



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

EXPLORING GRATITUDE IN BUDDHISM AS AN INSPIRATIONAL MORAL VALUE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Ven. Nguyen Quoc Hai¹, Dr. Chandrashekhar Paswan²

¹ Ph.D. Research Scholar, School of Buddhist Studies & Civilization, Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, UP. 201312, India.,

² Under Supervision, Head of School of Buddhist Studies & Civilization, Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, UP. 201312, India.

Abstract: In today's society, gratitude is a well-established tradition that has been left by the ancestors who lived before us. Gratitude always carries a deep human value as it is the heart of human values that we must follow to make a harmonious human society. Gratitude is considered a feeling of appreciation a person receives from others, which could have been material or immaterial. Regardless of religious faith, gratitude is regarded as a significant human attribute. People acknowledge the goodness in their lives with gratitude, which can also be cultivated by continuously practicing it. Moreover, as per the Buddha's teachings, gratitude is considered the spiritual practice to attain the ultimate goal of human life and a manifestation of loyalty and is referred to as a sense of affection or a feeling that an act of kindness should be positively responded to by others.

In this paper, the researcher aims to emphasize the Buddhist perspective of gratitude as a noble virtue in contemporary society to encourage intellectual and personal exploration of this new fertility field of study.

Keywords: Gratitude, Buddhism, Four Debts of Gratitude, Moral Value.

I. Introduction

In today's society, gratitude is the most eminent of the high moral traits essential for a human being. It measures an individual's ethical standards or ideals relative to those of human society. Gratitude is not just a word but must be reflected in the actions to make it truly meaningful. Everyone needs to be aware of this in order to build a better future together.

Gratitude is considered a feeling of appreciation from others that could have been material or immaterial. Regardless of religious faith, gratitude is regarded as a significant human attribute. The practice of gratitude helps people to acknowledge the goodness in their lives, which can also be cultivated by continuously practicing it. Moreover, as per the Buddha's teachings, gratitude is considered the spiritual practice to attain the ultimate goal of human life.

Buddhism is a religion with the obvious principles of gratitude and appreciation. As we practice the teachings of the Buddha, we realize that all life and phenomena in the universe are everlasting and related. Therefore, human beings should be grateful to each other. However, no one can remember all the favors they have received from others and show their gratitude to every other living being. As far as can be seen, gratitude is a moral that should be held and acted on well and for the good of the community. By being grateful, we hope to lead people to happiness and well-being, unite them, and make society more peaceful. This is how we show all living things how grateful we are. Moreover, gratitude can be described as both a pro-social and spiritual behaviour that develops forgiveness, well-being, and happiness for other human beings.

Gratitude, as regards social aspects, cannot be underestimated. Developing gratitude for one's nation or culture does not imply embracing those in authority unquestioningly. Instead, it means feeling immense compassion for one's nation and the people who live there and courageously trying to bring peace and prosperity to everyone. Moreover, gratitude can be described as both a pro-social and spiritual behavior that develops forgiveness, well-being and happiness for other human beings.

In particular, in this paper, the researcher aims to emphasize the Buddhist perspective of gratitude as an inspirational moral value in contemporary society to encourage intellectual and personal exploration of this new fertility field of study.

II. The Meaning of Gratitude

Most people instinctively understand gratitude, but it can be surprisingly difficult to define. Gratitude, it turns out, may signify many things to various individuals in various settings. Nonetheless, in order to study thankfulness scientifically, scholars have established some frameworks for conceiving it.

Gratitude is difficult to categorize. It has been defined as a feeling, attitude, moral virtue, habit, personality feature, or coping reaction. The word gratitude derives from the Latin term *Gratia* that meaning: kindness, thankfulness, or grace. This Latin root's derivatives "*had to do with compassion, generosity, presents, the joy of giving and receiving, or gaining something for nothing*" (Pruyser, 1976). The object of gratitude is other-directed persons and impersonal (nature) or nonhuman sources. Although a range

of life situations can generate sentiments of appreciation, gratitude often arises from the impression of a favourable personal outcome, not necessarily merited or earned, as a result of the acts of another person.

Gratitude is called *Kataññutā* in Pāli, and is generally coupled with *Katavedi*. In this combined form, *Kataññutā* is the feeling of thankfulness for benefits received or for kindness rendered, whereas *Katavedi* is the expression or manifestation of this feeling through words and deeds. Standing alone, *Kataññutā* is understood to cover both meanings.

The word *Kataññutā* consists of two parts: *kata*, which means what has been done, especially done to oneself and *aññutā*, which means knowing or recognizing. So, *Kataññutā* means knowing, recognizing or acknowledging what has been done by others for one's benefit, prosperity, success and happiness. Hence, the connotation of the Pāli word is rather different from its English equivalent. The connotation of the English gratitude is more emotional but the connotation of *Kataññutā* is more intellectual.

In Sanskrit, the word Gratitude is *Kṛtajña*, formed from the word *Kṛta* means cultivated and the root *jña* refers to a state of consciousness. Therefore, *Kṛtajña* references a state which is consciously created or chosen. It is the result of being fully present, the realization and acknowledgment of a particular moment in time.

In psychological parlance, gratitude is the positive recognition of the benefits received. Gratitude has been defined as "an estimate of gain coupled with the judgment that someone else is responsible for that gain" (Solomon, 1977). Gratitude has been said to represent "an attitude toward the giver, and an attitude toward the gift, a determination to use it well, to employ it imaginatively and inventively in accordance with the giver's intention" (Harned, 1997). Gratitude is an emotion, the core of which is pleasant feelings about the benefit received. At the cornerstone of gratitude is the notion of undeserved merit. The grateful person recognizes that he or she did nothing to deserve the gift or benefit; it was freely bestowed. This core feature is reflected in one definition of gratitude as "the willingness to recognize the unearned increments of value in one's experience" (Bertocci & Millard, 1963). The benefit, gift, or personal gain might be material or nonmaterial. Gratitude is other-directed its objects include persons, as well as nonhuman intentional agents (God, animals, the cosmos). It is important that gratitude has a positive valence: It feels good. Robert C. Solomon described it as "intrinsically self-esteeming" (Solomon, 1977).

The researcher would like to define appreciation in a much broader way so that it may better serve our aims. A broad sense of thanks or appreciation is represented by the act of appreciating what is worthwhile and relevant to oneself, gratitude is the appreciation of such things.

III. How to Practice Gratitude in Modern Times

Practicing gratitude does not mean denying life's problems. We live in difficult times, and you have surely faced several problems, doubts, and disappointments in your own life. Gratitude also does not contradict the Buddha's teaching on death: Death is certain; your death is certain; the time of death is uncertain; the time of your death is uncertain. Instead, gratitude practice is beneficial because it changes the mind, allowing you to live or, to put it another way, to die into life. The cure to thoughts of shortage and loss is easy access to life's joys and wonders. It enables you to face life's challenges with an open heart. The awareness you receive from practicing thankfulness frees you from becoming lost or connected with either the terrible or positive parts of life, allowing you to encounter life as it arises in each moment simply.

Recognizing appreciation's obligations represents the Buddhist ethos of fostering the richest possible humanity while returning gratitude is the hallmark of a life of knowledge that results from defeating fundamental ignorance. As a result, real Buddhist practitioners' lives are always illuminated by an inner light of appreciation and thankfulness.

According to the Buddha, there are Four Debts of Gratitude such as the following:

1. Gratitude to One's Parents
2. Gratitude to One's Teachers
3. Gratitude to One's Country and Society
4. Gratitude to The Three Treasures

III.1 Gratitude to One's Parents

The first gratitude in Buddhism is having an appreciation for our parents for giving us the gift of life with their unconditional care and love throughout our lives. In the *Katannu Sutta*, (*Gratitude, AN 2.31-32*), The Buddha declared:

"I tell you, monks, there are two people who are not easy to repay. Which two? Your mother & father... Why is that? Mother & father do much for their children. They care for them, they nourish them, they introduce them to this world."

Children should be grateful to their parents. If the parents commit wrongful acts the children should prevent them from continuing. They should encourage parents to perform wholesome acts. If the parents do not have faith the children should do what is necessary to establish them in faith. If the parents are unethical, the children should advise them to follow moral principles. If the parents do not learn the good teaching children should provide them with opportunities to do so. If the parents are not generous, the children should encourage them to be generous. If parents do not meditate to improve their wisdom the children should encourage them to meditate. If the parents are treading the right path grateful children follow their example. In this way, children show their gratitude to their parents in a most pragmatic manner in their daily life.

In many discourses, the Buddha urged sentient beings to be mindful of the gratitude of others and to repay it. The Buddha also expounded Abhidhamma to Santussita Deva that he repaid the gratitude to Mother Santussita Deva in payment of the gratitude. The Buddha also preached that he could accomplish what his father, King Suddhodana, established in Arahattaphala when he passed away. One should, therefore, dwell in accordance with the Buddha's auspicious dhammas while seeking the gratitude of others and performing favors for them.

According to the Buddha's teaching in *Sigalaka Sutta* (*Advice to Lay People*), in the relationship between parents and children denoted under the form of paying home in the East, a child should take care of and respect one's parent by doing five following obligations:

- (1) Supporting the parents,
- (2) Carrying out the parents' duties,
- (3) Upholding family traditions and lineage,
- (4) Acting in such a way as to be worthy of their inheritance,
- (5) Offering alms in honor of their departed relatives.

The Buddha advised the children not to do any evil things for their parents because such unwholesome things bring harm to themselves. At the same time, their parents should also avoid the unwholesome path and enter the righteous path. In other words, gratitude in Buddhism is not only to provide parents with all material needs but also to place the goal towards the moral and intellectual life of oneself and one's parents. The facts, according to the Buddha's teaching in that, besides taking care of and supporting parents materially, the children should direct their parents to develop their spiritual life by guiding them to cultivate and uphold virtues of faith, morality, charity and wisdom. In other words, in mental support, a child needs to build trust in one's parents, guide them to avoid bad actions and do good deeds, give up the evil of greed, practice giving and especially elude ignorance to attain wisdom. Only at that time, one can repay the gratitude of one's parents.

Hence, it can be said that repaying perfect gratitude to one's parents both physically and mentally is really good Dhamma and a wholesome cause for parents and children to walk together on the right path, peace and happiness under the Buddha's thought.

III.2 Gratitude to One's Teachers

Our teachers surround us. The individuals who educated and taught you transferred secular and Dharma knowledge and gave us stable wings to fly far and far in today's multicultural world.

The Buddha has advised us to be grateful to our teachers both those who show us the way to material success and those who guide us on the spiritual path. We are advised to show great thankfulness to our spiritual teachers because it is they who teach us how to eliminate suffering without expecting any material benefit from us in return. The students, therefore, should be obedient to their teachers, leading their spiritual life strictly in accordance with the moral and ethical guidelines they prescribe. They should attend to all their teachers' needs and create a peaceful atmosphere for the teachers to continue their spiritual practice smoothly. Monks should be grateful to their lay supporters always remembering that they are dependent upon them for support. Buddha has advised Bhikkhus to show their gratitude to lay supporters by guiding them through the Dhamma and directing them to the right path if they go astray. The bhikkhus should preach the Dhamma to them whenever opportune, after meals, when they are sick and distressed, at grief-stricken moments, as well as when they are healthy and mindful. While living an exemplary life the monks should give their lay supporters the gift of the Dhamma which excels all other gifts.

In other words, a disciple who wants to repay the teacher's kindness and altruism must try to study and follow the morals and ethics of the teacher's teachings. Only then can we spread the good influence of the lessons to many people.

III.3 Gratitude to One's Country and Society

We owe gratitude to our country and society because it helps us to acquire the necessities we need for our daily lives. While enjoying our land, and its produce, we feel we have to defend our country, if we want our life to be happy and our race to survive. Let us contribute to the safeguarding of our fatherland and make it strong and prosperous. Let us try to liberate it from foreign dominations. We are safe only when our country is strong and wealthy.

The national heroes who have contributed to the nation's construction and defense from ancient times to the present day. Therefore, we should show gratitude to our nation by being good citizens and contributing to making the country rich and strong. Support relief and charity work to help ease the suffering of our people. When foreign countries invade the country, unless you are a monk, you must not violate the precepts of killing and must join the army to fight the enemy to protect the country and your people.

Let us try our best and dedicate ourselves to our country according to our ability and strength. In case we have no talent to assume important responsibilities or no opportunity to help our country, let us try to avoid doing wrong things that may hurt it and we should never help the enemy in harming our native land.

Similarly, for our peaceful co-existence in society, we should be thankful to our relatives, friends, employers, helpers, and neighbours. Since gratefulness brings peace and happiness the Buddha advised us to cultivate it. "May you all be thankful and live long in heaven", says the Buddha. The thankful person lives happily and peacefully in this present life and goes to heaven after death. Peace and happiness are heavenly blessings that the thankful person enjoys in this life itself. Therefore, thankfulness is a source of heavenly bliss.

III.4 Gratitude to the Three Treasures

The Three Treasures are:

- The Buddha: The fully Enlightened One, the founder of Buddhism, guides the way to the end of suffering, obtaining peace, joy, and happiness to benefit all living beings all over the planet.
- The Dhamma: The teachings of the Buddha, the middle path with the eightfold path of practical cultivation in the present, including virtue, meditation, and wisdom.
- The Sangha: The Buddhist Community, the Community of Monks and Nuns. In the modern traditions, the word Sangha includes lay people. The Sangha upholds, practices and spreads the Buddha's teachings.

Man is born and brought up thanks to his ancestors and parents and he owes his existence to his country; that is the physical aspect of life. In the spiritual field, man needs the help of Buddha, the Teachings of Buddhism and the Priests to open his mind. Buddha is the most flawless and perfect creature who is infinitely altruistic and determined to save living creatures from misfortune and suffering. That is why He bequeathed His Teachings to the Priests to disseminate them throughout the world. The Priests are none but Buddha's great disciples. As Buddha always guides and saves human beings from bewilderment and suffering, we must respect Him, we must believe and have confidence in His world-salvation work and comply with His Teachings conveyed to us by the Priests. Our ancestors had known the miracle, the deep love of Buddha towards human beings. They respected and venerated Buddha, acted in compliance with His Teachings and have cultivated and strengthened our religion to expand it, thus building a castle of peerless and unparalleled virtue bequeathed to posterity.

The lay people should support the Sangha, the community of monks and nuns, by providing the monks and nuns with their material requisites, such as food, robes, shelter, and medicine. The dispensation of the Buddha thrives through their mutual support. Reciprocity in exchanging thankfulness is the best support and encouragement for both. Therefore, the whole relationship between the bhikkhus and laypeople rests on their mutual gratefulness.

Follow the Buddha's shining example and strive to practice to be worthy of being a child of Buddha. As the Buddha said: "Whoever does my teachings best is the one who respects me the most." This is the best way to be grateful for the Three Treasures.

IV. Conclusion

Gratitude may be broadly defined as appreciating what is valuable and meaningful to oneself. Gratitude, then, is at the root of Buddhist practice. Gratitude always carries a deep human value. It is the heart of human values that we must follow to create a harmonious society because not only is gratitude the greatest of the virtues, but it is also the parent of all others.

Those with a sense of appreciation and gratitude are loved and trusted by everyone and lead lives of tremendous fulfillment and satisfaction. Based on Buddhist teachings, it is clear that the inner radiance of those who embody true gratitude will imbue their lives with indestructible good fortune and benefit throughout the three existences.

Of course, it's a rare person who will take this route to freedom, but that doesn't lessen its value or relevance. As with gratitude and benefaction, it's an opportunity to become rare and distinctive that's open to anyone with the discernment to appreciate it and the determination to become truly kind and debt-free.

To benefit everyone, we have many wholesome conditions to study, understand, practice, and apply the meanings of gratitude into our daily lives today. We encourage, preserve, and enhance the traditional cultural aspects of the past and present to make life more beautiful in the here and now.

References

- [1] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Katannu Suttas*, The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha, Anguttara Nikaya, Wisdom Publications, 2012.
- [2] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Mahasala Sutta*, The Connected Discourses of the Buddha, Wisdom Publications, 1999.
- [3] Bhikkhu Khantipālo, ed. *Life's Highest Blessings: The Maha Mangala Sutta*. Pariyatti Publishing, 2018.
- [4] Carr, D., Morgan, B., and Gulliford, L., *Learning and Teaching Virtuous Gratitude*, Oxford Review of Education, 2015.
- [5] Daishonin, N. The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin; *Four Virtues and Four Debts of Gratitude - Volume II*, Soka Gakkai, 2020.
- [6] Davids, TW Rhys, and William Stede. *Pali-English dictionary*. Motilal Banarsidass, 2015.
- [7] Emmons, R. A. *The Psychology of Gratitude: An introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- [8] Jojn D. Ireland, *the Itivuttaka: The Buddha's Sayings*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1997.
- [9] Maurice Walshe, *Sigalovada Sutta, Thus Have I Heard*, Translation: The Long Discourses of the Buddha, Wisdom Publications, London, England, 1987.
- [10] Pruyser, P. W. *The Minister as Diagnostician: Personal Problems in Pastoral Perspective*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.
- [11] Rahula, Walpola, *What the Buddha taught*. Open Road Grove/Atlantic, 2007.
- [12] Solomon, R. C. *The Passions*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1977.
- [13] Taylor, Arnold C., ed. *Kathāvatthu*. Vol. 1-2, Pali Text Society, 1894, 1897.
- [14] Thera Nanamoli, *The Practice of Loving-kindness*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1958.
- [15] Thera Nyanaponika, and Thera Ñāṇamoli, *The Four Sublime States*, the Wheel Publication, 1958.

