

Renunciation

as edited by

David Dale Holmes

In *The Buddha And His Teachings* (1998) concerning the perfections (*pāramī*) of a Bodhisatta, Narada Maha Thera translates and narrates what the Buddha said about the value of **renunciation** (*nekkhamma*):

Pāramī means that which enables one to go to the Further Shore.

Pāramī are those virtues which are cultivated with compassion, guided by reason, uninfluenced by selfish motives and unsullied by misbelief and all feelings of self-conceit.

The actions of a Bodhisatta are absolutely selfless, being prompted solely by compassion towards all beings. so boundless is his love and so pervasive is his infinite compassion that unceasingly throughout the series of his countless lives he strives to diminish suffering, to elevate to greater honour the poor and the lowly, and to help the needy in every possible way. He seeks no delight in self-indulgence while his less fortunate brethren and sisters are steeped in misery.

To alleviate suffering he would not hesitate to sacrifice his most cherished possessions – not excepting life itself as illustrated in the story in the Vyāghri-Jātaka. With heart full of compassion he works for the weal and happiness of all beings; though always guided by reason. He is generously endowed with all the essential qualities of both head and heart in their full development which are dedicated to the service of the world at large. (Narada 459)

In serving others a Bodhisatta is not actuated by a desire for power or worldly possessions. Knowing as he does that fame comes unsought to him who is worthy of it, why should he pursue it? He is

completely altruistic in his motives and egoism plays no part in his disinterested activities. (Narada 460)

A Bodhisatta is keen to exhibit enthusiasm towards nekkhamma (renunciation), for by nature he is a lover of solitude. Nekkhamma implies both renunciation of worldly pleasures by adopting the ascetic life and the temporary inhibition of Hindrances (Nivarana) by Jhānas (Ecstasies).

A Bodhisatta is neither selfish nor self-possessive but is selfless in his activities. He is ever ready to sacrifice his happiness for the sake of others. Though he may sit in the lap of luxury, immersed in worldly pleasures, he may comprehend their transitoriness and the value of renunciation.

Realizing thus the vanity of fleeting material pleasures, he voluntarily leaves his earthly possessions, and donning the simple ascetic garb, tries to lead the Holy Life in all its purity.

“Here he practices the higher morality to such an extent that he becomes practically selfless in all his actions. No inducement whether fame, wealth, honour, or worldly gain, could induce him to do anything contrary to his principles.

Sometimes, the first grey hair, as in the case of the Makhādeva Jātaka (No. 9), is alone a sufficient call to a Bodhisatta to abandon the uncongenial atmosphere of the palace for the independent solitary life of a hermit. At times a dew-drop or a withered leaf may induce him to adopt the ascetic life.

Venerable Narada Maha Thera does, however, make the point that: *As a rule, the practice of renunciation is not [always] observed by a Bodhisatta. In the Kusa Jātaka (No. 53 1), for instance, the Bodhisatta was subjected to much humiliation owing to his unrestrained desire to win the hand of the beautiful princess Pabhāvati.*

Again in the Darīmukha Jātaka (No. 373) it is mentioned that a

Pacceka Buddha, quondam friend of the Bodhisatta, approached him and said:

*Pleasures of sense are but morass and mire,
The triply-rooted terror them I call.
Vapour and dust I have proclaimed them, Sire,
Become a brother and forsake them all.”*

And the [not yet perfect] Bodhsatta promptly replied:

*Infatuate, bound and deeply stained am I,
Brahmin, with pleasures, fearful, they may be.
But I love life, and cannot them deny;
Good works I undertake continually.*

The point here is that in order to achieve perfection we must strive diligently to eradicate unwholesome attachment to the senses and and moral imperfections.

Venerable Narada continues:

In the period of a Buddhaless Cycle, a Bodhisatta would adopt the life of an ascetic and lead the holy celibate life in solitude. If born in a Buddha Cycle, he would lead the life of a Bhikkhu in strict accordance with the rules that pertain thereto. An ideal Bhikkhu who leads an exemplary life is a blessing to himself and others. He teaches both by example and by precept. (Narada 474)

Within he is pure, without he purifies. He is very strenuous in working for his inner spiritual development, catering at the same time for the spiritual needs of those lesser brethren and sisters. He is no burden to society because he gives no trouble to any. He is like

the bee that extracts honey from the flower without damaging it. He possesses no property for he has renounced everything worldly. His needs are few, and contentment is his wealth. He repents not for the past, nor is he worried about the future. He lives in the present, free from all responsibilities and trammels of the world. He is ready to wander wherever he chooses for the good and happiness of others, without clinging to any abode. Under all vicissitudes of life he maintains a balanced mind, His free services are always at the disposal of others. Non-Buddhist ascetics are invariably called Paribbā-jakas, Ajīvakas Sanyāsins, etc. Bhikkhu (Sanskrit, Bhikshu) has now become exclusively Buddhistic.

The rules laid down for a Bhikkhu do not permit him to beg anything from another. He may accept the four requisites – robes, alms, lodging, medicine – presented to him. If in need of any requisite, he is allowed to ask it from his parents, close relatives, or from professed supporters.

A Bhikkhu is not bound to life-long vows. Of his own accord he enters the Order in order to lead the Holy Life until he chooses to leave it. Once he dons the yellow robe, the emblem of Arahants, he is bound to observe the rules that pertain thereto. To lead a life of perfect purity and selfless service, to control and purify the mind with ease, to see things as they truly are, to think rightly and deeply, to develop the higher nature of man, to appreciate fully the higher spiritual values, no other mode of life affords such facilities and such great opportunities as the life of a Bhikkhu.

A Bhikkhu may lead either a contemplative or a studious life. The former is more in harmony with the ideal of a Bhikkhu, for the ultimate object in donning the yellow robe, the emblem of sanctity and humility, is to eradicate passions and realize Nibbāna.

(Narada 475-476)

Although a Bodhisatta has not yet become an Arahant, he is striving

to eradicate impurities on the path to perfection.

Reference

Narada Maha Thera. 1998. *The Buddha and His Teachings*.
Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation.