

The Role of Monks

Sobhenti Sutta (AN2, 16)

As the result of preaching dhamma by the Buddha to the world, the four groups of disciples gradually arose in the world. They are; 1. monks (*Bhikku*), 2. nuns (*Bhikkunī*), 3. laymen (*Upāsaka*) and 4. laywomen (*Upāsikā*). The Buddha preached dhamma to them not only for attaining enlightenment, but also, to preach dhamma to others, handing dhamma over from generation to generation. The Supreme Buddha wanted his disciples to bring this valuable message for the wellbeing of many humans and deities. That's why the Buddha advised his first 60 noble disciples to travel from town-to-town preaching dhamma.

Caratha Bhikkave cārikam bahujana hitāya bahujana sukkhāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānam.....

It's evident that among the four groups of disciples the Buddha paid his special attention to the *Bhikku*, monks. There are few meanings of 'Bhikku' term. Basically, the meaning of 'Bhikku' is, he who sees the fear of the world or Samsāra. Furthermore, 'Bhikku' means he who begs for food. Also, 'Bhikku' means he who wears robes made by thrown away clothes.

Qualifications of Monks

According to the *Sobhenti Sutta*, it is very clear what the Buddha expected from his disciples.

Bhikkhu, bhikkhave, viyatto vinīto visārado bahussuto dhammadharo dhammānudhammappaṭipanno saṅghaṃ sobheti.

A *bhikkhu* who is competent, disciplined, self-confident, learned well, an expert on the Dhamma, practicing in accordance with the Dhamma, adorns (beautifies) the Saṅgha.

According to the *Sutta*, the Buddha says if above four groups are competent, educated, assured, learned people—who have memorized the teachings and practice in line with the teachings, they beautify the Saṅgha. What four? A monk, a nun, a layman, and a laywoman.

Here, the Exalted One explains six qualities which the *Bhikkus* should have. They are;

1. *Viyatto* - competent
2. *Vinīto* - disciplined
3. *visārado* - assured
4. *Bahussuto* – educated
5. *Dhammadharo* - memorized
6. *Dhammānudhammappaṭipanno* - practiced

He who has these qualities in his character beautifies the Saṅgha. If a monk can complete these qualities as the Buddha said, he is able to achieve the results of Dhamma, can solve any questions

of dhamma without fear and shame and is able to hand this message over to the next generation. That's why the Buddha always appreciated monks who have above qualities.

Main Duties of Monks

We have recognized four main duties of monks. They are;

1. Learning Dhamma
2. Practicing Dhamma
3. Preserving Dhamma
4. Propagating Dhamma

Learning dhamma which helps monks to achieve spiritual goals and to preach dhamma to the world is a main duty of a monk. Therefore, the Supreme Buddha often encouraged monks to learn dhamma well. Associating good friends, listening to dhamma carefully and reading Tipitaka, monks are able to improve their dhamma knowledge for the benefit of themselves and others. Here the usage of Tipitaka; Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma in Pali language is very important. Further, the core teachings in Buddhism such as the Four Noble Truths, the Dependent Origination, the Five Aggregates, the Three Characteristics of existence should be addressed clearly. Five qualities consist of learning dhamma. They are;

1. *Suta* – Listening Dhamma
2. *Dhatā* – Memorizing Dhamma
3. *Vacasā paricitā* – Practicing Dhamma by words
4. *Manasānupekkita* – Reflecting Dhamma
5. *Dittiyāsuppatividdhā* - Clearing vision through Dhamma

As monks we have more responsibility for Dhamma not just listening or practicing, but as monks who are responsible persons who protect and bring this message to the next generation.

Not only learning and memorizing Dhamma, but practicing dhamma is also a very important part of being a monk. According to what monks learned, we have to practice this rare and valuable message to the maximum level according to our knowledge, courage and wisdom. Here, we have to practice the Noble Eightfold Path in Short tranquility and wisdom in very short Mindfulness. Here it is very important to understand that **three doctrines in Buddhism should be together realized when we practice Dhamma. They are; the Four Noble Truths, the Dependent Origination and the Five aggregates.**

One of the main parts, the Buddha wished from monks is to preach this message to the world as it is. While we monks are practicing this message, we have to transfer this message to others kindly wishing for their wellbeing of this life and hereafter. Giving dhamma is the highest gift. The gift of dhamma excels all other gifts. When lay people take care of monks with four requisites, the duty of monks is that explaining Dhamma to people compassionately.

Further, monks should guide the next generation based on dhamma. According to *Makhādeva Sutta*, the Buddha emphasized to monks very clearly not be the last persons in the

dispensation of the Buddha. It means monks should not allow this message to be destroyed in their lifetime. The main purpose of establishing the *Sāsana* by the Worthy One was to pass his noble message from generation to generation for the wellbeing of many deities and men.

The duty of a monk is to do these four things as much as possible. First, we monks need to learn very clearly what the Buddha taught. The message, the Buddha explained for 45 years can be summarized into two. **They are the path to heaven (or a blissful life) and the path to deliverance.** With the understanding of the Karmic Law, practicing three meritorious deeds; *dāna*, *sīla* and *Bhāvanā* is the path to heaven or a blissful life. Not only we should do these three, but we have to contemplate them repeatedly. The practice of three trainings; *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* with the understanding of the dependent origination is the path to deliverance, emancipation or Nibbana. Among these three things wisdom or right understanding plays a main role since vision should be first. At the beginning of the path of liberation, the disciple should have a clear understanding about the dependent origination or about the arising and ceasing of the five aggregates.

When someone learns what the Buddha taught, especially his confidence in the Buddha's enlightenment (*Saddhā*) gradually increases. *Saddhā* or confidence in the Buddha is a main quality of a disciple. That's why the Buddha says confidence as the seed of wholesomeness (*Saddhā Bījam*). Here, the disciple has confidence in the Buddha's message that whatever he does for happiness among them practicing dhamma is mostly with visible results and immediately effective. With this confidence he gives the priority in his life to practice dhamma with the fullest capability. The more he has confidence in what the Buddha taught, the more effort or inner motivation (*Viriya*), mindfulness (*Sati*), concentration (*Samādhi*) and wisdom (*Pannā*) develop. These five are the spiritual faculties which help us to complete the enlightenment.

The Qualities of the real monks' friend

According to the *Bhikkumitta sutta* (AN), the Buddha explains the qualities of a monks' friend.

Mendicants, when a friend has seven qualities you should associate with, accompany, and attend them, even if they send you away. What seven? They're likable, agreeable, respected, and admired. They admonish you and they accept admonishment. They speak on deep matters. And they don't urge you to do bad things. When a friend has these seven qualities you should associate with, accompany, and attend them, even if they send you away.

*Piyo ca garu bhāvanīyo,
vattā ca vacanakkhamo;
Gambhīrañca katham kattā,
no caṭṭhāne niyojako.*

They're pleasant, respected, and admired,
 an admonisher who accepts admonishment,
 speaks on deep matters,
 and doesn't urge you to do bad.

The Buddha points out here seven qualities of a monks' good friend. They are;

1. *Piyo* – Pleasant
2. *Garu* – Respected
3. *Bhāvanīyo* - Admired
4. *Vattā* – Admonisher
5. *Vacanakkhamo* - Admonishment
6. *Gambhīrañca katham kattā* – Speaks on Deep Matters
7. *Nocaṭṭhāne niyojaye* – Doesn't Urge You to Do Bad

Virtue (*Sīla*)

Discipline in speech and behavior or virtue (*Sīla*) is the foundation of the spiritual path. Hence, the Buddha frequently points out the value of virtue or moral conduct. *Ākankeyya Sutta* explains many benefits of virtue. From having material facilities to achieving the final goal, liberation, practicing virtue helps us to achieve wishes. As a disciple who wishes to attain enlightenment should see the fear of doing any wrong conduct which is concerned by the wise. The Buddha advises Bhante Rahula, when we do something physically or verbally to reflect on it again and again whether it is correct. When we follow the path of liberation, we are able to see the visible results of practicing moral conduct. Disciple helps concentration, and concentration helps wisdom. These three qualities are interrelated.

Being a Successful Soldier

According to the *Pathamayodhājīva Sutta*, the Buddha explains the five kinds of soldiers, and they are compared to monks. The first soldier falters, faints, doesn't steel himself, can't engage in the battle on seeing a cloud of dust motivated up by the enemy army, some warriors are like this. This is the first type of warrior who can be found existing in the world.

The second soldier who can handle the cloud of dust, but on seeing the top of the enemy's banner, he falters, faints, doesn't steel himself, can't engage in the battle. Some warriors are like this. This is the second type of warrior who can be found existing in the world.

Then there is the warrior who can handle the cloud of dust & the top of the enemy's banner, but on hearing the tumult [of the approaching forces], he falters, faints, doesn't steel himself, can't engage in the battle. Some warriors are like this. This is the third type of warrior who can be found existing in the world.

“Furthermore, there is the warrior who can handle the cloud of dust, the top of the enemy’s banner, & the tumult (uproar), but when in hand-to-hand combat he is struck and falls wounded. Some warriors are like this. This is the fourth type of warrior who can be found existing in the world.

“Then there is the warrior who can handle the cloud of dust, the top of the enemy’s banner, the tumult, & the hand-to-hand combat. On winning the battle, victorious in battle, he comes out at the very head of the battle. Some warriors are like this. This is the fifth type of warrior who can be found existing in the world.

In the same way, there are these five warrior-like individuals who can be found existing among the monks. Which five?

There is the case of the monk who, on seeing a cloud of dust, falters, faints, doesn’t steel himself, can’t continue in the holy life. Declaring his weakness in the training, he leaves the training and returns to the lower life. What is the cloud of dust for him? There is the case of the monk who hears, ‘In that village or town there is a woman or girl who is attractive, good-looking, delightful, endowed with the foremost lotus-like complexion.’ On hearing this, he falters, faints, doesn’t steel himself, can’t continue in the holy life. This is the first type of monk.

Then there is the case of the monk who can handle the cloud of dust, but on seeing the top of the enemy’s banner, he falters, faints, doesn’t steel himself, can’t continue in the holy life. Declaring his weakness in the training, he leaves the training and returns to the lower life. What is the top of the banner for him? There is the case of the monk who not only hears that ‘In that village or town over there is a woman or girl who is shapely, good-looking, charming, endowed with the foremost lotus-like complexion.’ He sees for himself that in that village or town over there is a woman or girl who is shapely, good-looking, charming, endowed with the foremost lotus-like complexion. On seeing her, he falters, faints, doesn’t steel himself, can’t continue in the holy life. Declaring his weakness in the training, he leaves the training and returns to the lower life. This is the second type of monk.

Then there is the case of the monk who can handle the cloud of dust & the top of the enemy’s banner, but on hearing the tumult [of the approaching forces], he falters, faints, doesn’t steel himself, can’t continue in the holy life. Declaring his weakness in the training, he leaves the training and returns to the lower life. What is the tumult for him? There is the case of the monk who has gone to the wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty building. A woman approaches him and giggles at him, calls out to him, laughs aloud, & teases him. On being giggled at, called out to, laughed at, & teased by the woman, he falters, faints, doesn’t steel himself, can’t continue in the holy life. Declaring his weakness in the training, he leaves the training and returns to the lower life. This is the third type of monk.

Then there is the case of the monk who can handle the cloud of dust, the top of the enemy’s banner, & the tumult, but when in hand-to-hand combat he is struck and falls wounded. What is the hand-to-hand combat for him? There is the case of the monk who has gone to the wilderness,

to the foot of a tree, or to an empty building. A woman approaches him and sits down right next to him, lies down right next to him, throws herself all over him. When she sits down right next to him, lies down right next to him, and throws herself all over him, he—without renouncing the training, without declaring his weakness—engages in sexual intercourse. This is the fourth type of monk.

Then there is the case of the monk who can handle the cloud of dust, the top of the enemy's banner, the tumult, & hand-to-hand combat. On winning the battle, victorious in battle, he comes out at the very head of the battle. What is victory in the battle for him? There is the case of the monk who has gone to the wilderness, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty dwelling. A woman approaches him and sits down right next to him, lies down right next to him, throws herself all over him. When she sits down right next to him, lies down right next to him, and throws herself all over him, he extricates himself, frees himself, and goes off where he will. He resorts to a secluded dwelling place: the wilderness, the foot of a tree, a mountain, a glen, a hillside cave, a charnel ground, a forest grove, the open air, a haystack. Having gone to the wilderness, the foot of a tree, or an empty building, he sits down, crosses his legs, holds his body erect, and brings mindfulness to the fore.

Abandoning greed with regard to the world, he dwells with an awareness devoid of covetousness. He cleanses his mind of covetousness. Abandoning ill will & anger, he dwells with an awareness devoid of ill will, sympathetic with the welfare of all living beings. He cleanses his mind of ill will & anger. Abandoning sloth & drowsiness, he dwells with an awareness devoid of sloth & drowsiness, mindful, alert, percipient of light. He cleanses his mind of sloth & drowsiness. Abandoning restlessness & anxiety, he dwells undisturbed, his mind inwardly stilled. He cleanses his mind of restlessness & anxiety. Abandoning uncertainty, he dwells having crossed over uncertainty, with no perplexity with regard to skillful mental qualities. He cleanses his mind of uncertainty.

“Having abandoned these five hindrances, corruptions of awareness that weaken discernment, then—quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful [mental] qualities—he enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. With the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—he enters & remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain.

“With his mind thus concentrated, purified, & bright, unblemished, free from defects, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, he directs and inclines it to the knowledge of the ending of the mental fermentations. He discerns, as it has come to be, that ‘This is stress... This is the origination of stress... This is the cessation of stress... This is the way leading to the cessation of stress... These are mental fermentations... This is the origination of fermentations...

This is the cessation of fermentations... This is the way leading to the cessation of fermentations.’ His heart, thus knowing, thus seeing, is released from the fermentation of sensuality, the fermentation of becoming, the fermentation of ignorance. With release, there is the knowledge, ‘Released.’ He discerns that ‘Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done. There is nothing further for this world.’

“This, for him, is victory in the battle. This individual, I tell you, is like the warrior who can handle the cloud of dust, the top of the enemy’s banner, the tumult, & hand-to-hand combat. On winning the battle, victorious in battle, he comes out at the very head of the battle. Some individuals are like this. This is the fifth type monk who can be found existing among the monks. This monk who defeats defilements by his practice is appreciated by the Buddha.

Assimilation to the new environment

As the monks who are in the western world, we monks have to develop some skills and knowledge within us.

1. Language fluency
2. Social skills
3. Knowledge of new technology
4. Knowledge of new subjects like psychology, counselling, psychiatry
5. Understanding the cultural differences.

In the current world, the main problem is that mental illness. That’s more dangerous than physical illnesses. Here, a lot of counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists recommend their clients to practice loving kindness and mindfulness meditation as treatments. Having and practicing the Buddha’s message monks can do a great service to the world using some techniques in Buddhism like virtue, loving kindness meditation and mindfulness etc. According to Emotional Quotient (EQ), five qualities should be practiced by a person who needs to make a successful personality. They are;

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-regulation
3. Inner motivation
4. Empathy
5. Social skills.

Having this knowledge monks also can develop their skills to succeed their ministry.

Some examples given by the Buddha to the monks

The Buddha advises monks to be a moon. Moon is always pleasant, new and far, but appears like near. If monks are like that they can deal with lay people with less problems. Also,

the Worthy One says to monks to be like a new wife who has moral fear, respects others and doesn't condemn others. Further, the Buddha guides monks to be aware of lay people just like peeping to an old well. When someone peeps at an old well, he does it very carefully keeping his body back. Monks also should behave like that, when they associate with lay people. Then monks are able to fulfill their spiritual goals successfully.

The Field of the Disciples' Spiritual Father.

Having good discipline as monks according to what the Buddha taught, practicing the highest doctrine is the main duty. Even though the Blessed One explained many doctrines, finally, we have to practice only one which is mindfulness which consists of all the doctrines that the Buddha explained for 45 years. That's why the Buddha always encouraged his disciples to live in the field of the father which is mindfulness (*gocare bhikkhave caratha Sake pettike visaye*). Practicing mindfulness is the only way for the purification of beings, for destruction of sorrow and lamentation, for the overcoming of pain and grief, for the gaining knowledge, for the attaining enlightenment. For that let's dedicate our maximum effort day and night for our entire life.

If anyone can follow this path, he is an honorable person among deities and men as well. **The order of the blessed one's disciples is practicing well, rightly, correctly, properly. They are worthy of offerings and hospitality, worthy of gifts and salutation and the supreme field of merits for the world.**

As the result of practicing the Buddhist path, we monks are able to make a refuge within us, and are able to develop our inner peace. When monks are content, we are able to enhance our service to the world and pass this valuable message to the next generation too.



May the Triple Gem Bless you!

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