

Buddhism and Education in Cambodia – Bsd’s Buddhist Training to Enhance Peace and Prosperity

Ven. Socheat Cheam

PAÑÑASĀSTRA University of Cambodia

Abstract

Each and every society has their own way of practicing the beliefs. All faiths they are putting their trust in have a common goal which is to build peace for all human beings. Although they may have and are using various approaches from one to another, they are heading towards the same, final dream, which is to reside in an island of peace, prosperity and harmony. The same applies to Cambodia, one of the Buddhist-dominance state in South East Asia region. Cambodian people are majority Theravada Buddhism. For long time, this religion stays with the Cambodian people’s heart including the low and high or cold and heating situation. Buddhism serves great benefits to Cambodian society until the country has decided to put this special religion as her state religion (One can see more in the Cambodian Constitution).

Like other religions, Buddhism is a religion of peace, nonviolence and a human religion. It has played very important role in maintaining fair development, growth and stable peace. Ideally, the world should have no war or fighting if it could completely follow the teaching of each religion, especially Buddhism.

What are the core education in Buddhism? How these cores contribute to building peace and prosperity in a particular country or state?

The teaching of Buddha is mainly to educate people to live together peacefully. People have got to learn how to live in different environment. People have to be patient. They have to be tolerant and open their mind for something new. Importantly, they be kind and compassionate. They’ve got give hand to each other when in need.

Perhaps, people are different apparently. They may look more beautiful, white, physically strong, and rich than one another. But these things do not count at all. They may speak different language, eating different foods, sleeping different time and wearing different clothes but they share the same pain, suffering and happiness. If suffering and happiness are common things to all people regardless of their skin colors, races, status there must be a common practice towards the elimination of suffering and a common practice towards the creation of lasting happiness.

Keywords : Buddhism, Education, peace and prosperity

Introduction

Buddha has taught us that we are our own world. We are our own God. We are our own destiny. We reap what we sow. That means to achieve one particular development and growth in a society, it requires actual commitment from individuals in that given society. They have to depend on their own force in life. They have to use their own power both at physical and mental level. As clearly advised by Buddha in Khmer Pali words, “*Atta hi attanonathoko hi nathoparosiyaattana hi sudantenanathamlabhatidullabham* (One indeed is one's own refuge; how can others be a refuge to one? With oneself thoroughly tamed, one can attain a refuge (i.e., ArahattaPhala), which is so difficult to attain.)”. It could be translated as ‘whatever we do, we become.’ We are the master of our own lives. No one or any God gives us luck or fortune. Buddha just tells us that only practice and practice will give us result. No practice, no result. (Morvillo, Nancy, 2010 : 2)

Moreover, Buddha advises us to always do a self-reflection. Or put it differently, be in someone else shoe so that we can learn how hard it would be if it were us in that particular situation. This kind of advice is specifically teaches us open our mind and accept this huge world of different. Whatever it comes, it goes, Buddha once said. We don’t want to be hurt, blamed, and discriminated and so do the rest of people. We want development, growth, justice, fairness, and freedoms and so on and so on. The same thing with the environment around us. If we all want the same thing and we know that hurting other will make them more suffering, isn’t it crazy that to hurt people. Buddha told us hurting people is hurting our own-selves. Hate people is hate ourselves. In contrast, growth people is growing ourselves and love people is loving ourselves. We know this logic, we might realize that we used be in such crazy situation many times because we used to hate, get angry and hurt people. These are the teaching of Buddha. (Peter DellSantina, 1997 : 3-4)

Buddhism and Education in Cambodia

In Cambodia context, Buddhism education took its roots long time ago. We almost can’t trace back when exactly this Buddhism teaching was installed in our education system. We just know that our great Kings who believed in Buddhism began to mainstream and insert the teaching of Buddha in our daily life.

Till date, one of the ways to spread the teaching of Buddha in Cambodia is through Dharma-lecturing, inside class education, temple gathering and through the establishment of an organization or institution. Cambodian Buddhist monks play a very vital role in this activity. Either in temple, in class or preaching in each ceremony, Cambodian monks enjoy a special privilege upon the request of the people in the community.

1. Traditionally, Dharma lecturing has spread across the country, from North to South and from East to West. This kind of teaching is simple, easy to access and became a common use for most Cambodians. Whenever they celebrate a ceremony such as gratitude day, New Year, and other kinds of ceremonies Cambodian people will invite monks to give the Buddha's teaching. The monks, after got the invitation, prepare a speech for one and a half hour in length and deliver that speech in the actual day. The monks who can get this invitation mostly are smart and wise. They know both the Dharma and the art of delivering an effective speech. Cambodian people really like this kind of teaching. However, its weakness would be the less participation the young generation. If one has to observe, during the ceremony there are mostly old people come and pay attention the monks' teaching. Young Cambodian are not effectively integrated into this teaching at all.

2. That is why the second option is in place. Since the little kids and young Cambodian could not enjoy the teaching as old people and because their level of understanding, another special education plan was designed, which is to organize a small event allowing Cambodian monks to spread the teaching of Buddha in classroom of a primary, secondary and high school. This event could take place in the city, town or in the rural area and the length can be a day up to three days. As has been reported, this second types of education became a progressive and popular in Cambodia. Although the education took place only one or two days, it proves effective. The kids and young Cambodian do not need to understand everything about the Dharma and we, as the organizers, also don't expect that high. What hope is to create a closer relationship between Buddhism and young kids. Provide them a chance so that they can get familiar with Buddhism since very young age. The young started to remind themselves to live their life righteously and be a compassionate person.

3. Temple gathering is another common way where the teaching of Buddha can be spread. Like most Buddhism, lay man and lay woman often come to pagoda on the eight day or day of full moon for cultivating more

meritorious deeds. They also get a chance to refine their commitment to the triple gems (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) as well as the precepts (five and eight precepts). This third type of teaching proves a bit difficult to spread the Dharma. Why? It is because only old people come to the temple. Hence, monks can take this chance to give a teaching to them. But it seems this kind of teaching is not that effective. Therefore, it requires creative ideas and innovation in designing as well as creating a special program to attract more young and old people to come the temple.

4. The role of an organization or institution in providing a systematic lessons to the public. In Cambodia, we can see that there are a lot of NGOs, associations and unions that are working to spread the teaching of Buddha. They have changed the course of Cambodia. They have set up a standard for Cambodia to better level. They contribute a lot to increase the wellbeing of Cambodians. Particularly, Organization of Buddhist Social Development (BSD) has played a contributive role in spreading the teaching of Buddha to Cambodian people. It is working with the Royal Cambodian Government to reduce poverty, illiteracy rates and other forms of violence. It is working with the local commune to fight against corruption, crimes, and gangs and build a community of safety and security. Importantly, this NGO has done an effective job in building human resource in Cambodia. This NGO has a vision that it wants to see all Cambodians and the world become a responsible person. (K Sri Dhammananda, 1973 : 2-9)

This organization has worked in the field to recruit poor children, homeless children and marginalized children for skill training in three different short courses. There were 115 children received the training in the first term. These unfortunate kids got a chance to learn both Khmer language and English plus the teaching of Buddha so that after the training they can live their lives according to the Dharma.

There were 50 children recruited for the second course. This very particular training was under the title “Child’s Right Empowerment for Protection and Development.” For the third round of training in BSD organization, this organization has recruited 60 marginalized kids for the four months training called “Strengthening and Protecting Marginalized Kids.”

During all the three trainings, the organization has equipped those children based on four skills: Living a happy and moral, learning Khmer language, learning English language, and computer literacy. It is the hope and a vision of this organization to see those marginalized kids stay away from poverty, illiteracy, domestic violence and drug using. The organization holds

that when those kids are well equipped good knowledge, they can use this basic skills to start their life journey. The same thing with what Buddha has taught us that “ *NanthiPannaSamaApha* នឹងឫក ស្មើ អាក្រក់, Nothing is lighter than wisdom. (Phnom Penh Buddhist Institute, 1957 : 12-13) Wisdom is the only light that can clear the darkness. Wisdom is the key to all resolution. Wisdom is the key to all kinds of development, growth and peace. That is why BSD organization has put it strong commitment to provide basic knowledge to these kids so that they can live their lives as everybody else and that Cambodia can move forward like other countries in the region. (Triratna, Disciples, 1994 :11)

Conclusion of Buddhism and Education in Cambodia

Throughout the discussion above, we can see that the teaching of Buddha in Cambodian society is evolving over time. In fact, there are more than four ways that Cambodian people and monks are implementing in order to integrate the valuable concept of Buddhism into the classroom. It is accepted that the majority of Cambodians are believing and practicing Buddhism through centuries. They have never given up this teaching. Why? Because the teaching stays true through time. Whatever have been taught in Buddha's time is applicable and exist even right now or in the long future. We can assume that Buddhism is not just a belief but a great lesson to be learned and practiced by everyone. Only practice makes this teaching effective.

In short, a society that is peaceful, growth and stable must be raised by a peaceful, productive and faultless citizens. To advance the country like those nations in the world, they need to develop both soft skills (the mental health) and hard skills (physical development). This paper is writing to prove that the development of soft skills through the teaching of Buddha is one of the best ways. It is noteworthy of reminding that who dislikes the compassionate and kind person, who hates peace and who development. Buddha's teaching is to train people to love, not to hate, to be compassionate, not to revenge, and to support progress, not regression.

Therefore, Buddhism is a religion of peace, prosperity and harmony. Support the education through a lens of Buddhism is supporting peace, prosperity and harmony.

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