

# Buddhism: Merit Making and the Religious Field

## 1. Ten Precepts of the Monk:

1. Not to destroy life intentionally
2. Not to steal
3. Not to engage in sex
4. Not to lie
5. Not to take alcoholic beverages
6. Not to eat after noon
7. No participation in entertainment, shows, dancing, singing
8. No wearing garlands, perfumes, finery
9. No wide or high beds
10. Not to accept gold or silver

In addition: 227/250 *Vinaya* Rules

## 3. Ways of Making Merit (punya):

[in the Pali Canon]

1. *dāna*- giving
2. *shīla*- moral observance
3. *bhāvanā*- meditation
4. *apacitisahagatam*- respect for elders
5. *veyyavaccasahagatam*- service to a superior
6. *pattāhuppādānam*- transferring merit
7. *abbhanumodanā*- thanksgiving for the acceptance of merit
8. *desanā*- instruction
9. *savana*- listening
10. *ditthijjukamnam*- rectification of views

## 6. Worshipping Buddha Image: Merit

"When a noble disciple contemplates the Enlightened One, for that time the mind is not enwrapped by lust or illusion and at that time the mind is rightly directed. And with a rightly directed mind the disciple gains enthusiasm for the goal, the Dhamma, and the delight derived therefrom, earning merit." (*Anguttara Nikaya*, 10)

## 7. Hierarchy of Merit Recipients

Buddha  
Pacceka Buddha  
Arhat  
One on the way to Arahatsip  
One Never to be reborn  
One never to be reborn on earth  
A once-returned on earth  
One who has entered the stream  
One on the way to the Stream-enterer  
An outsider aloof from sensuality  
Ordinary but virtuous man  
Ordinary non-virtuous man  
Animals

## 2. Lay precepts:

1. Not to destroy life intentionally
2. Not to steal
3. Not to engage in sexual misconduct
4. Not to lie
5. Not to take alcoholic beverages

## 4. Ideology of Merit: the *Mallika Sutta*:

"When a woman has not been irascible or violent, and though much is said about her, she has not felt spiteful, angry, enraged, or sulky, nor manifested hatred or heart-burning; When she has given alms to monks of food, drink, building sites and has not felt envious at the gains, honor, reverence, respect and homage that came to others; Then, when she leaves that existence and comes to this one, wherever she is born, she is beautiful, attractive, pleasing, and possessed of surpassing riches, affluent, and high in the social scale." (*Anguttara Nikāya*, Pali Canon)

## 5. Living with Karma, Making Merit:

"The beings, O Brahmin, have their karma as their own, they have their heritage from the karma, the karma determines their birth, the karma is their friend and ultimate refuge, and it is the karma that divides them, relegating them either to the inferior or to the superior state of existence." (*Majjhima Nikāya*, iii)

## 8. Stages in the Theravāda Buddhist Path:

### Arhat:

fully enlightened; at death, *nirvāna* without remainder

↑

### "Non-Returner":

fetters of craving removed; one will not be reborn in human realm again and pass into *nirvāna* from there.

↑

### "Once-Returner":

When insight (*prajñā*) has deepened, craving and ill-will are weakened, one will return only once more to the human realm

↑

### "Stream-Enterer":

When one has realized and destroyed the fetters of clinging to vain rites and rituals, of having doubts about the Buddha's path, and admits the illusion of the self (*ātman*), one has "entered the stream" and undergoes no more than 7 future human rebirths.

↑

### Taking refuge:

in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha

## 9. Good Citizenship & Heavenly Reward:

A good person lives and works for the benefit, good, & happiness of many persons--father, mother, wife & children, servants, slaves, friends, relatives, dead kinsmen & ancestors, the reigning king, gods & divinities, and all ascetics and brahmans. He who lives thus and functions well established in the good faith and overcomes avarice attains the realm of the gods." (Anguttara Nikāya, iv, 2-5)

## 10. Merit Declarations, Ritual Offering:

"With these blossoms the Buddha I adore. With this merit may I come to attain Nirvana. As this flower fades and dies, so will my body wither and perish; if Arhatship is not achieved in the present life, may I be reborn in a higher plane."

"I offer this delicious food lacking in nothing -- fish, fruits, edibles -- to the Blessed One in deep reverence. May this food-offering of mine destroy all my evils and enable me to attain Nirvana."

## 11. Example of Merit Transfer to Pretas:

"Just as the rivers filled with water by rain flow into the sea and fill it, so may the merit this offering be transferred and reach our dead preta relations."

## 12. Example of General Merit Transfer:

"May air-dwelling gods and ground-dwelling gods nagas of great power, having rejoiced at the merit, long protect the Teaching."

## 13. Merit linking Gods and Humans:

"May the powerful gods in the sky and on earth be pleased with this offering of merit and thereby protect the religion for a long time."

"May there be rain in due season/ and the crops be plentiful; May the kings be righteous and the country become prosperous."

## 14. Domain of Karma, and its limits:

"So it is, O King, small is the suffering which is the result of karma. Numerous are the remaining causes. Fools pass over the limits of reason if they say that all experience is the result of karma... Analyzing karma is not possible without the insight of a Buddha." (Milindapañha)



## 15. Buddhism's Atheism? Ask the Buddha:

Sangarva: "Tell me, Lord Gotama, are there gods?"  
Buddha: "It is clearly observable whether there are gods."  
S: "Why do you give that answer to my question, Blessed One? You reply, 'It is clearly observable whether there are gods.' Then is it false or true?"  
Buddha: "Anyone who, when asked if gods there be ... this is clearly observable: any intelligent person will arrive at the same conclusion as to whether there are gods. *The world is in loud agreement that there are gods.*" (Pali Canon, quoted from von Glassenapp, p. 161)

## 16. Buddha's Advice to laity on deities:

"Wherever a wise man has taken up his abode, there he brings gifts to the deities of this place. Respected and revered by him, he is in turn respected and revered by the gods. They tremble for him as a mother trembles for her own son." (Digha Nikāya, 16,1,31)

"The son of a good family uses his wealth to present gifts, and he should respect and worship them. They in their turn are then gracious and say to him: Live long, and attain a ripe old age." (Anguttara Nikāya, 5,58,5)

17. On Pretas: "Whilst alive, they gave much to me, did much for me, they were my friends and associates, comrades and relatives... neither weeping, nor sorrow, nor any other forms of lamentation will be of any advantage to them, should the kinsmen alive do any of these things. But the gift which is made to the Sangha is well established in it, and it is of benefit to them for a long time to come, and reaches them. By this act, a social service is done to the departed spirits, the strength too is given to the *bhikkhus*, and as for you yourselves, merit is gained." (Petavatthu, 4-5, Pali Canon)

## 18. Buddha and Demons (yakshas):

One day, the Buddha resolved to go to Sakvalagala to reason with the yakshas since they wanted to undertake a campaign against mankind. After he arrived there and began to grow dark, Buddha made his halo radiate so that the ground became warm. A weird sensation seized the yakshas and they went to report what happened to them. Meanwhile the ground became hotter and hotter and soon began to glow. Finally, all the yakshas came running and threw themselves at the feet of the Buddha and entreated him to spare them. "We are poor miserable creatures living on slime and spittle. The Buddha had compassion for them. "I will spare you," he said, "But only on one condition. When you have struck someone with illness and the exorcist summons you, you have come and accept the offering which you are presented with. Afterwards you must leave the human alone and restore health."

## 19. Monastic Code and Exorcism:

Now at that time a certain Bhikkhu had a disease not human. Though his teacher and his superior nursed him, they were not able to make him well. He went to a place where swine were slaughtered and ate the raw flesh and drank the blood. Thereby the sickness abated. They told this to the Blessed One. "I allow, O Monks, in the case of a disease not human, the use of raw flesh and of blood." (Pali Vinaya)