

THE ETHICS AND VALUES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

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Introduction

This is my honor and pleasure to get a great chance for writing an article, **‘the Ethics and Values of Learning and Teaching’** for the Fourth Asian Conference on Education (ACE-2012). The word ‘Education’ is so interesting to everyone since the world is in need of well-educated people. A well-being is largely known as a well-educated person. In this world there are thousands of schools, colleges, universities, institutions and other places where the fields of education are provided. Here what do we mean by Education, Ethics, Values, Learning, and Teaching?

Literally, the word, ‘Education’ means the process of teaching or learning in a school or college, or the knowledge that you get from this world.¹ Furthermore, ‘Education’ can be interpreted as a process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or colleges, to improve knowledge and develop skills or the institution or people involved in teaching and training or the subject of study that deals with how to teach and to learn.² This is general definition of word, ‘Education’. For further, ‘Ethics’ literally mean the study of what is morally right and what is not or a system of accepted beliefs which control behaviour, especially such a system based on morals whereas ‘Values’ are defined as the beliefs people have about what is right and wrong and what is most important in life, which control their behaviour. In addition, ‘Learning’ is interpreted as the activity of obtaining knowledge or knowledge obtained by study whereas ‘Teaching’ is the job of being a teacher. These words, however, comprise a very wide field.

The Condition of Knowledge’s Arising

With regard to the condition of its arising one distinguishes three kinds of knowledge: Knowledge based on thinking, knowledge based on learning, knowledge based on mental development. ‘Based on thinking’ is that knowledge which one has acquired through one’s own thinking, without having learnt it from others. ‘Based on learning’ is that knowledge which one has heard from others and thus acquired through learning. ‘Based on mental development’ is that knowledge which one has acquired through mental development in this or that way, and which has reached the stage of full concentration.³ This is the way to bring about knowledge or wisdom.

How We Firstly Drop into New Subject

‘Subject’ is the thing which is being discussed, considered or studied or an area of knowledge which is studied in school, college, university or any other place. There are a lot of subjects which the learners can choose, but how can it be properly chosen for the benefit of oneself and others? It would be better if all of us can think about the subjects before we come to final decision as follows:⁴

- Making likeness to relevant subject by thinking it will help to your future.
- Focusing full concentrate to that subject.
- Making persistence to your mind that “I can learn and understand this subject”.
- Understanding and making clear to yourself – new ideas about that subject.
- Throw away ideas & thoughts that aren’t help or related to your new subject.

- Use that new idea to your day to day life.

These are essential factors that we should know. People have different points of view about the subjects they choose to learn or to teach, indeed. Some of us like Economy, Politic, Management, Tourism, Science, etc., other people love to study Philosophy, History, Sociology, Religions and so on. Actually, making likeness to relevant subject is not quite difficult, but we should keep in mind that the subject we choose will help us and others. It brings benefits to all of us, family, society and the world where we live in. This is called the Ethics and Values of Learning. If we have wrong decision about the subject, we are on the wrong way.

In the same way, teaching is also required to follow the best ethical norm of teacher. As teachers, we have the awesome privilege to influence the character of our students, by inculcating fundamental ethical values. These values include fairness, honesty, respect, and trust. Because of our positions of power, we have a concomitantly great responsibility for the moral development of our students. As you plan your courses and individual class sessions, think not only about the knowledge and skills that you want your students to acquire, but also the values that you want them to develop, for your course policies and classroom conduct will convey values implicitly whether or not you are aware of them. Students will act in ways they have been shown to act. Students will treat others in ways they have been treated. Here, fairness means we must treat all students fairly. Nothing causes more dissatisfaction and anger than students' perceptions that the teacher is unfair. As teachers, Honesty is to have a professional responsibility to appraise the quality of students' work. Our appraisals must be honest and candid, because students' own appraisals may not be complete, reliable, or well grounded. Honesty requires us to point out not only what is wrong about an answer, but also what is right. Honesty requires us to admit we don't know the correct answer to a student's question rather than guessing. Honesty requires us to write accurate reference letters. And respect is also very important to all people in the world because we treat each other with respect. For courses to succeed, students must trust teachers. We teachers must demonstrate trustworthy behavior by keeping promises. We must adhere to our grading standards and course policies. We must keep our office hours with zealous regularity. We must return conscientiously graded assignments promptly.

What Actually We Need to Learn and Teach⁵

In the modern world after thinking what subject will help us as well as other people in the future, we understand and make clear to ourselves about the subject. For instance, nowadays people love to study Business and Economy, Law, Management and so on. Business is generally interpreted as the activity of buying and selling goods and services, or a particular company that does this, or work you do to earn money. This is so simple to everyone, but what actually we need to learn more about business, economy, management, etc., is the ethics and values of learning or doing business- the difference between good things and bad things in all subjects we learn.

1. The difference between merits and bad things

Hence 'ten wholesome courses of action'⁶ are called the good things to do in life, namely, 1- Avoidance of taking life, 2- Avoidance of taking what is not given, 3- Avoidance of sexual misconduct, 4- Avoidance of lying speech, 5- Avoidance of slander, 6- Avoidance of using rude speech, 7- Avoidance of idle chatter, 8- Avoidance of greed, 9- Avoidance of malevolence, 10- Avoidance of wrong view. In

the same way, there are ‘ten unwholesome courses of action’⁷: 1- Taking life or harming other living beings, 2- Taking what is not given, 3- Committing sexual misconduct, 4- Lying speech, 5- Slander, 6- Using rude speech, 7- Idle chatter, 8- Greed, 9- Malevolence, 10- Wrong view. These are the most important lessons of life that all people in the world should learn. But most often why do people not like learning such lessons? This is because of greed, hatred and delusion. We should know that we all love lives. Once the universal teacher says thus:

“All tremble at the rod. Life is dear to all. Comparing others with oneself, one should neither strike nor cause to strike. He who seeks his own happiness by oppressing others, who also desires to have happiness, will not find happiness in his next existence. He who seeks his own happiness by not oppressing others, who also desires to have happiness, will find happiness in his next existence.”⁸

This is the way we should learn and teach. No matter how hard we are living in the world, we still want to live longer and longer with peace and happiness.

2. The difference between Right and Wrong

Everyone has heard these two words, but not all understand them well. Here we should know that if we do something right, beneficial, and helpful, we bring peace and happiness, security to ourselves, others and the whole universe. So also if we do something wrong, we are in troubles. In this point, I would like to talk about the right path that all people should walk along in life. First path is called Right Understanding (right perspective) – understanding of natural law of all things, understanding of characteristics of existences, understanding of truths.

In addition, right understanding is knowledge with regard to stress, knowledge with regard to the origination of stress, knowledge with regard to the cessation of stress, knowledge with regard to the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress.⁹ This is the true pathway of mind or way of understanding that will bring this about, which is a correct understanding of behavioral cause and effect and reality. And if we develop this correct understanding, with the strong determination to be free from this uncontrollably recurring rebirth, then we are free from suffering and its causes. And in order to be able to best help others we have to go deeper, we have to overcome the obstructions that are preventing our mind from understanding the interrelatedness of everything. So if we understand how everything is connected, we will understand cause and effect completely. It means that we will know how to help others: what will be the effect of our actions. So, based on love, the wish for others to be happy and to have the causes of happiness; and compassion, the wish for others to be free of suffering and its causes; and the exceptional resolve in which I take the responsibility to do it myself, to bring them happiness and get rid of their suffering.

The opposite of ‘Right Understanding’, we see word ‘Wrong Understanding’. ‘There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no priests or contemplatives who, faring rightly and practicing rightly, proclaim this world and the next after having directly known and realized it for themselves.’ This is wrong view.¹⁰ Indeed, whatever we do for our daily living, it must be following with right understanding, and otherwise, it will cause a lot of troubles to arise in family life as well as societies. The purpose of right understanding is to clear one's path of the majority of confusion, misunderstanding,

and deluded thinking. It is a means to gain right understanding of reality. Right view should be held with a flexible, open mind, without clinging to that view as a dogmatic position. In this way, right view becomes a route to liberation rather than an obstacle.

On the other hand, right understanding is the foundation for developing a proper sense of values, so sorely lacking in our age. Without right understanding our vision is dimmed and the way is lost; all our efforts will be misguided and misdirected, all our plans for individual and social development must flounder and fail. Such plans will have to be based on the Eightfold Path with its emphasis on self-effort, self-control, and respect for the individual. When wrong views prevail we will operate with a perverted sense of values: we will fling ourselves into the blind pursuit of wealth, power, and possessions; we will be obsessed by the urge to conquer and dominate; we will pine for ruthless revenge; we will dumbly conform to social conventions and norms. Right views will point us towards an enlightened sense of values: towards detachment and kindness; towards generosity of spirit and selfless service to others; towards the pursuit of wisdom and understanding. The confusion and moral lunacy now prevalent in the world can be eased, if not eliminated, if the path of the Buddha is followed. Right livelihood and right action, for instance, can help us avoid the conflicts that result from a wrong way of life and wrong action, thereby enabling a society to live in peace and harmony.

And other important paths we should have in life are: Right Thought - being resolved on renunciation, on freedom from ill will, on harmlessness; Right Speech - abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, and from idle chatter; Right Action - abstaining from taking life, from stealing, and from sexual misconduct; Right Livelihood - abstaining from making one's living through a profession that brings harm to others, such as trading in arms and lethal weapons, intoxicating drinks, poisons, killing animals, cheating, etc., and should live by a profession which is honourable, blameless and innocent of harm to others; Right Effort - making a persisting effort to abandon all the wrong and harmful thoughts, words, and deeds; Right Mindfulness - contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating feelings as feelings, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating mind as mind, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world; Right Concentration - one-pointedness of mind has the function of unifying the other mental factors in the task of cognition.¹¹

3. Who must be friends of us and who must not

Not to associate with the fool, to associate with the wise, and to pay respect to the one who is worthy of respect, is the highest blessing, the cause of happiness.¹² This is very true that if we associate with the fool or bad friends, they will lead us to be bad. Not before long, we will automatically become indulging in intoxicants, wandering the streets at inappropriate times, frequenting public spectacle, compulsive gambling, malevolent companionship, habitual idleness.¹³ This is the most important lesson we need to learn. Here who must be friends of us and who must not as follows:

- Who Must Be Friends of Us

(a) he who is a helpmate,

- i. he guards the heedless,
- ii. he protects the wealth of the heedless,
- iii. he becomes a refuge when you are in danger,
- iv. when there are commitments he provides you with double the supply needed.

(b) he who is the same in happiness and sorrow,

- i. he reveals his secrets,
- ii. he conceals one's own secrets,
- iii. in misfortune he does not forsake one,
- iv. his life even he sacrifices for one's sake.

(c) he who gives good counsel,

- i. he restrains one from doing evil,
- ii. he encourages one to do good,
- iii. he informs one of what is unknown to oneself,
- iv. he points out the path to heaven.

(d) he who sympathises.

- i. he does not rejoice in one's misfortune,
- ii. he rejoices in one's prosperity,
- iii. he restrains others speaking ill of oneself,
- iv. he praises those who speak well of oneself.

- Who Must Not Be Friends of Us

(a) he who appropriates a friend's possessions,

- i. he appropriates his friend's wealth,
- ii. he gives little and asks much,
- iii. he does his duty out of fear,
- iv. he associates for his own advantage.

(b) he who renders lip-service,

- i. he makes friendly profession as regards the past,
- ii. he makes friendly profession as regards the future,
- iii. he tries to gain one's favour by empty words,
- iv. when opportunity for service has arisen, he expresses his inability.

(c) he who flatters,

- i. he approves of his friend's evil deeds,
- ii. he disapproves his friend's good deeds,
- iii. he praises him in his presence,
- iv. he speaks ill of him in his absence.

(d) he who brings ruin.

- (i) he is a companion in indulging in intoxicants that cause infatuation and heedlessness,
- (ii) he is a companion in sauntering in streets at unseemly hours,
- (iii) he is a companion in frequenting theatrical shows,
- (iv) he is a companion in indulging in gambling which causes heedlessness."

This is the classification of who must be friends of us and who must not. However, it does not mean that you have to run away from the fool. It is certainly the highest

blessing indeed if we do not associate with the fool; not to let oneself become a fool; not to do unwholesome deeds; to remove defilements; to eradicate attachment.¹⁴

- What Should Be Avoided

Here is the reason why associating with the fool is bad. I would like to give more detail about it as follows:

(a) Indulgence in intoxicants which cause infatuation and heedlessness

- i. loss of wealth,
- ii. increase of quarrels,
- iii. susceptibility to disease,
- iv. earning an evil reputation,
- v. shameless exposure of body,
- vi. weakening of intellect.

(b) sauntering in streets at unseemly hours

- i. he himself is unprotected and unguarded,
- ii. his wife and children are unprotected and unguarded,
- iii. his property is unprotected and unguarded,
- iv. he is suspected of evil deeds,
- v. he is subject to false rumours,
- vi. he meets with many troubles.

(c) frequenting theatrical shows

- i. where is there dancing?
- ii. where is there singing?
- iii. where is there music?
- iv. where is there recitation?
- v. where is there playing with cymbals?
- vi. where is there pot-blowing?

(d) indulgence in gambling which causes heedlessness

- i. the winner begets hate,
- ii. the loser grieves for lost wealth,
- iii. loss of wealth,
- iv. his word is not relied upon in a court of law,
- v. he is despised by his friends and associates,
- vi. he is not sought after for matrimony; for people would say he is a gambler and is not fit to look after a wife.

(e) association with evil companions

- i. any gambler,
- ii. any libertine,
- iii. any drunkard,
- iv. any swindler,
- v. any cheat,
- vi. any rowdy is his friend and companion.

(f) the habit of idleness

- i. that it is extremely cold,
- ii. that it is extremely hot,
- iii. that it is too late in the evening,
- iv. that it is too early in the morning,

- v. that he is extremely hungry,
- vi. that he is too full.

This is what we should avoid in life. We should learn and teach these things to our young generation so that they can live peacefully and happily with themselves and others. It is not bad to himself only, but it is also bad to his family and society. Understandably, if we can avoid all these things, we can live in peace and happiness¹⁶: the happiness through obtaining wealth by righteous means, the happiness through using that wealth for the benefit of himself and others, the happiness obtained by being free from debt, and the happiness obtained by being free from blameworthiness. Here, we can notice that the happiness of the layman is closely related to the concept of wealth. But wealth must be obtained by righteous ways of life; otherwise, there is no happiness among man in the world. The Buddha balances the first three happiness which comes from the good economic, with the last one, which is spiritual. He emphasized that the first three kinds of happiness is not equal to one-sixteenth part of the happiness obtained by being free from blamelessness.

4. The Four Noble Truths¹⁷

This is a lesson that the universal master never failed to teach to people. In the modern world, most of people do not like to learn and teach such lesson because they thought it is out of date. But this is the only lesson that people should learn and teach in order to understand what the life really is. The following is what the four noble truths talking about:

The first noble truth: to live means to suffer, because the human nature is not perfect and neither is the world we live in. During our lifetime, we inevitably have to endure physical suffering such as pain, sickness, injury, tiredness, old age, and eventually death; and we have to endure psychological suffering like sadness, fear, frustration, disappointment, and depression. Although there are different degrees of suffering and there are also positive experiences in life that we perceive as the opposite of suffering, such as ease, comfort and happiness, life in its totality is imperfect and incomplete, because our world is subject to impermanence. This means we are never able to keep permanently what we strive for, and just as happy moments pass by, we ourselves and our loved ones will pass away one day, too. With right understanding of this first noble truth, we should not learn or teach what may bring troubles to ourselves and others.

The second noble truth: the origin of suffering is attachment to transient things and the ignorance thereof. Transient things do not only include the physical objects that surround us, but also ideas, and -in a greater sense- all objects of our perception. Ignorance is the lack of understanding of how our mind is attached to impermanent things. The reasons for suffering are desire, passion, ardour, pursuit of wealth and prestige, striving for fame and popularity, or in short: craving and clinging. Because the objects of our attachment are transient, their loss is inevitable, thus suffering will necessarily follow. Objects of attachment also include the idea of a "self" which is a delusion, because there is no abiding self. What we call "self" is just an imagined entity, and we are merely a part of the ceaseless becoming of the universe. In the modern world, thousands of living beings are suffering because of the desire and passion of the rich and the powerful people. We try to develop the world without human dignity, morality, and ethical way of living; it is impossible. We want our countries to be the best, so do other countries. Today we value so much on modern

Technology, but it would be fine if we encourage people to develop compassion, loving-kindness, morality, and ethical principle of living for themselves and others.

The third noble truth: the cessation of suffering can be attained through nirodha which means the unmaking of sensual craving and conceptual attachment. The third noble truth expresses the idea that suffering can be ended by attaining dispassion. Nirodha extinguishes all forms of clinging and attachment. This means that suffering can be overcome through human activity, simply by removing the cause of suffering. Attaining and perfecting dispassion is a process of many levels that ultimately results in the state of Nirvana. Nirvana means freedom from all worries, troubles, complexes, fabrications and ideas. Nirvana is not comprehensible for those who have not attained it.

The fourth noble truth: there is a path to the end of suffering - a gradual path of self-improvement, which is described more detailed in the Eightfold Path. It is the middle way between the two extremes of excessive self-indulgence (hedonism) and excessive self-mortification (asceticism); and it leads to the end of the cycle of rebirth. The latter quality discerns it from other paths which are merely "wandering on the wheel of becoming", because these do not have a final object. The path to the end of suffering can extend over many lifetimes, throughout which every individual rebirth is subject to karmic conditioning. Craving, ignorance, delusions, and its effects will disappear gradually, as progress is made on the path. In the modern society, the Eightfold Path is needed because this is the only way leading to peace and happiness.

Responsibilities of Teachers, Students

Teacher is literally defined as someone whose job is to teach in a school or college or a person whose job is teaching. It is very simple indeed. In human tradition, teacher is a person who is worthy of respect. He must let himself to become worthy of respect; he purifies his mind, view and realizes the things as they really are.¹⁸ I hope we all still remember our foremost teachers, our own parents. They taught us the good lessons of life that we ever had at school.

Anyway, in the modern society people can learn and teach everything and in everywhere. But I would like to say that no matter where in the world we learn or teach, we must keep in mind we have all these:¹⁹

- a. Teach and practice them social customs, precepts and religious activities.
- b. Teach all what you learnt from your teachers – Don't keep hidden things.
- c. Introduce your students to your friends who in higher level in relevant field.
- d. Save your students from hazards (social and environmental) as their father and mother.
- e. As a teacher you need to keep good character for sample you to your students.

This is the ethical principle of a teacher or responsibility of teachers towards their students. The universal master said thus: "One should first establish oneself in what is proper; then only one should teach others. A wise man should not incur reproach. One should act as one teaches others; only with oneself thoroughly tamed should one tame others. To tame oneself is, indeed, difficult."²⁰ According to the verses, we understand that a job of teaching is not easy because the Ethics and Values of teaching must be

included in any field of teaching. Again, “One should follow a man of wisdom who rebukes one for one's faults, as one would follow a guide to some buried treasure. To one who follows such a wise man, it will be an advantage and not a disadvantage. The man of wisdom should admonish others; he should give advice and should prevent others from doing wrong; such a man is held dear by the good; he is disliked only by the bad.”²¹

In the same way, all students should also have the responsibilities towards their teachers as follows:²²

- a. by rising from the seat in salutation,
- b. by attending on him,
- c. by eagerness to learn,
- d. by personal service,
- e. by respectful attention while receiving instructions.

These are the responsibilities of students for their teachers. We should commit ourselves as students because we still learn something from people and environments every day.

Conclusion

The Ethics and Values of Learning and Teaching play important roles to maintain human ethical principles of living. As most of people nowadays concentrate on material things, the human dignity is lessened. They take untruth for truth; they take truth for untruth; such persons can never arrive at the truth, for they hold wrong views.²³ But with ethics and values of learning and teaching, they take truth for truth; they take untruth for untruth; such persons arrive at the truth, for they hold right views.²⁴ No matter what subjects we learn or teach, but they must be good for ourselves and others. As the universal teacher said, ‘there is no fire like greed, no crime like hatred, no sorrow like separation, no sickness like hunger of heart, and no joy like the joy of freedom. Hunger is the greatest affliction, conditionality the greatest source of despair. The wise, seeing this as it is realize liberation, the greatest joy.’²⁵

Therefore, we have to solid our mind and make great persistence to achieve our goals. Remember that we should walk our learning and teaching thus: as a beautiful flower without fragrance is disappointing, so are wise words without right actions. As a beautiful flower with a delightful fragrance is pleasing, so is wise and lovely speech when matched with right action.

Abbreviation:

AN = Anguttara Nikaya
DN = Digha Nikaya
MN = Majjhima Nikaya
Dhp = Dhammapada
Vism = Visuddhimagga

BPS = Buddhist Publication Society

End Notes:

- ¹ Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, CD-Rom, 3rd Edition.
- ² Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 7th Edt, p. 488
- ³ Vism. XIV
- ⁴ AN, Sussusathi Sutta
- ⁵ DN: 30, Lakkhana Sutta
- ⁶ DN: 33, Singiti Sutta
- ⁷ DN: 33, Singiti Sutta
- ⁸ Dhp. X:130, p.124
- ⁹ MN: 9, Sammaditthi Sutta,
- ¹⁰ MN: 117, Mahacattarisaka Sutta
- ¹¹ DN: 22, Mahasatipatthana Sutta
- ¹² Khudaka Nikaya: 297, Mahamangala Sutta
- ¹³ DN: 31, Sigalaka Sutta
- ¹⁴ Khudaka Nikaya: 297, Mahamangala Sutta
- ¹⁵ DN: 31, Sigalaka Sutta
- ¹⁶ AN 4.62; PTS: A ii, 69
- ¹⁷ MN: 141: Saccavibhanga Sutta
- ¹⁸ Khudaka Nikaya: 297, Mahamangala Sutta
- ¹⁹ DN: 31, Sigalaka Sutta, tr, Maurice Walshe, Wisdom Publication, p. 461
- ²⁰ Dhammapada (Khmer &English), Ed., Ven. Suy Sovann, p. 56
- ²¹ Dhammapada (Khmer &English), Ed., Ven. Suy Sovann, p. 27
- ²² DN: 31, Sigalaka Sutta, tr, Maurice Walshe, Wisdom Publication, p. 461
- ²³ Dhammapada (Khmer &English), Ed., Ven. Suy Sovann, p. 4
- ²⁴ Dhammapada (Khmer &English), Ed., Ven. Suy Sovann, p. 5
- ²⁵ Essential Teachings, p. 9

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