



How to Effectively Teach Children According to Buddha's Teachings: A Study Based on the Sigālovāda Sutta

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ABSTRACT

In human society, there are many relationships that a person must go through. Depending on each relationship, people need to show responsibility and enjoy the benefits of that relationship. Of all the connections, the relationship between parents and children is the most important, sacred, and has the most bond or dependence based on a family. Therefore, family education is the educational process carried out by previous generations for the next generation, in which the educational role of parents towards children plays the most critical part.

Therefore, the value of family life in Buddhism is recognized and integrated into monastic life and religious festivals. To get a happy, peaceful present and future life, each Buddhist in the family continuously learns and follows the teachings of the Buddha. Many suttas can convey this message, especially the Sigālovāda Sutta. Within the breadth of the Sutta, I have to study and analyze the basics of the duties of parents in the care and education of children. Due to the Sutta's superiority which led to the expectation for this research, I chose the topic for my paper entitled: "*The Duties of Family Education According to the Sigālovāda Sutta.*"

The proposed research topic may rely on data from primary and secondary textual sources to be collected and analyzed.

Family is a specific topic but never lacking in life, so many scholars study it from different angles. This paper will discuss this relationship further to clarify the role and responsibility of parents emphasized in the Buddhist spirit. Then what are these duties, and is it difficult to practice or not? Above all, how should parents be able to fulfill their responsibilities to teach their children? All of this will elucidate in the work below.

Introduction

Children to parents are the blood ties of the family. In any era, this relationship is highly valued and respected. The family is a member of society; if a family is warm and happy, the association is peaceful, whereas culture is disordered if the family is not in harmony.

People often ask the Buddha about the duty of parenthood to be able to raise and educate their children in the best way. In the Buddha's advice to Sigala, he taught that while parenting duties mean meeting the child's need to be cared for and nurtured, parents must pay attention to more things to fulfill that role better.

For the Buddha, bringing up a child meant helping that child become a whole being. Parents must see it as the goal to help their children achieve inner progress, knowledge, abilities, and success. To strive to accomplish these things is to fulfill the duty of parenthood to the fullest extent.

The Buddhist point of view on the parent's status in the family occupies a central place because parents set the names like *Brahma*, *Pubbācariya*, *Pubbadeva*, and *Āhuneyya*, etc.¹. They bring up children and introduce them to the world.² They also get them to avoid lousy conduct, engage in good deeds, and learn arts and crafts. They help them marry suitable partners and transfer the wealth at the proper time.³ In this way, parents are beneficial to children who provide them with food, drinks, clothes, and other necessities. They also massage their bodies and bathe them. They also have to pay respect to their parents. When parents are pretty old, children have to look after them and do whatever is necessary for them. They also have to continue and preserve the family tradition and wealth. When parents are dead and gone, children transfer merit for their benefit.⁴

¹ A. II. 132. (Sabrahma-sutta).

² A. II. 164. (Suppatikāra-sutta).

³ D. III. 304. (Sīgala-sutta).

⁴ D. III. 304. (Sīgala-sutta).

According to the Buddha, loving and taking care of children is necessary for fulfilling parental responsibilities. However, just nurturing and protecting children is not enough to turn those parents into exemplary parents for their children to follow. Those are just the necessary steps to move on to the right path - a must-have practice for respectable, self-respecting people.

For a family, love is considered an essential factor in building happiness. Therefore, family education in Buddhism is also a loving education. The Buddha taught lay people to love, teach, and educate their children, especially to guide them away from evil and practice good things; follow the Buddha taught in the Sigālovāda Sutta, which is the 31st Sutta described in the Digha Nikaya. Now, we will analyze these five noble duties to see how important the spirit of education in the family is according to the teachings of the Buddha.

Five Kinds of Duties for Parents (mātāpitaro pañcahi thānehi puttāṃ anukampanti)

Forsooth, children were born by parents. Therefore, parents should have their responsibility to nourish and educate their children through the five following ways taught by the Buddha according to the Sigālovāda Sutta: "*The five duties include: to prevent your child from doing evil, to encourage him to do good, to teach him a profession, to marry a worthy partner for him, and to give his inheritance in due time.*"⁵

Based on the Buddha's teachings, although a parent's love for a child is sacred, it also has a specific duty. Here the writer clearly shows how parents educate their children to fulfill their responsibilities.

1. The first duty is to restrain children from evil (pāpā nivārenti)

Parents are the "first teachers" of their children. When they stay at home, parents are teachers who teach good things to prepare children to enter life. The Buddha used the term *papa pāpā nivārenti* to refer to the duty of parents to dissuade their children from unwholesome actions. *Pāpā* means any harmful action expressed through words, actions and thoughts. *Nivārenti* refers to the effort to avoid this unwholesome action. Helping children stay away from evil deeds is part of a parent's upbringing.

What measures do parents take to prevent circumstances that might draw their children into unwholesome actions? The Buddha did not believe that a robust method, such as punishment or beating, would help parents achieve this goal. He once said, "All men are threatened and haunted by punishment," and he rejected any form of punishment. We cannot find anything in the Pitaka to show that punishment is an effective way to train a child's character. Contrary to the belief that "if you don't hit, the child will spoil," the compassionate Buddha suggested better ways to help develop a child's character, which will discuss below.

The Buddha never encouraged verbal abuse as an effective way to help children get rid of unhealthy behavior. He taught that an angry response inevitably results in the use of heavy, offensive language. In a passage, the Buddha said that harsh, rude words could only lead to anger and suffering for the speaker. Based on this point of view, we see that scolding, slandering, punishing, or beating children will not help parents advise their children to stay away from unwholesome actions.

Counseling is an effective way to keep children from following harmful ways of life. But first, parents themselves must be role models: "Before teaching anyone, you must examine yourself." Parents must first practice their teachings for their children to listen to them. When parents also refrain from doing evil deeds, it is easier for them to persuade their children to stay away from such things.

In short, according to the Buddha, having a way to help children not become evil or immoral is a prerequisite duty of parents. Instead of entrusting that duty to teachers, or religious people, parents themselves must show their children that they care and have to help their children not to learn bad habits of their own or social. It can say that parents play an essential role in helping their child avoid the fourteen evil things or vice and recognize different kinds of friends to be a good child in his family, a good student at school, and a good citizen in society.

2. The second duty is to encourage them to virtue (kalyāṇe nivesenti)

Do not do evil deeds, diligently do good deeds, and keep a pure mind that Buddha's teaching. That is the most basic and necessary teaching of the Buddha to his disciples. In addition to having methods to keep children away from unwholesome actions, the duty of parents and children includes leading their children towards good deeds. The Buddha used the Pali term "*kalyāṇe nivesenti*" to describe it. "*Kalyāṇe*" means "good, cute and virtuous deeds." "*Nivesenti*" means "to establish" or "to be the cause of."

Actions of goodwill refer to words, activities, and thoughts from compassion, love, and wisdom. Thus, the elements of virtuous conduct are the practice of generosity (*dana*), the observance of the precepts (*sila*), and the development of the mind (*Bhavana*). The Buddha encouraged parents to cultivate these thoughts and actions in their children. With parents' dedication to teaching, children will be able to acquire these qualities.

The Buddha sent the message that parents need to guide their children to good and beautiful things with words and actions. Parents have to encourage their children to say, do and think good things. This upbringing and guidance should be the parent's primary purpose, not a secondary matter.

⁵ D.III.190; Oxford; PTS, 1995: 181.

Again, parents must lead an honest, righteous business life. That means making a living by the right job and making money with your talent and wisdom. The Buddha always emphasized that communicating with good knowledge (Pandita) complements one's personality; therefore, parents need to convince their children to make friends with such people. Again, the Buddha emphasized loving speech as an effective way for responsible people to cultivate wholesome deeds for others. Parents who want to teach and guide their children to the good must do the same.

However, the Buddha also saw that it is not always possible to bring immediate happiness to the person we are trying to lead toward wholesome actions. Especially parents will find it difficult to please their children with the right advice and teaching. Children prefer to do whatever gives them immediate gratification rather than long-term benefits. It can be very frustrating for them to hear advice from their parents that is not what they want to do.

In such cases, the Buddha advised parents to firmly defend their teachings' values, not indulge their children. When parents know that they are using suitable methods for developing their children's personalities, they must be determined to go to the end and not give up.



Teaching children to make offerings to monks

The life of the Buddha gives us one of the perfect examples of how a father must cultivate goodness in a child's heart. The Buddha's son, Rahula, was only seven years old when the Buddha promised him that he would give him "a father's best gift." The Buddha allowed Rahula to join the Sangha and devoted himself to teaching to help Rahula develop a whole personality. Many passages in the Pali canon show that the Buddha was very concerned about Rahula's good qualities and personality development.

Simultaneously, the child should be under the guidance of his mother and father to practice profitable wholesome actions like charity, chanting, praying, and Buddhist activities such as burning lights and offering incense and water to the Buddha. Thanks to parents' encouragement, children can live a kind life, do not harm others, and become wise people for the benefit of all sentient beings and society. Therefore, children need a good education. They need to educate on what is known and unknown and what has yet to be known. They need to educate about values. Religious scriptures largely codify standards of behavior and thus recognize and reaffirm the existing values. Global children need spiritual orientation in their consciousness, understanding, and judgment. We need enlightened generations of humanity.⁶

⁶ J. N. Singh, *Human Transcendence*, Delhi: Jai Publications, 2009: 43.

3. *The third duty is to train the children in a profession (sippam sikkhūpentī)*

Vocational education is an essential obligation of parents towards their children. When their children were young, parents had to take care of their children's food and clothing. When the children grow up, they should take care of getting married, creating a business for their children to rely on later. The Sigālovāda Sutta teaches that parents must create conditions for their children to study to get a suitable job. This job is necessary because if we only teach children to abstain from evil deeds and diligently do good deeds is only the primary moral foundation, whether the future of children's lives is famous or not is to guide their children's careers. Parents must know which profession is suitable for their children. Please don't force them against the work, or a job they don't like will not lead to good results and success later.

This duty shows us that parents need ways to improve their children's lives, besides helping their children develop their personalities. In the Mangala Sutta, the Buddha taught: "Having broad knowledge, skill, discipline, and loving speech are gracing." "Discipline" and "love language" belong to personality development; "broad knowledge" and "ability" are standards in the profession. Children need their parents' help in both of these areas.

According to Vietnamese custom, on the day of the birth ceremony, people display tools such as needles, nippers, trowels, chisels, planers, or pens on the table. When you see a child choosing a blood pressure device, the future may be a doctor. If he decides to chisel and plan, they know who will like to be a carpenter in the future; and if he chooses a pen, they know that their child will want to study and work in an office in the future. Let children automatically select according to their interests to understand what their children want. Moreover, if parents live the right career and develop in the present, children and grandchildren must also follow in the future. Their children's occupations must match their health, skills, and interests. Doing so will surely make the end of their children successful.

Most parents are very concerned about their children and want to give them the best future. However, there are still a few families because of life where parents do not have time to take care of their children. So they send their children to schools where the teachers don't care enough about the kids more than the parents. Why should they care? For them, teaching is simply a job, a way of making money.⁷ Actually, teachers can only be responsible for knowledge, but parents are the main ones in life.

4. *The fourth duty is to find them a suitable wife (paṭirūpena dārena samyojenti)*

Choosing a life partner for their child is extremely important. This duty does not mean that parents put their children there, but parents play the role of consulting and imparting their inherent experience so that their children choose a life partner that is suitable for each other for a long time. Love and marriage are about children.



Wedding Ceremony at Giac Ngo Pagoda

⁷ J. Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life*, Chennai: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1992: 97.

Like other human problems, the problem of passions and Sexual urges is complex and challenging and has become a dominant factor in human life. The deep significance of this whole problem of human life implicates the entire social and moral culture and the educational methods based on the development of the intellect.⁸ Therefore, when the child becomes an adult and has the intention to look for a partner for family life according to ordinary worldly law. Parents must propose marriage to suitable persons to their children at that time. However, parents who experience life have to select a worthy place for refuge and guarantee long happiness. But parents should not force children's marriage to follow their idea. Because, without love, how can they live together happily?

Though various forms of marriage were prevalent in ordinary circumstances, it was the duty of the parents to contract suitable marriages for their children, and as such parental consent was usually necessary for a wedding. This responsibility must have been strict regarding daughters' marriage, generally considered in the custody of parents, brothers, or any other relative.⁹

Marriage is an essential step in the life of a young friend. Parental guidelines can enrich children's understanding of choosing a suitable life partner. Therefore, parents can rest assured that they have given their children a new family to build happiness. The advice of the Buddha in the sutras is still convenient and helpful even in this day and age.

5. The fifth duty is to hand over inheritance to them at the right time (*samaye dāyajjam niyyādentī*)

Finally, the Buddha advised parents to hand over the family property to their children. Of course, the Buddha did not tell parents to give all of the family's possessions to their children to become homeless at the end of their lives. Instead, the Buddha advised them to appropriately transfer part of the family property to their children. The Buddha used the term *dāyajjam* to refer to the portion of family property to which the child was entitled. *Dāyajjam* means "a piece of property considered a gift from parents to children." In other words, *samaye* means "appropriate time."

The right time always creates a great value because if the inheritance gives too early, the children are not mature in spending, leading to wasteful spending, and eventually ruining the family. On the contrary, if the inheritance is too late, the children will lose the opportunity to do business and develop the economy. At the same time, the children will easily disagree and doubt their parents. Therefore, choosing an appropriate time to hand over the inheritance is wise. On the other hand, to avoid more or less unequal competition in the distribution of the estate, parents must consider and be transparent to avoid unnecessary consequences.

The Buddha taught that laypeople know how to make good use of their possessions, including saving money to create the happiness and well-being of their children. These teachings show us that raising and caring for children is the minimum duty of parents, not a good reason for them to consider themselves perfect, exemplary parents. The Buddha also mentions five things parents desire for a son born in the family. "He that is holpen he will help us; for us, and will do what must be to do; long will he keep up traditions; worthily possess his heritage; and make offerings to the petas when we are dead."¹⁰

Each person has a special place within the order of things. Each has a set of duties to perform, and the well-being of society depends on how each member functions in it.¹¹ Being born on this earth are independent of others, but mutual relatives like husband and wife rely on each other, children lean on parents in infancy, and parents depend upon their children in age.

Shortly, the duties that the Buddha explores perform functions for both parents and children within the family institution. Those functions or duties are reciprocal and reduce conflicts that arise between them. Thus, parents who know how to educate their children properly guide them to become the source of peace and happiness for all well-being. With this, children will take their parents as their models to lead the right way of living. Vice versa, if parents are immoral or irresponsible to their sons and daughters who later not only don't grateful and support them but grumble about them. Thus, one who fulfills the above duties referred to pay homage to the eastern quarter that he protected and made safe and secure.

Conclusion

In summary, the Buddha instructed lay people in the methods to help them become happy parents when teaching and educating children full of personality. When one thinks about one's success as a parent, one has every right to be proud of it. These obligations contribute to strengthening the bond between parents and children. The Buddha reminded children to show gratitude to their parents when they have fulfilled their duties. This positive result shows us how great a parent's duty is.

The Sigālovāda Sutta is the main Sutta extensively ascribed to the overall noble qualities of individuals and society's well-being. Thus, the Buddhist code of ethics primarily intends to address the high rates of a happy, peaceful, and prosperous lay livelihood. These responsible roles are the basic foundation of Buddhism to build for each person a virtuous life and the only way to achieve ultimate personal liberation.

⁸ Ibid., 117.

⁹ A.IV. 264; Oxford: PTS, 1989: 176-7.

¹⁰ A. III. 43; Oxford: PTS, 1988: 35.

¹¹ Medagama Vījiragnana Nayaka Thera, *Parents and Children: Transmitting the Buddhist Heritage Across Generations*, Bodhi Leaves No: 151, Buddhist Publication Society Online Edition, 2006.

In modern times, Bhikkhu Bodhi has identified the Sigālovāda Sutta as "the most comprehensive Nikāya" concerning "happiness directly visible in this present life." The Sigālovāda Sutta analyzes the roles and responsibilities of parents towards their children and other relationships in the family and society. The Buddha was a liberator of the oppressed and a great innovator of thought. "The sutras advocate a good balance of material and spiritual to maintain a simple family and personal life and help achieve the final stage of liberation.

It can say that the relationship between parents and children is very moral and educational. Parents take care of their children's material life and, most importantly, take care and develop their moral and intellectual life. Regarding the moral life, parents must train and teach their children moral qualities, avoid evil and do good, abandon the evil path and promote a life of right livelihood and right action. Next, parents also teach their children a high sense of responsibility and independence through stabilizing careers in society. In addition, parents also have to advise their children in choosing an ideal life partner so that the family's lives in the future will be durable and happy. Only such children deserve to inherit the inheritance drawn with the sweat and blood of their parents, of the generations of their fathers who preceded them. It thinks that this noble educational spirit should be thoroughly researched and applied by the elders and parent associations, so that love, development, and happiness can flourish in people's lives today and future.

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