

Fear, insecurity and suspicion will disturb our peace of mind. That is the price we have to pay for clinging to money or property. Buddhism teaches us not to be so unreasonably attached to material things. After all, we cannot take them away with us when we die. If we really want to experience peace, donate to charitable or religious organisations. If we do so, we free our minds from greed. If we want to develop spiritually, we must be prepared to sacrifice our money or property for the welfare of others. By this we mean those suffering from poverty and sickness and other calamities. However, this distaste for owing material wealth must come naturally – from true understanding. As we progress spiritually, ignorance gives way to understanding. Then we will freely give up material possessions. This letting go, brings great happiness, because it is accompanied by the wisdom of seeing things as they really are.

Contentment

Those who have not learnt how to maintain contentment while leading a worldly life never get satisfaction. They develop jealousy, suspicion and fear. They experience worry and insecurity. That is why the Buddha says “contentment is the highest wealth”. Poor people think rich people are very happy and lucky. They do not know the fear and restlessness that disturb the minds of the wealthy. Many wealthy people experience sleeplessness. A poor man does not experience such problems although he has to face other difficulties. The poor and the rich can only be happy if they feel contented and do not crave for the property of others. In this sense at least, we can say that the poor and the rich are equal.

One day, the Buddha had to sleep in a forest without any shelter during the winter. The next morning when He came out from the forest, He met a prince. The prince asked the Buddha where He was coming from. The Buddha said He was coming from the forest where He had spent the night. When the prince asked whether He had slept happily and peacefully, the Enlightened One said He is one who sleeps peacefully and happily not only one night but every night. Why did He

say that? It was because His mind had no worries or disturbances. His mind was always pure. He was free from family problems and property problems. Therefore, He could sleep peacefully. Our minds are not free from problems. That is why we are sometimes not happy and find it difficult to sleep peacefully. Attachments give temporary pleasures, but ultimately, they can disturb our peace of mind.

Buddhism does not prohibit people from having craving and attachment. Emotional attachments to property, people or ideas carry no formal punishment tags. All that Buddhism does is to explain the repercussions that occur when one becomes a slave to craving and attachment. They must be prepared to accept the consequences if they really want to enjoy the worldly life.

Conclusion

Let us remember that Buddhism is not against people having a pleasant life and worthy ambitions during their existence on this earth. The Buddha preached the middle path. He advocates a gentle and rational way of life which neither punishes by deprivation nor panders by excess. Buddhism teaches us to be moderate and thoughtful of our own well-being and the well-being of others. It encourages the gradual and consistent development of the spiritual life which leads to the eradication of craving, the root cause of unsatisfactoriness.

Buddhists are not expected to become saints overnight. Rather they are shown how to gradually gain final release from the pain of continuous rebirth. The way to do this is to practise Morality (*Sila*), Concentration (*Samadhi*) and Wisdom (*Panna*). Even the Fully Enlightened One took innumerable lifetimes to attain his final goal. Buddhism is a practical religion. It should be practised in a gentle and rational way.

Is It Wrong To Be Ambitious?

by

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It is difficult to find human beings who are free from selfish motives. That is the reason why there is conflict and discrimination among human beings. Buddhism teaches us to reduce our cravings. As we are attached to the world, we want to know whether it is wrong to entertain some ambitions. Is it wrong to become successful in a worldly sense?

The ideas that people develop in their minds to become successful doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors, teachers or businessmen are ambitions. Some Buddhists have asked, "If Buddhism advocates renunciation, then should Buddhists turn their backs on material success?" Nobody in this world can say that such ambitions are wrong or contrary to Buddhism.

Renunciation is for the Sangha

The Buddha clearly recognized two classes of people: those who had renounced the world (monks and nuns, known as *Sangha*) and those who chose to follow the life of householders (laypeople). The Buddha spoke of total renunciation for the life of a monk or nun as the only way for a religious life. Renunciation must only be undertaken when realisation appears in the mind. Otherwise, there will be feelings of disappointment or frustration. Those who make a premature renunciation may return to the lay life.

Householders have worldly duties

For householders, there is another way. For instance, during the Buddha's time, many rich people who enjoyed their mundane pleasures approached the Buddha, and told Him that it was difficult for them to renounce the world. They had worldly commitments, family obligations and many other duties to fulfil. So they requested the Buddha to lay down a suitable religious way of life for them to practise. The Buddha did not ridicule them; for He knew that not everyone was ready to give up the worldly life. He gave householders suitable guidelines to lead a religious life while tending to their normal occupations.

Advice to Householders

The first happiness is to enjoy the economic security of wealth acquired by just and righteous means; the second happiness is spending that wealth liberally on oneself, one's family, friends and relatives, and on meritorious deeds; the third happiness is to be free from debts; the fourth happiness is to live a faultless, pure and blameless life committing no evil in thought, word or deed.

According to the Buddha, we can experience worldly happiness by using what we have earned in a reasonable way, following basic religious principles. It is not correct to say that Buddhists should not experience worldly happiness. Harmless amusements and entertainments relax the mind and help reduce tension.

The Nature of Ambition

Every person entertains some kind of ambition. Yet the ambitions that we develop can create disappointment and frustration if they are of a selfish nature.

When we refer to the Buddha, He too had an ambition that was implanted in His mind long ago. He continued to develop that ambition, life after life, until He achieved it. But this ambition is best described as an aspiration. When we read the Buddha's discourses, we can understand how He had worked to reach the goal He aspired to. He has revealed this to us by referring to previous birth stories. He also explained the nature of the great virtues and discipline that He had to cultivate to achieve His aspiration.

When we compare our ambition with the Buddha's aspiration we can see a vast difference. This is because our ambition is primarily based on desire and anxiety bound to worldly pleasure. On the other hand, the Buddha's aspiration was to free Himself from selfishness in order to serve others. Some develop their ambitions by disturbing others' happiness. That is how problems and misery are created in this world. From the Buddhist point of view, this kind of selfish ambition is not justifiable.

What we should constantly strive to do is to develop the higher kind of ambition by working very hard to obtain freedom, happiness and liberation from our existing worldly problems. This ambition is harmless and worthwhile. However, this is not the final goal: we must not be satisfied with these temporary mundane ambitions. Our ultimate goal should be freedom from suffering – *Nirvana*, beyond ambition.

Right Livelihood

Right Livelihood means that we should earn a living without violating these principles of moral conduct. Buddhists are discouraged from being engaged in the following five kinds of livelihood: trading in human beings (e.g. slavery and prostitution), trading in weapons, trading in flesh by causing the slaughter of animals, trading in intoxicating drinks and drugs, and trading in poisons.

Some people may say that they have to follow such an occupation for their living and, therefore, it is not wrong for them to do so. But this argument is entirely baseless. If it were valid, then thieves, murderers, gangsters, thugs, smugglers and swindlers can also just as easily say that they are also doing such unrighteous acts only for their living and, therefore, there is nothing wrong with their way of life.

Some people believe that fishing and hunting animals for pleasure and slaughtering animals for food are not against the Buddhist precepts. This is another misconception that arises owing to a lack of knowledge in Dharma. All these are not decent actions and bring suffering to other beings. But in all these actions, the one who is harmed most of all is the one who commits these unwholesome actions. Maintaining a life through wrong means is not in accordance with the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha once said, 'Though one should live a hundred years immorally and unrestrained, yet it would indeed be better to live one day virtuously and meditatively'. It is better to die as a cultured and respected person than to live as a wicked person.

Rendering Service to Others

While working for our own happiness, freedom and salvation, we have to render some service for the benefit and happiness of others. The Buddha adopted this type of aspiration with deep conviction and boundless compassion. Whilst working for His own salvation, He served others in every possible way. He continued His service to humanity by sacrificing His sensual pleasures, by cultivating all the good qualities and virtues and by eradicating evil thoughts to maintain purity in the mind. This is the way He developed His selfless ambition to gain His enlightenment. He never cultivated it for His own benefit, but for the welfare and liberation of every living being. He developed boundless compassion and wisdom and expressed them by word and deed. But some ambitions can be selfish in nature. Therefore, we have to learn how to direct our ambitions in such a way as to relieve the suffering of others. Such ambitions are wholesome

because they contribute to the greater good of mankind.

Can we live without Craving?

Many people are bothered by this question: if eradication of craving is essential to achieve final liberation, how can we live without craving? It is true that certain necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, transport and medicine are indispensable for our living. At the same time, we have to have income to support our families to fulfil our duties. Attachment to one's family is natural. We should not regard such attachment as irreligious craving. The Buddha did say that craving for existence creates problems, but He did not say that we must torture ourselves and those around us whilst striving to give up craving. In Buddhism, craving itself is not a 'sin' but it creates mental impurities or unskilful action arising from ignorance which delays our spiritual progress.

In Buddhism, we develop spirituality in stages. At first we serve those we love in our own family circles. But we must learn to work for the benefit of all humanity. In this way we can refine our human nature to experience the divine nature. The Buddha wanted only to point out the danger of selfish desires. People develop these selfish desires for worldly gain which motivate wrong actions. Our striving for necessities could be decent if we do not develop an undue craving which harms others.

Eradicating Craving

If selfish desire is harmful, how can we eradicate it? When we become aware of our craving, we should take steps to train our mind to regard our possessions as impermanent and as a means to fulfil our duties. For example, if we have a large amount of money, we should take it as an opportunity to help our fellow beings. Those who do not have money can give their moral support and co-operation for the welfare of others. At this stage, we have to think that we are only custodians of the property which we claim as ours.