

# Role of Buddhism in Developing Leadership Skills



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## Abstract

Undoubtedly it can be said that Buddhism is all about individual development. The moral teachings of Buddhism are deliberately and or consciously defined with practicality. The practice of Buddhist moral teachings could benefit not only the practitioner but also have cumulatively positive effects on her/his surroundings. Buddhist text Tripitaka is a perfect guideline for attaining the supreme level of spirituality and practical well-being. Among the Buddhist teachings the Three Marks of Existence (Suffering, Impermanence, and No-self) is a life awakening teaching; which everyone must understand. It is a baseline teaching of Buddhism. Leadership is not only an individual quality; it has many effects in the societal context. A leader is an influential character; hence a leader must be an ethical being. Referring to the ethical leadership the present world it is in crisis.

Besides some renowned religious leaders, leaders from every sector are in controversies, either in their communities or outside. The seminar paper “Role of Buddhism in Developing Leadership Skill” forwards a belief that the development of leadership skills is possible through Buddhist religious practices. The paper has elaborated meritorious effects of practicing Buddhism or Buddhist moral living to develop leadership skills for the prosperous mankind. The paper has been concluded with available literature about the leadership skills and Buddhist moral teachings. Regarding the research methodology, most of the secondary data has been acknowledged to develop the seminar paper. The paper finds Buddhist moral teachings are inescapable to develop leadership skills.

**Keywords:** Buddhist Ethics, Moral Living, Leadership, Mindfulness, and Compassion.

## 1. Introduction

General definitions of leadership found in most dictionaries explain it is an individual quality that can influence people. A leader leads people to a common goal. A good leader should have a vision, guidance, communication, inspiring abilities, etc. Norman Schwarzkopf said, "Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without the strategy." (Schwarzkopf). Lewis H. Lapham said, "Leadership consists not in degrees of techniques but in traits of character; it requires moral rather than athletic or intellectual effort, and it imposes on both leader and follower alike the burdens of self-restraint." (Lapham). Personality traits of a leader are defined as the characteristics or qualities of leadership skills. Personality traits are behavioral consistency, and consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and emotions (Ashton). An individual who desires to develop their leadership skills needs to work on their

personality traits. Self-awareness, articulate thinking, effective communication, emotional maturity, cultivating positive thoughts, mindfulness, and discipline are some essential personality traits required for developing leadership skills. Buddhism is a way of life. Buddhism could be separated into two parts moral

teachings and spirituality. It provides a comprehensive framework for living ethically to build righteous character and cultivate inner and outer peace. The practice of meditation and precepts are the core teachings of Buddhism for moral living or building characteristics. Becoming a role model is an objective of a leader. An ethical being can become a good leader. To develop leadership skills an individual should practice Buddhism.

## 2. Review of Literature

The books, articles, and journals reviewed to develop the study are either on leadership or in Buddhism. The books written regarding leadership have mentioned morality, concentration, cooperation, building influencing character, etc. Likewise, the books about Buddhism explain Buddhist philosophies and moral conduct, but there are very few books or literary works combining these two. The books published emphasizing the topic, "leadership and Buddhism", have included terms like mindfulness, compassion, ethical integrity, wisdom, and so on, but there is a lack of explanation of basic moral conduct. The books have expressed the high value of Buddhist philosophies. It is important to understand basic moral conduct and the philosophy beneath it. There has not been found any Nepali writer's literature on the topic. The following

books have been reviewed to conclude the seminar paper.

- The book "Buddha: Spirituality For Leadership & Success" by Pranay has explored the application of Buddhist principles to leadership and achieving success, likely offering insights into mindfulness, ethical conduct, and compassionate leadership styles. The high rating implies that the content effectively delivers on this promise, providing valuable advice and guidance for readers interested in integrating spirituality into their professional lives. Mindfulness, Compassion, Patience, Humility, Ethical integrity, Self-awareness, and Wisdom are major points highlighted in the book.
- The book "The Leader's Way: Business, Buddhism and Happiness in an Interconnected World" by the Dalai Lama is enlightening into Buddhism and business principles. The book has highlighted Buddhist philosophies in the business context and leadership. The mentioned Compassion and Empathy, Emotional Balance, Ethical Integrity, Humility, Interdependence, and Inner Development are crucial for sustainable leadership.
- The book "The Competitive Buddha" by Jerry Lynch highlighted the integration of Buddhist principles

with competitive environments like sports and business. The book is praised for demonstrating how core Buddhist values can guide individuals through challenges and foster success. It emphasizes the positive aspects of competition while incorporating Eastern philosophy to elevate performance both on and off the field. The book expressed that compassion, mindfulness; equanimity, non-attachment, and wisdom are the key to successful leadership.

## 5. Statement of Problems

The world of happiness and joy is becoming a false tale because of overwhelming global conflicts and wars. Human ethics and morality are decreasing day by day. Religion and religious people have become a means of segregation and distinction to people. To spread morality and eliminate ethical crises, iconic leaders with high morality have to lead the world. To justify the above statements, the following research questions need to be satisfied.

- How do Buddhist moral teachings build and develop morality among people;
- Why it is worthy to apply and practice Buddhist moral guidance to develop leadership skills;

## 6. Objectives

The seminar paper forwards a claim

that the development of leadership skills is possible through Buddhist moral teachings and practices. Some objectives of the seminar paper are as follows:

- To Examine the Buddhist ethics is a meticulous guidance to develop an individual morality, i.e. leadership and leadership skills.
- To evaluate meritorious and commendable effects of practicing Buddhist moral teachings.

## 7. Research Methodology

The paper is relying on secondary sources of data, i.e. published books, journals, newspapers, and web articles and video files. Leadership is a vast term; it has broader importance in social and professional life. The paper explains and concerns leadership as a skill of a leader. The MLA 9th edition is followed for the work citation of this paper.

## 8. Analysis and Discussion

Buddhism teaches the Three Marks of Existence: Suffering (*Dukhaa*), Impermanence (*Anitya*), and No-self (*Anatma*) (Thapa 56-57). These teachings are life awakening; human life has inevitable sufferings, nothing is permanent and there is nothing to consider as self. Once an individual understands the teaching he/she becomes benevolent automatically. To understand what is suffering in

human life there is the teaching of the Four Noble Truths; Suffering, Cause, Cessation, and Path (Thapa 7). There is no phenomenon which has a permanent existence. Everything is dependent origin. The Dependent Origination theory of Buddhism is all about to teach impermanence and to teach no-self. In Buddhism, no-self doesn't mean that people or things don't exist but rather there is no permanent, unchanging essence or self to be found within them (Weltman). All these philosophical explanations in Buddhism are well enough to settle human greed, anger, and ignorance, i.e. *Rāga*, *Dosa*, and *Moha*; fundamental negative mental states (Keown). According to Buddhism these three roots when uncontrolled, are considered the source of suffering and the driving force behind the cycle of rebirth (Webster 100-105).

Now the question is how to control one's mind. What to practice and what are the methods; Buddhism teaches the Threefold Training: ethical conducts, mental concentration, and wisdom (*Śīla*, *Samādhi*, and *Prajñā*) (Thapa 10). Ethical conduct or virtue refers to right speech, right action, and right livelihood. Likely mental concentration refers to another three, i.e. right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Lastly, wisdom includes two; the right view and the right intention. All these eight complete the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism. An

individual who follows these eight paths will free himself from the suffering and cycle of rebirth (Pragyarasmi 1-117).

It seems the guidance of Buddhism is to attain spirituality, but these are more commendable in practical or daily life. A person having the right speech or control over his speech never gets into any problems causing his speaking. Similarly, practicing the right actions and living the right livelihood becomes the grounds for his/her happiness. The five precepts of Buddhism, i.e. refrain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication (Shakya 205-221) are the Buddhist moral conducts for right speech, action, and livelihood; there are more conducts for further and advanced practitioners.

Buddhist meditation techniques include the right effort, mindfulness, and concentration. The meditation techniques aim to cultivate mindfulness, awareness, and insight, leading to a deeper understanding of oneself and the nature of reality, and fostering inner peace and liberation from suffering (Than 6). Mindfulness of breathing, meditation of loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, equanimity, *samatha*, and *vipassana* are some of the meditation techniques of Buddhism (Than 64-65). These techniques of meditation bring mindfulness and awareness of thoughts, feelings, and sensations

without judgment. It resets the mind bringing calm and clearness of thought. It transforms the mind by cultivating positivity and reducing negativity such as stress, anxiety, attachment, anger, ignorance, etc. (Than 66-68).

The right view involves the proper understanding of the four noble truths, understanding the nature of reality, understanding ethical conduct, mindfulness, concentration, understanding the teachings conceptually and experimentally, etc. The right intention is all about cultivating positive mental states, and motivation for positive actions: the intention of renunciation, the intention of goodwill, and the intention of non-violence, the foundation for ethical conduct and interconnectedness (Kornfield 1-26).

The above-mentioned Buddhist philosophies and moral teachings have a direct effect on the practitioner's prosperous life and spiritual attainments. A leader could be defined as a good being with qualities of humanness. Since a leader has to lead his people or community he/she must have influencing good or positive characteristics. Correct behavioral attendances and positive attitudes are crucial for a leader to develop his/her leadership skills. A leader must be self-aware, a creative thinker, communicate effectively, have emotional maturity, discipline, etc. A leader's mental

state is much more responsible for quality leadership. Since the nature of Buddhist teachings, where there are many teachings referring to behavioral precision and the formation of the right mental state; Buddhist teachings are significantly applicable to developing leadership skills.

- **Self-awareness:** The literal meaning of the word awareness is knowledge or perception of a situation or fact, i.e. knowledge of self is self-awareness. An individual who knows about himself can achieve his desired dream path. Buddhism is a perfect guide for knowing oneself. A self-aware person understands his strengths and challenges, understands his own as well others' needs and feelings, can see how his behavior affects others, develop a growth mindset and learn from mistakes, etc. (Morin). When people understand themselves better, it becomes easier for them to build positive self-esteem. The practice of self-awareness involves meditation, mindful observation, self-reflection, and ethical conduct in Buddhism.
- **Articulate thinking:** A leader must have the capacity to think creatively and clearly. One can develop his/her thoughts when he/she is free with his/her mind; a stress-free mind. In Buddhism articulate

thinking involves cultivating clear, mindful, and compassionate thought processes, focusing on the understanding reality and promoting ethical conducts. Right view, right intention, right speech, knowing four noble truths, and mindfulness and meditation are Buddhist techniques to develop articulate thinking.

- **Effective communication:** Effective communication skill is another important skill for a leader. A leader having effective communication skills is much more appealing to his people. Having truthfulness, kindness, compassion, and avoiding harmful language are some of the basics of effective communication skills. The core Buddhist principles of right speech teach speaking clearly and concisely, using words that are easy to understand, rather than using harsh language, lies, and idle gossip recognizing when to speak and what to speak. Practicing Buddhist teachings can develop control over emotional reactions focusing on understanding the issue rather than winning arguments, i.e. ethical communication.
- **Emotional maturity:** Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and manage the emotions of own and others. The

term emotional intelligence (EQ) was first coined by researchers John Mayer and Peter Salovey. Research showed that 90 % of top performers (leaders) are high in emotional intelligence. The EQ is typically broken down into four core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (hbu.edu.). It can be said that Buddhism is all about emotional maturity. Emotional maturity doesn't mean suppression of emotions but rather observing them with mindfulness and developing equanimity. Emotional maturity in a Buddhist context involves developing a deep understanding of one's own emotions, recognizing their origins, and understanding how they influence thoughts and actions. Buddhism teaches emotional maturity by cultivating equanimity and positive emotions.

- **Mindfulness:** As per the definition of Oxford Languages mindfulness is a state of active, open attention to the present. This state is described as observing one's thoughts and feelings without judging them as good or bad. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta is the highly revered discourse of Buddhism which is considered an exact instruction on the practice of mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness of body (kāyā), mindfulness of feelings (vedanā), mindfulness of mind (citta), and mindfulness of mental phenomena (dhammas) are four sections of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (Purser 5). In simple words, an individual mindful of his body, feelings or emotions, mental states, and ethics, is a conqueror. A leader having such skills becomes undefeatable. Hence to understand own-self and others mindfulness practice of Buddhism is important to develop leadership skills.

- **Decision-making with compassion:** Leadership skills include decision-making as an important skill for a leader. Every decision of a leader must be just. Decision-making with compassion comes from the practice of compassion. A self-compassionate person has fewer chances to make wrong decisions. Compassion in decision-making requires empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, and kindness, the practice of treating others with consideration and respect (Plecas 105-119). A leader should make decisions beyond self-interest with ethical consideration and priorities the benefits of others' well-being. Compassion is the very first word that comes to mind when the word "Buddhism" is mentioned.

Compassion is purified love. It is a kind of service offered out of selflessness and wisdom. It is a form of contribution made without expecting anything in return. It is sacrifice made out of resolve and it is a combination of love, wisdom, resolve, and generosity (Yun 1).

## 9. Conclusion

Leadership is the ability to guide, inspire, and influence others to achieve a common goal. A good leader possesses qualities such as vision, integrity, decisiveness, effective communication, etc. A leader is an influential character. Every action of a leader could have impacts. A community leader impacts on his community but as a leader grows he puts more impacts, i.e. nationally, and globally. Leadership is not just about authority; it involves fostering teamwork, making ethical decisions, and motivating individuals to reach their full potential. That is why a leader must be an ethical man with high morality. Leadership is deeply tied to mindfulness, compassion, wisdom, and ethical behavior, emphasizing service to others rather than personal power; and Buddhist teachings are more effective to learn all these qualities. Self-inquiry and self-knowledge are present world requirements. A leader who has self-knowledge and self-inquiry becomes a good leader. Buddhism is about knowing the self. The moral teachings

of Buddhism apply to all. Abstaining from killing, stealing, lying, adultery, and intoxication are the basic precepts or moral teachings of Buddhism. If a person could practice these five precepts she/he could live a meaningful life. And the five precepts are keys to enlightenment. In the context of spirituality, the Eightfold Path of Buddhism is the instruction to get out of the world of suffering. Similarly, in practical life, the path leads to triumph and achievement, regardless of the specific area or field of activity. Buddhism creates a novel environment. A leader must work for the development of mankind. Human is unanimously linked with the natural environment of the whole world. To save the world environment and mankind, a skillful and good leader is present world's requirement. Hence, Buddhism and its teachings can significantly contribute to the development of leadership skills.

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