

# THE CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHIST ETHICS TO IMPROVE SOCIAL WORKERS' COMMUNICATION SKILL \*

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## Abstract

The academic article aims to explain about Buddhist ethics in communication and the contribution of Buddhist ethics to improve the social worker's communication skill. Communication can help individuals and groups to conduct a dialogue with one another effectively. Right speech is the noble way of communication that we maintain and avoid language that could evoke a defensive or aggressive reaction that we take care of four components: observations, feelings, needs, and requests. Different levels of communication that result in dialogue in different walks of social life are the basis of a democratic polity. Communication skill is one of the vital skills for all social workers. One path mentioned in the Eightfold Path is Right Speech or Sammavaca. It is the asset of outward communication or use in the case of addressing someone. The Buddha was aware of the power and function of speech in creating or losing such discursive power.

**Keywords:** Buddhist Ethics; Communication Skill, Social Workers.

## Introduction

It is a well-known fact that man is a social animal in many senses, political, economical, cultural and communicative sense, for instance. When it comes to communicative sense, while living as a member of society, he himself intentionally communicates what he really wants and what he does not really want to others. It can be claimed that the communication becomes inseparable part of man's life. At the present time, man's communication has been being advanced through the most effective means provided by the miracle of science and technology such as the highest speed internet. Man in the present society can communicate faster than the past by the help of the mentioned technology (Phramaha Pornchai Sripakdee,2017: 155). Communication is defined as the process by which thoughts or feelings are conveyed, either verbally, non-verbally, or virtually, across different persons, groups or systems. According to Ellis and McClintock (1990) communication is described as a linear, one-way process in which a sender intentionally transmits a message to a receiver, which should be guided by the intent to ensure comprehension. Trevithick (2005) added that communication could be tied to all ways through which knowledge is transmitted and received. In explaining the context specific attributes of communication, Koprowska (2010) averred that communication is contextual and should align with the gender, cultural, social, knowledge base, occupational, and age peculiarities of people. Summarily, communication is the process of sharing information,

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\* Received: July 30, 2022; Revised: August 25, 2022; Accepted: December 31, 2022

thoughts and feelings between people through speaking, writing or paralanguage. In the context of social work, effective communication follows through facilitating a common understanding, changing behaviors and acquiring information. Good communication as a social worker requires the expertise to be both sensitive and understanding of clients' situation in order to build rapport with the client, with the purpose of charting treatment pathways, and eventually fostering desired change (Trevethick, 2008). Communication in social work is vital to engaging clients (individuals, groups and communities), himself/herself (intrapersonal communication), colleagues, and other professionals, in the context of interventions and helping relationships (Shaw, 2005).

Human communication has been widened and intensified through different forms of mass media. We expect that the way of human communication will change and we can create a peaceful and harmonized world through compassionate ways of interpersonal and other levels of communication. Different levels of communication that result in dialogue in different walks of social life are the basis of a democratic polity. Means of mass media, right from the traditional to the new media outlets, are being shaped not only by the lifestyle of the general public but also in the ways of interpersonal communication. Contents of mass media have been creating a vast range of impact over public life and communication patterns(Kundan Aryal, 2020:64). In order to successfully communicate something as such, ethics concerning any kinds of communication should be taken into a critical examination what kind of speech one should speak out, what kind of speech one should not speak out. Social work deals with both simple and complex problems troubling the welfare and well-being of people. Understanding these problems takes a great deal of communication. This is why communication in social work is central to effective practice. Such communication measures include, oral, non-verbal or paralanguage, and virtual (ICT-based) communication (Trevithick, 2005). All of these measures apply to social work intervention. Social workers aim to improve people's lives by helping with social and interpersonal difficulties, promoting human rights and wellbeing. Social workers protect children and adults with support needs from harm.

## **Communication Skill of Social Workers:**

Social work is a profession in which trained professionals are devoted to helping vulnerable people and communities work through challenges they face in everyday life. Social workers practice in a wide variety of settings, united in their commitment to advocating for and improving the lives of individuals, families, groups and societies. Social work is a dynamic and demanding profession that requires a variety of skills and qualities. Whether these skills are innate or acquired, success in the field requires social workers to continually develop them throughout their career. Communication skill is one of the vital skills for all social workers. Basically, communication in social work is typified into verbal communication, non-verbal communication or paralanguage, and written communication. The fourth which should be considered is the virtual communication that occurs across the internet and wireless space. Communication – both verbal and non-verbal – is a vital skill for social workers. The ability to communicate clearly with a wide range of people is essential. It is the duty of social workers to advocate for their clients in order to do this, social workers must understand the client's needs. In addition to being cognizant of body language and other

non-verbal cues, this means communicating appropriately and effectively with clients regardless of cultural background, age, gender, literacy skill level or disability. Social workers must also communicate with care providers, colleagues, and agencies, and must document and report information in a clear manner(School of Social Work, 2021). According to Engelbrecht, L. K. (1999), there are different types of communication which a social work practitioner uses, and should gain mastery over. They are; 1) Intrapersonal communication: to communicate with yourself, 2) Interpersonal communication: to communicate with one other (or more) person, 3) Small group communication: to communicate with people in a group situation so that everyone has the opportunity to participate, 4) Public communication: to communicate with a group who form an audience and who are too many to enable participation, 5) Written communication: to communicate in written form with familiar or unfamiliar people in a formal or informal manner, 6) Electronic communication: to communicate with people by means of the electronic media, for example, a radio, television, computer or smart device, 7) Communication through the use of mediators: to communicate with people by means of an interpreter, facilitator or any other representative Adler & Rodman (1994) and Devito (1997). As a social worker, effective communication is significant, because it helps to build a relationship between the social worker and the client. Social workers communicate with clients as well as other professionals to obtain essential information that is relevant to the client's needs. Various types of communication are pertinent to social work. Communication is not only speaking. It also involves listening skills, body language and gestures, being in control of emotions, and engaging virtually. The social worker must ensure that his or her communication processes with clients, be it an individual, group or community, must observe communication etiquettes across all kinds of communication platforms.

### **The Buddhist Ethics to Improve Communication Skill for Social Workers:**

Buddhism is one of the religions of the world that has had a profound impact on mankind. It has influenced religious, philosophical, moral, ethical, cultural and ethical thinking in very significant ways. For a religion to have that kind of impact, it possess very interesting approaches to the issue of human communication. The Buddha was a communicator par excellence; he was a supremely influential teacher, and that influence is largely attributable to his success as a communicator. The Buddha preached to the people in a language that was readily understandable. He paid great care and attention to the psychological background and perceivable position of his potential audiences. He structured his messages in a way that would readily appeal to the lay persons. From a communications viewpoint, the rhetorical strategies adopted by the Buddha in his teachings are multi-faceted and most fascinating and merit (Professor Wimal Dissanayake, 2014:227). Buddhist teachings on right speech and mindfulness make us fully aware of the content and aim of any communication which is key to meaningful conversation. Ideal communication ultimately depends more on our inner factors such as level of clarity and our qualities such as kindness, patience, courage, and balance. Likewise, Buddhist techniques of mindfulness and Sammavaca are the assets of outward communication or used in the case of addressing someone. The Buddha was aware of the power and function of speech in creating or losing such discursive power. When it comes to Buddhist ethics concerning main types of communication, there are many discourses given by the Buddha appearing in various Suttas,

but here it is focused on particular one, Abhayarājakumārasutta. In Majjhimanikāya, as it appeared when the Buddha had discussion with Prince Abhaya about what kind of speech he would utter, he said that:

“Whatever speech the Tathāgata knows to be not fact, not true, not connected with the goal, and that is not liked by others, disagreeable to them, that speech the Tathāgata does not utter. And whatever speech a Tathāgata knows to be fact, true, but not connected with the goal, and not liked by others, disagreeable to them, neither does the Tathāgata utter that speech. And whatever speech the Tathāgata knows to be fact, true, connected with the goal, but not liked by others, disagreeable to them, the Tathāgata is aware of the right time for explaining that speech. Whatever speech the Tathāgata knows to be not fact, not true, not connected with the goal, but that is liked by others, agreeable to them, that speech the Tathāgata does not utter.

And whatever speech the Tathāgata knows to be fact, true, but not connected with the goal, yet liked by others, agreeable to them, neither does the Tathāgata utter that speech. And whatever speech the Tathāgata knows to be fact, true, connected with the goal, and liked by others, agreeable to them, the Tathāgata is aware of the right time for explaining that speech”.

The Buddha was a supremely effective communicator who interacted with various types of people, educated and uneducated, pious and impious. The Buddha responded to questions of metaphysics, to unanswerable questions and profitless queries reflects his deep-seated ideas about verbal communication and rationality. With regard to questions and challenges about the nature of reality and truth, the Buddha adopted a four-fold method of approach. First, he saw certain questions as meriting categorical or direct explication. Second, there were those questions that demanded to be explained analytically. Third, there were questions that invited explication only after a counter-question was posed. Fourth, there were those questions that should be laid aside. The last mentioned questions were those that could not be meaningfully answered in terms of experience or those that had little relevance to the problematic issues countenanced by human beings. What this mode of responding to questions reflects is another facet of the Buddha's views on language, truth and reality and its implications for communication(Professor Wimal Dissanayake, 2014:230). The four noble truths are the foundation of Buddhist philosophy and practice. Among them, the last one leads human beings to refrain from doing the things that cause us to suffer. The Buddha prescribes the Eightfold Path to get rid of suffering. One path mentioned in the Eightfold Path is Right Speech. However, before discussing Right Speech, we need to understand the Four Noble Truths from the teachings of Buddha. The Buddha says that the world is full of suffering. The Four Noble Truths are: 1) the truth of suffering, 2) the truth of the cause of suffering, 3) truth of the cessation of suffering, and 4) the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The Buddha teaches that there are four kinds of conversation: “The truth at an appropriate time; the truth at an inappropriate time; untruth at an appropriate time; untruth at an inappropriate time.” Only the first is skillful. The Patimokkha under Vinaya Pitaka of Tripitaka defines right speech or Sammavaca as abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech and idle chatter. Such acts of speech come under the definition of Right Speech (Samma vaca) by access to insight. Social work and Buddhism principles and philosophy, social welfare is considered as the work done in same forms intended for the benefits of humankind. Such work ranges from simple individual acts of charity, teaching and training to organized services in different forms for the betterment of the community, which

are also common areas of social work intervention(Kundan Aryal,2020: 64-65). In social work values and Buddhism, both teach the individuals to understand their responsibility towards oneself, the family, and the society. Buddhism and social work values caution the social workers to seek to facilitate needed assistance and support of communities, individuals and societies. It may promote social change, development, cohesion, and empowerment. Underpinned by theories of social sciences and guided by principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. A practicing professional with a degree in social work is called a social worker.

## **Conclusion:**

Buddhist ethics has flourished in light of canonical Buddhist aspects of the compassionate. Communication is the method that all professionals use to explain their way of performance. Buddhist ethic has the dimensions on human communication such as mindfulness, compassion, truthfulness and an absence of harshness. Buddhism is about accepting change, creating harmony, and treating all people with dignity and respect. As a social worker, effective communication is significant, because it helps to build a relationship between the social worker and the clients. Social workers communicate with clients as well as other professionals to obtain essential information that is relevant to the client's needs. Buddhist ethics for communication aim to support or help a person facing a problem arising from confused and negative states of mind in order to be happiness and good fortune arising from peaceful and positive states of mind. Social work has become a part and parcel of the Socially Engaged Buddhism. The aim of Buddhism is like the social work philosophy as help them to help themselves. The Buddha prescribes the Eightfold Path to get rid of suffering. One path mentioned in the Eightfold Path is Right Speech or Sammavaca. It is the asset of outward communication or used in the case of addressing someone. The Buddha was aware of the power and function of speech in creating or losing such discursive power. One positive practice of Sammavaca or Right speech is called rejoicing in merits. We take time to notice the good qualities of the people around us and try to find an opportunity to let them know what we appreciate about them. It might be congratulating someone on handling well a difficult situation at work or thanking them for helping out in some way.

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