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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhasa

Summary

This article describes what 'merit' means in Buddhism and the significance of merit making to sustain Dhamma practice. It also shows the 10 ways of making merit which the Buddha identified, as well as the conditions an individual will need to meet in order to practice Buddhism.

Ten Ways of Making Merit

The Buddha identified ten ways of making merit in ascending order of power.

These are given in Pali with English equivalents.

1. DANA – Charity, Generosity.
2. SILA – Observing Precepts, Morality.
3. BHAVANA – Meditation.
4. APACAYANA – Respect for Dhamma Teachers.
5. VEYYAVACCA – Giving a helping hand for others to perform virtuous deeds.
6. PATTIDANA – Sharing Merits.
7. PATTANUMODANA – Joyful acknowledgements in the sharing of Merits.
8. DHAMMASSAVANA – Listening to Dhamma.
9. DHAIKADESANA – Teaching Dhamma.
10. DHITTHUJUKAMMA – Righting one's own wrong views.

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Without mindfulness and wisdom we would not know to use these methods.

Buddha Dhamma Teachers constantly point to merit making opportunities and direct their Students in merit making activities.

In many countries around the world, education is highly valued. Therefore, when teachers are highly respected it is probable that much diligence is applied to learning by the students. To study the Buddha Dhamma a student must request to be taught in order to create the right form of mind to learn.

There are many stories in Japanese history where the student who comes to the temple to see the Master to learn the Dhamma, only to find himself refused every time he attempts to enter. On some occasions the student would be admitted after waiting many days and nights at the gate. The length of time is irrelevant, what is relevant is the readiness of the mind of the Student.

This practice originated at Nalandra Monastery in India. Four gatekeepers would stand guard, only admitting those deemed ready to be taught. Those about whom there were doubt would be referred to the Master. Aspiring Students included princes and people of great wealth, but what mattered was not the social status or wealth of the person who wanted to enter, again all that mattered was the readiness of the mind of the Student to be taught.

The Law of Cause and Effect (kamma and vipaka) determines that to attain learning and benefit in respect of anything, it is necessary to produce an accumulation of available wholesome action (Pali: kusala kamma).

This merit is the 'energy' of all realisations and the cause of continued wholesome conditions of practice. A corollary of this means, a lack of sufficient available energy, the Students meditation will not lead to producing realisations, and further, it will be difficult for the Student to find conditions that will support his or her Dhamma Practice. Some basic conditions have to arise in order for beings to be able to practice the Buddha Dhamma. These are:

1. You have to be born into a Buddha-Sasana.
2. You have to be born into a suitable body or form.
3. You have to be born healthy in order to live beyond a few years.
4. You have to have sufficient food, water, warmth and conditions to sustain this present life.
5. You have to meet the Buddha's Teaching of the Middle Way in a language that can be understood.
6. You have to be Teachable as regards the Middle Way.

7. You have to desire to Learn the Middle Way.
8. You have no major obstruction to being trained in the Middle Way.
9. Over an extended period of time, you have to desire to practice and realise the Teachings of the Middle Way.
10. You have to have sufficient leisure time to be taught and to practice the Middle Way.

In Australia, the maintenance and development of old and new Dhamma Centres is one type of activity that for many practitioners could act as the base of new wholesome kamma on which they continue to practice and realise the Middle Way. A Practitioner's home altar should reflect his or her Centre's altar for maximum benefit. If the temple attended is Mahayana, the home altar should reflect this style of practice. Cleaning altars is an offering in itself. It is no different to the cleaning of floors in a Monastery as Monks and Nuns do as part of their usual practice.

As the hard shell of a tortoise protects the soft body within, the soft Dhamma too, has to be protected by the hard structure of Temples: their upkeep, administration, financing and development, at the same time, the shell or structure is not an end itself, but exists for the benefit of Dhamma practitioners through supporting the preservation and proliferation of The Noble Eightfold Path as taught by the Buddha. A Centre with a sound structure will not become a dead institution, and will not become an empty shell devoid of the Body of Living Dhamma. Temples are for practicing.

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