

THE PRINCIPLES OF MARRIAGE IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM



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ABSTRACT

This study based on the texts of Theravada Buddhism and should follow and practice strictly to all. In general, to the ordinary people, the matrimonial is a vital important and cannot be avoided it. Concerning that the Buddha pointed out the duties in the Singalovada sutta and others his discourses for married life as well. If you follow and practice this guidance, peace and happiness will be welcome in the present and future.

Introduction

When we study the Buddha's Dharma,¹ we find so many suttas, which is concerned with marriages affairs, and the ways which should follow and practice to the people in this present and future. Especially, concerning the marriages affairs, Singalovda sutta, Parabava sutta and Maha mangala sutta are very famous in the Buddha's teachings. Today, in all over the world, we are seeing so many conflicts on the matrimonial forever and a day. As regards the conflicts, I think, that we need to ponder in this time. And we have to find out the ways to solve the problem which is arising in the marriage life. As to the marriage life, the Buddha expounded

¹.Dhamma, i. e. moral philosophy, wisdom, truth as propounded by Gotama Buddha in his discourses & conversations, collected by the compilers of the 5 Nikayas (dhamma--vinayaṅ sangayantehi dhammasangahakehi ekato katva VvA 3; cp. mayaṅ dh.ṅ ca vinayañ ca sangayama Vin II.285), resting on the deeper meaning of dhamma as expld under B 1 a, & being in short the "doctrinal" portions of the Buddhist Tipitaka in contradiction to the Vinaya, the portion expounding the rules of the Order.

exactly in the Singalovada sutta that to the husband and wife how must to follow and practice each other and show the result which they can get by practice very well. Therefore in this article I will discuss the duties, which have to follow and practice as a husband to his wife and as a wife to her husband, and other interested principles which the Buddha expounded in the Singalovada sutta and other his discourses in the Pali Nikaya. Actually, to my point of view, I consider that it should be followed and practiced not only Buddhist people but the other people in the world.

Choosing a compatible husband or wife

In order for a couple to stay together, it is necessary that they are compatible in terms of the level of virtues they possess — particularly the following four “virtues of compatibility” (samajivi-dhamma):

1. **Faith -sama-saddha:** husband and wife should have the same level of spiritual faith and the same level of “aim in life”
2. **Self-discipline -sama-sala:** husband and wife should have the same standards of Precepts, manners and etiquette as one another;
3. **Self-sacrifice -sama-caga:** husband and wife should have the same level of self-sacrifice in selflessly devoting themselves to generous deeds or helping others;
4. **wisdom-sama-panna:** husband and wife should have the same level of wisdom, creativity, empathy and common-sense — being on the same communicative “wavelength” — neither suffering overly from stubbornness.²

In addition, concerning compatibility, the Buddha warned of the perils of an old man bringing home a young girl as a wife: (When) an old man takes as a wife a vigorous young girl and cannot sleep, because of his possessiveness for her, this leads to his downfall.

Marrying your spouse

In the time of the Buddha, there was no such thing as a legal registration of marriages. A man and a woman mutually decided to accept each other as husband and wife and thereafter they lived together. Their marriage was carried out in the presence of the lay-community rather than in the presence of the spiritual community. In the present day, however, legal registration of a marriage is required. Details differ from country to country and Buddhism supports whatever complies with the Law. However, there remains no specific Buddhist ritual or procedure to conduct a marriage. Buddhism recognizes the traditions and cultures practiced by people in different countries — hence Buddhist wedding rituals differ from one country to another. In general, there will be a religious service for blessing and to give advice to the new couple, performed either in the home or in the temple. Marrying is about showing each other due respect — and this is the foundation of the trust which unifies the couple.

Maintaining the relationship of married life

In a recent piece of research on the emotions, it was discovered that immediately conflicts within a marriage lead to “stone-walling” (i.e. the husband and wife are no longer on speaking terms). Conflicts cannot be avoided in a marriage. The secret of happy marriage relies on keeping open channels of communication to deal with them. Maintaining good channels of communication according to the principle recommended by the Buddha is to maintain a healthy “emotional bank account” (Singahavatthu)³ with one’s marriage partner. There are four ways of maintaining a healthy emotional bank account with your partner as follows:

1. **Giving resources** -Dana: If two people are going to live together they must be able to share what they have with their partner. Any place that lacks giving will be parched like an

² . Parabhva Sutta,Samyutta Nikaya 20V,p.109-10

³ . Suppatheya, Singiti Sutta,p.81

emotional desert. it is important to keep open a channel of communication in the marriage whereby one partner can consult the other if they are suffering or are having problems with material resources.

- 2. Endearing speech** -Piyavaca: A husband and wife should take care always to address each other with polite speech, even in the case they need to criticize each other. Sometimes if things become too informal, careless words may touch on the “views” of the other partner and disturb the peacefulness of the family. After marriage, one should use the same standard of polite of speech used before marriage.
- 3. 3. Helpfulness** -Atthacariya: A husband and wife need to lend each other a helping hand. Also if one of the partners learns something new concerning spiritual knowledge, they should share it with their spouse. When a conflict arises in the marriage, there is a huge temptation to put all the blame on the other partner instead of taking collective responsibility but if both are well-versed in spiritual teachings, the couple will tend to deal with the problem directly instead of merely looking for someone to blame.
- 4. Consistency** -Samanatatta: Both husband and wife has implicit duties in the marriage and to the degree they live up to these duties they will avoid the suspicions of their partner. If a husband has decided that his wife should take responsibility for the running of the house, he should not subsequently come interfering in the household affairs. Sometimes “appropriateness” is not immediately evident for every situation — sometimes it is hard to sense what your partner expects of you — but if both partners meditate on a daily basis, they will tune in more easily to consistently harmonious behaviors.

Five duties of a husband to his wife

Based on these four principles, in the Singalovada Sutta the Buddha advised of five duties a husband should fulfil towards his wife and five duties a wife should fulfill towards her husband.

The duties of a husband are as follows:

- (1)He must praise his wife
- (2)He must never look down on his wife
- (3)He must never be unfaithful
- (4)He should give his wife the responsibility for looking after the house
- (5)He should bring his wife gifts of clothing or jewellery.⁴

- 1.** He should not keep a wife in secret. Once a man is married he should show off his wife in public, not keep his wife in secret. He should be careful to treat his wife with respect, in front of inferiors.
- 2.** Even though a couple is married doesn't mean that a husband will have an attitude of respect to his wife. Sometimes he may look down on her or even treat her like a slave or a pet animal. The husband restrains himself from looking down on his wife in any way, shows his responsibility for the human dignity of others.
- 3.** A Buddhist husband is a man of virtue it goes without saying that he refrains from the Four Defilements of Action (Kammakilesa): killing, stealing, adultery and telling lies. He would

⁴.Singalovada sutta, p.41

thus never be unfaithful to his wife, because doing so would destroy the human dignity of himself and his wife. The feelings of a person who is found guilty of sexual misconduct are described in the Sutta Nipata: Whatever fame and reputation he had before, of course vanishes . . . in the grip of his fantasies, he broods like a beggar. Hearing the outrage of others, he gets dear eased . . . hearing the spread of gossip, he then hides in his own embarrassment. He cannot accept the criticism of others on this count, and may lie to those who try to counsel him.⁵

4. To demonstrate his trust for his wife, a husband must give his wife the final word in the organization of the household and the family without interfering. If his wife is a “working mother” it doesn’t make her any less responsible for the affairs of the home and the family, but husband and wife will need to come to an agreement, according to the principles of the “emotional bank account”, whereby she can manage to keep on top of her domestic responsibilities without being overloaded.
5. Such gifts express the love of a husband for his wife and his appreciation of her virtues. Such generosity can mend many marriages. A husband should take his wife shopping for things she wants to buy. He should encourage her to do the things she wants to do sometimes to allow her to get out of the house occasionally.

Five duties of a wife to her husband

The duties of a wife to her husband are as follows:

1. She sees to the proper care of the household.
 2. She must take proper care of the ‘in-laws’
 3. She must never be unfaithful
 4. She must take good care of the shared wealth
 5. She must be careful in her responsibilities.⁶
1. The wife should see to it that the house become a heavenly mansion — the house should be peaceful, the food nourishing and appropriate in taste to the age and the health of the family members.
 2. The wife must look after her ‘in-laws’ especially well (within the limits of her convenience). She must be especially careful what she says to them because a few ill chosen words can have serious consequences.
 3. A Buddhist wife is a woman of virtue it goes without saying that she refrains from the Four Defilements of Action (Kammakilesa): killing, stealing, adultery and telling lies. She would thus never be unfaithful to her husband, because doing so would destroy the human dignity of herself and her husband.
 4. A wife should look after the shared wealth of the household responsibly — being neither extravagant nor stingy. This implies that the husband goes out to work but entrusts his wife with the money for the administration of the family finances.

⁵ .Tissametteya sutta,SN160v.p.817-20

⁶ .Singalovada sutta,p.42

5. Having been entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the household and the family she should see to it that these duties are properly fulfilled — rather than lazing around at home or doing other work to the neglect of the household.

Conclusion

From the Singalovada Sutta we learn that a husband has duties towards his wife and a wife has duties towards her husband. In the ideal world, both the husband and wife will fulfill their side of the bargain and in doing so, no danger will grow up in the relationship or for society at large — there will be happiness and prosperity both for husband, wife and society at large. If the husband and wife fulfill their duties accordingly the Buddha's teachings they will be good persons in their environment. If the neither the husband nor the wife fulfill their duties accordingly Buddha's teachings, they will not meet with peaceful and happy life in the present and future. Even though, most of the people in the world have failed to understand these important facts. To my point of view I consider that these duties which I had been discussed above, are vital important to human world and should follow and practice between man and woman who are going to build a peaceful future. As a Buddhist monk, I wish to say like that, the Dhammas, which Our Lord Buddha expounded with great compassion for forty five years in the whole India and others for the human kind, are the excellent one of the Dhammas in the world up to now. Therefore, whether you are Buddhist or other religious people, whether you are interested or not in this discussion, you should be fully aware and try to follow and practice these. If you practice these, you will get the grate fruition that unexpected in your life.

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