

## Introduction to Right Livelihood , by Dhammaloka

RL = practicing ethics as worker and consumer

**Right Livelihood can be an important spiritual practice in its own right, with the potential to bring about a profound transformation in the mental states of those practicing it. Furthermore, the significance of Right Livelihood is much greater than the benefits to those directly engaged in it. Through certain methods and forms of right livelihood a glimpse can be seen of a new, an alternative and higher society that is based on Dharma practice and spiritual friendship in action.**

RL = a practical working out of the precepts in everyday life:

Three main areas of Buddhist teaching on RL

- (1) choosing and pursuing the right occupation;
- 2) accumulating wealth through hard work, diligence and setting certain restraints on one's own consumption; and
- (3) sharing wealth honestly acquired with family, friends and the wider sangha.

**In our course – four main areas of reflection:**

1. the ethical nature of our work itself,
2. the people we are working with
3. the way in which we work, and
4. Right Livelihood and the dana economy

### 1) The Ethical Nature of the Work

Buddhist Scriptures: In the scriptures predominantly 'negative' description of RL: abstention from wrong livelihood, i.e. from all occupations trades which directly or indirectly involve the killing or harming of humans and animals and from all occupations which cause damage to the mind or which induce negative and destructive mental states: for instance, = 'unskilful' (*akusala*) and 'non-salutary' (Majjhima 51). How to apply today?

**Four categories of occupations:** Those that cannot be right under any circumstances (see the examples given above). Those not wrong and unskilful in the obvious and direct way that the first type, but which definitely increase people's greed. occupations which can constitute Right Livelihood if one makes an effort. occupations which are expressions of one's dedication to live a life of benefiting other living beings and the world.

**Putting it in another way:** In as much as possible, our work should be

- a) ethically skilful – both with regard to ourselves and to others,
- b) make a positive contribution to the world,
- c) not impose excessive stress and strain on ourselves, and it should
- d) provide time and opportunity for cultural and directly spiritual activities.

**a. Our work should be ethically skilful:** In and through one's work one should do no harm others. At no point should this principle be sacrificed to profit. Ethical considerations must take precedence over profit and the difficult decision may have to be taken to forego some profitable business activity in the interests of morality.

**b. Through our work we should be making a positive contribution to the world:** ... whether directly or indirectly.

Directly: Unless we can see that we are, through our work, adding to the world's well-being, there will be a feeling of impotence and even guilt. Work which is useless or entirely selfish in its effects will stultify ourselves and render us impotent and frustrated.

Indirectly: Using our work to create the wealth with which other, more directly valuable, work can be undertaken.

**c. The Conditions of work should not expose us to extreme stress and strain:** The conditions under which we work are among the primary formative factors in our lives today: To what extent do they help us to attain and maintain positive mental states?

**d. Our work life should leave time and opportunity for cultural and spiritual pursuits:** It is unlikely that our work itself will provide for all our human needs. Therefore, we need leisure and space in which to engage in other activities which will lead to a more balanced and more refined human development.

## 2) The people we work with

Other people have a very powerful effect upon us. As Buddhists we must take into account the people we are working with and the nature of our relationships with them.

Our colleagues – whether we like or don't like them – offer great opportunities for the practice of metta, of dana (in a more psychological sense), or patience, etc.

At the same time some of these people are likely to be a **constant challenge** and even threat to the level of mental balanced we have achieved. As far as possible we should aim to have colleagues who are at least sympathetic to the ideals of Buddhism - at the very least they should not be hostile to it.

Is there anyone in our work environment who we consider to be a genuine spiritual friend? Have we experienced others as mentors?

Are we ourselves acting as mentors to younger colleagues?

To what extent can we act and manage without an authoritarian hierarchy?

How do we relate to those higher – or lower – in the hierarchy than we ourselves?  
What about taking responsibilities and to making decisions according to the principle of consent?  
Not blame others for their shortcomings, for unskilful acts (he made me do it) or for not having done what they said they would.  
When we make mistakes, apologise and make amends.  
When we criticise, first check the facts and possible reasons why the other person hasn't met the expectations, and then express our critique in a way enabling the other person to learn and do better in future.  
How actively do we contribute to a climate of genuine friendliness, taking care and giving encouragement to each others?

### 3) The way in which we work

*"The way you do one thing is the way you do any thing"* For work to be Right Livelihood we must take full responsibility for what we do – and for how and who we are in doing it!

**The outer dimension of taking responsibility:** Taking full responsibility for what we are doing - which means, to some extent, for the business as a whole. Doing our job properly and conscientiously to the best of our ability Help when we notice that help is needed – look beyond our immediate concerns.

**The inner dimension of taking responsibility** = concerned with maintaining a positive mental state and a high degree of mindfulness throughout our everyday life.

**Positive mental states:** Work offers many opportunities to cultivate our mind since it presents us with many situations and circumstances which challenge and test us.

**Mindfulness** – the basic Buddhist virtue. - being aware of ourselves – both in the traditional Buddhist way and in terms of being aware of what we are committing ourselves to - awareness of other people and what they are doing, feeling and thinking. If we are mindful of other people we will easily be able to co-operate with them.

We will be good listeners, since mindfulness teaches objectivity, taking in what is said without judgement or censorship.

Responding to other peoples' needs - awareness of purpose as well as of suitability - why are we doing what we are doing?

How does what we are presently doing contribute to achieving our highest aspirations in life?

How – under given circumstances – should I best act in order to progress on the path towards liberation?

**Viriya** – there must be an **active response** to what we are aware of = cultivation of energy "in pursuit of the good"

**Work as koan or Tantric Guru – how can Insight arise in work situations?** The aim of the Buddhist life being the perfection of Wisdom and Compassion the question arises whether any kind of work can take us that far – can work take us to the "Other Shore"?

**Wisdom and Compassion seem to typically arise in response to some 'existential' core experience** – a situation that pushes us to the edge in life itself.

Are such situations likely to arise in our work situation?

Will we be ready to use them for Insight to arise?

How does our working situation - which, I suppose is somehow connected with achievement, pressure, money, power, position, security and other such matters, - how does this situation bring into play our deepest *samskaras*, those conditioned attitudes, tendencies and habits that limit us as individual human beings?

How do we deal with such experiences – particularly those that are less pleasant and perhaps even slightly humiliating?

How can we make use of our work to actively aspire towards breaking the first three fetters – and enter the Stream?

#### **4) Right Livelihood and the dana economy**

***How we use the resources – both material and psychological – we accumulate***

How do we develop our skills and capabilities in the work situation?

How freely do we make these available to others? -

Wages/Income versus 'support': Must income match the skills/position/responsibilities etc. we have taken on?

To what extent is the income we get (or aspire to get) 'desire'-based rather than 'need'-based?

How do we relate to the traditional 'four requisites' of the Buddhist renunciants?

What is the relationship between the sense of self-worth we experience and our income/position/title, etc.?

How are we working towards genuine selflessness, detachment, and freedom in these areas?

What about the principle of *Give what you can, take what you need?* -

How do we spend the wealth accumulated:

Who decides about how I spend the money I earn? *Where our money goes is where we go!*

Right Livelihood offers opportunity for dana. That is quite a traditional view.

How much of our income do we give to projects carried out in the spirit of the Dharma?

How much to full-time practitioners and teachers of the Dharma?

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