

The Significance of Practicing the Three Meritorious Deeds

As human beings, we are in this human realm as a result of previous good Karmic energy. Fortunate life, with good complexion, intelligence and being able to listen to the Buddha's message, is received by the power of meritorious acts. While we are consuming (spending) those results, we have to earn more positive karmic energy for fruitful benefit in this life and hereafter. The results of merit are not possible only after life rather most of them are obtainable in this life itself.

The Buddha's entire teaching focuses on gaining happiness. For the real happiness, The Buddha realized and explained three things that we should do. They are;

1. Not to do any evil
2. To cultivate good
3. To purify one's mind

*Sabba pàpassa akaranam kusalassa upasampadà,
Sacitta pariyodapanam etam buddhanasàsanam.*

All teachings in Buddhism can be categorized into above three.

The first advice of Buddhism is avoiding evil. Why Buddhism asks us not to do any evil. When we do any evil, our mind gets polluted and it gives us sorrow and tears because we have no peace of mind. If our mind is dirty with negative thoughts such as desire, hatred, jealousy and ignorance, we have no real happiness because of the absence of peace in mind, even though we may have a lot of facilities and comfortable life. Buddhism teaches that collecting evil means collecting sorrow. Evil is a synonym for suffering (*Dukkho papassa uchchayo*). If we do bad deeds with a wicked mind, bad friends come to our association. It is a huge disadvantage in our life because our entire success is gravely disturbed. That is why the Buddha always discouraged doing evil. Bad association not only steals our material wealth but also ruins our spiritual qualities as well.

As sentient beings, we usually do everything in our life for the purpose of achieving happiness and peace of mind. Whatever we do in our life, the bottom line answer is happiness. Why do we suffer further, if we have this understanding? The more we understand this truth the more vigilant we should become in getting ourselves rid of evil. If we are on the way of opposite of evil means we are on the way of opposite of sorrow, suffering, tear or sadness. Doing bad things in our life gives us a

lot of disadvantages, especially we lose our good friends and we lose our success in our life in terms of mental and physical health, education and wealth. According to Buddhism the main roots of unwholesomeness are desire, anger and delusion. All kinds of evils are created by these three reasons. If we can decrease those defilements as much as we are able, it means we are on the way of decreasing evil.

'Mind is the forerunner of all evil states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox.' (Dhammapada)

The second advice in Buddhism is doing good deeds. When we do good deeds such as helping others, loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, our mind is pure, calm, quiet, happy and peaceful. The main purpose of life is happiness. The main reason of happiness is pure mind with positive thoughts. The pure mind can gain happiness. In another words, happiness is decreasing evil and increasing good with meritorious deeds. When we do good, it means our mind is pure.

'Mind is the forerunner of all good states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one's shadow that never leaves'. (Dhammapada)

According to Buddhism, the main roots of wholesomeness are generosity, loving kindness and intelligence (or wisdom). All kinds of good deeds in our life depend on these three. Mainly we do three meritorious deeds.

They are;

- i. Generosity (Dana)
- ii. Morality or virtue (seela)
- iii. Meditation (Bhavana)

The first meritorious act that Buddhism talks about is generosity. If we sacrifice our time, wealth and energy for the wellbeing of others, it is generosity. When we offer something to others, our mind is rich in merit, and mind is very high in peace. Once the Buddha said; ***"If you know the results of practicing generosity like me, you never eat something without giving something to another"***. Generosity is the main door that we enter the wholesome world. When we practice generosity, many other qualities grow up such as compassion, kindness, and sympathetic joy.

Morality (or virtue) is the second meritorious deed in Buddhism. If we have good discipline in our speech and behavior, it means we have morality or virtues. When we have good discipline, we have no sorrow when we think of our past activities. Also we are honored and appreciated by our relatives and friends in the social life if we have virtuous life. The discipline in our behavior conduces to develop self-confidence and friendship in the society. Especially, if we have very good discipline, we can interact with any person or society without fear and doubt. That is very important thing in the social life. Discipline or virtue itself brings happiness which is our final goal in life.

The third meritorious deed is meditation. That also focuses on purifying our mind from negative thoughts such as anger, desire and delusion. Here we concentrate our mind on some good thoughts such as loving-kindness, and breathing meditation. When we meditate again and again thinking positive thoughts, we can keep our mind for long time with tranquility. Mind is with positive energy when we do merit. It means our mind is full with happiness. Here, in meditation, we especially practice mindfulness. It results in keeping our mind calm, quiet and peaceful because of the absence of negative thoughts. Mindfulness helps us to live in the present moment. We mostly lose our happiness because of no mindfulness living in the past or future. Also mindfulness helps us to understand the world's reality as it is.

By practicing good, the understanding of the karmic law is very important. As much as we listen to the Buddha's message, our knowledge about the world reality gradually increases. According to that message, we can see if we do something with polluted mind physically, verbally or mentally, suffering comes to us. Also if we do something with pure mind physically, verbally or mentally, fruitful results come to us bringing happiness. If somebody has this knowledge, he doesn't like to suffer further. He always avoids unwholesome activities and tries to do good as much as he can. Although the Buddha brought this message, it is not a creation of the Buddha. The Supreme Buddha only discovered the world's reality. Whether a Buddha appears or not this truth remains forever. Understanding of the karmic law is the understanding of one of the realities in the world that brings us happiness getting rid of suffering.

There are a lot of benefits of doing good or meritorious deeds. One of the results of doing meritorious deeds is reducing negative results of previous karmas. Sometimes we have to face some

bad situations as a result of previous bad karmas. If we always do good deeds, we are able to reduce those reactions a lot. Further when we always do wholesome deeds, our positive energy, and spiritual power increase much. Then our success increases. A lot of righteous ambitions in our life come true. On the other hand, according to our good actions, we are likely to meet with the people who share the equal qualities and interests. Having good friends with noble qualities is one of the factors of success in our life. When we go forward with good qualities, people with equal qualities come to our association. We can specially listen and discuss sublime truth with them.

If we have done merit in the past or continue to do, our mind is with that meritorious intention, and the memory of those merits always comes to our mind. Then our mind is with the pleasant memory of wholesome thoughts. Unwholesome thoughts have no chance to come to our mind and disturb our peace of mind. Every moment our mind is pure with positive thoughts. It means we can live with happiness without defilements. Defilements are the black or negative side in our mind that brings suffering. Merit is the white or positive side that brings happiness and purification.

To purify one's mind is the third advice of the supreme Buddha. Here, we cultivate our mind as meditation in both ways; concentration and insight. In the concentration meditation we keep our mind with particular good thought. As a result of concentrated mind we can live for a long time without suffering and stress, but it is not permanent and it can change. That is why Buddhism asks us to develop another step for permanent happiness that is insight meditation. Here, with concentrated mind we reflect all kinds of things that are mental and physical as impermanent, un-satisfactory and selfless. We reflect again and again on these three. As a result of practicing this world's reality, we can develop five qualities which are faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

May the Triple Gem Bless you!

තෙරුවන් සරණයි!

May all beings be well happy and peaceful!

(සියලු සත්ත්වයෝ සුවපත් වෙත්වා!)

(Tuesday Dhamma Discussion of Los Angeles Buddhist Vihara in Pasadena. 03/24/2015)