

## Moral Guidances in Jātaka

Myint San Kyi\*, Khin Min Kyi\*\*

### Abstract

In all Buddhist countries, the *Jātaka* stories are the major sources for developing the character of the people. They are used widely in preaching by monks and lay persons. By studying these stories, people can develop their knowledge and learn how to face the difficult experiences of modern life. They can easily develop human values and good qualities. The major purpose of these stories is to develop the moral and ethical value of the learners. Of all *Jātaka* stories which advise and give guidelines from various points of views given to those that give moral ethics will be extracted and presented in this paper.

**Keyword:** Moral ethics, Buddhist countries, *Jātaka* stories, human values

### Introduction

The religious teaching of any religion includes moral guidance that show the right way for its followers in its own way and in various degrees. These teachings are valuable as they give guidelines on how to interact among people or between people and their natural environment. They can indicate the right way and shape the human behavior to meet the needs of a peaceful world.

Likewise, Myanmar people receive valuable moral and ideology from the teaching of the Buddha. The teachings of the Buddha or the Theravada Buddhist doctrines are mainly aimed at the cessation of suffering and at the ultimate stage of *Nibbāna*. However, these doctrines also offer useful advice and guiding principle for the lay people to follow in their everyday activities. The discourses in the *Sutta Piṭaka* especially those mentioned in the *Jātaka* Commentary are very supportive to teach moral ethics.

As the teaching of moral practices or ethics found in *Jātaka* Commentary have been long influenced on Myanmar society and Myanmar culture, these moral practices will be revealed and presented in this paper by extracting them from their original *Jātaka*.

### The Code of Conduct incumbent on a Ruler

The code of conduct that rulers need to practice can be found in *Tesakuṇa Jātaka*.<sup>1</sup> In this *Jātaka*, king *Brahmadatta* asked the three pet birds how one should behave properly as a king. He had three pet birds; *Vessantarā*, a hawk-owl, *Kuṇḍalinī*, the common mynah, and *Jambuka*, the parrot. *Jambuka* was the *Bodhisatta*. Firstly, the hawk-owl said, "Your Majesty, a king should abstain from telling lies, great anger and talking funny things. These three practices are called the code of conduct for kings by the wise man".

In this sense, it is learnt that the three things a ruler should constrain in his behaviour are:

1. telling falsehood (*musāvāda*)
2. getting angry (*kodha*) and
3. talking funny things (*hāsa*)

\* Lecturer, Department of Oriental Studies, Dagon University

\*\* Dr, Associate Professor' Department of Oriental Studies, Dagon University

<sup>1</sup> J,I,1

JA,V,114-132

The ten precepts incumbent on a king are also found in *Nandiyamiga Jātaka*.<sup>2</sup> These are:

1. giving charity (*dāna*)
2. observing moral precepts (*sīla*)
3. giving away to the needy (*pariccāga*)
4. integrity (*ajjava*)
5. gentleness (*maddava*)
6. keeping Sabbath (*tapa*)
7. controlling the anger (*akkodha*)
8. not torturing the other (*avihiṃsa*)
9. patience (*khantī*)
10. no contradiction to public opinion (*avirodhana*).

These practices are also found in *Mahāhaṃsa Jātaka*.<sup>3</sup> As mentioned above these facts, anger (*kodha*) is the important fact for the ruler. If a ruler is not in anger, he can make judgments in a fair and unbiased manner.

Another different version of the ten precepts that a ruler must follow is found in *Tesakuṇa Jātaka*.<sup>4</sup> These precepts are

1. supporting and caring for the parents (*mātāpitu sudhammaṃcara*)
2. cherishing the spouse and offspring (*puttadāresu dhammaṃcara*)
3. bestowing gold, silver etc. upon friends, associates, courtiers, warriors, generals and public (*mittamaccesu dhammaṃcara*)
4. having good leadership and management to justly rule warriors, elephants and horses in the battle field (*vahane subalesu ca dhammaṃcara*)
5. ruling the villages and treating them justly (*gāmesu nigānesu dhammaṃcara*)
6. ruling the small villages justly (*raṭṭhe janapadesu dhammaṃcara*)
7. offering the *brahmanas* and *bhikkhus* alms meals and robes etc. (*sāmaṇe brahmaṇesu dhammaṃcara*)
8. treating the wild life and birds sensibly and justly (*migapakkhīsū dhammaṃcara*)
9. having the knowledge that the well-trained practice can lead to prosperity (*dhammocīṇṇosukhāvaho*)
10. having the knowledge that following the moral practices will result in being reborn at deva abodes and *brahama lokas* (*saindā deva sabrahmaṇā suciṇṇena divaṃ pattā*)

<sup>2</sup> J,I,145. J,A,III,255-259

<sup>3</sup> J,II,90-99. J,A,V,377-407

<sup>4</sup> J,I,1. J,A,V,114-132

During the reign of Monarchs, their good or bad conduct was the determining factor for the growth or decline of a country. If a king's conduct were bad, his attendants and retinue would also be bad. If so, the commoners or the general public would be poor. A country with many impoverished people would not decline. It was very unlikely to prosper. This fact was highlighted in some *Jātaka* stories among the 550 *Jātaka*. It was learnt that the people scolded and put the blame on the ruler for his bad conduct in *Gandatindhuka Jātaka* of *Timsanipāṭa*.<sup>5</sup> This *Jātaka* gave a good example of an immoral king who failed to rule the country properly.

### **Moral Ethics to be followed by the Service Personnel**

As ethics the indicator of a person's value, the government employee must follow the good conduct. These are some moral ethics to teach the servants in *Jātaka* stories. The moral principles of the servant are

1. to be virtuous<sup>6</sup>
2. to be able to control the six sense objects<sup>7</sup>
3. not to drink liquors or not to take other intoxicants<sup>4</sup>
4. not to take any of the ruler's prosperity without being given<sup>5</sup>
5. not to show aggressive manner<sup>8</sup>
6. not to have ill will and envy<sup>9</sup>
7. not to slander<sup>10</sup>
8. not to engage frivolous talk<sup>11</sup>
9. using the pleasing words in telling the truths,<sup>12</sup>
10. to control the greed just as the speed of an arrow depends on the strength of a bow, the intensity of greed depends on the degree of greed that is compared to a small stomach.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> J, I,397. J,A,V,103

<sup>6</sup> J,A,VII,200

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 199

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 197

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> J,A,VII,197

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> J,A,VII,195

<sup>7</sup> J,I,88. J,A,II,389-392

<sup>8</sup> J,II,83. J,A,V,355

Regarding the moral practices to be followed by the servants is found in some *Jātaka* in which the main characters are animals. *Supatta Jātaka*<sup>7</sup> highlights the loyalty of Sumukha, the Bodhisatta and the chief warrior of *Supatta, the king of crow* the king of crows. Sumukha sacrificed his life to defend his lord. He was not only a good servant but also a faithful one to his king. In this *Jātaka*, Sumukha, the chief warrior of crow king *Supatta*, looted the royal meal prepared for the king of Benares from his chef to please *Suphassa*, the queen of the king *Supatta*, who wanted to eat the delicious royal meal. When the king of Benares had the crow caught by the soldiers, he asked why the crow had done. So, Sumukha replied, "Your Majesty, the name of my lord is *Supatta*, the king of crows. His queen is called *Suphassa*. King *Supatta* accompanied by eighty thousand crows dwells near Benares searching food from the country. I am the chief warrior of the king. Queen *Suphassa* had a craving to eat your delicious meal. So, I managed to look for the food from the chief on the risk of my life. Now, I have already presented the delicious food to the king and queen. I have fulfilled my desire to satisfy her. So, please give me whatever heavy punishment to your heart's content. I'm ready to accept it." Sumukha bravely told the king of Benares.

Again the story of a faithful service personal was in *Cūlahamsa Jātaka*.<sup>8</sup> This *Jātaka* mentioned about Sumukha, the chief warrior of the *hamsas*. One day, *Dhataratṭha* the king of *hamsas* was caught in the snare trapped by the hunter and 90000 birds fled away and deserted him when he was caught. Sumukha, the chief warrior of *hamsas*, remained alone near the king to guard him. The king told him to leave him and go elsewhere for safety. But Sumukha replied, "Your Majesty, I will sacrifice my life because I want to accompany you and share your suffering. I have done meritorious deeds and I am confident in the good consequences of good deeds. I am also fond of you. I cannot leave you alone."

Likewise, the loyalty of a good servant to his king is found in *Mahāhamsa Jātaka*.<sup>13</sup>

*Mahāmsa Jātaka* is similar to *Cūlahamsa Jātaka* in plot. In this story, Sumukha, the chief warrior of king *hamsas* bravely said, "Your Majesty, I'm quite different from other *Hamsas* in a very large number. Although 90000 *hamsas* have already left you when you are in trouble, I will be your true friend through thick and thin. When your life is at risk, I'm also already to sacrifice my life. I don't want to follow the practice of bad companions and unfaithful ones."

*Vidhūra Jātaka* of *Mahānipāta* clearly describes the ethics of service personal to a king.<sup>14</sup> Courtier Vidhūra asked the permission of the *Punṇaka* demon to wait for three more days before he followed him to teach his sons how to behave well as service personnel to the king. His delivery of a homily on the virtues of personnel in the king service is known as "Rājavasati," which consists of 46 *gāthās*. These *gāthās* are detailed instructions about the correct behaviour of the king's service personnel in every aspect such as etiquette in attending the king, speech, and dress etc. The 550 *Jātaka* are found to be very useful as they have stated the ethics to be followed by service personnel. Many *Jātaka* describe the good conduct of the service men.

Among them, Chief warrior Sumukha of the crow king *Supatta* narrated in *Supatta Jātaka* describe the good conduct of the *hamsa* king *Dhataratṭha* in *Cūlahamsa* and *Mahāmsa Jātaka* of *Asitinipāta* are that the two noble and honorable service personnel.

### **Ethics Mentioned in *Mahādhammapāla Jātaka***

It is true that everyone whether he is the king or a commoner, must be virtuous as one wants to enjoy a long life expectancy. Observing moral precepts will result in good health and

<sup>13</sup>J,II,377. J,A,V,356

<sup>14</sup> J,II,275.J,A,VII,151

longevity. *Mahadhammapāla Jātaka* of *Dasalanipāta* narrates a story about the people of *Dhammapāla* village who live very long and enjoy good health because of their good morality.<sup>15</sup>

The people of *Dhammapāla* village in *Kāsi* province were so virtuous that none of them died young. Everyone had long life span and the oldest one died first. When the Professor inquired about the cause of their long life span, *Mahādhammapāla Brahmin* explained to the Professor why they enjoyed a long life.

1. We always do meritorious actions and follow virtues. We never tell lies and refrain from immoral deeds.
2. We associate with the virtuous ones only and follow their admonition and advice. We do not associate with the immoral ones.
3. We take great delight in making donations before, during, and after performing them. We rejoice in our meritorious deeds of giving alms before, during, and after doing this activity.
4. We give alms to whoever is in need regardless of their social rank. We offer things to Brahmins and ascetics alike and we also give alms to the poor and destitute.
5. We never commit adultery. We abstain from sexual misconduct.
6. We abstain from killing, stealing, having sex with prostitutes, telling falsehood, drinking liquors.
7. Our family members, relatives, attendants, and servants alike observe moral precepts and they always do virtuous deeds.

As the village people of *Mahādhammapāla* village follow the ethics mentioned above, they never died young. This indicates the truth of the saying, "Those who follow virtues are well protected by virtues."

### ***Jātaka Stories concerning Lokapālādhamma***

The purity of bodily action, speech and mind result from "*Hirī*" and "*Ottappa*". If one adopts these two moral principles, he will be free from all evils such as bad habits, bad words and bad thoughts. He will be admired by all human beings and *devas*. He will escape from different kinds of danger such as disasters, enemies and threats of all kinds. He will prosper in present life and he will never be reborn at the four lower worlds. In the *Samsāram*, moreover, his prayers will be surely answered. *Hirī* makes a person recoil with moral shame from committing immoral deeds. *Ottappa* is fear to do evil, because it is aware of the manifold evil consequences.

Whatever task done on the basis of *Hirī* and *Ottappa* is moral and meritorious one. It can be called *Kusalādhamma* or merit. Meritorious deeds are pure, blameless and innocent. Those who do meritorious action are so calm that their behavior in three modes, namely physical, verbal and mental one is peaceful and tranquil with no trace of aggression and other defilements. They can easily overcome whatever obstacles and difficulties.

---

<sup>15</sup> J,I,214. J,A,IV,49

*Devadhamma Jātaka* narrates about prince *Mahimsa* who both knows " *devadhamma*" and practices them well. So, he managed to escape from the threat of the ogre. Besides, he was able to rescue his two younger brothers from the danger of the ogre.<sup>16</sup>

*Bandanamokkha jātaka* narrated about the prophet, the *Bodhisatta*, who managed to resist against the wiles and deceit of the queen leading to sexual misconduct. As he is a virtuous one practicing *Hirī* and *Ottappa*, he not only escapes from the temptress but also saves those who got trapped into her wiles.<sup>17</sup>

*Nacca Jātaka* points out that lack of *Hirī* and *Ottappa* can lead to the loss of a golden opportunity<sup>18</sup> while *Sudhabojana Jātaka* narrates about a female deity who receives the celestial meal given by *Kosiya* ascetic for her practice of *Hirī*.<sup>19</sup> These *Jātakas* stories are assumed to be giving instructions and guidelines to value *Hirī* and *Ottappa*.

The importance of *Hirī* and *Ottappa* is also described in *Daddara Jātaka*,<sup>20</sup> *Sihakotthu Jātaka*,<sup>21</sup> *Naccaa Jātaka*<sup>22</sup> and *Vātaggasindhava Jātaka*.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the moral ethics found in *Jātaka* are the foundation of human civilization. If everyone follows and practices these moral ethics, a more sensible and better human environment will emerge. There will be a peaceful and prosperous world where its residents enjoy worldly pleasures at present and they will also be able to seek spiritual wealth for the future until they reach the cessation stage of the round of rebirths. Therefore, it is expected that if everyone follows the moral ethics described in *Jātaka*, they will become good citizens with a strong sense of duty and good morality.

### References

- [1] *Jātaka Pāli* (Pathamobhāgo), (1997), Department of Religious Affairs Press, Yangon, Union of Myanmar.
- [2] *Jātaka Pāli* (Dutiyobhāgo), (2000), Department of Religious Affairs Press, Yangon, Union of Myanmar.
- [3] *Jātaka Aṭṭakathā* Pathamobhāgo, (1997), Department of Religious Affairs Press, Yangon, Union of Myanmar.
- [4] *Jātaka Aṭṭakathā* Dutiyobhāgo, (1958), Department of Religious Affairs Press, Yangon, Union of Myanmar.
- [5] *Jātaka Aṭṭakathā* Tatiyobhāgo, (1959), Department of Religious Affairs Press, Yangon, Union of Myanmar.
- [6] *Jātaka Aṭṭakathā* Catutthobhāgo, (1958), Department of Religious Affairs Press, Yangon, Union of Myanmar.
- [7] *Jātaka Aṭṭakathā* Pañcamobhāgo, (2000), Department of Religious Affairs Press, Yangon, Union of Myanmar.
- [8] *Jātaka Aṭṭakathā* Sattamobhāgo, (1997), Department of Religious Affairs Press, Yangon, Union of Myanmar.

---

<sup>16</sup> J,I,2.J,A,I,145

<sup>17</sup> J,I,28. J,A,I,462

<sup>18</sup> J,I,8. J,A,I,222

<sup>19</sup> J,I,108. J,A,I,145

<sup>20</sup> J,I,43. J,A,II,60

<sup>21</sup> J,I,49. J,A,I,98

<sup>22</sup> J,I,8. J,A,I,222

<sup>23</sup> J,I,77. J,A,I,353