

Moral Ethics – Hospitality and Caring

Ethics and **morals** relate to “right” and “wrong” conduct. While they are sometimes used interchangeably, they are different: **ethics** refer to rules provided by an external source, e.g., codes of conduct in workplaces or principles in religions. **Morals** refer to an individual’s own principles regarding right and wrong.

Caring and Hospitality

The definition of **caring** is someone or something that shows kindness and concern for others. A person who is concerned about others and who **does** kind things for them is an example of someone who would be described as caring. Words Related to caring; brotherly, good, kind-hearted, helpful, hospitable, kind, neighborly, nice, compassionate, sympathetic, tender, courteous, gracious, polite.

Caring in Buddhism includes in brief, the whole universe – humans, deities, animals, trees, nature and environment.

Some examples of the Buddha’s caring

- The Buddha offered monkhood to Sunita, Sopaka who were outcasted by society.
- Buddha himself treated a severely ill monk – Putigattatissa when other fellow monks gave up treating
- Buddha called sister to Patacara who was treated like a madwoman by the people. Buddha asked devotees to provide Patacara physical support – food, cloth and shelter and taught Dhamma for her emotional wellbeing.
- After losing her only child, Kisagotami was desperate and finally came to the Buddha. The Buddha comforted her and preached to her the truth. She was awakened and entered the first stage of Arhatship. Eventually, she became an arhat.
- The Buddha spread compassion and loving kindness towards - Ajasatta, Devadatta, Angulimala, Nalagiri, Alawaka
- The Buddha went to realms of deities several times to preach Dhamma. Sometimes deities came to earth to visit the Buddha and Buddha preached to them Dhamma.

The word hospitality comes from the Latin *hospes*, which came from the word *hostis*, which originally meant "to have power." However, hospitality (*sakkàra*) is the act of being welcoming and helpful to guests, strangers and travelers. People who welcome visitors are called hosts. The people they welcome are called guests. The words hospital, hospice, and hostel also come from the word "hospitality". They are all about giving personal care to people who are away from their homes.

Many ancient societies taught that it was always right to offer hospitality to strangers who came to their door in need of food or shelter.

In India, hospitality was restricted to some degree by the demands of the caste system. For example, the *Manusmṛiti*, the most important Hindu law book, says that a brahmin should only offer hospitality to other brahmins and that he should neither greet nor return the greeting of monks or ascetics of unorthodox sects. It was probably because of such ideas that, when the Buddha went on alms gathering in the brahmin village of Pancasàlà, the inhabitants refused to give him anything (S. I, 114).

For the Buddha, hospitality should be shown to all, whatever their caste, religious affiliation or status. When Sāha, a leading citizen of Vesālā and a generous supporter of Jainism, became a Buddhist, the Buddha asked him to continue offering his hospitality to Jain monks who might come to his door (A. IV, 185).

The Tipitaka often says that the Buddha was 'welcoming, friendly, polite, genial, and engaging' towards everyone who came to see him (D. I, 116). One of the duties of a lay person was to make the Fivefold Offering, one of which was providing food, accommodation and help to guests (A.II, 68). When a monk turned up at a monastery, he asked the resident monks to go out and meet him, prepare a seat for him, bring him water to wash his feet, prepare accommodation for him and do other things to make him feel welcome (Vin. II, 207-11). The *Milindapanha* said that, if a guest turned up at a person's home after all the food had been eaten, more rice should be cooked in order to feed him and allay his hunger (Mil. 107). The Buddha considered failure to

reciprocate hospitality to be very bad form. He said: 'Whoever goes to another's house and is fed but does not feed them when they come to his house, consider him an outcaste' (Sn. 128).

Today, with hotels and rapid transportation, hospitality to travelers as practiced in the past is less relevant and less necessary. However, there are still many opportunities to be hospitable. Being newcomers to a Buddhist group, to the workplace or to the neighborhood can be a time of awkwardness and uncertainty. Welcoming such people, making them feel at home and introducing them to others is an expression of kindness.

A type of indirect hospitality common in the Buddhist world until recently was making provisions for travelers and pilgrims. People would build rest houses on the edge of villages or towns or along roads where there was a long distance between villages. Other devout folk would undertake to supply these rest houses with firewood for cooking and water for drinking and to keep them clean. The Buddha said that planting trees (probably along roads), building bridges, digging wells, building rest houses and providing water for wayfarers, were all meritorious deeds (S. I, 33).

In his *Suhurlllekha*, Nàgàrjuna urged his royal correspondent to 'establish rest houses in temples, towns and cities and set up water pots along lonely roads'. This last practice remains very popular in Burma. Groups of friends form what are called water-donating societies and undertake to place water pots along roads for the convenience of passersby. Water halls (*pànāyasàlà*) are mentioned in the scriptures (Vin. II, 153).

Story of two merchants –

The moral is: If you don't help others, you can't expect them to help you