

Wedding Talk

October 15, 2000

The Admonishments to a Newly Wed Couple

Today is the pre-wedding ceremony. In Buddhism, weddings are totally secular affairs, so we, monks, do not officiate at the wedding ceremonies. In our country, maybe even now, people do not need to go to the court to sign a wedding certificate, contract or whatever. The elders of the place officiate at the marriage ceremonies and they wed bride and groom together and that is binding. So it is actually very simple. But now the human society has become sophisticated and so you have to go to the court and contract all these things.

Since it is not a religious ceremony according to Buddhism, monks are not invited to the wedding ceremony. But people want to have a religious flavor in whatever they do including marriage. Before the marriage or sometimes after the marriage, they will invite monks to bless the couple and then they offer food and other requisites to the monks. That is a kind of recognition by the religious elders of the wedding. At such ceremonies, monks give a talk and words of advice to the newly wed couple.

Even during the time of the Buddha, one man, who was soon to give away his daughters to the in-laws, invited the Buddha and requested Him to give advice to the girls. In the olden days the custom is for the bride to go to the groom's house. Buddha gave advice to the girls who were about to get married. Since this happened more than two thousand and five hundred years ago, the advice Buddha gave then may not be so appreciated these days.

Do you want to hear something about that? You know our society used to be men dominated society, where man comes first and woman is second. So it is said that a wife should go to bed later than her husband; she should get up earlier her husband; she should attend to her husband and so on. The conditions of human society have changed. Women have fought for equal rights. Today, in most countries, man and woman are equal. Also, husband and wife are equal. The advice given in the ancient times should be modified to suit the conditions of the present times and human society.

At ceremonies like this, I always ask the newly weds three simple but important things to remember. I call them **three pillars of happy married life**. **The first thing is to be faithful to each other**. This is very important. You are going to become husband and wife because you love each other and so you should be faithful to one other. Nowadays, especially in the west, marriage, family life, and all related things are going in an unsatisfactory way. People do not pay much thought to extra-marital affairs and

so on. But we still follow the ancient custom and advice of the ancient elders. Therefore, it is important that you be faithful to each other and that is one thing you have to keep in mind.

The second thing is to have respect for each other's culture, religion, likes and dislikes, temperament and so on. That is also very important in life, especially when two people come to live together as husband and wife. Whenever there are two people, there are bound to be differences in likes and dislikes and so on. You should understand each other, have mutual respect and also tolerance to each other. Buddha said that tolerance or patience is the best of practices. So long as you practice patience, you will be in a good condition. If you or all of us do not practice patience or forbearance or tolerance, there are bound to be many problems. Even couples who belong to the same race, country, and religion, can have differences. It is important that you have to be respectful of each other - religion, culture and so on - and have understanding. If you want to impose your own culture, religion, or your likes on the other person, the marriage will not last long. So the second thing is to have respect for each other's culture, religion and so on.

You two people meet here, but you were born many miles. Eight thousand miles apart, right? One was born in Myanmar [in Asia] and the other in El Salvador [in South America], which is down south, right? I have not been there but I have been to Mexico. Two people, who were born eight thousand miles apart with differences in culture and religion, met and fell in love with each other so much that you decided to be partners of life. This should be for life, not just temporary. In our country marriage means for life. Even in the West until maybe a few years ago, a few decades ago, it is the same, right? **Till death do us part.** That is what you say at the marriage ceremony, right? Once you are united as husband and wife, you will be together until death comes. That means it is for life.

In order to live the life with happiness you need to adjust yourself to other person's likes and dislikes and so on. It is important that you do not impose your own will on another. That is the main cause of conflict between bride and groom or husband and wife. If you have tolerance for the other person's opinions, if you have understanding of the other person's likes and dislikes, then your married life will be a very happy one. I want you to be happy. I want you to lead a very happy married life. When you are happy, we are also happy. Right? If you are not happy, say due to conflicts and quarrels, one day you will come back to us and say, "Bhante, so and so is doing something". I want you to be happy; and for you to be happy there are many things to do, but one thing is that you must have understanding of each other. That is also a very important factor. Most people do not study or learn how to have relationship with people. There are many books and maybe there are courses that teach you how to

behave toward different people. I recommend some books. You can pick up some books that teach you how to persuade others, how to respond to criticism and so on. There are many such books at the stores. So the second pillar is what? To have tolerance, to have mutual respect, that is the second thing.

The third pillar is to live within your income. Nowadays there are millions of temptations. Things are produced faster than we can make use of; so whenever a new thing is advertised, we want to have it. If you see a car or equipment with new features, then you want to have a new car or equipment. The same with other new things. If your income is not enough to all of them, you will buy on credit. If you cannot pay off in time, you will be in debt. It is important that you do not spend more than you can earn. This is also the advice of the Buddha. He said, "your income must be more than your expenditure". When your income is more than your expenditure, you can save for emergency and you feel comfortable. It is important that you resist modern temptations and live within your income. That will give you peace of mind and also that is a source of happiness for you even though you may not own a very expensive car. If you are content with what you already have, then you don't have to worry about many things like buying a new car. It is important that you live within your means and make life as simple as possible. As a matter of fact, sophisticated life is a source of worries, anxieties, and conflicts. Keep life as simple as possible. But I am not telling you to live like monks, to live like recluses. Still you can keep your life relatively simple so that you have less worry, less anxiety. That is also very important. There are many other things that you already know but these three things are very important in a marriage. I think that the three pillars are important for a marriage to be successful, for a marriage to be happy. If you can follow these three pieces of advice, your marriage will be very enjoyable. We are glad that now you two get married.

One more thing I want to tell you, especially to the bride, is not to forget about religion. Whatever your religion is, be religious about religion. Religions teach good things. So it is important that we do not forget about our religion. Many people think that religion is outdated, but it is religion that keeps people from becoming barbarians. So be always devoted to religion, to the three gems: Buddha, Dhamma and Samgha. Do not forget to do merit whenever you can. You can do merit very easily. You don't have to spend a great deal of money. You don't have to spend a great amount of time. If you know how to do it, if you have the will to do it, you can do merit everyday. If you accumulate merit everyday, then with time, they will become a great heap of merit. To have the accumulation of merit is also an advice given by the Buddha. He said "The accumulation of merit is conducive to happiness." When you do merit, your mind is clear, your mind is pure. Pure mind produces pure material properties in the body. It is one way to keep yourself healthy and keep your mind happy. In order to keep the

mind happy, that means in order to keep the mind pure, you need to do some kind of merit: think of the Buddha, think of your religion. It is also important.

Today you offer food to the monks and offer money which we call four requisites for monks. You have now acquired merit. Now you are going to formally dedicate this merit. When you formally dedicate the merit, you use water. You pour water into the cups. That is a symbol for the formal dedication of merits. Why do we use water when we dedicate merit? It is not explained in the books but I think it is to symbolize the cleansing power of merit. When you do merit, your mind is pure. At the moment you do merit, there are no craving or attachment, no ill-will or no anger in your mind and so your mind is pure. Merit has a power to cleanse the mind of these impurities just as water has the power to cleanse the physical body. When your hands get dirty, you use water to wash and then your hands become clean. So in order to symbolize the cleansing power of merit you use water when you formally dedicate merit. That is one explanation.

The other explanation is that water is cool and coolness is a good quality, a good condition, especially in our country, Myanmar, and other tropical countries. We always like water but it may be different in this country and other countries. It is cold, we don't like cold. When you do merit, your mind is peaceful, right? You are not agitated; you are not angry; you are not greedy about something. At this moment your mind is very peaceful, that means your mind is cool in Asian sense. Not in the Western sense of the word cool as in "a person is cool", which means he does not like it, or he is not in favor of it. That coolness or peaceness is very important and it is valuable. In order to symbolize that peacefulness of merit, you use water. Water has cooling power. That is why when you dedicate merit, you pour water down into the cup.

This custom originated maybe even before the Buddha appeared in the world. So it is a very long standing custom. You may have heard about King Vessantara. When he gave away his children to a Brahmin, he used such the scuttle [incense] water and then he poured the water into the hands of the Brahmin and then the water went down to the earth. You can see such pictures in some ancient paintings. Now you are going to formally dedicate the merit and you do together here. This means you do merit together and it may conduce you to be together in the lives to come. We Buddhists believe in the multiplicity of life. We believe that we had many lives in the past and we will have many lives in the future.

That fact that you two meet together here from far distant countries shows that you had been together before in your past lives. It is not just accident actually, so you must have been together in your past life; that is why you are here now together. And if you want to be together in future lives, you do merit together. That is important. Men folks

think that doing merit is women's work and not theirs'. They may not do it themselves. They may just ask their wives to do it. But that is not correct because according to the teachings of Buddha what you do you get; if you don't do, you don't get. If you don't do the merit, you will not get the merit. I would like to advise you whenever you do merit, try to be together and do it together. There is a saying in Burmese: "**Even when we are born as birds, may we sit on the same branch**". That means may we be together wherever we are reborn. Our Bodhisatta (Buddha to be) had gone through many lives and almost every life he was always together with the woman who was to become YasodharĒ, his wife in his last life. So if you want to be together in future lives also, you do merit together like you are going to do today. That is if you want to be together. First you offer these offertories to us and then you are going to dedicate.

May all blessings be to you.
May deities protect you.
By the power of all Buddhas,
May happiness ever be yours.

May all blessings be to you.
May deities protect you.
By the power of all Dhammas,
May happiness ever be yours.

May all blessings be to you.
May deities protect you.
By the power of all Saṅghas,
May happiness ever be yours.

May you all be well, happy, and peaceful!

Now you are going to share merit you have accumulated today with all others beings. If you share your merit, you gain more merit. It is not like sharing a cake. When you share a cake, you get to eat only half of it. But when you share merit, you get the merit yourself and then you get another merit because sharing of merit is also an act of merit. So you get merit two times when you share merit. The other day I said "You get double merit", then the American man came and asked me "How much could he get?", he wanted the exact amount. When you share merit, those who accept your merit get merit themselves. And if they are some spirits or deities around, then they get the immediate results. When they get immediate results, they are pleased with you, so they protect as their own children. So it is always good to share merit with guardian deities,

spirits and so on because it is like making friends with them, and so they will always help you, protect you from dangers and so on.

SĔdhu! SĔdhu! SĔdhu!