

*Bodhi Leaf Publication No. 27*

# Treasures of the Noble

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# Treasures of the Noble

By

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# Treasures of the Noble



he treasures of the noble disciples of the Buddha are not precious stones and pearls, silver and gold, or fields and houses. Nor are the noble treasures connected with the power and glory of earthly sovereignty;

These are the seven treasures the noble have:  
Confidence, virtue, the sense of shame and fear,  
Learning, bounty, and understanding right.

Not poor is the man endowed with these,  
Not empty is his life of worthy things.  
Therefore should he who is in understanding  
fixed,

Be diligent working to gain confidence,  
Virtue, clarity, and vision of the truth,  
Mindful of the law of him who understood.

On a certain occasion Ugga, the chief minister of the King of Kosala, came to where the Blessed One was, saluted him, and sat on one side.

And the chief minister, who was seated at one side, said this to the Blessed One: Wonderful, venerable sir, marvellous, venerable sir, is the amount of riches,

wealth, possessions of Migara Rohaneyya. What is the extent of his vast treasures, his vast wealth, Ugga? Of gold alone he has a hundred thousand. What should one say of silver? Ugga, I do not deny that there is treasure of that kind. But, Ugga, such treasure is the common booty of fire, water, kings, robbers and unloved heirs. But there are seven kinds of treasure that are not the common booty of fire, water, kings, robbers and unloved ones. What are the seven? The treasure of confidence, of virtue, of the sense of shame and fear, of learning, of bounty, and of right understanding,

These are the seven treasures the noble have.  
Confidence, virtue, the sense of shame and fear,  
Learning, bounty, and understanding right.

Not poor is the woman or man with this great  
wealth,  
Unlosable in the world of gods and men.  
Therefore should he who is in understanding  
fixed,

Be diligent working to gain confidence,  
Virtue, clarity, and vision of the truth,  
Mindful of the law of him who understood.

In order to gain these treasures of the noble a man  
should be devoted to the doctrine of the Buddha.  
Therefore men of old said this:

“Except the doctrine of the Perfect One,  
There is no father and no mother here.  
The doctrine is your refuge and support  
And in the doctrine is your shelter true,  
So hear the doctrine, on the doctrine think  
And spurning other things live up to it.”

## **I. Confidence (Saddhā)**

A noble disciple is confident, trusts in the Enlightenment of the Perfect One, the Tathāgata: ‘Thus indeed is the Blessed One: He is an arahat, perfectly enlightened, endowed with knowledge and conduct, sublime, a knower of the worlds, a guide of men, a teacher of divine and human beings, enlightened and blessed.’

Confidence, according to a great Buddhist writer, is the entrance to the ocean of the Buddha’s law, and knowledge is the ship in which a man travels in that ocean.

Says the Buddha, ‘In these places, Ānanda, should you establish, fix and make firm, your friends, companions, and kith and kin, who think they ought to hear the doctrine. In what three places? In wise

confidence concerning the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, should you establish them, fix them, and make them firm. There may be change, Ānanda, in the four great elements, earth, water, fire, and air, but the noble disciple who is endowed with wise confidence concerning the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, cannot change. That is to say, it is impossible for him to be reborn in hell, or as an animal, or where unhappy spirits dwell’.

Confidence of the highest kind is that produced in objects connected with the realisation of Nibbāna, the peace arising out of the final destruction of craving. As the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, are the objects most intimately connected with Nibbāna, these best of all jewels in the world inspire the greatest confidence in a Buddhist.

The reason for absence of inner development is primarily lack of confidence in truth. It is said that the bhikkhu who lacks confidence departs from the practice of the virtue. He becomes dead to all good, and is unable to establish himself in the Law of the Buddha and the noble discipline. Confidence is the first of the seven treasures of the noble, and the first of the mental powers, and the controlling faculties of the mind. Around the magnet of confidence cluster energy, the sense of fear and shame, mindfulness, concentration, right understanding, and many other

qualities of the noble mind.

When confidence in the Buddha's enlightenment is strong in a person, the hindrances—sensuality, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and anxiety, and uncertainty—are suppressed, the passions are dispersed, and the mind is bright and clear. There is no possibility for a disciple of the Buddha to fall into states of demerit so long as he has confidence in the Master and the truth: it is when uncertainty as regards what is good possess him that a disciple is assailed by influences that lead him away from the right path. The Buddha says that he watches a disciple so long as the disciple fails to produce confidence, but once the disciple produces confidence the Master stops watching the disciple knowing that he is self-warded and incapable of slacking.

Confidence is the hand for gathering the merit of good deeds, wealth for the attainment of happiness, and seed for harvesting the fruit of immortality, the deathless nibbāna. Therefore it has been extolled by the Buddhas and regarded by them as the indispensable qualification for discipleship in the Dispensation of the Perfect One.

Confidence in the Dhamma begins with temporary conviction or belief in morally wholesome objects and reaches its crest in settled trust in the Perfect One, his

teaching, and his noble order.

## 2. Virtue (Sīla)

Goodness is the best thing in the world; The man of knowledge is indeed supreme.

Amongst deities and human beings,  
From good and knowledge springs all victory. —  
(Therīgāthā);

A noble disciple refrains from destroying living beings, from theft, from sexual misconduct, from telling lies, and from drink. This is called the treasure of virtue. —(Aṅguttara Nikāya),

Virtue provides a person with strength to realise the noble path leading to the extinction of ill. Vice is a swamp: who is in it sinks. The factors of enlightenment cannot be developed by one who is involved in vice. As the earth for those who live on it, so is virtue for the yogi; he has to be supported by virtue. Essentially virtue is restraint, non-distraction is concentration, and penetration is wisdom.

If a person does not think, speak, or act in a way



harmful to his own and others' welfare, he restrains his mind from ruining itself. One who examines his own thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and volitions, will find the natural, untrained mind inclined to do harmful things: 'What the virtuous person does is to gather strength for not letting the mind master him and for mastering the mind.'

Virtue is necessary not only for reaching the highest happiness, Nibbāna, the extinction of ill, but for living untroubled in the world too. A virtuous man gathers a great mass of wealth through diligence, his good reputation spreads, he enters an assembly confidently, he meets his end mindfully, and is at death reborn in a happy existence, says the Buddha.

A virtuous life is a life full of excellence as it removes the corruptions of hate: Without virtue, man is not different from an animal. Without a strong and pure character, man decays and becomes useless to himself and others. Greatness in the dispensation of the Buddha is established in compassion through renunciation of the destruction of living beings, in honesty through renunciation of theft, in chastity through renunciation of sexual misconduct, in truthfulness through renunciation of false speech, and in sobriety through renunciation of indulgence in strong drink and mind-confusing drugs.

The virtuous man does not act hurriedly; he is patient in all circumstances; he acts only after careful thought; he acts not as a slave but as a master at all times and everywhere. Having built for himself a strong citadel of noble qualities he lives where he can never be taken by Māra. Through guarding their sense faculties, the virtuous preserve their energies, and use them for proper and useful action.

Virtue cannot thrive in minds that are fanatical, violent, avaricious, dogmatic, and inconsiderate of others' well-being. In fact, one of the reasons for a man becoming virtuous is to give fearlessness to others through kindly, thoughtful, self-denying activities. The fragrance of the most sweet-smelling flowers does not travel against the wind, but the influence of a virtuous life pervades all space, and the memory of such a man continues to sweeten the world for a long time.

## **3 & 4. Shame and Fear (Hiri-ottappa)**

A noble disciple is endowed with the sense of shame,

is ashamed of doing wrong in thought, word, and bodily behaviour, is ashamed of committing evil, bad deeds. This is called the treasure of the sense of shame. A noble disciple is endowed with the sense of fear, is afraid of doing wrong in thought, word and bodily behaviour, is afraid of committing evil, bad deeds. This is called the treasure of the sense of fear. Principally connected with the sense of shame is self-respect, and principally connected with the sense of fear is the censure of the wise. These two qualities, shame and fear, are also called the protectors of the world. True and good men, with fear and shame, the bright qualities, are said to be those who are god-like in the world. These two qualities have always been praised by the Buddhas, the peerless guides, teachers of the world, because they provide effective stimulus to noble action. The man who has these two qualities will keep himself from slackening and going astray. The man who has these qualities is always on the alert, always awake to a sense of his duties: on the one hand he thinks, "Wrong action, thoughts and words are not suitable for me, because I am a man of good upbringing who follows the Buddha and the Dhamma. Further, I am loyal to my fellows in the noble life, and I do not wish to do wrong when they think I am doing what is right. To do wrong or to be slack in doing what is right is not the way to pay

homage to the Buddha and the Dhamma I follow. To act in that manner is definitely to be disrespectful and disregarding of the Teacher and the Law. Only when I, by practising the precepts, develop the qualities of compassion, honesty, chastity, truthfulness, and sobriety, do I serve the world and honour the Master and his teaching, through the giving of the gift of fearlessness to all beings". On the other hand he fears the consequences of evil deeds here and hereafter.

The man with a sense of shame and fear has a lofty standard of conduct. Morally he is very sensitive. He will never be careless of the means he uses to achieve his ends. For him the end cannot justify the means. The means must also be clean, non-violent, truthful, sober and honest. Nothing, not even the doctrine and discipline of the Perfect One, the Supremely Enlightened One, the Blessed One, will he defend dishonestly, violently, and untruthfully. If he is attacked, he will not retaliate. Retaliation is wrong according to the Parable of the Saw taught by the Blessed One. In that instruction he said, "Were villainous dacoits with a two-handled saw to cut off a man's limbs and were he even then tainted in mind, he would not be carrying out my instruction". The sensitive person, he who is endowed with a sense of fear and shame, keeps these words of the Master in mind at all times, especially in times of stress and

meets with compassion his opponents who wish to destroy him.

The effective observance of the Buddha's teaching depends on the practice of universal compassion and the true follower of the Buddha will think of those who know not what they do with compassionate mind, grown great, lofty, boundless and free from enmity and ill will.

## **5. Learning (Suta)**

The Blessed One said, "A noble disciple is learned, and is one who bears in mind what he has learned. By him is learned, borne in mind, recited, pondered on, and penetrated with right understanding, the meaningful, well expressed doctrines good in the beginning, middle and end, which speak of the absolutely complete, perfectly pure holy life. This is the treasure of learning". With that is stated the highest kind of learning known to humanity—the learning that ends all learning.

Other kinds of learning bring a man not to the cessation of suffering; they lead to further suffering,

wants, deficiencies, that is to further birth, disease, decay, unions with the unloved, separations from the loved and disappointments. Such learning is worldly, partial, defective and unsatisfactory from the standpoint of one who has seen that all is impermanent, all is ill, and all is beyond the control of the self, except the renunciation of the whole mass of ill through the renunciation of craving.

The Buddha's teaching of liberation from ill is what the noble disciple learns especially. To hear the doctrine and to master it is the object of the follower of the Buddha who has understood this. What arises ceases; what has an origin has also a cessation. But what does not arise does not cease; what has no origin has also no cessation.

Now the learning in which the noble disciple is a master has to be gained through study of the actual instruction of the Buddha now found in the Pali Canon, which gives the most complete account of the Buddha's teachings without the ambiguities of the Mahāyāna, and which is historically the oldest recorded account of the Buddha's words.

The learning of the scriptures by the noble disciple is different from the learning of the words of the Master by the worldling. The noble disciple learns the doctrine through the intensity of diligent practice as

well as through the study of it and so reads Law with the body and the mind; but the worldling knows it in a shallow way, through grasping the teaching intellectually and not applying it diligently to his life. The full profit of learning the Law comes only with the understanding of life that makes a man get rid of the attachment to life, that makes a man renounce the world. "It is impossible" says the Buddha "that he who is full of sensual aims; enjoying sensual pleasures, devoured by sensual thoughts, consumed with sensual heat, and eager in the sensual quest, should know, see, attain, and realise, what has to be known, seen, attained and realised (that is, the Law), by renunciation",

## **6. Bounty (Cāga)**

The noble disciple lives in the house with thought freed from the stain of avarice, bounteous; with hand stretched forth to give, delighting in letting go, devoted to giving, and happy in distributing gifts. This is the treasure of bounty.

Through avarice and through negligence,  
Thus indeed is an alms not given.

Alms must be given by him who is wise,  
And wishes merit to accumulate,  
Even when little they have, some do give:

Some do not give who have very much,  
A giving of alms from a scanty store is thought  
Equal to alms with a thousand pieces bought.

A battle and almsgiving are like its said;  
A few good men can overcome a host.

Who trusting in the good gives though a little,  
Will in the world to come be happy through  
giving,

Renunciation, which is the essence of the Buddhist way of life, begins with the practice of bounty. First, the aspirant for enlightenment learns to give away his external possessions; then he learns to become indifferent to his own body and to follow in the path of the Master, who, in his Bodhisatta days, gave limb, life, and all that he held dear for the sake of perfecting the virtues necessary for the attainment of the highest good. The whole way to enlightenment is adorned with bounty. There is no property the man bent on Nibbāna cannot part with.

Through bounty a man becomes dear to others and finds peaceful and noble-hearted associates. The bounteous man's good reputation spreads far and



wide; he enters an assembly without embarrassment, without diffidence and when he dies cannot but find happiness in the thought that he is taking with him the treasure of bounty to the next life. Appreciation of the fact that to give is to be endowed with mental treasure is not confined to the East. Bounty was, as it now too is, held in high esteem in the West. We find recorded in Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' this epitaph of Edward Earl of Devon: "What I gave, I have; what I spent, I had; what I left, I lost". The line of great givers of the West continues unimpaired. Although there is no-one who could emulate the Emperor Asoka, whose munificence is without parallel in the records of princes of the earth, there are many great and good men who have impoverished themselves for the good of the world, like the great Anāthapiṇḍika. Unbroken as the tradition of the Dhamma knowledge has been the tradition of the bounty in the East; but it could be made stronger and nobler were we to reduce our personal wants, and cut down our desires. The desire to hold on to money, property, power, and position, regardless of the suffering of others must be destroyed. Under no condition does the Buddha encourage blindness to the suffering of others. The stir of mind (*saṃvega*) necessary for pushing a man to Nibbāna comes from seeing the subjection of the world to suffering, and

acting in accordance with that vision by letting go, renouncing.

Not only in the Dhamma, but outside it too the importance of renunciation has been stressed. Meister Eckhart says, “O man, renounce thyself and so with toil-free virtue win the prize or, cleaving to thyself, with toilful virtue lose it... He who both has and is resigned nor ever cast one glance at what he has resigned but remains firm and unshaken and motionless in himself, that man is free”. To the attainment of unshakable deliverance of the mind through training in the art of renunciation does the practice of bounty lead him who is bent on transcending evil deeds, evil thoughts, and wrong understanding.

Through renouncing zest for every sensuous  
thing,  
For sake of freedom from the thought of self  
conceit,  
The lust of life in fine-material states,  
And states of pure mind, all restlessness,  
And every form of darkness, ignorance,  
The fires of craving will become extinct.

## **7. Right Understanding**

## (Sammā-diṭṭhi)

“The noble disciple has right understanding; he is endowed with right understanding which leads to the knowledge of the rise and fall of phenomena, and with excellent penetration which leads the complete destruction of ill.”

The summit of the Buddha’s teaching is reached when understanding of the nature of life becomes complete, and everything that helps to that right understanding is included in this treasure which is the most valuable of the treasures of the noble. Without right understanding, it is not possible to reach what is beyond the reach of becoming, of existence. To be able to appreciate the happiness of the cessation of becoming, and to work for reaching that happiness, a man has to grow in understanding the impermanence, subjection to ill, and the absence of any self whatsoever in the components of sentient life. He who knows that only ill arises and ceases when there is arising and ceasing of any kind is firmly established in knowledge founded on direct perception and not on knowledge founded on belief in another’s word. One who has such direct perception of the fact of ill and impermanence is a man of right understanding. At

this right understanding does a man who trains himself according to the instruction of the Buddha decide to arrive when he takes refuge in the Three Jewels: the Buddha, his Law, and the Order of Purified Ones.

In the Dhamma, men are purified finally and completely, not by virtue and concentration, but by right understanding. Virtue and concentration, are requisites for preparing the mind for right understanding. Therefore the Buddha praised the life lived with right understanding as the most excellent. How is that life developed? Through association with those who understand rightly, through receiving right instruction, and through becoming dissatisfied with the personality. The Buddha taught us to compare matter to a foam-ball, feeling to a bubble, perception to a mirage, formation to a plantain trunk, and consciousness to an illusion. If a man sees according to the instruction of the Buddha, he will realise the insubstantiality of all phenomena and develop disenchantment in regard to the things that bind beings to life. With the growth of that disenchantment, he will reach the freedom from all craving, the freedom for the sake of which men of good family go forth.

*Saddhā-dhanaṃ sīla-dhanaṃ / hiri-ottappiyaṃ  
dhanam*

*suta dhanañ-ca cāgo ca / paññā ve sattamaṃ dhanam.  
Yassa ete dhanā atthi / itthiyā purisassa vā  
adaliddo'ti tam āhu, / amogham tassa jīvitam.*

These are the seven treasures the noble have:  
Confidence, virtue, the sense of shame and fear,  
Learning, bounty, and understanding right.  
Not poor is the woman or man endowed with  
these,  
Not empty is his life of worthy things.

—Aṅguttara-nikāya, Sattaka-nipāta, No. 5

# Table of Contents

Title page	2
Treasures of the Noble	3
1. Confidence (Saddhā)	5
2. Virtue (Sīla)	8
3 & 4. Shame and Fear (Hiri-ottappa)	10
5. Learning (Suta)	13
6. Bounty (Cāga)	15
7. Right Understanding (Sammā-ditṭhi)	18