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## The Important Role of Reverence in Myanmar Society

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### Abstract

At the present time, all people long for world peace, but they have not been able to achieve this. If peace is desired, it must be sought for in the right way followed by right action, which is the task of morality. In Myanmar, the way to attain peace is adopted the line of action laid down in *Maha Mangala Sutta* (thirty eight blessings) which bring about peace and happiness. Among these rules, "To have reverence" is the one of the important disciplines for social relationship. The aim of this paper is to show the concept of reverence as a moral significant principle in Myanmar society. The research problem is why does the concept of reverence is essential for social relationship? The main questions of this research are 1. Why does the sense of moral responsibility decreased in present age? 2. What is the right way to attain peace and happiness in daily life? And 3. How to apply the right way in daily life? The hypothesis is that by practicing the right way, human being can achieve the peace and happiness.

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### Introduction

Buddhist ethics have permeated the very fabric of Myanmar society; they have influenced our social relationships, our political, social and family institutions, our art and culture. Buddhist ethics is primarily based on Buddha's *Dhamma*. *Dhamma* is the second figure for the reason that it contains the truth or solution for the problems of mankind and ways for attainment of *Nibbana*, In other words, *Dhamma* is universal, it has some aspects that are very simple and can be understood, appreciated and followed by ordinary people of mundane outlook. Of its three basic divisions, they are *Sila*, *Samædhi* and *Panna* which march together to the ultimate fulfillment, the goal of *Nibbana*, it is *Sila* that is primary concern of the average man. And rightly so, because *Sila* is the starting point of Buddhism, from which all the higher attainments are reached.

The moral principles laid down by the supreme Buddha in the *Mangala Sutta* are so beautiful in their simplicity. So stamped with the hallmark of eternal truth that all men of intelligence and good will, no matter what their own creed may be, should acknowledge and pay reverence to them.

The *Mangala Sutta* is one of the best known of Buddha's teachings, being endowed with attributes that cause it to be universally used in Buddhist countries as a *Paritta sutta*, i.e, a sermon recited for protection and blessing. The *Mangala Sutta*, otherwise is known as the Thirty Eight Noble Blessings. Among these blessings, the twenty second noble blessing of "to have reverence" is essential for any kind of human race. It has performed a valuable of all ages but is particularly important for young. Since it gave them a complete training in moral principle that will serve as an infallible guide throughout their later years. Everyone needs to know the concept of reverence. That is why; the aim of this paper is to show the role of reverence in society.

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## Part One

### *Mangala* as Buddhist Culture

The word '*Mangala*' is the most frequently used word among Myanmar. In Myanmar society the term "Mangalbar" has become a form of greeting among the people. It is now the established form of greeting between a teacher and pupils at school. The message of the greeting is quite clear. As the term '*Mangala*' means something good or auspicious or lucky or a good sign, the message means "Many your day be good" or "May you have good luck" or something to that effect. It is, indeed a message of good will. So, it may be said that the term '*Mangalaf*' is seeing, or hearing something pleasant or some pleasant physical sensation.

### Genesis of *Mangala Sutta*

In Buddhism, there are many famous *suttas* are preached by Buddha. Among them, *Mangala Sutta* is one of famous *suttas*. For twelve years, devas and men, wishing to have happiness and well-being, pondered over the question of what constituted a '*Mangal*' or auspicious. In those days, people were mostly guided by certain signs and omens which they considered to be auspicious. There were differences of opinion and they would not get a consensus among themselves in deciding what exactly was a *Mangala*. The devas went to *Sakka*, King of the devas, with the problem of '*Mangala*'. *Sakka* knew that the Buddha was the only person who give them the right answer; so he did not give them an answer. He chided them for coming to him instead of going to the Buddha. "Why did you not go to the flame instead of coming to a firefly to make a fire?" he asked the devas. Subsequently the Buddha was approached and requested to resolve the problem. *Sakka* sent a deva, on his behalf, to the Buddha at the Jetavana monastery. It was there that the Buddha delivered the *Mangala Sutta* to the deva during the night. It was repeated to the Venerable *Anada* at the First Buddhist Council, three months after the passing away (*PariNibbana*) of the Buddha.

The deva requested the Buddha, in one stanza of verse, to expound to him what constituted the stanzas. These twelve stanzas form the body of the *sutta*. In delivering the *Mangala Sutta*, the Buddha ignored the superstitions and various conflicting interpretation of '*Mangala*'. He showed them the *Mangala* from a practical and more useful angle. This was followed by Austerity Practices, and finally, by the Practice of Purity, culminating in the realization of *Nibbana*. Thus, within this narrow compass of eleven short stanzas, the Buddha had condensed all moral virtues into thirty-eight rules or modes of conduct. If these *Mangala* rules are obeyed or adhered to, one can become a good son, a good parent, a god citizen, a good administrator or even an ideal head of state. These *Mangala* rules are therefore very important in the making of a nation of good citizens, and in the building of an Ideal State, or a *Mangala* Country.

### The Thirty-Eight Modes of Auspicious Conduct

*Theravāda* Myanmar Buddhist ethics is mainly based on the ethical teaching of Buddha. According to Myanmar Buddhist ethics the five precepts and eight precepts are the stand and by which we can judge whether a man is morally good or not in addition to these precept a morally good person has to follow the Thirty Eight Blessings. The *Mangala Sutta*, otherwise is known as the Thirty Eight Blessings. It has performed a valuable of all ages but is particularly important for the young. Since it gives them a complete training in moral principle that will serve as an infallible guide throughout their later years. In *Mangala Sutta*, there are thirty-eight factors of Auspiciousness.

These Thirty Eight Noble Blessings which teaches the higher duties of human beings and is the oldest rule of Lord Buddha, is most appropriate to be practiced by those who truly desire peace. Among the Thirty Eight Blessings, the twenty second Noble Blessing of 'Reverence' is discussed in this paper.

## **Part Two**

### **The Twenty second Blessing of 'Reverence'**

Reverence is the twenty second Blessing. Reverence is called *Garava* in Pali term. There are many form of reverence that should be shown to a person who is worthy of it. Another name of Reverence is culture. It is of great value to a man in his social life. It is included in courtesy or good manners. It is a way to success for a man in the world. It wins the love, favor and good will of other. So everyone should show respect and veneration to others deserving of reverence by age, character, wisdom, virtue etc or associations either by words or by bodily signs in dealing with them. In other words everyone should show reverence by words or gesture to those who are greater than themselves in age or position etc, at all time. And one should show a feeling of love, regard and good will to every form of life, be it either big or tiny, for to all life is dear.

#### **Reverence as Culture**

Showing respects to those who are worthy of honor is the feeling of respect and physical and verbal expression of respect. The feeling of respect is the thing which distinguishes between the classes of human beings and animals. If people are behaving without any respect, they are not different from animals. Therefore respect is a culture that ushers human beings to the status of civilized beings.

The source of reverence is respect. Without respect there can be no reverence. Therefore these two qualities cannot be separated. Respect is a mental aspect and reverence is the expression of respect by deed and word. Physical and verbal expression of respect is there reflection of the feeling of respect in paying respect to those who are worthy of respect.

In daily life, possession of worthy treasure is not permanent. These treasures may come to a person and they may go from him at anytime. When they come to him he receives then with a smile and cheerful heart, but when they go away from him, he is grievously bereaved and sad. Thus acquisition of worthy treasures cannot give him happiness for all time. However the possession of spiritual (religious) treasures is permanent. For one can destroy the heart of a man. The more they acquire these treasures the more happy and peaceful. Among the spiritual treasures the triple gems are the most precious and most worthy of our respect and reverence.

Besides, those who respect their parents, guardians, teachers, elderly person etc obtain from them Sincere Love. If they are neglectful of those may live long but unaccompanied by glory and grace. They may be full of glory and grace but unaccompanied by a long life. Those who wish to gain the reverence of other should revere those to whom reverence is due. So they should practice the noble virtue of reverence in all things early in life. So, the Blessed one taught this twenty second Noble Blessing "to revere and honor those who deserve it".

The following verse is taken from the *Dhammapada* to illustrate this (109) "For one

who is ever inclined to honor and respect the elders, (those who are advanced in age and virtue) these four blessings, namely, length of age, beauty, happiness and strength are increased".<sup>1</sup>

### The Venerable Persons

Respect is paid to the five venerable one's, and persons who are senior in age, knowledge and attribute. In other words, the venerable person are those who are able to give merit-gaining, teaching, knowledge and trade, wisdom wealth, and position and deliver from the present difficulty and danger.

Buddha taught us to pay respect and learn from those who are older and wiser. It is a noble human quality to bestow honor on those who are worthy of honor. We must honor those persons who are senior in age to us and also person who are our spiritual serious.

Regarding respect, Chanmyay sayadaw teaches us to pay respects to the Triple. Gems, teachers, parents, spiritual older, older over, those who are of greater attribute and saintly persons for paying respects to these persons is a blessing.

*Ashim Janakabhivamsa* also explained the doctrine of respect and venerable ones as follows:

Respect is reverence and paying attention. The venerable ones are the Triple Gems, monks observing the rules of saintly conduct, teachers, parents, the seniors in age rank and attribute. The attribute here means the attribute of superabundance world namely the attributes of morals, practice of moral, fairness of mind, and wisdom senior in age means those who are older than are day, one hour and ever one minute. But among ordained monks, it is not the actual age, It is seniority in the years of monkhood.

Saying Shwe Hintha sayadaw stated ten kinds of respect in his Manual of *Mangala Sutta*. They are

1. respect paid to Buddha
2. respect paid to *Dhamma*
3. respect paid to *Sargha*
4. respect paid to *Sikkhæ*
5. respect paid to Sammædhi
6. respect paid to Appamæda
7. respect paid to the *Patisandhaya*
8. respect paid to the *Hiri*
9. respect paid to the *Uttapa*
10. Mutual respect among people.

Here, *Sikkhæ* means moral uprightness. Samædhi means fairness of mind. Appamæda means mindfulness of virtue. *Patisandhaya* means friendly social dealing. *Hiri* means shames of doing wrong things. *Uttapa* means fear of doing wrong thing.

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<sup>1</sup> Ven, U PannaDipa- Dhammapada

## The Vital Role of 'Reverence' in Social Relationship

Myanmar culture is imbued with beatitude of reverence. In Myanmar society, social dealing among persons is in accordance with the beatitude of reverence. One will be respected by others only if one is respectful to others. If one is reluctant to pay respect to other, other will also be reluctant to pay respect to you.

Concerning the concept of reverence Buddha explained in his *sutta*, i.e., *Mangala Sutta*. In this *Sutta*, there are thirty eight noble blessing. *Gar ova Mangala* is one of the famous *Mangala*. *Garava Mangala*, i.e., paying respect to those who are worthy of respect to those who are worthy of respect or reverence. With peace and prosperity prevailing in the country, people tend to forget their duties and obligations towards others. They become self-satisfied and proud and forget to respect one another. This *Garava Mangala* is particularly important for leaders, for the rich and for people in responsible positions. It is the respect of such people that is of great importance and is highly valued. Hence, to be respectful means to be respectful not only to one's elders superiors but also to respect these who are younger and those who are one's subordinate. Older people also most respect to younger ones. The admonition "Pay respects to the elders, regard highly of the ones of equal same age and feel kindly to the younger" is an old saying yet it is still a wise advice that should be observed. This saying is great value urging people to keep the love among friends and to perpetuate the friendship among friends. Therefore this ancient saying is a shining torchlight showing the way of peaceful co-existence in human society.

A person, who is superior in keeping morals, fairness of mind and wisdom, is given respect even though he may be younger in age. One must be able to give respect to those person who are superior in attribute. It is the duty of everybody who respect social moral rules to pay respect to those who are due respect. Just as respect is given to those who are superior in attribute, it must also be given to those who are senior in age. This is the social rule of conduct accepted by every race, every nation, every religion and every region. The respect for elders is the basis of unity, peace and happiness.

Tranquility and prosperity in social life depends on mutual respect among the people. The peaceful, pleasant Country that has been set up can be ruined if there is no sense of respect among both the old and the young. Moreover, we all understand that we will have to pay homage to the *bhikkhu*, and to pay respect to our elders. To preserve and keep our country secure, it is important that the people should have respect for one another. The younger must pay respect to the elders whether they possess worthy moral or not. That is why it is so important for people of means and those in power to observe *Garava* (reverence) *Mangala*.

## Conclusion

Children's respect for parents, pupils respect for teachers, the juniors' respect for the seniors in age and mutual respect among people are concerned with social customs. The foundation of Myanmar culture which Myanmar people take pride in is laid on the *Mangala Sutta* which Myanmar people have to learn and keep in mind. But it is regrettable to see young people laxing in moral concept and so they are more and more distant from the noble the *Mangala Sutta*. Once the people lose touch with the *Mangala Sutta*, the respect which is the mainstay of culture is gradually going to fade out.

When that time comes everybody has to make effort to same culture by adopting the moral attitude of "The Pheasant respect the crow and the crow respects the Pheasant" in accordance with the teaching of *Mangala Sutta* on respect. But nowadays, most of the young neglect the sense of reverence in practical life. Thus the sense of moral responsibility

decreased in present age.

Respect and reverence are given priority in every place, in every country by every race and religion. Thus people are practicing the teaching contained in the *Mangala Sutta* emphasizing on respect and mutual respect. The good quality should start at home. Children must be trained to honor their parents. Whenever children come home or when the parents are leaving home, the children should worship them. Similarly, the teacher should also teach students to give respect to those who are worthy in their daily task of physical and spiritual development of students. The breeding and proliferation of civilized, respect conscious young generations is the strengthening factor for unity, friendship and tranquility in the society. Paying respect is not for the respected one but for the one who shows respect. Nowadays filial love for parents is found to have declined. This is the cause for the collapse of the social world. Respect has great value. It is of primary importance in adopting the social attitude to prolong love and terminate hatred to keep the family relationship, and to keep the firm friendship among friends. So it may be said that paying respect is the right way to attain peace and happiness in daily life. Therefore reverence plays an essential role in social life.

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