

BUDDHISM AND EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA – BSD’S BUDDHIST TRAINING TO ENHANCE PEACE AND PROSPERITY

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ABSTRACT

Each and every society has their own way of practicing their religious beliefs. All faiths have a common goal which is to strive for peace for all human beings. Although they may have and are using various approaches, they share the same, dream, which is to reside in an island of peace, prosperity and harmony. The same applies to Cambodia, one of the Buddhist countries in South East Asia. The majority of the Cambodian people adhere to Theravada Buddhism. For a long time, this religion stays in the heart of the Cambodian people and has brought great benefits to Cambodian society so it was decided to make it her state religion (see in the Cambodian Constitution).

Like other religions, Buddhism is a religion of peace, and nonviolence. It has played a very important role in promoting fair development, growth and stable peace. Ideally, the world should have no war or fighting if it would follow a religious path, especially Buddhism.

What is at the core in Buddhist education in Buddhism? How does it contribute to promote peace and prosperity in a particular country or state?

The teaching of the Buddha is in a very prominent way to educate people to live together peacefully. People have got to learn how to live in different environments. People need to be patient. They have to be tolerant and open their mind for something new. Most importantly, they should be kind and compassionate. They should give a helping hand to each other when in need.

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People are different most obviously. They may look more beautiful, physically strong, and rich than the other. But these things do not count at all. They may speak different languages, eat different foods, sleep at different times and wear different clothes but they share the same pain, suffering and happiness. If suffering or happiness are common 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 goal and growth in a society, it requires actual commitment from individuals in that given society. They have to depend on their own strength. They have to use their own power both at a physical and mental level. As clearly advised by the Buddha in Khmer Pali words, “*Atta hi attanonthoko 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.)¹”. 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 will give us results. No practice, no result.

Moreover, Buddha advises us to always do self-reflection. Or to put it differently, be in someone else's shoes so that we can learn how hard it would be if it were us in that particular situation. This kind of advice specifically teaches us to open our mind and accept this huge world in its various shades. Whatever comes, it goes, Buddha once said. We don't want to be hurt, blamed, and discriminated and so it is for

¹ Dhammapada Verse 160, KumarakassapamatuttheriVatthu.

all people. We want development, growth, justice, fairness, and freedom. The same applies to the environment around us. If we all want the same and we know that hurting one another will make us suffer, isn't it crazy to hurt people. The Buddha told us that hurting people is hurting our own-selves. To hate people is to hate ourselves. In contrast, if we support we are growing ourselves and to love people is to love ourselves. We know this logic, we might realize that we used to be in such crazy situations many times because we used to hate, get angry and hurt people. This is the teaching of the Buddha.

Buddhism and Education in Cambodia

In the Cambodia context, Buddhist education took its roots long time ago. It is hard to tell trace back when exactly Buddhist 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 lives.

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

1. Traditionally, Dharma lecturing has spread all across the country. This kind of teaching is simple, easy to access and became popular for most Cambodians. Whenever they celebrate a ceremony s Cambodian people will invite monks to present the Buddha's teaching. The monks, upon being invited, prepare a speech for one and a half hour in length and deliver that speech on the actual day. The monks who get this invitation are mostly 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, as its weakness; it is not popular with the young generation. If one has to observe, during the ceremony there are mostly elder people attending and paying

attention to 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 little kids and young Cambodians do not enjoy the teaching as much as elder people and because of their level of understanding, another special education plan was designed, which is to organize a small event allowing Cambodian monks to spread the teachings of the Buddha in classrooms of primary, secondary and high school. This event could take place in city, town or in rural areas and duration could be one day up to three days. As has been reported, this second type of education became popular in Cambodia. Although the education took place only one or two days, it proved effective. The kids and young Cambodians do not need to understand everything about the Dharma and we, as the organizers, also don't expect that much. What we hope to create is a closer relationship between Buddhism and young kids. Provide them an opportunity so that they can get familiar with Buddhism from very young age. Then a seed is planted so young people started to remind themselves to live their life righteously and be a compassionate person.

3. Temple gatherings are other popular occasions where the teachings of the Buddha can be spread. Like most Buddhist, lay man and lay woman often come to the pagoda on the eighth day or full moon due to cultivate 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 elder 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 people.

4. The role of an organization or institution in providing systematic lessons to the public. In Cambodia, we can see that there are a lot of NGOs, associations and unions working to spread the teachings of the Buddha. They have changed the course of Cambodia. They have set up a standard for Cambodia to improve. They contribute a lot to increase the wellbeing of Cambodians. Particularly, the Organization of Buddhist Social Development (BSD) has contributed enormously to spread the teachings of the Buddha to Cambodian people. It is cooperating with the Royal Cambodian Government to reduce poverty, illiteracy rates and violence. It is cooperating with the municipality to fight against corruption, crimes, and gangs in order to build a safe and secure community. Importantly, this NGO has done an effective job in developing human resources in Cambodia. It has a vision to see all Cambodians and the world population alike to become responsible persons.

This BSD 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 were provided the opportunity to learn both Khmer language and English plus the teachings of the Buddha so that after the training they can live their lives according to the Dharma.

There performed 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 the BSD organization, it has recruited 60 marginalized kids for four months training called “Strengthening and Protecting Marginalized Kids.”

During all the three forms of training, the organization had trained those children in four skills: How to live a happy and moral life, learning the Khmer language, learning the English language and computer literacy. It is the hope and 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 with good knowledge, they can use these basic skills to start their journey through life. Like the Buddha has taught us that “ *NanthiPannaSamaApha* ឥតដ្ឋប្បញ្ញាណេនា អាកា, Nothing is brighter than wisdom.” Wisdom is the only light that can disperse the darkness. Wisdom is the key to all kinds of development, growth and peace. That is why the BSD organization has made a strong commitment to provide basic knowledge to these kids so that they can live their lives like everybody else and that Cambodia can move forward like other countries in the region.

Conclusion

Throughout the discussion above, we can see that the teachings of the Buddha in the Cambodian society has evolved over time. In fact, there are more than four ways that Cambodian people and monks are implementing the Dharma in order to integrate the valuable concept of Buddhism into the curriculum. It is accepted that the majority of Cambodians have practiced Buddhism for centuries. They have never given up this teaching. Why? Because the teachings stood the test of time. Whatever had been taught in Buddha’s time is still applicable right now or in the 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, growing and stable must be raised by peaceful, productive and faultless citizens. To advance Cambodia like other nations in the world, they need to develop both soft skills (for mental health) and hard skills (physical development). This paper has been written to prove that the development of soft skills through the teachings of the Buddha is one of the best ways. The 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. Supporting the education in the spirit of Buddhism is supporting peace, prosperity and harmony.

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ពុទ្ធសាសនបណ្ឌិតវគ្គវិទ្យាល័យព្រះត្រៃបិដកបាលីនិងសេចក្តីប្រែជាភាសាខ្មែរ(ភ្នំពេញ:រោងពុម្ពវិទ្យាស្ថានពុទ្ធសាសនបណ្ឌិតវគ្គវិទ្យាល័យ ព.ស. ២៥០០.

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គតិបណ្ឌិត សម្រាប់ពុទ្ធសាសនិក ដោយលោកជំទាវ ខូត ជីតា ប្រធានរាជបណ្ឌិត្យសភានៃព្រះរាជាណាចក្រកម្ពុជាឆ្នាំ ២០០៩.

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