

# What Makes for a Good Life

Bhante Bodhidhamma · DhammaBytes · 16:03

---

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa Namō Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sama Sambuddhasa* — Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed Noble and Fully Self-Enlightened One.

So now we've come to a particular discourse which is really asking the question: what makes a good life? And again you have to translate a lot of what the Buddha said into the modern idiom. So I shall read it and then we'll see what we can say about it.

"Now on one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling among the Kaliyans where there was a market town of the Kaliyans called Kakarapata. Then the Kalyan family man Dīgha Janu approached the Blessed One, paid homage to him, sat down to one side, and so seated he said to the Blessed One: 'Venerable Sir, we are lay people. We enjoy sensual pleasure, dwelling at home in a bed crowded with children, enjoying fine sandalwood, wearing garlands, scents and unguents, accepting gold and silver. Let the Blessed One teach the Dharma to us in a way that will lead to our welfare and happiness, both in the present life and in the future life as well.'"

So that sentence, "crowded with children, a bed crowded with children" — like Eskimos, the Tibetans also, the whole family sleeps in the same bed. They don't have mummy and daddy over there and the rest of them in the back room. There they are, just like these days, sensual pleasures, enjoying fine sandalwood and all that, and accepting gold and silver. So remember, in those days, that was fairly new. You had to be rich. There was still mainly society with barter. So this was the beginning of the merchant class.

"There are, Bhiyagapaja, four things that lead to the welfare and happiness of a family man in this very life." So you have to translate this family man to a couple or whatever. "What four? Accomplishment of persistent effort, the accomplishment of protection, good friendship and balanced living."

"And what is the accomplishment of persistent effort? Here, Bhiyagapaja, whatever may be the means by which a family man earns his living, whether by farming, trade, cattle raising, archery, or civil service, or by any other craft, he is skillful and diligent. He investigates the appropriate means and is able to act and arrange everything properly. This is called accomplishment of persistent effort."

In other words, you do a good job. That's pretty straightforward.

"And what is the accomplishment of protection? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man sets up a protection and guard over the wealth acquired by energetic striving, amassed by the strength of his arms, earned by the sweat of his brow, righteous wealth righteously gained, thinking: how can I prevent kings and bandits

from taking this away? Fire from burning it, floods from sweeping it, and unloved heirs from taking it. This is called accomplishment of protection."

Well, there's not so much that. It's just, yes, exactly. I was going to say kings and governments taking away our money and bandits. And, of course, now we have insurance, so we're not too worried about these things. But I love that "unloved heirs from taking it away."

"And what is good friendship? Here, Bhiyagapaja, in whatever village or town a family man dwells, he associates with householders or their sons, whether young or old, who are of a mature virtue, accomplished in faith, moral discipline, generosity and wisdom. He converses with them and engages in discussions with them. He emulates them in regard to their accomplishment in faith, moral discipline, generosity and wisdom. This is called good friendship."

So that's the definition of good friendship. Faith — he goes on actually to describe faith as having faith in the Buddha *Dhammasangha*. But it's also trust, isn't it? Trust in each other. Moral discipline. He also explains that afterwards. Generosity and wisdom. As I say, he comes to that, so we'll read that for the time being.

"And what is a balanced life? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man knows his income and expenditures and leads the balanced life, neither extravagant nor miserly, so that his income exceeds his expenditures rather than the reverse. Just as a goldsmith or his apprentice, holding up a scale, knows by so much it has dipped down, by so much it has tilted up, so a family man leads a balanced life."

That's interesting because these days everybody seems — everybody's in debt. The average debt is eight thousand pounds, as what is on the news. Our society has not been living the balanced life. And so we've ended up in this dreadful place.

"The wealth thus amassed has four sources of dissipation: womanizing, drunkenness, gambling and evil friendship. Just as in the case of a tank with four inlets and outlets, if one should close the inlets and open the outlets, and there would be not enough adequate rainfall, a decrease rather than increase of the water could be expected in the tank. So these four things bring about dissipation of amassed wealth.

'Similarly, there are four sources for the increase of amassed wealth: abstinence from womanizing, from drunkenness, from gambling, and from evil friendship. And just as in the case of a tank with four inlets and outlets, if one should open the inlets and close the outlets, and there would be adequate rainfall, an increase, rather than a decrease, of the water could be expected in the tank. These four things bring about the increase of amassed wealth."

So this tells you what people got up to. All sorts of clubbing. Drunkenness. This is not new, is it?

"These four things, Bhiyagapaja, lead a family man's welfare and happiness in the present life. Four other things lead to a family man's welfare and happiness in the future life. What four? Accomplishment in

faith, moral discipline, generosity and wisdom.

'And how is a family man accomplished in faith? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man has faith. He places faith in the enlightenment of the *Tathāgata*: the Blessed One is an *Arahat*, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed leader of persons to be tamed, teacher of *devas* and humans, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One. In this way, a family man is accomplished in faith.'

So this basically is pointing to the fact that we need a spiritual hero, really, to emulate. Somebody who guides us, a teacher. They're lucky to have the Buddha. So it puts them in a slightly better position.

"And how is a family man accomplished in moral discipline? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man abstains from the destruction of life, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from wines, liquors, and intoxicants, the basis of negligence. And this way a family man is accomplished in moral discipline."

You'll notice that wines, liquors, and intoxicants, he didn't consider them to be evil in themselves. It was more that it led to this basis for negligence. You do things under the influence that you wouldn't normally do.

"And how is a family man accomplished in generosity? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man dwells at home with a mind devoid of the stain of stinginess, freely generous, open-handed, delighted in relinquishment, one devoted to charity, delighting in giving and sharing. And in this way, a family man is accomplished in generosity.

'And how is a man accomplished in wisdom? Here, Bhiyagapaja, a family man possesses the wisdom that sees into the arising and passing away of phenomena, that is noble and penetrative and leads to the complete destruction of suffering. In this way, a family man is accomplished in wisdom.

"These four things, Bhiyagapaja, lead to a family man's welfare and happiness in a future life."

So, having made clear what he feels makes us happy in this life — persistent effort, doing a good job, protecting what one has, good friendship and a balanced life — and that is it. Now when he talks about future life, future birth, which we can either take to mean after death, or just this life, the future of this life. The first thing he points to is that we need to have some sort of guide, a spiritual guide.

And then he says to accomplish in moral discipline. Remember that in the Buddha's teaching, our unethical behavior is the measure of our delusion. That's why morality, ethics and wisdom go hand in hand. You can't have the one without the other because the impurity in our hearts is caused by this deep wrong understanding which always begins with seeking happiness in the wrong place. Because we seek happiness in the wrong place, we become attached to it, we hold on to things. And that develops into greed, and at worst into stealing, things like that.

And when we do that, anybody who threatens what we have becomes our enemy. Find ourselves in conflict. So aversion arises. And if that person's too big, fear. You run for it. So there's your three basic dispositions from the position of delusion: acquisitiveness, aversion, and fear. And from there, all the miseries arise.

And what he's saying is that we abstain from the obvious expressions of that, which is the destruction of life, the wanton destruction of life, from stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and from these wines and from intoxicants, anything that takes away our sense of moral responsibility. And then of course there's the opposite to that which is complementary and that's generosity.

The last two you see — accomplishments in generosity and the accomplishment of wisdom is seen as the arising and passing away phenomena. In other words, seeing that things are transient. When we really see that things are transient then of course you don't hold on to them. Your grip loosens.

And one of the measures of the spiritual life — our own personal development — is that you find much more joy in giving than in receiving. That's one little test you can set yourself: are you still expecting people to give you things to make you happy? But actually you get much more happiness by giving, by giving away.

Now when you give away you have to give something up, and there's your relinquishment. That's the undoing of that tightness that we have around things — "my, this is mine." And that's how wisdom grows, you see, through realizing, through the deep realizing with the impermanence of things.

So if anything is impermanent it's obviously not reliable, and therefore why should we be upset when things that we love and hold on to and say are mine disappear or broken? So if somebody gives you a very precious thing like a Ming vase, you have to imagine it already broken. So when it does break you're not upset. That's the idea anyway.

Remember that when it comes to things, actually you can only use them. The idea of possession is a legal fiction, isn't it? I mean, you might say, "this is my car, see?" And then a thief takes it. You still go around saying, "this is my car." No, it's a thief's car. They've got it. But you still hold on to it as "my car." I'm not suggesting that you shouldn't try and get it back, you understand. It's just the pain, the pain of somebody stealing your car, "my car."

So when you switch your thing from "my car" to "a car I use," then the pain isn't so much, you see.

So on this particular discourse, you see, he's sort of broadened it out a bit from the other stuff that we were doing the other weeks.

Very good. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May you be liberated from all suffering sooner rather than later.

Well, that was very weak. It obviously wasn't a good talk. I mean, it just didn't get the response. Oh, that's

terrible.

---

*Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.*