused by members of other religious traditions (*titthiya*).



Equipped with this understanding, we live carefully. By investigating the relevant causes and conditions, and acting accordingly, we make effort to prevent harmful change and to foster advantageous change.

The Buddha taught the ‘conditions that lead to non-decline’.<sup>1</sup> He declared that if one upholds these conditions then: ‘Only prosperity is to be expected, not decline.’<sup>2</sup>

But don’t these words conflict with the principle of impermanence? According to the law of impermanence, one may assume that growth must inevitably lead to decline. Yet here the Buddha outlines a mode of practice by which one can expect only growth, with no decline.

Indeed, there is no contradiction. Increased prosperity is a form of change. The word ‘prosperity’ refers to a desirable state of reality that is in flux; it is not static. Likewise, the word ‘decline’ refers to an undesirable state, subject to the same dynamics.

Many people, however, misunderstand this truth, convinced that prosperity must eventually lead to decline, and the other way around. They then wait around idly for their fortunes to change. The Buddha pointed out the harm in such misunderstanding as it disempowers people and can lead to a lack of motivation to act and engage.

Buddhism is a religion of action.<sup>3</sup> In full, it is a religion of study and practice for wise engagement with causes and conditions. It is not a teaching of inactivity or careless indifference.

The teaching on impermanence bids us to understand and make peace with this truth of nature. We recognize that we cannot always get what we want. As a result, craving is abandoned

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<sup>1</sup> *Aparihāniya-dhamma.*

<sup>2</sup> *Vuḍḍhiyeva pātikañkhā no parihāni.*

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: *kiriya-vāda.*

and suffering abates, until, with consummate understanding, suffering is completely dispelled. But on another level, we apply our understanding for active, determined and diligent engagement.

By relating skilfully to the law of impermanence, we therefore derive a twofold benefit, namely, composure and commitment.

**Composure:** Based on an understanding of this truth, the mind experiences letting go, independence, and freedom from distress. One accepts and comes to terms with things as they are. One is at ease.

**Commitment:** When one engages in activities and fulfils one's responsibilities, one is earnest, persevering, and vigilant.

Composure can be summarized as 'setting things down'; commitment has the sense of 'carefully taking things up'.

To conclude, the teaching of impermanence has a direct bearing on education, namely:

*First*, the law of impermanence underpins all of education. Human beings have the potential for development—all the way to becoming Buddhas—and to fulfil this potential they must be trained. This training and development is only possible, however, because of impermanence. Both our bodies and minds are subject to change; we can therefore grow and mature.

*Second*, the dynamic of change is not arbitrary; rather, it is shaped by causes and conditions. Human development, or education, is a conditioned process—an interrelated causal system. For education to be successful we must understand and act in harmony with this system. The Threefold Training is thus based on the laws of impermanence and conditionality.

*Third*, because things change and transform according to causes and conditions, it is incumbent on us to act with heedfulness. And the most fundamental form of heedfulness—the starting point—is heedfulness in relation to education: to learning

and self-improvement. We must be continually reminded to take care, to use our time well and not allow it to pass in vain. We thus develop into ‘virtuous beings’,<sup>1</sup> ‘noble beings’,<sup>2</sup> and eventually into ‘perfected beings’<sup>3</sup>—adepts.

True education is thus consistent with natural laws; it is a means by which we apply our knowledge of these laws to derive the greatest benefit.

## Dukkhatā & Skilful Life Management

The second of the three characteristics is *dukkhatā*—the ‘state of *dukkha*’. The word *dukkha* here does not refer to its common definitions as ‘suffering’, ‘pain’, or ‘dissatisfaction’—that is, as a human feeling or emotion. Rather, it refers to a property of all things and accords with a law of nature paired with impermanence. All things are subject to pressure, stress, friction, and oppression, whereby their constituent factors collide and run counter to one another, making it impossible to remain in an original state—they must all undergo transformation and become otherwise. In other words, all things are unstable and must disintegrate.

Although impermanence is relatively easy for people to see and recognize, *dukkha* has a greater impact on people’s lives and is of more personal concern. This is because the stress inherent in nature (*dukkhatā*) that presses, squeezes, crushes, and pounds—tearing things down and breaking them up—results in pressure and strain experienced by people as unpleasant feeling (*dukkha-vedanā*).<sup>4</sup> This discomfort—often felt as unbearable—then becomes a problem needing to be attended to and remedied.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kalyāṇa-puggala*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ariya-puggala*.

<sup>3</sup> *Asekha-puggala*.

<sup>4</sup> Trans.: both physical and mental.

All things—large and small, even to the minutest particle—are dependent on one another within a system of interrelated causes and conditions. They do not exist in isolation. If associated conditions exist and interact in a state of cooperation and balance, the dynamic of change and instability is temporarily exempt from strain and conflict. We describe such a state as ‘smooth’, ‘positive’, or ‘well-functioning’, that is, it is considered desirable by human beings.

Yet if the interrelationship of causes and conditions is imbalanced and uneven, the dynamic of change produces severe or hostile effects deemed by people to be negative, adverse, and harmful.

As the state of *dukkha* is a universal characteristic of nature, it is normal that human beings are continually impacted by pressure and friction.

The body is a clear example. It is a complex entity comprised of various organs each of which performs its own function while working in unison with other bodily parts. It can be separated into numerous subsidiary systems, for instance the respiratory system, digestive system, nervous system, muscular system, and so on.

Each of these minor systems are themselves comprised of myriad and complex ancillary factors, all of which function together in a state of continuity and balance, helping to prevent sicknesses and infections. All the while, these systems rely on the holistic integrity of the larger organism—the entire body—which exists in a natural state conducive to survival and good health.

The heart alone performs a formidable and extremely complicated task. It is robust, durable, and consistent, beating round-the-clock, nonstop. Specialists say that to reach the age of 76, one’s heart will have to beat approximately 2.8 billion times.

In Pali, the body's ability to function well and to avert danger—to maintain the various organs and body parts in a state of good health—is called *parihāra*.<sup>1</sup>

If a foreign object—even a very small one—impinges on the body, or some other physical impediment occurs, for example a bacteria or virus breaches the immune system, it can cause all sorts of problems and illnesses. These problems can be very difficult to rectify and may even result in death.

A mote of dust in the eye, a tiny insect crawling on the skin, an itch, or a hard object under one's mattress—all of these things can cause intolerable discomfort, from which one struggles to be free.

Continuous physical governance and oversight by the body itself requires a great deal of refinement and precision. If any imbalance occurs, say there are heart complications, then life cannot be sustained. We can learn a lot from the body's own ability to manage life. At the very least, it reminds us to be resolute and vigilant in all all areas of our lives.

In sum, all mechanisms of the physical body strive to be relieved from the state of *dukkhatā*: of pressure and unendurability. If this is possible, as in normal physical equilibrium, things function well—they exist in a state of health.<sup>2</sup> But if there is disturbance and imbalance, then illness occurs. (This can be compared to external physical objects: when a critical pressure is reached, things burst, crumble, shatter, and so forth.)

The body's task is onerous and painstaking. The heart alone pumps blood day and night, never asking for a rest. It is extremely difficult for human beings to match the skill and precision of the

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes it is called *khandha-parihāra*: 'managing the five aggregates' or 'managing life'. [Trans.: the term *parihāra* means 'attention' and 'care'; it can also be translated as 'management' or 'protection'.]

<sup>2</sup> *Sukha-bhāva*.

body's natural order. What we should focus on is supporting this natural order in a way that is most beneficial and favourable.

Those of you who have studied insight meditation<sup>1</sup> will be familiar with the principle that the concealer of the characteristic of *dukkha*<sup>2</sup> is 'bodily movement' (*iriyāpatha*).

If the body remains motionless in a single position, before long, it begins to experience pressure and stress,<sup>3</sup> which is then followed by a feeling of pain and discomfort.<sup>4</sup> Yet, because we are constantly changing our posture, we are usually not consciously aware of this strain and pressure. It is for this reason that bodily movement is said to conceal the characteristic of *dukkha*.<sup>5</sup>

What we refer to as a physical 'posture' is merely a shifting of position whereby people struggle to escape from stresses inherent in nature. From this deeper perspective, we can thus define *dukkha* in this context as 'stress'.<sup>6</sup>

In order to avoid this stress, human beings are endowed with unique mental qualities, whereby they can remain relatively independent of internal and external influences. The most significant of these qualities are intention (*cetanā*) and wisdom (*paññā*).

These two qualities are complementary. Intention refers to a mental focus and a determination to engage with that deemed by wisdom to be most excellent.<sup>7</sup> Wisdom is an understanding of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Vipassanā*.

<sup>2</sup> *Dukkha-lakkhaṇa*.

<sup>3</sup> *Dukkhatā*.

<sup>4</sup> *Dukkha-vedanā*.

<sup>5</sup> Trans.: *iriyāpatha* ('posture') literally means 'mode of movement'. The four postures are standing, walking, sitting, and lying down.

<sup>6</sup> Trans.: there is probably no single English word that can adequately convey the full meaning of *dukkha* in all its nuances, but in the context of the three characteristics, 'stress' is perhaps the most accurate.

<sup>7</sup> Trans.: this is 'wholesome' or 'right' intention; intention can of course also follow the course of mental defilements.

dynamic of interrelated causes and conditions—characterized by unendurability—along with an understanding of how to deal with these conditions in a way most favourable for reaching the goal aimed at by intention. In this context, the fulfilment of education is founded upon the development of these two chief qualities.

In many everyday situations, for instance a change of posture, these two qualities are not clearly evident; these basic physical actions are performed more or less automatically. If one sits for a long time one begins to feel sore and as a reflex, one stands up, goes for a walk, or lies down. Very little intention and intelligence is required. In other words, people do not need to draw upon their human potential.

When we discern the truth of *dukkhatā* and appreciate the opportunity to develop our human potential, we make an effort to strengthen these unique qualities in order to help circumvent and escape from stress as much as possible. Life—a dynamic of interrelated causes and conditions—thus functions smoothly. Moreover, by acting in this way, we advance in and derive the optimal benefits from the Threefold Training—the final triad.

Already, by skilfully relating to the four postures, we are able to maintain a physical equilibrium promoting good health. Conversely, if we simply wait for pain and discomfort to coerce us into shifting postures, without any supervision and oversight, we become heedless and our health is undermined.

Supervision and oversight here refers to guiding all associated factors away from pressure and conflict, and to integrating and balancing them in order to realize a noble goal.

## Dukkhatā & Developing Human Potential

People can actualize the highest human potential—of becoming a ‘Buddha’—through the understanding of *dukkhatā*.<sup>1</sup> We can say that this realization is made possible by virtue of *dukkhatā*, which bids people to manage and guide the dynamic of interrelated causes and conditions in a way that leads away from pressure and stress at every stage of training—and in every moment—until one reaches the final goal.

Conditioned phenomena<sup>2</sup> arise as a convergence of interdependent subsidiary components. In other words, parts make up a whole or organs make up an organism.

Yet all of these components arise and pass away according to the law of *dukkhatā*, that is, they are at odds with one another. Besides an inner conflict, these components are also in conflict with external factors. The net result is that all things are under pressure and unable to sustain an original state of existence; they must change and become otherwise. It is as if all things struggle or endeavour for constancy, a process that may be relatively smooth or difficult. As things change, they undergo perpetual adjustment and realignment. When this adjustment reaches a suitable degree or equilibrium, things can be said to be balanced, harmonious, and unified.

All things, large and small, are subject to this law of *dukkhatā*. They are constantly adapting, striving to find balance in a new state of being. This extends from smaller entities like the body, which is regularly shifting postures, up to the entire planet which is repeatedly convulsed by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: technically, realization of Nibbāna results from a comprehensive understanding of *anattā* (see Ud. 37), but as these three characteristics are facets of one truth, a penetration of one characteristic implies the penetration of all.

<sup>2</sup> *Saṅkhāra*.



Relying on our exceptional spiritual potential, we can develop wisdom and penetrate the truth of *dukkhatā*. We can then set down a clearly framed strategy and goal for managing causes and conditions in order to bring about optimal adjustment and balance. Indeed, we can go beyond mere adjustment and advance to self-improvement and enrichment.

The law of *dukkhatā* helps us to manage our lives, enabling all of our activities, both personal and social, to proceed well. Equipped with understanding, we become more adaptable, skilled at improving and fine-tuning everything we come into contact with. The alternative is to aimlessly allow nature to take its course, waiting for pressure to impinge on us, at which time we are forced to scramble for an escape.

The law of *dukkhatā* urges us to develop wisdom and to understand this law. We then apply our understanding to conduct ourselves skilfully in relation to this aspect of reality. In this way, pressure and stress are ‘defanged’—their toxins removed—causing us no trouble.

Endowed with an understanding of *dukkhatā*, we are able to solve all problems and bring about an end to suffering. We manage and adapt to all causes and conditions within the dynamic of universal interconnectivity. We thus manage our lives well, free from affliction.

Pressure affects things and people in different ways:

- Inanimate objects (which make up most things in the world): the ease or difficulty by which these objects steer clear of pressure and stress is entirely dependent on causal factors.
- Untrained human beings: ordinary, untrained people simply struggle to escape from stress, feeling victimized whenever it threatens to impinge.

- Beings seriously engaged in training: such people apply their understanding of *dukkhatā* to deal with situations, fluently guiding the dynamic of interrelated causes and conditions away from stress and towards equilibrium. They are thus able to bring about more desirable and elevated states of balance and integrity.
- Adepts: enlightened beings have mastered the training; they have brought spiritual training to completion.<sup>1</sup> With a comprehensive understanding of *dukkhatā*, their minds are liberated, immune to the influence of pressure and stress. They realize that pressure is part of the warp and woof of the world. It is an aspect of nature. They relate to it with wisdom, balancing relevant causes and conditions. They don't meddle with it; they are not personally disrupted by it. They abide in constant happiness and contentment, free from all suffering.

In sum, the teachings on impermanence<sup>2</sup> highlight the opportunity for developing human potential; the teachings on *dukkhatā* demonstrate on a practical level how this development is fulfilled.

## **Anattatā—Towards Irrevocable Liberation**

The third universal characteristic is *anattatā*—the state of *anattā*: nonself, not-self, selflessness. Although this is a most profound and subtle truth, we shall only be able to discuss it here in brief.

The teaching on *anattatā* describes how nothing exists that possesses a real, lasting 'self' which anyone could rightly take to be 'me' or 'mine'. All things, without exception, are merely 'natural

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<sup>1</sup> In Pali such a person is called a 'sage' (*paṇḍita*).

<sup>2</sup> *Aniccatā*.

phenomena',<sup>1</sup> that is, they are autonomous and they exist and proceed according to their own nature. For instance, they are subject to the law of causality, and they are not subservient to anyone's control, commands, desires, wishes, needs, and so forth.

What this implies is that the 'self' that we perceive and describe to others is merely a conventional self used for the sake of communication. This conventional self exists as a convergence of causes and conditions in any one moment of time; it exists as a collection of conditional factors constantly undergoing transition and change. This collection of factors we then refer to as a 'self'.

Take all of us who are sitting here. We are all collections of myriad causes and conditions arising in the present moment. Because these causes and conditions are perpetually changing, there exists no enduring, permanent self or soul. Whatever appears as a 'self' is entirely dependent on these causes and conditions.

Those who understand the law of *anattatā* thus have a comprehensive understanding of conditionality. They realize that all things proceed according to causes and conditions which shape the trajectory of change.

To clarify this matter, here is a formal explanation of *anattā*:<sup>2</sup>

*... For example, when based on intention, someone seizes, picks up, or performs an activity with the arm, one may say: 'my arm' or 'her arm'. In truth, however, the arm only moves in conformity with interrelated causes and conditions. If these causes and conditions vanish or change—for instance the nerves, muscles, or tendons are damaged—despite protestations of 'My arm! My arm!', one loses control over the arm. The arm only belongs to a person in a conventional sense, not in an ultimate sense.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Sabhāva-dhamma*.

<sup>2</sup> *Dictionary of Buddhist Terminology*; พจนานุกรมพุทธศาสน์ ฉบับประมวลศัพท์; newly expanded edition: 2018.

*One cannot absolutely exert one's will over those things with which one identifies or believes to possess, by dictating: 'It must be this way. It must be that way.' For such identification and ownership is only valid according to conventional agreements and beliefs. If one desires a specific result, then one must study and discern the relevant causes and conditions to bring this result about, and then act accordingly.*

Endowed with this thorough understanding, no selfishness remains even on a latent, subliminal level. Things exist in their absolute, natural state independent of any fixed 'observer'. A person sees things without distortion and attachment. There is no clinging to a sense of self. The heart is liberated from suffering and one lives and acts with wisdom: one leads a life of wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

There are several characteristics to such a life of wisdom:

- **Insight:** one sees that all things, including the perceived sense of self, exist according to their own nature. They are subject to causes and conditions.<sup>2</sup> They are independent of our will and desire. No-one can truly own or possess them. They are not subject to anyone's dictates and commands.

- **Liberation:** one's heart is emancipated; it is secure and at ease. One abides in harmony with truth and is thus free from attachment.

- **Freedom from suffering:** the cause of human suffering is a craving to acquire things for oneself or a hankering for things to proceed in a certain way. People then become preoccupied by these desires and yearn for gratification. In Pali, this craving and grasping is referred to as *taṇhā* & *upādāna*. While ignorantly fretting over the possibility that things may not turn out as one

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<sup>1</sup> *Paññājīvī*.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: the exception is *Nibbāna*, which is 'not constructed' (*asaṅkhata*): it exists free from causes and conditions.

wants, craving and grasping afflict the mind and cause suffering. By awakening to the fact that all things (including one's sense of self) are not beholden to desire, but instead proceed according to their own nature, one is freed from the shackles of craving and grasping, and one abides in wisdom. With the absence of *taṇhā* & *upādāna*, the heart is liberated and suffering ceases automatically.

- **Successful engagement:** released from craving and grasping, and no longer using personal desire as the main basis for happiness, one is able to act in the most advantageous and effective way. Understanding the law of conditionality, one investigates how things can reach and be sustained in an optimal state. One examines which conditions are obstructive and which ones supportive for bringing about desired results, and one then directs attention to these conditions and acts accordingly. Even if one is still unenlightened, by acting in this way, suffering is kept to a minimum and gradually abates. At the same time, one discovers increased success in one's endeavours.

- **Eradication of defilement:** by realizing that things are not subject to one's dictates and desires, and that one cannot truly possess anything, the mind is radiant, spacious and content. One does not cling to anything. Besides the benefits of abiding at ease and acting effectively, those mental defilements tied up with selfishness and attachment—causing personal turmoil and widespread conflict and suffering in the world—cease altogether. This refers in particular to the three chief defilements<sup>1</sup> of craving (*taṇhā*), conceit (*māna*), and holding to fixed views (*ditṭhi*).

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<sup>1</sup> *Kilesa*. [Trans.: note that this is an alternative triad of mental defilements; the triad more commonly referred to is: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*).]

## Benchmark for True Education

One important aspect to the teaching on selflessness is that it helps people escape from the enslavement to the three aforementioned defilements. At the end of the day, in order to truly dispel and vanquish these defilements, one needs to have achieved a comprehensive understanding of *anattā*—not-self.

These three defilements are the chief agents for all the problems in the world. They can be used as a gauge for the success or failure of human development and progress, and as a way to measure the efficacy of our systems of education. Indeed, it is our responsibility to educate people to pass beyond them.

When wisdom is deficient, people rely on these defilements to protect a cherished sense of self. They are as follows:

**1. Craving** (*taṇhā*): desire for personal gain and profit; covetousness; greed; thirst for sensuality; desire for gratifying sense objects.

**2. Conceit** (*māna*): desire for eminence and distinction; lust for power; arrogance.

**3. Fixed view** (*diṭṭhi*): attachment to views and opinions; an unyielding belief that one's own views constitute the truth; dogmatism; stubborn insistence that things must accord with one's own doctrine, belief, creed, ideology, and so on; narrow-mindedness; close-mindedness; refusal to listen to others; intolerance.

These three expressions of selfishness are the cause for social conflict and personal suffering. All of the persecution and oppression in the world stems from these three factors.

Due to craving, people get into arguments, exploit one another, compete and fight—even to the extent of initiating world wars—destroying other communities and ravishing the environment.

Due to conceit, people get into quarrels, mistreat one another, and engage in killing and warfare on par with that caused by craving.

Due to fixed views, people dispute with, bully and persecute one another, rally together to coerce and undermine others, and engage in religious and ideological warfare more cruel and prolonged than wars driven by greed or lust for power.

Fixed views are pernicious and their power is usually underestimated. Most of the world's problems stem from such views. When people compete for personal profit they may harm one another or engage in warfare, yet this conflict may be one-off and end quickly. The same is true for wars initiated by a grab for power. But wars based on dogmatic views are often protracted and repeated. This has occurred throughout history. Racial, ethnic, religious, and ideological wars have been endless.

This is a complex matter as these three defilements are inseparable. They reinforce each other. For instance: someone seeks power as a way to self-enrichment; or someone seeks riches in order to gain power; or someone seeks dominance in order to assert their dogma and then seeks wealth in order to maintain authority. In sum, these three factors cause conflict and prevent peace and harmony.

Those people who are predominantly covetous or conceited tend to have a problem with immoral behaviour. Besides causing others harm, they are frequently corrupt: stealing, defrauding, embezzling, and so forth. Dogmatic people, however, often don't engage in such standard forms of immoral behaviour. Just the opposite. In the eyes of everyday people, they are often morally strict and upright, thus engendering faith in others and gathering numerous followers. Yet dogmatic people adhere zealously to their views. For instance, if they maintain social ideologies, they insist that society must be structured in a precise and certain way. When they come into a position of power, they cannot tolerate

things to be other than what they advocate. And they are usually unwilling to wait. They can therefore become even more violent than a greedy or arrogant person.

When Pol Pot came into power in Cambodia he killed his fellow citizens mercilessly based on ideological grounds. Between 1975 and 1979 he was responsible for the deaths of between 2-4 million people. Throughout history there have been many similar examples of religious bloodshed and persecution.

When attempting to rectify this defilement of clinging to fixed views, the general notions around moral conduct usually do not suffice. What is needed is an advancement of wisdom—a lucid and comprehensive understanding that dispels selfishness—whereby one no longer follows one’s whims or takes only personal interests into account. Wisdom directs proceedings, accompanied by kindness and compassion. As mentioned earlier, to dispel fixed views, one needs to gain clear insight into the law of *anattatā*.

At this stage the three defilements of craving, conceit, and fixed views are replaced by the three chief virtues of the Buddha,<sup>1</sup> that is, wisdom, purity, and compassion.<sup>2</sup> This is the interface between the Three Characteristics and the Triple Gem: a comprehensive understanding of the former leads to virtues embodied in the latter.

Although educating people so that they are released from these three vices is the most fundamental method to solve the human dilemma, many modern notions of education fail to develop people in this way. Instead of helping people to reduce these three defilements and to enhance wisdom—at the very least to establish an understanding of cause and effect as a guiding principle for making decisions—they end up intensifying these defilements. As a result, instead of drawing upon genuine wisdom

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<sup>1</sup> *Buddha-guṇa*.

<sup>2</sup> *Paññā, visuddhi & karuṇā*.



to solve their problems, people use their intelligence to serve craving, conceit, and fixed views. The world is thus increasingly plagued by problems from every direction.

Within the system of the Threefold Training, a thorough understanding of the three characteristics utterly dispels these three defilements, and wisdom, purity, and compassion take their place. Even if people have not reached this consummate understanding, already reducing these three mental impurities increases constructive communication and harmonious coexistence.

If these three defilements are deep-seated and acute, there is no room for mutual dialogue. These days we have almost reached such a state of affairs. We witness an increased scramble for personal gain, pursuit of power, and stubborn adherence to ideologies and religious doctrines. People are unwilling to listen to one another, insisting that others follow their own desires and convictions. We must all try to rectify this situation. Education in particular must attend to this predicament.

When people gain insight into the truth of nonself, their selfishness abates and disappears. They realize that we are all fellow human beings sharing this planet, subject to the same laws of nature, and companions in birth, old age, sickness, and death. They feel mutual kindness and goodwill. Instead of exploiting, abusing, and intimidating one another, they cultivate lovingkindness, compassion, friendliness, and sincerity. Together they apply wisdom to solve problems and discuss matters judiciously, all heading for and achieving the same goal of global peace and wellbeing.

But to reiterate, if we wish to truly solve human problems, in particular those related to fixed views and opinions, wisdom must be cultivated to the extent of dispelling selfishness.



# Chapter 4

## Triad of Active Engagement

### Sound Education Based on Natural Truths

We now reach the triad of the Threefold Training which is the foundation of education. Earlier we talked about the guiding influence of the Triple Gem, which acts as a torch or lantern casting light on the path ahead. We then discussed the vital teaching of the Three Characteristics—an understanding of which is essential for the process of education to bear fruit. Yet both of these initial triads are at the periphery; our real work lies with the Threefold Training.

We develop and improve our lives by following the Threefold Training—guided by the Triple Gem and in harmony with the Three Characteristics. The three triads are thus intertwined.

Now we get down to the nuts and bolts of our educational work—the Threefold Training. Although the term *sikkhā* is most often translated as ‘training’, it is equally valid to use the words ‘development’, ‘cultivation’, ‘practice’ or ‘study’. You can choose whichever term you prefer.

I have discussed the Threefold Training at length in other places, for example in the newly printed, expanded edition of *Buddhadhamma*.<sup>1</sup> So here I will only touch upon some aspects of this teaching which seem most appropriate to the occasion.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: พุทธธรรม ฉบับปรับปรุงขยาย; English translation: *Buddhadhamma: the Laws of Nature and Their Benefits to Life*; © 2017.

Technically, the Threefold Training consists of the three factors of training in higher morality (*adhisīla-sikkhā*), training in higher mind (*adhicitta-sikkhā*), and training in higher wisdom (*adhipaññā-sikkhā*), but these factors are often abbreviated to *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*.<sup>1</sup>

**1. *Sīla*:** A basic definition of *sīla* is: ‘beneficial interaction and conduct vis-à-vis one’s environment, both material and social; moral conduct; non-harming; behaviour conducive to the cultivation of the mind and to wisdom’.

This may appear like a complicated definition, and indeed, there is more to be said on this subject. A thorough examination of *sīla* is necessary because at the initial stages of training—of education—the main focus is on engaging with material things and the environment. The term ‘environment’ here refers to both the natural environment and the social environment. Moral conduct is where educational work begins, preparing people for more subtle and profound levels of training.

This does not mean that one neglects the other two factors of mind and wisdom. Indeed, all three factors function together. But one begins by focusing on moral conduct, on one’s relation to the outside world, in terms of lifestyle, social customs, traditions and ceremonies, interpersonal relations, delight in one’s natural surroundings, and so forth. If one’s moral conduct is nurtured correctly, the mind and wisdom are enlisted and even enhanced. To sum up, *sīla* is developed with the backing of *samādhi* and *paññā*.

When the time comes to cultivate the mind and wisdom, healthy and well-grounded moral conduct acts as a firm foundation.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: this threefold classification may seem straightforward at first, but it contains many subtleties. In particular, note that the term *samādhi* here is synonymous with *citta* (in *adhicitta*). This corresponds to the division of the Noble Eightfold Path into three sections: two wisdom factors, three factors of moral conduct, and three factors of *samādhi* (*sammā-vāyāma*, *sammā-sati* & *sammā-samādhi*). ‘Concentration’ is thus only one aspect of the term *samādhi* in its wider sense, which can also be translated as ‘mental composure’, ‘mental collectedness’, ‘mental balance’, ‘emotional awareness’, ‘focused attention’, etc.

But at the beginning stages, we should focus on morality, with concentration and wisdom merely operating alongside as supports.

For children in particular, moral conduct is of paramount importance. And its implications are greater than what most people believe. It has a direct bearing on our personal lives, on those people under our guardianship, and on society as a whole. In order to gain clarity on this subject, we can begin by establishing a kind of formal outline or framework of *sīla*. Although the mind and wisdom are also vital principles, they do not yet come to the fore. We can look at them in more detail at a later stage.

Many people understand *sīla* to only pertain to social interactions. An example is the emphasis—however appropriate—on the five precepts.<sup>1</sup> But this is only one facet to *sīla*. We must beware that we don't neglect the relationship we have with material objects and the natural world.<sup>2</sup> Our *sīla* needs to be complete in all its dimensions.

Although *sīla* is usually defined as 'moral conduct', this definition is not exhaustive and all-embracing.<sup>3</sup> I will speak more on this subject shortly.

In addition, we should emphasize the cultivation of *sīla* whereby it becomes a foundation for cultivating the mind and wisdom.

**2. *Samādhi*:** Developing the mind so that it is endowed with qualities of:

- Virtue:<sup>4</sup> lovingkindness, compassion, gratitude, a healthy sense of shame, a fear of wrongdoing, and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: these precepts will be discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: this will be discussed at more length below.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: *sīla* can be translated as 'moral conduct', 'morality', 'ethical conduct', 'ethics', 'virtuous conduct', 'pure conduct', etc. The term 'virtuous conduct' may be the most appropriate translation to capture the wider range of meaning of *sīla*.

<sup>4</sup> *Guṇa-dhamma*.

- Strength and proficiency:<sup>1</sup> effort, patience, mindfulness, and concentration.
- Happiness:<sup>2</sup> joy, cheerfulness, gladness, delight, ease of mind; moreover, the mind can experience refined forms of happiness and be imbued with ‘awakened happiness’.<sup>3</sup>

Although *samādhi* is a key aspect to the Buddha’s teachings, for now this concise definition will have to suffice.

**3. Paññā:** Knowledge and insight into the truth of all things. This third training leads to a life guided by wisdom, at which, in the final stage, the heart is fully liberated. Technically speaking, one gradually understands various aspects of reality, culminating in a realization of the Four Noble Truths.<sup>4</sup>

We have now covered the ‘triple triad’: the three cardinal teachings which comprise the entirety of Buddhism. Siam Saamtri School has integrated these three teachings into its founding principles.

## The Overlooked Importance of *Sīla*

As hinted at earlier, there are aspects to *sīla* that deserve more attention. Buddhists on the whole have insufficient understanding of this fundamental training and fail to engage with it fully. One can even say that most people apply it incoherently.

If people in the present day were to study and practise all facets of *sīla*, they would benefit greatly and be worthy of the term

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<sup>1</sup> *Sāmatthiya*; also known as *samattha-bhāva*.

<sup>2</sup> *Sukha*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ariya-sukha*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ariya-sacca*.

‘Buddhist devotee’. Indeed, they would also benefit from their devotion, which otherwise often remains fruitless and barren.

*Sīla* refers to a person’s relationship and interaction with their environment—both social and material. This relationship to the outside world begins with communication and expression, which require specific doorways or channels.

We should be familiar with these channels of communication and learn how to use them in the most beneficial way.

There are numerous Pali terms for these channels of communication and expression. Perhaps the simplest one is *dvāra*.<sup>1</sup>

There are two groups of doorways (*dvāra*):

**1. Six doorways of cognition** (*phassa-dvāra*; ‘sense door’): eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

**2. Three doorways of volitional action** (*kamma-dvāra*; ‘channel of action’): body, speech, and mind.<sup>2</sup>

Both of these groups contain a single doorway acting as a shared centre or hub, namely the mind.

In terms of the first group, we receive and acquire data via the six sense doors. Whichever doorway is used for cognition—the eye seeing forms, the ear hearing sounds, and so on—all the sense input merges at the mind. The mind receives and collects all data. The mind is the gathering point.

In terms of the second group, whichever channel is used for outward expression, either as physical action<sup>3</sup> by way of the body—building a house, gardening, cooking, dancing, and so forth—

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: literally a ‘door’, ‘gate’, ‘entrance’. *Dvāra* shares the same Indo-European root as the English ‘door’.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: the Sanskrit term *karma* is more familiar to English speakers.

<sup>3</sup> *Kāya-kamma*.

or as verbal action<sup>1</sup> by way of speech—speaking abusively or politely, pleading, singing, and so on—all of these actions begin at the mind as mental activity.<sup>2</sup> The mind is the starting point.

When one combines these two groups, the mind lies at the centre; it is the link between the two. The cognitive process ends at the mind; the active process begins at the mind. Sense data all ends up at the mind, where it is processed. A new dynamic is then set in motion. Based on mental activity, outward expressions of speech and physical action are performed.

In regard to *sīla*, however, we focus on externals—on the interaction with the outside world. The main focus is not on the mind. If a thought arises, this does not yet directly pertain to moral conduct. For instance, if one thinks of telling a lie or killing a cat, this does not yet constitute a moral transgression. Such a transgression only occurs if one follows through with the act. Having said this, when the deed has been done, we must return to the mind and see if there had been intention. This is because the real catalyst for speech or action, and consequently for immoral deeds, is intention (*cetanā*).

The ultimate criterion for determining whether a moral transgression has occurred or not thus lies at the mind, namely, at intention.<sup>3</sup> Yet if the activity remains confined to mental activity, there has not been a violation of *sīla*. This distinction requires careful analysis.

In sum, human beings have two sets of ‘doorways’ for interacting with the world and communicating with their environment. Both of these groups are related to *sīla*, to virtuous conduct.

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<sup>1</sup> *Vacī-kamma*.

<sup>2</sup> *Mano-kamma*.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: note that ‘intention’ here refers to ‘volition’, ‘will’, ‘deliberate objective’, etc, rather than to ‘motive’.



With what do the six sense doors—the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—come into contact? The answer is animate objects and inanimate objects, or beings and things. The term ‘beings’ here can also be rendered as ‘social environment’. And ‘things’ can be rendered as ‘physical environment’, ‘material environment’, or ‘natural environment’. Although none of these terms seem completely satisfactory, hopefully they are clear enough to give a sense of what is meant here.

With our eyes we see people, animals, trees, rocks, houses, hills, rivers, seas, the sky, and so forth. With our ears we hear people speaking, the sound of waves and wind, and so on. The sense doors receive data by coming into contact with people, animals, and inanimate objects.<sup>1</sup>

The three channels of action (*kamma-dvāra*), of body, speech, and mind, function as means of expression in relation to the same objects, namely ‘beings and things’. Sparked by intention, people perform physical deeds—sweeping, cooking, hunting, fishing, building schools, renovating temples, and so on—and they perform verbal deeds—conversing with others, flattering and maligning, speaking polite and rude words, etcetera.

If people’s interaction with the outside world is skilful, their behaviour counts as ‘virtuous conduct’ (*sīla*). In the scriptures there is an important fourfold classification of *sīla*, which we should familiarize ourselves with and integrate into our educational endeavours. Without this familiarity, it is likely that children’s education will remain defective and hit-and-miss.

In Buddhist circles, much emphasis is given to the five precepts, which is covered under the first factor of the fourfold classification of *sīla*. Yet the five precepts only apply to our relation to sentient creatures or to the social environment. They are not comprehensive or overarching, since we also interact with

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: as sentient organisms, animals fall under the category of ‘beings’.

inanimate objects. The final three factors in this classification make up for the lack and bring about unity.

## **Five Precepts – Stay the Hand, Hold the Tongue What Should Be Used to Restrain the Eyes & Ears?**

In the scriptures, the fourfold classification of *sīla*, known as the ‘four modes of pure conduct’,<sup>1</sup> is mentioned in relation to the monastic community. It is considered to be a comprehensive, all-embracing definition for *sīla*, namely:<sup>2</sup>

1. *Pāṭimokkha-sīla*:<sup>3</sup> fundamental moral code; principal moral code.

2. *Indriyaśamvara-sīla*:<sup>4</sup> pure conduct as sense restraint.

3. *Paccayaapaṭisevanā-sīla*:<sup>5</sup> pure conduct as regards the use of the four requisites.<sup>6</sup>

4. *Ājīvapārisuddhi-sīla*: purity of livelihood.

Now to elaborate on these four factors:

**1. *Pāṭimokkha-sīla*:** technically, this term refers to the core disciplinary code of the monastic community, which for bhikkhus contains 227 training rules.<sup>7</sup> In this context, however, this term can be interpreted as the five precepts (*pañca-sīla*): the chief

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<sup>1</sup> *Pārisuddhi-sīla*.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: factors 3 & 4 are normally reversed, but I have listed them in this order to accord with the author’s further elaboration on these four factors below.

<sup>3</sup> Also spelled *pāṭimokkha-sīla*; it is usually referred to in full as *pāṭimokkhasamvara-sīla*. It is also called *sikkhāpada-sīla* and *vinayapaññatti-sīla*.

<sup>4</sup> This term can be abbreviated to *indriya-samvara*.

<sup>5</sup> Another name for this factor is *paccayasannissita-sīla* (‘*sīla* based on the four requisites’; ‘*sīla* connected to the four requisites’).

<sup>6</sup> Trans.: clothing, food, lodging and medicine.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the bhikkhus have numerous additional training rules apart from the *Pāṭimokkha*. [Trans.: a ‘bhikkhu’ is a fully-ordained Buddhist monk.]

principles of conduct for laypeople or the universal ethical principles for human beings. They focus on interpersonal or social relationships, namely:

1. To refrain from killing living creatures.
2. To refrain from stealing.
3. To refrain from sexual misconduct.
4. To refrain from lying.
5. To refrain from intoxicants causing heedlessness.

This first factor of *pāṭimokkha-sīla* points to the fact that every community requires a contract and set of rules regulating human interaction. This is true for all communities: nations have constitutions, government officials have a civil service code of ethics, guilds and professions have enforced codes of conduct, schools have disciplinary guidelines, the monastic community has the Pāṭimokkha, and so on.

It would be advantageous to have a similar code of regulations safeguarding the entire global community, similar to what has been attempted by the United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But with all the ongoing amendments, repeals, new declarations, and so on, we cannot afford any more delay in enacting a universal moral code for the global community. In any case, as Buddhists we already have such a fundamental moral code—valid in every time and era, and which corroborates all other codes—namely the five precepts.

**2. *Indriya-samvara*:** sense restraint; skilful application of the senses when making contact with one’s surroundings: when seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. Of these various kinds of sense contact, the two highlighted in this factor are seeing and hearing.

This aspect of *sīla* is of great importance. It is particularly relevant in this Age of Information Technology. People are

inundated by information and many use it heedlessly. This causes all sorts of problems, whereby technology becomes a harmful influence.

We must develop a skilful relationship to technology that is beneficial to our own lives and to those around us. If people's use of technology ends up undermining or harming their lives or society as a whole, then one can say that they are using it heedlessly, they are abusing it.

As human beings, we are fortunate to possess a unique spiritual faculty, namely, mindfulness (*sati*), to assist with cultivating wisdom and improving our lives.<sup>1</sup> Mindfulness must be present when we engage with the senses. In the context of IT, we begin by establishing a proper relationship to technology. We become a master of technology, rather than allowing ourselves to be enslaved by it. We avoid indulging in it as this only leads to 'losing one's senses'. Even better, we should determine to study and learn from technology, to enhance our lives through the pursuit of knowledge.

With mindfulness, one inquires into one's relationship to technology, asking such questions as: 'Why am I watching television?' 'Am I simply mesmerized by this show or am I also learning something?' When we look at something—whatever it is—we should derive some benefit and understanding from it. At the very least, we should gain an insight into the dynamics of things around us, discerning the interrelated nature of all things and the connection between specific events. For instance, we can become more skilled at investigating the law of conditionality. With such inquiry and investigation, we may gain a great deal of knowledge from a single TV programme. In this way, we can cultivate wisdom and foster virtuous conduct.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the Pali term *indriya* has diverse meanings. In the term *indriya-saivara* it refers to the sense doors. In other contexts, *indriya* means 'spiritual faculty' or 'controlling faculty' of which the most common grouping contains five factors including mindfulness (*sati*).

On the contrary, if one becomes enthralled by things, whereby one's work, studies, or health is undermined and compromised, one has wandered off course and falls away from virtuous conduct.

Rarely is sense restraint as a factor of *sīla* discussed. In regard to educating children, however, we must pay close attention to what they watch and listen to. Are they acquiring useful information, points of view, guidelines, and so forth, for solving problems, improving their lives, and assisting their parents, relatives, and fellow human beings?

Through skilful watching and listening, people can understand the significance of sense input they receive. They see the connection between various sense impressions—the data they receive by way of the senses—and they gain a deeper insight into the conditional process. They make the best use of their time and are no longer led astray by sense contact.

## Discovering Good Amongst the Worst

Human beings have great potential for sharpening their visual and listening skills. It is standard procedure in education that we initially provide children with means to discover wholesome information, material, experiences, and so on, so that they learn what is beneficial. In other words, we enable children to encounter what is best in the world.

But education should go further than that. After we introduce children to wholesome and positive things, and protect them against negative influences, we should advance to a higher stage whereby we also teach them to derive benefit from misfortune—from the most adverse and challenging situations.

In the real world—the wider world—we cannot always get what we want. We must face both pleasant and unpleasant conditions. When children are young and live under our care, we

expose them to what is good and positive. At this stage, they are reliant on subjects and activities we organize for them. Here, children depend on external influences, namely, the care provided by parents and teachers. But children won't always live under our guardianship. When they leave home and become independent, the world won't always cater to their wishes. There will not always be someone around to supervise their lives. They will face circumstances both good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant. If in early adulthood they still require constant guidance and supervision from others, this shows that they are still immature. They will tend to give up easily, fail in their endeavours, and lack self-reliance.

The function of parents and teachers acting as a 'positive external influence' for children is equivalent to being a 'virtuous friend'.<sup>1</sup> At this stage, the children still rely on and depend on us.

The real responsibility and ultimate success of being a virtuous friend—including all the activities we provide to children—hinges on being an effective medium, a stepping stone. We encourage and inspire children so that they learn to develop their own inner resources, preparing them for the wider world with all its complexities and challenges—a world that doesn't follow anyone's whims or constantly provide a support network. Children thus learn to rely on themselves.

If children come to possess these inner resources which enable them to live good quality lives in the world without depending on constant support and supervision by others, then their education will have been successful. They will be mature and self-reliant.

Parents and teachers initially introduce children to what is wholesome and favourable—to the best that life has to offer. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Kalyānamitta*.

path to proficiency and self-reliance, however, also entails teaching them the skills of deriving benefit from all experiences and situations—even those most adverse and challenging—through establishing a sound inner foundation.

Although there are many inner resources supportive of developing and mastering such skills, one that needs to be given special emphasis is analytical reflection (*yoniso-manasikāra*).<sup>1</sup>

From what has been said so far, we can divide the educational process into two stages:

1. Wholesome exposure: providing subject material, selecting sense input, and organizing activities that enable children to cultivate virtue and develop skills. In brief, we introduce them to what is best in the world.

2. Promoting proficiency: encouraging children to nurture inner resources enabling them to derive benefit from all experiences and situations, both good and bad. In particular, we have them exercise analytical reflection which is the chief factor in wisdom development.

When children encounter difficulty or face misfortune, they should be able to turn the situation into something positive, to discover something valuable from the experience. They consider: ‘Oh, this is an important test—an opportunity to learn. If I can navigate through this time of hardship, I will become stronger and more mature.’ If they cannot do this, they will likely become discouraged and depressed, which will then only cause them more anguish.

Those students conscientious about learning perceive problems as a sharpening stone for wisdom. When problems (*pañhā*) arise, wisdom (*paññā*) is honed. And with the onset of

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: also known as ‘wise reflection’, ‘critical reflection’, ‘skilful consideration’, ‘proper attention’.

wisdom, problems are dispelled. The more formidable the problems, the greater the opportunity to grow.

Those children whose education has borne fruit will live happy and contented lives. Although the world won't always satisfy their preferences, they won't be bothered. They will derive benefit from adverse conditions and be able to access joy even amongst high-pressure situations.

Someone truly skilled and proficient discovers happiness amidst suffering, a silver lining amidst crisis, and goodness amidst misfortune. Falling on hard times, they are neither dejected nor discouraged—they do not beat a hasty retreat. They strive to learn from suffering and make every effort to solve problems. As a result of their travails, they become stronger.

If people get lost in pleasure and gratification, then they are no longer progressing and seeking to improve themselves. They may even regress. Everything seems comfortable and easy. They live without a care. In this way, happiness can be detrimental.

We should thus develop a sense of urgency and conscientiousness around training and education. We can learn from everything we encounter. Trials and tribulations become opportunities to practise. When we approach difficulties in this way, our growth and development progresses and our happiness increases.

## **Fun in Learning – Risks of Training**

These days, much emphasis is given to making education fun. School lessons and classroom activities, it is claimed, must be fun and enjoyable for the students. This principle is perfectly fine if it is clearly understood. A lack of clarity, on the other hand, may produce results opposite to those we desire and become an obstacle to education.



As mentioned earlier, the main task for teachers is to integrate external learning tools with the development of students' internal resources, thus preparing them for the wider world.

If fun in learning is based primarily on external structures, for instance enjoyable teaching styles, amusing lessons and activities, and so on, then we must be cautious and circumspect. We should not get carried away. Otherwise, the students' enjoyment and happiness in learning will forever depend on these external structures. They will only pay attention if the activities are fun, and they won't be able to enjoy learning on their own.

Granted, having teachers prepare fun activities is of considerable benefit for the majority of students, especially for those at elementary stages, helping them to generate an interest in the subject matter and a desire to understand and complete the assignments. It is a means to develop inner resources. In education, the development of such inner resources is the criterion for success. If students have not yet developed them, then our educational models are probably not working, and are most likely destined to fail.

Note that there are two aspects to this principle: first, making a subject fun, and second, making it easy to understand. We normally hope that these two factors go hand-in-hand, although this does not always occur. The ability to explain a subject in a simple, easy-to-understand way is a particularly desirable trait in a teacher.

To summarize, making education fun is a tool for generating interest in learning and a desire for knowledge.

There are, however, two potential weak points:

1. Students do not enjoy learning on their own: in this case, students only enjoy learning when their teachers organize special activities. They do not generate inner resources and their happiness depends on external structures.

2. Students do not desire to understand the subject material: the goal of making education fun is to generate interest in the subject material. But if the children get hooked on simply having fun (including getting personally attached to the teachers), and only seek enjoyment, this goal is not achieved.

If enjoyment in itself becomes the goal, education is skewed towards chasing after pleasure—to having fun. Here, the students become seekers of sense gratification, whereby they are jaded by previous forms of enjoyment and constantly expect new ones. The teachers then must come up with increasingly stimulating variations of fun activities, to the extent that the entire educational process may be derailed. It all becomes a stage show. The children—the audience in this drama—gradually grow weak-spirited and immature, and their inner potential to develop is squandered.

Desire for knowledge is a vital factor for students. The large majority of children rely on external support, yet occasionally we encounter children with a keen thirst for knowledge. Whereas most children will only pay attention and study when presented with fun activities, these gifted children will take an interest in almost any subjects, both those that are easy and those difficult and demanding. Sometimes, the harder the subject the greater is their interest and determination to learn. We should try and generate this enthusiasm in all students, and help them discover an innate joy in learning.

If we want to promote a deepening of wisdom and an advancement of scholarship, we must pass well beyond this stage of making education fun. In some important fields of study, there is no-one interested in making the subject matter entertaining. Alternatively, in some fields, there are only a handful of knowledgeable people, and the experts lack the skill in making the subject fun. In such circumstances, those students with an ardent thirst for knowledge will be the only ones to seek out these accomplished and knowledgeable people. In some cases, they will happily devote their entire lives to the pursuit of knowledge and truth.

As mentioned earlier, the world at large does not follow our whims. Children do not remain in the classroom under the guidance of their teachers. If they overly rely on the enjoyment from organized activities, they will depend on the outside world to constantly make them happy, which is impossible. When faced with the harsh realities of life, they will find it unbearable; they won't be able to cope and they will be miserable. It is thus imperative for them to be able to generate happiness from within.

When desire for knowledge arises, students will seek it out on their own, happily initiating their own research and investigation, and deepening their understanding.

## **True Education Increases Happiness**

Famous scientists and explorers from the past often had to face extraordinary difficulty and hardship in their pursuit of knowledge. Yet because of their desire for understanding, they were happy in their quest even if they had to battle with adversity. Their ardent hunger for knowledge was a tremendous driving force, enabling them to travel to all corners of the earth from the North to South Poles, racked by bone-chilling cold. Despite the hurdles, they forged ahead and persevered, dedicating all their time and energy to the acquisition of knowledge.

People with a genuine desire for knowledge delight in learning. They are dauntless, willing to venture into foreign lands—over the Seven Seas—willing to put their life on the line in their quest for knowledge.

We should not rest content with simply organizing external activities for children. Don't let their happiness become dependent on external things. We should foster their inner resources, for example a love of knowledge. At first, they are happy because they encounter things they like. Later, eager to acquire knowledge, they see that they often learn more when

encountering things they don't like. They thus end up liking the disliked; they find pleasure in studying the unpleasant.

When we become more mature, we access increased happiness. Education provides people with an opportunity to cultivate happiness; happiness is thus linked to education. Unlike what is often assumed, there isn't only one kind of human happiness. Indeed, there are many different levels and degrees. And this cultivation of happiness is made possible by developing another factor, namely the development and refinement of desire.

Similar to happiness, people nowadays commonly believe that there is only one kind of desire. Yet in actuality there are diverse kinds of desire, and if people cultivate more refined levels they will also discover heightened forms of happiness.

One aspect of education is the development of happiness. Happiness is not limited merely to consuming things or to sense gratification. Already through learning new things, training ourselves, and accomplishing difficult tasks, we realize new forms of happiness. And many additional levels of happiness await those who apply themselves in study and improve their lives.

If children are only content due to sense gratification, their capacity for happiness will be extremely limited. They will be in a state of privation; although they constantly search for happiness, wherever they turn they will meet with discomfort and distress instead. Not getting what they like they will suffer; encountering what they don't like they will suffer; when asked to study they will suffer; when asked to work they will suffer. Life will seem almost unbearable. They will only be happy when they enjoy sense pleasure. They will be faint-hearted and unable to cope with suffering.

When students derive happiness from learning, they will naturally derive happiness from rolling up their sleeves and engaging with their studies. A truly effective system of education leads to this vital juncture, whereby students, having gained

insight into the law of cause and effect, develop delight and enthusiasm for individual endeavour; they develop wholesome desire (*chanda*) for doing that which is positive and constructive. Endowed with wholesome desire, people automatically derive happiness from active engagement.

Next, students begin to derive happiness from doing that which is difficult. Sometimes, the greater the challenge, the greater the satisfaction. No matter how tiring the job, they don't complain. This is similar to distinguished scientists and inventors, who, despite spending considerable time and energy in their research and experiments, work with wholesome desire—with delight and enthusiasm.

These days, however, children are not taught the principle of wholesome desire. Indeed, many people have never even heard of the word *chanda*. Children today find almost everything frustrating and difficult. Faced with responsibilities, they feel pressured and coerced. They lack enthusiasm and resolve, growing increasingly hesitant and indecisive. When individuals become weak and faint-hearted, society falters and civilization declines. We can be assured that if wholesome desire is obscured and forgotten, and craving becomes all-pervasive, people, possessed by craving, conceit, and attachment to fixed views, will lead human civilization to annihilation.

There are many more stages to developing happiness. Those people caught up in enjoyment by way of the five senses generally only notice their own lack of gratification and are insecure as a result; they constantly hanker after more pleasure. This interferes with their inner growth and development. But when one makes strides in education, one begins to see matters from another perspective. One recognizes one's own strength and the potential to give and to act.

When one cultivates and refines desire, one experiences happiness through generous and compassionate assistance—

through making others happy. This is clearly evident in the natural disposition of parents vis-à-vis their children.

When this cultivation extends to a desire for all things in the world to exist in a state of harmony and integration, one delights in the health of the natural environment and one wishes to protect it. And when this cultivation encompasses spiritual wellbeing, one finds joy in developing one's potential and in generating wholesome mind states.

Finally, when one develops wisdom—gaining insight into the truth of nature and seeing things as they really are—one transcends desire. One is happy through not having to satisfy or cater to any desires; the mind is liberated, spacious and radiant. One has made perfect peace with the world and abides in wise discernment.

Although there is more to be said about the vital cultivation of happiness, this short description will have to suffice for now.

In sum, regarding sense restraint, we must develop skill in using the six senses. When seeing or hearing, for example, we should glean beneficial input and information, and increase our understanding of the world. We can then apply the data we receive to enhance our lives and improve social harmony. This factor of *sīla* is crucial in the modern time.

## **Two Factors of *Sīla* Measures for the Dawning of Education**

**3. *Paccaya-paṭisevanā*:** pure conduct as regards the use of the four requisites. The term *paccaya* in this context can be translated as 'requisite of life' or 'necessity of life'. If we are deprived of these requisites, we cannot survive or prosper.

The very term *paccaya* indicates the following:

First, a 'requisite' implies a support for life; it is valuable and advantageous to life. Following this line of reasoning, if something

is harmful or destructive, we should refrain from using or consuming it.

These days, people tend to consume things indiscriminately. There is a general lack of clarity around the concept of consuming necessities for life. For this reason, people don't give proper consideration to whether the things they use truly support their lives. Many of the things they consume are dangerous and life-threatening. This lack of understanding and indiscriminate consumption results in such crises as diseases of affluence and environmental destruction.

Second, as the requisites—for instance food—make life possible, they also enable us to achieve our goals and aspirations. They are therefore means, not ends.

In the context of the monastic sangha, there is another specialized term for the four requisites, namely *nissaya* ('means of support'). We depend on the requisites to nurture and support spiritual development. Here, the meanings of *paccaya* and *nissaya* are identical.

Furthermore, consumer or commercial items should be seen precisely as 'requisites': we require a sufficient amount of them to survive. Not only that; we require a sufficient amount for personal growth and development, and for social peace and harmony.

Yet these requisites are not ends in themselves. Our lives are neither defined nor given meaning through their acquisition and possession. Nor is our ultimate happiness reliant on them.

Nowadays, however, people are mixed up: their mindset and behaviour is turned upside down. Many see material and economic gain as the goal of life, spending all their energy on obtaining sense objects and trying to squeeze as much pleasure as they can from them. Meanwhile, they abuse, persecute and kill one another, and ravage the environment to this end. This

confusion and unbridled greed is the source of almost all the current problems in the world.

The majority of people nowadays spend time indulging craving, without any consideration of whether the things they consume are truly advantageous or not. They look to pleasurable objects as the goal of life, trying to acquire as many as they possibly can, immersed in the search for sense pleasure. They don't recognize material things as merely requisites for enhancing one's life and advancing in the Threefold Training. This lack of wise consumption points to a basic deficiency in education.

In the scriptures, when this factor of *paccaya-paṭisevanā* is mentioned as a pure conduct for monks, what is being highlighted is wise consumption. And yet as Buddhists in general we often neglect to discuss or observe this principle.

Wise consumption leads directly to moderation, to consuming just the right amount. In the Buddha's teachings, moderation is given great import.

Take the example of eating. We eat in order to nourish the body—to keep it strong and healthy, and to mend any wear and tear. With a healthy body, we are ready to study and engage in work. Equipped with this understanding, we eat optimum portions of nourishing food in order to achieve these goals. We eat with wisdom and moderation.

One of the first lessons for newly ordained monks is to memorize and recite the Paṭisaṅkhāyo Chant. For instance, before partaking of a meal, the monks are encouraged to reflect on the true purpose of eating.<sup>1</sup> This reflection includes the words: 'Wisely reflecting, I use almsfood: not for fun, not for pleasure ... only for the maintenance of this body, for allaying hunger, for helping

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<sup>1</sup> The chant begins with: *Paṭisaṅkhā yoniso piṇḍapātaṃ paṭisevāmi neva davāya...*



with the holy life, and for promoting a livelihood,<sup>1</sup> for learning and for doing good. Thinking thus, “May I continue to live blamelessly and at ease...”

To sum up, even in relation to such a simple activity as eating, we must understand how it supports a virtuous life. If one eats merely to indulge in delicious flavours, caught up in the craving for pleasure and holding fast to consumerism, without any regard for the body which must take the brunt of such indulgence, one is devoid of this factor of pure conduct.

Wise consumption implies reflecting on and understanding the purpose of the items we use. The food we eat, the clothes we wear, and the dwellings we reside in, all of these things we must relate to with understanding, enabling their true function and value to manifest and be fulfilled. Otherwise, we consume things blinded by delusion, opening the door and giving a foothold to craving. We then end up compromising our health, troubling society, and destroying the environment.

By upholding this factor of *sīla* we live a life of moderation. We are able to distinguish the true value of the four requisites along with other material objects. When we use something we must give priority to its genuine and authentic benefits. For instance, when one buys a car, one should focus on its primary function and purpose as a vehicle, as a means of conveyance. The reason for buying a car is normally to meet this particular need. Other factors linked to popular trends—standing out from the crowd, appearing smart and elegant, showing off one’s social status, and so forth—are all artificial, counterfeit values that play a subordinate role. Although it is reasonable, with wise discernment, to accommodate such social trends to some degree, we must not get carried away by them. Our mainstay and anchor

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: ‘right livelihood’ (*sammā-ājīva*) of a monk entails upholding the ‘qualities of a renunciant’ (*samaṇa-dhamma*) and humbly receiving the four requisites offered by the lay community.

is the true and reliable value and purpose of each particular consumable item.

This matter of genuine and counterfeit value is crucial. We should instil in children a recognition of the true purpose of those items we buy and consume. For example, before giving a student a computer, we should ask them what they think its genuine advantage and objective is. Because the child must come up with an answer themselves, they will then most likely respect and comply with it, and they can use it as a reminder and guideline in the future. If their answer is off the mark, it shows that they are still misguided; we then must look out for them, preventing them from straying too far from a healthy course. By guiding them in this way, they will learn to appreciate the true value of things.

As mentioned earlier, the five precepts function as a universal moral code for human beings. Informally, we can call them the 'Code of Manu'.<sup>1</sup> As members of the human race, children should learn and uphold the five precepts.

In formal education, however, the two factors of pure conduct deserving of special care and attention are sense restraint, for instance being skilled at seeing and hearing, and wise use of the four requisites (or skilful consumption).<sup>2</sup>

It is for this reason that I use the phrase: 'True education begins with wise consumption.' Education begins with the commencement of life. Here, we are not talking about exiting the womb or the initial functioning of physical organs, but rather to living in the world: using the senses, communicating with the external environment, and consuming material objects. When we begin to engage with the world, the opportunity to learn, the opportunity to live a good

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: in the Rigveda of the Brahmanic tradition, Manu is the name of a mythical progenitor and sovereign of the earth, the father of the human race. In Sanskrit, this term sometimes refers to humankind as a whole.

<sup>2</sup> *Indriya-saṁvara* and *paccaya-paṭisevanā*, respectively.

life, also begins. In the same vein, when children start to interact with their environment, their education begins with training how to most effectively observe, listen to, and use objects around them. They develop skilful sense engagement and wise consumption.

So as a benchmark, if we wish to assess whether education has truly been initiated, we should examine whether these two factors of pure conduct have been established or not.

## **Career Education & Learning on the Job**

4. *Ājīvapārisuddhi-sīla*: *sīla* as purity of livelihood. In sum, this term refers to ‘right livelihood’ (*sammā-ājīva*).<sup>1</sup> The importance of livelihood—of making a living, earning one’s keep, or in colloquial language ‘bringing home the bacon’<sup>2</sup>—as a form of pure conduct is often overlooked.

The most basic definition for right livelihood is engaging in legitimate and lawful work, refraining from illicit activities to earn a living. Essentially, this refers to an occupation or profession that is not harmful or oppressive to oneself or others. It is even better if the work meets the needs of both individuals and society, benefiting both parties. This is consonant with the literal meaning of *ājīva*, that is, ‘to support life’, ‘to nourish’. One doesn’t just make money for oneself, but one also assists others.

In most cases, human occupations and professions are established in order to address specific personal or social issues and problems, or to produce specific items useful to society. For instance, the

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the term ‘career education’ in the title is not meant as ‘vocational education’ in the limited sense, but rather to any form of education preparing people for making a living and pursuing a career, occupation, profession, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Some people look for the bacon but never bring it home. [Trans.: this idiom is an attempt to translate the Thai ‘tam mah hah gin’ (ตำมาหากิน), literally: ‘working to find food’.]

medical profession has been established to cure people from illness, the teaching profession has been established to impart knowledge and virtue, and so forth. These kinds of vocations are inherently beneficial to society.

It is possible to elevate our livelihood to more refined levels. In particular, we can use it as a stage or platform for self-improvement and development. The expression ‘career education’—the acquisition of knowledge in order to make a living—points to only a fraction of what true education is about. Some people have the misunderstanding that education only pertains to such vocational skill and know-how. But as I said earlier, the term *sikkhā* (‘education’, ‘training’) has a bearing on our entire lives, relating also to our livelihoods.

From one perspective, our jobs provide us with an opportunity to acquire new knowledge: to learn and to grow. They are a key platform for development. Indeed, we should make the resolve to use our work for learning. We spend most of our lives engaged in earning a living. Work takes up most of our time, often for eight hours of the day, not including commuting, planning, attending to urgent matters, and so forth. If we don’t foster inner growth and development during these times, when else will we do it?

If we are conscientious about studying within the domain of our work, then we will train in and refine all dimensions of our lives: interpersonal relationships, cooperation, communication, effective speech, healthy relationship with the environment, and so on. In short, we train in pure conduct (*sīla*).

Moreover, we will train the mind, making it malleable, accommodating, loving, well-intentioned, steadfast, patient, disciplined, restrained, mindful, concentrated, peaceful, joyous, radiant, and so on. And vitally, we will cultivate wisdom, deepening our understanding of relevant professional knowledge, sharpening our expertise, learning about life and the world, developing

problem-solving skills, and with increased mastery realizing the Four Noble Truths.

If people fail to appreciate the valuable opportunity provided by their jobs and professions, their efforts will backfire: they will feel bored, annoyed, and stressed by their work. Their lives will likely take a turn for the worse and wisdom will be impeded.

Even if one doesn't immediately recognize how one's work is of benefit in the long run—either personally or to society—at the very least one can begin by recognizing it as an arena for practice and training. By doing this, one already profits. One can then make the most of the opportunity for learning and self-improvement.

Right livelihood is lawful, honest, and harmless. It attends to personal and social problems, or it produces something of value. Moreover, it is a platform for individual growth and development.

In sum, *sīla* (moral conduct; pure conduct) is comprised of four factors, all of which must be incorporated into formal education. When thinking about *sīla*, we should not limit ourselves to the five precepts, which constitute the fundamental or principal moral code, similar to the monks' Pāṭimokkha discipline which contains 227 training rules. Yet for both monks and laypeople, the remaining three factors of *sīla* must be incorporated into their lives and practice.



# Chapter 5

## Triple Triads: Laying the Groundwork for Practical Application

### Applying the Triple Triads in Society

As mentioned earlier, the three cardinal teachings—the Triple Gem, the Three Characteristics, and the Threefold Training—encompass the entirety of the Buddha’s teachings.

The Three Characteristics pertains to truths inherent in nature, to natural laws, which the Buddha realized and then imparted to us so that we may share in this realization. This teaching is linked to Dependent Origination, which describes the law of conditionality.<sup>1</sup> Both individuals and society as a whole are subject to these natural laws. When we gain insight into them, we can relate to all things skilfully and effectively.

The Threefold Training is a set of guidelines established by human beings to bring about individual prosperity and fulfilment, along with benefiting society and the natural environment. The training is based on the natural laws outlined in the Three Characteristics and is linked to the Noble Eightfold Path, which describes a virtuous way of life, culminating in spiritual purity and perfection.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the teaching on Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) focuses primarily on the origin and cessation of suffering.

The Triple Gem acts as a medium, enabling us to penetrate the truths outlined in the Three Characteristics and to progress in the Threefold Training all the way to reaching the final goal. This teaching is placed as the first amongst the three as it mobilizes us and acts as an anchor for applying effort and moving forward.

Once we are well-established in the Triple Gem, our task is twofold: first, to gain insight into the natural truths outlined in the Three Characteristics; and second, to practise in accord with the Threefold Training, which is a way to truly benefit from these truths.

These are broad explanations of the three cardinal teachings. However, when we wish to apply them in a communal or social setting and set down specific educational procedures, we must remember an important aspect of truth, namely: Although human beings are by nature trainable—and all of us are engaged in some form of training and study—from a wider perspective, at any one point in time, people can be seen to exist at different levels of development and maturity.

Take happiness as an example. Someone who has accomplished a particular level of training and cultivation may be perfectly content to live in a certain way, but someone else, who hasn't reached this level, may find this way of life unsatisfactory or even miserable.

For this reason, a healthy society must provide different ways of living—different lifestyles—for the benefit of its many members who are at various stages of development. A healthy society thus contains diversity within unity.

Diversity refers to the differences between people, both in respect to the level of personal development and in respect to personal aptitudes, temperaments, preferences, and so forth. One can say that people differ both in terms of spiritual faculties and in terms of disposition,<sup>1</sup> or in terms of depth and breadth.

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<sup>1</sup> *Indriya* and *adhimutti*, respectively.



Unity refers to the fact that, despite people's individual differences, everyone shares the common factor of requiring training and self-improvement (at his or her own unique and particular level).

It doesn't matter if people live in different ways, as long as everyone has the resolve to grow and develop. Varying lifestyles are completely acceptable; the minimum criterion is that one neither engages in harmful activities nor abandons the responsibility to learn and improve one's life.

Apart from people's individual differences, there are also differences related to specific communities. Some communities—for example the monastic community—are established for a specific type of training and education, and the individuals entering them do so by their own free will. Other communities, including schools and other educational institutions, are bound by wider social requirements; people joining them, for instance, may have to be of certain age or of a certain minimum age.

All told, those people who oversee and govern society should take these various factors into consideration, ensuring that people at different levels of maturity can develop at ease in a suitable setting. Most importantly, they must ensure that people can live in a way conducive to greater cultivation and wellbeing.

## **A Learned Society Is a Secure Society**

Human societies can be separated into distinct races, tribes, clans, nations, kingdoms, and so forth. And within these larger societies, smaller groups of people are often distinguished by such simple criteria as region or geographical area.

Since ancient times, however, there has been another model of separating groups of people in society based on creed, ethnicity, skin-colour, economic status, and so on. Most notable

examples are the caste system and the class system. These subsidiary groups of people have ways of life, codes of conduct, positions in society, and so forth, that are different from others in the same wider society. The ones who are subordinate are prone to prejudice and segregation, which most people recognize as negative elements in society.

Another common way to distinguish groups of people in society is by profession, each with its own special jobs and skills. Members of a particular profession often unite as distinct associations, guilds, work sectors, and so on. They share mutual interests, practices, and standards of conduct, and they look to each other for support. The tasks and responsibilities of such professions are relatively well-defined.

Because the conduct—both good and bad—of such members of a profession tends to have correspondingly positive or negative effects on society, as well as having an impact on the professional community itself, professional codes of discipline have been widely established to monitor people's behaviour.

Some occupations are not intrinsically 'professions' in the general sense, since they are not directly connected to earning a livelihood. They pertain primarily to social policy and supervision, including the guaranteeing of social justice (for instance in the domain of public service). As time has passed, however, they have come to be seen as distinct professions, for instance that of politicians or government officials. It can happen, however, that the role and purpose of people working in these professions becomes ambiguous. Failing to make a clear distinction of these roles, and seeing these occupations as merely another form of earning a livelihood, can have harmful consequences for society.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning with a negative impact on public opinion.

Another form of social group consists of people with the same ideas or interests—religious, philosophical, scientific, and so forth—meeting together, sharing knowledge, and participating in activities. (Perhaps we can even include groups of gamblers and drinking buddies as offshoots of this category.) These groups may remain loosely-knit affiliations or they may evolve into formal organizations.

On a slightly more refined level, there are those groups of people who share similar personal attributes and characteristics (or who perform similar roles in society), which are a natural outcome of training and study. Even if individuals endowed with such attributes are not acquainted or have no contact with one another, they automatically become part of such a group, of which there are many in society. If individuals possess virtuous attributes, and, having learned of one another, team up as a partnership in doing good deeds, they can be of great benefit to humanity even if they don't merge into an official community or association.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most diverse forms of community found abundantly throughout human history, are religious communities, which include small, loosely affiliated groups, all the way to large organizations resembling sovereign states. Religious communities may be established for undertaking important missions or for addressing specific social problems. They may arise without constraint or as a means to escape from pressure (or persecution) exerted by the wider society.

Religious communities are usually held together by the power of faith, injecting them with dynamism and potency. But, due to unyielding beliefs and convictions fuelled by such faith, along with the potential for faith to incite self-righteousness, zealous

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: this subject is discussed at more length in Part II under the section titled 'A Righteous Assembly'.

fervour, and factionalism, religious groups frequently perpetuate extreme conflict and violence.

Another important group of communities are educational communities. Although it may appear as if these exist in abundance, this is not the case. Most often—especially these days—it is more common to find ‘academic institutions’, which merely provide vocational training. They do not necessarily embody the true spirit of an educational community in the sense of developing human beings on all levels. Genuine educational communities are rare. Moreover, it seems as if few people nowadays are interested in making this distinction of what constitutes a true educational community.

As a general rule, Buddhism views the whole of society as an educational community: a centre for learning. This is connected to the Buddhist axiom that human beings are both trainable and in need of training. The Threefold Training, which incorporates the entire Buddhist practical framework, is applicable from people’s first contact with the outside world up to the time of full and complete spiritual realization: to self-mastery, to having finished one’s training (*asekha*). There is often not enough time in one’s life to bring about this consummate fulfilment. Education should thus be seen as a lifelong endeavour; indeed, it spans many lifetimes.

Even if we think nothing of it, our very survival depends on acquiring knowledge and developing new skills. And if we do take a keen interest in learning and education, then we will not only survive—we will prosper.

Many people take an interest in education merely to make a living and to get by. They hone bodily and verbal skills only to gain a minimum proficiency in action and speech (not necessarily in order to act and speak well), and to secure a job. They believe that their survival is thus ensured. Yet this is no guarantee; sometimes they still end up living under adverse conditions.

Human life is not limited to external conduct, to action and speech. There is also a vast area of expertise to be developed pertaining to the mind and wisdom.

Finally, under the aegis of the wider society, smaller communities may be deliberately established in order to foster virtue and understanding for all. These smaller communities reassure people that a wellspring of friendship exists, and their members encourage people to remain on the path of self-improvement, without veering off or falling by the wayside.<sup>1</sup>

Returning to the subject of society as a whole, each individual—knowingly or unknowingly, deliberately or inadvertently—is at a different stage of developmental progress (or regress). This is natural part of the human realm.

As everyone is required to train, develop, and improve (at least to survive), it is to everyone's advantage if we assist one another, providing each person in society with opportunities and structures most favourable to learning.

This assistance applies to all forms of social management organized at the village, municipal, or national level, from state governance up to global stewardship. We should remember, however, that the work performed by leaders, rulers, government authorities, and so on, is only truly meaningful and legitimate when it is conducive to everyone's improvement and development. (It is not enough to merely provide people with material goods for consumption until the entire planet is laid to waste.)

These descriptions attempt to demonstrate, according to the Buddhist teachings, which sort of communities and societies we should establish.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the author here is referring specifically to the Buddhist monastic community (*saṅgha*). This theme is expanded upon below in the section titled 'A Sanctioned Community'.

## **Equality Juxtaposed with Inequality**

Let us return to the fact that, at any one moment in time, people in society exist at different levels of development: they have achieved different degrees of maturity. It is impossible for everyone to be the same. At the very least, the disparity in people's ages dictates that they have had varying amounts of time to learn and grow.

For this reason, although everyone must equally engage in some form of education, everyone is also very different. We all have varying preferences, needs, abilities, and so forth. To use a modern expression, 'there is diversity within unity'.

In terms of equality, every person is equal in the eyes of truth, in the eyes of natural laws. This equality, however, has many implications. For instance, because all people are equal under the laws of nature at any one time, they are also different. How is this so?

In regard to natural laws, people are equal in the following ways: everyone exists in line with causal factors; everyone exists as a result of such factors; everyone reaps the fruit of such factors; and so on. In these respects we are all the same.

Having said this, everyone is faced with, shaped by, and in turn, generates, unique causes and conditions. Hence, we are all different; we are not the same. Inequality is thus a natural characteristic of equality.

If we are aware of this state of equality juxtaposed with inequality, then we will know how to skilfully relate to this apparent paradox. And endowed with this understanding, we will be able to assist others in the optimum way.

In the field of education, this juxtaposition is easy to see. For the most part, people's growth, both biological and psychological, is consistent with their age. In this respect, people are equal. At

the same time, we can discern how people from varying age groups differ. An example of this difference is the source of people's happiness. As mentioned in the scriptures, infants can have fun playing with their own excrement. When they are a little older, they enjoy playing in a sandbox. A few years later, they amuse themselves with dolls, miniature cars, and toy boats. In adolescence, they delight in going out and chatting with members of the opposite sex. We can see that what provides pleasure to members of one age group is a source of annoyance or tedium for members of another.

These descriptions refer to age-specific development. When discussing the development of the mind, however, matters become more complex.

People's knowledge is defined by the degree to which they develop their minds. Moreover, their perceptions, interests, and attitudes—even their sources of happiness—are shaped by the framework through which they engage in such development. And the conditions bringing about happiness for individual people often change. If one has gained insight into the truth (or an aspect of truth), an item formerly found to be captivating may now be perceived as wearisome or it is completely abandoned.

In like manner, scientists delighting in the pursuit of knowledge can become absorbed in their experiments and research—happily disheveled, living as if in need of neither food nor sleep. Meanwhile, someone caught up in sensuality may have to face a minor obstacle—for instance their car breaks down—and due to having to forego one day of pleasure, they have a temper tantrum, causing turmoil for others.

A similar example pertains to stream-enterers. Stream-enterers abide in regular joy and contentment. It takes very little to make them happy and their happiness is independent of external sense objects. They often view as excessive those pleasant items cherished by ordinary people. Instead of hoarding

these things, they prefer to give them away for others to enjoy, or they renounce them altogether. On the contrary, many people would be miserable or feel extremely deprived if they had to suffice with those items considered perfectly adequate—or even superfluous—by stream-enterers.

When establishing an egalitarian social system in harmony with natural laws, we must take into account the contrast of equality counterbalanced by inequality. And in terms of equality, we acknowledge that certain groups of people exist at corresponding levels of development and understanding.

This subject of equality juxtaposed with inequality can be summarized by the following headings:

**A. Laws of nature:** All living beings are prone to aging, sickness, and death, and they are dependent on causes and conditions. They are subject to the three characteristics and the law of karma; they live in conformity with their volitional actions: with wholesome and unwholesome deeds. In these respects, they are all equal.

**B. Standards based on laws of nature:** One's personal attributes, needs, sources of happiness, and so on, are based on the degree of one's training and development, and they correspond to other people who have reached the same level of development. One is naturally equal to such people. For example, by attending to causal factors outlined in the Threefold Training—by abandoning unwholesome actions and performing wholesome actions—stream-enterers are on equal standing with all other stream-enterers, once-returners are on equal standing with all other once-returners, and so on.

Given the equality inherent in nature—equality shared by all people and equality shared by select groups of people—we are faced with the important question of how to establish an egalitarian social framework that is in harmony with natural laws and is of greatest benefit to all human beings. At this point, we



must apply our intelligence and wisdom to directly manage human affairs, both individual and social.

**C. Conventional social systems:** Through mutual consent and agreement (sometimes through coercion), people set down laws, regulations, codes of conduct, human rights policies, and so forth, that provide everyone in society with the basic means for freedom, wellbeing, and happiness. These conventional systems should provide everyone with the opportunity to fulfil their own individual needs. (The principles of freedom and happiness here should be contingent on people not harming themselves or others, and on not neglecting their own self-improvement and development.)

## **Sustainable Development**

The principles described so far can be considered as laying down a foundation. They ensure that society is peaceful and that people are equipped with skills to make strides in their endeavours, but they do not yet address the essential work to be performed by human beings.

We should ask ourselves what we should be building upon such a foundation and how we should be applying our skills. It is not enough to simply produce material goods and increase wealth in society, which often just lead people to indulge in sense pleasure.

When it comes to practical application, our primary objective should be to provide people with the opportunity to study and grow: providing them with supportive resources and conducive environments. As a result, people will be able to establish a well-integrated lifestyle—cultivating higher morality, higher mind, and higher wisdom—and achieve a state of freedom that is mutually beneficial in society.

If we fail to provide such opportunities then we end up with a system of ‘social mismanagement’ whereby people cater to their

desires, compete for pleasure and gratification, get caught up in a vortex of dissatisfaction, and view rules and regulations in a negative light—as merely forms of restriction. Those people in authority are then burdened by constant law enforcement, trying to prevent transgression and disobedience. They have little time to address and fulfil people’s true needs.

In order to establish a healthy society, we must have a comprehensive understanding of natural laws related to human existence and to the world at large. We can then act accordingly, managing society so that all people are provided with favourable opportunities and a supportive environment, enabling them to live at ease.

A healthy society is not based on trying to make everyone the same—on trying to bring about uniformity and to force everyone into a single mould—as has often been attempted (and continues to be attempted).<sup>1</sup>

We do not create healthy societies by accommodating only fully enlightened beings; nor do we create them by pandering to fools. Similarly, healthy societies are not exclusively supportive to stream-enterers or to those swept away by the currents of sensuality. On the contrary, healthy societies are places where all kinds of people can live happily and develop in optimal ways.

In this context of establishing a healthy society, we should follow the example of nature itself; we should imitate nature. Through skilful investigation, we know that natural laws are categorical and absolute. If we generate specific causes and conditions, they will lead to specific results. With this understanding of nature, people agree on social conventions<sup>2</sup> enacted as human laws which guide and regulate people’s behaviour directing them to bring about positive results and

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the tendency to conform to specific values or behaviour results from various influences not least of which is direct social pressure through social media, propaganda, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Sammati*.

refrain from bringing about negative ones. Human laws are thus established to help people benefit from natural laws and can thus be seen as ‘imitative’ or ‘derivative’.

Laws of nature apply equally to all people (we are all equal in the eyes of natural laws).<sup>1</sup> In similar fashion, human laws are designed to apply equally to all people in a particular society. This can be summed up by the phrase: ‘Everyone is equal under the law.’ Human laws are enacted to ensure that people perform skilful actions (rather than harmful ones) in line with natural laws belonging to a universal order.

Having said this, human laws are distinct from what we call ‘nature’; they pertain to conventional rather than absolute truth. This distinction has brought up the persistent question in human history of what one should do so that people in society comply with laws and regulations.

There is a traditional Thai story of a tiger and a zookeeper that outlines this distinction.<sup>2</sup> In nature, equality plays out with constancy and precision. A tiger must eat in order to survive; if deprived of food it will weaken and die. This is an un failing natural truth. Human laws, however, do not exist automatically as an inherent part of nature. In this story, a zookeeper is hired to feed a tiger. He is paid a monthly wage plus a stipend (of one baht) for the tiger’s food. He gives the tiger only a small portion of food each day and pockets the rest of the money for himself. The tiger grows gaunt and eventually dies. Yet during this entire time the zookeeper has been receiving his wages plus the money he embezzled.

Equality in regard to human laws does not follow the same constancy and precision as it does in nature. Instead, it depends

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the literal translation from Thai is ‘in the face of.’

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: from the poem ‘Loka Niti’ (โลกนิตินิ) written in 1831.

on people's honesty, or more accurately, on their intention.<sup>1</sup> Human laws do not function independently and in a clear-cut way; they are subject to people's uprightness and integrity.

To secure equality within a human legal system, further measures must be implemented, for example supervisory procedures and penal codes, which are themselves additional laws. If people within such a system are dishonest, society breaks down despite its laws. This is summed up by the Thai expression: 'When the baht is spent, the tiger dies.'

If people lack education and training, they will consider laws, rules, moral codes, and so on, merely as constraints preventing them from doing or getting what they want and forcing them to do what they don't want. If the majority of people in society maintain this negative attitude towards rules and regulations, they will comply with them begrudgingly and will constantly look for loopholes. It is fair to call such people 'uneducated' and the society itself 'destitute'.

In such a destitute and corrupt society, the lawmakers, arbitrators of the law, law-enforcement officials, and even the ordinary citizens who are expected to abide by the law, all act in collusion.

If people begin to make strides in true education, then they will appreciate that legitimate and just laws are reasonable and necessary and that they are established to foster virtue, social harmony, and opportunities for self-improvement. With this appreciation, although they may still want to follow their own desires, people are willing to obey the laws. They consider: 'What I am being asked to do is correct. Although the rules and regulations may not always be to my liking, I should comply with them.' This compliance is one aspect to self-discipline and is a part of education.

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<sup>1</sup> *Cetanā*.

On a higher level, if people have refined their minds and wisdom—recognizing the benefit of just laws and discerning the link between human and natural laws—then they see that human laws are merely conventional notions that we willingly observe in order to create a healthy society and promote human development.

Returning to the two unique human qualities mentioned earlier, we can gauge the success of systems of education and the quality of human development as follows:<sup>1</sup>

- Comprehensive understanding of nature: establishing effective systems of education and laying down codes of conduct in harmony with natural laws by drawing upon the integrity and acumen of wisdom (*paññā*).
- Actions in accord with an understanding of nature: conforming to such codes of conduct with wholesome and sincere intention (*cetanā*).

These are the two criteria for establishing a healthy society (along with stable sub-communities) and for achieving true human development.

## **A Sanctioned Community**

After his awakening, the Buddha travelled around teaching the Dhamma and proclaiming the holy life for the welfare and happiness of the manyfolk, for the compassionate assistance of the world. Yet the society at that time was not very well-disposed or receptive; at the very least, his task was an arduous one.

Apart from wandering across the Indian subcontinent sharing his teachings, the Buddha also adopted a preexisting religious

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: these qualities were introduced in the section titled 'Dukkhatā & Skilful Life Management'.

communal format, reforming it into a training community known as the ‘sangha’.<sup>1</sup> Initially, this community was a haven for fully enlightened individuals who were thus able to live independent of unfavourable or hostile conditions in the wider society.

The sangha became a model community that transformed the wider society by opening its doors to people from all walks of life who were fully committed to engaging in spiritual practice.

The Buddha said:

*When members of the four social classes—nobles, brahmans, merchants, and labourers<sup>2</sup>—go forth from the household life into homelessness in the Dhamma and Discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata, they give up their former names and clans and are simply called ascetics, sons of the Sakyan.*

*Nobles ... brahmans ... merchants ... labourers, who are restrained in body, speech and mind, and who have developed the seven factors of enlightenment, will attain to perfect peace<sup>3</sup> in this very life. And whichever monk of these four castes becomes an arahant, who has destroyed the taints, fulfilled the holy life, done what had to be done ... he is declared to be chief among them.<sup>4</sup>*

Similarly, the Buddha responded to a brahman:

*Even though one mutters many chants, one is not a brahman by birth if one is rotten within and deceitful towards others. Whether noble, brahman, merchant, labourer, outcaste, or scavenger, if one strives, perseveres, and makes unremitting effort, one can realize supreme purity. Know, O brahman, that this is so.<sup>5</sup>*

To use a modern expression, we can describe the Buddha’s travelling about and giving teachings as a means of providing

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<sup>1</sup> *Saṅgha*: ‘monastic order’, ‘Order’.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: khattiyas, brahmans, vaishyas, and shudras, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> *Parinibbāna*.

<sup>4</sup> A. IV. 202; D. III. 97.

<sup>5</sup> S. I. 166.

people with education. He would advise both individuals and groups of people on various matters pertaining to improving their lives. This teaching would begin with adjusting their basic views of the world.

The training community of the sangha exists to this day. It lies at the core of Buddhist efforts to promote wellbeing and happiness for all human beings, and on a more subtle level it is the focal point for creating a human society that in itself becomes a vast centre of learning. Moreover, it is where awakened beings congregate and dwell. The monastic community thus provides a training along the path to awakening.

The Buddha asserted that every human being requires training, both basic education and higher forms of spiritual cultivation. Advancement in spiritual cultivation leads to gradual stages of enlightenment. As a collective term, enlightened beings at all stages of enlightenment are referred to as the ‘noble saṅgha’ (*ariya-saṅgha*). This noble community is comprised of individuals with distinct spiritual attributes and states of realization. It exists naturally, as a matter of course; it is not ‘established’ or ‘formed’ by any person or group of persons (it thus resembles some scientific communities comprised of individuals with similar interests, accomplishments, and so on).

Soon after his awakening, the Buddha established the bhikkhu sangha. This first generation of ordained monks were all, without exception, arahants,<sup>1</sup> whom the Buddha instructed to go out and proclaim the Dhamma to the manyfolk. They included those who had realized arahantship before their formal going forth as well as other who had realized initial stages of awakening and had asked for the going forth in order to progress to the final goal. There were also those individuals—specifically Yasa’s parents and former wife—who attained initial stages of awakening and chose to remain as householders.

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<sup>1</sup> This reckoning counts up to and includes the friends of Ven. Yasa. With the Buddha himself the number of arahants at that time totalled sixty-one.

This first generation of bhikkhus had completed their spiritual work. All of their remaining efforts were focused entirely on assisting others.

Besides being a community whose members endeavoured to share the Buddha's teachings and supported people's development in the wider society, the bhikkhu sangha was also established to provide suitable living conditions for arahants, those who have achieved supreme self-mastery.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, those individuals requesting to join this community and intent on training, although not yet having attained arahantship, took delight in living in the manner of arahants. The Buddha's wording for ordination candidates who were not yet arahants is: 'Practise the holy life for the complete ending of suffering.'<sup>2</sup> And the traditional request for ordination, used up to this day, includes the expression: 'For the realization of Nibbāna'.<sup>3</sup>

According to Buddhist tradition, the bhikkhu sangha is thus companion to the 'noble sangha', both of which are enveloped within the wider society.

Even during the Buddha's lifetime, a Buddhist social paradigm began to form:

The wider society consisted primarily of householders. Those principal enlightened individuals who were householders and still lived directly in society were stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*). They came from all walks of life: royalty, wealthy merchants, doctors, ordinary laypeople, and so on. Examples from the time of the Buddha include: King Bimbisāra, Queen Mallikā, Anāthapiṇḍika, Visākhā, and the physician Jīvaka. Many of these were wealthy benefactors and highly respected in their communities.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The bhikkhu sangha is also the most fitting environment for non-returners (*anāgāmi*)—those who have realized the third and next-to-last stage of enlightenment.

<sup>2</sup> *Caratha brahmacariyaṃ sammā dukkhassa antakiriya*.

<sup>3</sup> *Nibbāna-sacchikarānathāya*.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, they would often be invited to important social functions as a sign of special honour and distinction. [Trans.: it is recorded that Visākhā, chief among female lay disciples, held such a great reputation for bringing good fortune that the people of Sāvatti always invited her to their houses on festivals and holidays.]



Although these exceptional householders had realized stream-entry, the Buddha would generally characterize their way of life as ‘enjoying the pleasures of the senses’.<sup>1</sup> In addition, there were a few individuals (for example Cittagahapati and Prince Hatthaka) who had attained to non-returning and still chose to live as householders without going forth into the homeless life.

In the midst of this wider society and under its aegis, was the bhikkhu sangha which acted as a centre of intensive training and provided support and benefit for all. Those individuals who had completed their training—even those having arrived at full realization while still living as householders—dwelled in the monastic community. The principal members of this smaller independent community were thus arahants.

## **From the Three Trainings to the Three Meritorious Actions**

Most people in the wider society do not recognize the genuine purpose of education. They are often so busy and caught up in everyday concerns that they don’t have the time to take an interest in these matters. As a consequence, their training and development is usually limited to acquiring enough knowledge for survival and for meeting basic needs.

On the whole, those people ‘enjoying sense pleasures’ are preoccupied with material objects and interpersonal relationships: with consuming material goods, earning a living, family dynamics, competing with others, seeking profit, and so on. Their actions—in body, speech and mind—are generally tied up with a desire for gain.

Considering that most laypeople are preoccupied with acquiring material goods and with social engagements, rather than

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<sup>1</sup> *Kāma-bhogin* = *kāma-bhogī*: ‘one who enjoys sensual pleasures’.

introduce them directly to the ‘barebones’ framework of the Threefold Training, the Buddha would teach them a secondary system of development suited to their living situation. This teaching is also comprised of three factors. First, the Buddha would divert laypeople away from thoughts of getting and guide them towards a practice of giving. Second, in the context of earning a livelihood, he warned against harming others. And third, he urged people to train the mind and to generate happiness through the cultivation of virtue beginning with mutual love and goodwill.

These three factors can be summarized as follows:

1. **Generosity** (*dāna*): giving; sharing material possessions.
2. **Moral conduct** (*sīla*): upholding the essential principles inherent in the five precepts; living in society and earning a livelihood without harming, mistreating or exploiting others.
3. **Meditation** (*bhāvanā*): cultivating the mind and wisdom<sup>1</sup> with an emphasis on developing lovingkindness, calming the mind, fostering goodwill and compassion, and maintaining faith in what is virtuous and reasonable.

The framework for laypeople’s spiritual development was thus modified from *sīla, samādhi & paññā* to *dāna, sīla, & bhāvanā*.

These three factors can then be expanded upon:

- From giving material possessions, one graduates to sharing knowledge and to giving others the opportunity to participate in wholesome deeds.
- From non-harming and maintaining moral discipline, one graduates to cooperation, charity, showing courtesy and respect, honouring one’s elders, community service, and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> On this distinction between ‘mind’ and ‘wisdom’, see the previous footnote in the section titled ‘Sound Education Based on Natural Truths’.

- From developing lovingkindness, calming the mind, and so on, one cultivates the mind and wisdom further. One brings the four sublime states of mind (*brahmavihāra*) to completion, and one increases in virtuous qualities: mental fortitude, mindfulness, concentration, wholesome desire, effort, patience, joy, delight, and so on. One fosters self-reliance, becoming less dependent on external things and on sense pleasure. One is easily contented and one's happiness stems increasingly from wholesome mind states. One listens attentively to the Dhamma, seeks and clarifies knowledge, deepens wisdom, and straightens one's views.<sup>1</sup>

The three factors of *dāna*, *sīla* & *bhāvanā* are collectively referred to as *puñña-kiriya*: 'making merit', 'doing good', 'cultivating virtue'. It is up to each of us to perform this wholesome work, confirmed by the Buddha's words: 'The wise should cultivate goodness.'<sup>2</sup>

We can compare the cultivation of goodness with the modern expression: 'improving one's quality of life', although the term *puñña-kiriya* is perhaps more comprehensive as it encompasses all dimensions of the mind.

In the past, Thai people were relatively well-versed in the concept of merit-making, and the monks would often teach them the story of the young man named Magha which appears frequently in the scriptures.<sup>3</sup>

Magha made a similar living to others in his village, yet he was particularly kind-hearted, innovative, and keen on doing good. If he noticed anything that would be of service to others, he would act without asking for any help.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: *ditthuju-kamma*: 'making one's views upright', i.e. developing skilful contemplation, correct understanding, and right view.

<sup>2</sup> *Puññameva so sikkheyya* (It. 15-16).

<sup>3</sup> E.g.: DhA. I. 264.

His meritorious deeds<sup>1</sup> began with making his own land and the area around the village clean, refreshing, and delightful.<sup>2</sup> He created a village square for people to relax at after work, lit fires in the cold season for people to warm themselves, set out drinking water in the hot season, and improved the roads leading into the village.

Later, other enthusiastic young men from the village asked to participate in these good deeds until they comprised a group of thirty-three individuals, with Magha as leader. Together they built roads, bridges, and resting pavilions, dug wells and reservoirs, and planted gardens. Eventually, their merit-making activities extended to neighbouring villages.

Having gained the respect and trust of the villagers, Magha encouraged them to practise generosity and to abstain from unwholesome actions, like gambling and taking intoxicants, until almost everyone was offering a helping hand and was grounded in moral conduct. Due to the villagers giving up drinking, hunting, fishing, and so on, the village headman lost money from alcohol sales and from receiving payoffs, and thus looked for a way to interfere. He lodged a formal complaint with the king, accusing Magha of conspiracy and inciting rebellion.

The entire group of thirty-three was arrested, but when the king discovered that they were committed to doing good deeds in their community he pardoned them and offered his royal support. The thirty-three young men then expanded their activities and launched more ambitious projects, until other people, including women from the village, asked to share in the merit-making.<sup>3</sup>

We should familiarize members of the present generation with this dramatic story so that they develop a comprehensive understanding of the concept of ‘merit’ and act accordingly, rather than follow the mistaken and inaccurate beliefs that we often witness today.

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<sup>1</sup> *Puñña-kamma*. A ‘doer of good deeds’ = *puñña-kara*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ramañiya*.

<sup>3</sup> *Patti*: sharing in merit.

Moreover, we should realize the significance of establishing independent communities beginning at the village or township level—the smallest body politic of society—in order to resolve wider social problems and to initiate constructive progress.<sup>1</sup>

Siam Saamtri School, for instance, can establish itself as an alternative community and can forge new pedagogical methods and practices. It can take the helm, navigating through hostile and forbidding social trends just as in the Buddha's time the bhikkhu sangha was a centre for promoting a casteless society.<sup>2</sup> Even in the modern era caught in the currents of consumerism, the monastic sangha can be a haven free from consumerist values and a model for escaping from the clutches of consumerism.<sup>3</sup>

To summarize, we require a comprehensive understanding of natural laws and various principles pertaining to true education. But when we apply practical measures, for instance when we set down a formal educational system, we must determine suitable structures and procedures to meet our objectives so as to be of greatest benefit to individuals and society as a whole. In a nutshell, our knowledge must be complete and our design fitting.

As is clearly evident and much lamented, the world today is teeming with problems: unsustainable development, social decline, environmental crises, rampant consumerism and commercialism, a decrease in human integrity, a downturn of various forms of wellbeing, growing dissatisfaction, and so on. The genuine role and purpose of education is to uproot these problems.

M.L. Anong Nilubol once said: 'Nowadays, some girls when they reach adulthood lack self-esteem and practical skills, and as a consequence engage in unbecoming occupations. This causes me

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: what we call a 'grassroots' movement.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: there is an old Thai saying: 'Teachers are ferry boats' (ครูคือเรือจ้าง). The meaning of this saying is that teachers guide their pupils in the ways of knowledge as a ferryman leads people across dangerous waters to the safety of the other shore.

<sup>3</sup> We could call this alternative principle or trend 'moderationism'.

so much concern.”<sup>1</sup> This comment is a reminder of how we must earnestly work together to create a coherent educational system as education lies at the core of shaping and strengthening our nation.

True education must remain relevant and stay abreast of modern circumstances. The world requires people of stalwart virtue to help solve problems, to lead others away from harmful directions and guide them towards skilful ones, and to make constructive contributions leading to the fulfilment of a noble life, a healthy society, and a delightful natural environment.

Fulfilling this responsibility is confirmed by establishing true education. Such an education conforms to truth, meets people’s diverse needs (according to their various degrees of development), and culminates in the highest goal.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: M.L. Anong Nilubol is a leading scientist in Thailand. Throughout the years she has been dedicated to the promotion of education as a tool for development and prosperity.

# Chapter 6

## The Triple Triads in Practice

### Two Tenets Enabling Progress

Transitioning from a theoretical study of the triple triads to practical application essentially means drawing upon natural truths and integrating them into an educational methodology established as a conventional social form.

Mind you, the above statement is still confined to theory. We have merely shifted our attention from formal teachings on natural truths to formal standards set down by human beings. Our focus now will be on how to actually apply these standards.

No matter how we organize our educational systems, we should first look at those basic measures that are clearly practicable. We will then be ready to embark on our endeavours and make unhindered and assured progress. In other words, based on our understanding of the three cardinal teachings—the Triple Gem, the Three Characteristics, and the Threefold Training—we can set down clear guidelines for education.<sup>1</sup>

Although the Buddha taught numerous sublime and profound teachings, many modern-day Buddhists have grown negligent and remiss and have not put them into practice. Rather than use our

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<sup>1</sup> Ideally, people will develop an appreciation for key educational standards and procedures from the time that they are still students.

intelligence, we have on the whole failed to apply these teachings for establishing a coherent code for living. It is fair to say that we are devoid of common principles and standards. This is a big problem that must be addressed to the best of our ability.

Take the example of faith: in Thailand we don't have a shared and clearly defined idea of what kind of faith a true Buddhist should adopt and maintain.

This leads us to a useful twofold classification:

**1. Faith:** faith is linked to formal teachings, that is, as Buddhists we have confidence in specific doctrines and we are endowed with certain ideals, values, convictions, beliefs, and so on.

**2. Practice:** as Buddhists we have prescribed practices and forms of training to observe.

For many years I have given this matter much consideration. My concern for Buddhists drifting around aimlessly prompted me to write the book titled *The Buddhist's Discipline*.<sup>1</sup>

The monks still have a code of discipline. After ordination, monks are obliged to observe the 227 training rules which clearly prescribe what behaviour is appropriate and inappropriate. The Buddhist laypeople, however, appear to be anchorless. They claim to be Buddhists but when asked what this entails—what conduct and frames of reference qualify one as a Buddhist—they are generally stumped and clueless. It has been like this for a long time. How can we rectify this situation by coming up with a template containing a suitable number of guiding tenets?

A long time ago I first presented such a template in *A Constitution for Living*,<sup>2</sup> but this book contains a great number of guidelines and is thus a bit unwieldy. *The Buddhist's Discipline* was

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<sup>1</sup> วินัยชาวพุทธ [written in 1997].

<sup>2</sup> ธรรมนูญชีวิต [first published in 1976].



an attempt to consolidate these guidelines, although a thoughtful reader opined that it still contains a large number, a claim to which I admit.

This occasion affords another opportunity to set down a concise template of guidelines. It is still a work in progress and feedback is welcome. If you agree with this proposal to have such a framework, we can work together to refine it.

For the sake of brevity we can rely on the aforementioned twofold classification—faith & practice—to help define what it means to be a true Buddhist. This twofold classification can alternatively be outlined as ‘principles & practice’, which are the main headings that I will use from now on.

The first heading on principles I present as a list of declarations or vows. This is only one manner of presentation and it can be altered as desired.

### **A. Principles**

- ‘I believe that human beings are capable of achieving excellence by way of training and education.’
- ‘I determine to train myself so as to emulate the Lord Buddha’s wisdom, purity and compassion.’
- ‘I give utmost importance to truth and virtue.’ (‘I hold truth and virtue as my touchstone.’)
- ‘I will foster harmony and concord in my community beginning at home, thus creating a friendly environment conducive to growth and development.’
- ‘I will achieve my goals by way of wholesome and diligent action.’

The wording of these clauses is flexible, and we can choose how best to express these key principles pertaining to faith. Alternative wordings for the first clause, for example, include:

‘Human beings achieve excellence by way of training,’ ‘I have faith in awakening,’<sup>1</sup> and ‘I have faith in the potential inherent in all human beings to develop themselves into Buddhas.’ This final statement is a full rendering of this principle, although it may come across as too complex for the average person.

If we look closely at these five principles, we can see that they incorporate the two key teachings on the Triple Gem and on karma: the first two principles pertain to the Buddha, the third to the Dhamma, the fourth to the Sangha, and the fifth to karma.

As a minor aside, many Thai Buddhists are familiar with the traditional fourfold division of faith into: ‘faith in karma’; ‘faith in the fruits of karma’; ‘belief that beings are the owners of their kamma’; and ‘faith in the Buddha’s awakening’.<sup>2</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that this division is part of the original body of scriptures, the Tipiṭaka. In the original texts one finds only faith in the Buddha’s awakening (*tathāgatobodhi-saddhā*) and faith in the Triple Gem (*ratanaṭṭaya-saddhā*).<sup>3</sup>

Later, in the Commentaries, a new twofold division was made, namely:

- Faith in the Buddha’s awakening or faith in the Triple Gem (that is, faith in any one of the three Jewels).
- Faith in karma and the fruits of karma.<sup>4</sup>

The five principles stated above correspond to this more recent twofold classification of faith.

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<sup>1</sup> *Bodhi-saddhā*.

<sup>2</sup> *Kamma-saddhā*, *vipāka-saddhā*, *kamassakatā-saddhā*, and *tathāgatobodhi-saddhā*, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> *Tathāgatobodhi-saddhā* and *ratanaṭṭaya-saddhā*, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> *Kammaphala-saddhā*.

## Clarifying Key Doctrines

There is a lot of confusion these days around the term ‘karma’.<sup>1</sup> Some people see it in purely negative terms; others as a resignation to fate. The Buddha’s reason for teaching on karma, however, was for us to perform good deeds and to refrain from performing evil ones. He didn’t want us to sit back idly and merely wait for some predestined outcome.

He gave teachings on karma for us to make effort, not to wait (the fruits of karma come naturally of their own accord—there is no need to wait). If we have habitually performed unskilful actions in the past, we should turn over a new leaf and start performing skilful ones. If we are wont to perform good actions, we should refine and elevate them. It is for this reason that the Buddha set down guidelines for training, so that we may relinquish unwholesome deeds, develop wholesome ones, and advance on the path of goodness.

By making effort we become skilled in karma, proficient at performing intentional actions. This process begins with seeking out knowledge, and learning what is good and bad karma, just and unjust karma. We then train in abandoning bad karma and promoting good karma. In other words, we abandon what is unwholesome and foster what is wholesome. We engage in the cultivation of wholesomeness.<sup>2</sup>

We develop such proficiency in karma by increasing and refining our wholesome activities precisely within the context of training.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: note the first two definitions of karma in ‘Collins Concise Dictionary, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition 1999’: 1. Hinduism, Buddhism. the principle of retributive justice determining a person’s state of life and state of his reincarnations as the effect of his past deeds; 2. destiny or fate.

Similar confusion and ambiguity exists in the Thai language in respect to the word ‘gam’ (กรรม).

<sup>2</sup> *Kusala-bhāvanā*.

<sup>3</sup> *Sikkhā*.

From having performed unwholesome deeds, we deliberately engage in wholesome ones; from performing basic wholesome deeds, we elevate to more lofty ones.

It is imperative that we gain a clear understanding of the Buddhist concept of karma and to translate this understanding into concrete action. Nowadays, many people who call themselves Buddhists are caught up in divining lottery numbers,<sup>1</sup> following superstitious beliefs, beseeching supernatural powers, and so forth. They have gone off course and have lost touch with the true principle of karma.

We should make the explicit declaration that genuine success is reached by way of active engagement, not by entreaty or by idly waiting for a turn of fortune. Fatalistic views are now rampant in Thailand,<sup>2</sup> and they must be rectified by a proper understanding of karma. If we can cut through these tangled views, we will embody the aforementioned principle of ‘achieving one’s goals by way of wholesome and diligent action’.

The teaching on karma is linked to the teachings on heedfulness (*appamāda*) and effort (*virīya*). They must be applied in unison.

The Buddha said: ‘I teach a doctrine of kamma, a doctrine of deeds, a doctrine of effort.’<sup>3</sup> Note how he combined these three factors into a single declaration.

What this means is that intentional action must be accompanied by effort. These two qualities go hand in hand. For the sake of precision, we must mention effort in our discussions on karma, and we should highlight this teaching by the Buddha in order to dispel people’s misconceptions about karma.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: one method of divination is to look for numbers in the bark of sacred trees.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: variations of fatalism include determinism, predeterminism, and theological determinism.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: e.g.: A. I. 287. *Kamma-vāda, kirīya-vāda, & virīya-vāda*, respectively. Alternatively: ‘I am a proclaimer of kamma, a proclaimer of deeds, a proclaimer of effort.’

## Reliable Principles – Upright Practice

For our shared consideration, I propose the following list of seven modes of training:

### B. Practice

- Putting aside a minimum of such-and-such an amount of money each week for charity or donations in order to alleviate other people's suffering, to appreciate what is good, and to promote virtuous deeds.<sup>1</sup>
- Determining to undertake the five precepts and to abstain from immoral conduct.<sup>2</sup>
- Chanting some of the Buddha's verses for a prescribed amount of time each day, making the mind peaceful and aspiring to that which is wholesome.<sup>3</sup>
- Visiting a monastery once a month (or on the Buddhist holy days and important family days), cherishing such refreshing and delightful sanctuaries.
- Performing good deeds and at least once a week dedicating the merit to parents, teachers, and generous people in society (including those who have passed away) and in tribute to the Triple Gem.
- Setting aside one day per week/month to refrain from entertainment.<sup>4</sup>
- Establishing measures for developing moderation and wise consumption.

Let's examine each of these clauses in more detail:

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<sup>1</sup> This clause includes offering almsfood to monks.

<sup>2</sup> Appropriate to one's age and living situation. [Trans.: this will be explained below.]

<sup>3</sup> One should understand the meaning of the words being chanted.

<sup>4</sup> This observance can be refined by limiting how much one partakes of entertainment each day.

**1. Generosity:** Buddhists should practise sincere giving and sharing, making acts of generosity an integral part of their lives. If donating money to charity on a regular basis is burdensome, then one can determine to do so once a week.

**2. Moral conduct:** For many Buddhists, even keeping the five precepts becomes problematic. Fearing that they cannot observe the precepts impeccably, they end up sidestepping this aspect of training altogether. If they do undertake the precepts, they do so as a form of ritual. If people lack clarity and determination around such a basic practice, it will be very difficult for them to make any significant progress on the Buddhist path.

I am curious whether you have faced this problem. Take the example of the first precept on refraining from taking life.<sup>1</sup> Occasionally, the emphasis is put on not killing ants and mosquitos. Upholding this precept then appears formidable.

How can we help children, and indeed all Buddhists, develop self-confidence in respect to observing moral precepts? For if people lack such confidence, they will remain anxious and uneasy, worrying about such issues as killing insects. In the end, they get bogged down, making no progress.

Buddhism is a doctrine of training and development. Self-development is not a matter of undertaking particular exercises and gaining immediate expertise. We must begin with humble steps and gradually work our way up.

In the monastic discipline, a lot of scrutiny is given to the subject of refraining from killing as such conduct is directly related to the principle of harmlessness. Consequently, a clear distinction is made between different kinds of killing. Although killing other human beings falls under the general category of killing living creatures, such an offence for a monk carries a maximum penalty. It is classified as a *pārājika* offence:<sup>2</sup> a monk

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<sup>1</sup> *Pāṇātipāta*.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: 'a rule entailing defeat'.

automatically falls away from the state of being a bhikkhu and he must disrobe. Killing other creatures, however, is considered less serious and is classified as an offence entailing expiation.<sup>1</sup> If a monk deliberately kills an animal, for instance, he is absolved from this transgression through an act of confession.

In contrast, no such distinction is made in the five precepts for laypeople. The precept only states an overarching principle covering all scenarios. In this context the term *pāṇātipāta* encompasses killing any kind of living creature.

Failing to understand this matter causes confusion for people. Some choose to reject the entire contemplation of ethics, while others who are overly conscientious become uptight. Faced with the moral dilemma of what to do when encountering ants, mosquitos, weevils, centipedes, scorpions, and so on, they feel apprehensive and unsure. In respect to moral conduct it is essential that we stick to key principles of scholarship, namely truth and clarity.

In terms of the first precept, we can use the monastic training rules as a guideline by making similar distinctions.

In the context of *pāṇātipāta*, the scriptures define ‘living creature’ first and foremost as a human being. Indeed, there is one sutta passage on this subject that refers exclusively to human beings:

*‘Monks, what do you think? Have you ever seen or heard of the following: “This man has abandoned the taking of life, he is one who abstains from the taking of life; and for this reason kings seize him and execute him, imprison him, banish him, or impose a punishment on him?”’*

*‘Never, venerable sir.’*

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<sup>1</sup> *Pācittiya*.

*‘Good, monks. I too have never seen or heard of such a thing. But rather it is when they inform kings of his evil deed, saying: “This person has taken the life of a woman or man,” that kings have him arrested on the charge of taking life and then execute him, imprison him, banish him, or impose a punishment on him. Have you ever seen or heard of such a case?’*

*‘We have seen this, venerable sir, and we have heard of it, and we will hear of it in time to come.’<sup>1</sup>*

When the term *pāṇātipāta* is used in a broader sense, referring to all living creatures, the scriptures offer criteria for distinguishing the relative severity and ill-effects of various kinds of killing, as follows:<sup>2</sup>

*In terms of inferior living creatures, like animals, the killing of smaller animals is reckoned as less deleterious, larger animals as more deleterious. Why is this? Because [in the latter case] much effort is expended. Even if the effort expended is the same, the animals are of a larger size.... Moreover, in terms of creatures with similar physical bodies and degrees of virtue, [killing] with weak defilement and effort is less deleterious, with strong defilement and effort more deleterious.<sup>3</sup>*

Here we can see that many criteria are taken into consideration: the danger posed by the victim; the victim’s degree of virtue; the mental defilements (say of malice or vindictiveness) of the perpetrator prompting them to act spitefully, be abusive, and so on; the amount of effort put into planning and following through with the action (as opposed to acting on the spur of the moment); the size of the victim; and so forth.

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<sup>1</sup> A. III. 208-209.

<sup>2</sup> This analysis is found in eight commentarial texts, e.g.: DA. I. 69.

<sup>3</sup> This commentarial analysis includes the statement: ‘In terms of creatures endowed with virtue, like human beings, the killing of people with meagre virtue is less deleterious, people of great virtue more deleterious.’ [Trans.: this statement may appear repugnant to many Western readers. In any case, it should be seen in context.]



The key criteria can be boiled down to the virtue of the victim and the intention of the perpetrator. Killing a virtuous human being (or an animal of significant value and service) has relatively dire consequences, whereas killing a threatening animal or a pest is less detrimental. Furthermore, if one's thinking is corrupted, whereby one intends to inflict cruelty on the other party, despite them minding their own business and not posing any kind of risk, the actions are extra unskillful. In contrast, if one acts out of self-defence, for instance, the ill-effects are normally less severe.

These are examples of how we can apply the monastic discipline which acknowledges the complexity and relative nature of human actions in the domain of observing moral precepts by laypeople.

I wonder if we might be able to foster greater self-awareness in children resulting in them gaining clarity and confidence around keeping moral precepts. For instance, when formally undertaking the five precepts, children may inwardly reflect, or outwardly announce (not as a vow), words along the line of: 'I shall actively show kindness towards all living creatures with the exception of those posing an immediate threat; in any case, I will not inflict cruelty on any living creature', or: 'I shall abstain from killing any animals from this genre upwards.'

This strategy is simply a first step. We acknowledge that people are at different stages of maturity. When they formally undertake the precepts, they can initially say: 'I am ready to train in this precept to this extent, of that I am confident. Later, with more competence, I will gradually refine my training.'

Such an approach accords with Buddhism, which is a doctrine of training and development. We acknowledge our own state of readiness and train at whichever stage we feel confident.

This does not imply that we neglect moral conduct and remain complacent. For if we do this, we become Buddhists for whom anything goes, languishing in doubt and confusion.

## The Five Precepts Are Based on Harmlessness

I would now like to open the floor for questions to hear your thoughts and ideas.

**School director:** *In the case of very young children, we try to instil in them an appreciation of life. When encountering an ant, their first impulse is often to step on it. We teach them to see such creatures as fellow living beings which shouldn't be harmed. Having developed such an appreciation, they begin to study the behaviour of these creatures. For instance, they observe how ants use their antennae to relate to the world. They see these creatures as companions. We use this kind of teaching in association with undertaking moral precepts.*

This method of teaching can be seen as laying a foundation and is praiseworthy. The chief task at this stage is to foster lovingkindness and compassion, universal qualities ensuring harmonious coexistence. Moreover, this method promotes the cultivation of tenderness and sensitivity, helping people to abstain from killing throughout the duration of their lives. It is thus very useful at beginning stages of education.

Yet we must also prepare for more advanced levels of training. We should anticipate which challenges students may have to face in the future. Take the example mentioned earlier, whereby even adults sometimes have a sense of inner conflict, unsure of how to relate to moral precepts. If we learn to look at moral precepts with clarity, confidence, and sincerity, then we can avoid such problems.

It is certainly valuable to teach children how to cultivate lovingkindness and compassion using the reasoning that in a sense we are no different from other living creatures. Just as we cherish life, cherish happiness, and shrink away from pain, the same is true for other creatures. Applying such reasoned analysis is a way to observe moral precepts with wisdom, which naturally gives rise to love and compassion.

It happens, however, that children may see their parents spray insecticide at home and ask themselves: 'Eh, why are they doing this?' We must be prepared with an answer. Are we ready to provide them with a clear explanation?

**Parent:** *Our children do see this at home, but we try to explain to them why we do it and tell them that in the future we will use herbal, non-lethal insect repellents. At the end of the day, I feel that it isn't so difficult to teach children the principle of not killing in a way that they can understand.*

That's alright. The key principle to be taught here is to abstain from killing. What we must consider, however, is how to teach this principle in a way consistent with children's development, preparing them for adulthood and life in the wider society.

Children must also be able to distinguish between different kinds of killing and recognize how lethal actions have varying degrees of ill-effects. Equipped with this understanding, they will have greater clarity and self-confidence and be spared from confusion and conflicting ideas. And they won't swing to an opposite extreme of indiscriminate killing, believing that all kinds of killing are identical.

Parents can discuss these matters in a reasoned way with their children. For instance, they may say: 'I know that these creatures cherish their lives and I try to abstain from killing them. But they are dangerous and capable of inflicting serious harm. I love you as my child and I must therefore make a choice: choosing between a greater and lesser good, between more and less adverse consequences.' As the children grow older, the explanations can become gradually more refined.

**Parent:** *Hearing this is a relief. We can explain to our children that, depending on the circumstances, there are varying degrees of wrongdoing.*

Through skilful teaching, children will understand that their parents cultivate a heart of lovingkindness towards all beings and refrain from harming any creature that is not posing a threat. But occasionally an exception must be made if encountering a dangerous creature. Barring such encounters, their parents make every effort to avoid causing injury to anyone.

These matters revolve around the often confounding intricacies of moral restraint. Having gained clarity around these matters, students should then advance to the training in mind and wisdom. Besides being wholesome in themselves, these two latter stages of training also help in observing moral precepts with commitment and enthusiasm and in reinforcing moral conduct in general.

At the level of the mind, the emphasis is on cultivating lovingkindness and compassion. Rather than dwell on moral prohibitions, we should teach children the inherent beauty and virtue of all living creatures who are companions in the interconnected web of life and encourage them to care for these creatures.

At the level of wisdom, we should promote an interest in studying various living beings: their appearance, behaviour, and so on. An example of this investigation was mentioned earlier of students observing how ants use their antennae to relate to the world. The knowledge they gain can then enhance their feelings of kindness.

When the mind is imbued with kindness and wisdom is firmly established, moral conduct (*sīla*) operates merely in a supporting role whereby one is vigilant and desists from any unwholesome actions.

**Parent:** *Although I feel uplifted and inspired by what you have said concerning moral conduct, I'm also a bit confused. Every parent wants to provide what is best for their children. What I think is really difficult, however, is to enable children to derive anything positive from adverse situations. Secondly, I think it's very difficult in today's*

*society to teach children how to keep the five precepts impeccably. Earlier you were talking about right livelihood. Even for me, I find it extremely challenging to make a living while faultlessly keeping the five precepts. I once received teachings from a monk whom I highly respect. He told me that sometimes it won't be possible for me to keep all of the five precepts perfectly. On some occasions I may have to do my best and keep as many as I can. In such cases, he advised me to simply be aware of the necessity for breaking some of the rules in order to make a living. I wonder what you think of this advice.*

If one hasn't yet come up with a better solution, then that approach is acceptable; it is better than abandoning moral conduct all together. But when we deepen our understanding, we will refine the observance of moral precepts. And one way to promote such understanding is to examine the genuine purpose of moral conduct.

The Buddha made it clear that a pivotal factor in the context of moral conduct is the causing of harm. In respect to the fourth precept on false speech, for instance, a chief criterion for determining an act of lying is whether one harms other people. Harming lies at the heart of false speech. The corresponding account in the suttas is as follows:

*'Monks, what do you think? Have you ever seen or heard of the following: "This man has abandoned false speech, he is one who abstains from false speech; and for this reason kings seize him and execute him, imprison him, banish him, or impose a punishment on him?"'*

*'Never, venerable sir.'*

*'Good, monks. I too have never seen or heard of such a thing. But rather it is when they inform kings of his evil deed, saying: "This person has violated a householder or householder's son with false speech," that kings have him arrested on the charge of false speech and then execute him, imprison him, banish him, or impose a punishment on him. Have you ever seen or heard of such a case?'*

*‘We have seen this, venerable sir, and we have heard of it, and we will hear of it in time to come.’<sup>1</sup>*

We can apply this principle to examine everyday circumstances. A doctor, for example, may speak in a way that appears to deceive a patient. Is this an immoral act? If we look at the doctor’s intention, we will see that the spirit of moral conduct has not been overstepped as there was no intent to harm. On the contrary, the doctor may have spoken in order to prevent the patient from losing hope which would otherwise result in a deterioration of their condition.

In another scenario, we may meet someone who is lost and asks for directions. Although we know the right way, we mislead them with the wish to cause them harm. This is a clear example of immoral conduct.

In the earlier example of a doctor or caregiver not knowing how to avoid the subject and thus deceiving a despondent patient—someone who is not ready to accept the reality of their illness—we can call such an action ‘lying’. But as they are well-intentioned—they do not speak with the wish to cause harm—their actions don’t constitute a serious transgression.<sup>2</sup>

## Careful Analysis of Benefits

From a positive perspective, misleading a patient normally springs from kindness and compassion. From a negative perspective, the action is still slightly blameworthy; it is not completely pure because there remains an intent to stray from truth. In the context of training and development, we must thus endeavour to pass beyond all forms of false speech.

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<sup>1</sup> A. III. 210. This is the same sutta referred to earlier on the subject of killing.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: see the earlier footnote on intention and motive in the section titled ‘The Overlooked Importance of Sila’. The analysis here includes motive as a relevant factor.

This matter is complex. Although we may speak a falsehood out of good intention, on another level, shielding the truth from someone else may end up harming them. In any case, we can acknowledge that some people are not ready to accept the truth; it would be ill-timed and unprofitable for them to find out what is really happening. In the case of the sick, their condition may grow worse and their death may even be accelerated.

We must therefore act with care and discernment. It is not enough to momentarily quieten the patient's fears. We must also take the future into account and consider any greater long-term benefits.

The word 'care'<sup>1</sup> here refers to non-neglect and to recognizing and respecting people's diverse needs. Some sick people are ready to accept the truth of their situation and make necessary adjustments in their lives. Facing the truth at such a critical time may be to their ultimate advantage; they may receive the supreme benefit of life, which in Pali is called *paramattha*.<sup>2</sup> Receiving such benefit depends in large part on whether they have the support of skilled and competent friends.

It may be considered acceptable if a doctor or healthcare worker deceives a patient out of good intention. Shielding patients with terminal illnesses from the truth may help them to some extent. Yet it is often preferable to seek out a capable person who can help them face the truth of their situation. For if their death is imminent, one can say that the period they have remaining is the most valuable time of their entire lives.

Due to such consideration, the scriptures contain no categorical exceptions to the five precepts. Otherwise, people would probably use them as excuses to be heedless. In terms of the previous example,

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: *appamāda*; usually translated as 'heedfulness'.

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: although the term *paramattha* has varying nuances of meaning, it is always connected in some way to Nibbāna or it points directly to Nibbāna (it is a synonym of Nibbāna).

people would likely justify their deceit by claiming to be helping the patient. They would then brush the matter under the carpet. Instead, we are encouraged to develop a higher degree of integrity whereby both we and the patients discover the truth with clarity and a sense of ease.

In any case, as mentioned earlier, speaking misleadingly yet with no intention to harm is not 'lying' in the complete sense of the word. The element of intention to harm is required to fully constitute a moral transgression in this context. I trust these words are relevant to your comments on right livelihood.

**Parent:** *Yes they are, but I still wonder how to explain these concepts to children.*

This is a question directly related to child education. We must examine children's individual level of maturity and decide which topics they are ready to assimilate. In general, however, we can state that all people are trainable and capable of learning. It should thus be possible for us to teach these concepts to children.

As teachers and parents we should encourage children to look at intention and to recognize that it is not our aim to act out of malice and cruelty towards other creatures. Keeping moral precepts boils down to the principles of non-harming and non-violence, to goodwill, kindness, and compassion. These principles comprise the true spirit of moral conduct.



## Moral Deterrents Balanced with Compassionate Assistance

It is important to remember that apart from moral precepts involving restraint and abstention, the Buddhist teachings also contain affirmative moral principles. For instance, the four bases of social solidarity<sup>1</sup>—generosity, kindly speech, rendering service, and fair treatment of others—all pertain to the sphere of moral conduct.<sup>2</sup>

From keeping the five precepts and abstaining from harming others, we should advance to the four acts of assistance, thus building trust in society. Hence, the gist of *sīla*, of moral conduct, is twofold: non-harming and compassionate support.

For the most part, today's society promotes profiting from others rather than aiding them. Acknowledging the fact that we live under the sway and influence of a relatively competitive and exploitative social system, we should be vigilant. To the best of our abilities, we should minimize the harm we cause others and maximize the service and assistance we provide.

Due to various obligations, most people cannot simply step out of the system. So to start with we try to reduce our adverse effects and increase our positive ones. A wise understanding of our circumstances, however stressful, helps us to recognize opportunities for lending a helping hand and prevents indiscretion.

Although we may be aware that the general social trend is detrimental, we can swim against the current, abstaining from causing harm and drawing upon the positive principles of generosity, kindly speech, acts of service, and fair treatment to benefit others. These principles are essential for harmonious social living beginning

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<sup>1</sup> *Saṅgaha-vatthu*; also known as the four acts of assistance.

<sup>2</sup> *Dāna*, *piyavācā*, *atthacariyā*, and *samānattatā*, respectively. [Trans: *samānattatā* is often translated as 'even and equal treatment of others'.]

with one's immediate family. They empower us in the long run to create a society free from exploitation and conflict.

In sum, the heart of moral conduct thus rests with twofold intention: the aim to refrain from abuse and the wish to provide compassionate assistance. Does this explanation help to mitigate your concerns?

## **Building a Peaceful World By Way of True Education**

**Parent:** *I suppose it is up to the teachers and directors at the school to find a way of integrating this subject into the curriculum. As a parent I just worry that after graduation students will have to enter into a highly competitive environment and that they might face difficulties.*

We must remain resolute and undaunted and establish a long-term perspective. In order to find lasting solutions, we must first acknowledge that we live in a largely inhospitable and stressful society. In order to survive, it is sometimes difficult or impossible to avoid committing objectionable actions like taking advantage of or manipulating others.

Remember that this acknowledgement carries with it a responsibility. If we have a correct understanding, we will see that we must participate in remedying the unhealthy state of affairs in society. We are part of the solution.

With this understanding our attitude will change. We will strive to take part in reforming society, steering it in a positive direction. As the Buddha said: 'Happy is a world free from hostility.'<sup>1</sup> Although it may take time to achieve, creating such a peaceful world is the true goal of education.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: *Abyāpajjhaṃ sukhaṃ loke* (e.g.: Ud. 10).

The current generation of children in particular should receive an education preparing them to solve problems and to create a peaceful world. Aware that the world is in crisis, the wider scholastic community should make every effort to provide solutions. For if education cannot turn things around, what can?

Some people think that nothing can be done in the face of oppressive social conditions. But thinking in this way only makes one a victim whereby one either submits to these conditions or struggles to evade them. The upshot is that one's mental health can become compromised.

With a shift in attitude, however, we can see ourselves as agents of change and participants in problem-solving. We will increase our compassionate support and help to reduce social ills. If we can make this mental adjustment, we will have achieved another level of refinement and we can live in a flawed society in the best way possible.

Imagine someone working on an important business venture. At first they may be reluctant to get involved, yet because they wish to bring about positive change in society they carry on. At first it may appear as if they are capitulating to a harmful system, but their approval is secondary to their wholesome intent. They realize that without participation, no change is possible. In such scenarios we should apply the Buddha's exhortation: 'Relinquish a lesser good in consideration of a greater good.'<sup>1</sup>

We must train people to cope with all situations. As Buddhists in particular, we should teach people to benefit from even the most adverse circumstances, including living in oppressive or unfavourable societies. And simply coping is not enough; we need to give people the skills to actually bring about positive change.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: *cāje mattāsukhaṃ dhiro sampassaṃ vipulaṃ sukhaṃ*; Dh. verse 290. In this original passage, the word *sukha* is used ('Relinquish a lesser happiness in consideration of a greater happiness'). In the commentarial explanation of this verse, however, there is no specific reference to happiness; instead, it mentions any kind of 'good' or 'benefit' (SnA. I. 278).

When thrust into the fray of such adverse conditions, we may at first feel reluctant and incompetent. But if we are established in wholesome intention and have a long-term vision, then we will persevere in reforming society.

As mentioned earlier, an inaugural step to finding lasting solutions is to acknowledge that the world today is besieged by crises from all directions. Some people even think that we are on the verge of an apocalypse. One of the primary reasons for why the world finds itself in such dire straits is due to people who are very clever but who lack virtue.

In order to solve the world's problems we require people who are both clever and virtuous. Indeed, these people must be cleverer than those who are unscrupulous. Developing such gifted and morally upright people is one of the crucial tasks of education, and it takes daring and resolve. Succeeding at this task, we will foster a genuinely civilized world and enable human beings to achieve a noble life, a healthy society, and a delightful natural environment.

**School director:** *These are very helpful insights. As parents, teachers, and school directors, we are all concerned about how students will be able to cope with living in a competitive society. Your teachings paint a clear picture of what role a Buddhist education can play in preparing children for the world stage.*

## **Finding a Way Through Predicaments**

I am frequently asked similar questions. Here at the monastery, for example, the temporary ordainees come from a variety of occupations. Some of them are aware that their work has a dubious side and that it can be detrimental to the overall wellbeing of society, and they often ask me for advice.

My reply is that we must live with circumspection, and that we should establish a wholesome long-term vision. Although in the meantime we may have to participate in a corrupt system, we make every effort to offset any negativity by promoting what is supportive and beneficial. Acting in this way also helps our companions and co-workers. Otherwise, our work will only wreak more havoc on society.

Solving social problems in an enduring way requires wisdom. And it is precisely this circumspect participation and engagement with society that acts as the sharpening stone for cultivating wisdom.

Social engagement necessitates a close examination of existing social structures and enterprises. For if we fail to understand the mechanisms by which society functions, we won't be able to solve its problems and our efforts will be off target.

From this perspective, we can actually derive value from living under difficult circumstances. By examining the faults or disadvantages of our society we can grow in wisdom.

If one is unable to make this shift in attitude, one will become sullen and resentful, bemoaning the fact that one feels obliged to do things against one's will. The result is a state of helplessness, discouragement, and regret.

We should make haste in studying any problems we encounter and trace them back to their source. When we find ourselves in the midst of such problems what better time is there to examine them closely? With a shift of perspective we can benefit from them and we will realize how, based on good intention and wise understanding, we are an integral part of their solution.

If we are endowed with wise reflection (*yoniso-manasikāra*), we can benefit from the most difficult and adverse circumstances. The scriptures tell of monks who on the brink of death and racked

with severe pain were still able to attain complete enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> These stories show what is possible for human beings.

Returning to the subject of killing, we can begin by introducing young children to this theme in a general, all-inclusive sense, encouraging them at first to refrain from killing all creatures without distinction. This approach fosters a mind of kindness and compassion, and promotes a recognition of how all beings cherish life and shrink away from pain. Such understanding and compassion is the basis for peaceful coexistence.

From this initial stage, we can then prepare children for life in the world at large, providing them with skills to attend to both personal challenges and social dilemmas. Here it is up to the school to gauge the readiness and maturity of individual students.

At this point the students learn how to use their discriminative faculties and to act with self-assurance. Emotionally they will be unburdened by self-doubt, and intellectually they will clearly discern the complex issues around killing. They will grow in virtue and integrity, and their behaviour will be increasingly impeccable.

**3. Chanting:**<sup>2</sup> Although we can use the heading ‘chanting’ here, I suggest we broaden this mode of training to include the concept of *adhiṭṭhāna*, which in the suttas—in the way the Buddha used the term—refers to aspiration, determination, and resolve: to establishing a wholesome goal and striving to achieve it in an unwavering way. This differs from the meaning the term has taken on in the Thai language which is closer to a petition or plea.<sup>3</sup> So here, instead of aiming to acquire something, one vows to act.

In Buddhism, *adhiṭṭhāna* is one of the ten ‘spiritual perfections’ (*pāramī*). The Buddha used the virtue of determination to bring all

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<sup>1</sup> The fruit of arahantship.

<sup>2</sup> Factors 1 & 2 were covered in the previous section titled ‘Reliable Principles – Upright Practice’.

<sup>3</sup> อธิษฐาน. [Trans.: this adopted meaning of *adhiṭṭhāna* has come about in part due to the nuanced meaning of the term *sacca-adhiṭṭhāna* (or *saccakiriya*) which can be translated as ‘asseveration of truth’.]

the other perfections to completion culminating in the knowledge of awakening.<sup>1</sup> Exercising such sincere commitment generates mental fortitude and strengthens concentration.

**4. Visiting monasteries:** This is a suggestion for you to think about.

**5. Performing good deeds and dedicating merit:** Similarly, I suggest you consider how feasible it would be to integrate this practice into your curriculum.

**6. Refraining from entertainment:** One possibility here would be to limit the amount of time per day that children are allowed to watch shows on television or via other forms of media. This could become a daily routine or regular observance.<sup>2</sup>

This kind of practice would accord with undertaking the Uposatha precepts.<sup>3</sup> The spirit of such practice is that we uphold the five precepts for six days a week, followed by elevating our training by keeping the eight precepts for one day.

As mentioned earlier, the five precepts focus on not harming others. The eight precepts, on the other hand, focus on self-development, that is, on simplifying our lives, strengthening our characters, and purifying our minds. The result is that we are more easily contented and less dependent on material objects. In this case, the time saved by abstaining from entertainment can be used for doing good deeds and furthering spiritual practice.

**7. Moderation:** In order to promote this important principle, one could adopt the practice used by the monks, who are urged to reflect on the genuine purpose of food before they eat. Here at the monastery we eat together, and before the meal we chant the

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<sup>1</sup> *Bodhiñāṇa*.

<sup>2</sup> *Vatta*.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: the eight Observance day precepts traditionally undertaken on the full, new, and half moon days. The 7<sup>th</sup> precept includes the words: 'I undertake the rule of training to refrain from ... going to see shows....'

verses beginning with: *Paṭisaṅkhā yoniso piṇḍapātaṃ paṭisevāmi...* This chant outlines both valid and invalid reasons for eating. The translation ('Wisely reflecting I use almsfood...') is useful for those who don't know the meaning of the Pali.<sup>1</sup>

Christians have a similar practice whereby they say grace and offer thanks to their God before partaking of a meal. As Buddhists we apply the aforementioned chant as a reflection and a reminder to eat wisely, recognizing that delicious flavours are a relatively minor part of eating. The true advantages derived from food are that it nourishes the body, helps to repair damaged organs, wards off illness, and so on. In sum, eating should be helpful rather than harmful.

As mentioned earlier, practising moderation is linked to a distinct classification of *sīla*, namely 'pure conduct as regards the use of the four requisites'.<sup>2</sup> I believe there should be a way of incorporating this vital principle into the school curriculum. If you think it is appropriate, the students could chant these Pali verses in unison before lunch.

It is up to the directors and teachers at the school to decide which of these practices to adopt and how to formulate them in way most effective for application. I will leave this matter for your consideration. When convenient, we can meet again and come up with a final agreement. But before we move on, I would like to review and expand on some of these principles.

In respect to the third practice, we can recognize that, in a sense, chanting is complete within itself. It can be done individually or as a group activity. Perhaps we should give this wholesome tradition a special importance and distinguish it as its own heading.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the English translation as found in the Amaravati Monastery chanting book: 'Wisely reflecting I use almsfood, not for fun, not for pleasure, not for fattening, not for beautification, only for the maintenance and nourishment of this body, for keeping it healthy, for helping with the Holy Life, thinking thus: "I will allay hunger without overeating, so that I may continue to live blamelessly and at ease".'

<sup>2</sup> *Paccayaṇṇapaṭisevanā-sīla*.



Similarly, making the mind peaceful and aspiring to that which is wholesome are matters pertaining to concentration. Developing concentration can be done while chanting or on any other occasion when time permits, and it should be developed regularly and consistently.<sup>1</sup> Meditation is thus also worthy of its own heading.

We can therefore divide the third practice into two subclauses:

- Chanting some of the Buddha's verses each day.<sup>2</sup>
- Meditating for 5-10 minutes per day.

The practices mentioned so far can be considered routine. There are, however, specialized modes of training<sup>3</sup> that can help to refine our lives.

The first practice of putting money aside for charity includes offering almsfood to monks, which many Buddhists perform on a daily basis. Although for many people it is inconvenient to offer alms every day, it seems realistic to do so once a week, especially on the Uposatha, the Observance days.

Since the earliest times, Buddhists have honoured the Uposatha, using these days as a valuable opportunity for training. Keeping the eight Uposatha precepts has been an important tradition and is considered a virtuous and blameless activity.<sup>4</sup>

Nowadays people tend to have a break from work on weekends. One possibility is that we use one of these days on the weekend in the same spirit as the Uposatha, performing such good deeds as caring for the elderly, planting gardens and groves, building ponds, and so on. These could be communal activities that include children.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: in Buddhist circles, the English word 'meditation' is generally used to refer to the development of concentration.

<sup>2</sup> Again, one should understand the meaning of the words being chanted. Many people prefer to chant before going to sleep at night.

<sup>3</sup> Such specialized customs and practices are referred to as *cariya-vatta* or *kicca-vatta*.

<sup>4</sup> *Anavajja-kamma*.

We can thus add another practice to the list:

- Once a week, participating in an Observance day activity, for instance offering almsfood, spreading lovingkindness, listening to a Dhamma talk, reading a Dhamma book, and so forth, for upwards of 15 minutes.

Apart from traditional customs, there are also matters of decorum and etiquette. Thai people are universally admired for their grace and refinement, traits that have been cultivated and handed down in Thai culture so as to become almost second nature. As it happens, these traits accord with the request by some of you to include the principle of taking personal responsibility.

Correspondingly, we can add two more practices:

- Paying respects to the Triple Gem, and honouring parents, teachers, and other persons worthy of veneration.
- Attending to personal responsibilities, caring for personal belongings, and developing self-reliance.

Here we come full circle to the key teaching on the Triple Gem, a teaching guiding us to fulfilment and prosperity.

For the majority of people who have not yet realized the essence and core of the Buddhist teachings, that is, a realization occurring at the mind, traditional objects of devotion and worship, in particular Buddha images, have been created to remind people of the virtues of the Triple Gem and to foster an aspiration for purity. We should recognize the value of such devotion for children, and we can thus add one final practice:

- Providing objects of worship and devotion to remind students of the blessings of the Triple Gem.

Weaving in these additional modes of practice, we come up with a total of twelve practices which can be arranged in the following order:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: I have abbreviated these practices here for ease of memory.

1. Spending money for charitable purposes (at least once a week).
2. Undertaking the five precepts and abstaining from immoral conduct.
3. Chanting (at least once a day).
4. Meditating for 5-10 minutes per day.
5. Paying respects to the Triple Gem and to persons worthy of veneration.
6. Performing good deeds and dedicating merit to parents, teachers, and other benefactors (at least once a week).
7. Visiting monasteries.
8. Participating in an Observance day activity (e.g. offering almsfood, listening to a Dhamma talk, etc.) once a week.
9. Developing moderation and wise consumption.
10. Developing personal responsibility.
11. Setting a time limit for the amount of entertainment a child watches per day, and setting aside one day (at least once a month) to abstain from all such forms of entertainment.
12. Providing objects of worship and devotion to remind students of the blessings of the Triple Gem.

These principles and practices complete a proposed guideline for Buddhist education. Having twelve practices still appears like a fairly large number. For simplicity's sake, we may later choose to rearrange them or to make them more concise so as to help with recalling, understanding and applying them.



Part II

# **Application**



# Fulfilling Objectives

## Stable Foundation – Clear Principles

To succeed at our work in education, we require a stable foundation and clearly defined principles, both theoretical and practical. The true and reliable foundation exists in our own minds, namely the foundation of wisdom, which is critical for bolstering and sustaining our work.

We must continually develop wisdom. Moreover, for our work to be sustainable, we need to instil knowledge in those people who wish to coordinate with our efforts or carry on the work into the future. The term ‘wisdom’ here refers to a comprehensive understanding of natural truth—the Dhamma—including an understanding of the Buddha’s teachings which point to this truth.

Siam Saamtri School’s stability, established in the minds of its founders, must therefore be linked with an understanding of the laws of nature or the key principles of Dhamma, namely the Triple Triads, represented by the term ‘Saamtri’.

The added term ‘Siam’ can refer either to the Thai nation or to an essential principle directly related to the Triple Triads. To recap, the term ‘Siam’ is derived from the Pali word *sayāma*, comprised of *sa* (‘endowed with’) and *yāma* (‘self-restraint’, ‘self-control’, ‘self-discipline’).

Here, *sayāma* refers to possessing self-discipline in the context of training. We see how vital this attribute is for athletes and artisans, indeed for anyone wishing to acquire a physical skill. In order to gain mastery, they must first develop self-control, beginning with bodily poise: exercising their arms and legs, hands

and feet, eyes and ears, and so on. In short, they learn to control and hone their sense faculties.<sup>1</sup>

Having trained well, they can then use their sense faculties with proficiency. They gain expertise. Lacking self-discipline, however, they will never reach success. We can thus pinpoint this quality of *sayāma*—self-control, self-discipline, self-possession—as the heart of all human accomplishment. In other words, self-discipline enables people to make comprehensive strides in their education, which in its fullest sense refers to the Threefold Training.

The term ‘Saamtri’ incorporates all of the Buddha’s teachings. Indeed, the Triple Gem alone is all-inclusive and fully-representative of Buddhism, although its comprehensiveness should be seen as a set of interlinked principles, namely:

- The **Buddha** realized the knowledge of full awakening;<sup>2</sup> he realized the truth (**Dhamma**) of the Three Characteristics, thus attaining utter purity of heart.
- The Buddha’s realization of the Three Characteristics came about by undertaking the Threefold Training, that is, he practised the **Dhamma**, arranged into a framework of virtuous conduct (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).<sup>3</sup>
- Those people who in the footsteps of the Buddha practise and realize the Dhamma—attaining the ultimate goal and securing the highest happiness—are collectively referred to as the **Sangha**.

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<sup>1</sup> *Indriya*.

<sup>2</sup> *Bodhiñāna*.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: the author here is describing two aspects of the term ‘Dhamma’ in the first passage ‘Dhamma’ refers to ‘truth’, ‘reality’; in the second passage it refers to ‘system’, ‘procedure’, ‘code’, ‘method’, ‘framework’; in the third passage both meanings of the term are implied.



The concept of the Triple Triads ('Saamtri') is derived by distilling the interlinked principles inherent in the Triple Gem.

The first two principles or teachings—the Triple Gem and the Three Characteristics—act as a foundation. They are matters pertaining to clear understanding. The Threefold Training, on the other hand, pertains to practical application: to education in its fullest sense leading to true peace and fulfilment.

## Leading the Way

Every living creature must engage in some form of learning. This is particularly true for human beings, who are capable of achieving excellence and distinction by way of training and education. And as mentioned earlier, advancing in education requires self-control and self-discipline.

In any case, people beginning their education—and even intermediate students who are lax or remiss—require sustained guidance and support from a teacher. Parents, for instance, are called 'first teachers'<sup>1</sup> because they encourage their children to develop self-discipline and to progress on the path of study and practice.

The actual effort and work involved in training is the responsibility of each individual person. The teacher is simply seen as a guide,<sup>2</sup> someone who leads the way and offers compassionate assistance. Besides the terms 'teacher' and 'guide', we can also refer to such a person as a coach, trainer, instructor, tutor, counsellor, mentor, and so forth. Additional Pali terms for 'teacher' include: *netā*, *dametā*, *vattā*, and *sikkhāpaka*.<sup>3</sup> Whatever terms we use to describe such a person, they all converge at the Buddha's

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<sup>1</sup> *Pubbācariya*.

<sup>2</sup> *Magguddesaka*.

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: *netā* ('leader', 'guide'), *dametā* ('tamer', 'trainer'), *vattā* ('expounder', 'teacher'), *sikkhāpaka* ('trainer', 'teacher').

description of himself, that is: '[I am] a virtuous friend'.<sup>1</sup> Children would likely describe such a person simply as a 'good friend'.

If a school or monastery is to be truly harmonious, it must be a community based on friendship. In the same vein, monks, parents, teachers, and so on, should strive to be virtuous friends, accomplishing this by being endowed with the seven qualities of a good friend.<sup>2</sup> They should be:

**1. Endearing** (*piyo*): they should be kind and benevolent; they should take an interest in people's lives and problems; they should encourage others to listen and be open to advice.

**2. Worthy of respect** (*garu*): they should be principled and composed; they should act in a way fitting to their position as a teacher; they should be a refuge and sanctuary for others.

**3. Inspiring** (*bhāvanīyo*): they should possess exemplary virtue and wisdom, instilling in their pupils a sense of pride and trust.

**4. Skilled at speaking** (*vattā*): they should be able to provide clear and coherent instruction; they should inspire courage and gladness; they should be reliable advisors.

**5. Tolerant of speech** (*vacanakkhama*): they should be receptive to listening to others without aversion; they should be able to endure insults and criticisms without losing their temper.

**6. Able to explain refined matters** (*gambhīrañca kathaṃ kattā*).

**7. Not spurring on to useless ends** (*no caṭṭhāne niyojaye*): they should not lead people into harmful or foolish ways.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kalyāṇamitta*; S. I. 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Kalyāṇamitta-dhamma*.

## The Straight Path

In the context of the Threefold Training, virtuous conduct (*sīla*) pertains to a fundamental stage of education, namely the interaction with other people and our external surroundings. By maintaining healthy relationships we learn to benefit from our environment and foster orderly, peaceful, and safe communities: at home, at school, and in the world at large. In short, we create delightful natural settings and happy societies.

It is self-evident that social harmony and stability manifests due to people upholding pure conduct, to performing kind and wholesome actions by way of body and speech, and to engaging skilfully with their senses. And this pure conduct stems from and follows the dictates of their intention (*cetanā*).

Pure conduct implies an underlying purity of mind, a mind imbued with virtue. Besides purity, the mind here is also endowed with happiness. These wholesome attributes of the mind help to generate wholesome intention, leading to pure conduct by way of body and speech. Moreover, if mental purity is ingrained and secure, pure conduct will be correspondingly enduring and reliable.

This direct link between the mind and behaviour is one reason why these days in educational circles much emphasis is given to increasing and consolidating virtuous qualities in students.

There was a time when educators highlighted cleverness and intellectual prowess in students. Later, this approach was criticized, as it was recognized that savvy people often cause hardship and turmoil for society; they themselves profit but frequently at the expense of others. Students must also develop moral integrity. The focus was then on goodness. Eventually, goodness too was seen as inadequate; students also need to be happy. For if students are not endowed with happiness, their moral integrity will be shaky.

In the end, there has been a recognition that all three factors are required: cleverness, goodness, and happiness, which are inherent in the Threefold Training. Here, we venture beyond moral conduct to concentration (*samādhi*) which can be seen as a standard-bearer: a focal point and principal agent in the domain of the mind.

A concentrated mind is the foundation and gathering point for all wholesome qualities, including goodness, poise, stability, peace, happiness, and so on. And it is the crucible in which these attributes are refined.

Having said this, the way in which wholesome intention operates is ultimately a result of wisdom (*paññā*), which illumines, guides, manages, evaluates, decides, solves problems, adjusts tactics, and so forth, for attaining one's desired goals and eventually for realizing liberation.

The three essential factors of *sīla*, *samādhi* & *paññā* function in unison within a balanced and harmonious system of education. The Threefold Training lies at the heart of practical application. It is a straight and direct path leading to a virtuous life surrounded by a peaceful society and a refreshing natural environment. In brief, it leads to a 'noble life, a healthy society, and a delightful natural environment'.

## **Embarking on the Path**

As mentioned earlier, it is each person's individual responsibility to put forth the effort to live well and to grow in understanding. One problem we face, however, is that many people fail to make this effort. Even worse, many people have no appreciation for the valuable opportunity to learn, and they thus don't even begin to improve themselves. They are ignorant of the path of practice; they don't know where to begin and they never set out on the journey.

The task of a ‘good friend’, of a teacher, therefore goes beyond supporting and supervising students’ education. The work begins with showing them the way, with acting as a guide.

This leads us to the two catalysts for setting out on the path of training, namely:<sup>1</sup>

1. **Virtuous friendship** (*kalyāṇamittatā*): favourable external conditions; wholesome teachings and guidance from others.<sup>2</sup>
2. **Wise reflection** (*yoniso-manasikāra*): favourable internal conditions; skilful reflection; systematic reflection.

People naturally equipped with wise reflection are able to perceive things from different angles: their pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages, and so on. Moreover, they can compare this information with data accumulated from previous experience. They gain new insights into skilful ways of behaving and into aspects of truth even from relatively minor events. In short, they can think for themselves.

These naturally reflective people set forth on the path of discovery and realization independently from others. Yet they are rare and exceptional.

The majority of people lack such independent thinking. Instead of being direct agents, acting upon the world around them, they are ‘acted upon’. Rather than thoroughly investigating and analyzing what they experience, they form ideas and perceptions in conformity with others. They rely on teachings, claims, suggestions, traditional accounts, and so forth, imparted by others, both currently alive and from the past. They are also influenced by other sources of information, for example data transmitted via today’s mass media.

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<sup>1</sup> The original term for this pair is ‘conditions for the arising of right view’ (*sammādiṭṭhi-paccaya*); M. I. 294. They can also be called the ‘forerunners of the path’.

<sup>2</sup> *Paratoghosa*. [Trans.: literally ‘proclamation of others’; this term refers to any external influence or inducement, e.g. teachings, advice, information, news, etc. In this context it refers specifically to wholesome teachings.]

If these people receive good advice and guidance, they are likely to set off in a good direction. But if they receive false information, bad advice, or immoral counsel, they are likely to get caught up in delusion, deviate from a healthy path, and go astray.

In most cases, teachers cannot expect students to be fully endowed with wise reflection. Instead, they should offer kind counsel, showing students the way forward and encouraging them to cultivate this inner resource of wise reflection.

Although teachers provide guidance and support, at the end of the day the effort to learn and make strides in education rests with the students themselves. For education to be truly effective, students must therefore be equipped with the inherent qualities for sustaining and reinforcing the learning process. Helping equip the students with these qualities from the outset is a crucial task of a teacher.

The inherent qualities referred to here include the two forerunners of the path mentioned earlier plus five additional factors. Together, these seven factors are called the ‘dawning of a good life’, ‘harbingers of a life of learning’, or ‘seven qualities of a pupil’.<sup>1</sup> They guarantee that training and education will bear fruit and make steady progress, similar to how the first blush of dawn heralds the rising of the sun.

The seven qualities are:

1. **Good friendship** (*kalyāṇamittatā*): association with wise people; seeking knowledge and wholesome role models.
2. **Accomplishment in morality** (*sīla-sampadā*): being endowed with moral conduct and discipline.
3. **Accomplishment in wholesome desire** (*chanda-sampadā*): being endowed with aspiration for knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> *Magguṃpāda-pubbanimmita*: also known as the ‘precursors of the Noble Eightfold Path’.

4. **Self-actualization** (*atta-sampadā*): training oneself to one's full potential.
5. **Accomplishment in view** (*ditṭhi-sampadā*): believing in the law of causality; seeing things based on reason.
6. **Accomplishment in diligence** (*appamāda-sampadā*): establishing oneself in heedfulness.
7. **Accomplishment in wise reflection** (*yonisomanasikāra-sampadā*): applying skilful consideration to increase wellbeing and to realize truth.

## Progressing on the Path

Another important teaching linked to the Threefold Training is the teaching on the 'fourfold development' (*bhāvanā*). Practising the Threefold Training naturally results in engaging in the four kinds of development, namely:

1. **Physical development** (*kāya-bhāvanā*): developing a healthy relationship to one's physical environment.
2. **Moral development** (*sīla-bhāvanā*): developing social relationships.
3. **Mind development** (*citta-bhāvanā*).<sup>1</sup>
4. **Wisdom development** (*paññā-bhāvanā*).

These four kinds of development help us to measure people's advances in education. If we wish to determine what strides someone has made we should look at these four factors.

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<sup>1</sup> This term encompasses 'emotional development' and 'emotional maturity'.

In Pali, if one wishes to refer to a person who has completed these four kinds of development, the grammatical case is changed to *bhāvita*.<sup>1</sup> In like manner, there are four kinds of *bhāvita*:

**1. Developed in body (*bhāvita-kāya*):** establishing a healthy relationship to the physical world, especially to one's natural environment; relating to things mindfully without ill-effects and without being overwhelmed; relating to things in a way that is beneficial and increases wholesome states. In particular, one develops mastery in:

**A. Mindful sense engagement:** one is skilled at seeing, hearing, and so on; by way of sense contact one acquires useful information, deepens understanding, gains new perspectives, witnesses wholesome precedents for behaviour, grows in goodness, and so forth. Moreover, one is more prone to joy and delight.

**B. Wise consumption:** one uses material objects, including the four requisites and various forms of technology, with discernment and in moderation, in conformity with their true purpose and without indulgence or heedlessness.<sup>2</sup>

**2. Developed in virtuous conduct (*bhāvita-sīla*):** establishing a healthy, harmonious, and disciplined relationship to one's social environment; maintaining moral conduct in one's interactions with other people; making an honest livelihood. One refrains from using one's body, speech, and livelihood in ways that are harmful or abusive to others. Instead, interpersonal relationships enhance one's own life and benefit others, improving society and promoting peace. They do not give rise to mental agitation and turmoil, but rather lead to the increase of wholesome states.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: *bhāvita* is the past participle of the verb *bhāveti*. This term can also be used as noun referring to a fully developed person, i.e. an arahant.

<sup>2</sup> Remember the chant beginning *Paṭisaṅkhā yoniso*: 'Wisely reflecting....'



**3. Developed in mind (*bhāvita-citta*):** cultivating the mind so that it is endowed with the following qualities:<sup>1</sup>

- **Virtue:** one grows in kindness, compassion, generosity, empathetic joy, faith, deference, honesty, gratitude, and so on.
- **Strength and proficiency:** one grows in fortitude, perseverance, courage, patience, sensitivity, accountability, mindfulness, concentration, and so on.
- **Happiness:** one grows in joy, delight, contentment, clarity, ease, serenity, and so on.

**4. Developed in wisdom (*bhāvita-paññā*):** cultivating wisdom both in regard to seeking out knowledge from external sources and to exercising the inner resource of wise reflection; growing more skilled at reasoning, inquiry, investigation, problem-solving, and managing situations with clear insight which discerns causes and conditions and sees things as they really are, without bias or hidden motives. Having developed wisdom, one penetrates into the truth of the world and human existence. Mental defilements no longer hold any sway. One realizes complete freedom from suffering; perfect peace and happiness.

A person is defined as an arahant when he or she brings the fourfold development (*bhāvanā*) to completion and achieves fourfold self-mastery (*bhāvita*). The Buddha is the paragon of such individuals.

We should all strive to achieve such self-mastery. The more we develop, the greater the results we shall reap. These four factors of self-mastery are benchmarks for measuring a person's success in training and level of realization. They spring from a process summed up by the catchphrase: Threefold Training – Fourfold Development.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: these are the same qualities used to define *samādhi* in Chapter 4 in the section titled 'Sound Education Based on Natural Truths'.

## Arriving at the Goal

By practising the Threefold Training one lives a virtuous life characterized at a fundamental level by non-violence. When people refrain from harming themselves and others, peaceful coexistence is possible. Based on this solid foundation, people can then aspire to higher goals bringing about the welfare of everyone in society.

In Pali, the word for ‘personal welfare’ is *attattha* and the word for ‘others’ welfare’ is *parattha*. Although this dual welfare suffices for most practical purposes, a third kind is sometimes added, namely the ‘welfare of both parties’ (*ubhayattha*).<sup>1</sup>

The term *attha* can be translated as ‘welfare’, ‘benefit’ or ‘objective’.<sup>2</sup> In some contexts it refers to the essential characteristic of an activity or the purpose of life.

As mentioned earlier, if we wish to measure a person’s level of realization we can use the criteria of ‘development’ (*bhāvana/bhāvita*). Although such an assessment of an individual may be valuable, it is rather subtle and abstruse. It is comparatively easier to measure people’s development in the context of practical affairs, a process that is more clearly defined. This assessment can be made by observing how people achieve specific objectives or nurture specific forms of wellbeing, represented by the term *attha*. Here we can establish a framework for different kinds of benefit, beginning with ‘personal benefit’ which is the direct consequence of practising the Threefold Training.

The more we develop in moral conduct, concentration, and wisdom, the greater we reap personal benefits such as individual integrity, expertise, success, happiness, and so on. This development can be outlined as a threefold progression, namely:

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: this third factor pertains to the shared benefits of a community with a focus on communal harmony (*sāmaggī*).

<sup>2</sup> Trans.: other translations are: ‘good’, ‘advantage’, ‘wellbeing’, ‘essence’, ‘meaning’, ‘goal’, etc.

**1. Immediate benefit** (*ditṭhadhammikattha*): benefits apparent in the present existence; external benefits; worldly benefits. In simple terms this factor can be called ‘present benefit’ or ‘visible benefit’. It includes:

- Good health (resulting from eating in moderation, regular exercise, and so on).
- Money and employment (resulting from professional skill, astute budgeting, self-reliance, and so on).
- Honour: being embraced by and respected in society.
- Peaceful family life (resulting from being skilled at looking after one’s family and knowing how to make it endearing in the eyes of others).

Immediate benefits can thus be summed up as health, wealth, honour,<sup>1</sup> and a happy home.

**2. Future benefit** (*samparāyikattha*): benefits bearing fruit in the next life; inconspicuous benefits; spiritual benefits; spiritual assets. There are five virtues in particular that comprise this form of benefit:

1. **Faith** (*saddhā*): faith provides people with a goal, an anchor, a support.
2. **Moral conduct** (*sīla*): moral conduct brings about purity and self-esteem.
3. **Learning** (*suta*):<sup>2</sup> learning provides people with a wealth of understanding for conducting their lives.
4. **Relinquishment** (*cāga*): this virtue instils a sense of self-worth and contentment in having been generous, having expressed kindness, having performed good deeds, and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> In the scriptures, *yasa* (‘honour’) is separated into a threefold division: 1) *issariya-yasa* (‘prestige’, ‘fame’, ‘prominence’); 2) *kitti-yasa* (‘honour’, ‘respect’, ‘veneration’); and 3) *parivāra-yasa* (‘entourage’, ‘following’, ‘retinue’).

<sup>2</sup> Diligent study by listening, reading, etc.

5. **Wisdom** (*paññā*): wisdom brings about expertise and enables the attainment of liberation.

These five virtues should be constantly refined.

3. **Supreme benefit** (*paramattha*): this term refers to complete purity and liberation. The essential factor of supreme benefit is wisdom which penetrates ultimate truth and enables liberation. At this stage, the mind is no longer afflicted by clinging and grasping. Although one is subject to the vicissitudes of life—living in a world characterized by impermanence, unendurability, and insubstantiality<sup>1</sup>—the mind remains unshakeable. It abides in constant peace. One lives wisely, acting in harmony with causes and conditions.

The Threefold Training thus brings about a realization of three personal benefits: immediate, future, and supreme.

On most occasions, for ease of recall, the Buddha only mentioned the two former benefits whereby supreme benefit is included in future benefit. As mentioned earlier, the essential factor of supreme benefit is wisdom, enabling liberation. The fifth virtue comprising future benefits is wisdom, so when speaking in general terms, the second benefit can be seen to already encompass the third.

Hand in hand with generating personal wellbeing, we should also perform good deeds for others, helping them to grow and develop in these two (or three) benefits alongside ourselves.

From what has been said so far, we can outline the various benefits in two contrasting formats: vertical (or progressive) and horizontal (or in respect to persons involved):<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Anicca, dukkha, & anattā.*

<sup>2</sup> Both of these formats can be expanded to include three factors: 'supreme benefit' can be added to the first format, and 'welfare of both parties' can be added to the second.

**Progressive format:**

- Worldly benefit
- Spiritual benefit

**Personal format:**

- Benefit of self
- Benefit for others

If all of these benefits have been achieved, the Threefold Training comes to fruition and fulfils its objective, both for individuals and for society as a whole.

In terms of the individual, all aspects of one's life are enhanced: one becomes more successful in one's endeavours and more skilled at earning a living; one's relationship to other people and to the natural environment is harmonious and healthy; one increases in mental virtue, fortitude, dexterity, and happiness; and one grows in wisdom, gaining insight into truth. Finally, one realizes complete liberation at which point everything falls perfectly into place. In short, one prospers in the Dhamma.

## **Recognizing Diversity**

I would like to return to some themes related to human development and to corresponding social structures.

First, at any one moment of time, if we take a look at human society, we will see that people exist at different levels of maturity and that they have realized the aforementioned benefits—mundane, spiritual, and supreme—to significantly different degrees. The world contains fools, sages, and Buddhas.<sup>1</sup> Social measures need to take this diversity into account so that people can live peacefully at their own suitable level of development while at the same time have the opportunity to grow.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: here the term 'Buddha' can refer to any fully enlightened being.

In Buddhist cultures, this diversity is accounted for by a broad twofold division of society, namely:

**1. Lay community:**<sup>1</sup> the lay community comprises the majority of the population and in general it provides a platform for relatively basic and undemanding forms of training. The primary focus for laypeople—the chief criteria for their wellbeing—pertains to the material realm,<sup>2</sup> although most also give heed to the spiritual dimension.<sup>3</sup> Those who choose to elevate their practice, however, should be honoured and respected. The key individuals representing spiritual realization in this community are stream-enterers (*sotāpanna*).

**2. Renunciant community:**<sup>4</sup> the monastic community is enclosed within the wider society. It provides an arena for intensive practice and is meant for advanced training. Its goal and objective is securing the supreme benefit. Although the key individuals representing spiritual realization in this community are arahants, unawakened people are welcome to join if they aspire to this goal and determine to engage in the training. Indeed, such a decision should be honoured and respected.

We should understand the complexity of providing supportive conditions for growth in the context of human diversity. One of the characteristics of adepts—those who have finished their training—is that they clearly appreciate and discern such diversity. In terms of individuals, however, we can conclude by saying that everyone should bring their training to completion and realize the supreme benefit of awakening.

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<sup>1</sup> Community of householders; community of those who enjoy sense pleasures (*kāma-bhogin*).

<sup>2</sup> *Dīṭṭhadhamma*.

<sup>3</sup> *Samparāya*.

<sup>4</sup> Monastic community; bhikkhu community. [Trans.: the author uses the term *anāgārika* ('homeless one'; 'one who has gone forth from the household life').]

## Human Society

The disparity in people's level of development stems from many causes and conditions inherent in nature, not least of which are the actions performed by the individuals themselves. As we discussed earlier, in juxtaposition to this disparity, every person is equal in the face of natural laws. There is thus diversity within unity.

Although Buddhism acknowledges such diversity, for the good of individuals and society two universal guidelines are established:

- First, as fellow living beings inhabiting this planet and subject to the same laws of nature, as a minimum standard we should refrain from acting in any way that harms either ourselves or others.

- Second, considering the human potential of achieving excellence by way of training and education, we should make unremitting effort to fulfil this basic responsibility of improving ourselves.

Already by observing these two guidelines one is worthy of the term 'human being' as one possesses the true marks of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

In order to support the first guideline, the Buddha formulated a corresponding social code consisting of five basic moral precepts:

1. To refrain from depriving others of life.
2. To refrain from stealing.
3. To refrain from sexual misconduct.
4. To refrain from causing injury through speech.
5. To refrain from taking intoxicants leading to heedlessness, thus threatening others' sense of safety.

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<sup>1</sup> *Manussa-dhamma*.

If a society is adequately grounded in moral integrity, its informed leaders will set down suitable rules, laws, prescriptions, and so forth—sometimes in great detail—in order to regulate people’s behaviour. These include community statutes and national mandates all the way to universal declarations of human rights. In essence, however, all of these laws can be boiled down to the five principles expressed in the five precepts.

If people keep the five precepts, they contribute to the peace and harmony of society at large. At the very least, they help to minimize conflict and distress, and the population can be said to live in safety. Keeping the five precepts, however, does not guarantee that society will prosper, nor does it ensure that people will be happy.

In such circumstances, people maintain a minimum standard of moral behaviour and we can say that they are beginning to possess the true marks of humanity. Yet they still lack those qualities indicating that they are making strides in self-development and fulfilling their human potential. Here, we must advance from a minimum standard of behaviour to the second guideline of achieving excellence by way of training and education.

## **The Company of the Virtuous**

We should not rest content with merely controlling our moral behaviour. We must also evolve to greater levels of virtue and refinement, that is:

- We should progress from desisting from unwholesome behaviour to promoting wholesome behaviour.
- We should develop in mind and wisdom.

If we can make these advances, we will be fulfilling the two guidelines for humanity. At this stage, the template of the five



precepts is expanded into a list of ten factors encompassing the entire scope of training: moral conduct, mental development, and wisdom.<sup>1</sup> One passes beyond mere prevention and avoidance to comprehensive self-cultivation.

The ten factors can be divided into three categories:

### A. Body

1. Abstaining from killing; acting for the welfare of all living beings.
2. Abstaining from stealing.<sup>2</sup>
3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct.<sup>3</sup>

### B. Speech

4. Abstaining from false speech; being honest; speaking the truth.
5. Abstaining from divisive speech; speaking conciliatory words.
6. Abstaining from harsh speech; speaking courteous, agreeable, and inspiring words.
7. Abstaining from idle chatter; speaking accurate, reasonable, timely, and useful words.

### C. Mind<sup>4</sup>

8. Non-covetousness; openhandedness.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: *sīla, samādhi & paññā*.

<sup>2</sup> 'Abstaining from taking that which is not freely given.' [Trans.: this factor is paired with generosity.]

<sup>3</sup> Trans.: the scriptural definition of this precept: 'One does not violate women who are protected by their mother, father, brother, sister, or relatives, who are protected by the Dhamma (e.g. by legal guardianship), who have a husband, women who are off limits, even those who are engaged.' [Trans.: this factor is paired with 'contentment with one's wife' (*sadāra-santosa*).]

<sup>4</sup> This heading includes wisdom (*paññā*).

9. Non-ill-will; kindheartedness.

10. Right view; understanding the truths of nature.

Although the original scriptural term for these factors is the ten ‘forms of righteous conduct’ (*dhamma-cariyā*), they are now more commonly known as the ten ‘wholesome courses of action’ (*kusala-kammapatha*).<sup>1</sup> Endowed with these factors, one is deemed ‘human’ in the truest sense of the word whereby the two aforementioned guidelines for humanity are fulfilled.

Indeed, already by keeping the five precepts one is worthy of the term ‘human being’ (*manussa*). By developing and securing the ten forms of righteous conduct—the ten wholesome courses of action—one is elevated to being a virtuous and honourable human being.<sup>2</sup>

If we all observe these ten forms of righteous conduct, we can be confident to build a happy and prosperous world inhabited by a company of the virtuous, a virtuous population.

## A Righteous Assembly

When people progress from keeping the five precepts to observing the ten forms of righteous conduct, we can say that they are ‘developed’ or ‘cultivated’. This development or cultivation results from adopting a higher set of principles or mode of

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<sup>1</sup> The complete original term is *dhammacariyā-samacariyā*. For readers seeking a more comprehensive explanation of these factors, see: M. I. 285-89; M. III. 45-52. In the Cakkavatti Sutta the Buddha uses the ten wholesome courses of action as criteria for measuring the progress and decline of human society (D. III. 58-77). The commentaries define a ruler endowed with the ten wholesome courses of action as a ‘righteous monarch’ (*dhamma-rājā*; *dhammiko dhammarājā*). Moreover, in the commentaries they are sometimes referred to as ‘virtuous qualities’ (*kalyāṇa-dhamma*) or a part of ‘virtuous conduct’ (*kalyāṇa-paṭipadā*). [Trans.: the ten factors in Pali: 1) *pāṇātipātā veramaṇi*; 2) *adinnādānā veramaṇi*; 3) *kāmesumicchācārā veramaṇi*; 4) *musāvādā veramaṇi*; 5) *pisuṇāya vācāya veramaṇi*; 6) *pharusāya vācāya veramaṇi*; 7) *samphappalāpā veramaṇi*; 8) *anabhijjhā*; 9) *abyāpāda*; 10) *sammādiṭṭhi*.]

<sup>2</sup> *Kalyāṇa-puggala*; *dhammika-puggala*; *dhammacārī-puggala*.

practice. We can say that the very act of observing these principles and practices elevates these people to a new level. If the majority of people practise in this way, society as a whole will be healthy and happy.

It can happen, however, that people become complacent, satisfied with being 'righteous' but lacking resolve to develop further. It is important therefore to instil in people certain qualities whereby they are eager to improve themselves to ever more refined degrees.

Here we come to a vital point that dovetails with the Buddhist path, namely: one shouldn't simply adhere to virtuous principles and practices that have been prescribed by others. One must also learn to embody these principles and practices so that one continues to progress independently.

To sum up, we should cultivate inner qualities of self-reliance as well as uphold those practices established by learned people in society: we are then endowed with self-reliance and social accountability.

Soon after the arising of Buddhism, people endowed with such self-reliance and accountability steadily increased in numbers, automatically resulting in a group of people with shared attributes.<sup>1</sup>

Although it is possible to form an official association out of such people, if they are strong and stable enough collectively their influence will naturally branch out into the wider society. In other words, society as a whole will be transformed and moulded into the image of such a community of virtuous people. Creating a healthy society in this way is one genuine aim of education.

We should strive to create a society filled with virtuous individuals (who maintain the ten forms of righteous conduct). If

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<sup>1</sup> This subject was introduced in Part I, Chapter 5 under the section titled 'A Learned Society Is a Secure Society'. By being established in the five precepts one already qualifies as a member of such a 'righteous assembly'.

this is too much to ask, at the very least we should create a society of ‘human beings’ (who observe the five precepts). Those individuals who have developed themselves to heightened degrees, up to various stages of enlightenment, act as a pillar for a virtuous society. These virtuous people also act as an inspiration for others to continue on the path to knowledge and awakening.

Although the Buddha’s teachings on human training and development are comprehensive, when it came to society at large, which is comprised of people at all levels of maturity beginning with unheven individuals dependent on worldly pleasure, he left it up to righteous leaders<sup>1</sup> to manage affairs on the material level. They should do so in such a way that enables people to be firmly established in the ten forms of righteous conduct and to achieve immediate, visible benefits.<sup>2</sup>

A crucial factor for joining this so-called ‘community of virtuous people’ is a determination to enter into a life of training accompanied by a declaration to go to the Triple Gem for refuge. The Triple Gem acts as both a guiding star and a source of inspiration for cultivating inner qualities of self-reliance.

Those individuals who make such a declaration are called male and female lay-supporters (*upāsaka & upāsikā*).<sup>3</sup> Because they share the same attributes, they comprise a community of people endowed with self-reliance and accountability.<sup>4</sup>

In order to advance in training and spiritual development, laypeople must be endowed with five qualities known as the ‘factors for noble growth’ (*ariyā vaḍḍhi*), namely:<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Dhammarājā*.

<sup>2</sup> See the Cakkavatti Sutta (D. III. 58-79) and the teaching by King Bimbisāra on benefits manifesting in this lifetime (*ditṭhadhammikatha*) (Vin. I. 179).

<sup>3</sup> Literally: ‘one sitting close to the Triple Gem’.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Community of laypeople’: *upāsaka-upāsikā parisā*.

<sup>5</sup> Trans.: these five factors were mentioned in the previous section titled ‘Arriving at the Goal’.

1. **Faith** (*saddhā*): firm confidence in the blessings of the Triple Gem at the heart of which lies faith in the Buddha's awakening;<sup>1</sup> confidence that human nature can be cultivated to the extent of achieving supreme realization. This quality is the starting point of spiritual development.
2. **Virtuous conduct** (*sīla*): fundamental moral conduct beginning with keeping the five precepts and abstaining from causing others harm. From this stage one can then practise more refined levels of moral training, for instance by keeping the eight precepts.
3. **Learning** (*suta*): listening to and reading teachings and then reflecting on them in order to fully understand them; applying what one has learned correctly and effectively.
4. **Generosity** (*cāga*): relinquishment; charitableness; being attentive and sympathetic to the suffering of others; eagerness to lend a helping hand. This quality reduces selfishness, assists in the abandoning of mental defilements, and increases wholesome states.
5. **Wisdom** (*paññā*): insight into the arising and dissolution of conditioned phenomena. This quality vanquishes all defilements and brings about the cessation of suffering.

These five qualities for noble growth are abiding virtues of true lay disciples.<sup>2</sup> They galvanize people into action and enable the realization of profound spiritual benefits.<sup>3</sup> The community of laypeople endowed with these virtues can thus be called a 'community of noble growth'.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tathāgatābodhi-saddhā*; alternatively: 'faith in the peerless virtue of wisdom enabling people to realize Buddhahood.'

<sup>2</sup> The four constant factors are faith, virtuous conduct, generosity, and wisdom; learning is occasionally omitted from the list. For more on these five factors, including the subject of laypeople going to the Triple Gem for refuge, see: S. V. 395; A. III. 80; A. IV. 220-22.

<sup>3</sup> *Samparāyikattha*.

Apart from the obvious difference in numbers of people, there are other differences between a ‘society’ and a ‘community’. A society consists of diverse individuals each engaged in their own private activities and often seeking personal gain at the expense of others, thus leading to conflict. Even if there is a concerted effort to educate people to roughly the same degree of virtue, still each person is more concerned with their own affairs. It can’t be taken for granted that they take an interest in the wider public.

Communities are chiefly defined by unity rather than mere association. As well as sharing similar attributes and values, their members also participate in joint activities, events, and so on. Moreover, communities tend to emphasize mutual consideration, concern, and assistance.

The community of laypeople endowed with the five virtues follows this model. Its members cooperate in joint practices and activities and offer each other support for prosperity in noble growth—in spiritual cultivation. Such a community of noble growth is therefore also a community based on friendship, acting as a cornerstone for education in general and an inspiration for building a friendly and peaceful society.

## **Noble Growth: Worldly & Spiritual**

The factors for noble growth are essential for advanced development. The factors listed earlier emphasize spiritual benefits both in terms of the mind and wisdom. In respect to the wider society comprised of householders, however, we must also give importance to immediate worldly benefits, namely: health, wealth, honour, and a happy home.

For this reason the Buddha occasionally gave a teaching on ten factors of noble growth, divided into five worldly benefits and five spiritual benefits.

Before I present these ten factors, please note that worldly benefits—matters pertaining to material objects and social affairs—are dependent on time and place and change according to regional and temporal circumstances and conventions. This differs from spiritual benefits, which are constant and an inalienable part of what it means to be human. Recognize, therefore, that the worldly benefits I am about to mention from the scriptures apply to the Buddha’s time. It is appropriate that we adjust them to our own situation.

The ten factors are as follows:

*Monks, by growing in ten ways, a noble disciple develops in noble growth, and he gathers the essence and the best of this life. What ten? He grows in:*

*A. Worldly benefits:*

1. *Cropland*
2. *Wealth & grain*
3. *Wife & children*
4. *Servants & workers*
5. *Livestock*

*B. Spiritual benefits:*

6. *Faith*
7. *Virtuous conduct*
8. *Learning*
9. *Generosity*
10. *Wisdom.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. V. 137. In the *Dīghajāṇu Sutta*, the Buddha also describes worldly and spiritual benefits, but in terms of worldly benefits he emphasizes wealth, i.e. the four virtues conducive to benefits in the present (*diṭṭhadhammikathasaṁvattanika-dhamma*), which in Thai are known as the ‘core attributes of the wealthy’: accomplishment of industriousness (*uṭṭhāna-sampadā*), accomplishment of protection (*ārakkha-sampadā*), association with good people (*kalyāṇamittatā*), and living economically (*samajivitā*), and in terms of spiritual benefits he mentions only the four principal factors of faith, virtuous conduct, generosity, and wisdom (A. IV. 281-85).

Here is another teaching by the Buddha on immediate benefits, this time focusing on physical health:

*The Blessed One was dwelling at Sāvattihī. On that occasion King Pasenadi of Kosala had eaten a pot-measure of rice with delicacies. Then when he had finished eating, cramped and uncomfortable, the king approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, and sat down to one side.*

*Then the Blessed One, having understood that King Pasenadi had eaten and was cramped and uncomfortable, on that occasion recited this verse:*

*‘When a man is always mindful,  
Knowing moderation in the food he eats,  
His ailments duly diminish,  
He ages slowly, and he lives long.’*

*Now on that occasion the brahman youth Sudassana was standing behind King Pasenadi of Kosala. The king then addressed him thus: ‘Come now, dear Sudassana, learn this verse from the Blessed One and recite it to me whenever I am taking my meal. I will then present you daily with a hundred kahāpaṇas as a perpetual grant.’*

*‘Yes, Your Grace,’ the brahman youth Sudassana replied. Having learned this verse from the Blessed One, whenever King Pasenadi was taking his meal the brahman youth Sudassana recited [it].*

*Then King Pasenadi of Kosala gradually restrained himself until his intake of food was at most a small-pot measure of boiled rice. At a later time when his body had become energetic and spry, King Pasenadi of Kosala stroked his limbs with his hand and on that occasion uttered this inspired utterance:*

*‘The Blessed One showed compassion towards me in regard to both kinds of good—the present good and the higher good.’<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Doṇapāka Sutta: S. I. 81-82.



## A Model Community

Although the wider public is comprised of individuals at various levels of maturity, from the witless to the adroit, our aim should be to enable everyone to develop themselves to their full potential. This is the way to create a truly peaceful society. Buddhism exists to support and guide us with this endeavour and to provide us with a well-structured system of training.

As mentioned earlier, those laypeople keen on undertaking this training have shared attributes of self-reliance and social accountability, automatically giving rise to a ‘community of noble growth’, without any requirement for the community to be formally organized (although it is perfectly acceptable to do so).

If this community is adequately respectable and stable whereby its members have realized both worldly and spiritual benefits, other people in the wider society will be inspired to follow suit, thus helping to promote peace and wellbeing for all.

Realizing these benefits is not an overly daunting task because the Buddha bequeathed on those who enter upon the ‘noble way’<sup>1</sup> a clear framework for practice. By applying this framework and adjusting it to our present-day circumstances, our educational work will achieve optimal results.

Training and development bears genuine fruit when it is systematic and methodical. It is for this reason that a ‘noble discipline’<sup>2</sup> exists for householders which can be summarized as follows:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ariya-vīthi*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ariya-vinaya*. The noble discipline is the main topic of the *Siṅgālaka Sutta* (also called the *Sigālovāda Sutta*; D. III. 180-193), the gist of which is ‘paying homage to the six directions according to the noble discipline’ (*ariyassa vinaye evaṃ cha disā namassitabbā*). The commentaries consider this *sutta* to outline a ‘householder’s discipline’ (*gīhi-vinaya*); DA. III. 942, 959. The teaching on the thirty-eight blessings in the *Maṅgala Sutta* (Kh. 3; Sn. 46-7) also complements the noble discipline well.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed explanation of these principles see: ‘The Buddhists Discipline’ (วินัยชาวพุทธ) [written in 1997; translated by Dr. Somseen Chanawangsa].

## 1. Removing personal shortcomings<sup>1</sup>

### A. Abstaining from the four vices of conduct:<sup>2</sup>

1. Killing living creatures
2. Stealing
3. Sexual misconduct
4. Lying

### B. Abstaining from the four biases:

1. Bias due to desire (*chandāgati*)
2. Bias due to aversion (*dosāgati*)
3. Bias due to fear (*bhayāgati*)
4. Bias due to delusion (*mohāgati*)

### C. Abstaining from the six paths to ruin:<sup>3</sup>

1. Taking intoxicants
2. Roaming the streets at unseemly hours
3. Distracting oneself with entertainment
4. Gambling
5. Associating with bad friends
6. Laziness

## 2. Building up personal assets

### A. Choosing companions:

1. Avoiding four false friends (swindlers, smooth talkers, flatterers, and troublemakers)

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<sup>1</sup> The five precepts are incorporated in this section, i.e. abstaining from the four vices of conduct and abstaining from the first path to ruin.

<sup>2</sup> *Kamma-kilesa*: 'defiling actions'.

<sup>3</sup> *Apāya-mukha*.

2. Associating with four true friends (helpers, friends in good times and bad, good advisors, and kind-hearted friends)

B. Allocating wealth obtained by right livelihood:

1. Saving money through hard work
2. Budgeting funds into three parts:
  - One part for supporting oneself and one's family, for caring for one's associates, and for making merit
  - One part for carrying out one's work and business
  - One part for saving as a contingency reserve

### 3. Protecting all directions

A. Bringing peace to the six directions by fulfilling mutual responsibilities:<sup>1</sup>

- Forward direction: parents & children
- Righthand direction: teachers & pupils
- Posterior direction: husbands & wives
- Lefthand direction: friends & friends
- Nadir: bosses & employees
- Zenith: laity & monastic community

B. Establishing social standing, that is, the three kinds of *yasa*: prominence, honour, and entourage:

1. One is knowledgeable, astute, morally upright, gentle, humble, and yielding.
2. One is diligent, energetic, intrepid, steady, blameless, and circumspect.

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<sup>1</sup> Protecting (or paying homage to) the six directions is a principal part of the noble discipline and covers a wide range of material. Here, however, only the main headings are presented.

3. One is kind, friendly, generous, sensitive, and skilled at both leading and following.

C. Cultivating the four bases of social solidarity (*saṅgaha-vatthu*):

1. Generosity (*dāna*)
2. Kind and insightful speech (*piya-vācā*)
3. Acts of service (*attha-cariyā*)
4. Behaving oneself in a balanced, impartial way (*samānattatā*)

## Exemplary Buddhists

A strong community requires exemplary leaders. The Buddha described those honourable, resolute and exemplary leaders of the lay community as ‘precious lay disciples’<sup>1</sup> endowed with the following five attributes:<sup>2</sup>

1. They possess faith accompanied by wisdom; they are not gullible; they have unwavering confidence in the Triple Gem; they give chief importance to the truth.

2. They conduct themselves virtuously; they are grounded in the five precepts and right livelihood; when opportune, they observe the eight precepts in order to become less dependent on material objects; they minimize any harm they cause for others and increase aid and support.

3. They are not superstitious; they believe in karma; they are committed to making effort in line with cause and effect; they do not plead for divine intervention; they are not enchanted by omens, miracles, supernatural events, and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> *Upāsaka-ratana & upāsikā-ratana.*

<sup>2</sup> The five qualities of a lay-disciple (*upāsaka-dhamma*); A. III. 206.

4. ‘They do not seek outside here for a person worthy of offerings’; they do not search for awakened beings outside of the Buddha’s teachings.

5. They engage in Buddhist activities; they pay primary attention to performing virtuous deeds and practising in line with the teachings of the Buddha.

In the same vein, the *Milindapañhā* describes ten virtues of a Buddhist lay disciple:<sup>1</sup>

1. One is a friend of the monastic sangha in good times and bad.<sup>2</sup>
2. One is morally upright by way of body and speech.
3. One embraces the sovereignty of truth.
4. One delights in giving as far as one is able.
5. One strives to learn the Buddha’s teachings.<sup>3</sup>
6. One holds right view.
7. One is not superstitious; one does not espouse non-Buddhist doctrines even for life’s sake.
8. One delights in harmony.
9. One is sincere in one’s relation to Buddhism.
10. One goes to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha for refuge.

It is a matter of course that exemplary laypeople will put forth consistent effort in their practice resulting in various stages of enlightenment.

As mentioned earlier, keeping the eight Uposatha precepts is a longstanding tradition supportive of training. Not only is it a means of refining moral conduct, it provides people with the opportunity

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<sup>1</sup> *Upāsaka-guṇa*; Miln. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Literally ‘one shares in the fortunes of the sangha’.

<sup>3</sup> The Burmese edition states: ‘One strives to revive the religion if it is in decay.’

to develop other spiritual factors and to engage in wholesome activities.<sup>1</sup>

The five precepts are fundamental to preventing wrongful acts committed due to people's hankering after sense pleasure. They are universal principles. For any community or society to function well, its leaders must be grounded in the five precepts: they must internalize these principles and make them part of their 'regular conduct'.<sup>2</sup>

For Buddhists wishing to elevate their practice for developing wholesome states of mind, they can dedicate approximately one day per week (or four times per month) to observing the eight precepts.<sup>3</sup>

The three additional precepts (plus the modified third precept) undertaken on the Uposatha days counter sense indulgence. Examples are eating within a restricted period of time, abstaining from entertainment and self-adornment, using a simple bed, and so on. They are personal practices for increasing wellbeing and reducing dependence on material objects. By practising them, one secures an initial degree of freedom.

Observing the Uposatha days also frees up time and energy normally used for gratifying the senses. Instead, one uses this time and energy for self-improvement and for doing good deeds, for instance:

- Practising tranquillity and insight meditation.<sup>4</sup>
- Searching for knowledge; reading, listening, conversing, and so on.
- Visiting and caring for the elderly.
- Using one's ingenuity to benefit society.

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<sup>1</sup> *Anavajja-kamma*.

<sup>2</sup> *Nicca-sīla*.

<sup>3</sup> Known as the 'eight-factored Uposatha' (*aṭṭhaṅga-uposatha*).

<sup>4</sup> *Samatha-vipassanā* = mind development (*citta-bhāvanā*) and wisdom development (*paññā-bhāvanā*).

- Performing acts of service, for example planting trees and gardens, helping with monastery projects, and so on.

Some people with extra resolve observe the Uposatha precepts for eight days per month.<sup>1</sup>

## Accomplished Individuals

If people advance unswervingly in their study and practice, regardless of whether they belong to the wider society of householders or to the community of renunciants, eventually they will reach the supreme goal whereby they have finished their training and become adepts.

Another expression used for such an accomplished individual is ‘one who has done what was needed to be done’.<sup>2</sup> Such people have completed all personal matters; there remains nothing that they must do for themselves including engaging in the Threefold Training. They are fulfilled. They have achieved perfect happiness.

Perfect happiness is a state free from hankering. It is a state in which no effort is required for abiding in lasting contentment and satisfaction. It has three attributes:

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<sup>1</sup> The traditional days for observing the Uposatha precepts are: A) four times per month (8<sup>th</sup> day of the waning & waxing moon, 15<sup>th</sup> day of the waxing moon, 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> day of the waning moon); B) eight times per month (5<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> day of the waning & waxing moon, 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> day of the waxing moon, 13-14<sup>th</sup> or 14-15<sup>th</sup> day of the waning moon); C) nineteen times per month (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> days of the waning & waxing moon, 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> days of the waning & waxing moon, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> days of the waxing moon plus the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the waning moon, 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> days of the waning moon). This final mode of nineteen days is called an ‘observance of vigilance’ (*paṭijāgara-uposatha*) whereby each formal Uposatha day has a ‘reception day’ before and a ‘day of taking leave’ after. (The final Uposatha day of each month has no ‘taking-leave day’ because it marks the end of that particular month. A 30-day month thus has eleven days during which one does not keep the Uposatha precepts, and a 29-day month has ten days.)

<sup>2</sup> *Kata-kicca*.

1. **Perfect happiness is indwelling:** most people, particularly in this day and age, believe that happiness must be sought after, thus the commonly used phrase ‘pursuit of happiness’. Buddhists with correct understanding, however, know that happiness is to be gradually cultivated. Only then will one truly ‘be happy’. (Such inherent, sustained happiness cannot diminish; it can only be enhanced.)
2. **It is independent of external objects:** some forms of happiness rely on things outside of oneself. Those people who are not yet inwardly happy must seek after these things, and as their happiness is dictated by these objects, they are not free. If one cultivates happiness in the right way one realizes a happiness independent of external objects.<sup>1</sup>
3. **It is constant and enduring:** it is a happiness unadulterated by any form of suffering; no seeds for suffering remain in the mind.

For most unenlightened people, happiness is tied up in some way with suffering. Coarse examples of this relationship are sadistic pleasure and a wanton exploitation of the natural environment. Sometimes people’s pleasure is soon followed by misery either for themselves or others. Even at the moment of partaking in pleasure, there may be a subtle or subconscious worry, remorse, fear, and so on, plaguing the mind. In any case, the contamination by mental defilement still remains waiting to spread and cause distress.

In contrast, those people who are ‘well-trained’ are endowed with happiness gradually set free from suffering until they realize pure and perfect happiness, supreme happiness (*parama-sukha*).

On the whole, people yearn for happiness and strive to do whatever possible to maximize personal gratification. Yet they often don’t know what true happiness really is or how to describe it.

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<sup>1</sup> *Nirāṃisa-sukha*.



The aforementioned three attributes of perfect happiness are useful for an evaluation of this matter.

By cultivating the Threefold Training and developing fourfold self-mastery (*bhāvita*), people reach maturity and are endowed with inherent happiness. Nothing remains to be done for the sake of personal benefit. No effort is required to bring about fulfilment in any domain of one's life, including the domain of happiness.

If there is no longer a need to pursue happiness, people needn't vie with others for it; their own happiness isn't dependent on exploiting others or on having others lose out. Just the opposite: if one is perfectly happy, one is fully prepared to share one's happiness and to help others realize it too.

The Buddha and his enlightened disciples wandered forth teaching others a way of practice leading to a joyous life and a peaceful society. And while engaged in this ministry, they themselves abided in perfect happiness.

## **Assisting the Entire World**

To sum up, if one has fully developed moral conduct, concentration and wisdom—having cultivated healthy relationships, mental agility and fortitude, and comprehensive knowledge and vision—and one has realized perfect happiness, then one has done what was needed to be done. No longer burdened by personal matters, one can dedicate all one's time and energy to helping others.

Hence the Buddha's words when he sent out his enlightened disciples to proclaim the Dhamma:

*Bhikkhus, I am freed from all bonds, both divine and human. You too are freed.... Wander forth for the welfare and happiness of the manyfolk, out of compassion for the world.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Vin. I. 20-21.

The Buddha and his disciples embody the axiom that ‘enlightened beings serve the world’. Having finished their business and realized the supreme goal, they devote their lives wholeheartedly for the benefit of others.

Ordinary people who enter into an educational endeavour consistent with the Threefold Training become gradually more accomplished and grow in wellbeing—both worldly and spiritual—and benefit both themselves and others. Rather than such an education being criticized as leading to unsustainable development, it will be praised as helping all of humankind arrive at the true goal: a noble life, a healthy society, and a delightful natural environment.

Blueprint

For

**Reflection**



# Blueprint for Reflection

- ◇ -

## **Siam Saamtri**

(Sayāma & the Triple Triads)

**Siam** (*Sayāma*):

1. A former name for Thailand.
2. Self-control; self-restraint.<sup>1</sup>

**Saamtri:** the Three Jewels (*tiratana*), the Three Characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*), and the Threefold Training (*tisikkhā*).

**Siam Saamtri:**

1. The three threefold teachings of the Thai (Siamese) people; Thai people and the triple triads.
2. The three (threefold) teachings of people endowed with self-restraint; educating oneself so as to be guided by the three cardinal teachings of the Buddha.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: here, the author uses this term to denote a person, i.e. 'one possessing self-discipline', a 'master'.

## Triple Triads

1. **The Three Jewels** (*tiratana*): the Triple Gem; that which is truly valuable and auspicious:

### 1) Buddha

- Faith in the Tathāgata's awakening:<sup>1</sup> faith in the human potential to realize Buddhahood; trust in training and self-improvement; having a sense of urgency vis-à-vis education.
- Two virtues of the Buddha:<sup>2</sup> accomplishment of personal welfare & practice for the welfare of others.<sup>3</sup>
- Three virtues of the Buddha: wisdom, purity, and compassion.<sup>4</sup>

### 2) Dhamma

- The truth of nature. By awakening to this truth, human beings become 'Buddhas'.

### 3) Sangha

- A community marked by harmony and friendship, comprised of awakened beings—those who have finished their training—and those who are committed to undertaking the training.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tathāgatabodhi-saddhā*.

<sup>2</sup> *Buddha-guṇa*.

<sup>3</sup> *Attattha-sampatti & parattha-paṭipatti*.

<sup>4</sup> *Paññā, visuddhi & karuṇā*. *Visuddhi* can be replaced by the term *vimutti* ('liberation').

**2. The Three Characteristics** (*tilakkhaṇa*): distinct truths in line with laws of nature:

**1) Impermanence** (*aniccatā*). An understanding of this truth fosters:

- An insight into and a skilful response towards laws of nature.
- Heedful and diligent behaviour.

**2) Unendurability** (*dukkhatā*).<sup>1</sup> An understanding of this truth fosters:

- Effective adaptation, fine-tuning, and problem-solving vis-à-vis life situations.

**3) Insubstantiality** (*anattatā*). An understanding of this truth fosters:

- Freedom from enslavement by the selfish dynamics of craving, conceit and an attachment to fixed views.<sup>2</sup>
- Acting with wise discernment into causes and conditions.

**3. The Threefold Training** (*tisikkhā*): an education using the Triple Gem as a guiding light and based on an understanding of the three characteristics:

**1) Moral conduct** (*sīla*)

- Relating to one's physical and social environment in a way that is non-harmful, mutually beneficial, and conducive to cultivating the mind and wisdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the choice of this translation 'unendurability' is clarified in the earlier section titled 'Dukkhatā & Skilful Life Management'.

<sup>2</sup> *Tanhā, māna & ditṭhi*.

**2) Concentration** (*samādhi*)

- Developing the mental qualities of virtue, aptitude, and happiness.

**3) Wisdom** (*paññā*)

- Understanding the truth of all things and applying that understanding in order to guide the process of education until one reaches the goal of supreme liberation.



# Blueprint for Practice

- ◇ -

One of contemporary society's serious problems is that many people are only nominally 'Buddhists'.<sup>1</sup> The resulting deficit of suitable conduct and understanding resembles a fog obscuring the beauty and radiance of the Buddha's teachings. This is detrimental to both individuals—who fail to prosper in the Dhamma—and to society as a whole which loses out on valuable benefits it would otherwise obtain from people following the Buddhist path. We should hasten to remedy this predicament.

We shouldn't use the term 'Buddhist' lightly. To really be deserving of this title, a person must have particular principles, virtues, and standards of conduct that vouch for them as being genuine Buddhists.

The following section titled 'Guidelines for Buddhists' can be considered a benchmark containing fundamental principles and practices underpinning what it truly means to be a Buddhist.

Besides being worthy of the name 'Buddhist', those who uphold these principles and practices flourish in this very life and contribute to building a stable and prosperous society. They help in the transmission of the Buddhist path, safeguard the Dhamma, and preserve peace on earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the author is speaking about Thai society.

# Guidelines for Buddhists

## Principles<sup>1</sup>

1. **Excellence through training:** ‘I believe that human beings are capable of achieving the sublime—even becoming Buddhas—by way of training and education.’
2. **Aspiring to the Buddha’s chief virtues:** ‘I determine to train myself so as to emulate the Lord Buddha’s wisdom, purity and compassion.’
3. **Giving supremacy to the Dhamma:** ‘I give utmost importance to truth and virtue.’<sup>2</sup>
4. **Modelling society after the Sangha:** ‘Beginning at home, I will foster a harmonious society conducive to mutual support.’
5. **Achieving success through good karma:** ‘I will achieve my goals by way of wholesome and diligent action.’

## Practices

‘I will generate happiness and wellbeing for myself and society by observing the following practices’:

### A. Maintaining virtuous routines

1. **Honouring the honourable:**<sup>3</sup> paying respects to the Triple Gem and venerating parents, teachers and other persons worthy of veneration.

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<sup>1</sup> Here presented as declarations or vows.

<sup>2</sup> ‘I hold truth and virtue as my touchstone.’

<sup>3</sup> *Pūjā-pūjanīya*.

2. **Upholding moral conduct:** undertaking the five precepts and internalizing their essential principles;<sup>1</sup> not walking blind into the pathways of ruin.<sup>2</sup>
3. **Chanting:** chanting some of the Buddha's verses at least once a day before going to bed (while understanding the meaning of the words).
4. **Meditation:** composing and uplifting the mind; focusing on what is wholesome; developing concentration as a support for mindfulness and wisdom for 5-10 minutes per day.

## **B. Performing wholesome deeds**

5. **Keeping the Uposatha practices:** performing the various Observance day activities, for example: offering almsfood, spreading lovingkindness, listening to Dhamma talks, reading Dhamma books, and so on, together with one's companions at home, in the monastery, at school or at work (for upwards of 15 minutes).
6. **Generosity:** spending money that one has saved for charitable purposes in order to alleviate other people's suffering, appreciate what is good, and promote virtuous deeds (at least once a week).
7. **Making merit:** performing acts of service and dedicating the goodness to parents, teachers and altruistic people in society, and as a tribute to the Triple Gem (at least once a week).
8. **Visiting monasteries:** appreciating monasteries as places of delight and rejuvenation, and participating in events on Buddhist holidays and important family days.

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<sup>1</sup> Integrating them as innate principles of conduct (*nicca-sīla*).

<sup>2</sup> *Apāya-mukha*.

### C. Refining one's life

9. **Moderation:** developing wise and balanced consumption.
10. **Exemplary demeanour:** attending to personal responsibilities, caring for personal belongings, and performing one's work with dignity and self-reliance.
11. **Non-indulgence:** not watching more entertainment by way of electronic media than agreed upon at home; not falling under the sway of various alluring and stimulating sense objects; setting aside one day per week for abstaining from all such forms of entertainment.
12. **Taking a Buddha image to heart:** using a personal object of devotion as a reminder of the blessings of the Triple Gem and as a sign of one's commitment to the Buddha's teachings.

These guidelines incorporate the fundamentals of Buddhism. Those people who observe them faithfully are thus worthy of the designation 'Buddhist'.

Soon after babies are born and open their eyes to look at the world around them, they rely on the encouragement and guidance of their 'creators'<sup>1</sup> and 'first teachers',<sup>2</sup> namely, their parents, to help with the learning process. If we wish for people to successfully follow the Guidelines for Buddhists, we therefore need to begin at home.

Later, when children go to school and begin to study in earnest, they are formally recognized as 'pupils' or 'students'. In a similar fashion, from an early age, children should be provided

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<sup>1</sup> Trans.: the Buddha often adapted language from his time and gave words new meanings. In Brahmanism, the term 'Brahmā' refers (among other meanings) to the 'one impersonal universal spirit manifested as a personal Creator'. Here, the Buddha borrows this term to refer to parents.

<sup>2</sup> *Pubbācariya*.

the opportunity to develop a healthy self-identity as being 'Buddhists'. Developing such an identity is part of an integrated education and fully consistent with the Threefold Training.

When children become grounded in fundamental Buddhist principles and practices, their genuine expression as Buddhists begins to take shape. This self-actualization is a clear sign that their education is blossoming and leading to true splendour and distinction in their lives, just as the morning sun rises into the sky and graces the world with brilliant and life-sustaining rays of light.

When children grow and prosper in their education, it brings hope to family members, nations, and the entire global human community. It instils us all with confidence that well-trained and well-developed individuals can safeguard the Dhamma—safeguard what is virtuous and true—and lead humanity to enduring peace and wellbeing.