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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhasa

Summary - Building for Buddha

This article explains one form of Buddhist practice that can help us to improve our minds and the way we operate in this world.

The example provided is that of building, restoring or renovating buildings for Buddha. When done correctly, building can be a practice which makes not only new buildings; but new minds and kamma to have refuge in Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha.

Building for Buddha

When we practice Buddhism, we find out there are often better ways to operate in the world than the ways we learnt when we grew up.

Buddhist practice is to retrain ourselves so that we think, speak and act in ways which will cause our minds to improve and which will lead us to a bright and secure future.

We gradually recognize what we think we know needs to be re-examined. We need to hold lightly to what we think we know to prepare our minds to make a change for the better.

When we build for Buddha this can also be the case because, when done correctly, building can be a practice which makes not only new buildings; but new minds and kamma to have refuge in Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha.

We need to find out how to build in a way which contributes to our Buddha Dhamma learning and refuge.

We can make a lot of merit by constructing a Buddhist Temple, possibly vast amounts, but if we build with the wrong approach this merit will just be causes to receive the worldly acquisition and the wealth of many buildings in our future. No Buddha, no Dhamma - just buildings.

I can remember one of the first lessons I was given in building was when our Dhamma Teacher John Hughes decided to build a gate at the Buddhist Discussion Centre Australia. It is now known as the Northern gate and has since been adapted to house the Centre's temple bell.

We built the gate section by section until only the roof remained to be completed. We found some slate tiles which were ideal for the roof and I arranged three days off work to complete the task and help with other things.

Whilst I was eager to start work on the tiles – two holes had to be drilled through every tile to enable them to be secured to the roof – each time I thought I was going to get started, my Teacher would suggest we do something else; or at least have a cup of coffee, or maybe lunch.

The first day passed without me getting my hands on the tiles – the very thing I had set my time aside to complete. Day two was just plain frustrating. Despite my increasing eagerness to start work on the tiles John had other things which needed more immediate attention. From memory we would just sit while he talked about things. I think he talked for many hours during the three days, telling me about one or another thing that maybe I really wasn't interested in at all.

And on it went. In my head I had all these self-imposed timelines I was mulling over. Unfulfilled urges to be active, impatient aggravation to get holes drilled! As I boiled I could recognise my mind's strong addiction. I was stuck on following “my agendas” and a deep attachment to “doing”, which was being thwarted.

The Teacher was teaching the Dhamma. He was helping me. He was using the project of building the gate to reduce my mind's greed, my attachment to “my” views and opinions, my likes and dislikes, so I could come to the Right View. We build for Buddha, not to act out our own agenda's, even if acting out our agenda's makes us feel comforted.

Buddha training is designed to reduce our grabbing and grasping, our craving, our attachment to our own refuges, narrowness and opinions. This is because wisdom cannot arise while there is attachment to these things.

Dhamma projects are not only so we can make merit. If we don't guard against our greed, or stinginess or hate when working in our projects they are not fulfilling their function fully, and we are not benefiting through reducing our unwholesome mental states or building our wholesome states.

Setting Up Right Motive

At the beginning we need to approach our projects with the view that we are here to learn how to practice Buddhism correctly and build good minds through doing these worthwhile activities. This is the first thing we need to produce, which is called Right Motive.

You can develop many good qualities of mind whilst making the merit.

The good minds help build the merit, the merit helps the good minds get stronger and arise more frequently. But you have to target this for it to happen. You have to set yourself up with the Right Motive and wholesome effort for this to happen.

Some of the good qualities we can cultivate by “Building for Buddha” are:

patience,
practicality,
flexibility of mind,
lightness of mind and mental states,
pliancy of mind,
mindfulness,
generosity,
professionalism,
friendliness,
adaptability of mind,
attention to detail,
wise use of energy,
keeping five precepts,
joy,
recognising our resources,
recognising the wonderful blessings and conditions we already have by being in a position to do this work as an offering to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, with Buddha in our heart.

1. Before Commencing Building

Before starting work we can prepare our mind by chanting Homage to the Triple Gem (Namo Tassa for example), the 5 precepts and the Triple Gem Refuge, preferably in front of a Buddha image.

As we work during the day it is important to keep five precepts and recollect that this work is to provide a suitable Dhamma Teaching environment where people and devas can come to learn and practice the Buddha Dhamma for many years into the future.

It is the mission of our Centre for example, that we propagate the Buddha Dhamma at our location in Upwey for at least 500 years.

2. Work Safely and Mindfully - Guidelines

1. To keep the environment a safe workplace ensure that everybody wears safety clothing when appropriate such as eye goggles, gloves, hard hats, boots and so on.
2. Ensure that the builders drink plenty of liquids to not become dehydrated, particularly during the hotter weather toward summer. Vigorous physical activity can burn lots of energy so ensure everyone's food intake is sufficient. We generally stop work if the temperature reaches 35 degrees Celsius.
3. Examine the risks of each activity before starting – we look if there are sharp edges protruding, beams we can bump our head on, things we can trip over – we check out our surrounds well before we commence so we can recognize the potential dangers.
4. Pay attention to where other people are working. There is a risk of accident or injury occurring from the activities of persons working near each other.
5. Generally don't rush the work. Also we don't shout or yell which is disturbing to others, nor do we play games or hype ourselves or others up in the workplace. We do not allow children onto the worksite. We are considerate of others and work harmoniously helping each other.
6. Have respect for the tools. Tools have helped build much of our human world. They enable us to do something we could not otherwise do. Their use facilitates our modern lifestyle and the standard of living we enjoy. Keep them clean and put them under cover from rain.

3. We Wish Our Buildings To Be Beautiful

We use care that our work is pleasing to the eye - unparallel edges for example, tend to disturb the mind, things out of level can also have that effect, poor workmanship stands out - so we need to apply care and attention to the quality of our work.

We have a rule to double check all our measurements with care and attention and, if we are working with someone, else ask them to do the double checking.

We see our work as an offering to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. This includes Monks and Nuns and lay Dhamma Teachers and the many beings who will use this building we have created to learn and practice Buddhism in the future.

The building site has a leader who sets the pace, generally allocates the tasks and decides when we rest for tea, coffee or food. We check with that person to find out what needs to be done next and if we are unsure of how to do some aspect of the job we are working on.

4. At The End Of The Day

1. Put away the tools and materials and leave the site tidy for the next day's work.
2. Remember to dedicate your merit.
3. Be particularly careful that you do not let your mind go to unwholesome behaviour after spending time building. The unwholesome minds will become stronger quickly because of all the merit you have just made even if you have dedicated the merit.

Finding Resources

From time to time you may have the opportunity to get something for free which could be useful in building such as tools, nails, or building materials such as a door, for example. We encourage Members to look out for such things as over the years many of the materials we have used in our constructions have been donated to us as dana.

In our kitchen building project some years ago, just as we were about to start building the kitchen cupboards, sink and stove areas one of our Members heard that her neighbour had a professional kitchen sink in their garage they were not using. The neighbour was delighted to donate that to us and it is a great example of what can be found if we keep it in mind to look.

We can offer to pick up such items if they are too big for the donor to transport them.

Five Kinds of Dhamma Cetiya

It is worth recollecting that the Buddha advised there are four categories of pagoda worthy of homage. When we build for Buddha we are most likely providing a building which is in one of these four categories.

These buildings are called Dhamma Cetiya in Pali and are significant because of the holy object(s) they protect and are the home of. The four are:

1. Dhatu Cetiya - a pagoda or stupa containing the relics of the Buddha, a paccakka Buddha, an arahant or universal monarch.
2. Paribhogga Cetiya - the Four Holy Sites connected to the life of the Buddha in India.
3. Dhamma Cetiya – a building which contains Dhamma books, Tripitaka and other scriptures.
4. Uddesika Cetiya - a building that contains images of the Buddha or His Nobles Disciples. Objects worthy of respect in this category also

include the requisites belonging to monks, whether it be robes or bowls.

When we are the builders of such holy structures we are offering something truly precious to our community, the Buddha Sasana and all living beings.

The Dhamma community and its members that use the building are sustained and supported by its existence for their wellbeing and attaining perfect enlightenment. The structure by its nature protects and preserves all within, and the benefits of our offering in most cases will continue for a very long duration, possibly even hundreds of years.

This article was written by Anita Carter & Frank Carter
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