

The World Buddhist University Sunday Forum

Happy Life



Speaker : Dr. Somboon Duangsamosorn
Moderator Dr. Chris A. Stanford
Rapporteur Mrs. Suttinee Yavaprapas

On the First Sunday of the Month of February, Sunday, 1 February, 2552 (2009) between 12:00 – 13.30, Dr. Somboon Duangsamosorn was the guest speaker of the Buddhist Forum talking on Happy Life. Dr. Somboon Duangsamosorn is a native of Ratchaburi Province. He received his initial education in the monkhood leading to a Certificate of the Highest Grade of Buddhist Studies and Grade 5 of the Study of Pali Language. Simultaneously, he obtained the Mathayom 8 Certificate in secular education and consequently studied Political Science leading to a Doctorate Degree in Political Science. His working experience includes teacher of Buddhist Studies and Pali Language, and teacher of English and Thai Studies. He also taught Tourism, and initiated a very successful Professional Tour Guide Training Program and the Master of Arts in Tourism Management Program offered at Assumption University. During his service at Assumption University he held the positions of Director of the Office of Thai Art and Culture and was Assistant Dean of the ABAC Graduate School of Tourism Management. After a tenure of over three years as Rector of International Buddhist College in Songkhla Province, he is now Honorary Rector of the college.

In continuity of the Gandhian Philosophy, "To be happy is simple, but to be simple is hard," as introduced to the audience on Sunday, November 2, 2008, the Dhamma Talk on Happy Life touched in more detail on the Gandhian Philosophy and Lord Buddha's Preaching, both as a means, and an end to lead a happy life. Really speaking, to be simple is hard which is posing itself as a problem, or a hindrance to a happy life. This problem points to another Gandhian Philosophy as a solution and that is, "Simple Living and High Thinking." The process of high thinking in the Preaching of Lord Buddha was presented as an effective way to live a Happy Life.

At the outset, Dr. Somboon Duangsamosorn pointed out that simple living has to be encouraged and developed by high thinking in the mind as mind is that element that thinks. But what do we understand by High Thinking in the Buddhist way? All physical and verbal actions result from the mind according to that what the mind thinks and makes a decision. According to the Dhammapada, this is because "all mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner, they have mind as their chief, they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with an evil mind and *dukkha*" (Unhappiness) follows him as the wheel follows the hoof prints of the ox that draws the cart." (Dhammapada, p.1) Likewise, "if one speaks or acts with a pure mind *sukha*" (Happiness) follows him like a shadow that never leaves him." (Dhammapada,

p.2) In that case the mind must be free from and must not be contaminated with thinking about:

- Covetousness/avarice
- Illwill (*byapada*)/ Retaliation
- False view, wrong view, or wrong theory (*Mijchatthitthi*)

These terms have been translated into English and further defined by the Buddhist scholar P.A. Payutto in his dictionary of Buddhism from which I am quoting here. Most importantly, the mind must be free from ignorance:

- Ignorance of suffering
- Ignorance of causes of suffering
- Ignorance of cessation of suffering
- Ignorance of the path that leads to cessation of suffering

As well as:

Ignorance of the past

- Ignorance of the future
- Ignorance of states dependently
Originated according to specific
conditionality

The path that leads to cessation of suffering is known as the Eightfold Noble Path. There are eight elements that can be practiced in the given order or by concentrating on one particular concept at a time. They are:

1. Right View
2. Right Thought
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

A person's well trained mind that consists of goodwill normally brings forth happiness as resulted from his speech and action to him the well-trained mind practically commands to speak:

- The Truth
- Pleasant and encouraging words
- Polite and friendly words
- Positive and constructive words

The well-trained mind prevents sinful deeds as follows:

- Killing
- Stealing, theft, robbery, etc
- Adultery
- Consumption of intoxicants

Actually, simple living is the same as living in the good order of morality which is living in the *sila* or *sheela*, the Five Precepts in the strict sense.

He then presented some folk stories that aim to demonstrate people's reactions to verbal actions, as we may call them, and show the physical actions that follow:

1. A butcher sat on his bullock cart fully loaded with beef for supply to a community market about 30 kilometres away. While on the way, three men who looked weary and exhausted waved their hands to stop the bullock cart. The first man uttered these words. "Hey! you, butcher fellow, don't be too stingy. I have not eaten anything for three days. Now I am very hungry. You must give me some beef and if you don't, you will

go to hell.” The butcher thought, this man has spoken harsh words that are unpleasant to hear and hard to digest. Therefore he cut a piece from a tough part with connected tissue of the beef and threw it to him. The second man said, “Oh, father, I am very hungry for I have been without food for three days. So please give me some beef. The butcher thought, the word ‘Father’ is pleasant as it indicates the mental relation between father and son. It really touched his heart; therefore he cut a piece from the heart and handed it to the man. The third man said, “Oh, my friend, I am very tired because on the long way I have not gotten anything at all to eat. So, kindly give me some meat for my survival to which I will be highly grateful.” The butcher thought, the word ‘Friend’ really means friendship which is a great institute of mankind that makes the world a more pleasant place to live in. Then he cut a piece from the best part of the beef that is undercut and gently presented it to him.

2. A millionaire who was bald but loved to be flattered which made him happy, did not like such words as ‘clean, clear and shiny, glittering and polished’ to be heard around him. He owned a strong and healthy ox of which he was extremely possessive. He would never agree to sell it although he was offered a lot of money for the animal. One day in the afternoon, a clever young man came and said, “Oh, Multimillionaire with lovely thick hair on the head! For how much will you sell your ox to me?” “Oh, you said the words that made me pleased, take the ox for free. It’s now yours,” answered the millionaire. The young man thanked him and quickly took the ox by the rope and started off. After he had left and reached a spot not very far from the millionaire’s house, another man came by and asked, “Where and how did you get this nice ox?” The young man replied, “I got it free of charge from that bald millionaire. His voice rang quite loud in his joy and the word “bald” could be heard by the rich man who was quite angry and grabbed a goad stick and furiously ran after the young man. He was harboring the thought to hit, prick and poke the young man with the goad. While he was drawing near, the young man turned round and cried loudly, “Oh, Multimillionaire with thick and smart looking hair on the head, why are you running after me?” “Oh, my dear boy,” came the answer, “this ox is quite wild. I have brought to you this goad to keep him under control.”

3. A 25-year-old farmer left his house early morning every day with a couple of bulls and a plough to work in his rice field about four kilometres from his home. At 12 o’clock, his 22-year-old wife brought lunch for him regularly and that went on for months. Later on, he noticed that she was often late and kept him waiting hungrily. A neighbour told him about his wife’s infidelity with a young man about her own age. A week later, he told his wife that he would leave much earlier than usual as he would have a lot of work in the field. So, he left about 5 a.m. and went out to hide himself on a high branch covered by thick green leaves of a mango tree that was surrounded by many bushes, as informed by the neighbour, and in an isolated area. At about 8 a.m. his wife appeared with her lover. Both proceeded to a spot under the mango tree. The spot under the tree was covered with soft branches and leaves that served like a comfortable mattress. The lady, though on her back, could not see her husband as her sight was obstructed by thick leaves. The husband however could see everything and could no longer tolerate the love scene. So he pitched a long stick of thornless bamboo with a sharply pointed end to the ground, which pierced the adulterous couple. And so the lovers were killed.

In order to live our life in an atmosphere of Simple Living but High Thinking of the Gandhian Philosophy and the Preaching of Lord Buddha, we are advised to select and follow the principles as presented and in addition to those here are some more practical rules conducive to a Happy, Healthy and Long Life.

1. To eat hygienically
2. To be moderate with suitable and favourable things
3. To eat properly cooked food and ripe fruits, chewing properly to help digestion
4. To be honest with management of time

5. To practice Brahmajariya, with suitable sexual behaviour and with realistic not idealistic approach
6. To be morally upright, to conduct oneself according to Sheela -5-8-10-227
7. To be associated with good friends (Kalayanamittata)

According to the late Most Venerable Panyananda Bhikkhu, Thailand's highly respected monk, in our life we must learn every day; we learn and practice Dhamma by keeping in touch with Dhamma everyday. He often spoke of the need to "polish" the Dhamma in order to "keep it shining." Likewise, the well known educator, Rev. Brother Dr. Bancha Saenghiran, Rector of Assumption University, in his speeches, always advises the faculty members that "the appropriate process of learning is from information, that is developed to knowledge, and finally from knowledge to wisdom." It is possible to go one step further and say from wisdom to enlightenment to lead a happy life and beyond respectively.

When the floor was open, comments were made on a psychological dimension concerning a lot of emphasis on the negative. Perhaps in place of focusing on the "Don't do this," we should focus on the awareness of the beneficial. Dr. Suthira Duangsamorn added that the very important element in Buddhism is also the psychological part. Buddhism explains clearly deep into the "Chitta" Every moment, there is some kind of experience that we must examine. To really understand the "Chitta", the steps of the eightfold noble path must be practiced one after the other. Each time we should think "What is that that comes to us?" The Chitta is very difficult to follow. We should gradually increase our awareness of everything that happens around us. And that is the essence of Buddhism.

In relation to the sinful deeds, a question was pinpointed on the distinction between "adultery" and "lust". Adultery seems to be important in the Dharma. Yet, lust is a natural reaction like hunger. We all get hungry when we are deprived of food. Two issues were discussed. One is the overarched obligation for us to train our mind and the extent to which any motion of which tends to interfere with that. The other one is our overarched obligation in our relationship with ourselves and other people not to engage an activity which causes harms and damages to ourselves or other people.

Two words, "lust" and "passion" were explained by Dr. Somboon. There are two kinds of lust : Bhavatanha or lust that we would like to be something and Vibhavatanha or lust that we would not want to be anything. As for passion, it is called "raga" in Pali. It indicates emotion or feelings/mood to have sexual relations. If it is done in the right way, it produces happiness. On the contrary, if it is done by force, it produces unhappiness and suffering. Lust in economic terms is unlimited and political philosophy of Machiavelli might make it right. In living a happy life, we are encouraged to practice Brahmajariya. Ideally and realistically, the practice of Chamlong Srimuang and his wife abstaining from physical contact is reminded of the Gandhian Philosophy.



