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Business Ethical Principles in Buddhist Literature

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to express the ethical principles in Buddhist literature dealing with business. In the teaching of Buddha, many ways towards welfare can be found such as (1) the kind of business one should take (2) the way to do business (3) the ways to maintain the business (4) How to share the profits gained and etc. They are moral principles for business. Buddha wanted to know that success in business and ethics are interrelated and interdependent. This research focuses on the fact that Buddha's teachings have practical use for successful business.

Introduction

The Lord Buddha expounded his teachings to the human kind with the aim of guiding them in both mundane (Worldly-welfare) and supra mundane (*Lokuttara*) affairs so that they may enjoy prosperity therein. The teaching of the Buddha exists today in the form of three baskets (*Tipitaka*) and five collections (*Nikāya*). The teachings of Lord Buddha are indeed resources of ethical values as well as applied ethics. The Lord Buddha taught us a great many ways and methods for health, wealth, and economic security. It is necessary for us not only to find them but also to make the best use of them. Buddha showed us the Eight Fold Noble Path, namely (1) Right view (2) Right resolve (3) Right speech (4) Right conduct (5) Right livelihood (6) Right effort (7) Right mindfulness (8) Right concentration. Out of the Eight, Right speech, Right conduct and Right livelihood are ethical rules for a successful life. Especially right livelihood is concerned with business.

In the teaching of Buddha, One can find the kind of business one should take, right the ways to do business, good the ways to maintain the business, and how to share the profits gained. They are foundations of moral value in business. This paper focuses on the fact that Buddha's teachings have practical use for successful business.

Morality (*Sila*) as a Basic Rule of Business in Buddhist Literature

Any person always performs one deed or another by means of bodily action, speech or thought. Moral duties of conduct laid down are all concerned with verbal, physical and mental deeds. Buddha disclosed the classification of deeds in the following way. Human beings are always

doing one thing or another perpetually by the merit of three actions yielding in virtuous or evil deeds. These could be no more resulting deeds rather than good or bad deeds.

Man is continuously dealing with his environment in one or another way in performing deeds. If the deed is performed through a good physical means, it is a virtuous one, but if it is carried out in bad bodily actions, it is an evil deed. In the same way actions performed with good will either by speech or thought are holy deeds, but if they lack good will, they become evil deeds. They are vice deeds. Therefore everyone should keep in mind the importance of good or evil deeds.

Of the eight factors of the Eight Fold Noble Path, Right Speech, Right action, Right livelihood are one grouped under the heading of Morality (*Sila*). Morality (*Sila*) is not only for the first stage on this path to *Nibbāna* but also moral guideline to success in our daily life.

Right Speech is the prerequisite of the spiritual aspirant. Speech is the expression of the intention of the speaker and the person is bound to be effected pleasantly or unpleasantly by it. Right speech consists of four rules. They are as followed.

- (1) One must not tell lies.
- (2) One must not utter Slander (or) False Statement, which is intended to damage a person's reputation.
- (3) One must not say bad, unkind or cruel things about a person.
- (4) One must not utter frivolous speech.

Right action means unselfish action. It is the outcome of right knowledge, right resolve and right speech. Right action consists of three rules. They are as followed.

- (1) One must avoid killing any sentient being.
- (2) One must avoid stealing the un-given things.
- (3) One must avoid un-dulling in un-noble enjoyment and taking intoxicant.

Right livelihood means maintaining life by honest means. One must earn by good means. One must not trade (do buying and selling) any weapons, poison, intoxicants, slaves, human beings and other things by which bad things or bad events might occur. Right speech, Right action and right livelihood are concerned with “*Ājivatthamaka Sila*”.

The “*Ājivatthamaka Sila*” means a set of precepts in which right livelihood is included as the eight precept.

1. To refrain from killing.
2. To refrain from stealing.
3. To refrain from abusing other’s wife.
4. To refrain from telling lies.
5. To refrain from playing mischief.
6. To refrain from speaking ill of others.
7. To refrain from swearing at others.
8. To refrain from earning one’s living by evil means.

These *Sila* points out that person must live with a good action (or) right livelihood. Livelihood can be divided into two kinds. These are *Ājiva* and *Micchājiva*. Working at a Job or making effort to get food, clothing and shelter is called *Ājiva*. Making a livelihood by unfair means is *Micchājiva*. Any person must perform and obey the *Ājivatthamaka Sila* in his life. So, his livelihood must be called true livelihood (or) *Sammājiva*.

Four Endowments

The Lord Buddha, knowing the needs of mankind, expounded on the factors leading to prosperous life. The Buddha taught the Four Endowments (*Sampadā*), with the intention of benefitting and endowing the whole mankind with the much longed. For material wealth and temporal welfare, The Four Endowments are

- (1) *Uttāna Sampadā* : being diligent and alert in business undertaking
- (2) *Ārakkha Sampadā* : being able to have a good management of what one has earned
- (3) *Kalyāṇamitta Sampadā*: having a wide circle of good friends
- (4) *Samajivita Sampadā* : living within one's means, i. e, not spending more than one has earned by lawful means.

Sampadā means accomplishments, i.e, conditions for obtaining what one longs for.

Uttāna Sampadā

Diligence is the key-to accomplishing a task or work. Out of the three factors, *Kamma*, *Ñāna*, and *Viriya*, the action (*Kamma*) alone cannot produce wealth and gems. Diligence (*Viriya*) based on wisdom (*Ñāna*) is a requisite in successful accomplishment of one's ambition.

Uṭṭhana Sampadā here means being diligent and alert in one's business. One may be

- (i) in agriculture
- (ii) in trade
- (iii) livestock and fisheries
- (iv) in professional work based on skill
- (v) in a job such as in the government or in a private sector.

He must be diligent and alert in his work, and proficient. And he must be in pursuit of knowledge without being lazy if he is to be endowed with the *Uṭṭhana Sampadā*.

In doing so, one who wishes for well-being and wealth must have the necessary Five Conditions for Success (*Sampatti*), namely:

- (1) *Ñānasampatti* : having wisdom to differentiate right from wrong
- (2) *Gatisampatti* : having in a favourable place for business
- (3) *Upadhisampatti* : having necessary equipments and utilities
- (4) *Kālasampatti* : Knowing the opportune time
- (5) *Payogasampatti* : Striving with wisdom.

(1) *Ñānasampatti* : means having wisdom to know the do's and don'ts in one's business. That includes knowing everything about one's business inside, out and keeping away from pitfalls. Ignorant people go on like a blind elephant, destroying one's own prosperity. They don't even know if they are on the right track or not. Every one aspiring for well-being must try to have *Ñānasampatti*.

(2) *Gatisampatti* : means living and working in a favourable place for one's own business, in a hub of commerce. As a dress-cleaner should not live in a place people do not hire his service, so one must not live in a place where one's business is of where no service.

According to *Niti* philosophers, the favourable places of *Gatisampatti* include

- (a) a thriving commercial place
- (b) a place of learning
- (c) a place of medicine and medical men
- (d) a place of fair climate with fertile land

A person in pursuit of prosperity ought to be able to find a place of *Gatisampatti* for his work. A favourable, place will yield him success and fulfillment of material benefits. The Buddha taught in *Mingala Sutta*, "*Patirupdesavāsa Mingala*" preaching that living in a favourable place will bring forth prosperity and well-being and it is indeed a *Mingala*.

(3) *Upadhisampatti* : means good facilities and utilities for one's business. A mason, for example, must have his tools. So is true of any business. One must keep one's workplace in good shape, neat and tidy, be it an office or a shop or a store. Products and buildings always need to be nice and impeccable. In doing so, one's business may improve.

(4) *Kālasampatti*: means knowing opportune time to do a business. Businesses flourish on their respective opportune times. Selling cold drinks or lollipops in freezing winter will be a flat and even make one out of business. They are just for the summer. This shows how and why choosing, favourable time is important. If only the condition of *Kālasampatti* is realized, will business and prosperity come hand in hand. Old maxims and Sayings point out the importance of opportune time: "Ploughing the fields after the rainy season" "Drying the paddy after sun-set". These two remind us to grasp the opportunity. Another two, "Make hay while the sun shines" and "Make spins of cotton under the moon-light" also advise as to take advantage of the opportune time while we still can.

(5) *Payogasampatti*: means striving with wisdom, knowing the difference between what can and should be done and what are beyond struggle and fruitless. Doing what can be done will give out sweet profits just as a man who sows oranges reaps them. Things beyond our struggle should not be strived for. This will end in fruitless pains such as oiling a stone or swallowing a poison. A businessman will not gain much property and prosperity no matter how hard he tries unless he knows the essence of striving with wisdom (*Payogasampatti*)

The Venerable The-Lone Sayadaw admonishes, "Though *Kāmma* is mother (of all) in this world, the Buddha has preached that diligence guided by wisdom will lead to victory in every aspect of human life."

Doing and minding one's own business and not doing certain work outside one's resources is surely a condition for prosperity.

The Lord Buddha, in *Akapada Nipāta*, has pointed out that the single way to success is diligence with the wisdom of the clever men.

A person who strives for wealth must keep the four factors of effort in mind, viz.

- (1) effort till only one's flesh remains
- (2) effort till only one's blood vessels remain
- (3) effort till only one's bones remain
- (4) effort till one's flesh and blood dry up

And one must never give up his efforts.

Ārakkha Sampadā

Ārakkha Sampadā means protecting and keeping property that is earned by decent effort well under control. This is the second rule to abide by for those who aspire for success. Keeping one's right fully earned property from the five enemies, viz, Floods, fires, tyrants, thieves and robbers, and ungrateful sons and daughters (heirs), is *Ārakkha Sampadā*.

On *Ārakkha Sampadā*, there are four causes of long-lasting prosperity, viz.,

- (1) Finding lost property and things
- (2) Mending and overhauling old things to use again
- (3) living within one's means
- (4) Trusting property to a reliable steward or stewardess.

By these ways, one wishing for long-lasting prosperity must abide.

Kalyaṇamitta Sampadā

One wishing for prosperity must associate with virtuous good friends who are endowed with generosity, moral, and wisdom. He must take example from them in faith, generosity, moral and wisdom. Having such a wide circle of good friends is *Kalayaṇamitta Sampadā*.

Characteristics of a Good Friend

The characteristic of a good friends according to *Pathamamitta Sutta*, *Sattaka Nipāta* in *Aṅguttara Nikāya* should be made familiar with so that one may fulfill those characteristics and to be able to associate with good friends. They are

- (1) Giving what is hard to let go of
- (2) Doing something extraordinary for his friend's sake
- (3) Bearing and tolerating heavy offences
- (4) Confiding his secret
- (5) Keeping his friend's secret
- (6) Standing by his friend's side in face of danger
- (7) Not being contemptuous in misfortune and poverty

Characteristics of a True Friend

In Singalovada, four kinds of true friends can be found.

- (1) The *Upakara* friend who gives one help without the intention of expecting a reward
- (2) The *Samanasukha* friend who shares with one everything, through weal or woe
- (3) The *Atthakkhāyi* friend who advises one to do good and not to do evil
- (4) The *Anukampaka* friend who is always kind and compassionate to one as his own children

One who aspires for prosperity must be familiar with the characteristics of those true friends and associate with them.

Being associated with untrue friend, and false ones may result in decline of wealth. So, one should try to keep true friends.

Three Factors of Prolonged Friendship

In *Mahā bodhi Jātaka*, the lord Buddha taught three factors of prolonged friendship.

- (1) Avoiding too many visits and much familiarity
- (2) Avoiding scanty visits
- (3) Not asking for something dear and near to one's friend

A businessman, wishing for success, ought to avoid these three things in dealing with friends.

Samajivita Sampada

One must know one's own means in living; its pitfalls and traps. One must live in a moderate way of lifestyle, not squandering or not being

miserly. One must reflect, "This way will put me in the profit" and "This way will put me in the ruin". As a skilful shopkeeper can use his scales to know what is weightier than the other, so should a wise businessman know. One who lives more than he earns is like one who shakes down all the Fig fruits and leaves after eating just one in the same manner, one who has such a great wealth and lives miserly is said by others "this man will die a helpless death". He must know the increment and decrement of wealth and live within his means. This kind of livelihood is termed as "*Samajivita sampadā*".

The above four factor are ethical rules in business activities. In *Uttāhāna Sampadā*, it point out that diligence is the key to accomplishing a task or work, but this diligence must be associated with wisdom. *Ārakkha Sampadā* means protecting and keeping property that is earned by decent effort well under control. *Kalyanamitta Sampadā* point out that one wishing for prosperity must be associated with virtuous good friend who are endowed with generosity, moral wisdom. One must know the increase and decrease of wealth and live within means. This kind of livelihood is termed as *Samajivita Sampadā*.

These four endowments can be called the ethical theory in business.

Conclusion

Today is the age of the material development and people are rivaling to gain more and more material success. However, they cannot enjoy a wealthy life since they are ignorant of the ways to riches. The teaching of the Buddha show sure methods and means to success.

Capital alone cannot make successful business. Ethics and character play an important part. The teaching of the Buddha give sound advice on vocation; what type of vocation is wholesome, which mindset is beneficial, what the win-win situation is and so on. Buddha preaches the principle or rules that are ethical rules for business success. These ethical rules are concerned with duty ethics, social ethics, virtue ethics and consequentialist ethical theory.

In fact, they are vocational guideposts of moral to keep one on the right track to business success. One who lives by the principles laid down by the Buddha will certainly increase in wealth and property.

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မြန်မာဘာသာကျမ်းကိုးစာရင်း

- ၁။ ဇနကာဘိဝံသ၊ အရှင် (၂၀၀၆) **ကိုယ်ကျင့်အဘိဓမ္မာ၊** အမရပူရမြို့၊ နယူးဘားမား ပိဋကတ်ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။
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