

The Significance of Practicing Three Meritorious Deeds

As a kind spiritual teacher, the Buddha advises us to do good deeds and purify the mind in the name of happiness. By listening to the Buddha's message, we are able to understand how to practice good deeds. As much as we listen to the Buddha's message, we comprehend the nature of karmic law. The Karmic law means according to our mental position we have the same results. When we do something with a wicked mind, we will have the bad results. In the same way, when we do something with a pure mind, we will see the fruitful results. If someone does good deeds physically, verbally and mentally with a pure mind, those deeds are merit. The Buddha points out very clearly that practicing merit is similar to experiencing happiness. If someone likes more happiness, he has to do more merit. When we do good deeds, there are no defilements such as greed, ill will and delusion at that moment. Having negative thoughts brings us suffering, tear and stress. Pure mind with positive thoughts like generosity, kindness, compassion, mindfulness, wisdom conveys us happiness and comfort. As intelligent persons, our main ambition should be increasing merit as much as we can. According to Buddhism, there are three main merits that we can accumulate in the name of real happiness. They are practicing generosity, morality or virtue, and meditation.

Practicing generosity is the first meritorious deed that motivates us to go forward on the path of happiness. When we offer something to others kindly, concerning the receivers' qualities or needs, our mind is kind, helpful, pure and calm. According to Buddhism, generosity can be practiced in three ways, as giving of material offerings (Amisa-dana), giving of fearlessness (Abhaya-dana) and the giving of Dhamma (Dhamma-dana). These are the things which purify our mind and decorate it. Its final result is happiness. That is why the Buddha says "Practicing merits means gaining happiness" (Sukho Punnassa Uccayo). Doing more merits is having more happiness. Merit is a synonym to happiness. Therefore the person, who listened to the Buddha's advice, is always ready to offer something to others with cleaned hands. He offers or donates not only for his close relatives and friends but for any person who is in need.

The second meritorious deed that gives us peace of mind is practicing morality which is higher than generosity. The more we listen to the Buddha's message, the greater is our courage

to go on the path of freedom. In the pursuit of perfect happiness we still want to go forward on the path. That is why we discipline our behavior and speech as morality. We discipline our behavior and speech not just because of the fear of being criticized by others or next rebirth but for the sake of our mental culture itself. Good discipline in our behavior brings comfort to our life. If someone has a good discipline, it also means that he has not given reasons for others that they can blame or criticize him. He can remember his past with a happy mind because of his disciplined behavior. Because of good behavior, we are honorable in the society. We can go to any society or assembly without fear and doubt, when we have good discipline. Further having good discipline brings us wealth too. Virtue helps us to concentrate our mind as a primary foundation. Morality with sensual discipline benefits to successful meditation. Furthermore, we have received good life like a human life because of good discipline in our previous lives. Moral life helps to achieve good rebirth.

The third and the most important merit that Buddhism points out is meditation. Here we practice our mind in the correct way using some kind of meditation techniques such as loving kindness, breathing meditation etc. Meditation is the highest, fastest and most successful way to develop our spirit to the maximum level. Among the forty techniques of meditation in Buddhism, practicing loving kindness is very important and useful at the very beginning of mental culture. In many discourses, the Buddha has emphasized its need and benefits. Practicing merits such as generosity, virtue, and meditation is like ornaments which decorate our mind with happiness.

If we are always with positive thoughts with mindfulness, negative thoughts can't disturb our peace of mind. The main reason whether we are happy is our mind. If we can keep our mind in merit, we are able to keep our mind in peace. As the result of practicing merit, when we grow up with old age, we don't lose our happiness. When someone is getting old, usually he worries. However, if we can spend our life doing merit specially practicing meditation, we are able to overcome suffering. This is the only way to get rid of suffering. All other efforts will not be successful. In Buddhist meditation, we practice both tranquility and insight steps. First of all we focus our mind in a particular wholesome object again and again.

When mind is concentrated, we reflect on impermanence. The happiness in tranquility is impermanent. It can be changed any time. That is why Buddhism guides us to meditate up to wisdom using Insight meditation.

Practicing a meditation technique like loving kindness or breathing is not the end of the path of purification that Buddhism explains, but just the start. With the concentration of loving kindness, further we have to go forward with understanding of impermanence. When mind is concentrated, we reflect on impermanence about mind and body. It has to be practiced again and again with higher understanding. If we investigate arising and ceasing of all experience, we are going to be silent when the world changes. It means gradually impermanent happiness is going to be permanent. In the changing world, we can create an unshaken mind which can't be disturbed by anything or anybody. It means we live fully mindfully in the present moment seeing impermanence. Importance means arising and ceasing of our all experience that we get through our senses. Here we have an understanding that world arises and ceases at the moment. The most valuable and interesting explanation in Buddhism is impermanence. It says in Buddhism; **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) would not come to (the future) occurrence.** (අනුත්වා සම්භූතං නුත්වා න භවිස්සති). This is the nature of impermanence that Buddhism illuminates. Every moment the experience that we receive through our senses arises and ceases without anything remaining. This is living in the present moment without suffering. It is the highest result of practicing meditation and impermanence. Buddhism always encourages us to come to this level without delay as soon as we can. This is the highest result of our rare and valuable life. It is the way how we show our proficiency. We have to dedicate all our energy, courage, time, wealth in the name of this success. With birth most of us have received this potential. We can improve it to the maximum level by associating noble friends. If we can face old age and death without suffering by practicing this path, we are the fortunate people in the world. The supreme Buddha always encouraged us to achieve this result with earnestness (diligence).

May The Triple Gem Bless You!

(Tuesday Dhamma Discussion of Los Angeles Buddhist Vihara in Pasadena - 06/09/2015)