

## Four Good Things in Life

The supreme Buddha always kindly points out the most important things, places and persons in the world with his great self-realization for understanding of people. When we listen to those sermons attentively and intelligently, our knowledge also inspires and expands. Furthermore, we can reach the best position in the world. Especially, the Buddha always points out the path of happiness in various steps. According to our intelligence and effort, we are able to go forward following his advice.

In the Dhammapada, the Buddha once declares four kinds of good things in our lives.

*Atthamhi jātamhi sukhā sahāyā,  
Tuṭṭhī sukhā yā itarītarena;  
Puññaṃ sukhaṃ jīvita-saṅ-kha-yamhi,  
Sabbassa dukkhassa sukhaṃ pahānaṃ.* (Dhammapada 23, 12)

**Good are friends when need arises; good is contentment with just what one has; good is merit when life is at the end, and good is the abandoning of all suffering** (through Arahantship).

In this short stanza, the Buddha proclaims four good things that can be practiced for our inner peace and the success of this immediate social life as well.

### Good Friends (*Sahāyā*)

The very first line defines " **Good are friends when need arises.**" This is not just having a friend, but a good quality friend. In Buddhism, it is clear that always emphasizing the value of good association. According to the Buddhist point of view, having good friends decides the success of social and spiritual life. In this situation, here, first, the Buddha explains the importance of having good friends.

If we have a good friend, it is very useful when need arises. It is not enough just having a friend, but he should have good qualities. Here Buddhism emphasizes some qualities that a friend should have like honesty and intelligence as well. The trustworthy person is the best kinsman (relative). Also, a good friend should be generous, kind and grateful. Having a good friend is a safety when needs arise.

Buddhism always emphasizes the importance of trustworthiness or righteousness. If our relatives are not honest, actually they are not real kinsmen. If a person is honest and trustworthy, even though he or she is not a kinsman, actually he is a kinsman. That is why the Buddha says "trustworthy person is the best relative (*vissāsā paramā ñāti*)." Therefore, trust is the most important fact when we associate people in the society. When we have trustworthy people, it means we have kinsmen.

There is a very special important thing; that we should be honest first to find good friends. If our mind is not honest when we associate with trustworthy people, we can't win their trust. Therefore, first, we must be honest ourselves. Then we are able to find trustworthy friends. If we are not honest and intelligent, it is very difficult to find trustworthy people. Additionally, when we are not honest and intelligent, we are unable to distinguish trustworthy people even though we meet them.

### **Contentment (*Tuṭṭhī*)**

Next, the verse describes "**Good is contentment with just what one has**". Contentment or satisfaction is the greatest wealth. We do all things in our life in the name of happiness. We think that when we are wealthy, we can be happy. That is why we always try to earn more money and other wealth. It is clear that there are many people who are rich financially in the world, but they are not happy mentally. One of the reasons of this situation is that they are not satisfied with what they already have. And they often think their happiness will be in the future. They always wish a better tomorrow than today. That day never comes until they die. If someone thinks he is happy after he fulfills everything in his life, actually he is never happy. He is looking for happiness till he dies, but he never reaches happiness.

Therefore, we have to consider what the real happiness is, how we reach real happiness. Happiness or sadness depends on what we think. According to the Buddha's message, our real happiness depends on what we have just now, but not we will have in the future. For this realization, we have to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness means the awareness of our body and mind keeping our attention at the present moment. Here especially it is important to contemplate on our mind. The nature of the mind is that arising and ceasing every moment. Unsatisfactoriness or suffering arises because of ignorance that when we think something which happened in the past we think still it is happening. Also, when we think about something which will happen in the future we think it happens at the moment. If we are able to overcome this delusion of mind with practicing mindfulness, we can overcome suffering and can live happily. Whenever we are in mindfulness there is no space in mind for negative thoughts which disturb our peace of mind like desire, anger and delusion.

### **Merits (*Puññaṃ*)**

After that the Buddha says "**Good is merit when life is at the end.**" Merits means cultivating positive thoughts such as generosity, loving kindness, compassion. At the same time negative thoughts fade away such as desire, anger and delusion. The Buddha says practicing merits means cultivating happiness. As the result of practicing merits, we are able to be happy when we think those merits. Especially, we can be happy at the end of life when we think of our meritorious life.

Buddhism clarifies three meritorious deeds for the peace of mind. They are;

1. Generosity (*Dāna*)
2. Virtue (*Seela*)
3. Meditation (*Bhāvanā*)

Generosity means offering something to other concerning their qualities or needs with pure mind. Virtue is the discipline in speech and behavior. Meditation means mental culture or purifying one's mind from negative thoughts. Practicing these three merits reduces defilements like desire, anger and delusion.

### **Cessation of Suffering (*Sabbassa dukkhassa sukhaṃ pahānaṃ*)**

The last line of verse explains the highest fruit of life as "**Good is the abandoning of all suffering.**" The Buddhist doctrines especially focus on getting rid of suffering. The real happiness or success of our life depends on how far we have overcome suffering. Cessation of suffering depends on understanding of arising and ceasing of suffering. Understanding of life which consists of body and mind helps understanding of suffering.

When our eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind contact with external objects such as forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, mental formations, the experience arises at the moment. Simultaneously, five aggregates arise when a sense contacts with an object and mind. Five aggregates are: matter (*Rupa* - රූප), feelings (*Vedanā* - වේදනා), perception (*Saññā* - සංකල්ප), mental formations (*Sankhāra* - සංඛාර) and consciousness (*Viññāna* - විඤ්ඤාණ). Five aggregates are always together. They can't be separated. They could be realized by wisdom. These five aggregates are the bottom line of all our experiences which we receive through our senses. The nature of these five aggregates is that they weren't here before the experience. And also, they won't remain after the experience. Understanding of the dependent origination directly focuses on comprehension of five aggregates. The Buddha advises everyone who are in every spiritual level to reflect on five aggregates as arising, ceasing, enjoyment, danger and liberation. Every moment five aggregate arise when conditions are together. Also, they immediately cease when conditions separate. There is an enjoyment in these five things, but enjoyment is less, danger is a lot. That is why the wise people must find liberation from five aggregates. The Buddha says the highest education that a wise person should gain is the comprehension of five aggregates.

As a result of the union of the five aggregates, when factors are together, we have experiences through our senses such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body. When factors (or conditions) are separated, the experience ceases. The highest intelligence that Buddhism declares is the intelligence that "**Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) will not go to (the future) occurrence**" (*Ahutvā sambhutam hutvā na bhavissati* - අහුන්වා සම්භුතං හුන්වා න භවිස්සති). If someone can understand this ultimate truth practicing insight meditation, that is the only way to get rid of suffering. This is the main teaching that the Buddha realized, discovered and preached to the world to get rid of suffering. The Buddha has explained this theory in various ways in his teachings like this;

When this is, that is (*Asmin sati idam hoti*)

This arising, that arises (*Imassa Uppādā idam uppajjati*)

When this is not, that is not (*Asmin asati idam na hoti*)

This ceasing, that ceases (*Imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*)

Understanding of Buddhism depends on how far we have understood this theory, the dependent origination. If someone has a clear knowledge, he is knowledgeable about suffering. Understanding of suffering causes us to understand the four noble truths. If someone knows suffering as lack of knowledge of this theory, by listening to what the Buddha taught he tries to understand the dependent origination, five aggregates and four noble truths as much as he can. And also, he always tries to practice the path to get rid of suffering. Here he has to practice three disciplines. They are;

1. Virtue            (*Seela*)
2. Tranquility    (*Samādhī*)
3. Wisdom         (*Paññā*)

First of all, he disciplines his physical and verbal actions with the knowledge of the dependent origination. Having a good discipline in speech and behavior, he gradually trains his mind in tranquility by practicing concentration meditation. Because of his clear knowledge about the process how suffering arises with concentrated mind, he reflects on impermanence. Here he always reflects on arising and ceasing of the five aggregates. As much as he can examine, his ignorance gradually decreases. Simultaneously, arising of other parts of dependent origination of his life also decreases. As the result of practicing this path, suffering gradually decreases. He always tries to live with virtue and concentration, seeing insight as impermanence. Also, he is aware of the present moment with great contentment.



May the Triple Gem Bless you!

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May you be mindful and wise!

(සතිමත් සහ නුවණැති වන්න)

May all beings be well, happy and peaceful!

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