



Recipe for Success in Personal Development

GB 102 E



RECIPE FOR SUCCESS IN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

GB 102E

Translated by Dr. Anunya Methmanus

March, B.E. 2553

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INTRODUCTION

The course ‘Recipe for Success in Personal Development’ (GB102E) teaches the student to undertake personal development by using the principles outlined in ‘Life’s 38 Blessings’. The materials for this course have been garnered from the Mangala Sutta in the Tripitaka and other relevant literature which has been used in the Path of Progress Quiz. The quiz has now been held all over Thailand for more than 20 years.

Although this course material has been reviewed many times, the committee believes that it may still contain mistakes and it hopes that it will receive feedback from the student so that the course material can be improved further.

The Committee

January, B.E. 2552

COURSE SYLLABUS

1. Description of the Course Material

GB 102E Recipe for Success in Personal Development

This course deals with personal development and is based on the principles of Life's 38 Blessings at both the theoretical and practical levels. These Blessings are divided into groups and presented in a chronological order from the mundane to the supra-mundane and all the way to the attainment of Nibbana.

2. Course Objectives

1. To enable the student to learn about the principles of Life's 38 Blessings at both the theoretical and practical levels which lead to personal development in both the secular world and the Dhamma world.
2. To enable the student to correctly apply the principles of Life's 38 Blessings to his/her daily life.
3. To enable the student not only to undertake personal development but also to perform the work of a virtuous friend.

3. Topics Covered in the Course

Chapter 1 : Recipe for Success in Personal Development Based on the Principles Outlined in Life's 38 Blessings.

Chapter 2 : The First Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Getting Started

Chapter 3 : The Second Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Getting Ready for Further Training

Chapter 4 : The Third Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Becoming a Useful Person

Chapter 5 : The Fourth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Making Our Self Useful to Our Family

Chapter 6 : The Fifth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Making Our Self Useful to Society

Chapter 7 : The Sixth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Being Mentally Prepared

Chapter 8 : The Seventh Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Cultivating Basic Virtues

Chapter 9 : The Eighth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Cultivating Higher Virtues.

Chapter 10: The Ninth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: The Practices Which Lead to the Eradication of All Defilements.

Chapter 11: The Tenth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: The Fruits of Defilements Eradication

Chapter 12: The Main Points of Recipe for Success in Personal Development

METHOD OF STUDY

1. Self-Study

The steps for studying each chapter are as follows:

- 1.1 Spend an hour each day on the course material, and finish each chapter within one to two weeks.
- 1.2 Begin each chapter with a pre-test to assess the student's prior knowledge of the material covered in the chapter. Complete the exercises provided for the chapter. After completing each chapter, the student should assess his/her comprehension of the material covered by completing the test at the end of the chapter.
- 1.3 Use other learning aids especially the broadcasted programs as detailed in 5).

2. Self-Evaluation before and after the Lesson

The student should complete the pre-test before beginning each chapter in order to assess his/her prior knowledge of the subject. The student can then pay special attention to what he/she has no knowledge of. The student should also complete the test at the end of each chapter. The student will then know how well he/she has learnt the material covered in the chapter and whether he/she is ready to proceed to the next chapter. A satisfactory grade is when the student can score correctly about 80% of the test. Self-evaluation will only be effective if it is carried out honestly.

3. The Text

The student should begin each chapter by first going over the layout of the chapter in terms of its topics, concepts, and objectives before proceeding with the detailed study.

After having finished reading the details of each topic, the student should write down its main points and complete the exercises and the test provided for the chapter. This way the student will know how well he/she understands the material covered and how he/she can apply what he/she has learnt to his/her daily life.

4. The Exercises

The exercises are part of the overall evaluation. Therefore, complete all the exercises provided in each chapter according to the given time table. The student should not wait until the last minute to do the exercises all at once because such practice is missing the point. Moreover, the student will not be able to deliver his/her completed exercises on time and will be penalized as a result. The penalty may cause the student to fail the course altogether. The student should only look up the answer at the end of the chapter after having completed each exercise.

5. Long-Distance Learning via Satellite and other Media

The Foundation for the Study of the Dhamma for the Environment broadcasts its programs via satellite to present information which promotes morality in both the theoretical part and the practical part. One noteworthy program is called 'The Inner Dreams Kindergarten'. This special program teaches the truth about life and the world. It also teaches the Law of Kamma using real life stories in the format of case studies. Additional learning can be obtained through E-learning, and its home page is <http://www.dou.us>

6. Attending the Inner Dreams Kindergarten Program

This is one of the programs which are broadcasted live via satellite Monday to Saturday from 19:00 to 21:30 (Thai time). Reruns of the program are listed in the program schedule which can be obtained from DOU's coordination center.

7. Final Exam

Exams consist of short essays and multiple choice questions. Although exams are an important part in evaluating the student's comprehension of the course material, it is more important that the student learns to search for in-depth information of the relevant subject matters he/she may be interested in and apply what he/she has learnt to his/her daily life.

CHAPTER 1

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS IN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES OUTLINED IN LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 1

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS IN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES OUTLINED IN LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS

1.1 Personal Development as Outlined in Life's 38 Blessings

1.2 The Meaning of Life's 38 Blessings

1.3 The Importance of Life's 38 Blessings

1.4 The Origin of Life's 38 Blessings

1.5 The Overall Picture of Personal Development as Outlined in Life's 38 Blessings

The First Group of Life's 38 Blessings : Getting Started

The Second Group of Life's 38 Blessings : Getting Ready for Further Training

The Third Group of Life's 38 Blessings : Becoming a Useful Person

The Fourth Group of Life's 38 Blessings : Making our Self Useful to our Family

The Fifth Group of Life's 38 Blessings : Making our Self Useful to Society

The Sixth Group of Life's 38 Blessings : Being Mentally Prepared

The Seventh Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Cultivating Basic Virtues

The Eighth Group of Life's 38 Blessings : Cultivating Higher Virtues

The Ninth Group of Life's 38 Blessings : The Practices which Lead to the Eradication of All Defilements

The Tenth Group of Life's 38 Blessings : The Fruits of Defilements Eradication

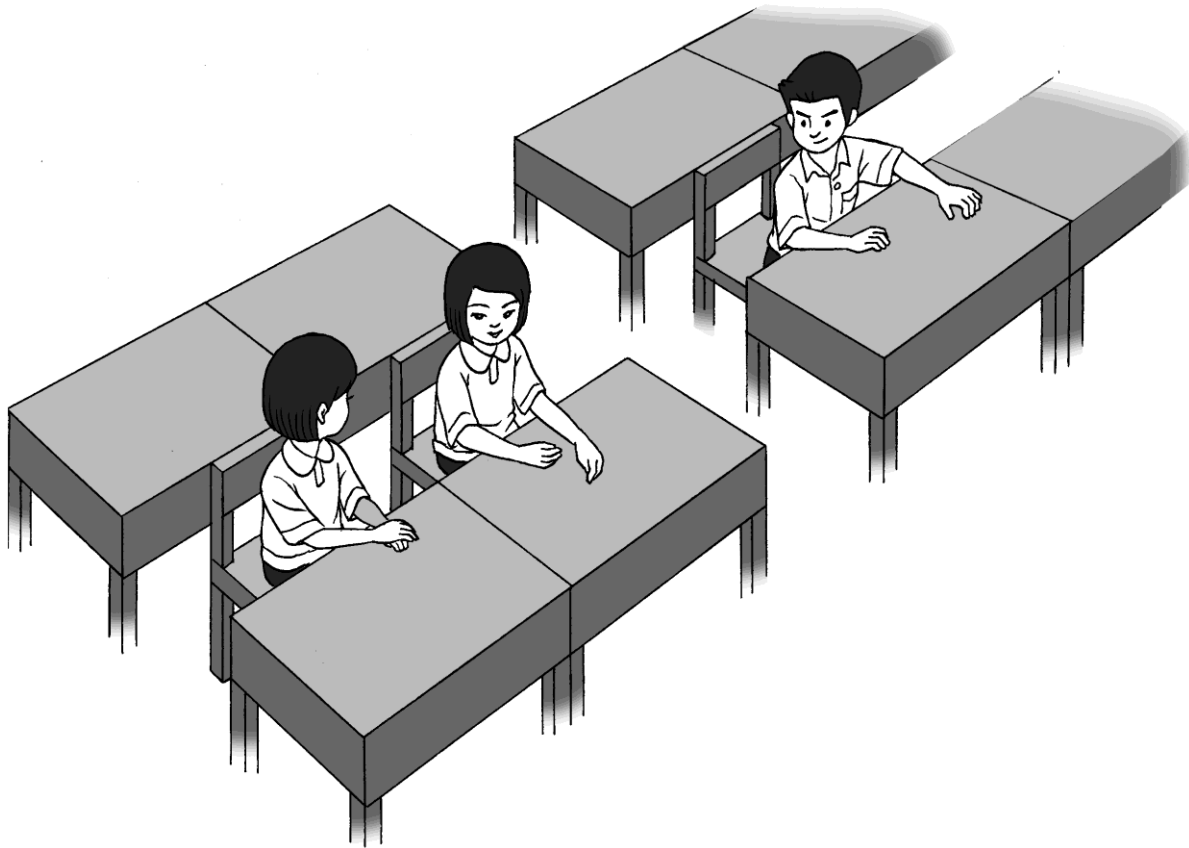
CONCEPTS

1. Life's Blessings mean the source of happiness and prosperity in life. The Lord Buddha has taught them to us and they consist of 38 parts.
2. Practicing Life's 38 Blessings keeps us away from the causes of ruin and enables us to perform good deeds through our body, our word, and our thought at the basic, intermediate, and high levels. Such practices bring about awareness and insight which in turn bring about the end of life's obstacles and all forms of unwholesomeness. The practices also bring about personal growth and prosperity in this and future existences until Nibbana can be attained.
3. Life's 38 Blessings are interrelated and can be divided into 10 different groups. The first five groups deal with the building of our life which takes place on a daily basis. The latter five groups deal with the training of our mind for the purpose of attaining our ultimate goal.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of Life's 38 Blessings.
2. To enable the student to understand and correctly describe the principles outlined in Life's 38 Blessings.
3. To enable the student to correctly explain the origin of Life's 38 Blessings
4. To enable the student to describe all 38 blessings and their division into ten different groups.
5. To enable the student to correctly describe how the 38 blessings are interrelated.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS IN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT BASED ON THE PRINCIPLES OUTLINED IN LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS



1.1 Personal Development as Outlined in Life's 38 Blessings

Every one of us wishes to meet with success and happiness in both our personal life and work life. Therefore, we endeavor to undertake training so that we can keep on growing in our work life. Both the private organizations and the government offer a variety of courses specifically to meet the needs of different people at different stages. Some courses are better and more effective than others but all of them are geared toward helping the attendees to better and more easily meet with the material success that they are seeking in life.

The Lord Buddha has a deep and genuine understanding of humanity and knows that every human being seeks happiness and success in life. As a result, He has formulated the recipe for success in personal development which works for both the secular world and the Dhamma world. This recipe for success is so far reaching that it works for this and future existences, and all the

way to the time when Nibbana can be attained. This recipe for success is called Life's 38 Blessings and no other recipes for success in the world can ever be compared to it. The reason is that whoever practices Life's 38 Blessings will meet with success regardless of his age, gender, religious persuasion or race. This recipe for success has been proven true and effective for over 2,600 years. Moreover, it is what every human being must know in order to achieve genuine growth.

1.2 The Meaning of Life's 38 Blessings

What is a blessing (or Mangala)?

The sages of old defined blessing as the path of progress, happiness, and prosperity.

The Thai dictionary defines blessing as the source of prosperity.

Therefore, '**Life's Blessings**' mean the source of happiness and prosperity in life and they consist of 38 parts.

1.3 The Importance of Life's 38 Blessings

The path of progress in this case can be divided into three levels as follows.

1. Progress in this existence: This includes for examples being a good student, making a good living, earning a lot of money, having a good reputation, having a good family, etc.
2. Progress in future existences: Having accumulated lots of merit in this existence, at the time of death, one will be reborn in the Celestial Realm.
3. The attainment of Nibbana: This is the ultimate progress.

The practice of Life's 38 Blessings brings about growth at all three levels because the practice not only enables us to avoid all causes of ruin but also enables us to do wholesome deeds with our body, word, and thought at the basic, intermediate, and ultimate levels. In addition, the practice gives rise to awareness and insight. Therefore, the practice of Life's 38 Blessings brings about growth in this and future existences up until Nibbana can be attained. Moreover, Life's 38 Blessings are: 1) easy to understand because it has been arranged in such a way as to foster ready understanding; and 2) easy to practice because it has been arranged accordingly in the order of increasing difficulty like a staircase which leads us gradually upward from the first to the 38th step.

Why Must We Learn about Life's 38 Blessings?

As a human being, it is not enough for us to be well-educated and have the ability to make a good living because such accomplishments alone cannot guarantee true and lasting happiness. Having a good standard of living merely affords us physical ease and comfort but does not fulfill the needs of our mind.

Human beings are made up of two main parts which include the body and the mind. It is a fact that the human body requires sustenance in order to develop and grow. It is also a fact that the human mind requires the Dhamma in order to develop and grow. Since the human mind is

dominated from birth by defilements in the forms of greed, anger, and ignorance, only the Dhamma can counteract the powerful influence of our inherent defilements. Based on the fact that we are made up of body and mind, it means that we need both secular and Dhamma education in order to meet with genuine and lasting happiness and success. It is for this reason that we must learn about Life's 38 Blessings and practice them in our daily life.

1.4 The Origin of Life's 38 Blessings

About 26 centuries ago, people were actively searching for answers to such spiritual questions as where do people come from, where do we go after we die, what can we do in order to be happy, what will help us to meet with success in life, etc. The spiritual debates were sometimes carried out in the park, near the city gate or at the town square.

Different people had different views and all tried to solicit their personal views. Lively debates had continued for a long time until eventually someone came up with the idea of confining the debates to the subject of, "What are life's blessings?"

One debater by the name of '**Ditthamangalika**' offered his opinion by saying, "The physical forms we see around us are life's blessings. When we wake up in the morning and see flocks of birds flying in the air, the sun rising in the east, the green trees, cute babies, these are all life's blessings."

Another debater by the name of '**Sutamangalika**' was ready to contradict the first debater by saying, "Not so fast. If what we can see with our eyes are life's blessings, then would not the repulsive sight of feces, urine, or a very sick person be considered life's blessings as well?" Sutamangalika continued, "It's not what we see which constitute life's blessings but rather it's what we hear such as bird songs, music, laughter, etc. It's what we hear that gives rise to life's blessings."

Another debater by the name of '**Mutamangalika**' spoke up, "That's not really true because the sound of people arguing with each other, threatening each other or the sound of harsh words can hardly be considered life's blessings."

Mutamangalika continued, "Life's blessings are whatever affects us emotionally such as sweet smelling flowers, clean clothes, and delicious food."

Another debater spoke up, "That can't be the case because foul smells, dirty things, ugly thoughts can affect us emotionally and these things can hardly be considered life's blessings."

This topic of debate became so widespread that the subject was broached in the home, in the meeting hall, in the club, among travelers, etc.

Finally, even celestial beings are talking about it starting from the earth sprites, the air sylphs, all the way to the Celestial Beings and Brahma Beings. Still, no one can settle the debate by coming up with a universally acceptable description of life's blessings.

However, there was a special group of Brahma Beings who dwell in the Brahma Realms of Suddhavas. These were formerly human beings who have attained the Anagami Dhammakaya (The Non-Returners). They knew something about life's blessings but not in their entirety. All they could do was to make it known to other Celestial Beings that 12 years hence, the Lord Buddha would happen on earth and He would settle the question for everyone once and for all.

After our great Bodhisatta became self-enlightened as the Lord Buddha, one day while He was staying at the Jetavana Temple near the city of Savatthi, King Sakka of the Tavatimsa Realm along with a host of Celestial Beings came to have an audience with the Lord Buddha. One gentleman Celestial Being took the opportunity to ask the Lord Buddha about what life's blessings were.

It was then that the Lord Buddha taught about Life's 38 Blessings. According to our Lord Buddha, life's blessings have nothing to do with any material thing but they have to do with the principles involved in personal development.

Although the Lord Buddha's teaching on the subject was perfect and could not be undermined by anyone, it did not mean that all the cult leaders of the time were willing to abandon their wrong views. These cult leaders harbored arrogance and stubbornness and they continued to propagate their wrong beliefs. As a result, two main teachings about life's blessings have survived until the present days and they include:

- 1. Life's blessings according to the thinkers: Life's blessings which result from having things;** these things may vary from one time period to another.
- 2. Life's blessings according to the Lord Buddha: Life's blessings which result from doing things;** that is, from doing things for the purpose of personal development. The principles laid out in Life's 38 Blessings are the truth, hence, they never change. Moreover, whoever practices according to these principles will most certainly meet with success and prosperity. **The Lord Buddha invites everyone to come and prove His Teachings for himself: Ehipassiko.**

1.5 The Overall Picture of Personal Development as Outlined in Life's 38 Blessings

Life's 38 Blessings can be depicted as a set of stair which goes from the first to the 38th step in the order of increasing difficulty. They can be divided into ten groups. The first five groups deal with the practices which involve personal development in a day to day situation and they work for everyone regardless of race, language, and creed. These first 18 blessings have to do with the way we behave and live our life in order to meet with growth at a personal level in the secular world and Dhamma world. They also apply to the development and improvement of private organizations, society, politics, and government. The latter five groups deal directly with the training of our mind for the ultimate purpose of defilements eradication and the attainment of Nibbana.

The First Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Getting Started

Blessing No. 1: Not Associating with Fools

Blessing No. 2: Associating with the Wise

Blessing No. 3: Revering Those Who Are Worthy of Our Reverence

The first order of personal development is to form good habits. Our habits are formed by our environment which includes the people around us; therefore, it behooves us to pick our environment carefully by:

1. Not associating with fools so that we do not become like them and put our self in harm's way;
2. Associating with the wise in order that we can emulate their good habits and virtues;
3. Revering those who are worthy of our reverence so that our good habits can continue to improve further. People who are worthy of our reverence can also serve as our role models.

The Second Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Getting Ready for Further Training

Blessing No. 4: Living in a Suitable Environment

Blessing No. 5: Possessing Past Merit

Blessing No. 6: Having the Correct Life Objective

Once we have already formed good habits, the next step requires us to get ready for further training. It may be said that all things being equal, the varying levels of success achieved by different people come as a result of the differences in their personal development.

In Order for Us to Get Ready for Further Training:

1. **We must live in a suitable environment** in that our environment should foster our personal development. Great trees like the Bodhi tree or banyan tree become dwarfed when planted in a pot but in fertile ground they can grow to be gigantic trees.

If we live in a poor environment, it is difficult for us to accomplish good things. On the contrary, a good environment can foster our growth and development. If the people around us are decent and virtuous, it is much easier for us to learn good things from them. When our home is clean and comfortable and there is plenty of good food for us to eat, such an environment is conducive to our growth and development.

2. **We must possess past merit** in that we must have already accumulated lots of merit in our previous existence(s), for it is our past merit which allows us to have a healthy body, a high intelligence, a quick wit, a joyful and cheerful disposition, etc. It is our human endowments that enable us to meet with success in school and later on at work and in life.

Having possessed past merit, it is also more likely that we can continue to accumulate merit regularly in this existence by giving alms, keeping the Precepts, and practicing meditation. The merit accumulated in this existence will go to work with the merit we had accumulated in our previous existence(s) to further bless our life with every good thing. However, if we are heedless and neglect to accumulate new merit in this existence, we may well be inviting failures and disappointments into our life. Therefore, whatever level of past merit we may possess; it behooves us to continue to earnestly accumulate new merit in this existence.

- 3. We must have the correct life objective** in that we must choose to engage in right livelihood. It is also important that we enthusiastically and constantly look to develop our skills to the best of our ability so that we can be a success in whatever field we choose to work.

The Third Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Becoming a Useful Person

Blessing No. 7: Being Scholarly

Blessing No. 8: Being Creative

Blessing No. 9: Being Disciplined

Blessing No. 10: Practicing Cultured Speech

The next step in personal development has to do with being a useful person. Human beings are different from animals in that we can make our self useful to our self and others in society.

To Be a Useful Person We Must Possess the Following Attributes:

1. We must not be ignorant but must seek to educate our self so as to possess breadth as well as depth of knowledge.
2. Besides head knowledge, we must also be able to apply what we know to our work.
3. We must not be temperamental and insist on having our way all the time. We must cultivate self-discipline and show respect for rules and regulations.
4. We must not have a quick or vicious tongue. No matter how talented we may be, without the ability to choose our words carefully, we are of no use to our self and others.

These first three groups of Life's 38 Blessings prepare us to make our self useful to the people around us as illustrated in the next two groups of Life's 38 Blessings.

The Fourth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Making Our Self Useful to Our Family

Blessing No. 11: Supporting Our Parents

Blessing No. 12: Raising Our Children

Blessing No. 13: Supporting Our Spouse

Blessing No. 14: Not Being a Procrastinator

Having made our self useful, it is now time to make our self useful to our family by:

1. **Supporting our parents** in that we make sure that they are comfortable and well cared for as they get older.
2. **Raising our children** in that we raise them to be a decent and contributing member of society.
3. **Supporting our spouse** in that we treat our spouse with consideration and respect; we do not stray; we create a home life that is warm and loving.
4. **Not being a procrastinator** in that we perform our work with due diligence and finish every project on time.

Practicing these four Blessings will bring stability and happiness to our family.

The Fifth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Making Our Self Useful to Society

Blessing No. 15:	Practicing Generosity
Blessing No. 16:	Cultivating Human Decency
Blessing No. 17:	Supporting Our Relatives
Blessing No. 18:	Engaging in Harmless Work

Besides creating a warm and loving home for our family, every one of us has the obligation to make our self useful to society at large by:

1. **Practicing Generosity** in that we know to share what we have with others who deserve our help in times of need. In addition, practicing generosity enables us to scrub our mind clean of miserliness. Moreover, it is one way that we can accumulate merit and in the process play a part in bettering our society.
2. **Cultivating Human Decency** by following the Tenfold Wholesome Course of Action.
3. **Supporting Our Relatives.** Our relatives in this case include first of all those related to us by blood, then those related to us by race and nationality, and ultimately those related to us as citizens of the world. Therefore, when we support our relatives, we are in a sense enabling everyone to live together in peace and harmony.
4. **Engaging in Harmless Work** in that we earn right livelihood and take part in altruistic efforts which benefit the general public.

When we talk about cultivating human decency, we mean **the practice of the Tenfold Wholesome Course of Action** such as no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lying, etc. The Tenfold Wholesome Course of Action prevents us from doing the unthinkable when we are faced with disgust, rage, bribery, or sexual lust in the course of our work life.

The latter five groups of Life's 38 Blessings deal specifically with the training of our mind for the purpose of eradicating our inherent defilements and attaining Arahatsip.

The Sixth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Being Mentally Prepared

Blessing No. 19: Abstaining from Unwholesomeness

Blessing No. 20: Abstaining from Alcohol

Blessing No. 21: Cultivating Heedfulness

The next step of personal development is to become mentally prepared for elevated training by:

- 1. Abstaining from Unwholesomeness:** As long as we still perform unwholesome deeds, our mind continues to be dominated by our inherent defilements. When our mind loses its good quality as a result of demerit it is incapable of elevated training. Therefore, it is very important that we abstain completely from unwholesomeness.
- 2. Abstaining from Alcohol:** Alcohol and other addictive substances cause us to lose awareness and a mind lacking in awareness cannot be trained. A drunk is incapable of comprehending Dhamma teachings.
- 3. Cultivating Heedfulness:** A heedless person is someone who takes his/her time on earth for granted. A heedless person thinks that he/she is still young and strong; therefore, he/she believes that he/she has plenty of time left on earth and can afford to wait where performing good deeds or cultivating virtues is concerned when in fact we can never be certain about anything since we have no idea when death will come to us. For the very reason that death can come to us at any time, we cannot afford to be heedless. On the contrary, we need to undertake self development and accumulate as much merit as possible while we still can.

The Seventh Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Cultivating Basic Virtues

Blessing No. 22: Being Respectful

Blessing No. 23: Being Humble

Blessing No. 24: Being Content

Blessing No. 25: Being Grateful

Blessing No. 26: Listening to Dhamma Teachings

Having prepared our self mentally according to the sixth group of Life's 38 Blessings, we are now ready to cultivate basic virtues.

- 1. We must learn to be respectful** in that we appreciate others for their virtues. We learn to approach virtuous individuals respectfully in order to learn from them. Some people are disrespectful because they cannot appreciate other people's virtues; therefore, they do not know to learn from virtuous people.
- 2. We must practice humility** in that we must make sure not to be arrogant or boastful. We know to appreciate our self for who and what we are. We are ready to learn from wise and virtuous people. Arrogant people are too busy thinking too highly of themselves to be able to learn from other people.

3. We must learn to be content in that we practice moderation to such an extent that our mind is tranquil. A tranquil mind is amenable to elevated training.

A discontented person tends to feel anxious and restless. The more he has, the more he wants. Such a person is far too dominated by his wants to be able to comprehend Dhamma teachings.

4. We must know to be grateful to whoever has helped us in any way by finding ways to repay them. A grateful person naturally endears himself to others.

When we are respectful, humble, content, and grateful, we are bound to be treated with kindness by wise and virtuous people and they will be more than willing to pass on their knowledge and wisdom to us.

5. Listening to Dhamma teachings on occasions. Dhamma teachings can be employed as a mirror to reflect our own virtues at any point and time and see what improvement still needs to be made.

The Eighth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Cultivating Higher Virtues

Blessing No. 27: Cultivating Patience

Blessing No. 28: Being Willing to Learn from Others

Blessing No. 29: Valuing Righteous Monks

Blessing No. 30: Conversing about the Dhamma

We can cultivate higher virtues by:

1. Cultivating Patience in that we learn to endure such conditions as the glare of the sun, the rain, the heat, the cold, as well as personal discomfort such as aches and pain, hurt feelings, temptations, etc. We must learn to endure everything for the sake of cultivating higher virtues.

2. Being Willing to Learn from Others in that whenever someone is trying to teach us something even when he/she appears to be nagging or using harsh words, we do not show our annoyance but listen carefully to what he/she has to teach.

3. Valuing Righteous Monks: Certain Dhamma topics are difficult to explain but can be readily exemplified by the conduct of righteous monks. For example, when the venerable monk teaches that Precepts can bring about happiness some people may have a difficult time understanding this concept until they can see for themselves how the monks, who practice according to the Dhamma-Discipline, are the very picture of happiness and joy.

4. Conversing about the Dhamma on Occasions in that one seeks to learn the Dhamma from righteous monks by conversing about the Dhamma with them whenever possible.

Blessings numbers 27, 28, 29 are cultivated in order that we can be prepared to learn the Dhamma from righteous monks.

The Ninth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: The Practices Which Lead to the Eradication of All Defilements

Blessing No. 31:	Practicing Religious Austerity
Blessing No. 32:	Practicing Chastity
Blessing No. 33:	Penetrating the Four Noble Truths
Blessing No. 34:	Penetrating the Path of Nibbana

The earnest practice of this group of blessings is for the purpose of achieving the ultimate level in personal development which is the eradication of all defilements.

- 1. Practicing Religious Austerity:** We endeavor to extinguish all our inherent defilements by practicing the prescribed forms of religious austerity.
- 2. Practicing Chastity:** Once we have practiced religious austerity until our defilements are seriously weakened, we must hasten to practice chastity and rise beyond sense-desire so as to further weaken our defilements before they have the chance to rear their ugly heads again.
- 3. Penetrating the Four Noble Truths:** We must diligently and earnestly practice meditation until we can attain the Dhammakaya and employ the Dhammakaya-Eye to penetrate the truth about our reality through the Four Noble Truths.
- 4. Penetrating the Path of Nibbana:** Once we have penetrated the Four Noble Truths, we must continue to practice meditation and keep our mind at a standstill until the different layers of defilements are peeled off and Arahantship is attained.

The Tenth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: The Fruits of Defilements Eradication

Blessing No. 35:	Being Unperturbed by Life's Vicissitudes
Blessing No. 36:	Being Distant from Sorrow
Blessing No. 37:	Being Distant from Subtle Defilements
Blessing No. 38:	Being Blissful

After we have taken a shower, we can say that our body is no longer dirty, no longer sticky but is clean and fresh. In the same manner when we have undertaken personal development to the point where all defilements can be removed from our mind, we can say that our mind is:

- 1. Unperturbed by Life's Vicissitudes:** Our mind is as steadfast and stable as a mountain in that we are unperturbed by gain, position, praise, happiness as well as their counterparts.
- 2. Distant from Sorrow:** Our mind is removed from all forms of attachment. It is constantly overflowing with joy, clarity, and brightness. It is no longer gloomy or sad.
- 3. Distant from Subtle Defilements:** Our mind is freed from every form of defilements in the same way that water rolls off the lotus leaf.

4. **Blissful** because it is safe and out of harm's way. Its round of rebirth is finished. It is completely free, clean, radiant, bright, pure, and ready to attain Nibbana after the manner of the Lord Buddha and all the Arahats.

CHAPTER 2

THE FIRST GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: GETTING STARTED

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 2

THE FIRST GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: GETTING STARTED

2.1 The First Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Getting Started

2.2 Blessing No. 1: Not Associating with Fools

2.3 Blessing No. 2: Associating with the Wise

2.4 Blessing No. 3: Revering Those Who Are Worthy of Our Reverence

CONCEPTS

1. Getting started begins with a suitable environment for the very reason that we learn from those around us. Therefore, it is important that we stay away from fools. At the same time, we must associate with wise people and know to revere those who are worthy of our reverence.
2. A fool is a person whose mind is routinely gloomy. Such a condition causes a fool to have wrong views, wrong values, and wrong judgment. A fool cannot differentiate between what is good and what is bad, what should be done and what should not be done. Therefore, not associating with fools ensures that we do not fall under their negative and destructive influence.
3. A wise person is a person whose mind is routinely clear and bright. Such a condition causes a wise person to have right views and right values. A wise person can differentiate between what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong, what is merit and what is demerit. A wise person lives his life by his wisdom. Therefore, associating with the wise allows us to emulate their good example and virtue.
4. Revering those who are worthy of our reverence means that we venerate, admire, and hold in high esteem someone who serves as a role model for us such as the Lord Buddha and righteous monks.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the importance of the first group of Life's 38 Blessings: Getting started.
2. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning and characteristics of a fool, and the harm wrought by a fool.
3. To enable the student to tell if someone is a fool and explain the harm wrought by associating with a fool.
4. To enable the student to know the different types of fools as well as the fruits of not associating with fools.
5. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of a wise person, and a wise person's characteristics and virtues.
6. To enable the student to tell if someone is a wise person and correctly describe the different types of wise people as well as the results of associating with the wise.
7. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of reverence and give details about the different types of individuals who are worthy of our reverence.
8. To enable the student to correctly describe the different ways of showing reverence and the fruits of revering those who are worthy of our reverence.

THE FIRST GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: GETTING STARTED

2.1 The First Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Getting Started

Blessing No. 1: Not Associating with Fools

Blessing No. 2: Associating with the Wise

Blessing No. 3: Revering Those Who Are Worthy of Our Reverence

This first group of recipe for success in personal development is called getting started. It can be compared to the first step of the stair which will lead us ultimately to success and growth in both the secular world and the Dhamma world.

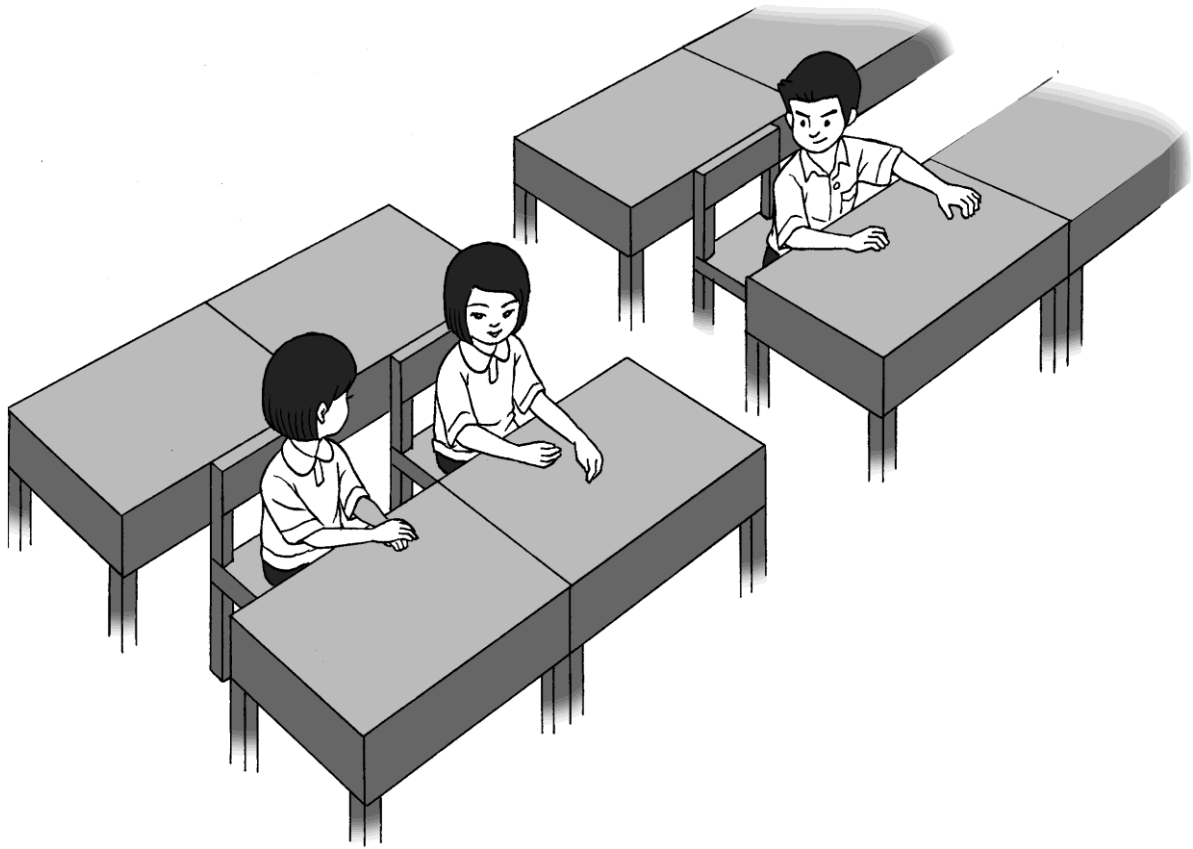
The first step in getting started helps us to avoid the causes of ruin by not associating with fools. The second and third steps of getting started help us to develop right view and good judgment by associating with wise people and revering those who are worthy of our reverence.

These steps help us to differentiate between what is good and what is bad; what is right and what is wrong; what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. We can choose to think, say, and do only what is wholesome. When we repeatedly think, say, and do only what is wholesome, we are essentially forming a good habit. And the people that we associate with as well as the people that we venerate play an important role in helping us form good habits.

Getting started in personal development requires us to do the following:

- 1. Not Associating with Fools:** We must make sure to stay away from fools so that they cannot cause us any harm; neither can we be negatively influenced by them.
- 2. Associating with the Wise:** When we are around wise people constantly, we cannot help but emulate them in such a way that their virtue becomes our virtue.
- 3. Revering Those Who Are Worthy of Our Reverence:** When we understand how highly virtuous individuals deserve our reverence and how they can serve as our role models, we are already learning to form right view, increase our awareness and self-possession in such a way that we can proceed to the next level of personal development.

2.2 Blessing No. 1: Not Associating with Fools



2.2.1 What Is a Fool?

A fool is a person whose mind is routinely gloomy. Such a condition causes a fool to have wrong view, wrong values, and wrong judgment. A fool cannot differentiate between what is good and what is bad, what should be done and what should not be done. For example, wise people know that alcohol is bad because it causes the drinker to lose awareness. They know that the loss of awareness in turn brings about all kinds of ruin. Fools, however, believe that alcohol drinking is the means to strengthen friendship and make new friends. Wise people believe that playing cards for money is a cause of ruin while fools believe it to be a useful activity because it stimulates the brain.

A fool looks just like an ordinary person very much like the rest of us. In fact, a fool may be our sibling, relative, spouse, teacher, etc. A fool may be highly educated, assume a high position, surrounded by a huge retinue, etc. Regardless of who a fool may be, it can be said that a fool is incapable of employing his/her talents and abilities for a good cause.

2.2.2 Characteristics of a Fool

A fool cannot help but display the following three characteristics:

1. **A fool routinely thinks bad thoughts:** covetousness, thoughts of revenge, wrong view.
2. **A fool routinely says bad words:** Lies, offensive language, words that cause division, nonsensical speech.
3. **A fool routinely does bad things:** bullying, killing, stealing, and other indecent deeds.

2.2.3 The Harm Wrought by Being a Fool

1. A fool has wrong view and causes his own pain and suffering.
2. A fool suffers the loss of reputation.
3. A fool suffers the loss of respectability.
4. A fool suffers the loss of dignity.
5. A fool is visited upon by all forms of wickedness and harm.
6. A fool destroys any chance of happiness in this and future existences.
7. A fool destroys the reputation of his family.
8. A fool is destined for the State of Loss and Woe after he dies.

Etc.

2.2.4 How Can We Tell If Someone Is a Fool?

We can tell if someone is a fool through his/her action:

1. **A fool has a penchant for leading others down the wrong path.** A fool does this through persuasion and through his/her example. A fool may persuade others to play hooky, to steal, to try an addictive substance, to become a gang member, etc. A fool may treat his/her friends to alcohol, the nightlife, etc.

Children and very young people, who have not yet had enough life experience, can be easily led down the wrong path. Therefore, it is important that the adults around them watch carefully their own word and action as well as those of visitors to the house in order to make sure that the children are not exposed to bad examples.

2. **A fool has a penchant for doing what is not his/her business.** He/she interferes with and interrupts other people's work by for examples finding faults with co-workers, sending anonymous letters, creating disturbances, making trouble, etc.
3. **A fool has a penchant for vices.** A fool mistakes bad things for good things. A fool enjoys gambling. A fool smokes, plays hooky, argues with his/her parents, etc. A fool thinks of a doer of good deeds as a stupid person. A fool thinks of a person fearful of wickedness as being a coward.

4. **A fool is easily angered.** A fool becomes angry when reminded to study before an exam. A fool becomes angry when told to get up early. Sometimes, a fool becomes angry just because someone looks at him/her.
5. **A fool refuses to accept rules and regulations.** A fool refuses to cross the street at the pedestrian crossing. A fool thinks nothing of littering, being late for school, being late for work, etc.

2.2.5 What Is Meant by Associating?

When we associate with someone, it means that

- We **spend time with** the person such as sharing meals with him, sharing the same sleeping quarters, co-organizing an event, co-investing in a venture.
- We **accept** the person as our friend, our spouse, our co-worker.
- We **offer** the person trust, admiration, title, position, belongings.

Now that we know what it means to associate with someone, we must make sure that we do not associate with fools. And if we have already made the mistake of associating with a fool, then it is time that we stay away from him/her before we emulate his/her wicked ways.

There is an old saying,

“Keep a distance of half a meter from a dog;
Keep a distance of two meters from a monkey;
Keep a distance of 1,600,000 kilometers from a fool.”

2.2.6 The Harm Wrought by Associating with Fools

When we associate with a fool, we potentially allow the person

1. To lead us down the wrong path
2. To cause us to meet with failure and ruin
3. To cause us to be regarded with distrust by others
4. To cause us to feel uncomfortable because of the person’s wicked ways
5. To cause disharmony and division in our life
6. To cause us to be in harm’s way
7. To cause us to be destined for the State of Loss of Woe

Etc.

2.2.7 Types of Wickedness

There are two types of wickedness:

1. **External Wickedness:** This includes fools in general. This type of wickedness can be avoided; hence, it is not as harmful as the second type of wickedness.
2. **Internal Wickedness:** It arises out of our own bad thought, bad word, and bad action which result in unwholesomeness. It is very important that we make every effort to uproot all internal wickedness.

2.2.8 Guidelines for Daily Living

1. We should strive to eliminate all forms of unwholesomeness however slight it may be. For example, we must not allow our self to get up late or forego evening chanting and meditation practice at bedtime.
2. We should not keep going over the mistakes which were made in the past by us or anyone else. We should forget past mistakes and be determined to do only good deeds from now on.
3. We should accumulate merit by giving alms, observing the Precepts, and practicing meditation on a regular basis.
4. We should avoid any contact with fools. We refuse to listen to, read or talk about them. We should listen to, read or talk about wholesomeness instead by reading Dhamma books, listening to Dhamma teachings, talking about virtuous people who perform admirable and wholesome deeds.
5. If situation necessitates us to have to be around fools because they happen to be our co-workers, our relatives, our siblings, etc., we should be aware of the danger we are in and we must be vigilant at all times. Fools and their wicked ways are contagious and we must exercise care when we have to be around them. We have to counteract the situation by accumulating merit regularly and keeping our mind clear and bright all the time. We must realize the fact that our most important responsibility is to quell our own wickedness.

2.2.9 The Fruit of Not Associating with Fools

When we keep away from fools, we are essentially protecting our self because:

1. We will not be led down the wrong path.
2. Our human decency will not be undermined.
3. We can continue to do good deeds.
4. We will not risk being harmed by fools.
5. We will not risk being blamed for or implicated in any wrongdoing.
6. We will be trusted by others.
7. We will experience growth in our life and career.
8. We can contribute to our own happiness and the happiness of our family and society.
9. We can help prevent fools from corrupting society.

Etc.

*“For as long as demerit is not yielding its fruit,
Fools mistake demerit for honey;
As soon as demerit yields its fruit,
Fools will know sufferings.”*

Khuddaka-nikaya. Dhammapada 25/14/24

2.3 Blessing No. 2: Associating with the Wise



2.3.1 Who Are the Wise?

A wise person is a person who possesses a clear and bright mind which causes him/her to have right view, right values; therefore, his/her life is guided by his/her wisdom.

- A wise person can differentiate between what is good and what is bad.
- A wise person can differentiate between what is right and what is wrong.
- A wise person can differentiate between what is merit and what is demerit.

A wise person is not defined by his/her level of education but by his/her virtue. A wise person has a clear and bright mind. A wise person is a good and decent person. A wise person may or may not be a highly educated person. A wise person possesses morality, concentration, and insight.

2.3.2 Characteristics of a Wise Person

Since a wise person has a clear and bright mind, right view, and insight, it means that he/she possesses the following three special characteristics:

1. **A wise person habitually thinks good thoughts:** A wise person thinks about giving alms. A wise person thinks about forgiving others. A wise person does not hold a grudge. A wise person has right view, and believes in merit and demerit. A wise person believes that we owe our parents a debt of gratitude, etc.
2. **A wise person habitually says good words:** A wise person uses truthful words. A wise person uses words which bring about harmony. A wise person uses words that are useful. A wise person uses words that express love and kindness. A wise person uses the right words at the right place and at the right time.
3. **A wise person habitually does good deeds:** A wise person's action reflects his/her love, kindness, and compassion. A wise person earns right livelihood. A wise person practices generosity, observes the Precepts, and practices meditation regularly.

2.3.3 A Wise Person's Virtues

1. Katannu: A wise person feels indebted to everyone who has helped him/her in any way.
2. Attasuddhi: A wise person endeavors to cleanse himself/herself of unwholesomeness
3. Parisuddhi: A wise person helps others to cleanse themselves of unwholesomeness
4. Sangaha: A wise person regularly gives to charity.

2.3.4 How Can One Tell if Someone Is a Wise Person?

We can tell if someone is a wise person by his/her action as follows:

1. **A wise person leads others down the right path.** A wise person persuades others to stop smoking, drinking, gambling. A wise person persuades others to chant before bedtime, keep the Precepts, be a good student, earn right livelihood, etc.
2. **A wise person attends to his/her responsibilities.** A wise person does not tarry but quickly fulfills his/her responsibilities in a timely manner. A wise person does not procrastinate. A wise person does not interfere with other people's work except when being asked.
3. **A wise person does things that are right and appropriate.** A wise person says and does everything in a straightforward manner. A wise person enjoys conversing about the Dhamma. A wise person is repulsed by vicious gossip. A wise person makes himself/herself useful to others, etc.
4. **A wise person calmly accepts constructive criticism.** A wise person is not arrogant and has a high regard for what is right and good. A wise person regards those who offer him/her advice as a treasure trove regardless of their age, position, title, economic status and endeavors to change himself/herself for the better. A wise person does not respond in

anger even when he/she is spoken to harshly as a result of a misunderstanding but will wait for the right time to calmly explain himself/herself.

- 5. A wise person respects rules and regulations.** A wise person understands the need for rules and regulations in an organization to keep it running smoothly and effectively. **A wise person is repulsed by disorder, dinginess, messiness.**

2.3.5 How Does One Associate with a Wise Person?

We should seek the company of a wise person by:

1. Paying him/her a frequent visit.
2. Seeking every opportunity to be around him/her.
3. Treating him/her with sincerity and respect.
4. Listening to his/her teachings.
5. Memorizing his/her teachings.
6. Contemplating his/her teachings.
7. Practicing according to his/her teachings.

2.3.6 Types of Wise People

There are two types of wise people as follows:

- 1. External:** These are people who are decent and virtuous. Their lives are guided by their wisdom.
- 2. Internal:** These are our individual self when we think good thoughts, say good words, and do good things. To associate with our internal sage, it means that we must learn to keep our mind clear and bright so that we think only good thoughts, say things that are encouraging to others, do things that will benefit our self and others by practicing generosity, keeping the Precepts, and practicing meditation regularly.

2.3.7 The Fruit of Associating with the Wise

When we associate with wise people,

1. We will have a clear and bright mind which enables us to emulate their good example.
2. We will possess increasing insight which will help us to be more steadfast and rational.
3. We will have right view.
4. We can avoid making mistakes.
5. We will meet with approval and admiration.
6. We will meet with happiness and we will be out of harm's way.

7. We will succeed and grow.
8. We will be reborn in the States of Happiness.
9. We can more easily attain the Path and Fruit of Nibbana.

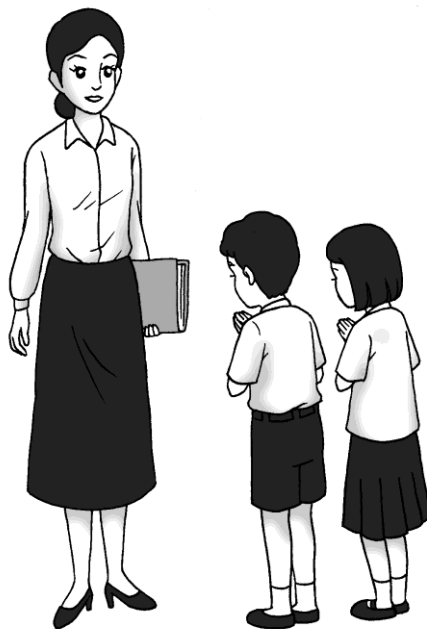
Etc.

It is a fact that whoever associates with fools will meet with sorrow for a very long time because fools can bring us troubles any time. Keeping the company of fools is like living with an enemy whereas keeping the company of the wise is like living happily with close relatives.

Therefore, we should associate with wise people who are insightful, scholarly, diligent, righteous, and distant from defilements. Wise people have a highly developed moral sense and admirable daily routine. We should associate with the wise in the same way that the moon keeps the company of the sky.

Khuddaka-nikaya. Dhammapada 25/25/42-43

2.4 Blessing No. 3: Revering Those Who Are Worthy of Our Reverence



2.4.1 What Is Meant by Reverence?

When we venerate a person, we sincerely admire him/her; we hold him/her in high regard; we have faith in him/her. We revere him/her when we are in his/her presence as well as behind his/her back. We show him/her our reverence when we are in his/her presence. We do so because we realize his/her decency and virtue. When we show our reverence behind his/her back, we do so in order to be reminded of his/her virtue so that we can continue to emulate them.

When we learn to venerate a highly virtuous person, we are in a sense refining our mind as we become increasingly aware of the value of virtue. Initially, we first learnt to pay homage to such an exalted individual as the Lord Buddha when we were a child, we might be doing it without any conscious realization of what we were doing. However, as time went by and our knowledge about the Lord Buddha increased, we began to pay homage to the Lord Buddha with true reverence and deep gratitude.

2.4.2 Individuals Who Are Worthy of Our Reverence

These are individuals who possess exceptional virtues and can serve as our role models. They possess a highly developed sense of morality. They possess elevated concentration and insight. Such individuals include:

- 1. The Lord Buddha:** The Lord Buddha is the most sublime sage in the world due to His perfect insight, compassion, and purity.
- 2. The Sangha or Buddhist monks:** These are monks who practice righteousness according to the Dhamma-Discipline. They also teach the laity to practice wholesomeness.
- 3. A king who possesses the Ten Sovereign Virtues.**
- 4. Parents and older relatives who are virtuous.**
- 5. Teachers who are knowledgeable and virtuous.**
- 6. Superiors who are virtuous.**

Etc.

All individuals, who are above us in terms of virtue, are worthy of our reverence. When we revere such individuals, we are in a sense being reminded of their exceptional virtues. Besides their persons, there are things related to them which also deserve our reverence.

1. In the case of the Lord Buddha, these include His Teachings (the Dhamma), the Holy Relics, The Buddha Image, the Four Holy Places of Buddhism.
2. In the case of the Sangha, these include their relics and their pictures.
3. In the case of our parents, our teachers, our bosses, our king, these include their teachings and their pictures.

2.4.3 How Do We Show Our Reverence?

1. We show it physically in the presence of the person or in front of his/her image or picture.
2. We show it verbally by singing his/her praises both in the person's presence and behind his/her back. For example, we do Morning and Evening Chanting to praise the Triple Gem.
3. We show it mentally by respectfully contemplating the person's teachings.

2.4.4 The Ways of Showing Our Reverence

There are two ways of showing our reverence:

1. **We show it with objects (Amisapuja).** These include money, flowers, clothes, etc.
2. **We show it with our deeds (Patipatipuja).** We follow the Lord Buddha's Teachings by practicing generosity, observing the Precepts, and practicing meditation; by doing our best to reduce our greed, anger, and ignorance. When we show our reverence with our deeds, it is the highest form of reverence because we are doing everything we can in order to keep our body, word, and mind clean and clear. It is the best and most effective way to become a sage.

A Cautionary Note:

It is important that we do not make fun or make light of what we have learnt from wise people. When we treat the teachings with respect, we will succeed and grow in ways that may be miraculous.

On the contrary, if we treat the teachings and the teachers with disrespect, we are blocking our insight and inviting ruin into our life.

Warning:

It is important that we do not venerate a person or thing that is unworthy of our reverence because it will cause us to be deluded and led down the wrong path.

1. We should not admire, praise, promote or support a fool regardless of his position and power.
2. We should not pay homage to anything that has to do with a fool such as his/her picture, image, work, etc.
3. We should not admire a person or thing that does not bring about blessings such as a movie star, a singer, a sportsperson or to display posters advertising such causes of ruin as alcohol, cigarettes, etc.
4. We should not pay homage to a person or thing that makes us stupid such as a big tree, a tall mountain, a spirit house, a person who acts as a medium, etc.

2.4.5 The Three Effects of Namaskar

We usually pay homage to the Buddha Image by performing Namaskar¹. The performance of Namaskar can have the three following effects:

1. **The more we do it, the achier we become.** Such is the effect of Namaskar when performed without truly appreciating the reason for it.

¹ A gesture which expresses deep respect, a bow made with hands pressed together, palms touching and pointing upwards in front of the chest.

2. The more we do it, the more stupid we become. Such is the effect of Namaskar when performed for the wrong reason. One performs Namaskar in order to beg for what one wants such as a winning lottery number.

3. The more we do it, the wiser we become. Such is the effect of Namaskar when performed as homage to the Lord Buddha because we realize the true worth of the Lord Buddha and His Teachings. When we pay homage to the Buddha Image, we do so with three Namaskars.

The first Namaskar is performed in order to contemplate the Lord Buddha's incomparable insight which occurs as a result of His Self-Enlightenment. We have also learnt that it is through the practice of meditation that the Lord Buddha becomes self-enlightened. Therefore, as we perform the first Namaskar, we think about following the Lord Buddha's Teachings by practicing meditation regularly.

The second Namaskar is performed in order to contemplate the Lord Buddha's purity which occurs as a result of having kept the Precepts immaculately throughout His countless previous lifetimes. Therefore, as we perform the second Namaskar, we think about following the Lord Buddha's Teachings by keeping the Precepts immaculately.

The third Namaskar is performed in order to contemplate the Lord Buddha's boundless compassion for having tirelessly taught all beings some of His enlightened knowledge. Our Lord Buddha had pursued Loving-Kindness Perfection throughout His countless previous lifetimes until it reached the fullest extent. Therefore, as we perform the third Namaskar, we think about following the Lord Buddha's example by practicing generosity.

2.4.6 The Fruit of Revering Those Who Are Worthy of Our Reverence

1. It allows us to develop right view.
2. It allows our right view to grow.
3. It teaches us to be gentle, polite, endearing, and honorable.
4. It allows our mind to be clear and bright.
5. It allows us to possess awareness and self-possession.
6. It prevents us from becoming arrogant.
7. It allows us to grow in willpower and strength.
8. It is an indirect way to remove the influence of fools.
9. It is a way to boost the status of a wise person so that he/she can better work to benefit the public.

Etc.

CHAPTER 3

THE SECOND GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: GETTING READY FOR FURTHER TRAINING

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 3

THE SECOND GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: GETTING READY FOR FURTHER TRAINING

3.1 The Second Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Getting Ready for Further Training

3.2 Blessing No. 4: Living in a Suitable Environment

3.3 Blessing No. 5: Possessing Past Merit

3.4 Blessing No. 6: Having the Correct Life-Objective

CONCEPTS

1. We must get ready for further training if we wish to meet with success and prosperity in life in the present and future existences. In getting our self ready for further training, we need to live in a suitable environment, possess past merit, and have the correct life-objective which consists of three levels.
2. A suitable environment means any living environment that is good and conducive to the health of our body and mind. Where we live should be a place where we can earn right livelihood, advance in our career, and accumulate deeds of merit. A suitable environment is characterized by the four types of comforts: The comforts of place, the comforts of food, the comforts of decent people, and the comforts of virtues.
3. Merit is an entity which is formed in the mind. Merit makes the mind clean and clear, and devoid of gloominess. A clean and clear mind is destined for the fortunate realm. Merit occurs when 'The Ten Ways of Making Merit' are performed. Possessing past merit means that we had accumulated merit in our previous existence(s) and have also continued to do so in the present existence. It is our past merit which blesses us with happiness and success in life. It is our past merit which blesses us with human endowments, celestial endowments, and Nibbana endowments.
4. Having the correct life-objective means firstly setting appropriate life goals at the basic, intermediate, and ultimate levels; and secondly, endeavoring to do everything we can to realize the set goals.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of the second group of Life's 38 Blessings: Getting ready for further training.
2. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of the concept 'living in a suitable environment'.
3. To enable the student to correctly describe the characteristics of a suitable environment and in the right order of importance.
4. To enable the student to correctly describe the ways to create a good home environment as well as the fruit of living in a suitable environment.
5. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning and properties of merit and what it means to possess past merit.
6. To enable the student to correctly describe the four levels of merit and their examples as well as how to correctly practice 'The Ten Ways of Making Merit'.
7. To enable the student to correctly describe the ways to make merit daily and the fruit of possessing past merit.
8. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of having the correct life objective.
9. To enable the student to correctly describe the three levels of our life objective.
10. To enable the student to correctly describe how we can stay true to our life objective as well as the fruit of having the correct life objective.

THE SECOND GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: GETTING READY FOR FURTHER TRAINING

3.1 The Second Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Getting Ready for Further Training

Blessing No. 4: Living in a Suitable Environment

Blessing No. 5: Possessing Past Merit

Blessing No. 6: Having the Correct Life Objective

Once we have begun the work of personal development by having right view and the right role model to guide the way we think, speak, and act, next we need to have the right tools in which we can advance to the second stage of personal development and this includes:

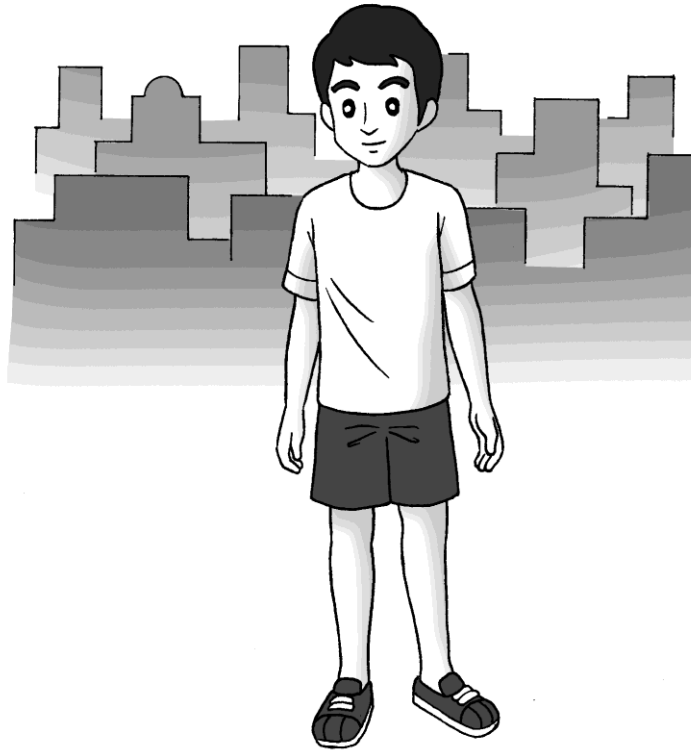
1. Living in a Suitable Environment: Wherever we live must be the kind of environment which promotes good physical and mental health. Moreover, it must support our earning of right livelihood and career advancement. It should also be a place where we can easily accumulate wholesome deeds. Such a place is characterized by the four types of comforts which include the comforts of home, the comforts of food, the comforts of decent people, and the comforts of virtues. When we live among decent people, it is easier for us to find role models and learn from them.

2. Possessing Past Merit: It means that we had accumulated merit in our previous existence(s) and have also continued to accumulate new merit by practicing 'The Ten Ways of Making Merit'. Our past merit will bless us with for examples good health, a good intellect, cleverness, a quick wit, a cheerful disposition. Our past merit also helps us to succeed in school and in our career.

The merit which we accumulate in this existence through the practice of generosity, the observation of Precepts, and the practice of meditation, will help our past merit to send forth its fruit even faster and better.

3. Having the Correct Life Objective: Our life goals can be short term, medium term, and long term. Once we have determined what our life goals should be, it remains for us to endeavor to work steadfastly and diligently toward these goals. We know what abilities and virtues we need to cultivate in order to realize our life goals.

3.2 Blessing No. 4: Living in a Suitable Environment



3.2.1 What Is Meant by a Suitable Environment?

It means an environment which is wholesome and promotes good physical and mental health. A suitable environment supports our earning of right livelihood, our career growth, and our accumulation of wholesome deeds.

Our environment includes our home, our school, our work place, our community, our province, our country, and all the way to our continent and our world.

3.2.2 How to Find a Suitable Environment

1. When we are young, it means that we go to a good school, get a good education, live in a nice home, and undertake religious training in a good temple.
2. When we grow up, it means that we can choose where we wish to live and work. But wherever we live and work, we are obligated to develop these places such that they become even more suitable for us and others.

3.2.3 Characteristics of a Suitable Environment

A suitable environment must have the following four characteristics:

1. **The Comforts of Place:** It means that we live in a house where water and electricity are readily available; where there are trees and shrubs. We go to a school that has nice class rooms, good sanitation, good airflow, a playground. It should be quiet and spacious. We own a shop or a business in a community center where it is easy to commute to. We live in a province which is not located at too high an elevation; neither should it be a low lying plain susceptible to regular flooding. Its weather is not too hot or too cold, etc.
2. **The Comforts of Food:** It means that we live close enough to a food market or near the farms from which we can buy food.
3. **The Comforts of People:** It means that we live in a place where there are no ruffians, gangsters, thieves, and criminals. It means that we live among decent, virtuous, and disciplined people.
4. **The Comforts of Virtues:** In the secular world, it means the presence of good schools and good local governance. In the religious world, it means the presence of righteous monks and righteous sages who can educate the people in terms of the Dhamma. It means a place where Buddhism flourishes and the people can attend Dhamma lectures, give alms, keep the Precepts, and practice meditation regularly.

3.2.4 The Four Characteristics of a Suitable Environment and Their Order of Importance

A suitable environment is marked by the four characteristics which are placed in the order of decreasing importance as follows:

1. The comforts of virtues.
2. The comforts of people.
3. The comforts of food.
4. The comforts of place.

If the comforts of place are lacking but food is abundantly available, one can still survive. If the comforts of food and place are lacking but one is surrounded by decent people, one has the opportunities to make improvements on the comforts of food and place. However, in order for there to be decent people, the comforts of virtues must be present.

For example, Japan is an Archipelago and regularly encounters natural disasters such as violent storms, volcano eruptions. Its available living space is also small and in the past there was a limited amount of food. However, its people are diligent, disciplined, and productive. They work hard to advance themselves in life. The Japanese are patriotic and the country has good governance. In spite of the fact that Japan used to be lacking in the comforts of place and food, it has been able to develop itself into an economic giant as a result of having the comforts of people and virtues.

On the contrary, Thailand is blessed with favorable geography and rarely encounters natural disasters. Food has always been abundant here. Yet, its people are lacking in self-discipline and diligence. Although Thai people are Buddhists, they are far too concerned with personal comforts and ease to practice the Lord Buddha's Teachings. As a result of the fact that Thailand is lacking in the comforts of people and virtues, it is still behind many other countries in many ways.

It behooves the Thai people to cultivate human decency, self-discipline, diligence, and the desire for growth by practicing the Lord Buddha's Teachings so that Thailand will have a chance to become a developed country in the near future. Thai people are fortunate in that they have the opportunity to study and practice the Lord Buddha's Teachings as well as accumulating merit regularly.

A Cautionary Note:

In many countries where there is great material advancement and the people's lives are filled with ease and comfort because consumer goods are plentiful and readily available, jobs are easy to find, income is high, and some Thai people might be tempted to immigrate to such a place. Yet these places are lacking in the comforts of virtues and there is scant opportunity to make spiritual progress and accumulate merit. The people in these countries tend to be so work-oriented that they hardly pause to think about the practices of generosity, Precepts, and meditation. Therefore, it can be said that people in these countries have succeeded only in achieving the basic level of their life objective.

3.2.5 How to Create a Good Home Environment

1. By keeping it clean and neat with a good airflow.
2. By choosing to buy fresh and healthy food as well as cooking it properly.
3. By undertaking personal development and encouraging each member of the family to work on personal development as well.
4. By attending the temple together so that the family can give alms, observe the Precepts, and practice meditation together. There should be an altar room in the house as well as reading materials which are about the Lord Buddha's Teachings. There should not be inappropriate reading materials in the house such as pornography.

3.2.6 The Fruit of Living in a Suitable Environment

1. It allows us to experience ease and comfort for both the body and the mind.
2. It allows us to be able to grow in both the secular world and the Dhamma world.
3. It allows us the opportunity to practice generosity, Precepts, and meditation.
4. It allows us the opportunity to learn the Lord Buddha's Teachings (the Dhamma).
5. It allows us the opportunity to attain the Dhammakaya.
6. It allows us the opportunity to listen to the Lord Buddha's Teachings.
7. It allows us to make an excellent gain in the form of faith in the Triple Gem.
8. It allows us to receive an excellent education in the forms of morality, concentration, and insight.
9. It allows us to be able to support Buddhism.
10. It allows us to feel strongly connected to the Triple Gem.
11. It allows us to learn heedfulness from virtuous individuals.
12. It allows us to take the Triple Gem as our highest refuge.
13. It allows us to receive Ariya wealth in the form of the Path of Nibbana.

3.3 Blessing No. 5: Possessing Past Merit



3.3.1 What Is Merit?

Merit is an entity which is formed in the mind. Merit makes the mind clean and clear, and devoid of gloominess. Such a state of mind causes us to be reborn in the States of Happiness. We can gain merit when our mind is tranquil, and we choose to think good thoughts, say good words, and do good deeds.

Merit improves the quality of our mind by making it steadfast, pure, radiant, bright, spacious, full, fresh, light, free of anxiety and tension, and ready for worthwhile work. Each time that we perform a deed of merit, the resulting merit gets accumulated in our mind.

When we have practiced meditation until we attain the Dhammakaya, we will be able to see merit with the Dhammakaya-Eye. But even before we can ‘see’ merit, we can at least feel its effect, since merit causes us to feel cheerful and happy. In this case, merit can be compared to electricity in that we cannot see electricity itself but we can see the result of its action. We know that electricity causes the light bulb to give off light, the air conditioner to remove humidity and cool the room, etc.

3.3.2 What Are the Properties of Merit?

1. Merit cleanses the body, the word, and the mind.
2. Merit brings about happiness and prosperity.
3. Merit can follow us to future existences.
4. Merit can never be stolen from us.
5. Merit brings us all forms of material wealth.
6. Merit brings us human endowments, celestial endowments, and Nibbana endowments.
7. Merit is the means to attain the Path and Fruit of Nibbana.
8. Merit enables us to undergo the round of rebirth in the States of Happiness.

3.3.3 Types of Past Merit

There are two types of past merit.

1. **Merit from the Distant Past:** It means the merit which results from our accumulation of good deeds in our previous existences and up to our birth in the current existence.
2. **Merit from the Past:** It is the merit which results from our accumulation of good deeds in this existence starting from birth until the present.

Merit from the distant past sends forth its fruit in our current existence just as a good quality fruit tree readily yields plenty of delicious fruits. A person who possesses merit from the distant past tends to have a clear and pure mind from infancy. He/she tends to possess good looks, a high intellect, a healthy body, etc., which allow him/her to easily accumulate new merit. He/she tends to readily meet with success in life.

Merit from the past results from an accumulation of such good deeds as being a good student, being hard-working, keeping the company of the wise, practicing meditation, etc. A person possessing this type of merit has an easier time in meeting with success in life.

It behooves all of us to accumulate merit regularly because merit blesses us with every good thing in life. Our Lord Buddha had earnestly accumulated merit and pursued Perfections all throughout His previous countless existences such that in His final rebirth, He was able to attain Self-Enlightenment through meditation practice at the age of 35.

3.3.4 The Fruit of Merit

There are four levels of the fruit of merit.

- 1. At the Mental Level:** This is where merit yields instant fruits.
 - Merit causes our mind to be healthier by making it tranquil, steadfast, not easily perturbed by either praise or blame.
 - Merit causes our mind to be competent. When our mind is clean, clear, and bright, it can think faster, deeper, and broader. The mind's penetrating power is enhanced in such a way that we can make decisions quickly and accurately.
- 2. At the Personality Level:** When a person practices generosity, Precepts, and meditation regularly his/her mind is tranquil, fresh, and cheerful, filled with merit and devoid of thoughts of wickedness. With the mind in such a state, he/she cannot help but sleep well, be practically free from worries, look radiant, be confident and gracious in any situation.
- 3. At the Level of Our Life Circumstances:** Our life circumstances are the direct results of our past merit and demerit. Our past merit blesses us at the mental and personality levels and causes us to receive material gain, position, praise, and happiness. Our past demerit causes us to meet with failure, disappointment, a serious illness, etc. Since our current existence is determined by our past merit and demerit, it is often easy for people to think that a good deed does not beget a good result. For example, a person that accumulates merit regularly may be struck with a sudden and serious illness. His sudden and serious illness is in fact the manifestation of his past demerit which resulted from an unwholesome deed(s) he committed in a previous existence(s). Therefore, regardless of the problem we are facing, it is crucially important that we continue to accumulate merit because it is always possible that our newly accumulated merit can go to rid us of whatever problem we may be facing at the moment.
- 4. At the Social Level:** When we are a decent person and we are in the habit of accumulating merit, we will be welcome anywhere and treated with respect. We will have the opportunity to help those around us to follow our example and together all of us can help create peace and prosperity in our society.

3.3.5 Some Examples of the Fruits of Merit and Their Corresponding Wholesome Deeds

<u>Fruit of Merit</u>	<u>Wholesome Deed Performed in a Previous Existence(s)</u>
Longevity	Abstaining from taking another being's life.
No illnesses	Abstaining from abusing other living beings.
A good health	The habit of giving food as alms.
A good complexion	The habit of observing the Precepts, giving clothes as alms.
A position of power	Absence of envy or jealousy, being happy for others in their success.
Wealth	The habit of practicing generosity.
A high birth	The habit of being respectful and humble.
A high intellect	The habit of keeping the company of the wise, practicing meditation, abstaining from alcohol and other addictive substances.

3.3.6 The Different Ways of Making Merit

Every wholesome deed results in merit. However, to facilitate our understanding and practice of wholesome deeds, the Lord Buddha has given us 'The Ten Ways of Making Merit' as follows:

1. Dana It is the sharing of what we have with others in need.
2. Sila Precepts protect us from harming other beings.
3. Samadhi It includes chanting, practicing meditation, reading Dhamma materials, etc.
4. Apacayana It means showing reverence to virtuous individuals.
5. Veyyavacca It means taking part in activities that benefit the public.
6. Pattidana It means dedicating our merit to all sentient beings.
7. Pattanumodana It means rejoicing in other people's merit.
8. Dhammassavana It means listening to the Doctrine.
9. Dhammadesana It means expounding the Doctrine.
10. Ditthujukamma It means having right view.

These ten ways of making merit can be abbreviated to ‘**The Three Ways of Making Merit**’ (**Punnakiriya-vatthu**) as follows:

- Dana:** It means removing miserliness from our mind and includes numbers 1, 5, 6, and 7.
- Sila:** It means preventing us from doing unwholesome deeds and includes number 2.
- Samadhi:** It means the training of our mind in order to develop a high intellect, awareness, and insight and includes numbers 3, 4, 8, 9, and 10.

3.3.7 Merit and Good Fortune

Fortunate circumstances in our life are brought about mostly by the merit which we had accumulated in our previous existence(s) and to a small extent by our present merit.

When a person’s mind is gloomy as a result of his/her accumulated unwholesomeness or demerit he/she is easily dominated by his/her defilements. Such a state of mind can only lead to more troubles and unhappiness. When a person flies into a rage, his/her heart pounds and the heart rate increases. As a result, blood circulation is altered, there is increased metabolism in the blood, and the angry person feels his/her body heat rising from the chest to the face while the nerve endings tremble. This process can affect one’s complexion by causing it to become coarse and dull. It can also cause indigestion and gas problems. A person that is easily annoyed, unhappy or moody cannot help but show his/her annoyance, unhappiness or moodiness in his/her speech. When a person acts in anger, it is easy for him/her to make mistakes.

On the contrary, when one’s mind is clear and bright as a result of one’s accumulated wholesomeness, one is not easily dominated by one’s defilements because one possesses awareness and self-possession. When the mind is calm, fresh, clear, and bright, it helps the body to function properly. One has a good complexion, a nice voice, an even temper, and good manners. One makes good decisions and easily meets with success and prosperity in life.

A Cautionary Note:

Now that we know how merit is the source of every good thing in life, it behooves us to accumulate merit whenever possible. A person that possesses past merit but neglects to accumulate new merit is like a rice farmer that after the harvest sells and uses all of the rice grains without making any provision for the next planting.

The wholesomeness that we have accumulated may not yield its fruit in the present lifetime but it most certainly exerts a positive effect on our mind. It is therefore to our advantage to continue accumulating merit by practicing generosity, Precepts, and meditation. We can then be said to possess merit and good fortune.

3.3.8 Guidelines for Daily Living

We need to make haste and accumulate new merit now so that the new merit will follow us to our future existences. Toward this end, the following serve as good guidelines:

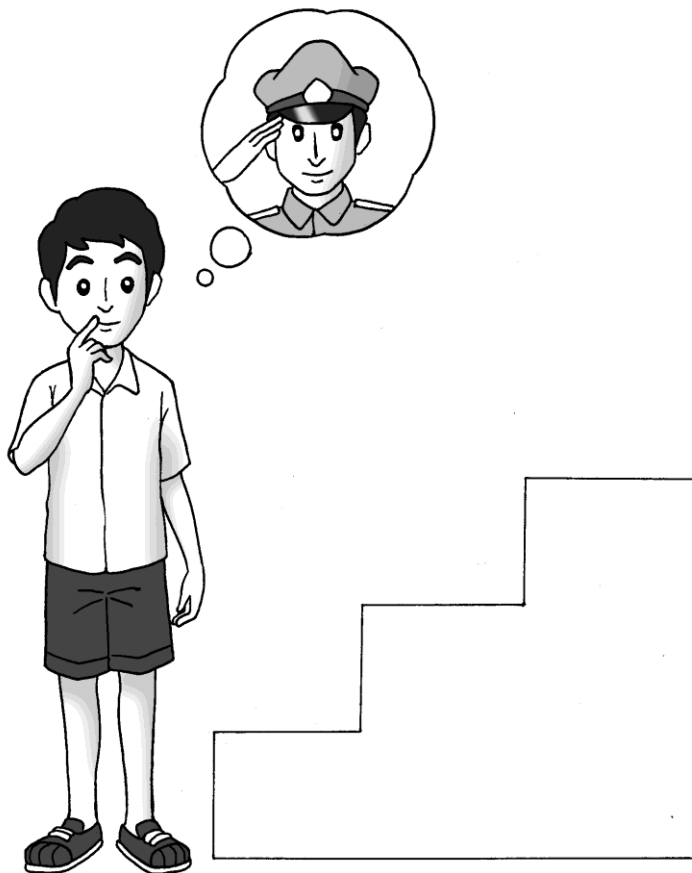
- 1. If we have not given alms in the morning, we should not yet have breakfast.**
- 2. If we have not yet pledged to keep the Precepts in the morning, we should not leave the house.**
- 3. If we have not yet practiced meditation at night, we should not go to sleep.**

We need to exercise patience, persistence, and willpower when it comes to accumulating merit.

3.3.9 The Fruit of Past Merit

1. Our past merit blesses us with material wealth which makes it easy for us to accumulate new merit.
2. Our past merit provides us with prosperity.
3. Our past merit provides us with all kinds of happiness.
4. Our past merit enables us to make provisions for our current as well as future existences.

3.4 Blessing No. 6: Having the Correct Life-Objective



3.4.1 What Is Meant by Having the Correct Life-Objective?

We must have the correct life-objective so that we can live our life appropriately and in such a way that we can accomplish our life-objective.

It cannot be over-emphasized how important it is for us to have the correct life-objective. Having the correct life-objective is the first step toward a life of happiness and prosperity. Should a person have an incorrect life-objective by for example wanting to be the greatest thief on earth or the biggest producer of heroin and tries to do everything to realize his life-objective, his life not only provides nothing useful for himself but also causes untold unhappiness in other people's lives.

Therefore, a person who wishes to prosper in life must first of all have the correct life-objective before he/she goes about seeking the knowledge and training he/she needs in order to accomplish it.

3.4.2 What Should Be Our Life-Objective?

There are three levels to our life-objective and they include the basic level, the intermediate level, and the ultimate level as follows:

- 1. The Basic Level:** This is the level of our life-objective which guides us in the current existence. It involves the ability to support our self and gain material wealth by earning right livelihood. Right livelihood includes such professions as being a businessman, a physician, an engineer, a farmer, etc.
- 2. The Intermediate Level:** This is the level of our life-objective which pertains to our future existences. After we have accomplished the basic level of our life-objective by securing material wealth, we must then accumulate merit earnestly and as much as possible in order to make provisions for our future lives. Death is not the end of us, for as long as we still possess defilements, we will continue to undergo the round of rebirth.

Many people know only about the basic level of our life-objective and spend their time going to school, being trained to earn a living, securing material wealth to support himself and his loved ones without any thought of accumulating merit. Such a life is no different from the life of a bird or other animals that learn from their parents how to look for food, how to make a nest, how to provide for the young, etc.

We are human beings and as such we are best equipped to perform good deeds. It is not enough for us to be pre-occupied with earning a living but we must also add value to our life and make provisions for our future existences by endeavoring to accumulate as much merit as possible. Our accumulated merit will also facilitate the achievement of the ultimate level of our life-objective.

- 3. The Ultimate Level:** This is the level of our life-objective which pertains to the complete removal of defilements and the attainment of pure and eternal bliss which is Nibbana.

Every living being is meant to eventually be free from defilements and attain Nibbana. Toward this most noble end, some will take longer than others. However, as long as defilements are still intact, we will continue to experience pain and suffering to a more or less extent depending on our overall merit and demerit. Every living being has undergone the round of birth countless times. If we were to put all of our bones from these countless lifetimes together, they would pile as high as a mountain. If we were to collect all the tears which have been shed in these countless existences, they will form a body of water larger than an ocean. Therefore, the longer we prolong our attainment of Nibbana, the longer we will have to be plagued by the pain and suffering of the round of rebirth.

While our Lord Buddha was pursuing Perfections as a Bodhisatta, He had also had to undergo the round of rebirth endlessly. However, He had the advantage of having the correct life-objective in that He wished to free Himself of all defilements so that He could be emancipated from the round of rebirth and attain Nibbana. For countless existences, He had endeavored to pursue Perfections at the cost of His flesh, blood, and life in order to achieve His life-objective. And it was only when He had pursued Perfections to the

fullest extent that He could become self-enlightened as the Lord Buddha and attain complete Nibbana.

Therefore, it should behoove all of us to stay true to the ultimate level of our life objective so that we can live our life appropriately by continuing to purify our body, word, and mind through the earnest and regular practices of generosity, Precepts, and meditation. And one day, we will be able to follow the Lord Buddha and the Arahats to Nibbana.

A Cautionary Note:

Some people may have started life wanting to do good things such as earning an honest living but due to their lack of willpower, they may with the passing of time become discouraged and feel that they are not gaining the kind of material wealth they dreamt about and they may become involved in scams and end up in jail. Other people may have started out practicing generosity, Precepts, and meditation but when faced with many distractions in life, may give up the practices altogether. It is therefore important that we learn to remain steadfast to our life objective.

3.4.3 How to Stay True to Our Life-Objective?

1. We stay true to our life-objective by cultivating faith which comes from rational and logical thinking. There are two types of faith as follows:

- 1) **Rational Faith:** It is faith which results from rational and logical thinking. It is the kind of faith which is accompanied by insight.
- 2) **Irrational Faith:** It is faith which does not result from rational and logical thinking. It is the kind of faith which is not accompanied by insight but dominated by ignorance.

When we talk about faith, we mean having the following four beliefs.

- The belief that the Law of Kamma exists
- The belief that our action has consequences in that a good deed yields a good result whereas a bad deed yields a bad result. There are three components to a good deed.
 1. A good deed arises out of a **good purpose**.
 2. A good deed means something which **is done to the best of our ability**.
 3. A good deed is something which **is done in just the right way**, not overdoing it or under-doing it.
- The belief that merit and demerit, which result from our good and bad deeds respectively, are our own and reside within our mind.
- The belief that the Lord Buddha is a real person and His Self-Enlightenment is a fact.

2. We stay true to our life-objective by observing the Five Precepts (please see details about Precepts in Blessing No. 9).

3. We stay true to our life-objective by becoming scholarly which comes from the pursuit of secular and Dhamma education.
4. We stay true to our life-objective by practicing selflessness (or Caga).
 - 1) We willingly share what we have with others in need. This practice allows us to gradually pry our self loose from our inherent miserliness.
 - 2) We say goodbye to our bad mood, anger, and any thoughts of revenge while practicing forgiveness.
5. We stay true to our life-objective by practicing meditation. Meditation keeps our mind clear and bright. This is the most important way to stay true to our life-objective because meditation practice enables us to develop steadfastness and willpower.

These five practices, which enable us to stay true to our life-objective, are termed **‘Saradhamma’**. Saradhamma means core virtues.

3.4.4 The Fruit of Having the Correct Life-Objective

1. It enables us to be our own refuge.
2. It enables us to be heedful.
3. It enables us to be properly prepared for our death.
4. It enables us to meet with favorable circumstances in life.
5. It enables us to have the Triple Gem as our highest refuge.
6. It enables us to be a good citizen of our country and the world.
7. It enables us to be a good role model for the younger generation.
8. It enables us to be safe from the peril of the State of Loss and Woe.
9. It enables us to reap the full benefits of being a true human being.
10. It enables us to receive human, celestial, and Nibbana endowments.

Etc.

CHAPTER 4

THE THIRD GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: BECOMING A USEFUL PERSON

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 4

THE THIRD GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: BECOMING A USEFUL PERSON

4.1 The Third Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Becoming a Useful Person

4.2 Blessing No. 7: Being Scholarly

4.3 Blessing No. 8: Being Creative

4.4 Blessing No. 9: Being Disciplined

4.5 Blessing No. 10: Practicing Cultured Speech

CONCEPTS

1. Human beings are considered to be the most sublime beings because we can make our self useful to our self and others to the fullest extent. People that have undertaken the work of personal development are scholarly, creative, disciplined, and practice cultured speech.
2. A scholar means a person who possesses a breadth of knowledge; a person who knows to pursue the right kind of knowledge; a person who is well-educated; a person who has read and heard a great deal. These attributes give rise to the intelligence and intellect necessary for meeting with career success in terms of gain, position, praise, happiness, etc.
3. A creative person is a person who can express his/her talents in an admirable manner. A creative person has practical ability in that he/she knows how to turn what he/she has learnt into a thing of substance. A scholar on the other hand is a person who is learnt and knowledgeable.
4. Discipline means rules and regulations which are used to control our physical and verbal behavior so that orderliness, harmony, and happiness in society can be created. Discipline helps us to stay away from wickedness and allow us to use our talents and abilities in an ethical manner. There are two types of discipline: Discipline in the secular world and discipline in the Dhamma world. A disciplined person means a person who is disciplined in both the secular world and the Dhamma world.
5. Precepts mean normalcy. Precepts are considered the basic level of discipline in the Dhamma world. Precepts distinguish humans from animals. Therefore, whoever transgresses the Precepts is doing himself/herself a great deal of harm. Every Buddhist must earnestly and regularly observe the Precepts because observers of the Precepts will meet with happiness in the current existence, be reborn in the States of Happiness, and ultimately attain the Path and Fruit of Nibbana.
6. Cultured speech means words which have been refined in such a way that they are just right and provide benefits for both the speaker and the listener.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the importance of the third group of Life's 38 Blessings: Becoming a useful person.
2. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of a scholar and the difference between a scholar and a sage.
3. To enable the student to correctly describe the characteristics of a well-rounded education as well as the characteristics of a scholar.
4. To enable the student to correctly describe how one can become a scholar as well as the results of being scholarly.
5. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning, types, and components of creativity.
6. To enable the student to correctly describe a creative person's characteristics, how to become creative, as well as the fruit of being creative.
7. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning and types of discipline as well as the difference between discipline in the secular world and discipline in the Dhamma world.
8. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning and components of Anagariyavinaya and the reason that the Lord Buddha has decreed it.
9. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of Agariyavinaya, how the Five Precepts are the human norm, and how to keep the Precepts all throughout our life.
10. To enable the student to correctly describe the fruit of keeping the Precepts and the benefits of being disciplined.
11. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning and components of cultured speech.
12. To enable the student to learn about what it takes to be a good peace agent.
13. To enable the student to correctly describe the harm of castigating a fellow monk or an Ariya individual as well as the difference between truthful and untruthful comments.
14. To enable the student to correctly describe the Perfect Man's voice and the fruit of practicing cultured speech.

THE THIRD GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: BECOMING A USEFUL PERSON

4.1 The Third Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Becoming a Useful Person

Blessing No. 7: Being Scholarly

Blessing No. 8: Being Creative

Blessing No. 9: Being Disciplined

Blessing No. 10: Practicing Cultured Speech

We have already undertaken the work of personal development at the basic level by not associating with fools, by associating with the wise, and by revering those who are worthy of our reverence. We have subsequently advanced to the next stage of personal development which involves living in a suitable environment, possessing past merit, and having the correct life-objective. The next stage of personal development requires that we cultivate breadth of knowledge, self-reliance, the ability to use our knowledge in an ethical manner, self-control, the ability to benefit our self and other people in society by becoming scholarly, creative, disciplined, and practicing cultured speech.

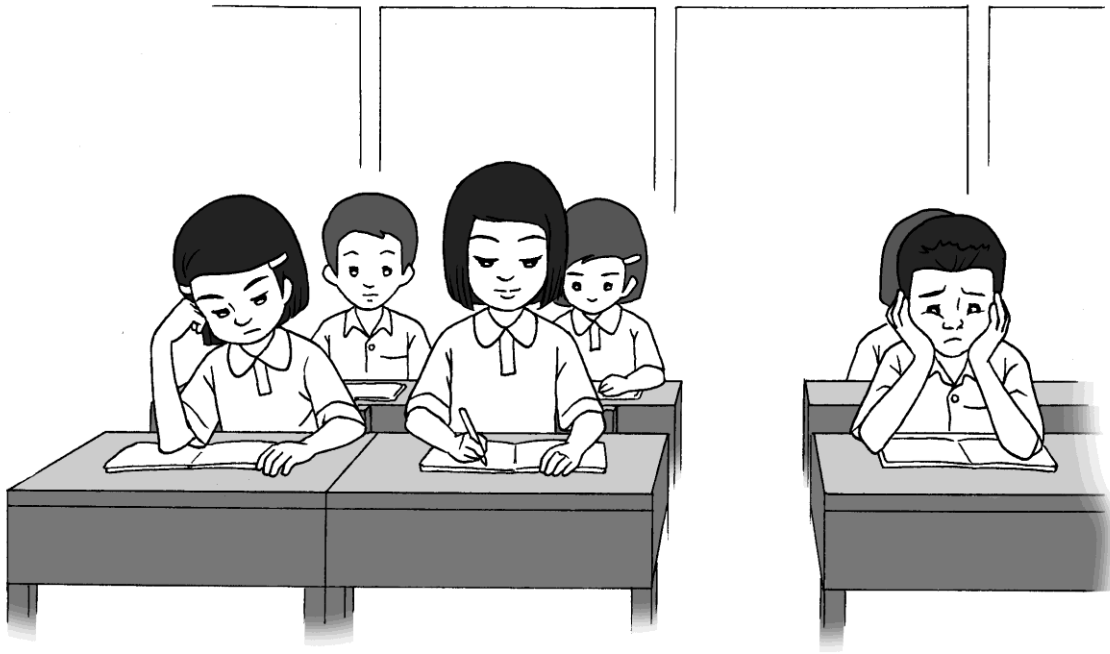
1. **Being Scholarly:** It means that we cultivate breadth of knowledge by keeping our self abreast of new and useful information. Such new knowledge is useful in helping us advance in our career. It is the key to gain, position, praise, happiness, etc.
2. **Being Creative:** It means that we cultivate creativeness by learning to create things that are beautiful, elaborate, refined, and pleasing. It is the ability to turn head knowledge into practical knowledge.
3. **Being Disciplined:** It means that we willingly follow rules and regulations. It means that we are in control of our word and body. Discipline allows everyone in society to live happily and peacefully with each other. Discipline enables us to use our talents and abilities appropriately.

There are two types of discipline: Discipline in the secular world and discipline in the Dhamma world. A disciplined person is a person who is disciplined in both the secular world and the Dhamma world.

Being disciplined means that we are not temperamental or self-serving but are respectful of rules and regulations. It means that we use our talents and abilities appropriately.

4. **Practicing Cultured Speech:** It means that each word that we speak has been well thought out. It means that we speak useful words and we speak them at the right place and at the right time. We speak words that create harmony and unity, words that are praised by the sages.

4.2 Blessing No. 7: Being Scholarly



4.2.1 What Is a Scholar?

A scholar is a person that has cultivated breadth of knowledge in such a way that the knowledge becomes the key to gain, position, praise, happiness, etc.

4.2.2 The Difference Between a Scholar and a Sage

A sage or a wise person is a virtuous person. A sage acts appropriately and in such a way as to benefit oneself and others as much as possible. A sage is destined for the States of Happiness. A sage may or may not be highly educated.

A scholar is a person who possesses a breadth of knowledge but may or may not be virtuous. A scholarly person may for example use his knowledge to produce chemicals which can be used to make heroin. In that case, the scholar is working his way toward the States of Unhappiness.

4.2.3 Properties of a Well-Rounded Education

1. **It Has Depth:** It means depth of knowledge. For example, a physician can tell what the patient is suffering from just by the way the patient looks. Or a mechanic can tell what is wrong with the engine just by the way it runs.
2. **It Has Roundness:** It means knowledge which comes from observing our environment such as the climate and geography of a particular area, the mood of the people, the goings-on in the community, etc.
3. **It Has Breadth:** It means breadth of knowledge. It means knowing the inter-relatedness of different phenomenon or components in a subject, an event, etc.
4. **It Has Distance:** It means being able to look ahead and foretell the future. For example, one has only to observe the climate to be able to tell which kinds of fruit will be in shortage for the year. One can tell by a coworker's behavior to know that one is about to be deceived and cheated.

Only a person who possesses the four aspects of a well-rounded education as stated above can be said to be a true scholar.

4.2.4 Characteristics of a Scholar: We can learn to be a scholar or a good student by cultivating the following five characteristics:

1. **Bahussuta:** Attentive listening - To be a good scholar, we must cultivate attentive listening. We must also have a penchant for learning new things through listening, reading, researching.
2. **Dhata:** Memorization - To be a good scholar, we must develop a good memory and the ability to summarize the main points of any new information. It is to be pointed out here that poor memory in this lifetime is a result of the misdeeds performed in a previous existence(s) which include alcohol drinking and false speech. Therefore, anyone that suffers from a poor memory in this lifetime should endeavor to abstain completely from alcohol as well as speaking falsehood but should instead practice reciting Dhamma phrases and form the habit of taking notes. Soon enough the memory should improve.
3. **Vacasa Paricita:** Recitation - To be a good scholar, we need to recite new information until we know it by heart. Since the Dhamma is Truth, it is especially useful to be able to recite as many Dhamma phrases as possible. In terms of secular knowledge, we should recite only what is important to us since secular knowledge still changes with time.
4. **Manasanupekakkha:** Contemplation - To be a good scholar, we need to contemplate each piece of new knowledge in order to understand it clearly and thoroughly.
5. **Ditthiya Supatividdha:** Penetration - To be a good scholar we need to develop the insight to penetrate a subject thoroughly at both the theoretical and practical levels. However, this particular characteristic can be fully realized only with the earnest practice of meditation.

4.2.5 Characteristics Which Prevent One from Being a Scholar: These include:

- 1. A Lustful Temperament:** It means a person that enjoys praise and adoration to excess. This characteristic can make one temperamental and too obsessive with one's looks to undertake serious learning. To correct the situation, a person with a lustful temperament should realize the reality of the aging process and death by learning to consider the ugliness of a corpse as frequently as possible.
- 2. A Hateful Temperament:** It means a person that is quick to anger; a person that holds a grudge and harbors thoughts of revenge. To correct this situation, a person with a hateful temperament should keep the Precepts and learn to radiate love and kindness to all beings regularly.
- 3. A Delusive Temperament:** It means a person that is habitually forgetful, inattentive, crude, and unstable. He also has doubts about the virtue of the Triple Gem. To correct this situation, a person with a delusive temperament should practice meditation in earnest.
- 4. A Cowardly Temperament:** It means a person that lacks self-confidence and initiative; a person that is unwilling to start anything for fear of the consequences; a person that is very much a follower. To correct this situation, a person with a cowardly temperament should associate with the wise and endeavor to learn from them.
- 5. A Materialistic Temperament:** It means a person who values material possessions more than knowledge.
- 6. A Desultory Temperament:** It means a person who casually and haphazardly jumps from one thing to another.
- 7. A Drinker:** It means a person who indulges in alcohol. A drinker loses the ability to accumulate knowledge.
- 8. A Childish Temperament:** It means a person who is irresponsible and overly playful.

4.2.6 How To Be a Scholar?

1. A scholar knows to choose carefully the topic to be learnt.
2. Once the choice has been made, a scholar endeavors to learn it to the best of his ability.
3. A scholar enthusiastically and regularly seeks new knowledge.
4. A scholar must be learnt in both the secular world and the Dhamma world.
5. A scholar is ready to put whatever he has learnt into practice.

A Cautionary Note:

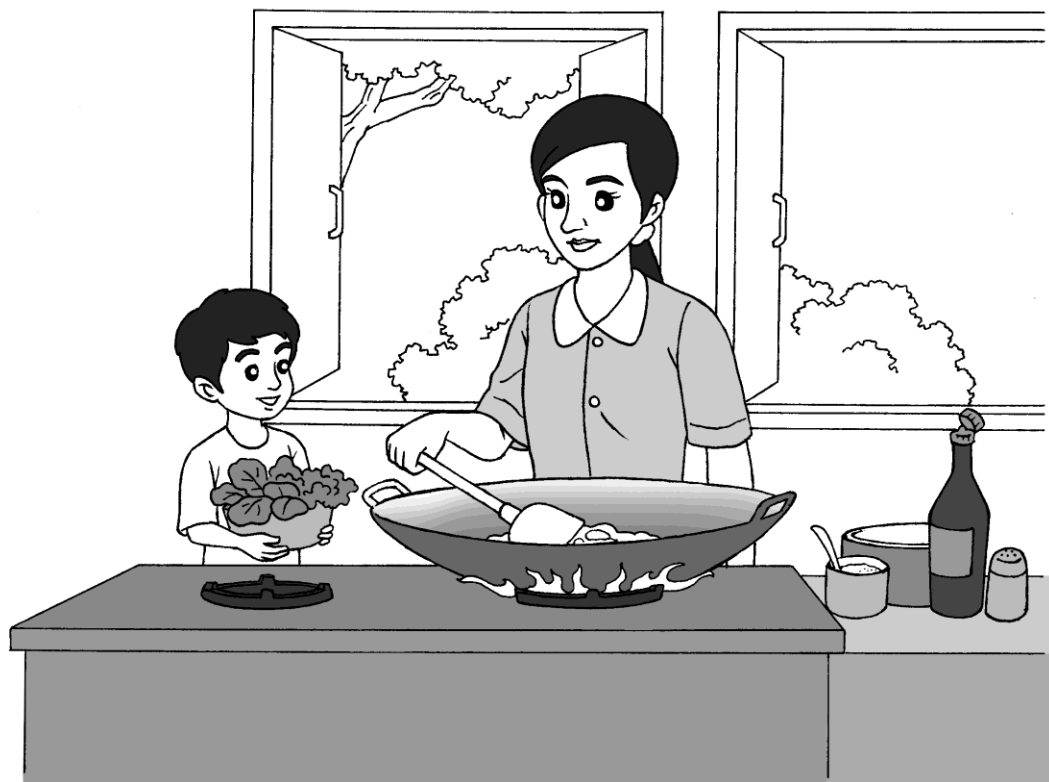
Secular knowledge without the accompanying Dhamma knowledge can lead a well-educated person down the wrong path. For example, a scientist may put his knowledge of nuclear fusion into making a nuclear bomb which can cause unspeakable destruction to human lives and properties. Secular knowledge may enable a person to meet with worldly success and power here and now but his success and power cannot guarantee success and safety in his future existences. Therefore, it is very important that we possess both secular knowledge and Dhamma knowledge, since our Dhamma knowledge can serve as a guiding light to enable us to decide to do only what is right and ethical.

4.2.7 The Fruit of Being Scholarly

1. A scholar can be his own refuge.
2. A scholar can become a leader.
3. A scholar can be bold and confident in every situation.
4. A scholar can be blessed with gain, position, praise, and happiness.
5. A scholar can earn genuine respect.
6. A scholar in this existence has the opportunity to be scholarly in future existences.
7. A scholar can develop other abilities.
8. A scholar's attainment of Nibbana can be facilitated.

Etc.

4.3 Blessing No. 8: Being Creative



4.3.1 What Is Creativity?

Creativity is the ability to create things that are beautiful, elaborate, refined, and pleasing. **Creativity means knowing how to do things in a clever way.**

A scholar has the cleverness to know what to learn and how to learn it. A creative person knows how to put what he knows into practice.

A scholar may or may not be creative. A person may know everything there is to know about painting, cooking, etc., but head knowledge alone does not make him a painter, a cook, etc.

4.3.2 Types of Creativity

Physical Creativity: This includes every form of craftsmanship such as weaving, drawing, designing, sculpting, etc. It also includes gardening, running a plantation, writing, healing the sick, etc., all the way to good manners, knowing how to dress for an occasion, knowing how to show hospitality, knowing how to show respect, composure, etc.

Verbal Creativity: This is expressed as eloquence, the ability to choose the right words for the right occasion, the ability to use words that are uplifting.

Mental Creativity: This is expressed as awareness, self-possession, good and creative thinking.

4.3.3 Components of Creativity

To be creative what we create must be composed of the following six components:

1. It must be elaborate.
2. It must add value.
3. It must promote creativity.
4. It must not provoke sense-desire.
5. It must not provoke thoughts of revenge.
6. It must not provoke aggression.

4.3.4 Characteristics of a Creative Person

1. A creative person must have faith in what he is going to create in that it is good, it is useful; therefore, he is determined to do it well.
2. A creative person must not be sickly but knows to take care of his health.
3. A creative person must not be boastful. Boastfulness hampers one's learning as well as one's creativity.
4. A creative person must not be lazy but he is persistent and patient.
5. A creative person must be wise and observant.

4.3.5 How to Develop Creativity

1. We must learn to be observant. We must learn to pick out the outstanding points of everything around us.
2. We must work on our assignment in earnest. We must not think any part of the work as being too mean or too lowly.
3. We must complete every facet of our assignment in a thorough manner.
4. We must constantly make improvement on our work.
5. We must keep the company of the creative people in our field.
6. We must practice meditation regularly so that our mind is calm, clear, and bright. Such a state of mind promotes creativity.

A Cautionary Note:

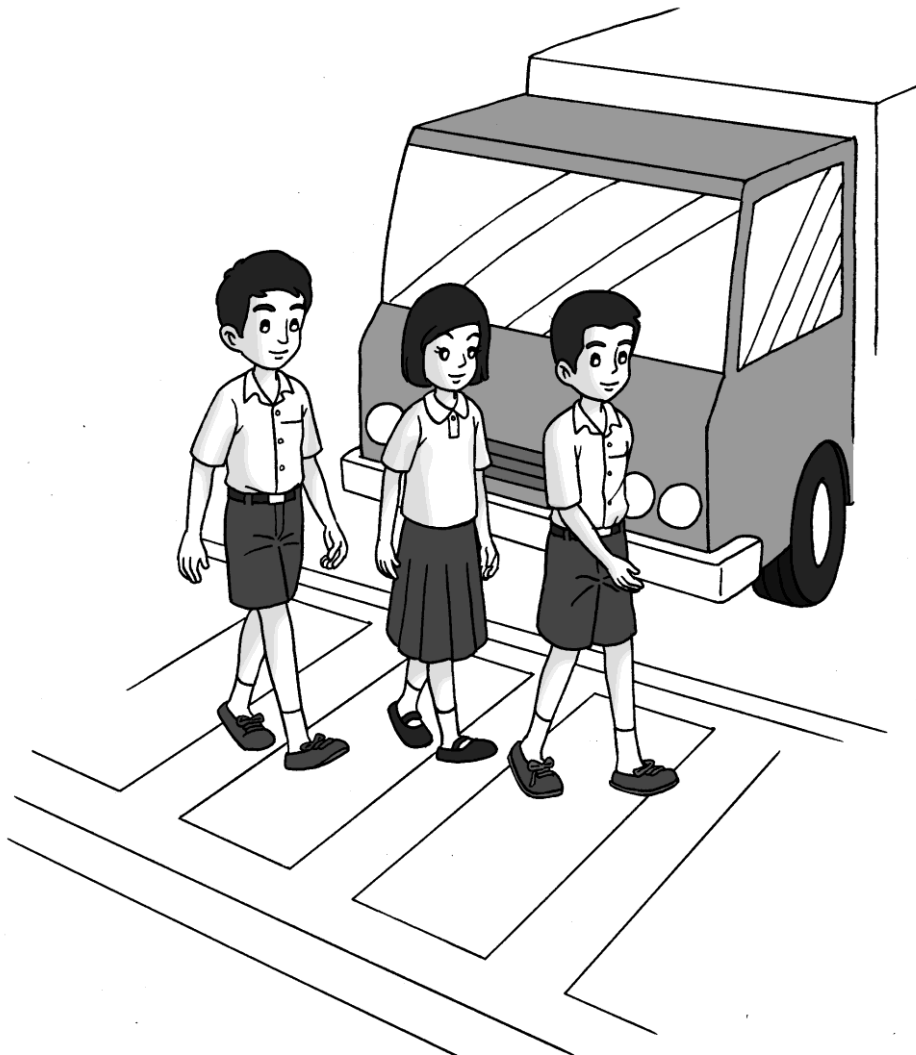
It is important that we are not overly critical of other people's work; otherwise, we will turn into a critical person and with time we may become reluctant to produce any work for fear of being criticized.

4.3.6 The Fruit of Being Creative

1. When we are creative, our work stands out.
2. When we are creative, we can make a good living.
3. When we are creative, it makes us observant, clever, and witty.
4. When we are creative, we can create prosperity in our life.
5. When we are creative, we can be happy now and in future existences.
6. When we are creative, we can play a part in helping to develop this world both materially and spiritually.

Etc.

4.4 Blessing No. 9: Being Disciplined



4.4.1 What Is Discipline?

Discipline means rules and regulations which are used to control our physical and verbal behavior so that everyone in society can live together in peace and harmony. **Discipline enables people to stay away from all forms of unwholesomeness and allows each one of us to use our talents and abilities in an appropriate and clever manner.**

4.4.2 Types of Discipline

There are two types of discipline: Discipline in the secular world and discipline in the Dhamma world.

4.4.3 Discipline in the Secular World

Discipline in the secular world is enforced through rules and regulations and it includes law, legislation, etc.

4.4.4 Discipline in the Dhamma World

Since Buddhists consist of householders and monks (or non-householders), discipline in the Dhamma world is divided into two types as follows.

1. **Anagariyavinaya:** It is the discipline which applies to monks and novice monks.
2. **Agariyavinaya:** It is the discipline which applies to all householders.

4.4.5 Anagariyavinaya: Discipline for a Non-Householder

The highest objective in the life of a Buddhist monk is the complete removal of defilements. Such an objective requires the ultimate form of insight which can only be gained through elevated meditative attainments. Elevated meditative attainments are in turn based on Precepts which bring about purity. There are four components to Anagariyavinaya as follows:

1. **Patimokkhasanvara:** It is the 227 Precepts which every monk must keep.
2. **Indriyasānvara:** It is the restraint of one's eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind such that one does not become attached to any physical form, any particular sound, any particular taste, any particular touch, as well as certain emotions. It means that one does not look at something which should not be looked at, listen to what should not be listened to, smell what should not be smelled, taste what should not be tasted, touch what should not be touched, or think what should not be thought.
3. **Ajivaparisuddhisānvara:** It means right livelihood for a monk which involves the begging of alms. A monk must not earn wrong livelihood by seeking gain through divining winning lottery numbers, practicing fortune-telling, acting as a matchmaker, doing things to please lay devotees, etc.
4. **Paccayapaccavekakkhana:** It means considering the four requisites before consuming them with the realization that they are merely the means to sustain life. Such consideration prevents one from becoming intoxicated with food, clothing, medicine, and shelter.

When Buddhism was first established, no rules were decreed because there were only a small number of monks and each monk practiced the Dhamma in earnest. They knew what should and should not be done. Once the number of monks increased and there were increasing incidents of misbehavior, the Lord Buddha had begun to decree a particular rule after each particular incident. Therefore, there was a reason behind the decree of each rule. For example, the first rule was decreed because a monk called Sudin had had sexual intercourse with his wife because his parents wanted him to leave them an heir. After this incident, the Lord Buddha decreed the rule which forbids the monks from having sexual intercourse.

4.4.6 Why Did the Lord Buddha Decree the Monastic Discipline?

1. He did it in order to keep the monks on the path of righteousness.
2. He did it in order to intimidate monks who are not easily shamed.
3. He did it in order to promote well-being for the monks.
4. He did it in order to keep the monks happy with the Precepts.
5. He did it in order to prevent defilements from rearing their ugly heads in the present.
6. He did it in order to prevent defilements from rearing their ugly heads in the future.
7. He did it in order to inspire faith in non-believers.
8. He did it in order to increase faith in the believers.
9. He did it in order to help the monks stay true to the Dhamma.
10. He did it in order to safeguard the code of monastic discipline which is instrumental in perpetuating Buddhism.

4.4.7 Discipline for a Householder (Agariyavinaya)

The most important code of discipline for a householder is the Five Precepts.

4.4.8 What Are Precepts (Sila)?

Precepts mean the human norm in that Precepts are what distinguish humans from animals.

4.4.9 What Is the Human Norm?

We are defined as a human being by the way we behave. And as a human being, it is the norm that we abstain from the following five forms of misdeeds:

1. We abstain from killing. It may be the norm for certain animals such as tigers and lions to kill other beings for food but it is not so for a human being.
2. We abstain from stealing. It may be the norm for animals such as dogs to steal food from another animal but it is not so for a human being.
3. We abstain from sexual misconduct. It may be the norm for most animals to have many sexual partners but it is not so for a human being. It is the norm for a human being to be satisfied with his/her own partner.
4. We abstain from lying.
5. We abstain from alcohol and other addictive substances.

Another name for the human norm is the Five Precepts.

The Five Precepts or the human norm comes into being in order to make this world a peaceful place. Although the concept of the Five Precepts had been known before the Lord Buddha's time but only the Lord Buddha knows them to be the human norm and therefore, must be practiced by every human being. It is for this reason that He has incorporated the

Five Precepts into His Teachings. The Five Precepts are not commandments but are what distinguish humans from animals in that

On days that our Five Precepts are kept intact, in those days we are 100% human.

On days that we transgress one of the Five Precepts, it means in those days we are 80% human and 20% animal.

On days that we transgress two of the Five Precepts, it means that in those days we are 60% human and 40% animal.

On days that we transgress three of the Five Precepts, it means that in those days we are 40% human and 60% animal.

On days that we transgress four of the Five Precepts, it means that in those days we are 20% human and 80% animal.

It means that when all the Five Precepts have been transgressed, our humanity is lost, and so are our peace and happiness. In this case we are nothing but a walking dead because we are dead to all wholesomeness. A walking dead is a detriment to himself as well as to other people.

4.4.10 How to Keep the Precepts Throughout Our Life

In order to maintain our human norm, it is necessary for us to value the Precepts more than life itself. It takes wisdom to keep the Precepts successfully.

- We must realize that the Five Precepts are what define us as a human being.
- We must realize that when we transgress the Precepts, we are deviating from the human norm.
- Unfortunately, most people these days do not keep the Precepts and the results are disastrous as can be seen in nationwide and worldwide violence, chaos, and calamities.
- It is every Buddhist's duty to help alleviate the suffering of humanity by keeping the Five Precepts earnestly and regularly. Each one of us must be part of the solution and never part of the problem. We must also help persuade those around us to keep the Five Precepts for their sake and the sake of everyone in the world.

There is one good way of ensuring that we keep the Five Precepts throughout our life and that is to pledge the Five Precepts every morning in front of the Buddha Image as follows.

- Panatipata veramani: I will not kill.
- Adinnadana veramani: I will not steal.
- Kamesumicchacara veramani: I will not commit any sexual misconduct.
- Musavada veramani: I will not lie.
- Suramerayamajjapamadatthana veramani: I will not consume intoxicating substances.

Not only keeping the Five Precepts makes us human, but the illnesses we suffer as a race have their root causes in our transgression of the Precepts.

Transgression of the First Precept causes us to have a short lifespan, to be sickly.

Transgression of the Second Precept causes us to suffer nerve problems such as anxiety, neurosis.

Transgression of the Third Precept causes us to contract venereal diseases, AIDS.

Transgression of the Fourth Precept causes us to have a poor memory, suffer from such diseases as Alzheimer.

Transgression of the Fifth Precept causes us to develop alcoholism, cirrhosis, etc.

It is necessary that we keep the Five Precepts on regular days and endeavor to keep the Eight Precepts on the Buddhist Holy Day by keeping the three additional Precepts as follows:

The Third Precept is changed to abstinence from sexual intercourse.

The Sixth Precept: No food consumption from noon to the following morning.

The Seventh Precept: Abstaining from the use of cosmetics, perfumes, and other beauty products; abstaining from watching or participating in any form of entertainment.

The Eighth Precept: Abstaining from sleeping on a thick, soft mattress.

Keeping the latter three Precepts works to keep our sexual urge under control. It also serves as:

- 1) A natural birth control.
- 2) A way to discourage us from indulging in excesses.
- 3) A way to keep our mind calm which makes it conducive to elevated meditative attainments.

4.4.11 The Fruit of Precepts

1. Precepts give rise to material wealth which can be joyously consumed.
2. Precepts give rise to personal safety.
3. Precepts give rise to a good reputation and a good future.
4. Precepts give rise to confidence and boldness in every social situation.
5. Precepts give rise to a good memory.
6. Precepts open the way to the Celestial Realm and ultimately to Nibbana.

4.4.12 The Benefits of Discipline

Secular discipline and Dhamma discipline have the following beneficial effects:

1. **Discipline Leads to a Higher Road:** It means that a disciplined person can elevate his/her status. For examples:

A street urchin becomes a student once it attends school and learns discipline.

An ordinary boy becomes a novice monk once he ordains and observes the Ten Precepts.

A novice monk becomes a monk once he ordains and observes the 227 Precepts.

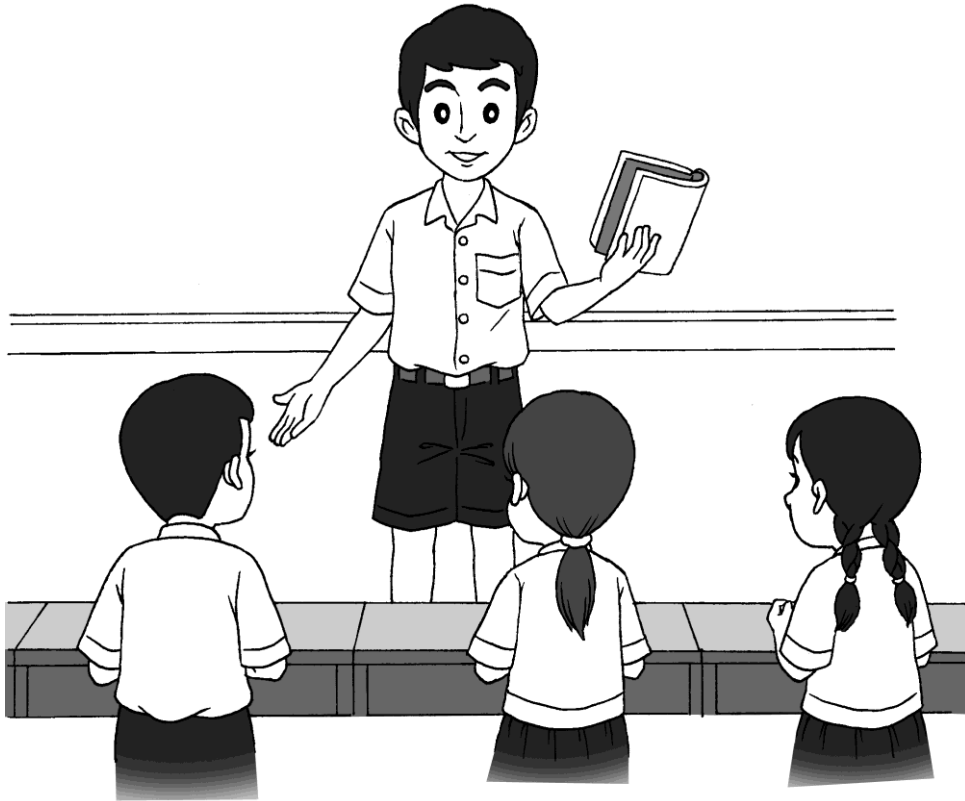
Discipline controls our verbal and physical behavior in such a way that it enables us to realize our life-objective.

2. **Discipline Leads to Illumination:** Discipline enlightens us about our true nature.

3. **Discipline Leads to Differentiation:** Discipline distinguishes people from one another. For example, a group of people, who accumulate weapons in order to fight with another group of people, are called soldiers when discipline is present but are called terrorists in the absence of discipline. A person that carries a gun in his/her person is called a police when discipline is present but is called a gangster in the absence of discipline. A person that begs for alms is called a monk and not a beggar when he observes the 227 Precepts.

Discipline makes it possible for us to make advancement in life, increase our purity, and elevate our status. A truly disciplined person is someone who is disciplined in both the secular world and the Dhamma world.

4.5 Blessing No. 10: Practicing Cultured Speech



4.5.1 What Is Cultured Speech?

Cultured speech means words which have been well thought out before they are spoken.

Here it is to be noted that we have two eyes in order to see, two ears in order to hear, two nostrils in order to smell but only one mouth in order to eat and speak. It means that by nature we are meant to see a lot, hear a lot but to speak a little. Even when we eat, we are meant to eat only an appropriate amount. When we speak, we should speak in an appropriate manner by using words which are useful to our self and other people. In other words, we should practice cultured speech.

4.5.2 Properties of Cultured Speech

- 1. Our Words Must Be True:** They are not made up, embellished, or exaggerated.
- 2. Our Words Must Be Polite:** They are words which come from a pure heart. Truthful words must not be crude, divisive or hurtful.
- 3. Our Words Must Be Useful:** They are words which benefit the speaker and the listener alike. Words which are true and polite but do not benefit anyone or may even cause harm should not be spoken.
- 4. Our Words Must Be Kind:** They are words which come from love and kindness.
- 5. Our Words Must Be Spoken at the Right Time and at the Right Place.**
 - Speaking at the right time: It means knowing when to speak and when not to speak, how long to speak and what result may be expected.
 - Speaking at the right place: It means knowing where to speak in order to obtain the expected result.

4.5.3 Characteristics of a Good Peace Agent

1. A good peace agent is open to other people's opinions.
2. A good peace agent knows how to make others listen to what he has to say.
3. A good peace agent speaks in a precise and concise manner.
4. A good peace agent has his speech memorized.
5. A good peace agent understands the topic and detail of a subject.
6. A good peace agent helps his audience to understand his speech.
7. A good peace agent knows to speak words that are useful.
8. A good peace agent does not practice divisive speech.

4.5.4 The Harm of Castigating a Fellow Monk

Whoever castigates a fellow monk that practices the Dhamma and is an Ariya individual will meet with the following 11 calamities:

1. He will not attain the Dhamma that he has not yet attained.
2. He will fall from the Dhamma that he has already attained.
3. His Dhamma will be flawed.
4. He will have the illusion that he has attained the Dhamma when he has not.
5. He will no longer be pleased with the practice of chastity.
6. He will commit an offence against the Dhamma-Discipline.
7. He will leave the monkhood.
8. He will become seriously ill.
9. He will suffer insanity.
10. At the time of death, he will not be conscious.
11. He will be reborn in the State of Loss of Woe, in the States of Unhappiness, in a Place of Suffering.

4.5.5 Words That Are Suspect

1. Words that are used to admire the virtue of a non-believer.
2. Words that are used to admire the morality of a transgressor of Precepts.
3. Words that are used to admire the profound knowledge of one who does not know how to listen.
4. Words that are used to admire the generosity of a miserly person.
5. Words that are used to admire the wisdom of a stupid person.

4.5.6 The Perfect Man's Voice

A person who has spoken truthful words throughout many of his previous existences will eventually attain the voice of the Perfect Man which has the following characteristics:

1. It is clear.
2. It is succinct and flowing.
3. It is gentle and sweet.
4. It is pleasing to the ears.
5. It is well-rounded and attractive.
6. It is not hoarse or blurred.
7. It is deep.
8. It is resonant.

4.5.7 The Fruit of Practicing Cultured Speech

1. It makes us attractive and endearing to people of all classes.
2. It helps us meet with advancement in the secular world and the Dhamma world.
3. It helps us negotiate successfully with others.
4. It lets us hear only things that are good and pleasing.
5. It helps us avoid the State of Loss and Woe.

Etc.

Truthful words spoken in whatever language, in whatever accent are noble words and admired by the sages.

CHAPTER 5

THE FOURTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: MAKING OUR SELF USEFUL TO OUR FAMILY

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 5

THE FOURTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: MAKING OUR SELF USEFUL TO OUR FAMILY

5.1 The Fourth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Making Our Self Useful to Our Family

5.2 Blessing No. 11: Supporting Our Parents

5.3 Blessing No. 12: Raising Our Children

5.4 Blessing No. 13: Supporting Our Spouse

5.5 Blessing No. 14: Not Being a Procrastinator

CONCEPTS

1. Once personal development has proceeded to the point where we are surrounded by good things, and able to benefit our self and others, we must also build a good, happy, and stable home life by supporting our parents, raising our children, supporting our spouse, and not being a procrastinator.
2. Our parents give us life. They raise us, and teach us to be a good person. They have made it possible for us to be educated for the secular world and the Dhamma world. Therefore, it is necessary that we repay them as soon as we can while they are still living and continue to repay them even after their death.
3. As parents, it is our duty to raise our children to grow up to be good and smart for both the secular world and the Dhamma world so that our children can perpetuate the family line and be the source of our pride and joy.
4. To create a happy family, spouses must know to treat each other with respect and consideration. They must be faithful to each other and they must possess similar virtues.
5. It is our duty to support our family by creating a sound economic base for the family. This requires that we do not procrastinate in our work but to employ our awareness and intellect to finish everything well and in a timely manner.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the importance of The Fourth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Making our self useful to our family.
2. To enable the student to correctly describe how we owe our parents a debt of gratitude and why our parents are called our Brahma Beings, our celestial beings, our first teachers, and our devas of purity.
3. To enable the student to correctly describe how we should treat our parents and the fruit of supporting our parents.
4. To enable the student to correctly describe the reason why we are responsible for raising our children and what we can expect of them.
5. To enable the student to correctly describe the different types of sons and daughters.
6. To enable the student to correctly describe how we can raise our children for the secular world and the Dhamma world.
7. To enable the student to correctly describe the importance of providing parental love for our children from their infancy to the age of three as well as the results of having properly raised our children.
8. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of a husband, the meaning of a wife as well as the seven types of wives.
9. To enable the student to correctly describe the characteristics of a good life partner and how to make spousal love last by following the practice of The Four Principles of Service and Social Integration.
10. To enable the student to correctly describe how a husband should treat his wife and how a wife should treat her husband.
11. To enable the student to correctly describe the advice for the newlyweds and the results of having properly supported one's spouse.
12. To enable the student to correctly describe the reasons why we procrastinate as well as the fruit of finishing our work on time.
13. To enable the student to correctly describe what stands in the way of finishing our work on time as well as the fruit of not being a procrastinator.

THE FOURTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: MAKING OUR SELF USEFUL TO OUR FAMILY

5.1 The Fourth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Making Our Self Useful to Our Family

Blessing No. 11: Supporting Our Parents

Blessing No. 12: Raising Our Children

Blessing No. 13: Supporting Our Spouse

Blessing No. 14: Not Being a Procrastinator

Once personal development has proceeded to the point where we are surrounded by good things and able to benefit our self and others, the next step requires that we make our self useful to our family by creating a good, stable, and happy home by doing the following:

1. Supporting Our Parents: We owe our parents a debt of gratitude because our parents have given us our human body and have raised us to be a good person in the secular world and the Dhamma world. We must therefore care for our parents when they get older and after they leave this world we must continue to make merit on their behalf. When we support our parents we are also providing our children with a good example.

2. Raising Our Children: We must be sure to raise our children to be a good and decent person for both the secular world and the Dhamma world. We must also serve as a good role model for them.

3. Supporting Our Spouse: Husband and wife must treat each other with respect and consideration if they want to create a warm and loving family. They must be faithful and giving to each other and they should possess similar virtues.

4. Not Being a Procrastinator: Since we must earn a living in order to support our self and our family, we are required to succeed in what we do for a living. And one key element of success is doing our work well and completing it in a timely manner. This means that we must not be a procrastinator.

5.2 Blessing No. 11: Supporting Our Parents



5.2.1 The Debt of Gratitude Owed to Our Parents

The Lord Buddha has given us the following analogy in order to give us an idea of the debt of gratitude we owe to our parents. **“If a son were to carry his parents on his shoulders, give them food and water, let them defecate and urinate on his shoulders until he turns 100, even then he still cannot adequately repay his parents.”**

Someone has given another analogy, “If one were to use the sky for paper, the top of the Sineru Mountain for a pen, the water in the ocean for ink, one can write about the virtues of one’s parents until the sky is filled with letters, the mountain is completely eroded, and the water in the ocean is completely used up, one still cannot fully describe them all.”

We owe our parents a great debt of gratitude for at least two very important reasons:

- 1. Our Parents Serve as Our Physical Prototype:** Physical form can render value to things that may otherwise be quite worthless. For example, one can add value to a lump of dirt by fashioning it into a doll or into a Buddha Image which can be used to represent the Lord Buddha. Should our physical prototype come from such animals as an elephant, a horse, etc., then we will be an elephant or a horse and do as an elephant or a horse does. It is because we are so fortunate as to have human beings as our parents that we possess the physical form that can be used to accumulate all kinds of good deeds.
- 2. Our Parents Serve as Our Psychological Prototype:** It is because our parents have raised us and taught us with such love and care that we can be a good and decent person with the potential to do so many good things.

5.2.2 Some of the Names Used to Call Our Parents

Parents have been called their children's first Brahma Beings, first Celestial Beings, first teachers, as well as Arahats and the reasons for such names are given as follows:

- 1. Our parents are called our Brahma Beings** because Brahma Beings possess 'The Four Noble Sentiments' which include:
 - 1) Loving-kindness: Our parents are infinitely loving and kind to us.
 - 2) Compassion: Our parents feel our suffering deeply and are always on hand to help us.
 - 3) Altruistic joy: Our parents feel our joy deeply.
 - 4) Equanimity: Our parents let us go after we can stand on our own. When we do make a mistake, our parents do not add to our problem but are there to support us.
- 2. Our parents are called our Celestial Beings** because they are the first people to have protected us since birth.
- 3. Our parents are called our first teachers** because they are the first people to teach us how to do things.
- 4. Our parents are called our Arahats** because they possess the following four virtues.
 - 1) They have done the difficult work of raising us.
 - 2) They have loved and protected us from harm.
 - 3) They have been true to us and therefore they serve as our field for cultivating merit.
 - 4) Our parents deserve our respect.

5.2.3 A Son's or a Daughter's Virtues

A son's or daughter's virtues begin with the acknowledgement that he/she owes his/her parents a great debt of gratitude followed by the intention to repay them. A son or a daughter should possess the two virtues of Katannu and Katavedi.

Katannu means having the wisdom to appreciate our parents' worth for the very fact that they have loved us and done so much for us and all in an unconditional manner. They have loved and supported us without having any foreknowledge of how we will eventually turn out or whether we will be worth their investment of time and effort.

Katavedi means repaying our parents for all that they have done for us. Repayment has two forms.

1. We make known to others our parents' virtues.
2. We repay them for their virtues.

Making known to others our parents' virtues: Usually at our mother's or father's memorial service, we distribute his/her biography to let the guests read about his/her virtues. However, the best way to make our parents' virtues known to others is by the way we are as a person. It will never do to write about our parents' virtues if we are an immoral and unethical person. If we truly love our parents, we must act in ways that will make them proud by being a good and decent person. Remember that through our behavior, we can either bring praise or condemnation to our parents.

Repayment occurs in two different periods:

1. The period when our parents are still living: It means that we help our parents with their work. We care for them when they are sick and when they are old. We make sure that they are comfortable and well provided for in their old age.
2. The period after our parents are gone: It means that we give them a proper funeral and we make merit on their behalf regularly.

These forms of repayment are trivial considering the great debt of gratitude we owe them. When we possess both Kattanu and Katavedi we will also make sure to do the following.

1. If our parents do not have faith in Buddhism, we must do what we can to help them become believers.
2. If our parents do not practice generosity, we must try to encourage them to do it and to let them know the value of alms-giving.
3. If our parents do not keep the Precepts, we must try to encourage them to do it.
4. If our parents do not practice meditation, we must try to encourage them to do it.

When we can help our parents to have faith in Buddhism, to give alms, keep the Precepts, and practice meditation, we are essentially helping our parents to meet with happiness in this as well as future existences.

5.2.4 The Fruit of Supporting Our Parents

1. We learn to be more patient.
2. Our awareness becomes sharper.
3. We learn to be more rational.
4. We are protected from harm.
5. Good things come to us more easily.
6. We are safe even in times of danger.
7. Celestial Beings want to watch over us.
8. We become praise-worthy.
9. We meet with prosperity.
10. We will have good children.
11. We meet with happiness.
12. We become a good role model for our children.

Etc.

A person who supports his aging parents is praised by the sages and will enjoy a happy *rebirth in the Celestial Realm*.

Khuddaka-nikaya. Jataka.Sattatinipāta 28/162/67

5.3 Blessing No. 12: Raising Our Children



The Lord Buddha says that a child can be its parents' blessing but on the other hand if the parents are negligent, the child may well turn out to be the parents' scourge.

5.3.1 Why Must We Raise Our Children?

All of us undergo aging and will eventually die. And all of us would like to leave a legacy of good deeds behind. Having something to be proud of does our mental health good and keeps us going strong for as long as possible. As parents, nothing can be compared to the pride we feel when we have brought our children up to be good and decent people as well as contributing members of society.

5.3.2 What Parents Hope for?

1. They hope that their children will take care of them in their old age.
2. They hope that their children will carry on the family's business.
3. They hope that their family name will be perpetuated.
4. They hope that their children will look after their inheritance.
5. They hope that their children will make merit on their behalf after they die.

5.3.3 What Does It Mean To Be a Son or a Daughter?

The Pali word ‘putra’ means a son or a daughter.

1. A putra perpetuates the family’s good name.
2. A putra is the parents’ pride and joy.

5.3.4 The Types of Sons and Daughters

There are three types of ‘putra’ as follows:

1. **Abhijataputra:** It means a son or a daughter who is superior to his/her parents in terms of virtues. He/she is considered to be a superior ‘putra’ and will bring prosperity to the family.
2. **Anujataputra:** It means a son or a daughter who is equal to his/her parents in terms of virtues. He/she is considered to be a fair ‘putra’ and will be able to keep the family’s name and status.
3. **Avajataputra:** It means a son or a daughter who is inferior to his/her parents in terms of virtues. He/she is considered to be an inferior ‘putra’ and will bring ruin to the family.

5.3.5 What Does It Take To Have a Good Son or a Good Daughter?

1. The parents themselves must be good and decent people. Parents that possess a great deal of past merit will have good children in the same way that a good fruit tree yields many good fruits. At birth, an infant possesses a similar level of virtues as its parents. Therefore, whoever wishes for good children must first accumulate as much merit as possible.
2. The parents must do a good job at raising their children both for the secular world and the Dhamma world.

5.3.6 How to Raise Our Children for the Secular World

There are five distinctive areas involved in good parenting:

1. **As parents we must keep our children away from wickedness.** It means that we must do all we can to make sure that our children do not follow the path of wickedness. Most importantly, we must make sure that they do not associate with fools. We encourage our children to bring their friends home so that we can observe the type of company our children are keeping. Should we find that any of their friends have the characteristics of a fool, we must encourage our children to stay away from them.

We must keep our children away from wickedness at a very young age. Besides the matter of friends, there are other matters such as TV programs, the Internet, and other media that we as parents must keep an eye on. We must not use TV as a babysitter and should allow our children to watch only wholesome and useful programs. It is best that we watch TV with our children in order that we can better advise them of suitable programs and shows.

As parents, it is not easy for us to keep our children away from wickedness and at times misunderstanding may arise. Problems arise for three reasons as follows:

1. Conflicting opinions
2. Conflicting wants
3. Defilements

Conflicting opinions arise when things are looked at from opposing points of view. For example, teenagers tend to view going out with friends as a means to develop good social skills and keep in touch with what is the latest while parents view it as a threat to one's study, safety, etc. In this case, the child may resent his parents for forbidding him to go out with friends thinking that his parents are old-fashioned.

In all fairness, children should listen to their parents for two very good reasons: One, parents mean their children well; two, parents know more about life. As many friends that we may have around us, no one on earth can ever love us the way that our parents do. Moreover, all of us have made mistakes out of ignorance when we were young. Therefore, it behooves the children to listen to their parents. On the parents' part, they should be tactful and patient when they must forbid their children to do something.

Conflicting wants may arise out of different preferences between parents and children. For example, parents may enjoy the quiet and comforts of home whereas young people may enjoy getting dressed up and going out. Parents and children need to find a middle ground where they can meet and this should be based on mutual love and understanding.

Defilements in the forms of anger, stubbornness, arrogance, etc., which are inherent in both parents and children can make for a difficult relationship. Therefore, it is very important that parents cultivate virtues and teach their children to do the same by starting at a very young age. Our virtues can keep our defilements at bay and make it easier for conflicts to be resolved in such a way that is mutually satisfactory.

- 2. As parents we must instill goodness and decency in our children.** We must teach our children to keep the Precepts and behave in a moral and ethical manner. We must seek to help our children develop their minds by cultivating self-restraint and self-discipline, for it is our mind that controls our thought, word, and action.

Material objects can be arbitrarily divided into 2 categories and they include things that are used for food and things that are used as tools. We need food to sustain our body. We need tools to make a living. For examples, a farmer needs a plowshare; a clerk needs a pen.

Mental wealth can be also be arbitrarily divided into 2 categories and they include: The Dhamma (food for the mind); and secular knowledge (tools for the mind).

Everyone must eat in order for their body to work. Likewise, everyone must learn the Dhamma in order for their mind to work properly. In terms of secular knowledge,

everyone must pursue his own field of study in order to gain whatever knowledge needed for his respective job or career. Out of the four categories of material objects and mental wealth only such physical tools as a knife may be shared by all in the family, the rest has to be obtained by each individual self through each individual's effort.

It is the parents' duty to instill goodness and decency in their children. This means that:

- 2.1 Parents must be a good role model themselves.
- 2.2 Parents must choose the kind of company for their children to keep.
- 2.3 Parents must choose appropriate books and other media for their children.
- 2.4 Parents must take their children to visit such sages as Buddhist monks who practice righteousness as well as virtuous teachers.

3. Parents must provide a good education their children. Not only must parents make sure that their children get the kind of education they need but they must also keep up with their children's school schedule, grades, etc. If children must attend school away from home, parents need to make sure that they are under the care of a trusted chaperon or go to a reputable boarding school.

4. Parents must make sure that their children choose a good and decent spouse. There are two steps involved in this activity.

- 4.1 Parents must be involved in every aspect of their children's wedding.
- 4.2 Parents must make sure that their children choose the right spouse.

It is conceivable how conflicts may arise between parents and children in the matter of choosing the right partner. Two problems are involved here:

- 4.2.1 What are the positive and negative effects of the parents' interference?
- 4.2.2 Who should be the decision-maker in this matter?

As far as the first problem is concerned, the only negative effect may come from parents that act heavy-handedly. However, if the parents and children have a good and close relationship, the parents can exert a very positive influence in this matter by the mere fact that they are older and more experienced. Moreover, parents have only genuine love for their children and naturally do everything for the good of their children especially in such an important matter as choosing the right spouse.

As far as the second problem is concerned, it is best that the parents and children work together to decide when the children should marry and who they should marry. It is important that parents allow their children to marry the person they love, since love is the basis of marriage. It is important that children choose the partner that their parents approve of as a way of repaying their parents and as a way of bringing blessings into their marriage. However, there will be situations when the children love someone the parents dislike. In that case, the parents must resign themselves to the fact that the couple may be meant for each other. The exception to this rule will be when the person our child loves is immoral and will lead him/her to ruin. In this case, the parents must step in and forbid the union.

5. Parents should give their children their rightful inheritance when the time is right.

The right time is when the children are old enough to be self-responsible. For the children that are still involved in the causes of ruin, hence are not yet self-responsible, they have no right to any inheritance.

For parents that are very wealthy, they should provide a living will for their children in order to prevent any conflicts that may arise later among the children which may lead to lawsuits, violence, etc.

5.3.7 How to Raise Our Children for the Dhamma World

1. Attend the temple with our children so that they can learn the Dhamma.
2. Encourage our children to chant daily before bedtime.
3. Encourage our children to accumulate merit regularly such as making a food-offering to the monks, keeping the Precepts, etc.
4. Encourage our children to practice meditation with us.
5. Male children should be encouraged to ordain as a novice or a monk. Once ordained, they should practice meditation and study the Scriptures.

5.3.8 How It Is Important for a Child from Infancy to Three Years Old to Receive Parental Love

(Note: The following excerpt is provided by Dr. Niyom Ketjumras)

Medical research has found that breast-feeding for at least six months and the love received from parents from infancy to three years old play an important role in the behavior of a child when he grows up. Child psychologists have found that children who had been breast-fed for at least 6 months tend to have a cheerful disposition and rarely throw a temper tantrum. These children tend to have a beautiful countenance and they smile a lot. Their eyes are bright and joyful. Researchers explain that when a child is being breast-fed it is held and cuddled by its mother. It can feel its mother's touch. It can hear its mother's heartbeat. It can hear its mother's breathing. It can see its mother's face. These senses fill the child with contentment. Children that are breast-fed for at least 6 months tend to feel safe and secure. They are kind and considerate. They are joyful, reasonable, and patient. Bottle-fed children tend to be less considerate and more selfish.

Researchers have found that the information stored in the brain from birth to three years old is difficult to change. Fear of cats, fear of thunder, fear of height, etc., mostly result from experiences which occur during this tender period. Therefore, it behooves parents to start teaching their children beginning at infancy and it behooves mothers to breast-feed their children so that they can grow up to be loving and kind and have a good mental health.

A Cautionary Note:

1. Love your children but do not spoil them. Parents spoil their children because they cannot bear to inflict them with punishment and/or because they have no time for their children. The guilt they feel drives them to spoil their children.
2. Do not be too strict with your children.
3. Do make sure to spend enough quality time with your children.
4. Correct your children as soon as they do something wrong but do it gently. At the same time, praise them when they do something good.
5. Teach your children to help with household chores.
6. Provide your children with the four necessities of life and provide for them the Dhamma as well.

5.3.9 The Fruit of Having Properly Raised Our Children

1. Parents can feel proud of their efforts.
2. There is love and harmony in the family.
3. The country has more decent citizens.
4. Society will have more role models.

Etc.

5.4 Blessing No. 13: Supporting Our Spouse



When we chew food, if our tongue and teeth do not work together, chances are that we will end up biting our tongue. Likewise, if husband and wife do not support each other and do not understand each other, their marriage cannot grow and can result in many tears.

5.4.1 What Is a Spouse?

A spouse can be a wife or a husband. A husband provides for his wife whereas a wife behaves in such a way that she deserves to be provided for.

5.4.2 The Types of Wives

The Lord Buddha teaches that there are overall 7 types of wives:

1. **Vadhakabhariya:** It means a murderer of a wife. This type of wives thinks about ruining her husband. She tries to take his life. She curses him and beats him up. She takes pleasure in other men.
2. **Joribhariya:** It means a thief of a wife. This type of wives steals from her husband in that she does not know the value of money. She is a spendthrift. She incurs debts.
3. **Ayyabhariya:** It means a boss of a wife. This type of wives chips away at her husband's dignity. She is lazy. She's fond of food. She has a foul mouth. She intimidates her hard-working husband in the same way that a master intimidates his worker. She feels proud that she can intimidate her husband.
4. **Matabhariya:** It means a mother of a wife. This type of wives loves her husband unconditionally in the way that a mother loves her child. Whatever calamity may befall her husband, whatever illness may inflict her husband, she never says or does anything that may hurt his feelings. Even if her husband dies young, she will never remarry.
5. **Bhaginibhariya:** It means a sister of a wife. This type of wives respects her husband and her love for him is true but she may be temperamental, naughty, and sensitive. She teases him. She pouts. She comforts him.
6. **Sakhibhariya:** It means a friend of a wife. This type of wives has similar likes and dislikes as her husband. She is virtuous and well-behaved but she feels equal to her husband and will not give in to her husband when he is irrational.
7. **Dasibhariya:** It means a slave of a wife. This type of wives acts like her husband's servant. She puts up with her husband were he to beat her or berate her. She submits completely to her husband's authority.

Husbands can also be grouped into 7 types as above.

It is only some time after marriage that a husband or a wife shows himself or herself for what he or she really is.

Before marriage, men and women dress themselves in clothes, appearance, and manners in order to impress each other. However, after marriage, each partner must shoulder his/her responsibility and it is the time that each will show himself/herself for what he/she truly is.

5.4.3 Attributes of a Good Spouse

In order for husband and wife to live together in harmony and happiness, they must possess ‘**Samajividhamma**’ which includes:

1. **Samasaddha**: It means that the husband and wife share the same level of faith in Buddhism and they share the same life objective.
2. **Samasila**: It means that the husband and wife share the same level of morality and have similar ethical standard. They have similar good manners.
3. **Samacaga**: It means the husband and wife share the same level of generosity and selflessness.
4. **Samapanna**: It means the husband and wife share the same level of intellect. They are equally logical, reasonable, and creative. They are not stubborn. They are empathic and have similar communication skills.

5.4.4 How to Make Spousal Love Last

Our Lord Buddha teaches that to make spousal love last, the couple must practice ‘The Four Principles of Service and Social Integration’ which include:

1. **Alms-Giving (Dana)**: Once two people have made the commitment to live together as a couple, they must share their incomes by pooling them together and share the responsibility of managing their money.
2. **Endearing Speech (Piyavaca)**: The couple needs to speak to each other in a polite manner especially when conflicts arise and need to be resolved.
3. **Altruism (Atthacariya)**: The couple must act in ways that are helpful to each other. It is best for both parties to continue increasing their knowledge of the Dhamma and to practice it in their daily lives.
4. **Knowing One’s Place (Samanattata)**: The couple must fulfill their individual roles as a husband or a wife. They are cognizant of their responsibility whether they are inside or outside the home. The couple can be aided in this matter by practicing meditation regularly in order to increase their awareness and self-possession.

Every person hence every couple can enhance the quality of their lives by practicing almsgiving, keeping the Precepts, and practicing meditation.

5.4.5 How a Husband Should Treat His Wife

1. A husband should honor his wife by acknowledging her as his wife both publicly and privately. He should never criticize her in public. He should allow her a suitable amount of freedom in terms of time alone or time with her friends and relatives.
2. A husband should never be disrespectful to his wife but should consult her in family matters. Most importantly, a husband must never abuse his wife verbally or physically.
3. A husband should never be unfaithful.
4. A husband should give his wife authority over household matters.
5. A husband should occasionally give his wife gifts of clothes and jewelry.

5.4.6 How a Wife Should Treat Her Husband

1. A wife should make a home for herself and her husband. The home should be clean, neat, and comfortable. Meals should be nutritious and delicious. She makes sure that her husband's clothes are clean and neat.
2. A wife should be giving to her husband's family and help them out in times of need.
3. A wife should be faithful and loyal to her husband.
4. A wife knows how to manage the family money. She is neither stingy nor extravagant.
5. A wife should be diligent and does not become involved in any causes of ruin.

Our Lord Buddha gives the married couple the Four Principles of Service and Social Integration because such practices will hold the couple together and make their love last all throughout their lives.

A Cautionary Note:

It behooves the wife to continue practicing the Four Principles of Service and Social Integration, alms-giving, and Precepts even when she finds that her husband may be thinking of straying. Some women make the mistake of neglecting the husband and the home while they search everywhere for masters of black magic to conjure up tricks to lure their husband back. Such pursuit can only make matters worse and are never helpful.

5.4.7 Advice for the Bride

The advice has to do with the puzzling comments which Visakha's father made to her on her wedding day. There were 10 comments altogether as follows:

1. **Do Not Bring the Fire Outside.** It means that a wife should not tell people outside the family about any family problems.
2. **Do Not Bring the Fire Inside.** It means that a wife should not bring other people's problems into the home.
3. **Give to the Giver.** It means that whoever returns what he/she borrows from her at the stated date, should the same person ever need help from her again in the future, she should help him/her.
4. **Do not Give to a Non-Giver.** It means that whoever does not return what he/she borrows from her at the stated date and refuses to help her in times of need even if he/she is in the position to help her and when it is not morally wrong to help, he/she does not deserve her help in the future.
5. **Give to a Giver and Non-Giver.** It means that a wife should help her relatives out in times of need whether or not they return what they borrowed from her at the stated time.
6. **Eat Happily.** It means that a wife should provide meals for her family as well as for her husband's parents. Once she has done this, then she can sit down and enjoy her food.

- 7. Sit Happily.** It means that a wife should never sit in a place which is above where her husband's parents are sitting.
- 8. Sleep Happily.** It means that a wife should wake up before her husband's parents and should go to bed after they have already gone to bed. In this way, she can sleep happily.
- 9. Worship Fire.** It means that when the husband or his parents are angry, the wife should remain silent and never talk back. Otherwise, she may be causing the fire of anger to spread. She should wait until everyone calms down before explaining herself.
- 10. Worship Devas.** It means that when the husband or his parents do good things, the wife should encourage them to do more of them.

5.4.8 The Fruit of Supporting Our Spouse

1. It makes spousal love last.
 2. It creates harmony in the family.
 3. It creates peace and happiness in the family.
 4. It makes us praise-worthy and admirable.
 5. It provides a good example for the younger generation.
- Etc.

5.5 Blessing No. 14: Not Being a Procrastinator



5.5.1 The Reasons That Work Does Not Get Done in Time

There are three main reasons why work does not get done in time:

1. **The Timing Is Wrong:** It means that we start our work at the wrong time. For example, we clean the house when the sun is out but hang the laundry out when it is raining. Another example, we were a lazy student when we were young but wish to further our education when we are too old to do it.
2. **The Process Is Wrong:** It means that we go about our work haphazardly without any thought of the correct order of things; therefore, we end up wasting a lot of time and effort.
3. **Plain Laziness:** It means that we use every excuse in order to avoid doing our work. The Lord Buddha teaches that whenever we are ready to do a good deed, the timing is always right and there is no need to wait.

5.5.2 How to Get Our Work Done in a Timely Manner

The Lord Buddha teaches that when we undertake any work, what we need to practice is ‘**The Four Paths of Accomplishment**’ which include:

1. **Will or Chanda:** It means having the will to do something.
2. **Effort or Viriya:** It means putting in the effort to do something.
3. **Active Thought or Citta:** It means doing something attentively.
4. **Examination or Vimansa:** It means finding the best way to do something.

Will or Chanda means that we love what we are working on. Will occurs when we have a good idea about what we will gain when the work is finished. For example, we go to school in order to prepare our self for future employment.

An employer will do well to create job satisfaction for the employee by letting him know the importance of his role in the overall scheme of things. It will not do for the employer to merely issue commands and exercise his/her authority liberally.

Effort or Viriya means endeavor and persistence. Effort in this case is analogous to courage and is considered a virtue. The opposite of effort is laziness.

Laziness can be overcome by cultivating effort. Effort can be gained only when we stay away from all causes of ruin.

It is noteworthy that in order for work to progress smoothly, both the supervisor and the subordinate must practice effort. If the supervisor is lazy and sponges off his subordinate’s effort, soon enough the subordinate will lose steam and no work will get done. However, if the supervisor is hard-working, his good example will encourage his subordinate to be hard-working as well.

Laziness destroys every virtue. A lazy person makes neither a good monk nor a good householder.

Active Thought or Citta means that we do our work in an attentive manner. Most adults are responsible enough to pay attention to their work. The problem arises more out of the fact that some people have a tendency to mind other people’s business. And in so doing they become unduly critical of other people and their work. It is for this reason that the Lord Buddha teaches us to pay attention to our own business; that is, the finished part of our work as well as the unfinished part.

Examination or Vimansa means coming up with the best way to get our work done. We do so by employing our intellect to analyze and investigate the work that we are doing so that we can find the best way to get it done. It will not do to merely work attentively because the work may not get done or it may get finished without yielding the desired result.

People that work without using ‘examination’ may become enslaved to their work simply because it takes them so long just to get something done, sort of like the story of the Peta that arranged people’s feet and heads. The story goes that a Peta was assigned by his

superior to keep watch over a byway shelter. Therefore, when the travelers were asleep, the Peta will appear at the shelter to check things out. First, he walked by their heads and proceeded to arrange every head so that the heads lined up properly. Next he walked by their feet and proceeded to arrange every foot so that the feet lined up properly. But when he walked by the people's heads again, he had to arrange the heads once more, so on and so forth all night long without realizing that people were of different heights. It is easy to see from the story that this Peta's work can never be done. It behooves us to use 'examination' in our work so that we do not carry out our work the way this Peta does.

People that employ 'examination' in their work do each stage of the work at the right time, in the right order, and in the right way.

5.5.3 What Stands in the Way of Getting Our Work Done in Time?

The major hindrances come in the forms of '**The Six Causes of Ruin**' and they include:

1. Drinking alcohol
2. Frequenting the nightlife
3. Watching all forms of entertainment
4. Gambling
5. Associating with fools
6. Laziness

'The Six Causes of Ruin' or 'Apayamukha' are what lead us to an unseen but ruinous destination. The Pali 'Apayamukha' comes from two words: Apaya and Mukha where Apaya means ruin and Mukha means the entrance.

Initially such causes of ruin may appear innocuous. For example, one may think of the nightlife as being enjoyable and gambling as being fun and exciting. Yet, when any or all of these activities are engaged routinely and perhaps even addictively, they can be the cause of untold damage.

Noteworthy Information:

Attributes of a Good Employer

1. A good employer knows to assign work which is suitable to each employee.
2. A good employer knows to provide adequate compensation for each employee.
3. A good employer knows to provide the employees with extra benefits.
4. A good employer knows to share something special with the employees on certain occasions.
5. A good employer knows to allow the employees certain days off work.

Attributes of a Good Employee

1. A good employee knows to begin work early.
2. A good employee knows to stay late in order to finish his work.
3. A good employee knows to take only what is given by his employer.
4. A good employee knows to improve upon his work.
5. A good employee knows to praise his employer's virtues.

5.5.4 The Fruit of Not Being a Procrastinator

1. It helps us to improve our economic status as well as that of the family and the country.
2. It helps us to gain happiness.
3. It helps us to become self-sufficient.
4. Others can depend on us.
5. It helps us to accumulate merit easily.
6. It helps us to live our life with heedfulness.
7. It helps us to close the entrance to the State of Loss and Woe.
8. It helps us to spend our hereafter in the Celestial Realm.
9. It helps us to form good habits which will follow us across many lifetimes.
10. It makes us admirable.

CHAPTER 6

THE FIFTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: MAKING OUR SELF USEFUL TO SOCIETY

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 6

THE FIFTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: MAKING OUR SELF USEFUL TO SOCIETY

6.1 The Fifth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Making Our Self Useful to Society

6.2 Blessing No. 15: Practicing Generosity

6.3 Blessing No. 16: Cultivating Human Decency

6.4 Blessing No. 17: Supporting Our Relatives

6.5 Blessing No. 18: Engaging in Harmless Work

CONCEPTS

1. Once we can establish a happy and stable family, it is time that we make our self useful to society by giving alms, cultivating human decency, supporting our relatives, and doing harmless work so that we can play a part in creating social harmony and stability.
2. Alms-giving means sharing what we have with others in need for the purpose of ridding our self of miserliness, and for the purpose of accumulating merit. When we practice generosity regularly, we are essentially elevating our mind and playing a part in creating peace in society.
3. When we cultivate human decency it means that we behave in such a way that is morally good and socially correct because we are practicing the Lord Buddha's Teachings. It is every human being's responsibility to continue refining himself by increasing the level of his decency; part of it includes impartiality.
4. Our relatives are our siblings, aunts, uncles, children, etc. But they also include those we know well, those who live in our province, those who live in our country, and those who share our earth. Therefore, supporting our relatives is the means to promote social harmony and stability.
5. When we do harmless work we are doing work which is honest, harmless, lawful, not conflicting with tradition, morally right, and non-exploitative. It also includes altruistic work for the good of the self and society.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the importance of the 5th group of Life's 38 Blessings: Making our self useful to society.
2. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning and types of alms as well as the reason behind alms-giving.
3. To enable the student to give examples of the kind of alms-giving that does not yield any fruit; to enable the student to describe how to earn a lot of merit from alms-giving.
4. To enable the student to correctly describe the fruit of alms-giving as well as the summary of the fruit of alms-giving.
5. To enable the student to correctly describe what it means to cultivate human decency, how to practice according to 'The Ten Wholesome Course of Action', and the fruit of cultivating human decency.
6. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning and types of relatives as well as how to locate a genuine relative.
7. To enable the student to correctly describe the characteristics of a relative, when and how to support a relative, as well as the fruit of supporting our relatives.
8. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of harmless work, how to tell if the work is harmless, and the four characteristics of harmless work.
9. To enable the student to correctly describe the types of harmless work and examples of harmless work as well as the fruit of doing harmless work.

THE FIFTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: MAKING OUR SELF USEFUL TO SOCIETY

6.1 The Fifth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Making Our Self Useful to Society

Blessing No. 15: Practicing Generosity

Blessing No. 16: Cultivating Human Decency

Blessing No. 17: Supporting Our Relatives

Blessing No. 18: Engaging in Harmless Work

Once we have built a happy and stable family, the next step in self-development is to reach out and make our self useful to society by doing the following:

- 1. Practicing Generosity:** It means that we willingly share what we have with others who are in need and deserve our help. When we practice generosity, not only are we accumulating merit but we are also chipping away our miserliness. Our generous acts make us a better person because we are contributing to other people's well-being.
- 2. Cultivating Human Decency:** It means that we practice according to the Lord Buddha's Teachings especially 'The Ten Wholesome Course of Action'. Moreover, we must take care not to exercise partiality.
- 3. Supporting Our Relatives:** It means that we not only help our blood relations out in times of need but we also help our friends and the people who live in our province, our country, and our world. When we support our relatives we must do it in such a way that it does not go against our moral principles. In supporting our relatives, we are helping to create a more harmonious and stable society.
- 4. Engaging in Harmless Work:** Harmless work is work which is honest, lawful, moral, ethical, not harmful and exploitative. Harmless work is work which benefits the self and others and it includes what we do for social and humanitarian causes. Harmless work furthers our cultivation of virtues.

6.2 Blessing No. 15: Practicing Generosity



6.2.1 What Is Alms-Giving?

Alms-Giving Is an Act of Generosity. It is the willingness to share what we have with others in order to benefit them. Alms-giving is the basis of human decency and life is not possible without it. For example, if our parents do not practice alms-giving, we will not be able to survive. A house cannot be a home if the couple does not share their earnings. The world will be filled with stupid people if teachers are not willing to share their knowledge with the students. If people do not exercise forgiveness which is a form of alms-giving, the world will be filled with angry people. Every aspect of life is made possible because of alms-giving.

6.2.2 Types of Alms

1. **Amisadana:** It is the giving of objects
2. **Dhammadana or Vidayadana:** It is the giving of knowledge. Secular knowledge includes all the arts and sciences. The sharing of secular knowledge is called Vidayadana whereas the sharing of Dhamma knowledge is called Dhammadana.
3. **Abhayadana:** It means giving up anger and thoughts of revenge.

The highest form of alms-giving is Dhammadana because Dhamma knowledge benefits the recipient not only in this life but in future lives as well. The benefits of Dhamma knowledge are everlasting.

Sabbadanam dhammadanam jinati

Dhammadana is the highest form of alms-giving.

6.2.3 Why do people give alms?

1. One gives alms in order to curry favor with someone. For examples, during an election, a hopeful candidate may build a road or a bridge in the community where he/she is seeking votes. A person may buy gifts for the mother of the girl with whom he has fallen in love. Such alms-giving has an ulterior motive; therefore, it earns hardly any merit.
2. One gives alms in order to aid someone. Such an act is made out of one's love and kindness. Parents provide for their children. A wealthy person provides scholarships for underprivileged children. Etc.
3. One gives alms in order to show one's gratitude. One treats one's parents with love and respect. One takes care of one's parents when they are ill. One helps support one's parents when they get older. One gives to Buddhist monks and novices who practice righteousness because they are the world's Dhamma teachers. One gives to everyone who is generous and kind to him.

A Cautionary Note:

It behooves us to realize that when we die, we cannot take a whit with us. The only thing that can follow us after we die is 'merit'. And one way of making merit is through alms-giving. Alms-giving benefits all of us who still experience aging, sickness, death, and rebirth.

6.2.4 What Kinds of Alms-Giving Do Not Yield any Fruit?

1. When the given objects are addictive substances such as cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana, etc.
2. When the given objects are weapons such as guns, knives, etc.
3. When the given objects are theater tickets, concert tickets, etc., which only serve to fuel the fire of sense-desire.
4. When one provides someone with an animal for the purpose of mating or with a female companion in the form of a call girl.
5. When the given objects are pornographic materials.

6.2.5 How to Earn a Lot of Merit from Alms-Giving

For alms-giving to earn a lot of merit, it must meet the following three criteria:

1. **The alms to be given must be obtained by honest means.** For example, they must not be stolen items. A food-offering consisting of simple foods, which were purchased by money earned from right livelihood, earns more merit than a Chinese banquet paid for by money obtained from wrong livelihood.
2. **The alms are given with good intention;** that is, they are given for the purpose of chipping away one's miserliness and for the purpose of earning merit, not for fame, praise, or other ulterior motives.

Good intention must be displayed throughout the following three periods.

- Before the alms-giving, one feels the joy of giving.
- During the alms-giving, one is joyous.
- After the alms-giving, one feels joyous every time one recalls the act.

3. **The recipient of our alms is virtuous.** Our Lord Buddha teaches that the Sangha or Buddhist monks, who practice righteousness according to the Dhamma-Discipline, are the richest field for cultivating merit. The alms-giver must also be virtuous and keeps at least the Five Precepts. It is for this reason that before the alms-giving, the monks will first lead the laity to pledge the Five Precepts.

6.2.6 The Fruit of Alms-Giving

A person that practices generosity on a regular basis has a calm and clear mind. He/she rarely experiences problems in life. The reason is that a generous person attracts good things and material wealth into his/her life. This does not happen with a stingy and greedy person. It is an old saying that whoever practices generosity in his previous lives will be very wealthy in this life. The Lord Buddha has the following to say about the fruit of alms-giving:

*A person should give what is suitable to give.
It is admirable to practice generosity.
Only fools do not praise alms-giving.
The alms of a believer are not considered trivial.
An alms-giver meets with prosperity.
A generous person is well-loved by many.
A wise person that makes other people happy receives happiness in return.*

*Khuddaka-nikāya. Jataka. Sattatinipāta 27/1012/217
Khuddaka-nikāya. Jataka. Atthkanipāta 27/1184/249
Khuddaka-nikāya. Dhammapada 25/23/38
Khuddaka-nikāya. Vimānavatthu 26/47/82
Khuddaka-nikāya. Udāna 25/168/215
Samyuttanikāya. Sagāthavagga 15/845/316
Anguttaranikāya Pañcakanipāta 22/35/43, 22/37/45*

*A person who gives food as alms is the giver of strength.
A person who gives cloths as alms is the giver of a good complexion.
A person who gives means of transportation is the giver of happiness.
A person who gives light sources is the giver of vision.
A person who gives shelter is the giver of every good thing.
A person who gives Dhammadana is the giver of everlasting knowledge.
(Kinda Sutta) Samyuttanikāya. Sagāthavagga 15/138/44*

*Whoever gives what is desirable will receive desirable things.
Whoever gives superb alms will receive things that are of superb quality.
Whoever gives good-quality alms will receive things that are of good quality.
Whoever gives sublime alms will receive things that are sublime.
Whoever gives superb, good, and sublime alms will experience in his rebirth longevity and position.*

(Manāpadayī Sutta) Anguttaranikāya Pañcakanipāta 22/44/56

6.2.7 Summary of the Fruit of Alms-Giving

1. Alms-giving is the source of all kinds of wealth.
 2. Alms-giving is the source of material wealth.
 3. Alms-giving is the source of happiness.
 4. A giver is well-loved by many.
 5. Alms-giving is the source of friendship.
 6. A giver is endearing.
 7. A giver is sought after by good and decent people.
 8. A giver does not feel awkward in social circles.
 9. A giver is bold and courageous anywhere.
 10. A giver has a good reputation.
 11. A giver is reborn in the Celestial Realm.
- Etc.

6.3 Blessing No. 16: Cultivating Human Decency



6.3.1 What Is Meant by Cultivating Human Decency?

Cultivating human decency means behaving our self in such a way that is good and correct, just and without partiality. The Lord Buddha ranks cultivating human decency before Blessings No. 17 and 18: Supporting our relatives and engaging in harmless work. The reason is that when we work for the benefits of other people we must come into contact with the general public. If we do not want to jeopardize our work, it is very important that we first possess the necessary qualities which allow us to work effectively with other people.

Therefore, before we can work to benefit the general public, it is important that we have already developed our self to the point where we can live and work harmoniously with other people; where we can be a part of the solution rather than a part of the problem. The work of cultivating human decency includes the following two areas:

1. Practicing impartiality.
2. Practicing virtues.

The Practice of Impartiality bestows peace and stability to society. The lack of impartiality or fairness can wreak havoc in society, causes family to be torn apart, causes unrest and revolution in the land. Ultimately it causes war between countries.

Fairness is dictated by what is right and reasonable. Fairness needs to be practiced by everyone in every social class.

Partiality or the lack of fairness is brought about by the following four factors:

1. Love: One is partial as a result of love.
2. Hatred: One is partial as a result of hatred.
3. Illusion or ignorance: One is partial out of ignorance.
4. Fear: One is partial out of fear.

Practicing virtues means practicing according to the Lord Buddha's Teachings especially 'The Ten Wholesome Course of Action' (**Kusala-kammapatha**) which include:

1. **Abstaining from Killing:** It means that we do not take the life of another living being. This particular wholesome course of action encourages us to solve problems in a peaceful manner rather than in a violent manner. Since killing is an act of pure violence, it causes the killer's mind to be sad and gloomy. Moreover, killing is a misdeed which incurs severe retribution. Killing complicates problems by perpetuating the vicious circle of violence.
2. **Abstaining from Stealing or Obtaining Things by Dishonest Means.** These include theft, robbery, extortion, burglary, making a false claim of ownership, cheating, deception, scheming, falsehood, counterfeit goods, false accounting, furtive exchange of goods, black marketeering, and corruption.

This particular wholesome course of action encourages us to earn right livelihood.

3. **Abstaining from Sexual Misconduct:** Sexual misconduct includes adultery, rape, having sexual intercourse with an under-aged person, etc.

This particular wholesome course of action fosters human rights and peace in society.

4. **Abstaining from False Speech:** False speech includes the following seven forms of falsehood: outright lies, not admitting to one's wrongdoing, boasting about one's supernatural powers when one does not possess them, pretending to be sicker than one really is, the intention to mislead others, exaggeration, and making light of serious matters.

When we abstain from committing these seven forms of falsehood it means that

- We refuse to lie even if it means that telling the truth may bring us harm.
- We refuse to lie for other people's sake.
- We refuse to lie for material gain.

This particular wholesome course of action encourages us to be honest and to be brave enough to stand up to the truth. It encourages us not to run away from problems or seek personal gain by lying.

- 5. Abstaining from Using Divisive Speech:** It means that we do not use our words to cause division or schism among people but we use them to promote harmony instead.

This particular wholesome course of action encourages us to say words that promote harmony.

- 6. Abstaining from Using Offensive Language:** It means that we do not use the kind of language that is crude, irritating, and base. Offensive language includes words that are hurtful, words that cause a negative impact, sarcasm, swear words, crude and offensive words, threats.

This particular wholesome course of action encourages us to display our gentility by the choice of our words.

- 7. Abstaining from Nonsensical Words:** It means that we do not speak incessantly but to speak truthful and useful words at the right time and place.

This particular wholesome course of action encourages us to be responsible for every word that comes out of our mouth.

- 8. Abstaining from Covetousness:** It means that we do not regard another person's belongings with the intention to take them for our self.

This particular wholesome course of action encourages us to have respect for other people's belongings. When our mind is free from covetousness, it is at peace.

- 9. Abstaining from Thoughts of Revenge:** It means that we do not hold a grudge, seek revenge, etc. It means that our mind is not tainted with rage but is clear, bright and cheerful.

This particular wholesome course of action encourages us to practice forgiveness at all cost so that our mind can be clear and bright all the time.

- 10. Abstaining from Wrong View:** It means that we have **the Eightfold Right View (Sammaditthi 8)** which include:

1. We believe that alms-giving is good hence we practice it.
2. We believe that it is good to revere those who are worthy of our reverence hence we practice it.
3. We believe that treating our guests with kind hospitality is good hence we practice it.
4. We believe that The Law of Kamma exists.
5. We believe that this world and the hereafter exist.
6. We believe that we are indebted to our parents.
7. We believe that the Hell Realm and the Celestial Realm exist.
8. We believe that there are righteous personages who are devoid of defilements.

This particular wholesome course of action encourages us to have the correct basis for our beliefs so that our judgment, our principles, and our concepts can be correct as well.

It is necessary for everyone to have Right View especially leaders in any field. A person that wishes his work to truly benefit society must possess Right View.

A person's human decency keeps him/her safe. Anyone who wishes for happiness, a leadership position, and advancement in life, must first possess human decency.

6.3.2 The Fruit of Cultivating Human Decency

1. It is the source of wholesomeness.
2. It enables us to be heedful.
3. It makes us the keeper of Truth.
4. It enables us to help Buddhism flourish.
5. It is the source of happiness in the present as well future existences.
6. It keeps us from incurring retribution.
7. It makes us a forgiving person.
8. It enables us to live like a sage.
9. It enables us to create peace and prosperity for our self and others.
10. It enables us to be reborn in the States of Happiness and facilitates our attainment of Nibbana.

Etc.

6.4 Blessing No. 17: Supporting Our Relatives



Trees that grow together in a wood can withstand gale-force winds whereas a giant tree which stands alone can be easily torn up by the roots. Likewise, a person who has family and friends can withstand the vicissitudes of life.

6.4.1 What Is a Relative?

A relative means an acquaintance, a person who is close to us. A relative is someone we can trust. There are two types of relatives:

1. Relatives in the Secular World: These can be divided into two groups.

- People that are related to us by blood such as our grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, grandchildren, etc. (Since our parents, spouse, and children are the people closest to us and we have a special responsibility towards them, they are not included here.)
- People that are not related to us by blood but share a special closeness with us. They include our close friends.

2. Relatives in the Dhamma World: We gain these relatives in the following four ways.

- When we sponsor an ordination of a monk
- When we sponsor an ordination of a novice monk
- When we pledge to support a monk
- When we teach someone the Dhamma

6.4.2 How to Locate Genuine Relatives

When we regard someone as a relative, it means that we form a strong bond with that person and we are ready to help him/her out in times of need. It is a bond that cannot be broken by distance or adverse circumstances. A relative is someone who visits us when we are ill; who is beside us when we are down on our luck; who behaves toward us in a consistent manner.

6.4.3 Characteristics of a Relative Worthy of Our Support

1. Someone that is as a general rule self-reliant and self-sufficient.
2. Someone that is decent, gentle, respectful, considerate, and is not involved in any causes of ruin.

6.4.4 When to Support Our Relatives

1. When they fall on hard times.
2. When they need money to invest in their business.
3. When they have no means of transportation.
4. When they lack the tools for their trade.
5. When they are ill.
6. When they need help with their work.
7. When they are framed or sued.

A Cautionary Note:

It is imperative that we exercise care when we support our relatives. Otherwise, we may inadvertently end up hurting them and our self.

6.4.5 How to Support Our Relatives in the Secular World

We support our relatives in order to promote harmony and stability and we can do so by employing ‘**The Four Principles of Service and Social Integration**’ (Sangahavatthu):

1. **Dana:** It means that we share what we have with others on special occasions. We may set up funds which can be used to help our relatives out in times of need without expecting them to pay us back. However, whatever money is returned will be put back into the funds to be used to help out other relatives in the future.
2. **Piyavaca:** It means that we employ only gentle, polite, and honest words. Even in times of anger, we do not curse at anyone or resort to offensive language.
3. **Atthacariya:** It means that we make our self useful to our relatives. We help out at weddings, ordinations, funerals, etc.
4. **Samanattata:** It means that we know our place and we behave in a manner consistent to our role. We know how to behave as a relative, a parent, a son or daughter, a supervisor, a subordinate, etc.

6.4.6 How to Support Our Relatives in the Dhamma World

We encourage them to perform such wholesome deeds as alms-giving, observing the Precepts, practicing meditation. We encourage them to be true to the Buddhist Faith. We encourage them to ordain if they are men. We teach them the Dhamma.

A Cautionary Note:

It is a sign of human decency to support our relatives but we must do it righteously and correctly. We must not support our relatives at the risk of displaying favoritism at work.

As a relative, we must consider things very carefully before we ask another relative for help. We must never ask our relative to act immorally or unethically for the sake of helping us. In other words, we must never ask them to commit any wrongdoing for the sake of helping us.

Blessing Numbers 11, 12, 13 teach us to support our parents, children, and spouse. We are taught Blessing Numbers 14, 15, and 16 before Blessing Number 17 which has to do with supporting our relatives because we must first be able to earn right livelihood, practice generosity and impartiality before we can support our relatives in a righteous and correct manner.

6.4.7 The Fruit of Supporting Our Relatives

1. It gives us protection.
 2. It gives us power.
 3. It earns us merit.
 4. It fosters a good relationship.
 5. It fosters closeness.
 6. It promotes harmony.
 7. It promotes loyalty.
 8. It promotes peace.
 9. It is the practice of the wise.
 10. It creates a good and stable extended family.
 11. It helps us to have a large number of good relatives in future existences.
 12. It makes us a good role model for the next generation.
 13. It creates a good environment.
- Etc.

A family whose members work to create harmony and stability within the family will make it difficult for it to come to harm. Such a family can be compared to a thick bamboo clump covered with thorns which makes it difficult for anyone to cut it down.

6.5 Blessing No. 18: Engaging in Harmless Work



6.5.1 What Is Meant by Harmless Work?

Harmless work means work which does not incur retribution or cause any harm to anyone. On the contrary, it benefits the self as well as other people.

There are two ways to approach work:

- 1) One works in order to get something done. One does not care if one's work produces a positive or negative impact.
- 2) One works in order to benefit oneself and other people.

In the first case, one does whatever one can at whatever cost to others in order to get what one wants. For example, one may choose to make money by selling alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs without any regard for the consequences of one's action. Or one may do everything one can in order to get a promotion regardless of how many feet one has to step on.

To engage in harmless work means that one chooses one's work carefully and with great consideration. One makes sure that whatever work one does one must not harm anyone in any way.

6.5.2 How to Tell if the Work Is Harmless

There are four ways to evaluate if the work is harmless. The first two ways are secular principles whereas the latter two ways are Dhamma principles.

6.5.3 Characteristics of Harmless Work

Work which is considered harmless must meet the following four criteria:

1. What we do does not violate the law.
 2. What we do does not break with tradition.
 3. What we do does not transgress the Precepts.
 4. What we do does not go against moral principles.
-
1. What we do does not violate the law. The rule of law applies to everyone in that everyone must follow the law and law-breakers will be punished. For example, the zoning laws of any municipality state that a permit must be obtained before one can have a house built anywhere within the municipality. One may believe that according to the Dhamma, it is all right not to comply with the law, since after all the land belongs to him and the money with which to build the house is also his. However, such an action incurs blame; therefore, it is not considered to be harmless work.

The Lord Buddha teaches everyone including the monks to comply with the law of the land so that everyone can live together peacefully.

2. What we do does not break with tradition. Tradition is a long established way of thinking or acting which becomes the norm for a particular people. There are traditional practices involved in a wedding, an expression of hospitality, a show of respect to one's elders, etc.

As Buddhists, it behooves us to learn the traditions of whatever people we visit and comply with them as long as they do not hurt our sense of morality and ethics. However, if they do then it is up to us to stay away from such people. Such traditions may involve the disrespect shown to elderly people, the contempt shown to women, forbidding one to urinate in the same place which means that no permanent toilets can ever be built, etc.

3. What we do does not transgress the Precepts. Precepts are the basis of everything good. The Threefold Training, which consists of morality (specifically the Five Precepts), concentration, and insight, emphasizes the importance of morality as the basis for concentration. As Buddhists, we must make sure that the work we do does not transgress any of the Five Precepts.
4. What we do does not go against moral principles. Sometimes what we do may not violate the law, go against tradition, transgress the Precepts, but it may go against certain moral principles. For examples, holding a grudge or harboring thoughts of revenge may not directly violate the law, break with tradition, transgress the Precepts but it violates 'The Tenfold Wholesome Course of Action'. Likewise, laziness violates 'The Four Paths of Accomplishment'; gambling is one of the Causes of Ruin.

Therefore, whatever work we choose to do, we must make sure that we are engaged only in harmless work as judged by the four criteria described above.

6.5.4 How to Know the Nature of the Work before Doing It

The Lord Buddha teaches: “Nissamma karanan seyyo” which means before we do anything, we must consider it carefully. Nowadays, there are sayings: Don’t sniff before you see what it is that you are sniffing. Don’t sign anything before reading what you are signing.

Young people may feel reluctant to adopt such a principle because they would rather do things quickly and impulsively. But such quick and impulsive acts can very often backfire. People who do things quickly and impulsively often have cause to feel regrets later on. For example, one may find out when it is too late that it is not good to skip school regularly or it is bad to drink too much once one’s health begins to deteriorate or it is bad to gamble after one has lost everything.

6.5.5 Types of Harmless Work

The work that we do must meet the four criteria of harmless work and can be divided into two different types as follows:

1. Work which we do for our own benefits.
2. Work which we do for the benefits of the general public.

6.5.6 Work Which Is Done for Our Own Benefits

We work in order to earn a living. Some of us are farmers. Some are merchants. Some are carpenters. Some are mechanics, so on and so forth. According to the Lord Buddha, there are such things as right livelihood and wrong livelihood. Wrong livelihood is something every Buddhist must never engage in because it is harmful to oneself and other living beings. Worst of all, such work incurs serious retribution.

Wrong Livelihood Includes:

1. The trading of weapons.
2. The trading of humans.
3. The trading of poisons.
4. The trading of addictive substances such as cigarettes, alcohol, etc.
5. The trading of livestock which are meant to be slaughtered for food.

6.5.7 Work Which Is Done for the Benefits of the General Public

Work which is done for the benefits of the general public includes donating money and/or time and efforts toward the building of a bridge, a road, a rest stop, etc.

6.5.8 A Cautionary Note for Those Who Are Involved in Community Service

Before we get involved in community service, it is important that we have already cultivated human decency according to Blessing No. 16 so that we can work with other people smoothly and effectively. In addition, we should make it a habit to keep the Eight Precepts on every Buddhist Holy Day because the practice helps us to be calm and slow to anger. We must make sure that we get involved in community service not for the sake of fame or recognition but for the sake of cultivating generosity as well as merit. We do it in order to help create a good environment for our self, our family, and everyone in our community. As we volunteer for community service, it is also important that we spend adequate time with our own family.

6.5.9 Examples of Harmless Work

1. Keeping the Eight Precepts.
 2. Taking part in useful work.
 3. Contributing to the building of a temple, a Cetiya, etc.
 4. Planting trees as homage to the Triple Gem.
 5. Contributing to the building of a bridge.
 6. Contributing to the construction of the public water system.
 7. Setting up a water stand to provide drinking water for passers-by.
 8. Providing shelter for the needy.
 9. Practicing the Tenfold Wholesome Course of Action.
 10. Keeping the Five Precepts and practicing meditation.
- Etc.

6.5.10 The Fruit of Doing Harmless Work

A person who is engaged in harmful work is courting serious troubles. The more harmful work one does, the more retribution one incurs. Harmful work causes one to lose one's human dignity and decency. On the contrary, a person who is engaged in harmless work sleeps easy at night and is on his way to true and lasting happiness and prosperity.

CHAPTER 7

THE SIXTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: BEING MENTALLY PREPARED

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 7

THE SIXTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: BEING MENTALLY PREPARED

7.1 The Sixth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Being Mentally Prepared

7.2 Blessing No. 19: Abstaining from Deeds of Demerit

7.3 Blessing No. 20: Abstaining from Alcohol

7.4 Blessing No. 21: Cultivating Heedfulness

CONCEPTS

1. In order to gradually scrub our mind clean of defilements, the next thing we must do is to abstain from all unwholesomeness, from alcohol and other addictive substances and cultivate heedfulness.
2. When we abstain from deeds of demerit, it means that we do not perform any act which is immoral be it physical, verbal, or mental. At the same time, we feel too ashamed to commit any unwholesome deed (Hiri). We are also fearful of the negative consequences of our unwholesome deed (Otappa).
3. We abstain from alcohol and every addictive substance because these substances can skew our judgment and blur our awareness. A mind lacking in awareness is incapable of cultivating virtues.
4. When we cultivate heedfulness, it means that we are fully aware at all times how each and every one of our acts is being judged by the Law of Kamma. Therefore, it behooves us to exercise care before thinking, saying or doing anything.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the importance of the Sixth Group of Blessings: Being mentally prepared.
2. To enable the student to correctly describe the origin of demerit and how to lighten the effects of demerit.
3. To enable the student to correctly describe: a) how one can abstain from deeds of demerit; and b) the meaning of deeds of demerit as described in ‘The Tenfold Unwholesome Course of Action’.
4. To enable the student to correctly describe: a) the meaning of Hiri and Otappa; b) the origin of Hiri and Otappa; and c) the fruit of abstaining from deeds of demerit.
5. To enable the student to correctly describe: a) what it means to abstain from alcohol; and b) the harm wrought by alcohol consumption.
6. To enable the student to correctly describe: a) how one can break the drinking habit; and b) the fruit of abstaining from alcohol.
7. To enable the student to correctly describe: a) what it means to be heedful; and b) characteristics of a heedless person.
8. To enable the student to correctly describe: a) the meaning, duty, and benefits of awareness; b) the meaning of awareness by analogy; and c) how to develop awareness into heedfulness.
9. To enable the student to correctly describe: a) the seven areas in which we need to be heedful; and b) the fruit of cultivating heedfulness.

THE SIXTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: BEING MENTALLY PREPARED

7.1 The Sixth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Being Mentally Prepared

Blessing No. 19: Abstaining from Deeds of Demerit

Blessing No. 20: Abstaining from Alcohol

Blessing No. 21: Cultivating Heedfulness

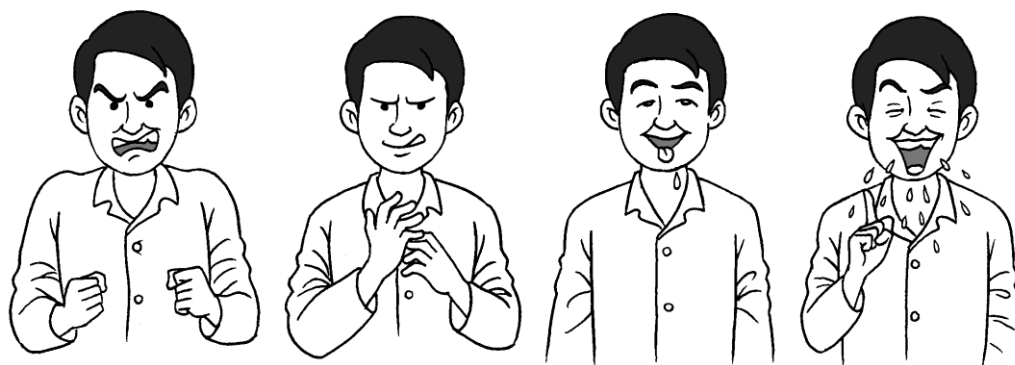
The first 18 blessings deal with personal conduct which leads to success and prosperity in life. Such personal conduct can also be applied to areas such as business, society, and government. These first 18 blessings deal with personal development in a step-wise fashion. The latter 20 blessings deal with mental development at an elevated level. This heightened level of mental development is necessary for the cultivation of higher virtues so that all defilements can be removed and Arahatsip can be attained.

The Sixth Group of Life's 38 Blessings helps us to be mentally prepared so that we can develop our virtue further and in such a way that our defilements can be continuously weakened. Blessing numbers 19, 20, and 21 are as follows:

- 1. Abstaining from Deeds of Demerit:** A deed of demerit is any act be it physical, verbal, or mental which causes the mind to be gloomy. Deeds of demerit are morally wrong and they incur demerit or woeful consequences. We cannot cultivate virtue as long as we are still committing deeds of demerit. A person can abstain from deeds of demerit only when he can feel ashamed of them and fearful of their negative consequences.
- 2. Abstaining from Alcohol:** It means exercising care when using addictive substances for medicinal purposes. It means abstaining completely from every addictive substance because addictive substances impair our awareness and a mind which lacks awareness cannot be trained to cultivate virtue.
- 3. Cultivating Heedfulness:** It means that we are cognizant of the fact that every one of our acts incurs consequences as dictated by the Law of Kamma. Therefore, it behooves us to exercise care before we think, say, or do anything.

A heedless person thinks that he is still young; he is still strong; he is still healthy and that he still has all the time in the world to perform deeds of merit. A heedful person, however, knows that an illness can strike at any time; death is like a time bomb in his body that can go off any time; therefore, he hastens to accumulate good deeds and undertake personal development.

7.2 Blessing No. 19: Abstaining from Deeds of Demerit



7.2.1 What Is Demerit?

When something such as our food has gone bad, it means that it is no longer good. A mind that has gone bad is said to be covered with demerit; hence, its quality has been compromised. Therefore, the term ‘demerit’ means a mind that has gone bad.

7.2.2 What Is the Origin of Demerit?

Other religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism have their own view about how demerit or sin occurs. Christianity and Islam teach that whoever goes against the teaching of their God is sinning against God. Christianity also teaches that sin can be inherited from the first pair of human beings Adam and Eve.

In Buddhism, the Lord Buddha’s enlightened Knowledge enables Him to discover the fact that our inherent defilements are the origin of demerit and that defilements can be completely removed. The Lord Buddha teaches that demerit or sin is personal and cannot be inherited. Demerit occurs when a person allows his inherent defilements to drive him to commit a bad deed; hence, the demerit incurred is his and his alone.

7.2.3 How to Lighten the Effects of Demerit

While some religions believe in a supreme being that has the power to wash away a person's sin provided that the person remains faithful to the supreme being.

In Buddhism, sin or demerit can be lightened or diluted by the earnest accumulation of merit as demonstrated in the following example. Suppose we place one spoonful of salt into a glass of water and stir, we will find that the water tastes very salty. Now if we pour the glass of salty water into a pail and fill the pail with water, we will find that the water tastes somewhat brackish. Now if we pour the pail of brackish water into a large water tank and fill it up with water, we will find that the water tastes as if it has no salt in it at all. This kind of dilution is called Abboharik which means that something is present but its presence cannot be detected.

Abboharik is the Buddhist way of lightening the effects of a person's demerit. It means that if we wish to dilute the effect of demerit, we must first of all never again commit any more deeds of demerit but we must accumulate every kind of good deeds in earnest. In this sense our demerit can be compared to salt and our accumulation of good deeds can be compared to the amount of water which we keep adding to the salt in order to continue diluting its effect.

7.2.4 What Is Meant by Abstaining from Deeds of Demerit?

When we abstain from deeds of demerit, it means that we stop doing things which can cause our mind to become gloomy.

7.2.5 Deeds Which Incur Demerit

These are called 'The Tenfold Unwholesome Course of Action' (Akusala-kammapatha) and include:

1. **Killing:** This includes killing a human being or an animal. It also includes all forms of physical abuse.
2. **Stealing:** This includes stealing, robbing, scheming for one's material gain, taking bribes, corruption, etc.
3. **Sexual Misconduct:** It includes adultery, rape, pornography, etc.
4. **Lying:** It includes outright lies, false testimony, constructing false evidence, etc.
5. **Divisive Speech:** It includes words which disrupt harmony, scandals, etc.
6. **Offensive Speech:** It includes curse words, sarcasm, and other forms of verbal abuse.
7. **Nonsensical Speech:** It includes incessant talking, saying things that are useless, words that are boastful.
8. **Covetousness:** It includes lusting after another person's belongings, looking at another person's possessions with the thought of stealing them.
9. **Thoughts of Revenge:** They include the desire to avenge oneself, the desire to hurt another person.
10. **Wrong View:** It means The Tenfold Wrong View which includes a disbelief in merit and demerit, a disbelief in the Law of Kamma, a disbelief in the hereafter, etc.

7.2.6 How to Successfully Abstain from Deeds of Demerit

The Lord Buddha teaches that our mind is boss in that everything begins in the mind. If a person's mind is bad, his word and deed will also be bad and the ill consequences of his bad word and deed will follow him in the same way that the wheels of the wagon follow the tracks of the team of oxen that pulls it.

But if a person's mind is good and pure, his word and deed will be good and pure as well and the happiness which arises out of his good and pure word and deed will follow the person in the same way that his shadow follows his body.

Now that we know how our mind is boss it means that if we want to successfully abstain from deeds of demerit we must first cultivate the two virtues of Hiri and Otappa.

7.2.7 What Are Hiri and Otappa?

Hiri means feeling ashamed of deeds of demerit. It means that we view any deed of demerit as being dirty, distasteful, and repugnant; therefore, we will never want to do it.

Otappa means feeling fearful of the consequences of demerit. We know that each deed of demerit incurs such ill consequences as problems, unhappiness, and retribution; therefore, we will never want to do it.

Hiri and Otappa are also called celestial virtues because every celestial being must possess Hiri and Otappa.

7.2.8 How Can a Person Cultivate Hiri?

1. By realizing the true worth of his humanity. He understands that a human being should be above animals; therefore, he will not lower himself by committing the Tenfold Unwholesome Course of Action.
2. By realizing for example how at his age he should not be courting a young girl.
3. By realizing all the good deeds that he has already accumulated in his life; therefore, he refuses to be tempted to commit any deed of demerit.
4. By realizing his level of wisdom in that he knows right from wrong.
5. By realizing how he is a child of the Lord Buddha.
6. By realizing how he has good teachers and how he is an alumnus of a reputable institution.

7.2.9 How Can a Person Cultivate Otappa?

1. By being fearful of condemnation and the loss of a good reputation once his deed of demerit such as stealing is found out.
2. By being fearful of punishment such as being put in jail for stealing.
3. By being fearful of rebirth in the States of Unhappiness.

A Cautionary Note:

Deeds of demerit are easily carried out because committing a deed of demerit is like going with the flow of the current, in this case it is the current of defilements. Deeds of merit on the other hand are carried out with difficulty because performing a deed of merit is like going against the current; therefore, it requires patience, courage, and care. It is not enough to merely abstain from deeds of demerit but we must earnestly accumulate deeds of merit by giving alms, keeping the Precepts, practicing meditation, etc. This way, we will most certainly meet with success and happiness in this life and in future lives as well.

7.2.10 The Fruit of Abstaining from Deeds of Demerit

1. When we abstain from deeds of demerit we do not incur retribution.
 2. When we abstain from deeds of demerit, our life is filled with wholesomeness.
 3. When we abstain from deeds of demerit, we will not be plagued with illnesses.
 4. When we abstain from deeds of demerit, it makes us heedful.
 5. When we abstain from deeds of demerit, our faith in the Lord Buddha's Teachings increases.
 6. When we abstain from deeds of demerit, our mind is clear and bright and ready to cultivate higher virtues.
- Etc.

7.3 Blessing No. 20: Abstaining from Alcohol



7.3.1 What Is Meant by Abstaining from Alcohol?

In this case, what we must abstain from is not just alcohol but every kind of addictive substances. The means of intake can be through drinking, sniffing, snorting, smoking, and intravenous injection. The term abstaining implies a) consuming something with care; and b) no consumption.

7.3.2 The Reason for the Two Meanings of ‘Abstaining’

There are certain religions that forbid the consumption of alcohol and the use of alcohol for medicinal or any other purposes because they view alcohol as a sinful substance. However, Buddhism allows the use of addictive substances for medicinal purposes such as the use of morphine to relieve pain, the use of alcohol to extract actives for medicinal purposes. Abstaining from alcohol means exercising care when using alcohol or other addictive substances for medicinal purposes and no consumption at all in all other cases.

7.3.3 The Harm Wrought by Alcohol Consumption

The Lord Buddha teaches that alcohol consumption is harmful to us in the following six ways:

1. It causes us to waste money. Alcohol addiction has the potential to turn a millionaire into a pauper.
2. It causes fights to break out. Alcohol consumption changes one's personality and this change can cause a drinker to get into fights.
3. It causes many diseases such as cirrhosis of the liver, stomach ulcer, heart problem, stroke, problems with the nervous system, etc.
4. It causes one to have a poor reputation. No drunks have a good reputation and no drunks are trustworthy.
5. It causes one to feel no shame. Drunks can be found lying unconscious on the street. They can be found shouting or taking off their clothes in public places.
6. It causes one's intelligence to be compromised.

Alcohol is one of the causes of ruin. Alcohol consumption wastes money, destroys friendship, ruins a person's health, causes a person's honor, dignity, and intelligence to be compromised. Alcohol may help one escape from problems very temporarily but the troubles wrought by alcohol consumption and alcohol addiction far outweigh what little relief it may initially offer.

7.3.4 The Long-Term Effects of Alcohol Consumption

The harm wrought by alcohol is not only felt in this lifetime but will also follow the drinker over many future lifetimes. For examples:

1. The former drinker will be reborn a mute person.
2. The former drinker will be reborn an insane person.
3. The former drinker will be reborn retarded.
4. When reborn in the Animal Realm, the former drinker will be reborn a reptile such as a snake, a monitor, etc.

7.3.5 How to Abstain from Alcohol Completely

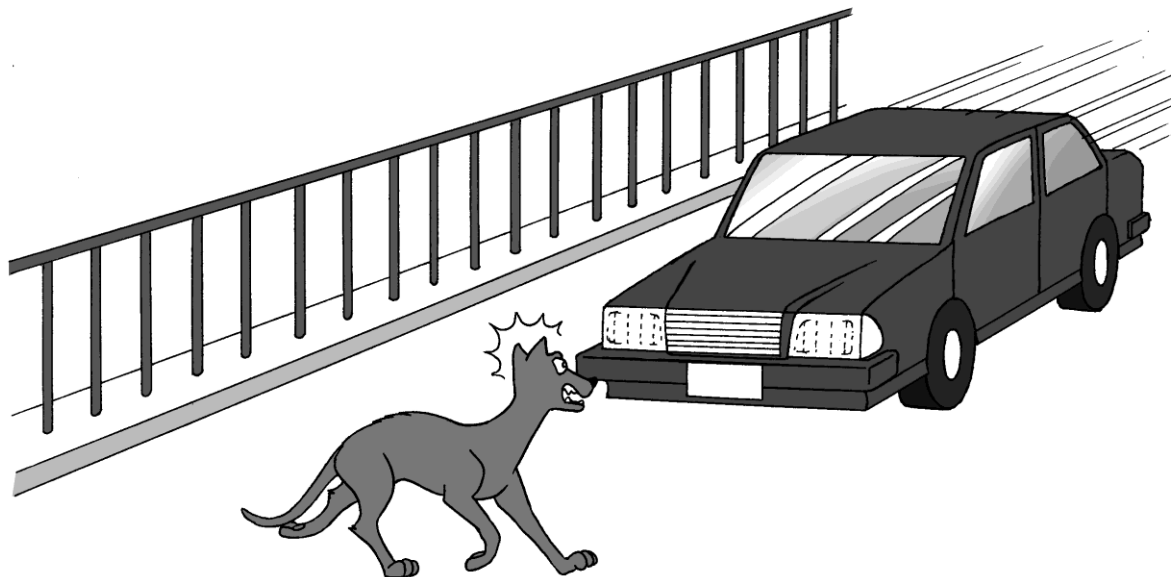
1. One must realize fully how harmful alcohol is.
2. One must decide to kick the habit by giving his word to someone he respects such as a monk.
3. One must rid his home of everything which reminds him of alcohol.
4. One must realize how one is a Buddhist, a child of the Lord Buddha, a child in a good family, etc., and it is not fitting for one to consume alcohol.
5. One must stay away from one's drinking buddies.

7.3.6 The Fruit of Abstaining from Alcohol

1. One's awareness is intact.
2. One is sober.
3. One does not get into fights.
4. One possesses good judgment.
5. One will not be reborn insane, mute or retarded.
6. One is respectable.
7. One has a good reputation.
8. One does not become an ingrate.
9. One is not given to lying or using divisive speech.
10. One is not given to offensive language or nonsensical speech.
11. One's Hiri and Otappa are intact.
12. One can exercise Right View.
13. One can easily attain the Path and Fruit of Nibbana.

Etc.

7.4 Blessing No. 21: Cultivating Heedfulness



7.4.1 What Is Meant by Heedfulness?

When we are heedful, it means that our awareness is intact. It means that we do not think, say, or do anything that will lead us to ruin. It means that we do not let an opportunity to make merit go by. We are aware of our responsibility. We know to abstain from unwholesome deeds. We perform our work in an earnest and responsible manner so that our work progresses well.

Heedfulness is a most important virtue. It summarizes the Lord Buddha's Teachings as shown in His final advice:

"Monks, I wish to remind you how all conditioned things are subject to change and must undergo decay. Therefore, let all of you exercise heedfulness."

(Māhāparinibbāna Sutta) Dīgha-nikāya. Mahāvagga 10/143/180

7.4.2 What Is Meant by Cultivating Heedfulness?

Since the Lord Buddha's Teachings are about the cause and effect of our every thought, word, and deed, we are required to possess heedfulness so that we can be well aware of our deed and its consequences.

7.4.3 Characteristics of a Heedless Person

1. A heedless person is a Kusita person: A Kusita person is a lazy person in that he does not put in the effort to do something but wants a good outcome. He does not study but wants a good grade. He does not perform at work but wants a promotion.
2. A heedless person is a Ducarita person: A Ducarita person is a self-serving person in that he does whatever he wants but he expects a good outcome. He does not do his work properly but he wants a promotion. He abuses everyone verbally but he wants everyone to love him.
3. A heedless person is a Sithila person: A Sithila person is a person that does little work but expects big result. He spends an hour studying but he wants to get the highest grade. He treats someone to a meal and expects that someone to be forever indebted to him.

7.4.4 What Is Awareness?

Awareness means knowing the difference between what is right and what is wrong; what is good and what is bad. Awareness allows us to consciously say and do right things.

7.4.5 What Is the Function of Awareness?

1. Awareness helps us to exercise care in such a way that we are protected from harm.
2. Awareness allows us to exercise self-control.
3. Awareness reminds us to accumulate good deeds.
4. Awareness reminds us to earnestly accumulate good deeds.
5. Awareness helps us to know our responsibility.
6. Awareness helps us to do our work in a thorough manner.

7.4.6 What Can Awareness Be Compared to?

Awareness can be compared to a pillar to which our mind can be anchored.

Awareness can be compared to the gate-keeper of our mind that carefully watches what comes in and what goes out.

Awareness can be compared to the minister of finance that keeps tab of our merit/demerit account.

Awareness can be compared to the rudder that steers our life in the right direction.

7.4.7 How Does Awareness Benefit Us?

1. Awareness gives rise to concentration.
2. Awareness keeps our body and mind healthy.
3. Awareness sharpens our intellect.
4. Awareness allows us to gain wisdom.
5. Awareness keeps us away from unwholesomeness.

7.4.8 Using Awareness to Help Us Cultivate Heedfulness

1. Awareness helps us to abstain from deeds of demerit.
2. Awareness helps us to keep our body, our word, and our thought wholesome.
3. Awareness helps to remind us of the suffering in the State of Loss and Woe such that we absolutely refuse to commit any unwholesome deed.
4. Awareness helps to remind us of the peril of the round of rebirth such that we earnestly practice meditation so that we can work toward ending our round of rebirth and attain Nibbana.
5. Awareness helps to remind us to practice meditation so that we can rid our mind of lust, anger, and ignorance.

7.4.9 The Areas in Which We Cannot Afford to be Heedless

1. We cannot afford to be heedless in the area of time: It means that we realize how time passes by from day to week, from week to month, and from month to year; therefore, we must hasten to accumulate good deeds.
2. We cannot afford to be heedless in the area of age: We realize that at whatever age we are, we are never too young to start accumulating good deeds
3. We cannot afford to be heedless in the area of health: We realize that we can get sick at any time and that we must hurry to accumulate good deeds while we are still healthy.
4. We cannot afford to be heedless in the area of lifespan: We realize that death can come to us at any time and without warning.
5. We cannot afford to be heedless in the area of work: We realize that today we must do the best work we can in whatever we do.
6. We cannot afford to be heedless in the area of education: We realize how valuable education is and that we must earnestly seek to be properly educated.
7. We cannot afford to be heedless in the area of meditation practice: We realize the true benefits of meditation practice in that meditation practice leads us to happiness in this and future lifetimes and it is the only practice that will lead us to our ultimate life goal which is Nibbana.

7.4.10 The Fruit of Cultivating Heedfulness

1. Our life will be filled with wholesomeness.
2. Heedfulness is the path of immortality.
3. We will not be reborn in the State of Loss and Woe.
4. Our suffering will be lessened.
5. We will not be bored with doing good deeds.
6. Our awareness will work together with our heedfulness to encourage us to make merit.
7. We will live a happy life.
8. We will be enthusiastic about accumulating good deeds.
9. We will be able to rid our self of unwholesomeness.

Etc.

Pamado maccuno padan: Heedlessness is the path of death.

Appamado amatan padan: Heedfulness is the path of immortality.

Khuddaka-nikāya. Dhammapada 25/12/18

CHAPTER 8

THE SEVENTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: CULTIVATING BASIC VIRTUES

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 8

THE SEVENTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: CULTIVATING BASIC VIRTUES

8.1 The Seventh Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Cultivating Basic Virtues

8.2 Blessing No. 22: Being Respectful

8.3 Blessing No. 23: Being Humble

8.4 Blessing No. 24: Being Content

8.5 Blessing No. 25: Being Grateful

8.6 Blessing No. 26: Listening to Dhamma Lectures

CONCEPTS

1. The cultivation of basic virtues requires that we be respectful, humble, content, and grateful. It also requires that we listen to Dhamma lectures on occasions.
2. When we respect someone, we respect him for his virtue. We show our respect sincerely both in the person's presence and behind his back. When we respect someone, it gives us the opportunity to learn from him. Being respectful lifts us up and prevent us from becoming arrogant.
3. When we practice humility we are in essence ridding our self of stubbornness, arrogance, boastfulness, and rudeness. We practice humility by knowing our true worth, our limitations and flaws.
4. When we cultivate contentment it means that we know how to be happy with what we have. When we can be happy with whatever we have, it frees us from greed.
5. When someone has been good to us, kind to us, helpful to us, we feel grateful to him and will seek to repay him however and whenever we can. Gratitude is a virtue that endears us to other people.
6. In order to constantly improve our mind for the work of personal development, it is very important that we find the time to listen to Dhamma lectures. Listening to Dhamma lectures is like looking at our self in the mirror. The Dhamma we hear will reflect to us the level of our virtue at any given moment and tell us how we can further improve upon it.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the importance of the Seventh Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Cultivating basic virtues.
2. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of respect, who and what we should respect.
3. To enable the student to correctly describe the different ways of showing respect as well as the fruit of being respectful.
4. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of humility and the difference between respect and humility.
5. To enable the student to correctly describe the causes of arrogance and the harm wrought by arrogance and stubbornness.
6. To enable the student to correctly describe characteristics of a humble person, an example of a humble person as well as the fruit of humility.
7. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning, characteristics, and types of contentment.
8. To enable the student to correctly describe how contentment is the gateway to true happiness.
9. To enable the student to correctly describe contentment where our livelihood is concerned, the principles governing the management of our material wealth, and the types of poor people.
10. To enable the student to correctly describe how to cultivate contentment and the fruit of contentment.
11. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of gratitude as well as who and what deserve our gratitude.
12. To enable the student to correctly describe the fruit of gratitude and how necessary gratitude is in cultivating virtues.
13. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of listening to Dhamma lectures on occasions and what those occasions are.
14. To enable the student to correctly describe the attributes of a good lecturer of Dhamma as well as those of a good listener.
15. To enable the student to correctly describe the habit which can be instilled by listening to Dhamma lectures and the fruit of listening to Dhamma lectures on occasions.

THE SEVENTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: CULTIVATING BASIC VIRTUES

8.1 The Seventh Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Cultivating Basic Virtues

Blessing No. 22: Being Respectful

Blessing No. 23: Being Humble

Blessing No. 24: Being Content

Blessing No. 25: Being Grateful

Blessing No. 26: Listening to Dhamma Lectures

Now that we have undertaken personal development by practicing the first 21 blessings, it is now time to embark upon the seventh group of Life's Blessings which deals with cultivating basic virtues. There are five blessings in this group:

- 1. Being Respectful:** It means that we know another's person's virtue and are ready to show the person due respect both in his presence and behind his back.
- 2. Being Humble:** It means that we rid our self of arrogance and stubbornness. A humble person knows his true worth and at the same time is cognizant of his own shortcomings. A humble person is not given to finding faults with others. The lack of humility makes it difficult for a person to appreciate another person's virtue or to learn from him.
- 3. Being Content:** It means that we are satisfied and happy with what we have. A content person possesses peace and equanimity. In this sense, being content is the opposite of being insatiable.
- 4. Being Grateful:** It means that we are cognizant of every good thing that each person has done for us. It means that we are grateful to every person who has been good to us and we find every opportunity to repay them. A grateful person endears himself to other people. A grateful person is a respectable person.
- 5. Listening to Dhamma Lectures:** It means that we find every opportunity to listen to a Dhamma lecture from a Buddhist monk who practices righteousness according to the Dhamma-Discipline. Once we have listened to a Dhamma lecture we should contemplate its content and use it to mirror the level of our own virtue at that given moment. In this way, we will have a better idea of how to further improve our self.

8.2 Blessing No. 22: Being Respectful



8.2.1 What Is Respect?

Respect means knowing and appreciating another person for his virtue; hence, we treat the person accordingly. It is a fact that most people are much better at finding faults with other people than seeing the good in them. It goes without saying that any person that can see the good in another person has to have already possessed a certain amount of wisdom. The ability to see the good in another person has the effect of increasing our own virtue.

8.2.2 Who and What Deserve Our Deepest Respect?

According to the Lord Buddha, the following deserve our special attention and deepest respect:

1. The Lord Buddha.
2. The Dhamma.
3. The Sangha.
4. Education.
5. Meditation practice.
6. Heedfulness.
7. Hospitality.

Respecting the Lord Buddha: The Lord Buddha deserves our deepest respect because He possesses the Buddha-Virtues. These can be summarized as incomparable insight, incomparable compassion, and incomparable purity. When the Lord Buddha is still living, we should show our respect by doing the following:

1. We should go to see the Lord Buddha in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening.
2. When the Lord Buddha is doing walking meditation bare-footed, so should we.
3. When the Lord Buddha is doing walking meditation in an area of low elevation, we must never do our walking meditation in any area that is above it.
4. When the Lord Buddha is seated in a low seat, we must never sit in any seat that is above it.
5. In the presence of the Lord Buddha, a monk does not wear his robe in such a way that both shoulders are covered.
6. We do not put our shoes on in the Lord Buddha's presence where He can see us.
7. We do not open our umbrella in the Lord Buddha's presence where He can see us.
8. We do not defecate or urinate in the Lord Buddha's presence where He can see us.

After the Lord Buddha has attained complete Nibbana, we show our respect by doing the following:

1. We go to worship at the Cetiya on occasions.
2. We go to worship at the Holy Places which include the place where the Lord Buddha was born, the place where He attained Self-Enlightenment, the place where He gave the first Dhamma lecture, and the place where He attained complete Nibbana.
3. We pay homage to the Buddha Image.
4. We treat the area where the Uposatha Hall is located with proper respect.
5. We do not wear shoes in the area around the Cetiya.
6. We do not use an umbrella in the area around the Cetiya.
7. We approach the area near the Cetiya in silence.
8. When entering the area around the Uposatha Hall, we remove our shoes, close our umbrella, and do not act in any way that is inappropriate.
9. We practice the Lord Buddha's Teachings regularly.

Respecting the Dhamma: The Lord Buddha's Teachings deserve our deepest respect because of the untold benefits they have on our life. We show our respect to the Dhamma by doing the following:

1. Attend a Dhamma lecture when one has been scheduled.
2. Listen to Dhamma lectures in a composed and attentive manner.
3. Do not fall asleep, talk, or let your thought wander during a Dhamma lecture.
4. Do not place Dhamma books in a low area such as the floor.

5. Do not belittle the Dhamma.
6. Take care when teaching or relaying any part of the Dhamma so that no mistakes are made.

Respecting the Sangha: We show respect to the monks that practice righteousness according to the Dhamma-Discipline, and do the work of perpetuating Buddhism. We show our respect to the Sangha by doing the following:

1. We greet them with a Namaskar.
2. We are appropriately seated before them.
3. We do not wear shoes or use an umbrella when we are in the company of monks.
4. We do not behave inappropriately.
5. We do not take the liberty of giving a Dhamma lecture unless invited by the monks.
6. We do not take the liberty of answering a Dhamma question unless invited by the monks.
7. We do not walk, stand or sit too close to the monks.
8. We look upon the monks with respect.
9. We welcome the monks with appropriate offerings.

Respecting Education: We appreciate the value of secular education and Dhamma education and show our respect by being studious. Whatever subject we take up, we should study it in breadth and depth. Moreover, we should support and promote both secular education and Dhamma education.

Respecting Meditation Practice: We respect meditation practice because we realize its immeasurable value. We show our respect by practicing it regularly and earnestly. The importance of meditation practice is emphasized in the Sikkhattaya or the Threefold Training which includes morality, concentration, and insight. Morality which results from the keeping of Precepts is the basis of concentration. Concentration leads to insight which is the vehicle of Enlightenment. When we keep the Precepts, it allows us to abstain from all misdeeds and this makes our mind clear and bright. This state of mind is proper ground for developing concentration which comes from meditation practice. Therefore, meditation practice is fundamental to every good deed and to the eventual removal of all defilements.

Respecting Heedfulness: Heedfulness is achieved through awareness while awareness allows us to be conscious of everything we think, say, and do. Awareness in turn results from the regular practice of meditation. Therefore, we respect heedfulness by practicing meditation regularly.

Respecting Hospitality: It means that we realize the importance of showing our guests due hospitality, for in so doing we are giving our self the opportunity to make new friends. There are two ways to welcome our guests:

1. We welcome them with things such as a generous amount of food and drink.

2. We welcome them with Dhamma by conversing about the Dhamma with them, by sharing our Dhamma knowledge with them, etc.

It is important that every member of the household understands the importance of hospitality and knows how to properly welcome guests in our absence.

8.2.3 The Different Ways of Showing Our Respect

When we genuinely respect someone or something, we can show it physically and verbally. This includes giving way to the person, getting up to greet the person, giving our seat to the person, holding our hands in a praying position while talking to the person, paying homage with a proper Namaskar, asking for permission before doing something, a formal salute, a firing gun salute, lowering of the flag, etc.

A Cautionary Note:

A person who knows to treat another person with respect is considered to be a wise person. Therefore, it is important for the person being treated with respect to return in kind by respectfully acknowledging another person's show of respect.

8.2.4 The fruit of being respectful

1. A respectful person is endearing.
 2. A respectful person is a happy person.
 3. A respectful person has a radiant complexion.
 4. A respectful person does not incur retribution of any kind.
 5. A respectful person can readily emulate the practices of a virtuous person.
 6. A respectful person does not lack a helpful hand.
 7. A respectful person has improved awareness.
 8. A respectful person has wisdom, knowledge, and ability.
 9. A respectful person will be high-born in his subsequent rebirths.
 10. A respectful person can more easily attain the Path and Fruit of Nibbana.
- Etc.

A monk that respects the Lord Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, the practice of meditation, the Threefold Training, heedfulness, and hospitality, can be said to be close to Nibbana itself.

Anguttaranikāya Sattakanipat 23/29/29-30

8.3 Blessing No. 23: Being Humble



8.3.1 What Is Humility?

In Pali, humility is represented by the word Nivato where Vato means air and Ni means none. Therefore, Nivato means not filling up with air. A Nivato person is not stubborn, arrogant, rude, or contemptuous. On the contrary, he possesses a quiet dignity and he knows his place.

8.3.2 The Difference between Respect and Humility

Respect is what we feel for other people when their virtue has been made known to us.

Humility has to do with our self in that we know our own worth but at the same time we are willing to learn from others.

A person that is respectful may not necessarily be humble. Therefore, it is important that these two virtues are cultivated together.

8.3.3 What Causes Some People To Be Arrogant?

When we get hung up on certain favorable personal circumstances, it has the potential to make us feel superior to other people and cause us to be arrogant. These favorable personal circumstances include:

1. Family or lineage
2. Financial status
3. Good looks
4. Personal talents and abilities
5. Title
6. Retinue

What all of us must realize is the fact that every human life on earth must experience what is called ‘The Eight Worldly Conditions’ which include gain, loss, fame, obscurity, praise, blame, happiness, and unhappiness. The only certainty in life is uncertainty. Therefore, it does not do for us to get hung up on things which are impermanent. Should we be fortunate enough to be blessed with these favorable circumstances, we can be grateful for them while they last but know that they can disappear any time. In this way we will not run the risk of becoming arrogant.

8.3.4 The Harm Wrought by Arrogance

1. Arrogance can cause us to forget who we are.
2. Arrogance can cause us to have difficulty making friends.
3. Arrogance can cause schism in an organization.

Any organization, whose members are humble, stands a better chance of staying united despite personal differences because whenever conflicts arise they can be resolved in a reasonable manner. On the contrary, if any organization, whose members are arrogant and separated by their class differences, it can hardly stand united or achieve anything significant or meaningful.

Any person who has an arrogant nature; any person who is made arrogant by his economic status, any person who is made arrogant by his lineage, any person who is contemptuous of his own relatives, that person is on the road to ruin.

(Pābhava Sutta) Khuddaka-nikāya. Suttanipāta 25/304/347

8.3.5 How to Rid Oneself of Arrogance

1. We must keep the company of virtuous friends. The reason is that a virtuous friend is honest in his evaluation of us. A virtuous friend tells us like it is. Moreover, virtuous friends serve as a good role model for us.
2. We must cultivate analytical reflection (or Yonisomanasikara). We can learn to see things as they really are in that everything and everyone changes with time and nothing remains the same. In this way we will be less likely to get hung up on too many things.

8.3.6 Characteristics of a Humble Person

1. A humble person has good manners. He knows to treat each person accordingly. His manners reflect his humility and dignity.
2. A humble person practices endearing speech. He speaks honest and useful words at the right time and at the right place. It is easy for a humble person to say sorry and thank you. It is easy for a humble person to express joy and give compliments to someone who has done well. A humble person does not use offensive language. He does not use words to cause schism. He is not boastful. He is not sarcastic. He does not use words for the purpose of intimidating people.
3. A humble person has a gentle soul. He treats everyone with kindness and compassion. He does not have a quick temper. He sees the good in others. He is broad-minded. He handles diversity easily.

8.3.7 Examples of a Humble Individual

Once, Phra Sariputra who was the Lord Buddha's Chief Disciple, was accused by another monk of being arrogant and showing his arrogance by deliberately crashing into him as they passed each other. The Lord Buddha asked Phra Sariputra if what another monk had said was true. Phra Sariputra said, "Most Exalted One, I exercise constant awareness and self-possession. I exercise awareness in everything I do; not unlike a man that holds a tray filled to the brim with oil and making sure that he does not spill a drop of it as he is walking; otherwise, he would be killed by the man with a drawn sword that is following right behind him. I act as though I was a piece of rag, an ox with its horns shorn off, a half-caste orphan in a strange village,"

Now, Phra Sariputra had been a highly educated personage in that he was a graduate of all the 18 Branches of the Arts. After his ordination, he attained Arahatsip and was recognized by the Lord Buddha as being most excellent in the area of insight. Moreover, he had been appointed the Lord Buddha's Chief Disciple. If a personage who possesses such rare and exceptional virtues like Phra Sariputra could be this humble, how can ordinary individuals like the rest of us behave otherwise!

As a result of Phra Sariputra's truthful words, the monk that had made the false accusation had to get right up to admit his wrongdoing and apologized to Phra Sariputra in front of the entire company of monks.

On that occasion, the Lord Buddha praised Phra Sariputra for being as unperturbable as a stone pillar; possessing equanimity; being as clean and clear as pure water; emancipated from the round of rebirth.

8.3.8 The Fruit of Humility

1. Humility allows us to live happily because we have no enemies.
2. Humility makes us endearing and worthy of respect.
3. Humility promotes harmony in any organization.
4. Humility allows us to befriend virtuous individuals.
5. Humility allows us to learn by following the examples of virtuous individuals.
6. Humility is our refuge both in this and future existences.
7. Humility helps us to be heedful.
8. Humility helps us to attain the Path and Fruit of Nibbana.

Etc.

8.4 Blessing No. 24: Being Content



8.4.1 What Is Contentment?

The Pali word for contentment is ‘**santosa**’ where ‘san’ means self and ‘tosa’ means joy. Therefore, ‘santosa’ means being happy, joyous, satisfied with what one has. In other words, one has a sense that one has enough of what one needs; one exercises moderation.

8.4.2 Characteristics of Contentment

There are three characteristics of contentment.

1. Sakenasantosa: Being happy with what we have.
2. Santenasantosa: Being happy with what we receive.
3. Samenasantosa: Being happy as a result of a calm mind.

Being happy with what we have means that we are satisfied with everything about our self in terms of our parents, our spouse and children, our work, our country, etc. We have no intention of taking other people’s belongings. Being satisfied with what we have at any given moment does not mean that we are not motivated to work harder. It just means that as we are striving to achieve our different life goals, we are happy with our progress every step of the way.

Being happy with what we receive means that we are satisfied with whatever we receive as a result of our endeavor. We feel satisfied even if what we receive may fall short of our expectation. We do not whine about our disappointment or feel sorry for our self but we keep our happiness intact as we look to further improve our performance.

Being happy as a result of a calm mind means that we do not become overjoyed when we meet with a favorable circumstance or overwrought when we meet with an unfavorable circumstance.

8.4.3 Types of Contentment

There are three types of contentment.

1. Yathalabhasantosa: Being happy with what we can obtain.
2. Yathabalasantosa: Being happy with our talents and abilities.
3. Yathasarupasantosa: Being happy with our status.

Being happy with what we can obtain means that we are happy with what we can get right now as we endeavor to do the right things in order to obtain more of what we want. For example, we may expect to get both a raise and a promotion but all we get is a raise. In this case, we know to think that at least we have gotten a raise and we learn to be happy with that.

Being happy with our talents and abilities means that we do not overrate our self but know our talents and abilities for what they really are.

Being happy with our status means that we accept who and what we are.

A Cautionary Note:

Contentment has nothing to do with laziness or a lack of aspiration. It has however everything to do with learning to be happy with who we are and what we have. Contentment helps us not to exploit other people for personal gain. Contentment makes it unnecessary for us to compete with each other as rivals. Contentment makes it unnecessary for us to be jealous of other people. Contentment goes hand in hand with moral conduct.

8.4.4 What Things Do People Want More Of?

Most people seem never to have enough of the following:

1. Position and power.
2. Material wealth.
3. Food.
4. Sensual pleasure.

Personal happiness begins with contentment. Whatever job we have at the moment, we are happy with it and we perform it to the best of our ability. We are happy with our spouse. We fulfill our every role to the best of our ability. In this way, we are happy at work and we are happy at home.

8.4.5 How Can Contentment Be the Gateway to True Happiness?

There are two kinds of happiness (or 'sukha') in this world:

1. **Samisasukha:** It is the kind of happiness which is derived from external objects. It is the crude kind of happiness because it is tainted with suffering. The reasons are:

- 1.1 We must work hard to obtain the objects of our desire.
- 1.2 Once we have them we must try to keep them safe.
- 1.3 We may become terribly unhappy if the desirable objects cannot be obtained.

2. **Niramisasukha:** This is internal happiness which does not require any external objects. This kind of happiness is attained when the mind is:

Clean	the absence of defilements.
At peace	the absence of anxieties.
Free	light and spacious.
Bright	filled with the kind of insight that can penetrate Truth.
Complete	the absence of lacks, loneliness; there is only joy and fulfillment.

Niramisasukha is true happiness and one of the factors which brings about true happiness is contentment.

8.4.6 How to Earn a Living in a Contented Manner

In Buddhism, earning a living is meant to provide us with the four requisites necessary to sustain our body so that we can use our body to perform all kinds of good deeds. Earning a living is not meant to be the means of acquiring all kinds of material wealth for the purpose of indulging in sensual pleasure.

8.4.7 How to Manage Our Material Wealth

1. First of all, our material wealth must be gained in a righteous manner and not through immoral or unlawful means.
2. We must be neither a spendthrift nor a miser. We must know to spend what we have on sustaining our self and our family as well as giving to charity.
3. Our attitude toward our material wealth should be that our material wealth is a tool necessary for sustaining life and not a god.

8.4.8 The Types of Poor People

There are two types of poor people:

1. People are poor because they possess very little material wealth. Such people can always improve their situation if they can find the opportunity to earn a better living.
2. People are poor because they never feel that they have enough. Such people cannot improve their situation and will feel poor for the rest of their lives.

8.4.9 How to Cultivate Contentment

1. We should consider the fact that aging, sickness, and death are part of life and that no amount of material wealth can help us escape these realities. Moreover, once we die we must leave everything behind.
2. We should exercise moderation in our consumption of food.
3. We should give alms regularly in order to gradually erode away our miserliness.
4. We should keep the Precepts especially the Eight Precepts. When we keep the Eight Precepts, we are cultivating contentment by curbing our attachment to sensual pleasure. This austerity practice calls for us to abstain from sexual intercourse, food consumption after the noon hour, using color cosmetics and perfumes, sleeping on a thick, soft bed.
5. We should practice meditation regularly so that our mind is calm and centered.

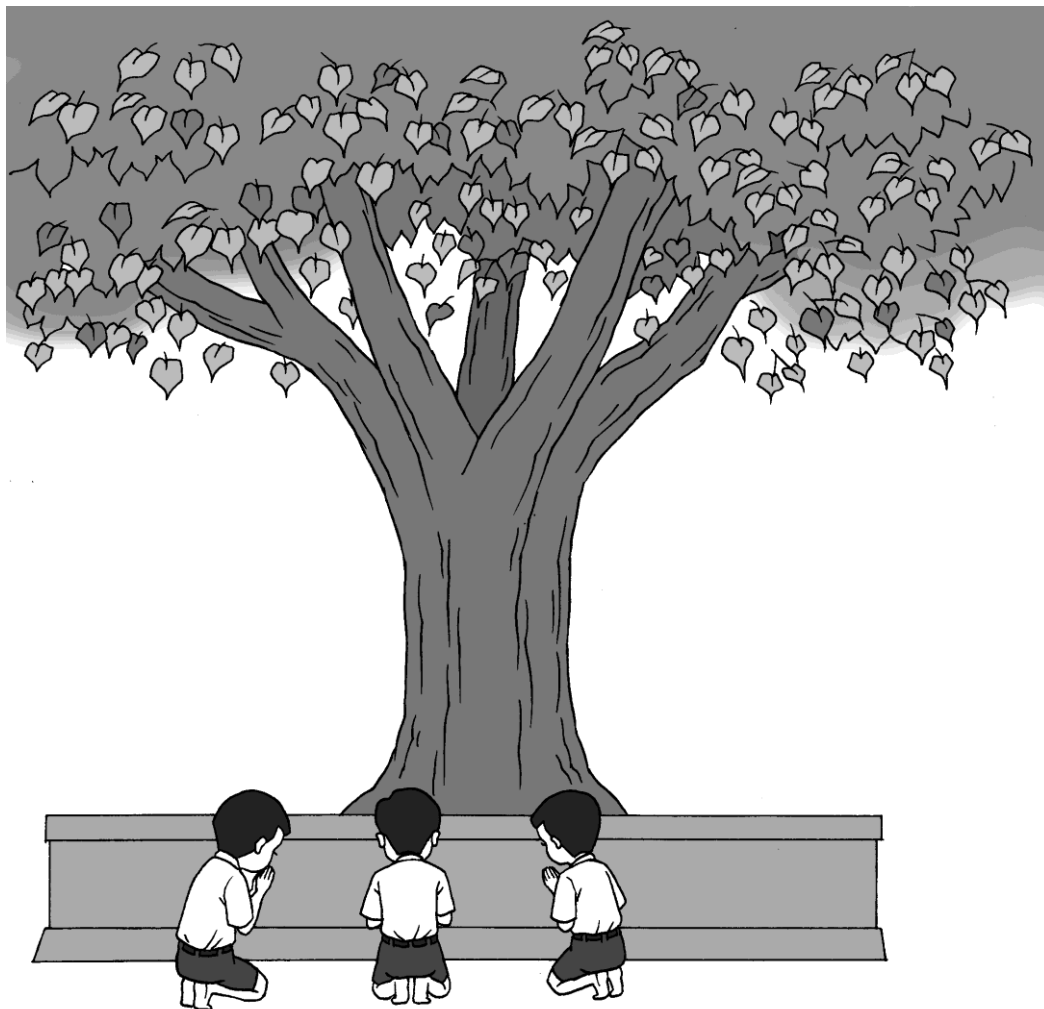
8.4.10 How to Cultivate Contentment in the Thai Society

Traditionally, Thai men have had a way of cultivating contentment by undertaking ordination for three months or longer. A monk has an opportunity to experience the kind of happiness that comes from inner peace which is completely different from the kind of superficial happiness that comes from sensual pleasure. A monk owns just three robes and one alms-bowl. He is not burdened by excess and can be as free as a bird in the air. Thus a monk has the real opportunity to cultivate and appreciate contentment.

8.4.11 The Fruit of Contentment

1. Contentment makes us worry-free.
 2. Contentment keeps us away from unwholesomeness.
 3. Contentment makes us happy.
 4. Contentment keeps us away from bad things and helps us meet with good things.
 5. Contentment makes it easy for us to practice morality.
 6. Contentment protects us from troubles and harm.
 7. Contentment gives us willpower.
 8. Contentment helps us grow.
 9. Contentment gives us the opportunities to do more good deeds.
 10. Contentment helps Buddhism to flourish.
- Etc.

8.5 Blessing No. 25: Being Grateful



8.5.1 What Is Gratitude?

Gratitude means acknowledging a benefit that one has received or will receive. Another meaning of gratitude is the appreciation of merit. This means that we acknowledge the fact that the merit, which we had accumulated in our previous existences, is providing us with everything desirable in our present existence. Therefore, to ensure our continuing good fortune, we know to accumulate as much new merit as possible in our current existence.

8.5.2 To Whom Should We Show Our Gratitude?

1. **We should show our gratitude to any individual who has helped us in any way by repaying him/her whenever we can.** Individuals to whom we should show our deep gratitude are the Lord Buddha, the Sangha, our parents, our Preceptor, our teachers, our king or a ruler who practices the Ten Sovereign Virtues. We show our gratitude by being a practicing Buddhist, a good son or daughter, a good pupil, and a good and law-abiding citizen.
2. **We should show our gratitude to any animal that has helped us in any way such as elephants, horses, oxen, water buffaloes.** We treat them with kindness and compassion by not working them too hard, by giving them sufficient feed, by not working them when they are old, etc.

This type of gratitude is given in the following example. This incident happened during the Lord Buddha's time. One day, the king of Rajagarh went out to the royal park and had fallen asleep. At the time, a cobra was moving toward him and was getting ready to strike. A chipmunk, which saw the cobra, let out a squeal and woke the king up in time to chase the snake away. The king felt grateful to the chipmunk for having saved his life, so he put the chipmunk under his protection and had it fed everyday. It was for this reason that the park was later called 'Veluvankalantakanivapasathan' which means 'the bamboo forest where the chipmunk has been fed by the king'. Later still, it became the first Buddhist temple and the name was changed to Veluvana Temple.

3. **We should show our gratitude to any object that has helped us in any way.** Such objects include Dhamma texts, course books, academic institutions, temples, trees, woods, tools of the trade, etc. We should treat these objects accordingly.

There is a saying which appears in one of the Jataka stories called 'Temiya', "It is not only the people that have helped us in any way, even a tree which has given us shade should never be sullied. Whoever rests in the shade of a tree and cuts down its branches, strips it of its leaves, etc., is said to be harming a friend. Therefore, such a person is vile and will meet only with misfortune".

4. **We should show our gratitude to merit.** If we are blessed with good health, a good complexion, a high intellect, material wealth, a high level of success, know that they are the results of the merit which we had accumulated in our previous existence(s). Every good thing in life can be realized only by the power of merit. Therefore, we should be grateful to our past merit and endeavor to accumulate as much new merit as we can in order to make provisions for our future existences.
5. **We should show our gratitude to our self.** Our body is the very instrument for performing all sorts of wholesome deeds. Therefore, we must take good care of our body and do not transgress against it by consuming alcohol and other addictive substances, frequenting the nightlife, using our body to commit such evil acts as killing, stealing, having an affair, etc.

8.5.3 What Important Role Does Gratitude Play in the Cultivation of Goodness?

Performing good deeds does not come naturally to us. The situation is made especially difficult when we are faced with obstacles. Yet, when we know gratitude, we can be more easily motivated to accumulate good deeds in spite of obstacles.

For example, it is more difficult for us to go to school and study hard than to play hooky. Yet, when we recall how hard our parents must work in order to raise us and provide for us and how our teachers work hard to equip us with knowledge, we have the motivation to be a good and responsible child. We do not want to cause our parents or our teachers any grief and we do not want them to feel ashamed of our behavior.

Monks and Buddhists whose work is to propagate the Lord Buddha's Teachings must occasionally meet with people who do not understand their work or some other obstacles. As a result, some may become discouraged and give up their good work altogether. However, if they are anchored in the deep gratitude which they feel toward the Lord Buddha and the incomparable Buddha-Virtues, they will have the determination and the willpower to continue doing their work to the best of their ability. They will also be aware that before a Bodhisatta can become self-enlightened as a Buddha, he has had to put his life on the line throughout countless lifetimes in order to pursue Perfections to the fullest extent.

Therefore, gratitude is an important virtue and it can keep us grounded in the Dhamma so that we can continue to accumulate wholesome deeds.

8.5.4 The Fruit of Gratitude

1. Gratitude keeps us on the path of wholesomeness.
 2. Gratitude motivates us to continue accumulating wholesome deeds.
 3. Gratitude helps us to be heedful.
 4. Gratitude brings about Hiri and Otappa (Being ashamed of unwholesomeness and fearful of its consequences).
 5. Gratitude gives rise to patience.
 6. Gratitude makes the mind bright and clear.
 7. Gratitude makes us admirable.
 8. Gratitude makes us endearing.
 9. Gratitude brings us help from human and celestial beings alike.
 10. Gratitude makes it possible for us not to incur retribution.
 11. Gratitude brings us good things.
 12. Gratitude facilitates our attainment of the Path and Fruit of Nibbana.
- Etc.

8.6 Blessing No. 26: Listening to Dhamma Lectures



8.6.1 Why Must We Listen to Dhamma Lectures?

We need to make time to listen to Dhamma lectures from virtuous individuals in order to elevate our mind and our intellect. The Dhamma lectures we listen to can help us see if we have already possessed the virtue mentioned in the lecture and if not how to go about cultivating the particular virtue. For example, when we listen to a Dhamma lecture about gratitude, we can evaluate whether or not we possess this virtue and if so at what level. We can also evaluate if we need to improve upon this virtue and how to go about doing it.

8.6.2 When Should We Listen to Dhamma Lectures?

1. We should listen to a Dhamma lecture on the Buddhist Holy Day or Monks Day which takes place once a week. The reason is that by the time a week has passed, we will need a refresher in order to stay on course.
2. We should listen to a Dhamma lecture whenever our mind is dominated by anxieties and unwholesomeness. Our mind can become gloomy for three main reasons:
 - 2.1 When we are dominated by thoughts of sensual pleasures in terms of sex, physical form, taste, smell, sound, touch, and a longing for these things.
 - 2.2 When we are dominated by thoughts of revenge.
 - 2.3 When we are dominated by thoughts of violence.

Therefore, as soon as we find our self being dominated by any of these thoughts we must protect our self and others by listening to a Dhamma lecture.

3. We should listen to a Dhamma lecture whenever a Dhamma lecture is being given by an individual who is an expert teacher of the Dhamma.

8.6.3 Attributes of a Good Lecturer

Once the Lord Buddha said to Phra Ananda, “Ananda, it is not easy to give a Dhamma lecture because a good lecturer must possess the following five attributes:

1. He must teach the Dhamma by proceeding in an orderly fashion with a gradual increase in the level of difficulty. This requires that:
 - 1.1 The lecturer have a real knowledge of the topic he is teaching.
 - 1.2 The lecturer be articulate enough to deliver his lecture in an effective manner.
 - 1.3 The lecturer prepares the content of his lecture well.
2. He must teach the Dhamma by citing the cause and effect of each point while giving clear examples of the points he is making. He must also be able to answer satisfactorily any questions the audience may have for him.
3. He must teach the Dhamma with heartfelt goodwill for his audience. He persists in his teaching even if his audience cannot immediately follow the train of his lecture. His love, kindness, and compassion are such that his sole aim is to benefit his audience with his teaching.
4. He must not teach the Dhamma in order to seek personal gain such as fame, admiration, gifts, etc.
5. He must not teach the Dhamma in order to proclaim his own goodness or find faults with another person.

8.6.4 Attributes of a Good Listener

1. A good listener must not deem the Dhamma topic being taught as being beneath him. The reason is that every single Dhamma topic if practiced to the ultimate level has the potential of leading the practitioner to rid himself of all defilements and attain Nibbana. For example, the Dhamma topic at its most basic level is “Staying away from fools”. If we practice this Dhamma topic by not associating with fools, and by not keeping any of our own unwholesomeness by breaking every bad habit that we have, this practice when repeated over many lifetimes can lead us ultimately to Nibbana.
2. A good listener must not underestimate the lecturer’s knowledge and ability. For example, we must not underestimate a young monk. The Lord Buddha teaches us not to underestimate the following people and things:
 - 2.1 Never underestimate a small fire because even a small fire can end up burning down the entire city.
 - 2.2 Never underestimate a small venomous snake because its bite has enough potency to cause death.
 - 2.3 Never underestimate a king for being young because Alexander the Great was able to rule nearly half of the world when he was in his 20s.
 - 2.4 Never underestimate a young monk because a novice as young as 7 years old has been known to have already attained Arahatsip.
3. A good listener must not underestimate his own ability to learn the Dhamma. Some people think themselves not intelligent enough to understand the Dhamma; therefore, they do not attend any Dhamma lecture. During the Lord Buddha’s time, there were many examples of dull-witted monks who attained Arahatsip after having heard just one Dhamma lecture from the Lord Buddha. At times, we may not understand a particular Dhamma topic well but with repeated listening, we can gain a better understanding of it.
4. A good listener must pay full attention to the Dhamma lecture while it is being given. During the Lord Buddha’s time, whenever the Lord Buddha gave a Dhamma lecture on a complex topic, He would close His eyes in meditation. The listeners would follow His example and closed their eyes in meditation as they listened to His words. As a result, a host of these attentive listeners were able to attain the different stages of Enlightenment.
5. A good listener must exercise analytical reflection as he listens to the Dhamma lecture so that he can quickly grasp the significance of what he has heard.

8.6.5 The Habit Instilled by Listening to Dhamma Lectures

When we listen to Dhamma lectures on a regular basis, we are essentially forming a very good habit which will make it easier for us to attain the Dhamma in this and future existences. The habit of listening to Dhamma lectures provides us with the following four benefits:

1. In our next rebirth, we will be able to recall the Dhamma and will continue to practice it such that our attainment of the Path and Fruit of Nibbana can be facilitated.
2. In our next rebirth, we can be a teacher of Dhamma and our attainment of the Path and Fruit of Nibbana can be facilitated.
3. In our next rebirth, even if we cannot at first recall the Dhamma but as soon as we attend a Dhamma lecture, we will be able to understand its content and our attainment of the Path and Fruit of Nibbana can be facilitated. The reason is that we have formed the habit of listening to Dhamma lectures regularly in this lifetime.
4. In our next rebirth, even if we cannot at first recall the Dhamma and there is no one to give us a Dhamma lecture, a few poignant words from someone can help us to recall and understand the Dhamma and our attainment of the Path and Fruit of Nibbana can be facilitated.

Those of us who chant regularly in the morning and evening without any comprehension of the Pali language can at least experience peace and be used to the Pali words such that in our next rebirth when we hear someone chant we will want to get close to that person. And when we have the opportunity to listen to a Dhamma lecture, we will be able to understand its content. The reason is that in this lifetime we chant and listen to Dhamma lectures regularly.

8.6.6 The Fruit of Listening to Dhamma Lectures

1. We can increase our Dhamma knowledge.
2. We can review the Dhamma material which we have already heard.
3. Any questions we may have about a particular Dhamma topic can be answered.
4. We can rectify our view should it stray for whatever reasons.
5. We can elevate the state of our mind.

CHAPTER 9

THE EIGHTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: CULTIVATING HIGHER VIRTUES

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 9

THE EIGHTH GROUP OF LIFE’S 38 BLESSINGS: CULTIVATING HIGHER VIRTUES

9.1 The Eighth Group of Life’s 38 Blessings: Cultivating Higher Virtues

9.2 Blessing No. 27: Cultivating Patience

9.3 Blessing No. 28: Being Willing to Learn from Others

9.4 Blessing No. 29: Valuing Righteous Monks

9.5 Blessing No. 30: Conversing about the Dhamma

CONCEPTS

1. The next level of personal development calls for us to cultivate patience, be willing to learn from others, know the value of righteous monks, and learn to hold Dhamma conversations on certain occasions.
2. Patience means the ability to keep our mind calm when faced with what is desirable as well as what is undesirable. Patience is needed to ward off discouragement so that we can continue to overcome whatever obstacles that may come our way and strive to reach whatever goals we have set for our self.
3. Being willing to learn from others means that we respectfully and humbly learn from the good examples of virtuous people.
4. Valuing righteous monks means that we regard monks who practice righteousness according to the Dhamma-Discipline as our role models where moral standard is concerned. When we know the value of righteous monks, we can then be motivated to accumulate wholesome deeds by practicing the Dhamma.
5. Conversing about the Dhamma on occasions increases our wisdom such that we know to abandon all unwholesome deeds and hasten to accumulate only wholesome deeds.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the importance of the Eighth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Cultivating higher virtues.
2. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning, characteristics, and types of patience.
3. To enable the student to correctly describe how to cultivate patience as well as the fruit of patience.
4. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning, characteristics, and types of people who are willing to learn from others.
5. To enable the student to correctly describe the causes of stubbornness, how to cultivate the willingness to learn from others, and the fruit of being willing to learn from others.
6. To enable the student to correctly describe the importance of valuing righteous monks, the meaning of righteous monks.
7. To enable the student to correctly describe how to value righteous monks, what can be gained from valuing righteous monks, and why the laity wants the monks to visit them at home.
8. To enable the student to correctly describe the way to treat a righteous monk and the fruit of valuing righteous monks.
9. To enable the student to correctly describe why we must converse about the Dhamma on occasions and what it means by conversing about the Dhamma.
10. To enable the student to correctly describe why it is difficult to hold a Dhamma conversation as well as how to properly conduct oneself during a Dhamma conversation.
11. To enable the student to correctly describe how to hold a Dhamma conversation.
12. To enable the student to correctly describe the importance of conversing about the Dhamma at home and the fruit of conversing about the Dhamma on occasions.

THE EIGHTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: CULTIVATING HIGHER VIRTUES

9.1 The Eighth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: Cultivating Higher Virtues

Blessing No. 27: Cultivating Patience

Blessing No. 28: Being Willing to Learn from Others

Blessing No. 29: Valuing Righteous Monks

Blessing No. 30: Conversing about the Dhamma

After we have pursued the basic virtues of being respectful, being humble, being content, being grateful, and listening to Dhamma lectures we are now ready to proceed to the next step in personal development by cultivating higher virtues.

1. **Cultivating Patience** means developing the ability to keep our mind calm when faced with what is desirable as well as what is undesirable. Patience is needed to ward off discouragement so that we can continue to overcome whatever obstacles that may come our way and strive to reach whatever goals we have set for our self.
2. **Being Willing to Learn from Others** means that we respectfully and humbly learn from the good examples of virtuous people.
3. **Valuing Righteous Monks** means that we regard monks who practice righteousness according to the Dhamma-Discipline as our role models where moral standard is concerned. When we know the value of righteous monks, we can then be motivated to accumulate wholesome deeds by practicing the Dhamma. Moreover, righteous monks can readily give us an idea of what true peace and happiness are like through their radiant looks and serenity.
4. **Conversing about the Dhamma on Occasions** increases our wisdom such that we know to abandon all unwholesome deeds and hasten to accumulate only wholesome deeds.

9.2 Blessing No. 27: Cultivating Patience



9.2.1 What Is Patience?

Patience means the ability to keep our mind calm when faced with what is desirable as well as what is undesirable. Patience is needed to ward off discouragement so that we can continue to overcome whatever obstacles that may come our way and strive to reach whatever goals we have set for our self.

Every undertaking big or small cannot be successful without one very fundamental virtue and that is patience. It is for this reason that the Lord Buddha said, **“Besides wisdom, I admire patience as a real virtue.”**

9.2.2 Characteristics of the Right Kind of Patience

1. The right kind of patience is marked by **tolerance**. It means that we do not succumb to any provocation but are focused solely on practicing morality, concentration, and insight.
2. The right kind of patience is marked by **the absence of viciousness**. It means that we know how to rein in our anger should it ever arise. A person that is quick to anger is a person that has not yet cultivated patience.
3. The right kind of patience is marked by **the absence of retaliation**. It means that we refuse to pay back in kind.
4. The right kind of patience is marked by **constant joy** which is present even in the face of difficulties.

The sages of old advise us to cultivate patience by knowing when to cover both our ears, close both our eyes as well as our mouth and learn to sit and lie down comfortably.

When we are patient, it means that:

1. We persist in staying away from unwholesomeness.
2. We persist in performing wholesome deeds.
3. We persist in protecting our mind from becoming gloomy.

9.2.3 Types of Patience

There are four types of patience as follows:

1. We exercise patience **when we are faced with such problems as inclement weather, etc.**
2. We exercise patience **when we are faced with discomfort and pain** due to an illness.
3. We exercise patience **when someone transgresses against us by treating us rudely, unfairly, etc.**
4. We exercise patience by **not allowing our self to succumb to our defilements.**

9.2.4 How to Cultivate Patience

1. We cultivate patience by practicing Hiri (feeling ashamed of unwholesome deeds) and Otappa (feeling fearful of the consequences of unwholesome deeds).

During the time when our great Bodhisatta was pursuing Perfections as Temiya, he had been born a prince. When he was little, he heard his father pronounce a judgment on a criminal by having the criminal put to death via smoke inhalation. The incident caused Temiya to recall a previous lifetime where he had been a king and had had to sentence many criminals to death. As a result of the misdeeds, he had had to suffer in the Hell Realm for a long time. He feared that as a king, he would have to sentence people to death and end up in the Hell Realm again. Therefore, from that day onward, Temiya pretended to be deaf, mute and crippled. He patiently put up with everything as a result of Hiri and Otappa. Finally, his father the king decided to have him taken outside the city and buried alive. But as soon as he was outside the city gate, he showed himself to be well and normal. He took up the religious life and later his

parents, his relatives, and his subjects also decided to follow his example by taking up the religious life as well.

2. We cultivate patience by being positive. We make it a practice to look at things on the bright side in order to preserve our equanimity. This practice is very well exemplified by Phra Punna. Before he was ordained, he had been a merchant from Sunaparanta and had gone to trade in the city of Savatthi. There he had the opportunity to listen to a Dhamma lecture from the Lord Buddha and decided to ordain. After his ordination, he found that his meditation practice had not progressed well because he was not used to the climate in Savatthi. Therefore, he went to see the Lord Buddha and asked for permission to return to his hometown. The Lord Buddha said to Phra Punna,

“Are you sure you really want to do this, Punna? You know how the people of Sunaparanta are fierce and uncouth. What if they abuse you verbally, what would you do then?”

“It’s better than being beaten, Most Exalted One.”

“But what if they did beat you?”

“It’s better than being thrown at with clumps of dirt, Most Exalted One.”

“What if they did throw clumps of dirt at you?”

“It’s better than being caned, Most Exalted One.”

“What if they did cane you?”

“It is better than being stabbed with a knife, Most Exalted One?”

“What if they meant to kill you with a sword?”

“That isn’t so bad, Most Exalted One.”

“How’s so, Punna?”

“Some people want to commit suicide and they have to go look for some sort of instrument in order to get the job done but I’m luckier than them in that I don’t have to look for an instrument at all.”

“In that case, Punna, you may leave.”

Once Phra Punna arrived at his hometown, he continued to practice meditation earnestly and not long afterward he was able to attain Arahatsip.

3. We cultivate patience by practicing meditation regularly. Patience and concentration support each other. The story of Phra Lomasana demonstrates how this is done. This monk had practiced meditation until he could recall his previous existences even though he had not yet attained Arahatsip. One day he was practicing meditation under the hot sun and he was perspiring profusely. One of his pupils asked him to move into the shade to practice meditation there. The monk told him that he was sitting in the hot sun precisely because he was fearful of the heat and continued to sit and contemplate the hell realm of Aveci where he had once been. The heat in the hell realm of Aveci was infinitely hotter than being under the hot sun. He continued to practice meditation under the hot sun until he eventually attained Arahatsip.

9.2.5 The Fruit of Patience

1. Patience gives rise to wholesomeness.
2. Patience makes us attractive and endearing.
3. Patience helps us destroy the root cause of all unwholesomeness.
4. Patience gives us happiness and peace.
5. Patience is one of the sublime attributes of the sages.
6. Patience plants us firmly on morality and concentration.
7. Patience makes it easy for us to achieve The Four Noble Sentiments¹.
8. Patience facilitates our attainment of Nibbana.

Etc.

¹ The Four Noble Sentiments include loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity.

9.3 Blessing No. 28: Being Willing to Learn from Others



9.3.1 What Does it Mean To Be Willing to Learn from Others?

A person is willing to learn from others because he has the patience to listen to advice, suggestion, and instruction from a virtuous person. A person that is willing to learn from others is naturally respectful and humble. He is not busily talking back or making excuses.

There are some people who appear to be able to put up with all sorts of hardship but can hardly stand being given advice, suggestion, or instruction. These people are difficult to teach because they are stubborn.

9.3.2 Characteristics of a Person Who Is Willing to Learn from Others

The willingness to learn from others is displayed by the following eleven characteristics:

1. One does not try to make excuses when one is admonished.
2. One tries to correct one's mistake as pointed out by a virtuous person.
3. One does not try to find faults with the person who gives him advice.
4. One responds to a virtuous person's advice in such a way as to encourage him/her to continue teaching him.
5. One knows that anyone who is willing to give him advice risks his anger and retaliation; therefore, it is important that one treats the advice-giver with respect and appreciation.
6. It takes a humble person to be willing to learn from others.
7. One regards an advice given by a virtuous person as a treasure trove.
8. One does not act in a stubborn manner by continuing to err.
9. One does not argue with the advice-giver or retaliate in any way.
10. One should not only be receptive to good advice but also ask to be admonished whenever one errs in any way.
11. One patiently listens to words of advice even when they are rudely delivered.

These eleven characteristics can be summarized into three characteristics as follows:

1. One is receptive to good advice. It means that one does not talk back or make excuses for one's mistake. Neither does one try to find faults with the advice-giver.
2. Having been given advice, one hastens to mend one's way.
3. One appreciates the person who gives him advice regardless of the person's position, age, etc.

9.3.3 What Makes a Person Willingly Learn from Others?

There are three main reasons why a person is willing to learn from others:

1. A person that is looking for material gain such as a reward, an inheritance, a bonus, etc. Such a person pretends to be willing to learn when in fact he/she is just brown-nosing.
2. A person that lacks self-confidence. He/she is easily influenced by other people. Such a person is not really willing to learn but he/she is in fact quite stupid.
3. A person that honors goodness and virtue. He/she naturally wants to improve himself/herself; therefore, he/she is genuinely willing to learn from others.

9.3.4 What Causes Stubbornness?

There are 16 reasons why people are stubborn:

1. People are stubborn because they have unwholesome desire and are out to get what they want at whatever cost.
2. People are stubborn because they are arrogant and think themselves superior to other people.
3. People are stubborn because they are quick to anger. They dislike being told what to do and will show their displeasure by being angry.
4. People are stubborn because they harbor thoughts of revenge. They are unforgiving and rarely smile.
5. People are stubborn because they lash out angrily and indignantly should they be told what to do.
6. People are stubborn because they are quick to react negatively to any advice.
7. People are stubborn because they are quick with all kinds of excuses.
8. People are stubborn because they are quick to reject both the advice and the advice-giver.
9. People are stubborn because they react to advice with sarcasm.
10. People are stubborn because they are quick to change the subject whenever they are given advice.
11. People are stubborn because they feel negative toward whoever gives them advice.
12. People are stubborn because they harbor dark secrets which cause them to be paranoid and resistant to advice.
13. People are stubborn because they are wont to feel obligated to anyone.
14. People are stubborn because they are narrow-minded.
15. People are stubborn because they think themselves perfect.
16. People are stubborn because they have Wrong View.

9.3.5 How to Be Willing to Learn from Others

Now that we know the 16 reasons for stubbornness, it is crucial that we check to make sure that we are not stubborn in any way. Moreover, we should exercise the following:

1. We must bear in mind that when we refuse to heed anyone's advice we are not likely to mend our way.
2. We must bear in mind the Lord Buddha's Teaching which says that whoever admonishes us is doing the work of revealing a treasure trove to us.
3. We must learn to be respectful of words of advice by listening to them calmly and attentively.
4. We can learn to ask for support by allowing other people to give us advice.
5. We must practice meditation earnestly so that our mind will be clear and bright. The equanimity derived from meditation practice allows us to calmly consider another person's advice and take whatever action necessary to improve our self.

9.3.6 Things to Know about Stubborn People

There are three main types of stubborn people:

1. Some stubborn people are either stupid or lazy.
2. Some stubborn people think they know everything.
3. Some stubborn people readily fly into a rage.

These three types of stubborn people behave differently toward their superior:

1. The first type is willing to receive order but not advice.
2. The second type needs some persuasion before they will do as told.
3. The third type is more or less beyond help.

There is one example of the second type of stubborn people in the person of a monk by the name of Channa. He was once one of our Lord Buddha's royal pages when our Lord Buddha was still living in the palace as Prince Siddhattha. Channa was the person that accompanied Prince Siddhattha when he left the palace to take up the religious life. Later, Channa ordained as a monk. He was one very stubborn monk, however. Thinking himself close to the Lord Buddha, he refused to listen to anyone. Finally, Phra Ananda, our Lord Buddha's personal assistant asked the Lord Buddha what was to be done with Phra Channa. The Lord Buddha said that after His attainment of complete Nibbana, let all the monks treat Phra Channa as if he did not exist and let him do whatever he pleased. The monks were to ignore him completely. After a few days of being completely ignored by the entire company of monks, Phra Channa realized how he had erred and subsequently asked the monks for forgiveness. He also promised that he would never be stubborn again. This type of punishment is called 'Brahmadanda'.

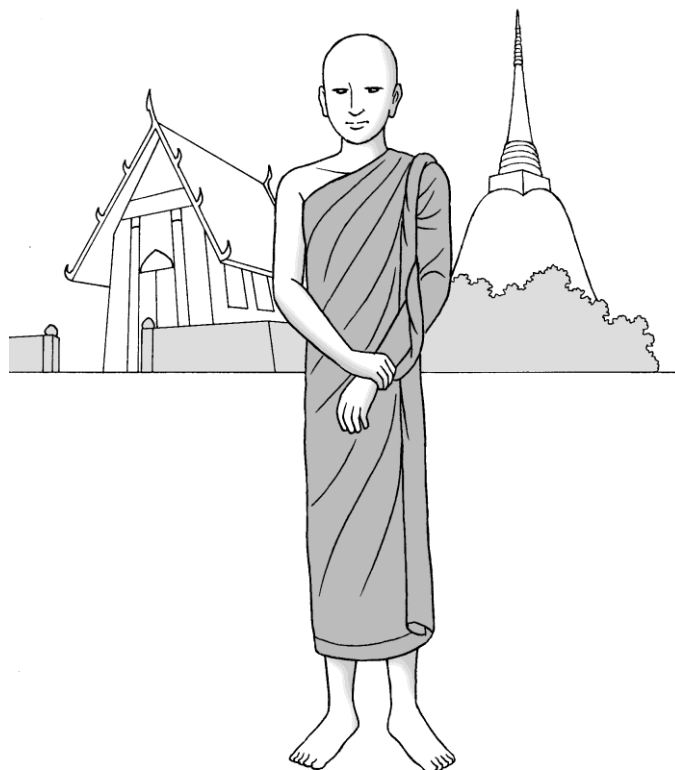
9.3.7 The Fruit of Being Willing to Learn from Others

1. When we are willing to learn from other people, they are likely to treat us with love and kindness.
 2. When we are willing to learn from others, we have the opportunity to receive good advice.
 3. When we are willing to learn from others, we have the Dhamma as our refuge.
 4. When we are willing to learn from others, we can more easily abstain from unwholesomeness.
 5. When we are willing to learn from others, we can more easily cultivate higher virtues.
- Etc.

A wise person that points out our shortcomings is essentially revealing to us a treasure trove. When we keep the company of such a person, we stand to gain every good thing.

Khuddaka-nikāya. Dhammapada 25/16/25

9.4 Blessing No. 29: Valuing Righteous Monks



9.4.1 Why Must We Value Righteous Monks?

Let us first take a look at the two kinds of happiness:

1. The first kind of happiness is derived from such material things as lovely music, delicious food, a soft couch, etc. This is called external happiness.
2. The second kind of happiness is not derived from material things but is gained through meditative attainments. This is called internal happiness.

Internal happiness is incomparably superior to external happiness and monks who practice righteousness according to the Dhamma-Discipline can more easily gain access to internal happiness. The internal happiness inherent in righteous monks cannot help but encourage us to emulate them so that we too can gain access to such happiness. It is for this very important reason that we must value righteous monks.

9.4.2 Who Are the Righteous Monks?

The Pali word ‘**Samana**’ means a monk who practices righteousness according to the Dhamma-Discipline; therefore, he is firmly planted in morality, concentration, and insight. A ‘**Samana**’ is a monk who has abstained from all unwholesomeness.

9.4.3 Characteristics of a Righteous Monk

1. A righteous monk never physically abuses anyone. The Lord Buddha praised the Chief Disciple Phra Moggalana for being highly considerate and gentle in spite of his great supernatural powers. It was well-known that Phra Moggalana would only receive food-offering from those who could afford to give it and he would take just enough for his consumption in the way that a carpenter bee feeds on the pollens without ever bruising the flowers.
2. A righteous monk never verbally abuses anyone. He does not gossip about anyone. He does not cause schism among the monks. He does not make up stories to make anyone look bad. He does not use words which are unbecoming to a monk.
3. A righteous monk possesses inner peace because his mind is kept still and focused at the center of his body at all times. He is filled with love, kindness, and compassion. He has abstained from unwholesomeness.

When a monk possesses the above three characteristics, he is calm, graceful, and dignified. **Therefore, a righteous monk serves as a good role model for every human being.**

9.4.5 How to Value a Righteous Monk

We value a righteous monk at three different levels:

1. We value him with our eyes in that we see his calm, graceful, and dignified form.
2. We value him with our thought in that we think of his righteousness.
3. We value him with our Nana or Insight. This can only happen after we have practiced meditation to the point where we can attain Phra Dhammakaya and subsequently employ the Dhammakaya-Eye to penetrate another person’s mind. In this way, we will know for sure if the monk is genuinely righteous.

9.4.6 How to Treat a Righteous Monk

1. We must **pay him a visit** as often as possible.
2. We must **support him** by providing him with the four requisites, by cleaning his cell, etc.
3. We must attentively **listen to his Dhamma lectures**.
4. We must frequently **recall his gracious and dignified manner as well as his teachings**.
5. We must **look upon him with respect and devotion**. In realizing his virtue we endeavor to follow his example.

9.4.7 Why Do Laypeople Want a Righteous Monk to Visit Their Home?

1. Because welcoming a righteous monk into our home is a good deed. The fruit of such an act is rebirth in the Celestial Realm.
2. Because greeting a righteous monk with due respect is a good deed. The fruit of such an act is rebirth in a noble family.
3. Because the offering of alms to a righteous monk reduces our greed and miserliness. The fruit of such an act is great honor.
4. Because the offering of alms to a righteous monk earns us merit. The fruit of such an act is material wealth.
5. Because we can listen to his Dhamma lectures and we can converse with him about the Dhamma. The fruit of such acts is wisdom.

9.4.8 How to Greet a Righteous Monk

1. If we have alms readily available, we should greet him by offering him alms.
2. If alms are not available, we should greet him with a Five-Point Namaskar.
3. If it is not convenient to greet him with a Five-Point Namaskar, a simple Namaskar will do.
4. If it is not convenient to greet him with a Namaskar, we should stand up straight or pay him respect in any way we can such as giving way to him.
5. At the very least, we must regard him with deference.

9.4.9 The Fruit of Valuing a Righteous Monk

1. We gain awareness as we contemplate his virtue.
 2. We gain the willpower to follow his example.
 3. We will be blessed with clear and bright eyes.
 4. We will be blessed with heedfulness.
 5. We gain merit.
 6. We will receive human, celestial, and Nibbana endowments.
 7. Our attainment of the Path and Fruit of Nibbana will be facilitated.
- Etc.

9.4.10 The Story of How Phra Sariputra Found a Righteous Monk

When Phra Sariputra was a householder, his name was Upatissa. He had been born to a wealthy family and was educated in all the 18 branches of the arts. He had later gone in search of the Truth and ordained under a sect leader called Sayajaya. He found that Sayajaya's teachings did not lead him to subdue his defilements. Therefore, he left the sect leader to go in search of an Arahat.

One day he came across the Arahat Phra Assaji while Phra Assaji was on his alms-round. Phra Assaji's complexion was radiant and his mannerism graceful, calm, and dignified. Upatissa felt inspired and followed behind Phra Assaji in order to provide the Arahat with food. After Phra Assaji was finished with his meal, Upatissa approached him and asked,

"Venerable sir, you look so radiant. Who is your Master and whose teachings do you favor?"

Phra Assaji answered, "The Lord Buddha is my Master and I favor His Teachings."

Upatissa asked, "What does your Master teach, sir?"

Phra Assaji answered, "I am newly ordained and have not practiced the Dhamma-Discipline for very long. I may not be able to explain the Teachings to you in full but I can do them in brief. Whatever phenomenon arises from a root-cause, the Most Exalted One teaches about that root-cause and how to annihilate it. This is what my Master teaches."

Upatissa contemplated what Phra Assaji was saying and as a result he was able to attain the Stream-Entrance. That is, he became enlightened as a Sotapanna right then and there.

9.5 Blessing No. 30: Conversing about the Dhamma



9.5.1 Why Must We Converse about the Dhamma?

The Lord Buddha compares wisdom to precious gems. Whoever possesses a great deal of wisdom can be said to possess a wishing tree. The reason is that a human being's life is plagued with all kinds of problems and it takes wisdom to provide solutions to these problems. There are two main sources of wisdom as follows:

1. We gain wisdom from listening to a virtuous sage's Dhamma lecture.
2. We gain wisdom through contemplation.

However, the shortest way to gain wisdom quickly is to converse about the Dhamma on occasions. This practice encourages us to be a good conversationalist as well as a good listener. Active listening together with contemplation allows us to understand what is being said and to ask questions as they arise. We must also make it a point to share with others whatever Dhamma knowledge we possess whenever we can.

9.5.2 What Is Meant by Conversing about the Dhamma?

A Dhamma conversation can be held between two people or among a group of people for the purpose of increasing each person's wisdom. The conversation should take place at an appropriate time and place. Dhamma conversations are a source of joy, happiness, merit, and growth for all of the active participants.

In Buddhism, the word 'Dhamma' has at least two meanings.

1. Dhamma means such natural occurrences as birth, aging, sickness, and death.
2. Dhamma means such good and virtuous deeds as alms-giving, keeping the Precepts, practicing loving-kindness, showing our parents our gratitude. When we carry out these virtuous deeds, it is said that we are practicing Dhamma.

The correct way to hold a Dhamma conversation is to talk about what give rise to wholesomeness and unwholesomeness so that we can be sure to abstain from unwholesomeness and to accumulate only wholesome deeds.

9.5.3 Guidelines for Holding a Dhamma Conversation

1. All the parties involved in the conversation must be well-versed in the contents of the Dhamma topic under discussion. They must also exercise Blessing No. 10 which involves the practice of cultured speech. A Dhamma conversation can proceed as follows:
 - 1.1 The conversation material must be true.
 - 1.2 The conversation is carried out using polite words.
 - 1.3 The conversation material is beneficial to all involved.
 - 1.4 The conversation is carried out in a spirit of love and kindness.
 - 1.5 Each person must know when to speak.
2. All the people involved must know how to do active listening by:
 - 2.1 Keeping their minds on the conversation at hand in order to contemplate what is being said; and
 - 2.2 Not going against what they are hearing just because it may not be what they have been practicing.
3. All the people involved must know how to conduct a conversation and as in any good conversation, there must be a certain degree of give and take in order to allow the conversation to flow smoothly. It is polite not to interrupt another person while he is speaking.

9.5.4 How to Properly Conduct Oneself during a Dhamma Conversation

1. Before participating in a Dhamma conversation, each participant must have kept the Five or Eight Precepts immaculately at least for seven days prior to the event.
2. It is important that each participant practices meditation regularly especially just before the event.
3. Each participant should be dressed politely. It is best to wear white.
4. Each participant must practice good manners in everything he does or says.
5. Each participant must speak politely.
6. It is very important that the participants do not contradict the Lord Buddha's sayings, since the Lord Buddha's words are Truth.
7. Each participant must never use words which can cause division but uses words which promote harmony.
8. Each participant must not become angry should someone contradict him. He should first listen attentively to what the other person is saying.
9. Each participant must not have the ugly desire to put another person down.
10. Each participant takes part in the event with the intention to share his Dhamma knowledge with others in the group so that everyone stands to gain. This is not the time to try to outdo each other.
11. Each participant must stick to the agenda by not for example talking about other people especially by way of gossiping.
12. Each participant should not take too long in saying his part.

9.5.5 How to Converse about the Dhamma

1. The topic discussed must be about the Dhamma.
2. Each participant must conduct himself properly during the event.
3. The goal of the event should be mutual gain in Dhamma knowledge.

9.5.6 With Whom Should We Converse about the Dhamma?

1. We should choose someone that is firmly planted in the Dhamma.
2. We should choose someone who is well-versed in the Dhamma topic chosen for the conversation.

9.5.7 Conversing about the Dhamma at Home

In the old days, it used to be that Thai families held a Dhamma conversation routinely. By day the parents went out to work in the fields or elsewhere and the grandparents stayed home to weave baskets and do chores while the children played nearby. From time to time, the children would gather around their grandparents and the grandparents would take the opportunity to do story-telling. Generally they told stories about the Lord Buddha's previous lives or other Dhamma stories. At dinner time, every member of the family ate together. After the meal, the parents would talk to their children about Dhamma matters. It was also the time when the parents could scrutinize their children closely and monitor their children's behavior. Should they find anything amiss, this was the time when they would teach and advise their children.

Unfortunately, this kind of spontaneous Dhamma conversation has become rare nowadays where most families are more likely to gather in front of a television rather than around each other for a Dhamma conversation. In some families, the children have their dinner with their nanny while their parents attend one kind of social function or another.

9.5.8 The Fruit of Conversing about the Dhamma

1. It makes our mind wholesome.
2. It makes us clever.
3. It makes us intelligent.
4. It helps us learn more about the Dhamma.
5. It allows us to gain a deeper understanding of certain Dhamma topics.
6. It dispels any doubts we may have about a Dhamma topic.
7. It makes us have Right View.
8. It helps our mind to become purer.
9. It is the way to preserve the Ariya tradition
10. It is one way to follow in the footsteps of the sages.

Etc.

CHAPTER 10

THE NINTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: THE PRACTICES WHICH LEAD TO THE ERADICATION OF ALL DEFILEMENTS

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 10

THE NINTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: THE PRACTICES WHICH LEAD TO THE ERADICATION OF ALL DEFILEMENTS

10.1 The Ninth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: The Practices Which Lead to the Eradication of All Defilements

10.2 Blessing No. 31: Practicing Religious Austerity

10.3 Blessing No. 32: Practicing Chastity

10.4 Blessing No. 33: Penetrating the Four Noble Truths

10.5 Blessing No. 34: Penetrating Nibbana

CONCEPTS

1. Once we have cultivated higher virtues the final stage of personal development requires that we work earnestly to eradicate all of our defilements by practicing religious austerity, chastity, and meditation so devotedly until we can penetrate the Four Noble Truths as well as Nibbana.
2. Practicing religious austerity means "The Thirteen Austere Practices" (or Dhutanga) which aim to melt away every trace of defilements.
3. Practicing chastity means following the practices of a Brahma Being. It means cultivating all the Buddhist virtues so diligently and earnestly that defilements are kept at a distance. This process proceeds through the different planes of consciousness and into the realm of the Supramundane.
4. The Four Noble Truths are sublime in that whoever can penetrate them will become sublime. The Four Noble Truths are part of the Lord Buddha's enlightened knowledge and can only be accessible through meditation practice.
5. Nibbana means extinguishment; that is, the extinguishment of all defilements. Nibbana means the end of suffering, the end of the round of rebirth, etc. Once a person has practiced meditation until he can penetrate the initial level of the Four Noble Truths, he will continue to contemplate them in-depth until he can penetrate Nibbana. During the process, layer after layer of his defilements are being peeled off until no defilements are left and he attains Arahantship.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the importance of the Ninth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: The practices which lead to the eradication of all defilements.
2. To enable the student to correctly describe the reason why we must practice religious austerity.
3. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of religious austerity as well as 'The 13 Austere Practices' (or Dhutanga) and how to practice religious austerity in our daily life.
4. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of 'Restraint of the Senses' (or Indriyasamvara) as well as how to correctly practice it.
5. To enable the student to correctly describe what causes a monk to be lazy, what causes a monk to be diligent, and the fruit of religious austerity practice.
6. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of chastity practice.
7. To enable the student to correctly describe the different planes of consciousness.
8. To enable the student to correctly describe the three levels of chastity practice, practicing chastity by entering the monkhood, and the fruit of chastity practice.
9. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning and importance of the Four Noble Truths.
10. To enable the student to correctly describe what it means to penetrate the Four Noble Truths and the fruit of penetrating the Four Noble Truths.
11. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning and categories of Nibbana.
12. To enable the student to correctly describe the attributes of individuals who have penetrated Nibbana as well as the fruit of penetrating Nibbana.

THE NINTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: THE PRACTICES WHICH LEAD TO THE ERADICATION OF ALL DEFILEMENTS

10.1 The Ninth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: The Practices Which Lead to the Eradication of All Defilements

Blessing No. 31: Practicing Religious Austerity

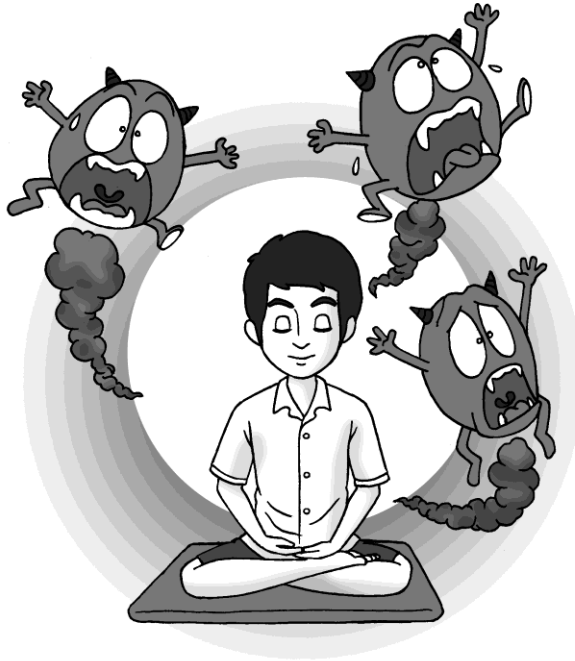
Blessing No. 32: Practicing Chastity

Blessing No. 33: Penetrating the Four Noble Truths

Blessing No. 34: Penetrating Nibbana

- 1. Practicing Religious Austerity.** It means 'The 13 Austere Practices' (or Dhutanga) which aim to eradicate every trace of defilements from our mind.
- 2. Practicing Chastity.** It is the practice that keeps defilements away as our mind goes through the different planes of consciousness.
- 3. Penetrating the Four Noble Truths.** It is the practice which allows us to penetrate the sublime Truth through the practice of meditation. It is through our elevated meditative attainments that we can penetrate suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering.
- 4. Penetrating Nibbana.** Once we can penetrate the Four Noble Truths, we can progress with our meditation practice and contemplate the Four Noble Truths. As we do so, defilements will be systematically removed until we are eventually freed from all defilements, attain Arahantship, and end our round of rebirth.

10.2 Blessing No. 31: Practicing Religious Austerity



10.2.1 Why Must We Practice Religious Austerity?

We must practice religious austerity because all of us have a tendency to backslide and the reasons are:

1. Every misdeed arises from our inherent defilements.
2. Defilements are almost impossible to remove for the following reasons.
 - 2.1 Defilements are not visible and at best we can only see their effects. Therefore, we do not know them well and we are hardly aware of their power.
 - 2.2 Our mind is familiar with defilements in the same way that fish are familiar with water.
 - 2.3 We have no idea how to remove our defilements; that is, not until the happening of the Lord Buddha. Some religious beliefs know about defilements but have no idea how to remove them. So they resort to worshipping fire or praying to God or some other practices.

The Lord Buddha teaches us to extinguish our defilements by practicing religious austerity which works by melting away every trace of defilement.

10.2.2 The Thirteen Austere Practices (or Dhutanga)

Some Buddhist monks choose to follow the Thirteen Austere Practices in order to hasten the process whereby their defilements can be extinguished. Householders may also choose to follow some of these practices. The Thirteen Austere Practices as prescribed for Buddhist monks can be divided into 4 categories as follows:

Category 1: These Austere Practices Have to Do with a Monk's Clothing

1. He wears only the robes which are fashioned out of discarded cloths.
2. He uses only the Triple Robe set and no other cloths.

These austere practices enable a monk to relinquish any concern he may have about clothing.

Category 2: These Austere Practices Have to Do with a Monk's Food

1. He eats only the food he obtains through his alms-round.
2. He does his alms-round on a designated route only.
3. He eats only once a day.
4. He eats his food from his alms-bowl where savory and sweet dishes are placed together.
5. Once he starts eating, he will no longer receive food from a lay devotee.

Category 3: These Austere Practices Have to Do with a Monk's Shelter.

1. He lives in the woods, not in a community.
2. He lives under the shade of a tree in an umbrella-like tent.
3. He lives outdoor in the open and sleeps in an umbrella-like tent.
4. He lives in an umbrella-like tent only in a graveyard.
5. He lives wherever he is assigned to live.

Category 4: This Austere Practice Does Away with Laziness.

1. He sits, stands, and walks but does not lie down to sleep. This practice can help one's meditation progress very quickly. Some monks can follow this practice for months at a time. The Arahant Phra Mahakassapa followed this practice all throughout his ordained life and was recognized by the Lord Buddha to be most excellent in the area of austere practices.

Monks and lay devotees can choose to follow any one of these 13 austere practices for whatever length of time and whenever they wish.

10.2.3 Practicing Religious Austerity in Our Daily Life

We can practice religious austerity in our daily life by doing the following:

1. Practicing restraint of the senses (or Indriyasamvara)
2. Practicing meditation diligently

10.2.4 Restraint of the Senses (or Indriyasamvara)

We have altogether 6 channels by which to receive the senses and they include the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind. These six channels are what make our mind either gloomy or bright. They play a very important role in our life and it is necessary that we know as much about them as we can.

The Lord Buddha has the following to say about these six channels.

1. Our eyes are like a snake. They like to look at things that are hidden or covered up.
2. Our ears are like a crocodile. They like cool places. They like to hear lovely words.
3. Our nose is like a caged bird. It likes to struggle. As soon as it smells something, it wants to know where the smell comes from.
4. Our tongue is like a mad dog. It doesn't like to stay idle. It likes to gossip.
5. Our body is like a fox. It likes anything or any place that is soft and warm.
6. Our mind is like a monkey. It is naughty. It is constantly moving from one thought to another from the past to the future. It is never still.

Restraint of the senses plays a very important role in terms of winning our war against our inherent defilements. When we practice restraint of the senses we are essentially putting all the six channels of the senses under our control.

Practicing Hiri (being ashamed of unwholesomeness) and Otappa (being fearful of its consequences) as described in Blessing No. 19 allows us to develop restraint of the senses as shown in the following virtuous cycle.

Hiri and Otappa give rise to restraint of the senses.

Restraint of the senses gives rise to morality.

Morality gives rise to concentration.

Concentration gives rise to insight.

Insight is the inner light which allows us to 'see' our inherent defilements in such a way that we can extinguish them. Therefore, it behooves everyone to practice restraint of the senses.

10.2.5 The Diligent Practice of Meditation

If we want our meditation practice to progress well, it is very important that we practice it diligently.

10.2.6 What Causes a Monk to Be Lazy in Regards to Meditation Practice?

1. He knows that there is work to be done but he would rather rest first. He has no wish to exert any effort for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
2. He has already completed his work and he feels it is time to rest. He has no wish to exert any effort for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
3. He knows that he has some traveling to do and he would rather rest up before taking the trip. He has no wish to exert any effort for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
4. He has already made the trip and he feels it is time to rest. He has no wish to exert any effort for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
5. He has gone on his alms-round but receives little food; therefore, he has no wish to exert any effort for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
6. He has gone on his alms-round and receives a lot of food. Having consumed all the food and feeling very full, he has no wish to exert any effort for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
7. He is suffering from a minor illness; therefore, he has no wish to exert any effort for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
8. He has gotten over his illness and feels it is not yet time to exert any effort for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.

10.2.7 What Causes a Monk to Be Diligent in Regards to Meditation Practice?

1. He knows that there is work to be done but he wishes first to take some time to practice meditation for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
2. He has completed his work; therefore, he hurries to practice meditation for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
3. He knows that he has to do some traveling; therefore, he first takes the time to practice meditation for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
4. He has already made the trip and hurries to practice meditation for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
5. He has gone on his alms-round and receives little food. Having consumed what little food he received, he feels light and easy and thinks it a good opportunity to practice meditation for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
6. He has gone on his alms-round and receives a lot of food. Having had his fill, he believes it is time to practice meditation for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment.
7. He is suffering from a minor illness; therefore, he feels it is time to practice meditation for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment before his condition gets worse.
8. He has just recovered from an illness and feels it is time to practice meditation for the purpose of attaining Enlightenment before he gets sick again.

10.2.8 The Fruit of Practicing Religious Austerity

1. Practicing religious austerity puts an end to our self-indulgence.
 2. Practicing religious austerity gives rise to virtue.
 3. Practicing religious austerity brings about blessing numbers 1 to 31.
 4. Practicing religious austerity facilitates our attainment of Nibbana.
- Etc.

10.3 Blessing No. 32: Practicing Chastity



10.3.1 What Is Meant by Practicing Chastity?

Practicing chastity means that we behave like a Brahma Being in that we endeavor to cultivate all of the Buddhist virtues to the fullest extent and in such a way that all defilements can be extinguished. This process proceeds through the different planes of consciousness and into the realm of the Supra-mundane.

10.3.2 The Different Planes of Consciousness

The Lord Buddha has discovered that our mind has four different planes of consciousness and these include:

1. **The Sense-Sphere:** This is the plane of consciousness where the mind is still immersed in sensual pleasure. Ordinary people possess this plane of consciousness.
2. **The Form-Sphere:** This is the plane of consciousness where the mind is immersed in the bliss of the Jhanas of the Form-Sphere. It is the plane of consciousness which is attained by individuals who have practiced meditation until they attain the Form Jhanas. These individuals are no longer interested in sensual pleasure because they are immersed in the bliss of their meditative attainments which are superior and far more refined than sensual pleasure. These individuals will spend their hereafter as a Brahma Being in the Form Brahma Realm.
3. **The Non-Form Sphere:** This is the plane of consciousness where the mind is immersed in the bliss of the Jhanas of the Non-Form Sphere. This plane of consciousness can be attained by individuals who have practiced meditation until they attain the Non-Form Jhanas. These individuals are immersed in the bliss of their meditative attainments which are far more refined than the bliss of the Form Jhanas. These individuals will spend their hereafter as a Non-Form Brahma Being in the Non-Form Brahma Realm.
4. **The Supra-Mundane Sphere:** This is the plane of consciousness which is attained by the Arahats who have successfully extinguished all of their defilements. In this plane of consciousness, there is only pure and eternal bliss.

These four planes of consciousness can be further divided into two main groups as follows:

1. The Mundane Sphere: This includes:

- The Sense-Sphere
- The Form-Sphere
- The Non-Form Sphere

2. The Supra-mundane Sphere

In the Mundane Sphere, everything is still subject to the Three Characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and the absence of true selfhood. Individuals in the Mundane Sphere must still undergo the round of rebirth which can take place in any one of the three spheres depending on their overall Kamma. There is no true and lasting happiness in the Mundane Sphere. The planes of consciousness in the Mundane Sphere are therefore called 'Samsaracitta' which means that the mind is still running to and fro, around and around.

Happiness in the Mundane Sphere can be defined as follows.

Happiness in the Sense-Sphere can be compared to the happiness of a child playing in the sand.

Happiness in the Form-Sphere can be compared to the happiness of a person happily engaged in his work.

Happiness in the Non-Form Sphere is like the happiness felt by the parents when their children meet with success or a person admiring his own finished work.

10.3.3 The Purpose of Chastity Practice

In Buddhism, the ultimate purpose of chastity practice is to eradicate all attachment to everything mundane in order to strive for everything supra-mundane. The Supra-mundane Sphere is attainable through the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. This noble path enables the practitioner to eradicate sexual desire, the Form desire, and the Non-Form desire.

For us ordinary people, the biggest hurdle we face in our Dhamma development is sexual desire. Therefore, when we can extinguish sexual desire our Dhamma practice can progress quickly. This particular blessing emphasizes the removal of sexual desire.

10.3.4 The Use of Analogy to Describe the Harm Wrought by Sense-Desire

The following is what the Lord Buddha has to say about sense-desire.

1. Sense-desire can be compared to a hungry dog gnawing on a bone which has some dried blood on it. The more it gnaws at the bone, the more tired it grows and its hunger cannot be satisfied.
2. Sense-desire can be compared to a piece of meat held in the beaks of a vulture or a hawk. It is anxious that other birds may snatch the meat from it. It cannot claim absolute ownership of the piece of meat.
3. Sense-desire can be compared to a man holding a lit torch made of dry grass as he walks against the wind. It is only a matter of time before he has to throw the torch away. Besides, as he walks with the lit torch, he has to inhale its smoke.
4. Sense-desire can be compared to a pit of hot coals.
5. Sense-desire can be compared to a dream.
6. Sense-desire can be compared to a borrowed treasure.
7. Sense-desire can be compared to a fruit-laden tree located deep in the forest.
8. Sense-desire can be compared to a chopping board.
9. Sense-desire can be compared to a spear or a lance.
10. Sense-desire can be compared to the head of a poisonous snake.

These few examples ought to give us a good idea as to the real harm of sense-desire as well as the pain and suffering which accompanies romantic love and marriage.

10.3.5 How to Practice Chastity

The first step toward chastity practice for householders is keeping the Five Precepts. The next step is keeping the Eight Precepts on occasions. The final step is keeping the Eight Precepts everyday of their lives or to ordain as a monk in order to practice righteousness according to the Dhamma-Discipline. All three levels of chastity practice are facilitated by meditation practice.

The first level of chastity practice enables the practitioner to attain kingship. The second level of chastity practice enables the practitioner to attain the Celestial Realm. The third and highest level of chastity practice leads the practitioner out of defilements.

Khuddaka-nikāya. Jataka. Mahānipāta 28/526/199

10.3.6 Interesting Information about Ordaining as a Novice or a Monk

It has been a traditional practice for male Buddhists in Thailand to ordain as a monk for a time when they are twenty years old. Ordaining as a novice or a monk is a great way to practice chastity and there are things about ordination that we should know about.

1. Men aged between 15 and 20 ought to ordain as a novice for a period of time in order to give themselves the opportunity to practice meditation earnestly. Men aged between 20 and 25 can ordain as a monk.
2. Duration of ordination can be 3 months during the Rains-Retreat or 1 to 2 months during summer vacation. It is useful to ordain for at least a month so that one can have some time to study the Dhamma-Discipline. Of course, it is best when one can ordain for life.
3. It is crucially important for one to choose very carefully the place or the temple where one will spend time as a monk. The chosen place must be able to help one study and adhere to the Dhamma-Discipline. Otherwise, there is no point in entering the monkhood.
4. As a monk, one must practice righteousness according to the Dhamma-Discipline.
5. As a monk, one must spend one's time studying the Dhamma-Discipline, practicing meditation, and studying the Dhamma.
6. If one ordains for at least 3 months, one can also spend some time engaging in altruistic work but this should never be at the expense of one's Dhamma practice. Every monk must display the kind of mannerism which inspires faith in the laity.

10.3.7 The Fruit of Chastity Practice

1. Chastity practice keeps our mind free from worries and anxieties.
2. Chastity practice liberates us.
3. Chastity gives us more time to accumulate good deeds.
4. Chastity makes us praiseworthy.
5. Chastity helps us progress in the areas of morality, concentration, and insight.
6. Chastity facilitates our attainment of Enlightenment.

Etc.

Sense-desire is very harmful indeed. It is the cause of terrible suffering. It gives scant satisfaction. It is the source of fights, conflicts, and unwholesomeness.

(Māhādukkhakkhandha Sutta) Majjhimanikāya Mūlapannāsa 12/198/169-172

10.4 Blessing No. 33: Penetrating the Four Noble Truths



10.4.1 The Fundamental Principle of Buddhism

The Fundamental Principle of Buddhism is the Four Noble Truths.

10.4.2 The Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths are:

1. **Dukkha:** It means the pain and suffering experienced by the body or the mind or both.
2. **Samudaya:** It means the cause of suffering.
3. **Nirodha:** It means the cessation of suffering
4. **Magga:** It means the path leading to the cessation of suffering

If we compare the Four Noble Truths with an illness, Dukkha can be compared to the sick body; Samudaya to the germs; Nirodha to the body which has recovered from an illness; and Magga to the medicine which cures the illness.

10.4.3 The First Noble Truth: Dukkha

The Lord Buddha has discovered the fact that all sentient beings experience Dukkha. Millionaires, Presidents, Prime Ministers, Universal Monarchs, and even Buddhist monks experience Dukkha. The difference is in the amount. The Lord Buddha divides Dukkha into 11 categories and these 11 categories of Dukkha can be grouped into two characteristics.

1. Sabhavadukkha: It means permanent Dukkha. And no one can avoid it. Sabhavadukkha includes: 1) Jati or birth; 2) Jara or aging; and 3) Morana or death. The Lord Buddha has discovered the fact that birth is the cause of every form of suffering. Therefore, to end Dukkha, we must end rebirth. The Lord Buddha has also discovered that we start aging as soon as we are born. However, the aging process accelerates with time. It means that the older we are, the faster we age.
2. Pakinnakadukkha: It means temporary Dukkha which comes from the slowing down of our mental function, our encountering of an undesirable situation, etc. There are 8 kinds of Pakinnakadukkha as follows.
 1. Soka: Grief, sadness, anxiety
 2. Parideva: Pining for somebody or something
 3. Dukkha: Illnesses
 4. Domanassa: Feeling hurt, feeling stressed out
 5. Upayasa: Feeling depressed, feeling abandoned
 6. Appiyehi sampayoga: Feeling frustrated and flustered at having encountered something undesirable
 7. Piyehi vippayoga: Grieving the loss of someone or something
 8. Yampicchan nalabhati: Feeling gloomy for not getting what we want.

10.4.4 The Second Noble Truth: Samudaya

The Lord Buddha has discovered that the root causes of Dukkha are our inherent defilements specifically in the form of 'Tanha' or craving. There are 3 types of craving as follows:

1. Kamatanha: It means the craving for things such as money, wealth, a good time, romantic love, admiration, etc. Kamatanha is the craving for desirable form, taste, smell, sound, touch, and sensation.
2. Bhavatanha: It means the craving for wanting to be something desirable such as a Prime Minister, a big shot, a singer, a movie star, etc.
3. Vibhavatanha: It means the craving for being distanced from something undesirable such as not wanting to be poor, old, sick, etc.

10.4.5 The Third Noble Truth: Nirodha

Nirodha means the cessation of suffering. It is the state whereby the mind is free from defilements, from every form of craving, and is kept still at the center of one's body at all times. At this point one experiences only pure bliss.

10.4.6 The Fourth Noble Truth: Magga

Magga is the path leading to the end of suffering. Magga is also called **the Noble Eightfold Path** and includes:

1. **Right View:** It means having right view about such things as the debt we owe to our parents, the Law of Kamma, the reality of the hereafter all the way to the Four Noble Truths.
2. **Right Thought:** It means thinking about not being attached to sense-desire, not holding a grudge, not harming others, etc.
3. **Right Word:** It means not lying, not inciting conflicts and division, not using offensive words, etc.
4. **Right Action:** It means not taking the life of another being, not stealing, keeping the Eight Precepts, etc.
5. **Right Livelihood:** It means earning a living in a way which does not cause harm to other beings.
6. **Right Effort:** It means endeavoring to perform only wholesome deeds.
7. **Right Awareness:** It means not allowing the mind to wander aimlessly.
8. **Right Concentration:** It means keeping the mind still at the center of the body.

The expanded form of the Noble Eightfold Path is contained in the 84,000 Buddhist Scriptures. In its abbreviated form, it becomes the Threefold Training which includes morality, concentration, and insight.

Morality (Sila): Right Word, Right Action, Right Livelihood

Concentration (Samadhi): Right Effort, Right Awareness, Right Concentration

Insight (Panna): Right View, Right Thought

When the mind is kept still during meditation until the Dhammakaya can be attained, this point coincides with the simultaneous practice of the Noble Eightfold Path.

10.4.7 Penetrating the Four Noble Truths

We have already learnt about the different kinds of Dukkha, the causes of Dukkha, the cessation of Dukkha as well as the Eightfold Noble Path. However, penetrating the Four Noble Truths is a totally different matter altogether. To truly penetrate the Four Noble Truths, one must penetrate each of the Noble Truths three times for a total of 12 times.

The penetration of the Four Noble Truths is accompanied by the ability to put every form of Dukkha away. For example, in penetrating Samudaya or the cause of suffering, one finds

that it is necessary to abandon craving or Tanha. Moreover, one has the ability to abandon it completely once and for all.

The Lord Buddha teaches that once a person can penetrate just one of the Four Noble Truths, he will be able to penetrate the other three truths as well. For example, once one has penetrated Dukkha, one will subsequently be able to penetrate Samudaya, Nirodha, and Magga. Once one penetrates Samudaya, one will be able to penetrate Dukkha, Nirodha, and Magga. Such simultaneous penetration of the Four Noble Truths can only be achieved through the Dhammakaya-Eye.

The Inner Bodies

Within each and every human being, there exist refined bodies one inside another. These refined bodies or Inner Bodies are manifested by the power of Dhamma practice as described below.

Practicing the Five Precepts	This gives rise to the Refined Human Form (Astral Body)
Practicing Hiri and Otappa	This gives rise to the Celestial Bodies
Practicing the Four Noble Sentiments	This gives rise to the Brahma Bodies
Practicing the Noble Eightfold Path	This gives rise to the Dhammakayas

Every one of us has the opportunity to attain these Inner Bodies once our mind can be kept completely still at the center of our body through meditation practice.

Characteristics of the Dhammakaya

The Dhammakaya is the living Buddha who leads us to the different stages of Enlightenment. The Dhammakaya has a crystal clear appearance and is self-luminescent. The Dhammakaya is thousands of times brighter than the sun. He possesses the 32 attributes of the Perfect Man in the same way that the Lord Buddha does. In addition, the Dhammakaya has on top of his raised crown a special feature which looks like a small lotus bloom. The Dhammakaya is made up of an elemental composition which is especially refined, elaborate, and completely devoid of defilements. To penetrate the Four Noble Truths, we require the eyes of the Dhammakaya or the Dhammakaya-Eye.

Who Can Penetrate the Four Noble Truths?

Individuals can be divided into 3 categories depending on their level of virtue:

- 1. Ordinary Individuals:** This applies to the people that are still laden with defilements and possess a mixture of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness.
- 2. Gotrabhu Individuals:** These are the people that are advancing from ordinary individuals toward Ariya or holy individuals. These individuals have practiced meditation to the point where they can attain the Gotrabhu Dhammakaya. They possess a low level of defilements. Such individuals can be said to have the left foot on earth and the right foot on Nibbana. As they endeavor to accumulate more and more wholesome deeds and practice meditation further and further until they can attain the more refined

Dhammakayas, they can become an Ariya individual. But if they slacken in their meditation practice, they will regress to the state of an ordinary individual.

3. Ariya Individuals: These are the people who have practiced meditation to the point where their defilements have been gradually removed until none is left. Ariya individuals will never return to the state of an ordinary individual, since they are firmly planted in wholesomeness and their faith in the Triple Gem can never waver. There are four categories of Ariya individuals.

3.1 Ariya individuals who have attained the Sotapanna Dhammakaya.

3.2 Ariya individuals who have attained the Sakadakami Dhammakaya.

3.3 Ariya individuals who have attained the Anagami Dhammakaya.

3.4 Ariya individuals who have attained the Arahant Dhammakaya.

All four categories of Ariya individuals can penetrate the Four Noble Truths and so can individuals who have attained the Gotrabhu Dhammakaya.

The following table shows how each of the Four Noble Truths must be penetrated thrice such that twelve times are required for all four Truths.

<u>The Four Noble Truths</u>	<u>The First Round</u>	<u>The Second Round</u>	<u>The Third Round</u>
Dukkha	Attachment to the five aggregates is Dukkha	Dukkha should be penetrated	Dukkha has been penetrated
Samudaya	Craving is the root cause of Dukkha	Craving should be removed	Craving has been removed
Nirodha	The end of craving is Nirodha	Nirodha should be penetrated	Nirodha has been penetrated
Magga	The Noble Eightfold Path is the practice leading to the end of Dukkha	The Noble Eightfold Path should be thoroughly practiced	The Noble Path has been thoroughly practiced

10.4.8 The Fruit of Penetrating the Four Noble Truths

Once we can attain the Dhammakaya and penetrate the Four Noble Truths through the Dhammakaya-Eye, we will be able to penetrate the fact that life on earth is filled with Dukkha or suffering. What we experience as happiness is merely a time period where there is less suffering. We will be able to realize the value of merit and merit-making. We will also be able to realize the danger of unwholesomeness which gives rise to demerit and how repulsive it truly is.

We will be able to see how demerit results from unwholesome deeds and how defilements taint our mind and make it gloomy. At the same time, we can see how our accumulation of merit through alms-giving, keeping the Precepts, and meditation practice can cleanse our mind such that it can become clean, clear, and bright.

When we can see things as they really are, it helps us to keep our mind grounded on wholesomeness. We will then be motivated to practice meditation so that our meditative attainments can advance further and further. Once we have developed the ability to keep our mind at a standstill for a longer period, we will be able to ‘see’ the large, bright Morality Sphere, Concentration Sphere, and Insight Sphere. As our mind becomes increasingly still, the grip which defilements has on our mind will be gradually loosened until eventually our mind can break free of defilements altogether. This is the point where we can attain Arahatsip and end our round of rebirth.

10.5 Blessing No. 34: Penetrating Nibbana



10.5.1 What Is Nibbana?

Nibbana has several meanings. Nibbana means extinguishment. It means no more in the sense that defilements, which are the root cause of Dukkha, have been extinguished. It means that defilements are no more; therefore, Dukkha is no more. Nibbana means emancipation. It means being emancipated from Dukkha and the Three Spheres of Existence.

Generally Nibbana is taken to mean:

- The state of mind where all defilements have been removed.
- The dwelling of personages who are devoid of defilements. It is a place of pure and eternal bliss.

10.5.2 Categories of Nibbana

There are two categories of Nibbana:

1. **Saupadisesanibbana:** It is also called **the Living Nibbana**. Saupadisesanibbana is located at the center of the Dhammakaya who dwells within each and every one of us. On the day that our Lord Buddha attained Self-Enlightenment, he attained the living Nibbana. The mind of the Lord Buddha and the mind of all the Arahats are kept still in the Living Nibbana at all times. The Living Nibbana is the place devoid of Dukkha.
2. **Anupadisesanibbana:** It is also called **the Dead Nibbana**. Anupadisesanibbana is a place which lies outside the Three Spheres of Existence. Upon physical death, the Lord Buddha and the Arahats entered the Dead Nibbana with their Dhammakaya. In Anupadisesanibbana, the Dhammakaya of each Buddha is surrounded by the Dhammakayas of His Arahats.

10.5.3 Individuals Who Can Penetrate Nibbana

Nibbana can be penetrated only with the Dhammakaya-Eye. Therefore, every Ariya individual including a Gotrabhu individual can penetrate Nibbana. A Gotrabhu individual cannot keep his mind on Nibbana all the time just yet. Therefore, when his mind is not kept on Nibbana, he is still susceptible to Dukkha.

10.5.4 The Nana of the Gotrabhu Dhammakaya Can See Nibbana but Cannot Yet Eradicate All Defilements

This statement is true and is explained in the Commentary under the topic of Saratthadipani.

10.5.5 Attaining the Gotrabhu Dhammakaya Nana Can Cause all Defilements to Be Temporarily Removed

This particular state is called Tadangapahana.

10.5.6 Can an Ordinary Individual Attain Nibbana?

The answer is yes. One must follow in the footsteps of the Lord Buddha and the Arahats by endeavoring to practice meditation until one can attain the Gotrabhu Dhammakaya and the more refined Dhammakayas. Once the Dhammakaya-Eye can be employed to penetrate the Four Noble Truths, one can attain Nibbana.

10.5.7 The Fruit of Penetrating Nibbana

1. When we can penetrate Nibbana, our mind is impervious to the Eight Worldly Conditions.
 2. When we can penetrate Nibbana, our mind is devoid of grief.
 3. When we can penetrate Nibbana, our mind is devoid of subtle defilements.
 4. When we can penetrate Nibbana, our mind is filled with bliss.
- Etc.

CHAPTER 11

THE TENTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: THE FRUIT OF DEFILEMENTS ERADICATION

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 11

THE TENTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: THE FRUIT OF DEFILEMENTS ERADICATION

11.1 The Tenth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: The Fruits of Defilements Eradication

11.2 Blessing No. 35: Being Unperturbed by Life's Vicissitudes

11.3 Blessing No. 36: Being Distant from Sorrow

11.4 Blessing No. 37: Being Distant from Subtle Defilements

11.5 Blessing No. 38: Being Blissful

CONCEPTS

1. Once we have penetrated the Path of Nibbana and all defilements have been removed from our mind, we will be unperturbed by life's vicissitudes. We will be distant from sorrow. We will be distant from subtle defilements. And we will be blissful.
2. The state of being unperturbed by life's vicissitude is attained by individuals who have already penetrated the Path of Nibbana. Such an individual possesses equanimity in such a way that he cannot be affected by the Eight Worldly Conditions of gain and loss, position and the loss of position, praise and blame, happiness and unhappiness.
3. The state of being distant from sorrow is attained by individuals who have already penetrated the Path of Nibbana. Such an individual can no longer be trapped by causes of sorrow such as romantic love. Therefore, his mind is content, clear, and bright. It is no longer parched or gloomy.
4. The state of being distant from subtle defilements is attained by individuals who have already penetrated the Path of Nibbana. No defilements, coarse or subtle, can ever have a hold on such an individual again.
5. The state of blissfulness is attained by individuals who have already penetrated the Path of Nibbana. Such an individual is blissful because he has been emancipated from the peril of the round of rebirth.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the state of mind which can be gained once all defilements have been removed from it.
2. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of ‘The Eight Worldly Conditions’ and the state of being unperturbed by life’s vicissitudes.
3. To enable the student to correctly describe the meaning of sorrow and the state of being distant from sorrow.
4. To enable the student to correctly describe the state of being distant from subtle defilements as well as the types of defilements and the harm wrought by them.
5. To enable the student to correctly describe human problems as well as the state of blissfulness and the attributes of a blissful person.

THE TENTH GROUP OF LIFE'S 38 BLESSINGS: THE FRUITS OF DEFILEMENTS ERADICATION

11.1 The Tenth Group of Life's 38 Blessings: The Fruit of Defilements Eradication

Blessing No. 35: Being Unperturbed by Life's Vicissitudes

Blessing No. 36: Being Distant from Sorrow

Blessing No. 37: Being Distant from Subtle Defilements

Blessing No. 38: Being Blissful

Once we have practiced Life's Blessings from numbers 1 to 34 until we can eradicate all of our defilements and penetrate the Path of Nibbana, there are ways to describe our state of mind at this point as follows:

- 1. The State of Being Unperturbed by Life's Vicissitudes.** It means that our mind can no longer be perturbed by 'The Eight Worldly Conditions' of gain and loss, position and the loss of position, praise and blame, happiness and unhappiness.
- 2. The State of Being Distant from Sorrow.** It means that we can no longer be trapped by causes of sorrow such as romantic love; therefore, our mind is content, clear, and bright. It is not parched or gloomy.
- 3. The State of Being Distant from Subtle Defilements.** It means that no defilements, coarse or subtle, can have a hold on us ever again.
- 4. The State of Blissfulness.** It means that we are blissful because we have been emancipated from the peril of the round of rebirth. The mind is completely clean, pure, clear, and bright. It is the state of mind which possesses many supernormal abilities.

11.2 Blessing No. 35: Being Unperturbed by Life's Vicissitudes



11.2.1 What Is Meant by Being Unperturbed by Life's Vicissitudes?

A mind that can be perturbed is a mind that is fearful and anxious. The mind is fearful and anxious because it may meet with something undesirable or it may not get what it wants. The Eight Worldly Conditions are what every human being including the Lord Buddha must experience. They can be divided into 2 categories:

- a. Favorable Conditions.
- b. Unfavorable Conditions.

a. Favorable Conditions which include:

1. Gain: It means all kinds of gain such as money, properties, a child, a spouse, precious gems, etc.
2. Position: It means having position, status, and power.
3. Praise: It means receiving accolade, recognition, etc.
4. Happiness: It means feeling comfortable in body and mind, feeling joyous, etc.

These four favorable conditions are what people in general crave for and work toward. Once they have obtained these favorable conditions they are naturally possessive of them and will never want to be parted from them.

b. Unfavorable Conditions which include:

1. Loss: It means losing whatever one has gained such as losing material wealth, losing a child through death, etc.
2. Loss of position: It means being deprived of position and power such as being demoted or fired from a job.
3. Blame: It means being castigated.
4. Unhappiness: It means feeling uncomfortable in body and mind.

Everyone fears these four unfavorable conditions and do not wish these things to happen to them. And once they do happen, people cannot wait for them to end. But when they do end, people are fearful that they may return again.

11.2.2 What Is It Like to Be Unperturbed by Life's Vicissitudes?

Having penetrated the Path of Nibbana, we possess the kind of equanimity which can never be perturbed by 'The Eight Worldly Conditions' as described above. We know only too well how everything in life is subject to change and is impermanent.

11.2.3 The Three Characteristics

Everything animate or inanimate is marked by the Three Characteristics of:

1. Aniccan: It means impermanence. Everything changes with time. Our body undergoes aging. Buildings and houses in time become dilapidated.
2. Dukkhan: It means the inability to remain the same. We die. Our house falls down.
3. Anatta: It means the absence of true selfhood. We cannot force our body not to age. Neither can we force it not to die. Our body is made up of different elements which exist for a time as our body. Eventually our body must die and return back to the elements from which it came.

People in general do not penetrate 'The Three Characteristics' which are inherent in everyone and everything; it is no wonder that their lives should be plagued with unhappiness.

Individuals who have penetrated the Path of Nibbana can 'see' the Dhammakaya and Nibbana. They possess the knowledge that the Dhammakaya is Niccan, Sukkhan, and Atta in that the Dhammakaya is permanent, remains the same, and possesses true selfhood. Such individuals can retain their equanimity in the face of favorable and unfavorable situations alike.

A Cautionary Note:

The sages of old warned us not to laugh out loud when we are happy and not to wail loudly when we are sad. They told us to persevere when we are faced with unfavorable conditions in our life while at the same time continue to accumulate good deeds. They told us to remember that when the night is at its darkest, it is the sign that dawn will soon approach.

11.3 Blessing No. 36: Being Distant from Sorrow



11.3.1 What Is Meant by Sorrow?

Sorrow is a result of a parched heart. The root cause of sorrow is love. Love for a person, an animal, or a thing brings on sorrow and the worst kind of sorrow has its root in romantic love.

Normally an uncontrolled mind is like a monkey in that it is never still. It wanders aimlessly from thought to thought. However, as soon as a person is love-struck, his mind becomes fixated on the object of love. And it is when a person is disappointed in love that he knows sorrow. Even when a person's love can be fulfilled, the person still knows sorrow since nothing and no one remains the same. So anyone that is thinking about becoming romantically involved, he/she can be prepared for sorrow. The Lord Buddha warns us that whatever amount we put into love, we can be prepared to experience that same amount of sorrow. It means that if we love someone 100%, we can be prepared to experience sorrow 100%. If we love someone 50%, we can be prepared to experience sorrow 50%. If we love someone 1%, we can be prepared to experience sorrow 1%.

There is an old saying:

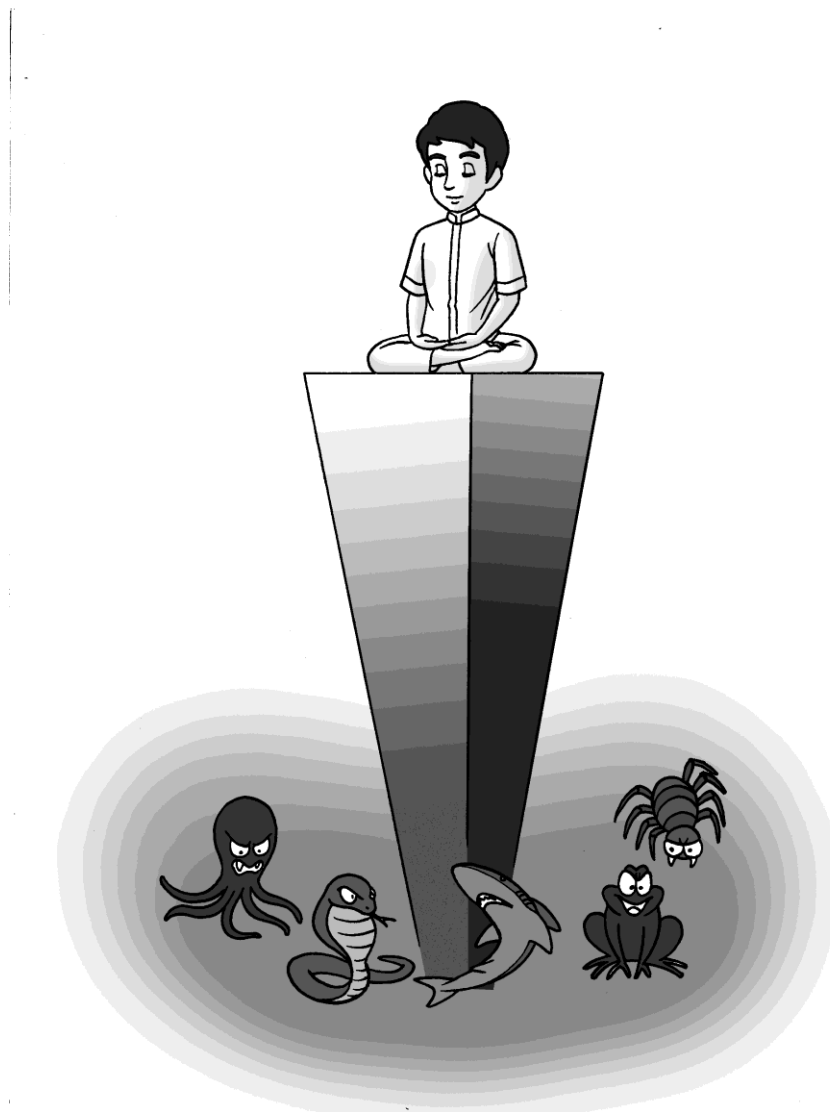
Love brings tears; therefore, no love equals no tears.

Love brings suffering; therefore, no love equals no suffering.

11.3.2 How to Keep Sorrow Away

Individuals that have penetrated the Path of Nibbana can never be perturbed by love. However, for us ordinary individuals we can keep sorrow away by practicing meditation diligently and being constantly cognizant of our own death. Our meditation practice can help us to see things for what they really are. For example, we are aware that we must die one day and while we are still living, it is best that we spend the time we have left on earth accumulating good deeds, and practicing meditation until we can penetrate the Path of Nibbana.

11.4 Blessing No. 37: Being Distant from Subtle Defilements



11.4.1 What Is Meant by Being Distant from Subtle Defilements?

When we are distant from subtle defilements, it means that defilements both coarse and subtle have been eradicated from our mind. The mind becomes clean, pure, clear, and bright.

11.4.2 Types of Defilements

There are three main families of defilements: Raga or Lobha (greed), Dosa (anger), and Moha (delusion). Each of the families of defilements consists of many levels from the very coarse to the very fine:

- 1. The Raga or Lobha Family:** It includes sensual pleasure such as love, want, etc. There are different levels of Raga starting from the very coarse to the very fine as follows:
 - 1.1 Abhijjhavisaṃmalobha: A strong expression of greed as seen in robbery, theft.
 - 1.2 Abhijjha: Having a strong desire for another person's belongings.
 - 1.3 Lobha: Wanting something by dishonest means but the act is not carried out just yet.
 - 1.4 Papiccha: Wanting something by unethical means and without any regards for one's reputation.
 - 1.5 Mahiccha: Selfishness.
 - 1.6 Kamaraga: Sensual passion.
 - 1.7 Ruparaga: Craving for form in the case of individuals who have attained the Form Jhanas.
 - 1.8 Aruparaga: Craving for non-form in the case of individuals who have attained the Non-Form Jhanas.Kamaraga, Ruparaga, and Aruparaga are considered subtle defilements.
- 2. The Dosa Family:** It includes annoyance, malice, thoughts of revenge. There are different levels of Dosa starting from the very coarse to the very fine as follows:
 - 2.1 Bayapada: It is the need to avenge oneself and sometimes it can be carried over across many lifetimes as in the case of Phra Devadat's deep desire to take vengeance on our Lord Buddha.
 - 2.2 Dosa: It is the need to harm and destroy someone or something such as thinking about killing someone, thinking about burning someone's house down, etc.
 - 2.3 Kodha: It is rage without the accompaniment of a destructive act.
 - 2.4 Patigha: It is deep displeasure.Patigha is subtle defilement in the Dosa Family.
- 3. The Moha Family:** Moha or delusion darkens the mind in such a way that it is incapable of differentiating between right and wrong, good and bad. There are different levels of Moha starting from the very coarse to the very fine as follows:
 - 3.1 Wrong View: When one has wrong view, it means that one cannot see how one owes one's parents a debt of gratitude. One does not believe that merit and demerit exist. One does not believe in the hereafter. Etc.
 - 3.2 Moha: Not knowing what is good or bad, right or wrong.
 - 3.3 Sakaya-ditthi: Believing in the personal self
 - 3.4 Vicikiccha: Having doubt about Dhamma matters. One doubts the existence of merit and demerit. One doubts if meditation practice can lead one out of defilements.
 - 3.5 Silabbataparamasa: Believing in the efficacy of rites and ceremonies.

3.6 Mana: Arrogance

3.7 Uddhacca: Restlessness. This applies to the restlessness of the mind when it is close to but not yet at the center of the body.

3.8 Avijja: Ignorance of the Truth. One does not know where one comes from, where one is going after one dies, why one is born, etc.

Sakkayaditthi, Vicikiccha, Silabbataparamasa, Mana,

Uddhacca, and Avijja are considered subtle defilements in the Moha Family.

In summary, there are altogether 10 subtle defilements as follows:

1. Sakkayaditthi
2. Vicikiccha
3. Silabbataparamasa
4. Kamaraga
5. Patigha
6. Ruparaga
7. Aruparaga
8. Mana
9. Uddhacca
10. Avijja

These are also called Samyojana 10 or the Ten Fetters. A Sotapanna individual can remove Sakkayaditthi, Vicikiccha, and Silabbataparamasa. A Sakadagami individual can remove these first three fetters as well as weakening the rest of the fetters. An Anagami individual can remove two additional fetters which are Kamaraga and Patigha. An Arahant whose mind is directed at Nibbana at all times can remove all ten fetters. Therefore, an Arahant's mind is pure, clear, and bright at all times.

11.4.3 The Different Levels of Harm Wrought by the Three Families of Defilements

Raga causes the least harm but it is difficult to dispel as in the case of romantic love.

Dosa causes a lot of harm but it disappears quickly.

Moha causes the most harm and it is very difficult to dispel. Moha in the form of ignorance of the Dhamma causes the most harm. Individuals ignorant of the Dhamma are capable of every unwholesome deed; therefore, they end up spending the hereafter in the Hell Realm. It can be said that our endless rebirth in the round of rebirth is caused by Moha.

Note:

It is very important that we understand how these three families of defilements can proliferate if we are not vigilant. We can always change for the worse if we are not careful. Therefore, it is crucially important that we constantly guard our self against these defilements by accumulating wholesome deeds and practicing meditation regularly. We must endeavor to continue with our meditation practice so that we can eventually attain the Dhammakaya, penetrate the Path of Nibbana, eradicate all defilements from our mind, and attain Arahantship.

11.5 Blessing No. 38: Being Blissful



11.5.1 Human Problems

Human beings are born with two sets of problems.

1. Internal problems: These include birth, aging, sickness, and death.
2. External problems: These include harm wrought by another person, an animal, or a natural disaster.

11.5.2 Why Must We Have These Problems?

We must have these problems because all of us are bound to the round of rebirth by the following four bonds (or Yogas):

1. Kamayoga: The bond of sensual pleasures such as delicious food, lovely music, beautiful clothes, a good-looking spouse, etc.
2. Bhavayoga: The bond of pleasure as derived from the Form and Non-Form Jhanas. Individuals who have attained the Form or Non-Form Jhanas are immersed in the ecstasy of their Jhanas. They will spend their hereafter in the Form Brahma Realm or the Non-Form Brahma Realm. After their time in these realms is up, they have to undergo the round of rebirth yet again.
3. Ditthiyoga: The bond of Wrong View.
4. Avijjayoga: The bond of ignorance of the Dhamma.

11.5.3 What Does It Mean to Be Blissful?

A blissful mind is a mind which has been emancipated from all defilements. The four bonds have been severed. It is the mind of an individual who has escaped the round of rebirth. It is the mind of an Arahant. The mind of an Arahant possesses many supernormal abilities which include the Six Abhinna, the Three Vijja, the Eight Vijja, and the four Patisambhiddhanas.

11.5.4 The Six Abhinna Include:

1. **Iddhividhi (Psychic Powers):** The ability to fly, the ability to change one's physical form, the ability to enlarge or reduce one's size, the ability to become invisible, etc.
2. **Dibbasota (Divine Ear):** Clairaudience
3. **Cetopariyana:** Knowing the thoughts of other people
4. **Pubbenivasanusatinana:** The ability to recall one's previous existences
5. **Cutupapattanana (Divine Eye):** Knowing other people's previous existences
6. **Asavakkhayanana:** The ability to remove all defilements

Not every Arahant possesses all six Abhinna. However, every Arahant must possess the Three Vijja.

11.5.5 The Three Vijja Include:

1. **Pubbenivasanusatinana:** The ability to recall one's previous existences
2. **Cutupapattanana (Divine Eye):** Knowing other people's previous existences
3. **Asavakkhayanana:** The ability to remove all defilements

Some Arahants possess the Six Abhinna. Some Arahants possess the Eight Vijja. And some Arahants possess the Four Patisambhiddhanas.

11.5.6 The Eight Vijjas Include:

1. **Vipassananana:** Having the insight to penetrate the Three Characteristics of all compounded things.
2. **Manomayiddhi:** Mental powers
3. **Iddhividhi (Psychic Powers):** The ability to fly, the ability to change one's physical form, the ability to enlarge or reduce one's size, the ability to become invisible, etc.
4. **Dibayasota (Divine Ear):** Clairaudience
5. **Cetopariyanana:** Knowing the thoughts of other people
6. **Pubbenivasanusatinana:** The ability to recall one's previous existences
7. **Cutupapatanana (Divine Eye):** Knowing other people's previous existences
8. **Asavakkhayana:** The ability to remove all defilements

11.5.7 The Four Patisambhidananas

1. **Atthapatisambhida:** Having the insight to penetrate the Dhamma such that one is able to elaborate each Dhamma topic so as to make it easier for people to understand.
2. **Dhammapatisambhida:** Having the insight to penetrate the Dhamma such that one is able to summarize each Dhamma topic in a way that every main point is included.
3. **Niruttipatisambhida:** Having the insight to penetrate the languages of humans and animals.
4. **Patibhanapatisambhida:** Having the insight to penetrate solutions to problems, having a ready wit to solve an urgent problem.

CHAPTER 12

THE MAIN POINTS OF THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS IN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

TOPICS COVERED IN CHAPTER 12

THE MAIN POINTS OF THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS IN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

12.1 The Main Points of the Recipe for Success in Personal Development

12.2 The Main Points of Each Group of Life's 38 Blessings

12.3 Practicing Life's 38 Blessings in Our Daily Life

CONCEPTS

If we want to meet with success in life in both the secular world and the Dhamma world, we need to practice according to the Lord Buddha's Teachings. We must be ready to undertake personal development in order to be as good a person as we can be so that we can benefit not just our self but also our family, our community, our country, and our world. We should take every opportunity to accumulate wholesome deeds knowing that they are the source of merit. Moreover, we must practice meditation regularly and earnestly so that we can continue to weaken our defilements. Our highest aim in life should be the eradication of all defilements and the attainment of the Fruit and Path of Nibbana.

OBJECTIVES

1. To enable the student to correctly describe the overall picture of Life's 38 Blessings and how practicing these blessings is the very means to our personal development.
2. To enable the student to practice these blessings in his/her daily life.

THE MAIN POINTS OF THE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS IN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

12.1 The Main Points of the Recipe for Success in Personal Development

This chapter summarizes all the materials covered in this course book.

Success in personal development as detailed in Life's 38 Blessings can be brought about by practicing these blessings accordingly. Success in our personal development benefits us in every area of life in such a way that we will meet with happiness and prosperity not only in this lifetime but in our future existences as well.

The Lord Buddha has so wisely arranged Life's 38 Blessings in the order of increasing difficulty as well as in a stepwise fashion. For this course, these blessings have been further divided into 10 groups where the first five groups consist of 18 blessings, and the latter five groups consist of 20 blessings. The first five groups focus on the practices which allow us to meet with success in the secular world. The latter five groups focus on the practices which allow us to cultivate higher virtues. Success in the first part facilitates success in the latter part.

The first five groups of Life's 38 Blessings have to do with getting started, getting ready for further training, becoming a useful person, making our self useful to our family, and making our self useful to society. The latter five groups of Life's 38 Blessings have to do with being mentally prepared, cultivating basic virtues, cultivating higher virtues, the practices which lead to the eradication of all defilements, and the fruit of defilements eradication.

12.2 The Main Points of Each Group of Life's 38 Blessings

- 1. The first group of Life's 38 Blessings has to do with getting started. This involves not associating with fools, associating with wise people, and revering those who are worthy of our reverence.**

Practicing these blessings is like laying the foundation for a blessed life. Personal development is made possible when we can differentiate between what is good and what is bad, what is merit and what is demerit, what is right and what is wrong, the should as well as the should-not. In this way we can exercise good judgment by choosing to think, say, and do only what is wholesome.

Our good judgment can be garnered from two main sources:

1. From the people we associate with
2. From cultivating our own analytical thinking

A person of good judgment must not associate with fools, must associate only with the wise, and know to revere those who are worthy of our reverence. In addition, a person of good

judgment must have a good knowledge of Right View, the Law of Kamma, the Tenfold Wholesome Course of Action, and the Tenfold Unwholesome Course of Action.

- 2. The second group of Life's 38 Blessings has to do with getting ready for further training. This involves living in a suitable environment, possessing past merit, and having the correct life objective.**

Living in a suitable environment enables us to grow and develop further. The merit which we had accumulated in our previous existences endows us with physical endowments, favorable attributes, and material wealth. Knowing the correct life objective enables us to set right goals and strive to achieve them.

- 3. The third group of Life's 38 Blessings has to do with becoming a useful person. This involves being scholarly, being creative, being disciplined, and practicing cultured speech.** If we want to be self-sufficient, if we want to make our self useful, it is necessary that we develop our own talents and abilities to the point where we can use them to benefit not only our self but also our community.
- 4. The fourth group of Life's 38 Blessings has to do with making our self useful to our family. This involves supporting our parents, our children, our spouse, and not being a procrastinator.** It is everyone's responsibility to support one's family in every meaningful way. Our family includes our parents, our spouse, and our children. It is everyone's responsibility to create a good home environment for the family such that each family member can grow and develop as best as he can in both the secular world and the Dhamma world.
- 5. The fifth group of Life's 38 Blessings has to do with making our self useful to society. This involves practicing generosity, cultivating human decency, supporting our relatives, and being engaged in harmless work.** It is not enough that we provide for our family and create for them a good home environment. We must also look to benefit the world at large so that we can live in a nurturing and peaceful world. When we practice this group of Life's Blessings we are essentially helping to create a nurturing environment for everyone in society.

If we have truly practiced the above mentioned five groups of Life's 38 Blessings, we can be said to be a successful and admirable person in the secular world. Since our ultimate goal in life is to end our round of rebirth and attain Nibbana, it is important for us to practice the latter five groups of Life's Blessings as well.

- 6. The sixth group of Life's 38 Blessings has to do with being mentally prepared. This involves abstaining from unwholesomeness, abstaining from alcohol, and cultivating heedfulness.** In order to develop our self further, we need to do everything we can to remove every obstacle that stands in the way of our progress. Toward this end, we need to abstain from the Tenfold Unwholesome Course of Action, keep our awareness intact, and exercising care in not letting anything cause our progress to slow down.

7. **The seventh group of Life's 38 Blessings has to do with cultivating basic virtues. This involves being respectful, being humble, being content, being grateful, and listening to Dhamma lectures.** As we develop our self further, we need to learn the Dhamma from virtuous individuals. But before anyone is willing to teach the Dhamma to us and before we can be equipped to learn the Dhamma, it is necessary that we first cultivate certain basic virtues as detailed in this group of blessings.
8. **The eighth group of Life's 38 Blessings has to do with cultivating higher virtues. This involves cultivating patience, being willing to learn from others, valuing righteous monks, and conversing about the Dhamma.** We need patience in order to develop our self further and further. We also need role models from whom we can learn. Finally we need to hold Dhamma conversations with virtuous and knowledgeable individuals in order to gain the necessary wisdom.
9. **The ninth group of Life's 38 Blessings has to do with the practices which lead to the eradication of all defilements. This involves practicing religious austerity, practicing chastity, penetrating the Four Noble Truths, and penetrating Nibbana.** This group of blessings enables us to weaken our defilements in such a way that we are no longer attached to sensual pleasures and ready to work toward the realms of the Ariya or holiness. We must also practice the Noble Eightfold Path by practicing meditation until we can attain the Dhammakaya. By employing the Dhammakaya-Eye, we can then 'see' the Four Noble Truths. Through the contemplation of the Four Noble Truths, we will eventually be emancipated from our defilements, end our round of rebirth, and attain Nibbana.
10. **The tenth group of Life's 38 Blessings has to do with the fruit of defilements eradication. This involves being unperturbed by life's vicissitudes, being distant from sorrow, being distant from subtle defilements, and being blissful.** Once we are emancipated from defilements and our round of rebirth comes to an end, our mind will be perfectly clean, clear, and bright. Such is the mind of the Lord Buddha and the Arahats.

12.3 Practicing Life's 38 Blessings in Our Daily Life

This requires that we study the principles of each blessing so thoroughly that we understand them well enough to apply them in our daily life. Whenever we run into any problem, we must check to see if we have done anything to violate one or more of the blessings so that we can make the effort to correct our self. By diligently practicing Life's 38 Blessings in our life, we will be forming an excellent habit which will follow us throughout our future existences. By practicing these blessings over and over again repeatedly lifetime after lifetime, eventually some time in the distant future our mind will have become pure enough as to be emancipated from our defilements and Nibbana can be attained.