



Relevance of Inter-Personal Relationship in Society

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Abstract

The Sigāla-Sutta of the Dīgha-Nikāya shows with what great respect the layman's life, his family and social relations are regarded by Gautam Buddha. A young man named Sigāla used to worship the six cardinal points of the heavens - east, south, west, north, nadir and zenith - in obeying and observing the last advice given him by his dying father. Gautam Buddha gave advice to various people in various occasions. Gautam Buddha told the young man that in the 'noble discipline' of his teaching the six directions were different. According to 'noble discipline' the six directions were: east: parents; south: teachers; west: wife and children; north: friends, relatives and neighbors; nadir: servants, workers and employees; zenith: religious men. 'One should worship these six directions' said Gautam Buddha. These six directions represent the duties of householders towards their family and social relationships. One should perform one's duty perfectly towards their family, friends and concern people in society. Gautam Buddha beautifully described the responsibilities and duties of a person.

Keywords: Dīgha-Nikāya, Sigāla-Sutta, Righteous Action, Wholesome Deeds, Sīla, The Four Noble Truths, The Eightfold Path, Right Livelihood.

Introduction

In *Sigālovada-Sutta*¹ of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, Gautam Buddha has explained beautifully the duties of the householders towards their family, friends, relatives, neighbors, helpers and towards religious teachers. To understand the *Sigālovada-Sutta* in detail the story behind this *Sutta* is important to know. This *Sutta* highlights the social relationships of a person. How one should perform one's duty perfectly towards their family, friends and concern people in society. The story of *Sigālovada-Sutta* is like this:

Once Gautam Buddha was staying near the town of Rājagaha in the Bamboo Wood at the Squirrel's feeding ground. Now at that time a young householder named Sigāla, a householder's son rising bedtime, went forth from Rājagaha, with wet hair and wet garments and clasped hands uplifted, paid worship to the several quarters of earth and sky:- to the east, south, west, north, to the nadir and the zenith.² Meanwhile the Buddha dressed himself in the early morning, took bowl and robe and entered

Rājagaha on alms round. Now The Buddha saw Sigāla worshipping and spoke to him thus:-

Gautam Buddha: Why, young householder, do you rising bedtimes and leaving Rājagaha, with wet hair and raiment, worship the several quarters of earth and sky ?

Sigāla: Sir, my father, when he was a-dying, said to me: Dear son, you should worship the quarters of the earth and sky. So I, sir, honoring my father's word, reverencing, revering, holding it sacred, rise bedtimes and, leaving Rājagaha, worship on this wise.³

Gautam Buddha: But in the religion of an Ariyan, young householder, the six quarters should not be worshipped thus.

Sigāla: How then, sir, in the religion of an Ariyan, should be worshipped ? It would be a excellent thing, sir, if the Exalted One would so teach me the doctrine according to which, in the religion of Ariyan, the six quarters should be worshipped.⁴

Gautam Buddha: Here then, young householder, give ear to my words and I will



speak. So be it, sir, responded young Sigāla. And Gautam Buddha said:

How, O householder, does the Ariyan disciple protect the six quarters ? The following should be looked upon as the six quarters: parents as the east, teachers as the south, wife and children as the west, friends and companion as the north, servants and work people as nadir, religious teachers and *brahims* as the zenith.⁵

So this was said by Gautam Buddha to young householder Sigāla. Here the following is the brief description of six directions as regarded by noble disciple.

According to Ariyan disciple the six directions were: east- parents; south- teachers; west- wife and children; north- friends, relatives and neighbors; nadir- servants, workers and employees; zenith- religious men. Gautam Buddha said that one should worship these six directions. These six directions represent the duties of householders towards their family and social relationships. Gautam Buddha says that one could worship them only by performing one's duties towards them.

The Relation between Parents and Children

The relation between parents and children is considered as the eastern direction. The children should honor their parents as the eastern quarter according to the five ways. Gautam Buddha said to Sigāla: In five ways a child should minister to his parents as the eastern quarter: Once supported by them I will now the support; I will perform duties incumbent on them; I will keep up the lineage and tradition of my family; I will make myself worthy of my heritage.⁶

Parents are sacred to their children. The Buddha says: Parents are called *Brahma Brāhmaṇi mātapitaro*. The term *Brahma* denotes the highest and most sacred conception in Indian thought, and in it the Buddha includes parents. So in good Buddhist families at the present time children literally 'worship' their parents every day, morning and evening. They have to

perform certain duties towards their parents according to the noble discipline.⁷

Five responsibilities of children towards their parents are: The children should take care of their parents in their old age; the children should do whatever they can do on their behalf; the children should maintain family lineage and tradition; the children should protect the wealth earned by their parents and the children should perform their funeral rites after their death.

In the *Aṅguttara- Nikāya* Gotama Buddha called *Brahmā* to the parents. Gautam Buddha said: 'Monks, those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home are reckoned unto *Brahmā*.⁸ Those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home are ranked with the teachers of old. Worthy of offerings, are those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home. "*Brahmā*" monks, is a term for mother and father. 'Teachers of old,' monks, is a term for mother and father. 'Worthy of offerings,' monks, is a term for mother and father. Why so? Because mother and father do much for children, they bring them up, nourish and introduce them to the world.'⁹

So this is the way one can perform their duty towards their parents. If we follow these advices then there will be an ideal society based on love and compassion. There will be no need of an old age shelters. Every relation should be based on love and care. Parents need support of their children at their old age. So, one should do as much as possible one can do for their parents. The children should also maintain their lineage and tradition of their family. They should perform their funeral rites after their death. In this way, the children should perform their duty towards their parents.

Further, Gautam Buddha said to the householder Sigāla: In five ways parents thus ministered to, as the eastern quarter, by their child, show their love for him: they restrain him from vice, they exhort him to virtue, they train him to be a profession, and they contract a suitable marriage for him and



in due time they hand over his inheritance. Thus is this eastern quarter protected by him and made safe and secure.¹⁰

Parents, in their turn, have certain responsibilities towards their children. The five responsibilities of parents towards their children are: They should keep their children away from evil deeds or restraining them from wrongdoing; they should keep them in good and beneficial actions; they should give them a good education and trained them in a good profession; they should help them to choose a suitable partner for marriage into good families and they should hand over the inheritance to them in due time.

The children first learn from their parents. How one brought up the children play a very vital role in the character building of a child. The parents should protect their children from wrong doings and bad actions. They should teach them from their childhood by setting an example of their good deeds. The parents should make them to hire good education. We see today that parents impose their unfulfilled dreams on their children. This is not good. This is not the righteous way. Making compulsion on them is wrong.

The Relation between Teacher and Pupil

The relation between teacher and pupil is considered as the southern direction. In five ways, pupil should honor their teachers as the southern quarter. Gautam Buddha said to Sigāla: In five ways should pupils minister to their teachers as the southern quarter: by rising from their seat, in salutation by waiting upon them, by eagerness to learn, by personal service, and by attention when receiving their teaching.¹¹

The duties of pupils towards their teachers are: By rising for them; by waiting upon them; by showing keenness desire for learning; by duly serving them and by giving attention while receiving their teachings. A pupil should give due respect to his teacher. Pupil should be attentive while receiving their teachings.

Further, Gautam Buddha said to the householder Sigāla: And in five ways do teachers, thus ministered to as the southern quarter by their pupils, love their pupil: they train him in that wherein he has been well trained; they make him hold fast that which is well held; they thoroughly instruct him in the lore of every art; they speak well of him among his friends and companions. They provide for his safety in every quarter. Thus is this southern quarter protected by him and made safe and secure.¹²

In the same way, there are five ways the teacher should guide his pupil. And teachers should give in return with compassion in five ways: By training him in self-discipline; by ensuring the teachings are well-grasped; by instructing in every branch of knowledge; by speaking well of them amongst their friends and colleagues; by providing safeguards in every direction.

A good teacher never hides anything from his pupil. A good teacher thoroughly instructs his pupil in the knowledge of every art. Teacher should not only teach his pupil but also guide him to choose right profession.

The Relation between Husband and Wife

The relation between husband and wife is considered as the western direction. In five ways a wife should be ministered to by her husband as western quarter. Gautam Buddha said to Sigāla: In five ways should a wife as western quarter be ministered to by her husband: by respect, by courtesy, by faithfulness, by handling over authority to her, by providing her with adornment.¹³

The relation of husband and wife totally depend on mutual understanding and respect. To understand the feeling of wife and take care accordingly is very important. Husband should be devoted to his wife. And wife should also be devoted to her husband. A husband should take care of his wife in these five ways: By honoring her; by courteousness; by faithfulness; by sharing authority and by giving gifts to her. The fact that Gautam Buddha did not forget to



mention even such a thing as the gifts a husband should make to his wife shows how understanding and sympathetic were his human feelings towards ordinary human emotions.¹⁴ Further Gautam Buddha said to the householder Sigāla : In these five ways does the wife, ministered to by her husband as the western quarter, love him: her duties are well performed, by hospitality to the kin of both, by faithfulness, by watching over the goods he brings, and by skill and industry in discharging all her business.

The wife so respected reciprocates with compassion in five ways: By being well-organized; by hospitality to the kin of both; by faithfulness; by looking after the household goods and by skillful and diligent in all duties. Thus is this western quarter protected by him and made safe and secure. The Relation between Friends, Relatives and Neighbors

The relation between friends, relatives and neighbors is considered as the northern direction. There are five ways through which one can have an excellent relation with their relatives, friends and known ones.

Gautam Buddha said to Sigāla: In five ways should a clansman minister to his friends and familiars as the northern quarter: by generosity, courtesy and benevolence, by treating them as he treats himself, and by being as good as his word.¹⁵

In five ways friends and colleagues as the northern direction should be respected. The five ways: By generosity; by speaking kind words; by helping them; by impartiality and acting for their welfare and by honesty and sincerity to them.

Further, Gautam Buddha said to the householder Sigāla: In these five ways thus ministered to as the northern quarter, his friends and familiars love him: they protect him when he is off his guard, and on such occasions guard his property; they become a refuge in danger, they do not forsake him in his troubles, and they show consideration for his family. Thus is the northern quarter by him protected and made safe and secure.¹⁶

Friends and colleagues so respected reciprocate with compassion in five ways: By protecting when he is careless or off guard; by guarding his property when he is careless; by being refuge for him when he is in danger; by not abandoning him in misfortunes and by honoring all his descendants.

A society grows through a network of relationship. We are depended on each other. Everyone needs love, care, protection, support and guidance. To be kind towards your friends and familiars makes your life easier. First you give them what you need from them. Respect, loyalty and care are the pillars of good friendship. One should maintain their relation by heart. A friend should be full of compassion and kindness. Friendship needs kindness, generosity, courtesy and benevolence. Friends should not be ignored during the period of misery or pain.

The Relation between Master and Servant

The relation between master and servant is considered as the nadir direction. Gautam Buddha said to Sigāla: In five ways does an Ariyan master minister to his servants and employees as the nadir: by assigning them work according to their strength; by supplying them with food and wages; by tending them in sickness; by sharing with them unusual delicacies; by granting leave at times.¹⁷ There are five ways of respecting workers and servants as the nadir direction. Gautam Buddha suggested the ways how to deal and behave with others.

The five ways to behave with workers and servants are: By allocating work according to capacity; by providing wages and food; by tending them in sickness; by sharing them unusual delicacies; by granting leave at a suitable time.

Further, Gautam Buddha said to the householder Sigāla: In these ways ministered to by their master, servants and employees love their master in five ways: they rise before him, they lie down to rest after him; they are content with what is given



to them; they do their work well and they carry about his praise and good fame.¹⁸

Thus is the nadir by him protected and made safe and secure.

An employee should be paid timely. Work should be given according to the capacity of the worker. This is very imperative to align the social system. For an ideal society, there should be an equal distribution of work according to the efficiency of the worker. One should not be unduly misused. Child labor and bound labor is an evil of society.

And workers and servants so respected reciprocate with compassion in five ways: By rising earlier and go to work before master; by going to rest after his master; by showing content what is given according to his work; by doing their work effectively and by carry about his praise and good fame.

The Relation between the Religious Teachers and the Laity

The relation between religious teachers, recluses and the laity is considered as the zenith direction. There are five ways; one should respect the religious person as the zenith quarter. Gautam Buddha said to Sigāla householder: In five ways should the clansman minister to recluses and *Brahmins* as the zenith: by affection in act and speech and mind; by keeping open house to them, by supplying their temporal needs.¹⁹ In these five ways religious teachers as the upper direction should be respected: By affection in act; by compassionately words; by kindly thought; by keeping open house to them and by providing material needs.

Further, Gautam Buddha said to the householder Sigāla: Thus ministered to as the zenith, recluses and *brahmins* show their love for the clansman in six ways: they restrain him for evil. They exhort him to good, they love him with kindly thoughts; they teach him what he had not heard, they correct and purify what he has heard, they reveal to him the way to heaven. Thus by him is the zenith protected and made safe and secure. How laity should respect the religious person and how the religious person should do for laity's well being. All

relation should be based on love and compassion. And religious teachers so respected reciprocate with compassion in six ways: By restraining him from wrongdoing; by exhorts him to do well; by thinking compassionately; by telling him what ought to know; by illuminating what you already know and by showing the path to heaven.

Gautam Buddha beautifully explained the duties and responsibilities of different groups which encompass society- parents, children, husbands, wives, friends, relatives, neighbors, employees, employers, teachers and religious person. This discourse contains a broad spectrum of social relations. Relations between different categories of persons should be based on care, love, compassion and mutual understanding. All of these recognize mutual responsibilities and recognize above all that pursuit of individual happiness and welfare of others.

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