

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF USING THE BUDDHIST MENTORING CONCEPT TO BUILD UP AN ETHICAL ATMOSPHERE IN GLOBAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

An academic mentor is defined as a faculty advisor. In Buddhism, a mentor is considered as an ideal teacher who shares life experiences and wisdom with the students. According to the Buddhist perspective, a mentor should have a concrete long-term relationship with the student, but it should not be too close or too far from the student as well. The way of mentoring depends on mutual understanding, respect, and empathy. It means that a mentor should conduct himself properly towards the student. In modern education perspectives, a good mentoring practice is endowed with multiple roles. The goal of mentoring in modern education is to help the student improve the various potentialities within himself. Buddhism recommends that the mentor should be sufficiently qualified to hold this position and is capable of developing critical thinking, self-discipline, and good habits with students, respectively. In general, the Buddhist mentor is approachable, available, and is familiar with the students. In addition, the mentor benefits enormously by reaching towards the goal on the grounds of ethical atmosphere. The Buddhist mentoring concept can be applied to global education concepts positively.

1. INTRODUCTION

The mentoring concept is mentioned in Buddhist scriptures as well as in classical literature and currently it is used in the field of

education. The Buddha addressed the mentor as “Upajjhaya” simply means a teacher. Homer, in his classic *Odysseus* introduced the mentor as a wise and trusted guardian. An academic mentor in the present global education arena bears multiple roles. Mentoring is typically defined as: a relationship between an experienced and less experienced person in which the mentor provides guidance, advice, support, and feedback to the mentee (Haney, 1997). The mentoring concept in the present academic context is more updated and has attributes to psychosocial and career-related areas respectively. It is not only confined to a face to face, long term relationship between two persons but also could be involved in a one-on-one relationship or even a network of multiple mentors. A network can also be referred as a “cascade mentoring” (Packard, 2003). The Buddhist perspective in mentoring directly concerns the teacher and student relationship in the ethical perspective. However, it can be applied to the modern education system to make a strong relationship between teacher and student, and further, to create a close match in demographic variables in case of education circles. Therefore, the Buddhist mentoring concept addresses a board sense of a functional relationship between mentor and mentee.

2. BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON MENTORING

The Buddhist mentor (*Upajjhaya*) is introduced by the Buddha in order to uphold high standard discipline, motivating, inspiring, and enthusiastic behavior patterns in the mentee who lives with his teacher. “The Vedic term *Upajjhaya*, and in Buddhist Sanskrit *Upadhyaya*, is analyzed as upa+adhi+i, lit. ‘one who is gone close up to’, a spiritual teacher or “preceptor” (Witanachchi, 2011). In the background, to introduce a mentor to the Order of Buddhist monks is due to the malpractices of some Buddhist monks who behave against the disciplinary code. It is mentioned in the Buddhist canon that the Buddha as a great master in contemporary society, many followers from various parts of the country gathered around him and some were entered into the Order (acquired ordination). The newly ordained monks remained under the personal supervision of the Buddha until they reached sufficient spiritual maturity in the Order. In the course of time, the number of candidates that were entering the Order of the Buddhist monks increased and the

Buddha was unable to pay personal attention to guide them and be involved with their disciplinary matters. Therefore, he had to seek the assistance of his senior monks to guide these newly ordained monks (Witanachchi 2011). Such a scheme was necessary and very urgent as all the new recruits were not of the desired high caliber in intelligence and experience. One could often see references to monks and nuns described by the Buddha as unintelligent and unexperienced (*bala avyatta*). There were also those who sought admission to the Order for reasons other than spiritual or religious. They came from all walks of life and from all strata of society. Those coming from lower strata of society were possibly uneducated and were not aware of even the basic rules of social ethics.

The need for appointing a mentor to train and guide monk recruits for their spiritual advancement, and to overcome the unethical manner and lesser behavior of some monks was the way to form educated and experienced disciples. The constitution of mentorship occurs due to the misbehavior of monks, it is mentioned in the Mahavagga; “Now at that time monks, being without mentors, not being exhorted, not being instructed, walked for alms food wrongly dressed wrongly clothed, not befittingly attired . . . and they are manner less in having foods, they remained in the refectory making a loud noise, a great noise. Then the people were saying that the sons of Sakyamuni were not befittingly attired, were also making loud noises, and were fed up with the monks. The modest monks heard the blame from the people and told this matter to the Lord Buddha. Having heard the matter, the awakened one, the Lord rebuked them, saying, “... it is not fitting, monks, in these foolish meant, it is not becoming, it is not proper, it is unworthy of recluse, it is not allowable, it is not to be done.” Further, the Buddha points out certain facts that are to be adhered to by the disciples in dealing with the society. “Disciples should perform by pleasing those who are not yet pleased, by increasing the number of those who are already pleased, and having given reasoned talk on what is fitting, and on what is becoming. He addressed the disciples saying, “I allow a mentor to recruit the mentee monk” (Mahavagga pali).

The mentor should arouse in the one who shares his chamber the attitude of a son’s mind (*putta citta*), the one who shares his

chamber should arouse in the mentor the attitude of a father's mind (*pitu citta*) like living with reverence and with courtesy towards one another. Then they will come to growth, to increase and to mature in the knowledge of wisdom and discipline." (Mahavagga pali).

The mentoring concept intended is a modern perspective in the broad sense. An effective mentoring relationship is characterized by mutual respect, trust, understanding, and empathy. Good mentors are able to share life experiences and wisdom, as well as technical expertise. They are good listeners, good observers, and problem-solvers. They make an effort to know, accept, and respect the goals and interests of a student (Zelditch, 1995). The Buddhist's thought on mentoring is sharing the experience with each other like father and son. Generally, the "father" is a matured and well experienced person while the "son" is less experienced and advisable. For this reason, the Buddha mentions that the mentoring has occurred with good partnership between mentor and mentee which is built upon trust and honesty. However, the Buddha does not recommend having a very close relationship between them and advises to keep a certain distance. The mentee should not be too far away from the mentor, but also should not be too close. At the same time, one should strive as a mentor to be aware of the distinction between friendship and favoritism. It is obvious that the Buddha advises not to allow favoritism in the case of developing a long-term relationship between the two. He (the mentee) should not interrupt the mentor when he is speaking, however, if the mentor is bordering on an offence, then he should speak to warn him. The Buddhist mentoring concept is completely based on ethics and allows both sides to exchange perspectives and support each other.

Obviously, the Buddhist mentorship is not an authority. The mentee comfortably feels the freedom to ask questions and confess to the mentor. There is an example in Anguttara Nikaya (Upajjhaya Sutta) about one mentee monk, who lived with his mentor monk, sharing his cell and one day the mentee went to his mentor and confessed to him the difficulty he experienced in living the celibate life. It further mentions that if dissatisfaction has arisen in the mentor, then he should give him a talk on discourse. If he committed an offence against an important rule, he deserves

probation. The meaning of probation is giving emotional and moral encouragement to the mentee. In Buddhism, it is recommended (in the *Mahavagga Pali*) that the relationship between mentor and mentee should be based on mutual understanding, with reverence, and with difference. Courtesy towards one another would grow in time, and finally mature in this wisdom (*Dhamma*) and discipline (*Vinaya*).

The Vinaya account states that the mentee needs to be under the guidance of the mentor. The chief duty of the mentor is:

- To guide them in the discipline of decorum and propriety
- To guide them in the discipline leading to the attainment of the monastic ideal
- To regulate their life in terms of the Dhamma
- To regulate their life in terms of Vinaya
- To dispel any incorrect views by analyzing them in terms of the Dhamma (*Mahavagga Pali*,64p).

The purpose of guiding mentees is to prevent them from a distorted perception, a distorted mind, and distorted prejudices (*Anguttara Nikaya*, ii). As mentioned earlier, the role of the mentor is not being a guide of the mentee, but it is a parent-like concern towards the mentee. Consequently, this strong and lovely relationship creates a perfect spiritual life for the mentee. Buddhism always gives priority to purifying one's thoughts, therefore, the above three prospects are mainly leading him to spiritual stability which regulates the mentee and leads him to acquire a wide knowledge regarding discourse. In other words, the spiritual stability based on morality and conduct is called "*sila*" or virtue. It is the first stage in regarding the basic training and ethics to adhere in studying any subject.

According to the *Samyutta Nikaya*, it is very important to stand on virtue (*sila*) first to gain knowledge and to develop one's mind. "The perfection in *sila*, no doubt, marks the first stage in the spiritual development of the Buddhist disciple and this advice of the Buddha to his disciples is found scattered in many places in the Sutta Pitaka, sometimes addressed to single individuals and sometimes to the Sangha as a whole. It is thus clear that *sila* was the

corner-stone of early Buddhist monasticism. First and foremost, the Buddhist disciple had to be *silava* (virtuous). It meant that the disciple had to regulate his life in terms of what is recorded under sins as conditions of good monastic living, abstaining from what is indicated as “worthy and contradictory to his spiritual aspirations” (Dhirasekara, 2007). The Buddhist mentor relationship basically is dependent on caring and sharing with each other. The mentee is not expected to be a subject of the mentor and has enough freedom to correct his mentor if he is in the wrong such as violating the disciplinary code. It is mentioned in the Vinaya as follows:

- If dissatisfaction has arisen in the mentor, then the mentee should discuss it with him. If remorse has arisen in the mentor, then mentee should get another to dispel it.
- If the wrong views have arisen in the mentor, then the mentee should give him a talk on discourse.
- If the mentor committed an offense against an important rule, he deserves probation.
- If the mentor deserves rehabilitation, then the mentee appeals to the Sangha community to rehabilitate the mentor.
- If the Sangha community desires to carry out an act against the mentor- one of censure, guidance, banishment, reconciliation, or suspension, then the mentee could appeal to the Sangha to carry out the necessary disciplinary action against him or change it to a lighter one (*Mahavagga Pali*).

The Buddha further points out that the mentor should conduct himself properly and be exemplary towards his pupils. Within this context, the Buddhist mentee is considered to be on a certain standard of knowledge and on a good setting of virtue. He is not merely a normal pupil, but he is empowered to urge the sangha community to correct his mentor whenever he is on the wrong track. “These duties of the institution are not one-sided, but mutual. Above attention was drawn to the broad outlines of the services expected from a mentor (preceptor) towards his ward. The mentor must assist his co-resident pupil with regard to his education, literally, by recitation (*uddesa*), by inquiry (*paripuccha*) to help

him to clear his doubts, by exhortation (*ovadena*) to put him on the right track and instruction (*anusasaniya*) (Witanachchi, 2011).

Finally, Buddhist mentoring is more than advising. It is counseling on ethical basis to exchange experiences between two individuals. It is characterized by mutual trust, understanding, and empathy. The Buddhist mentor needs to acquire sound qualifications to hold this position and the Buddha further said, I allow you monks to give guidance as an experienced, competent mentor who is ten years studying or of more than ten years studying. The ultimate achievements of mentoring in Buddhism are to possess and adopt moral habits: the body of concentration, the body of wisdom, the body of freedom, the body of vision and knowledge, and of freedom in the shade of the mentor.

3. THE BUDDHIST MENTORING AND THE GLOBAL EDUCATION

Global education is considered to be a vast and complex issue in the academic setting, and it is a knowledge-based idea that has arisen in the end of twentieth century. “Global education is tantamount to giving a broader geographical perspective to the social studies curriculum to enable students to compete more effectively in the global marketplace. For others, it represents a fundamental re-evaluation of content, organization, and purpose of schooling in line with a transformative vision of education in a planetary context (pike, 2000). Further, it states that the objectives of global education would be developing education, including education for global perspectives, intercultural education, and world studies. “UNICEF is committed to ensuring access to basic education of good quality where children can acquire the three essential learning tools needed to gain the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes critical to their own lives, the well-being of their families, and their constructive participation in society” (UNICEF, 1999).

However, the prospectors of education want to create a perfect citizen together with high level qualities and a high standard knowledge. Therefore, it is accepted that global education should consist of norms and values based on being able to make creative and visionary persons- academically and socially. But the current education system is not sufficient to produce such a perfect citizen

for the wellbeing of the society. At present, the school syllabus leads to build a much closer relationship between education and the economy in general. In this respect, the mentorship which is available in current academia is unsuccessful in developing the moral aspects in students. On the contrary, the Buddhist mentoring concept is affordable, trustworthy and full of ethics and it is a friendly approach in the global education system and can be attributed to any subject stream, respectively. Buddhist mentoring is quite different from modern mentoring. It is apparent when investigating the objectives of both sides. There are various definitions and objectives of mentoring in modern education, as well as in counseling, being pointed out by educationists and psychiatrists as well:

- Mentoring is a partnership between two people built upon trust.
- The mentoring relationship is confidential.
- Mentors can help individuals reach significant decisions about complex issues.
- Mentoring is a positive development activity.
- Mentors can advise on development and how to manage a career plan (Clutterbuck, 2001).

It is obvious that the existing mentoring is variable in its nature, origin, and purpose. In other words, mentoring has been defined generally as a coach in the field of modern education (Robbins, 1991). Coaching is always part of mentoring, but coaching does not always involve mentoring. Within the context of a mentoring relationship, coaching has to do with the skill of an individual to fill a particular knowledge gap by learning how to do things more effectively. Coaching is normally concerning one's skill and knowledge, but sometimes directing the individual to improve skills only. The purpose of coaching is more professional than the mentoring, some scholars conceptualize the mentoring relationship as career development or a business arrangement. But mentoring is not only counseling for career development, it is required to establish social values also. The American

Psychology Association (2006) defines the mentor and mentee as thus:

A mentor who is clear and upfront about what the mentee can expect from a mentoring relationship, who guides the process, and who sets appropriate boundaries to create an environment in which the relationship can thrive. A member who can provide a perspective during critical incidents, and encourage the mentee to find balance, enables growth throughout the relationship. From the mentee's perspective, respectful behaviors such as punctuality, reliability, and the development of an independent work style, create an environment in which the mentor can best meet the needs of the mentee.

Within this context is how to attribute the Buddhist mentoring concept to the improvement of the quality of the teacher workforce as well as the student attitude in the global education system. Buddhist thought is not pointing out one side in mentoring, it insists on both parties potentially solving the issues related to education, personal, institutional, disciplinary and so on. The Buddhist mentor is required to be a full measure of wisdom, and integrity. It is mentioned that the mentee also should be a moral vigilant person to direct the mentor whenever he needs assistance in dealing with organizations or whenever he damages his ethical body. Therefore, the comprehensiveness and mutuality are the essence of both parties in mentoring and Buddhist mentoring doesn't end with academic success or career improvements of a mentee, but it is life long process that works unto the spiritual attainment of the mentee. In addition, the Buddhist thought is mainly concerned on one's spiritual improvement rather than materialistic achievements. It is said that mentorship may not be a higher position or influential role in accordance with Buddhism, but it is a parental and guiding role with an extraordinary experience about the world. Jacobi (1991) points out three components of the mentoring relationship; emotional and psychological support, direct assistance with career and professional development, and role model. This refers to only one aspect of mentoring but the Buddhist approach in mentoring is working harmoniously and productively benefitting each other and can easily be applied to global education in building a sustainable

world. Current global education is derived in part from its practice, not just from a theoretical understanding alone (Pike, 2000). The Buddhist thought of mentoring is a theoretical and practical form in the collective inquiry regarding any educational setting and it would be a new approach in forming a consensus view in the global education capacity by developing the ethical aspects to make perfect citizen for the sustainable society.

4. CONCLUSION

Buddhism always suggests a democratic, open, and harmonious relationship between the mentor and mentee, and it is solely based on spiritual attainment of both sides as opposed to mundane success of individuals. The present education system of the world has failed to make a perfect person by educating him alone, therefore, the objectives of modern education should be based on norms and values. In this respect, Buddhist mentoring is not a way of solving the problems of solely the mentee but offering him an insight in social issues. This study basically identifies the significant applications on Buddhist mentoring that can be used in developing the global education culture respectively. The goal of Buddhist mentoring is the spiritual achievement of mentee. The relationship between the Buddhist mentor and mentee is on a parental base and it is quite different from the role of a teacher. The Buddhist mentoring partnership is lasting unto spiritual attainment of the mentee - who feels freewill, freedom, and privilege to ask any question from the mentor and also the freedom to correct the mentor when he is in wrong view. The main thing is that the objectives of Buddhist mentoring are not merely career oriented. They first focus on changing the behavior patterns on ethical basis of the mentee. The fundamentals of Buddhist mentoring are mutual trust, understanding, and empathy with each other, accordingly, sharing experiences of both mentor and mentee. Buddhist mentoring recommends not having too close of a relationship between the mentor and the mentee which causes favoritism. In other words, the mentee has a right to select a proper mentor when commencing the studies. Ultimately, Buddhist mentoring targets producing a platform for students to develop their spiritual level under the guidance of a well experienced mentor. The mentor should perform

towards the mentee as a father to a son. It is not giving priority on text books or other school materials, but on counseling to change the behavior pattern of the student which is an essential part to be applied in the modern global education context.

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