

# A Buddhist Reflects on Rewarding Children



Vijaya Samarawickrama

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Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardana Society  
Buddhist Maha Vihara  
123, Jalan Berhala, Brickfields,  
50470 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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佛陀教义弘扬协会

Buddhist Maha Vihara,  
123, Jalan Berhala, Brickfields,  
50470 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
Tel: 603-22741141 Fax: 603-22732570  
E-Mail: [info@buddhistmahavihara.com](mailto:info@buddhistmahavihara.com)  
Website: [www.buddhistmahavihara.com](http://www.buddhistmahavihara.com)  
[www.ksridhammananda.com](http://www.ksridhammananda.com)

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## FOREWORD

Principal Carolyn Hill, of Sheehy Elementary School in Tampa, USA in her article “Incentives-or Bribes” opined

*“I feel kids need to know there are rewards for doing what is right. You go to work, you get a salary. You have a good driving record; you get a lower insurance rate. I think it’s all in alignment with how the world works.”* [St. Petersburg Times, March 5, 2006]

In another article “Reward Positive Behaviour”, on FamilyEducation.com, author Ericka Lutz points out

*“A child rewarded learns, When I do well, I’m appreciated and rewarded.”*

Over and over we have been taught that we should praise and reward our children a lot more. What could be wrong with that? On the surface, praise looks marvellous - the key to successful children! Scratch this surface, however, and the results may look different.

This booklet **REWARDING CHILDREN** by Mr Vijaya Samarawickrama helps us find a balance between the two extremes.

Committee of Management  
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## REWARDING CHILDREN

Perhaps the most important and challenging task that the human race has ever faced throughout the course of civilization is that of nurturing the young. Humans have reached the top of the evolutionary ladder because they have developed not only the ability to think and translate thoughts into actions, but, essentially through language and example, to transmit their experiences to others of their kind. Over the last ten thousand years in many parts of the world our ancestors built new civilizations and technologies and passed them on to successive generations which improved on them before handing them down again. Progress was thus ensured.

It wasn't an easy process though. The younger generation was not always ready to accept what parents were eager to hand down. Through puberty and adolescence (today even as early as six or seven) children have always rebelled against "outdated" ideas, to develop their own ways of doing things only to face opposition from their children in turn. Perhaps the most common expression throughout the whole of human history is, "Our children are not as well behaved as we were when we were young"!

Although experts in the field seriously doubt it, a great many writers have attributed the following statement to Socrates who lived in Greece about the same time as the Buddha:

*"The children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, they show disrespect*

*to their elders... They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs and are tyrants over their teachers”.*

Perhaps a little more authentic is the following statement by someone called Hesiod in the eighth century B.C.:

*“I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words.*

*When I was a boy, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly wise (sic) and impatient of restraint.”*

And seven hundred years ago in 1274 C.E. Peter the Hermit wrote this in a sermon:

*“The world is passing through troublous times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint. They talk as if they know everything, and what passes for wisdom with us is foolishness with them. As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behaviour and dress”.*

Whether these are authentic quotes or not, we can safely assume that throughout history adults have always been worried about the younger generation when the truth is that there have been as many wonderfully well behaved young people in every age as there have been difficult ones, although the latter have always received more publicity. So really we need not worry unduly about

our youth today. They are no better or no worse than we or our ancestors have been throughout the course of human history. Given the incredible resources we have at hand today our task is to discover how we can help our youths reach levels of achievement and wisdom more efficiently and at a faster pace than we ourselves had done. To do this we need to critically look at the methods we had employed in the past and develop new ones with fresh understanding.

Rebelliousness and non-conformism among the young is not something new. It is actually a good thing. It is the ability to reject ways of thinking and behaving which are unsuitable for changed circumstances which helps mankind progress into the future. We only have to see how youths in China (Tiananmen Square), Indonesia (Suharto), America (Barack Obama) either rebelled against years of injustice or brought in winds of change for the benefit of all.

Having said that, we must pause and remind ourselves that there is a difference between “freedom” and “licence”. While youths need the freedom to express new ideas and reject old ones, at the same time they cannot be given total independence for the simple reason that they lack experience and foresight to sense the dangers of hasty actions. In short we must tread the Middle Path between holding back and letting go. So our challenge today is to make the younger generation behave in the manner we want them to while at the same time giving them room to mature in their own way. How do we help to mould a lifestyle based on old time - tested values which are relevant and meaningful to present circumstances? How can

we EDUCATE children most effectively? Here we are asking ourselves how we get them to want to learn accepted ways of behaving rather than simply to force them to do so? From time immemorial the only way to get others to do what we have wanted them to do in all spheres of human activity from religion to politics, has been through reward and punishment: offer the carrot or wield the stick.

For the most part history seems to have opted for punishment as the most effective means to impress on young minds the necessity to follow approved modes of behaviour. From Greece to India, to China and Japan, the birch, the cane and the bamboo (not forgetting the brutal hand) were liberally employed by joyless adults in their grim pursuit to make juveniles “good”. One can only reflect sadly on the enormous amount of suffering which has been inflicted on billions of the world’s young in the mistaken belief that pain is the only path to goodness.

In spite of its widespread use, however, punishment has always had its critics. During the nineteenth century in England, for example, when uncontrolled corporal punishment was rife in so-called “schools” overflowing with unwilling children conscripted for “upliftment” and “culture”, great writers like Charles Dickens wrote heart-rending novels (e.g. Oliver Twist, Hard Times Chap 2: Murdering the Innocents) while poets like William Blake even earlier wrote poems (“*The Chimney Sweep*”) in their efforts to convince the authorities that cruelty did not ennoble human beings. Both pleaded for humanity and compassion when dealing with the young. The result was that by the beginning of the



20th century educationists began to look for ways other than punishment to make learning effective. For example by 1915 it was written: ‘The use of power should be as infrequent as possible’, ‘Be friendly with them without lapsing into familiarity, and sometimes unbend from the high position in which you are placed. A brow of severity is not always needed’. For the next fifty years schools and parents went in the opposite direction giving children far more freedom than they needed, so that by 1961 when we were overwhelmed by psychedelic flower power it was written: “Between 1935 and 1956, in America, permissiveness had gone too far, so David Ausubel stated: ‘Few if any children are so fragile that they cannot take deserved reproof and punishment in stride’ ”. We had come round one full circle, from punishment to reward and back again.

The use of reward, while less widespread than punishment, also has its antecedents in the early development of civilization. Our ancestors learnt that one way of ensuring the goodwill of the spirits (‘gods’) they worshipped was to reward them for favours granted, for example for success in hunting, in childbirth, in averting sickness or natural disasters and so on. These rewards generally took the form of offering material objects ranging from fruits and flowers to animals and humans as sacrifice. Taking their cue from these practices kings rewarded citizens while parents rewarded children for approved behaviour. Religion of course is centred on reward (heaven) and punishment (hell). Over time, reward and punishment became partners being used alternatively to keep the vast majority of human beings on the straight and narrow path to heaven with the approval of all sectors

of society. Questions regarding the degree of success these methods have achieved need not detain us here.

In education also the question we ask today is, “How do we get young people to make positive and socially beneficial choices for themselves and others at school, and also, across the entire spectrum of their life?” (Peter Henry “Carrots & Sticks”, April 2008). Rewards can be powerful allies if we use them judiciously. They can serve as effective incentives if the person is interested in the reward. But if used unwisely they can be counter – productive. Often we make the mistake of giving children what we ourselves would want (electronic gadgets, money) or what we felt we ourselves had been deprived of when we were young. Such gifts could be meaningless to a child and encourage her to become a collector of items rather than developing useful values. A more beneficial approach would be to impress on a child to earn a reward by having really worked for it and, once earned to treasure it for the sense of fulfillment it brings.

Besides giving rewards parents and teachers have agonized over what to give and how much to give. They have also asked, “When does a reward become a bribe? And how will either of these impact on a future adult’s spiritual and psychological development? Don’t rewards, especially if they are easily given, reduce a child’s self reliance? Shouldn’t a child be good for goodness’ sake rather than to earn a reward? And what about the form and size of the reward?”

Sad to say these questions are being asked as much by affluent middle class parents (especially the ‘how much’ aspect) as those from lower income groups whose pain is more acute in that they lack the means to provide material rewards for their children. These are very complex issues for which we cannot provide easy clear-cut suggestions but we can organize our thoughts more profitably if we are prepared to re-orientate our perceptions on how we should look at ourselves and the society in which we live.

At the outset we need to ask ourselves what is the meaning of HAPPINESS, because everything we do is designed to give us what we call happiness. How many of us really know what happiness means? Once we know what constitutes happiness then we will be in a better position to find the means to attain it. The Buddha teaches that there are two kinds of happiness - the mundane and the transcendental. Mundane happiness is associated with pleasure and it can be obtained by pleasing the senses – with good food, beautiful music, attractive objects and so on. But because nothing is permanent, the ‘happiness’ that the acquisition of these objects brings passes away, leaving us craving for more. Suffering is the knowledge that nothing we own will last forever. According to this understanding, pleasure is the source of suffering because it is impermanent. True happiness, which goes beyond pleasing the senses, is permanent. This is the happiness we should aspire to. Admittedly, though, because we are human, it is not entirely possible to completely ignore the kind of happiness we experience by pleasing the senses. Therefore, of course, we may enjoy a few worldly pleasures, but we should acquire

the habit of not depending on them in the long run. **We can reward our children by making them happy for a short time with material rewards, but we must help them to work for lasting, permanent happiness.** This is the Middle Path.

Today we associate Happiness to a very large extent with success. In the context of this discussion we believe that parents experience happiness in part by their children's success in school. We will make any sacrifice – of time, money and effort – to ensure that success. This is all well and good. Unfortunately our definition of success is so coloured by the materialist values of today's society that we measure it by only one yardstick: a 'successful' person is one who has wealth, prestige, power, influence, possessions. Our entire school system is geared to making children aspire to these benchmarks. And inevitably this means doing well academically. A child's success is measured by how well she performs in exams. The system is geared to separating the precious few who have an aptitude for book - learning from the majority who have other talents – as in games, crafts, technical skills. These latter are not only largely ignored but actually looked down upon by the education and social systems. Those who “pass” exams are praised (which is a form of reward) and the others are at best reprimanded or pitied (punishment).

If we want to correct this gross injustice towards the larger part of our population of children we must re-think what “success” means. First we begin by acknowledging that no two individuals are alike. Each being has a special aptitude and a unique character

depending on the individual karmic past that it inherits. The Buddha demonstrated this on numerous occasions as when he guided Cula Panthaka (Dhp 25) or Kisa Gotami (Dhp 114) or the young monk who was asked to meditate on a beautiful object rather than a rotting corpse (Dhp 285). Each of them had a different capacity for learning and the Buddha used different approaches to reach them. We need to recognize differences and vary our expectations. (Please refer to the appendix for brief summaries of these stories). So the “success” we expect from one child must be different from that we expect from another. Our reward systems must be varied rather than uniform. We need to look for ways to reward the best scholar, the best athlete, the best artist, the best gardener, the best cheerleader and so on. “Best effort” must also be rewarded. There is room to recognize the ability or the contribution of everyone.

Some may argue that if everyone is rewarded, then the whole objective of encouraging people to aim for higher achievement is defeated. We can reply that the purpose of education is to make each child perform to the best of his or her own ability, that is, to first and foremost compete against him or herself. No five fingers on the hand are the same. In the same way, we must recognize that each child has abilities which must be nurtured in a unique way. We must all be familiar with the story in the Christian Bible where (in Matt 25:15 ) it says, “And so to one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability. On his return the first servant told him he had invested his 5 pieces and they had increased, while the one with two pieces had also doubled his share. The last one had buried his single piece and done nothing

about it. The master praised the first two servants and reprimanded the last. Obviously, the lesson is that no matter how many “talents” we are born with, we have to increase them with diligent effort. Of course we cannot expect the man with two talents to convert them to twenty. Similarly, the task of the adult is to make each child develop to the best of his or her own ability. To do this we encourage everyone but each form of encouragement must be tailored to the particular needs and capacity of an individual. Just as the punishment must fit the crime, the reward must be commensurate with the achievement.

Now what kind of reward should one give? There are two kinds of rewards, intrinsic and extrinsic. Extrinsic rewards are tangible gifts such as tokens, money, privileges and so on. These are the best known and schools as well as parents often give them to reward their children for having lived up to expectations. Withholding them, of course, is seen as a punishment. The question arises: how does one decide whether the reward fits or is appropriate for the achievement? For example when a twelve year old obtains 5 distinctions in a public examination the parents reward her by giving her \$100 for each distinction. How do they reward her in subsequent examinations, when she finishes university, for example? Another question: what happens to the child’s value system? Should the passing of exams be tied to material rewards? Is that the purpose of learning? In any case, we can also ask whether most public examinations evaluate the skill of putting knowledge to practical use, or simply test a pupil’s memory, the power to remember a number of facts. Should they be rewarded for this? These

same questions can be asked for all other achievements – in athletics, or social recognition for example. The acquisition of knowledge and pleasurable material consequences do not necessarily match and children can grow up with the wrong values. Perhaps the question is not so much about the fact that these rewards are given, but whether the objective of the reward, to appreciate or recognize desired good behaviour, is met with appropriateness and moderation. Rewards can lose their value and effectiveness if wrongly granted. Worse still, the liberal granting of rewards can create greed rather than inspire a child to reach higher goals. The other kind of reward mentioned is intrinsic, which means rewards which are unquantifiable, like praise and quality time spent with children, showing genuine interest in completed works and projects or something the child cares for. Rewards can also include privileges – the permission to sleep late, to go out with friends and so on. No one can deny that personal gestures of approval: a touch, a gleam in the eye, a nod, a smile, a hug, a pat on the back or simply genuine interest, are far more effective in encouraging a child to continue to do well than any material gift is. These kinds of reward go deep into one's psyche, ensuring well-being and happiness. Sadly many busy parents today have no time or inclination for personal expressions of love, but have opted to substitute them with expensive material gifts. The Buddha teaches that *mudita*, ( best translated in this context as 'altruistic joy' or the genuine happiness one feels at the success of others), is a divine quality. When adults practice *mudita* with children, surely it surpasses any material reward.

We should also bear in mind that not every child will react to reward or punishment in the same way. For example, the gift of an expensive gadget like an I-Pod or Playstation may be less meaningful to a child from a well-to-do family than one from a poorer background. Or an active child could be grounded from outdoor activity as punishment whereas an introverted one could see it as a blessing and even welcome the 'deprivation'. The bottom line is that there cannot be a standard general rule regarding reward and punishment when it comes to children.

What we need to be particularly watchful about with regard to rewards is that, when a child is pitted against others, fairness and justice must prevail. The present system of singling out the naturally-gifted for recognition is blatantly unfair. What about those who may not be as gifted but who try hard? Effort and attitude need to be rewarded as well. Improvement, no matter how little, needs to be recognized and praised. Sometimes we reward the occasional good behaviour of children who are constantly getting on the wrong side of us, but we ignore those who never give any trouble. The message which comes across is "it does not pay to be good all the time".

"There are many classrooms where pupils who conform receive little or no recognition for their efforts, while pupils who challenge the rules and expectations receive endless sanctions, yet when they finally do manage to control their behaviour and conform, they also receive an avalanche of praise and rewards" (Kathleen Miller). The bad guys receive all the attention; the good ones are ignored.



No one can deny that our present system is woefully inadequate to develop “ariya puggalas” – noble beings. Our entire civilization today is designed to develop greed. Our consumerist culture is founded on greed. If you think about it, many of our widespread practices had noble beginnings – like Father’s Day and Mother’s Day, but they have been hijacked by the commercial world to create more greed and to exploit emotional blackmail, where people go through the rituals of gift - giving out of a sense of obligation and duty rather than as a genuine desire to show gratitude. After all, is it not a sad comment on our times when we have to set aside a single day to show gratitude to parents? In Buddhist countries showing gratitude to parents is a daily affair!

This is just one example of a world gone terribly wrong. At every turn noble values like gratitude and mudita (joy at others’ success) have been commercialized and reduced to the mere exchange of gifts and rewards. We are in urgent need of bringing to the world a very different system than the one we have in place in our schools, our homes, our workplaces and even our recreation centres. We need to ask ourselves what is the purpose of education, formally at school or informally at home. It should be to “create intelligent, engaged, socially alert and considerate choice makers”. “Education must help young people internalize their choices, harmonize their self - understanding to desired and desirable outcomes, essentially constructing their own ethical choice-making framework.” (New Teacher Network, April 2008) This means that the purpose of education is to make individuals responsible and capable of making independent choices which are

beneficial to themselves and society. Education is all about effecting change, of making people to be better human beings who are capable of enjoying happiness and making others do the same.

Where can a model for such a system be found? Is there an alternative to the present system which we have been using for millennia to train our young, to inculcate in them our values and aspirations? Not surprisingly twenty five centuries ago, the Buddha had given sound advice on the matter both explicitly and implicitly in his sermons to lay people on how they can find happiness and meaning in their lives. Tracing all our sufferings to a single source, craving, He showed how we can live simple, uncomplicated lives by reducing our wants and growing out of our dependence on material objects to provide happiness. “Santutti Paramam Dhanam”: Contentment is the highest wealth. This is the direct opposite of modern civilization’s consumerist culture which feeds on craving and discontent. Unfortunately these negative traits are so deeply entrenched in our lifestyles that it will take an enormous amount of re-orientation to look at existence from a totally different angle. It requires us to fully understand and practise the Noble Eightfold Path to step in the right direction towards lasting happiness. The Noble Eightfold Path begins with Perfect Understanding. Understanding of what? Of the true composition of the world around us. The source of craving is the illusion that what we recognize as a SELF, an “I” is really non - existent, and that all the things we grasp at are also impermanent and without any ultimate reality. So when an illusory self grasps at apparent objects, the result is frustration. Perfect Understanding lays bare this truth of non-

reality. When this understanding is perceived even dimly, the rest of the Eightfold Path becomes visible and attracts us to follow it with the right emotion or right intention. When we have Perfect Understanding and see things as they really are, it becomes easy to give up the things we grasp at because we realize that we have mistaken the Unreal for the Real. Perfect Understanding leads to the Right Emotion which helps us to easily give up unessential things without a sense of regret or feeling that we are sacrificing something. This is maturing spiritually. Let's take the example of a five year old to make this point clear. If his father gives him an Ultraman toy for his birthday, he will be very happy and refuse to give it away or share it with others for any reason. Now if the same toy is given to him when he is 25 years old, will he have any trouble parting with it? What has happened? He has matured and sees things as they really are – 'Ultraman' is a mere toy! Similarly when we mature spiritually we begin to see all material things for what they really are – just toys incapable of providing lasting happiness. When we see that they cannot bring lasting happiness we give them up easily. We call this renunciation.

With regard to the question of rewards, the duty of an adult, from a Buddhist point of view, is to help a child to grow up to understand that material things cannot bring true happiness. Of course this does not mean that we refrain absolutely from giving presents, but they must be given judiciously and with wisdom. The child must really appreciate and value the gift, because it was really earned. If rewards are easy to come by they lose their value. It is also important to remember that rewards must never be mistaken for bribes – to

get someone to do something in expectation of material gain. Never bribe a child to behave well. The child must learn that good behaviour is its own reward.

Children learn best by example. If adults wish to inculcate correct values in children, they must first set the example themselves. If parents themselves expect expensive gifts and find pleasure in collecting material things surely children will follow them. On the other hand, if they have the right values and the right understanding, they will genuinely find no pleasure in collecting material objects. To repeat: “Santutti paramam dhanam” – contentment is the greatest wealth. The tragedy of our modern consumer society is that we are never allowed to be satisfied with anything for too long. This constant craving for something new permeates every aspect of our lives from material possessions to personal relationships. The result is that ours is a society which knows no happiness – and it is a trait we pass on to our children.

It is therefore necessary that we work hard to re-orientate our value systems and learn to be satisfied with our basic needs. How do we begin to do this? By examining what causes unhappiness. If we know the cause of unhappiness we could look for ways to eradicate it.

A sad observation about society today is that although there are six and a half billion people on earth, human beings have never been lonelier. This is especially true of urban families where parents and children do not share the same closeness which they did in agricultural societies a hundred years ago. Because of the pressures

of urban living, parents and children are separated for long hours each day by work and school. The latest phenomenon is when parents leave their children for several years while they work overseas to provide their families with material comforts. The result: children have good shoes, good clothes, expensive toys, comfortable homes – but no parental love and attention. They end up lonely and estranged. A letter to TIME magazine (December 22, 2008) illustrates this point succinctly: “For a decade, my father lived alone while supporting his wife and children, who left South Korea to pursue an education abroad. Although it was my father who stayed behind, I believe the emotional hardship for any divided family is similar. My parents’ sacrifices motivated me to work hard in school, but after many years apart, relating to my father on a personal level became hard work. Concerned about his limited involvement in my upbringing, my father felt it was his duty to correct me as often as possible. As an adult, it was difficult for me to internalize his lectures. Such divided families are the ultimate symbol of what parents are willing to sacrifice in order to provide a better education for their children. It may not always be the best way, but I will always be grateful to my parents for the decisions they made”. Grateful, yes, but emotionally deprived ... for life.

In another letter in the same magazine one respondent wrote: “Few children – rich or poor, in whichever corner of the globe – prefer gifts and toys to the presence of their mothers”.

So happiness cannot be obtained through the provision of material benefits alone. We need to find it by other means. This brings us back to our main discussion

which is about the kind and the extent to which rewards can be given to enhance a child's development by encouraging him or her to strive harder. Excessive rewards can be counter productive. Material gifts can never adequately substitute for meaningful family relationships.

The entire teaching of the Buddha is about transformation, changing from Ignorance to Wisdom, from performing unskillful actions to skillful ones.

The purpose of education is to effect a change of behavior in a person, and to pass on our values: generosity, kindness, responsibility perseverance, integrity and so on. We want these values to be internalized. To effect these changes we have depended quite heavily on rewards to entice children to cooperate with us. But by now it is clear that the use of rewards is not necessarily always effective. A better, more effective method was taught by the Buddha through the Noble Eightfold Path. It is the path of transformation. It consists of two parts, which are the Path of Vision (Perfect Understanding, and Perfect Emotion or Intention) and the Path of Transformation which comprises the six factors of Perfect Speech, Action, Livelihood, Mindfulness and Concentration. As one progresses along the path, one becomes progressively more self sufficient, relying more and more on oneself to become a noble being.

Noble behaviour cannot be brought about by someone else but only through individual self-effort. The best that someone else can do for us is to show us the way, by example and instruction. To obtain the ultimate goal, which is Perfect Happiness, one is taught to develop

Perfect Understanding of what constitutes that ultimate goal and what actions are best suited to obtain it. The reward is the happiness one experiences – no other reward is necessary. Although we may say there is a kind of reward system in Buddhism – that good deeds are rewarded by good results (e.g. favourable births in the next life) – this is not taught as the ultimate goal. In the parable of the raft, the Buddha tells of a man who sets out on a journey to reach a certain destination. On the way he comes to a river in flood, so he makes a raft and rows himself across. Now after having crossed the river he abandons the raft because it is now useless for the rest of the journey. Here the Buddha is advising us to rely on his teachings only for the purpose of leaving samsara behind, but we could also use the parable to further understand our position regarding rewards. Rewards are a very useful means to an end, but we must have the wisdom to discard the means at some time in order to gain the end. The entire thrust of the Buddhist Path is to make one understand that we rely less on external aids to reach the destination, and rely more on self – effort. Children too must learn at some point that they must work on self - improvement for its own sake rather than in expectation of a reward. We can give the wrong message by offering a reward (which is a bribe, really) to get something done. Now the wrong message could be that “if someone had to bribe me to do something, then it must be unpleasant”: If you have to bribe me to do good or to study, then being good and studying are unpleasant. Rather than this the Buddhist attitude to inculcate in oneself is that the joy and self respect that one gains by doing something right is its own reward. Studying and being good have their own reward in bringing inner happiness and self-fulfilment

: there is no need for a material reward.

The danger of getting children to do something in expectation of a reward is that it will strengthen desire or greed, which is taught as the cause of all suffering. While a reward can bring temporary pleasure, it will fade away and give rise to craving for another reward.

Most of us can recall the experiment on Pavlov's dogs. In this experiment the Russian psychologist Ivan Pavlov showed that his dogs salivated when a bell was rung at the same time food was given. After several times, only the bell was rung and yet they salivated. However the tendency to salivate dropped off after the bell was rung without the food being offered at the same time. In the same way, we can motivate children to do something we want by giving them a reward. Obviously, we cannot reward them for everything they do. But if no reward is forthcoming each time, they could become de-motivated. This leads us to question whether material rewards are a good idea in the first place. Besides, we should also consider whether, if rewards are freely given, then their 'special quality' and novelty wears off and does not provide the incentive which is intended.

On the other hand, if after the initial period of rewarding, the child is helped to higher levels of motivation, especially if she can understand the benefits of desirable behaviour for its own sake, then rewards and punishments become unnecessary or irrelevant. How many of us still remember that in sports, for example, the objective is not to win a gold medal, but to perfect the skill? Once this is understood and accepted and



practised the reward becomes unnecessary.

Buddhism teaches that there are three stages of development: the *pariyatti*, the *pattipatti*, the *pativeda* or the learning, the practising and the realization. The learning process must be followed by the practice (or the physicalization of the theory), but the process is not complete until it is internalized in the Realization. At this final level, no encouragement is necessary: it becomes natural, a part of one's nature.

So while reward is good and even necessary at the early stage of development, one must be weaned from dependence on props for the evolution of a noble being. We also talk of *SILAVA* and *SILAMAYO*. The one who endeavours to perfect his moral behaviour is *silava*, whereas the noble being who has purified his mind is good by nature, *silamayo*: he or she no longer needs encouragement or instruction. This is the final goal of the Buddhist Path to salvation. And since salvation is the Perfection of Wisdom, all human endeavour must be geared towards the development of wisdom. While at the initial stages we use "SKILLFUL MEANS" to set a person on the correct path, as wisdom increases, the crutches which are needed initially become unnecessary. In other words we can discard the raft in the parable and depend on ourselves to reach the destination.

The main objective in the Buddha's method is to convince an individual of his or her self worth. This acceptance of one's own value (gained through the actions of caring associates, *kalyana mitras*, and exercises like meditation on loving kindness) provide

the initial motivation to improve oneself. This is coupled with the person's taking responsibility for his or her own development. Children particularly can be persuaded to take on the responsibility for their own development without relying on extrinsic rewards given to them by others.

There is a story in the Dhammapada (Verse 178) which illustrates this point. Anathapindika was a millionaire banker who was a devout follower of the Buddha, but his son Kala hadn't even the slightest interest in spiritual affairs. Fearing the effects of the evil karma Kala was thus accumulating, Anathapindika offered his son a hundred pieces of gold if he would go to the monastery and observe the precepts for a single day. The son went, but not only did he not listen to any religious teaching, he came home early to demand the promised reward. The next day the father offered a thousand pieces of gold if he would recite a single stanza of the Buddha's Teaching. The Buddha, through his supernormal vision, was aware of what was happening, so He willed it such that Kala would be unable to remember anything immediately. The youth was determined to earn the reward, so he went the next day and the following day and made a serious attempt to learn the stanza. But as he diligently applied himself to memorize the lines, his understanding of their meaning grew and he eventually perceived the real meaning of the Dhamma, as a result of which he gained the first stage of sainthood.

Early next morning he followed the Buddha to his father's house for almsgiving but since he had given up the greed for monetary rewards, when Anathapindika publicly offered him the money Kala promptly refused

it. Anathapindika told the Buddha, “Venerable sir, my son has changed his mind; he now behaves in a noble manner.”

Kala had gained the greatest treasure through the skilful means of promising a material reward. The Buddha then uttered the following verse:

“Better than absolute sovereignty over the earth  
Better than going to heaven  
Better than even lordship over all the worlds,  
Is the Fruit of a Stream-winner” (Dhp 178)  
*(A stream winner is a sotapanna, one who reaches the first stage of spiritual perfection)*

This is why it is said: “Sabba dhanam dhamma dhanam jinati”: The gift of the Dhamma excels all other gifts.

*“The ultimate goal of rewarding children is to help them internalize positive behaviours so that they will not need a reward. Eventually self motivation will be sufficient to induce them to perform the desired behaviour and outside re-enforcement will no longer be necessary.”*

*“If humans are given the freedom to learn things as they come up naturally in life, there’s no need to bribe them with the promise of a reward to force them to learn something when they are not ready. I believe that rewards motivate children to get rewards, not learn”.*

What we want for our efforts is to produce a generation of children who can self- regulate, self-monitor and become self-reliant. To do this we must create

an atmosphere of freedom to help young people to understand and successfully make the right decisions in their lives which result in happiness for themselves and those around them.

## **APPENDIX**

### **STORIES FROM THE DHAMMAPADA**

Here are three examples of the method the Buddha used to instruct people according to their different characters.

#### **Dhammapada verse 25**

*By sustained effort, earnestness, discipline and self control, let the wise man make for himself an island which no flood overwhelms.*

Story:

Due to past bad karma, Culapanthaka was so stupid that he was unable to memorise even one verse of the teachings. His brother, Maha panthaka, who was very clever, advised his brother to return to the lay-life. But the Buddha told him that it was not important to be intellectually clever to attain spiritual perfection and instructed him to simply rub a clean piece of cloth while saying ,’defilement, defilement ‘. Culapanthaka did as he was told and as he rubbed the cloth, he realized that the mind in its original state is perfect, but due to ignorance it becomes defiled. As he realised this, his past good karma took effect and he became an arahant, with psychic powers.

## Dhammapada verse 114

*Though one should live a hundred years without perceiving the deathless state (Nirvana) yet better is a single day's life if one perceives the Deathless state*

Kisagotami was very unhappy because her in-laws were treating her badly, but she eventually gave birth to a son and they began to respect her. Unfortunately, however the boy died, and she became so distracted that she lost her mind and went around the town asking everyone she met to restore her baby back to life. Someone directed her to the Buddha, who, knowing her distracted state of mind, refrained from giving her a lecture on impermanence as he would normally have done in other circumstances. Instead, he told her that he would help her, but she would have to bring him a handful of mustard seeds, with the condition that the seeds must be taken from a house where no death had occurred. Kisagotami went from house to house, but while everyone was willing to give her the seeds, no one could say that they had not lost a loved one. Slowly it dawned on Kisagotami that death is a condition of existence which no one is exempted from and that even if her son was restored back to life he would eventually die anyway. In this way she learned to accept death. As a result of the Buddha's skilful teaching she understood the reality of life.

## **Dhammapada Verse 285**

*Cut off your affection, as though it were an autumn lily, with the hand. Cultivate the very path of peace. Nibbana has been expounded by the Auspicious One.*

On one occasion a young man became a monk and as part of his meditation practice, he was asked to focus his mind on a rotting corpse. Now this man found it very difficult to focus his mind on the disgusting object. No matter how hard he tried, he was unable to meditate on the loathsomeness of the body. So, Venerable Sariputta brought him to the Buddha, who asked him what he had been before he became a monk. The young man replied that he came from a family of goldsmiths who had always worked on crafting beautiful objects. Accordingly, the Buddha handed him a lotus flower made of gold and asked him to meditate on that instead. The young man found that he could easily gain one-pointedness of mind by reflecting on the beauty of the lotus and he eventually became an arahant. Again the Buddha succeeded in guiding a person based on his particular temperament, rather than applying the same general rule for everyone.

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Mr Vijaya Samarawickrama (also well known as Uncle Vijaya) is a very inspiring and respected Buddhist teacher who has inspired many through the lens of Buddhism by his noble action in expounding the Dhamma. He graduated as a Specialist in the Teaching of English as a Second Language from the Malayan Teachers Training College in Liverpool, England and later on a B.A.(Hons) in English and Linguistics from the University of Malaya and an M.A. (Drama and Theater) from the University of Hawaii.

He is not only a dedicated teacher but a talented writer who has assisted the Late Chief Venerable, Ven K Sri Dhammananda with his numerous publications. He travels around the world to share the gift of Dhamma by delivering talks and organising workshops and seminars in schools, colleges, universities and Buddhist organisations.

Notes 笔记

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