

Section 11-2: Advice and Guidance to Lay Followers

Of the life of 45 years of the Buddha dedicated to teaching Dhamma we can see that he also was concerned of the progress of his lay followers—their happiness at home life and progress of their spiritual life. The Blessed One encouraged his white-clad lay followers (called as upasaka and upasika) to uphold the five precepts, to observe eight precepts on Full moon days and to lead a harmless life with kindness and compassion towards other beings. Following are selected extracts from scriptures to show how the Buddha guided his lay followers.



The Buddha giving advice to lay followers: picture courtesy:
<https://www.facebook.com/BuddhismPathToNirvana/photos>

▲ How to Live a Household Life with Peace and Happiness

◆ Advice to Young Sigālakaⁱ

On one occasion the Buddha met a young householder Sigālaka who was paying homage to the six directions. Then the Blessed One asked the purpose of his action, he said: ⁱⁱ

‘Lord, my father, when he was dying, told me to do so. And so, Lord, out of respect for my father’s words, which I revere, honour and hold sacred, I have got up thus early to pay homage in this way to the six directions’

After listening to young Sigālaka, the Buddha told him the way in which an ariyan disciple pay homage to the six directions is different from his practice. When Sigālaka asked of that practice the Buddha said thus:

*“...young householder, it is by **abandoning the four defilements of action, the four causes, by not following the six ways of wasting one’s substance** by **not doing evil** from- through avoiding these fourteen evil ways — that the Ariyan disciple covers the six directions, and by such practice becomes a conqueror of both worlds, so that all will go well with him **in this world and the next**, and at the breaking up of the body after death he will go to a good destiny, a heavenly world...”*

Note: Four defilements are: 1) Taking life, 2) taking what is not given, 3) sexual misconduct, 4) lying speech these defilements spring up due to greed, ill will, foolishness and fear, **six ways of wasting**

one's wealth: 1) addiction to strong drink and drugs, 2) haunting the streets at unfitting times 3) attending carnivals 4) being addicted to gambling 5) keeping bad company 6) habitual idleness



Picture courtesy: <https://declutterthemind.com/>

♦ To do good, abandon evil

"If one regards oneself as dear
One should not yoke oneself to evil,
For happiness is not easily gained
By one who does a wrongful deed...

Therefore, one should do what is good
As a collection for the future life.
Merits are the support for living beings
When they arise in the other world.
SN: 3:4 (Dear sutta)

♦ On one occasion brahmin householders of Veludvāra village approached the Blessed One and said:

*"Master Gotama, we have such wishes, desires, and hopes as these: 'may we dwell in a home crowded with children!...we enjoy Kāśian sandalwood! ...we wear garlands, scents... we receive gold and silver! with the breakup of the body, after death, may we be reborn in a good destination...'"*ⁱⁱⁱ

The Blessed One then advised them:

“When, householders, the noble disciple possesses ...seven good qualities andfour desirable states, if he wishes he could by himself declare of himself: ‘I am one finished with hell, finished with the animal realm, finished with the domain of ghosts, finished with the plane of misery, the bad destinations, the nether world. I am a stream-enterer, no longer bound to the nether world, fixed in destiny, with enlightenment as my destination.’^{iv}

Note: 7 Good qualities: purifying 3 ways of bodily and verbal conduct: by not doing them, urge others not to do them, praising of not doing bad deeds: 1) not killing 2) not stealing 3) no adultery 4) no false speech 5) no harsh speech 6) no divisive speech 7 no idle chatter. **Four desirable states:** 1-3 confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangaha 4) possessing unbroken virtue.

♦ On one occasion, young Koliyan Dīghajāṇu approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him and said:^v

“Bhante, we are laymen enjoying sensual pleasures, living at home in a house full of children. We use sandalwood from Kāsi; we wear garlands, scents, and unguents; we receive gold and silver. Let the Blessed One teach us the Dhamma in a way that will lead to our welfare and happiness in this present life and in future lives.”

The Buddha said:

“There are, Byagghapajja, these four things that lead to the welfare and happiness of a clansman in this present life. What four? 1) Accomplishment in initiative, 2) accomplishment in protection, 3) good friendship, and 4) balanced living... There are, Byagghapajja, these four other things that lead to a clansman’s welfare and happiness in future lives. What four? 5) Accomplishment in faith, 6) accomplishment in virtuous behaviour, 7) accomplishment in generosity, 8) and accomplishment in wisdom.”

*“Enterprising in his occupations,
heedful in his arrangements,
balanced in his way of living,
he safeguards the wealth he earns.*

*Endowed with faith, accomplished in virtue,
charitable and devoid of miserliness,
he constantly purifies the path
that leads to safety in future lives”*

Note: The four accomplishments in householder’s life (satara sangrha vastu) : 1) **Accomplishment in initiative:** skilful and diligent and have a sound judgment in order to carry out and arrange properly belonged to oneself 2) **accomplishment in protection:** he make arrangements to protect his wealth from kings, robbers unsuitable heirs taking it, and prevent destruction from fire and flood. 3) **Cultivating good friendship:** association with wise people leads him to develop his spiritual faculties 4) **Balance living:** he knows his income and accordingly set up his expenditure. He avoids womanizing, drunkenness, gambling and bad friends.

▲ Importance of Taking Care of Parents

The Buddha often insisted, that people should take care of their parents. In this regard the Buddha pointed out two important things: 1) Providing material comforts to ones' parents 2) Supporting them to establish in Dhamma—take refuge in the Triple Gem; guiding them into develop Right View, so they could attain the first level of spirituality— to be a stream winner.

The Blessed One did not just advise others about treating their parents with respect. The Buddha not only helped his own parents but also his stepmother, who had adopted him when he was young, to develop spiritually and to liberated from samsara suffering. We have discussed this in detail in section:2 of this compilation.

Following are some details from the scriptures, elaborating the advices and guidance of the Buddha towards the welfare of one's parents:

♦ Parents are the First Teachers of Children

*“ Mother and father are called ‘Brahmā’ (great!)
and also “first teachers.”
They are worthy of gifts from their children,
for they have compassion for their offspring.*

*Therefore, a wise person should revere them,
and show them due honor,
serve them with food and drink,
with clothes and bedding,
by massaging and bathing them,
and by washing their feet*

*Because of this service
to mother and father,
the wise praise one in this world
and after death one rejoices in heaven ”^{vi}*

♦ Two Persons that Cannot Easily be Repaid

The Buddha said that's to repay one's parents is hard. If they can establish them in spiritual life, then one is able to repay their parents. He said:

“...even if one were to establish one's parents as the supreme lords and rulers over this great earth abounding in the seven treasures, one still would not have done enough for one's parents, nor would one have repaid them. For what reason? Parents are of great help to their children; they bring them up, feed them, and show them the world... if, when one's parents lack faith, one establishes them in faith... in virtuous behaviour... in generosity; ... in wisdom: in such a way, one has done enough for one's parents, repaid them, and done more than enough for them... ”^{vii}

“The wise person, dwelling at home,
truly lives for the good of many.

Day and night diligent toward
his mother, father, and ancestors,
he venerates them in accordance with the Dhamma,
recollecting what they did for him in the past”^{viii}

▲ Important of Making Merits and Sharing them

Another important advice given to lay followers were to make merits and share them with their departed relatives who are waiting to get merits from their relatives. Some of the advices of the Buddha in this matter are highlighted below:

◆ Merits is a Designation for Happiness

The Buddha advised everyone (including his disciples) not to be afraid of making merits. In the following passage, he described how he had made merits which were beneficial to him for his many rebirths in samsara:^{ix}

“ do not be afraid of merit. This is a designation for happiness, ...I recall that for a long time I experienced the desirable, lovely, agreeable result of merit that had been made over a long time. For seven years I developed a mind of loving-kindness. As a consequence, for seven eons of world-dissolution and evolution I did not come back to this world...I fared on to the realm of streaming radiance. When the world was evolving there, I was Brahmā... Sakka... many hundreds of times I was a wheel-turning monarch...”

Therefore, one desiring the good,
aspiring for greatness,
should deeply revere the good Dhamma,
recollecting the Buddhas’ teaching.

◆ More Benefits of Making Merits

In the following sutta the Buddha pointed out **living in a suitable place** and **association with good friends** support a person to make merits which would bring him good fortune:

*“...When a person dwells in a suitable locality
and makes friends with the noble ones,
when he has formed right resolutions,
and done deeds of merit in the past,
grain, riches, fame, and reputation,
along with happiness accrue to him ”^x*

◆ Merits Supports Good Rebirths

In the following sutta the Blessed One described how to make merits by giving gifts, food etc. to others such as virtuous persons, visitors, one going on a journey, to a sick person. The merits made in this life bring happiness for the present life and also for lives in the other world^{xi}

*Therefore, with a non-regressing mind,
one should give a gift where it yields great fruit.*

*Merits are the support of living beings
when they arise in the other world...*

* When Suppavāsā, Koliyan daughter ^{xii}, gave food to the Buddha and the Sangha, the Buddha praised her and said that her generosity would bring good fortune:^{xiii}

*“...those recollecting such generosity
dwell in the world inspired by joy.
Having removed the stain of miserliness and its root, blameless,
they go to the heavenly abode”*

* In the following sutta the Buddha said that there are three bases of meritorious activity and they bring good rebirths.

What three? The basis of meritorious activity consisting in giving; the basis of meritorious activity consisting in virtuous behaviour; and the basis of meritorious activity consisting in meditative development. Even if one practice these three bases in **average way**, he will be reborn among humans in a favourable condition. If someone practice... in **superior way** he will be reborn in Deva realms.^{xiv}

♦ **Sharing Merits (*punna*) with Departed Relatives**

In Buddhist culture sharing merits of good deeds is a common feature. In the scriptures we can see many instances where the Buddha advising people to give merits to their departed relatives.

* On one occasion when King Bimbisara offered the 1st monastery to the Buddha and the sangha, he accrued much merits. Tradition says that during that occasion some of his relatives from former life waited to receive merits but failing appeared in a dream. The King had been disturbed by the bad dream inquired from the Buddha about it. The Blessed One with his supernormal powers understood that the former relatives in Petha realm were waiting for merits. Hence, the king gave food and other requestees to the Buddha and sangha and shared merits with his former relatives. Because of given merits they rejoiced and been released from their woeful status.^{xv} Afterwards, the Blessed one gave a discourse to the king regarding importance of sharing merits with departed relatives thus:

*“ They stand beyond the walls,
and at the junctions and crossroads,
they stand at the door-posts,
having come to their former homes.*

*But when abundant food and drink,
both staple and non-staple, is prepared,
no one remembers these
beings, because of their past unwholesome deeds,*

Thus, those who are compassionate
give to their departed relatives,
at the right time, pure, excellent,
suitable drink and food.

Thinking: "May this go to our relatives,
may our relatives be happy!"
Those who have gathered,
the departed relatives who have assembled
around the food and drink,
respectfully offer their thanks:
saying: " May our relatives live long!
Those to whom we owe this gain,
for we have been honoured,
those who give are not without reward!" ^{xvixvii}

* The following sutta also highlights the importance of offering merits to the departed relatives.

On one occasion Brahmin Jāṇussoṇī ^{xviii} approached the Blessed One and asked:
"Master Gotama, we brahmins give gifts and perform the memorial rites for the dead with the thought: 'let our gift be of benefit to our departed relatives... let our departed relatives partake of our gift...can our gift, actually be of benefit to our departed relatives?'"

Buddha, then gave detailed description of departed beings who had taken rebirth in a certain realm, who could benefit from such offerings. The Blessed One also pointed out that it is impossible to say that in this long samsara journey, our relatives and friends were not born in unfortunate places where they were waiting to get merits from their relatives. The Buddha concluded by saying that there are beings who can benefit from alms given in memory of the dead. Likewise, people who offer such alms also receive much merit. Brahmin Jāṇussoṇī, understood the teaching said:

"It's astounding and amazing, Master Gotama, that there is reason to give gifts and perform the memorial rites for the dead, since for the donor too it is not fruitless".^{xix}

▲ How to Take Food in order to Maintain Good Health.

The Buddha has advised his followers how to partake their meals so they can have a good digest which help for healthy life. He also often pointed out that healthy body would support to develop meditation.

"When a man is always mindful ...
Knowing moderation in the food he eats
His ailments then diminish:
He ages slowly, guarding his life" ^{xx}

▲ How Buddhists Should Dwell in Home Life

Often in scriptures we can see the Buddha advising lay followers to be generous towards monks, nuns and other ascetics who need support to maintain their spiritual life, and to

support family and relatives, poor and beggars who need food, clothing etc. He also encouraged them to develop meditation, especially recollections (anusati bhavana) of the Triple Gem, their generosity and virtue, higher qualities of Deva etc. Following suttas elaborate this point.

◆ On one occasion Mahanama the Sakyan approached the Buddha as asked: how should one dwell in lay life with various duties and engagements etc. Then the Blessed One showed him the way: To be successful in homelife one must have faith, energy, mindfulness, stillness of mind and wisdom. Then one must develop further 6 things: 1-3 recollection of the qualities of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha (anusati). To recollect one's own: 4 virtue, 5 generosity & 6 qualities of Devas. ^{xxi}

Note: Details of anusati bhavana are given in the above suttas.

▲ Keeping Precepts Brings Happiness in this Life and Favourable Rebirth.

The Buddha has shown his men and women lay followers the importance of observing the Five Precepts on daily basis and the Eight Precepts on Uposatha days. ^{xxii}
Following is some of the suttas carrying this message:

◆ Keeping five precepts

The following sutta points out the benefits of keeping five precepts.
The Buddha said:

“There are... these five gifts, great gifts, primal, of long standing, traditional, ancient, unadulterated and never before adulterated...not repudiated by wise ascetics and brahmins. What five? ^{xxiii}

1) **abstain from destruction of life** 2) – 5) abstain from: **taking what is not given...from sexual misconduct...from false speech... from liquor, wine, and intoxicants.** - this gives to an immeasurable number of beings freedom from fear, enmity, and affliction. He himself enjoys freedom from fear, enmity, and affliction. Keeping these precepts led a person to be happy in this life and to gain a good rebirth.

◆ Keeping eight precepts

One should not kill living beings or take what is not given;
one should not speak falsehood or drink intoxicants;
one should refrain from sexual activity, from unchastity;
one should not eat at night or at an improper time.
One should not wear garlands or apply scents;
one should sleep on a low bed or a mat on the ground;
this, they say, is the eight-factored uposatha
proclaimed by the Buddha,
who reached the end of suffering.

Whatever wealth exists in this sphere—
pearls, gems, and excellent beryl,
horn gold and mountain gold...
those are not worth a sixteenth part

of an uposatha complete in the eight factors...

Therefore, a virtuous woman or man,
having observed the uposatha complete in eight factors
and having made merit productive of happiness,
blameless goes to a heavenly state^{xxiv}

▲ Generosity

The Buddha constantly praised almsgiving and pointed out to laypeople the benefits of giving alms to the ascetics, gifts to the people in need, sick people etc.

* In the following sutta the Buddha pointed out how a good person should give gifts:
(1) He gives what is pure; (2) he gives what is excellent; (3) he gives a timely gift; (4) he gives what is allowable; (5) he gives after investigation; (6) he gives often; (7) while giving he settles his mind in confidence; and (8) having given, he rejoiced ^{xxv}

He gives what is pure and excellent,
allowable drinks and food at the proper time;
he gives gifts often to fertile fields of merit,
to those who lead the spiritual life.
He does not feel regret,
having given away many material things.

Those with deep insight praise
the gifts given in this way.
Having thus practiced charity
with a mind freely generous,
one intelligent and wise, rich in faith,
is reborn in a pleasant, unafflicted world ^{xxvi}

Faith, moral shame, and wholesome giving
are qualities pursued by the good person;
for this, they say, is the divine path
by which one goes to the world of the devas ^{xxvii}

▲ How to be Free from Suffering

On one occasion Bhadraka the headman approached the Buddha and said:

“It would be good, venerable sir, if the Blessed One would teach me about the origin and the passing away of suffering...”

The Buddha used the method of dialogue to teach Dhamma to so Bhadraka could himself realise how the suffering come to be and how it passes away:

Buddha: *“What do you think, headman? are there any people in Uruvelakappa on whose account sorrow... pain...would arise in you if they were to be executed, imprisoned... or censured?”*

Bhadraka: *“There are such people, venerable sir.”*

Buddha: *“But are there any people in Uruvelakappa on whose account sorrow... pain, ...would not arise in you in such an event?”*

Bhadraka: *“There are such people, venerable sir.”*

Buddha: *What...is the cause and reason why in relation to some people ...sorrow, and pain, arise in you if they were to be executed...while in regard to others no such sorrow... pain, would arise in you?*

Bhadraka: *“Those people... in in relation to whom sorrow...pain, would arise in me if they were to be executed...these are the ones for whom I have ...attachment...”*

Then the Blessed One said:

“...whatever suffering arose in the past...whatever suffering will arise in the future, all that will arise rooted in desire, with desire as its source; for desire is the root of suffering.”

“In this way too, headman, it can be understood: ‘Whatever suffering arises, all that arises rooted in desire, with desire as its source; for desire is the root of suffering.’”

In this way the Buddha showed Bhadraka, how to identify causes of suffering and to abandon it in order to lead be free and peaceful ^{xxviii}

▲ How to Recognize Good and Wise Person

One of the advices that the Buddha consistently gave to his devotees was to associate with wise people and not with foolish people. The opening stanza of the Mangala Sutta is:

"Not associating with fools,
with the wise associating...
honouring that worthy of honour:
this is a supreme blessing"^{xxix}

◆ How to Recognize Wise People

*The following was the advice given to King Pasenadi of Kosala:

*“ It is **by living together** with someone, great king, that his **virtue** is to be known, ...it is by **dealing with someone**, great king, that his **honesty** is to be known... it is in **misfortunes**, great king, that a person’s **strength** is to be known... It is by **discussion with someone**, great king, that his **wisdom** is to be known... and that after a long time, not after a short time; by one who is attentive, not by one who is inattentive; by one who is wise, not by a fool...”*

“A man is not easily known by outward form
Nor should one trust a quick appraisal,
For in the guise of the well-controlled
Uncontrolled men move in this world.

“Like a counterfeit earring made of clay,

Like a bronze half-penny coated with gold,
Some move about in disguise:
Inwardly impure, outwardly beautiful ^{xxx}

* The Buddha has shown the criteria to identify a fool and a wise person.
If a person has three bad qualities — bodily misconduct, verbal misconduct, and mental misconduct he is considered to be a fool, association of such people bring harm to ones' ordinary life as well as spiritual life. However, if a person has three good qualities — good bodily conduct, good verbal conduct, and good mental conduct he is considered to be a wise person; association of such people bring good tidings to ones' ordinary life as well as spiritual life ^{xxxi}

End Notes: Section 11-2.

ⁱ He became a lay follower of the Buddha. * The Sigālovāda Sutta is a popular sutta among Buddhists in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma.

ⁱⁱ DN: 31 (Sigālaka Sutta)

ⁱⁱⁱ SN55: 7 *The people of Bamboo Gate)

^{iv} Ibid.

^v AN8: 54 *His clan's name is Byagghapajja.

^{vi} AN3: 31 (Brahma sutta)

^{vii} AN2: 33.

^{viii} AN8: 38.

^{ix} AN7: 62.

^x AN4: 31 (The wheel sutta).

^{xi} AN4: 36.

^{xii} She was the mother of Sīvalī Thera, The Buddha designated her as the foremost among givers of what is excellent, see: AN1:263.

^{xiii} AN4: 57 (Suppavāsā sutta).

^{xiv} AN8:36.

^{xv} See section 14: Part 2 for details. In [Maha Buddhavamsa—The Great Chronicle of Buddhas](#) by Ven. Mingun Sayadaw -describes this episode in details.

^{xvi} KN:KP:7 (Tirokuddha sutta- Hungary Shades outside the wall, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi)

^{xvii} Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu-

<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/pv/pv.1.05.than.html>

^{xviii} He was a wealthy brahmin of Sāvattihī became follower of the Buddha. Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta (MN:27) delivered to him.

^{xix} AN10: 177 (Jāṇussoṇī sutta).

^{xx} SN3:13 (A Bucket Measure of Food sutta). * This advice was given to King Pasenadi Kosla, who followed the Buddha's advice and became healthy.

^{xxi} AN11: 11, 12 & 13.

^{xxii} Upostaha is a Buddhist Observance Day that take place in Full moon and New Moon days. On those days lay people refrain from their daily home life, go to a monastery or a temple, take eight precepts and spend the whole day and the night doing chanting, listening to Dhamma talks and meditations.

^{xxiii} AN8:39

^{xxiv} AN8:42 * IN AN8:V Uposatha chapter has many suttas related to this subject.

^{xxv} AN8: 37 (Good persons gifts sutta).

^{xxvi} Ibid.

^{xxvii} AN8:32 (Giving).

^{xxviii} SN42: 11.

^{xxix} KN:KP:5 (Mangala sutta, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi)

^{xxx} SN3: 11

^{xxxi} For details see: AN3: 2, 3 & 4.