

<研究ノート>

A Brief Note on the Guidance Possible from the Pāli Canon for the Development of Nursing Today

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Buddhism considers good health as the highest gain⁽¹⁾. That is why, there is a large number of rules and regulations and many teachings in the *Vinayapiṭaka* and *Suttapiṭaka* on such aspects as the prevention of disease and personal hygiene and the treatment necessary once illness sets in.

1.

1.1. Special Qualities Which a Nurse should Possess

In this regard it is worth indicating five special qualities which a nurse should possess as set forth in the *Gilānupaṭṭhāka sutta* of the *Pañcakanipāta* in the *Aṅguttaranikāya*.⁽²⁾ Same five facts can be seen in the *Cīvarakkhandhaka* of the *Vinaya Mahāvagga*⁽³⁾ as given below.

- i. The nurse should be skilled in the handling of the necessary medicines.
- ii. The nurse should know what kind of foods and drinks is beneficial and non-beneficial to the patient.
- iii. The nurse should treat the sick without expecting any material gain but out of compassion.
- iv. The nurse should not show aversion to remove the patient's faeces, urine, vomit or spit etc.
- v. The nurse should often be able to talk to the patient, to strengthen his mind, make his mind pleasant, and to make him zealous with virtuous talk.

1.2. The Nurse should not Leave the Patient Alone

The patient should not be left alone if his mind is weak. If there is someone always with the patient, loneliness, fear etc. are dispelled. The *Meghiya sutta* of the *Udānapāli* is an example in point. According to that sutta ven. Meghiya was attending on the Buddha. When he expressed his intention to go to a separate place leaving the Buddha alone, Buddha advised Meghiya not to leave him alone and to wait till another Bhikkhu came⁽⁴⁾.

1.3. External Appearance of the Nurse or Attendant

He should be clean in whatever he does. He should be clean and simple in dress. The Buddhist view of cleanliness and simplicity is important here. His face and outward appearance should be pleasant. *Mettānisamsa sutta* explains that when one acts with compassion and loving kindness his face becomes charming and he appears pleasant to people⁽⁵⁾.

1.4. According to the Buddhist View Nurse's or Attendant's Speech should be Kind and Soft

The *Tikanipāta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya* mentions three kinds of words spoken by persons as *gūṭhabhāṇi*, *madhubhāṇi* and *phupphabhāṇi*.⁽⁶⁾ *Gūṭhabhāṇi* means foul smelling unpleasant words which are like excreta. Such words cause the mentality of the patient to break down. It is words sweet like honey (*madhubhāṇi*) or fragrant like flowers (*pupphabhāṇi*) which bring relief to the mind of the patient. According to Buddhism such kind of words should be spoken by a nurse. A good example for this is the story of Paṭācārā. According to that well-known story, she lost her two children, husband, parents and brother on the same day. She ran senselessly without clothing. The Buddha addressed her in very intimate words by saying "my sister"⁽⁷⁾. The nurse or the attendant should take that incident as an example.

1.5. A Nurse should be able to Understand the Mentality of the Patient

According to Buddhism a nurse should be able to understand the mentality of the patient because some are patently mental patients. The story of *Kisāgotami* is a good example for this. She appealed to the Buddha to cure her dead child. The Buddha understood her mentality and asked her to bring a handful of mustard seeds from a house where no one had died. From morning till evening she went from house to house carrying her dead child seeking mustard. But she could not find a house where no one had died. Finally she understood that her child had undergone the reality of death. It was then that she came to her senses⁽⁸⁾. We can say that according to Buddhism the nurse should understand the mental condition of the patient similarly. Therefore it is the responsibility of the nurse or attendant to stabilize the patient's mind.

1.6. A Nurse should be able to Allay the Fear of Death in a Patient

When the disease increases, fear of death naturally overtakes the patient's mind. It is the responsibility of the nurse to dispel that fear and even in a terminal illness assuage his or her mind. The story of *Dhammika upāsaka* in the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* is a good example in point. When *Dhammika upāsaka* was ill and close to death. Bhikkhus went to him and chanted the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhānasutta*. He died having achieved calmness of mind⁽⁹⁾.

The above facts show that the nurse should be of very high mental qualities. According to *Aṅguttaranikāyaṭṭhakathā*, in addition to the above qualities the nurse should be a wise, clever and energetic person⁽¹⁰⁾.

2.

Presently in Sri Lanka, in the nursing service there are both male and female nurses and attendants. They belong to various religions. Most of them are Buddhists. At a first glance, the differences of their way of service

cannot be related to their religions. But we can surmise that nurses and attendants who are Buddhist do their duties kindly and patiently, because Sri Lankan Buddhist people learn from their childhood, how to treat and nurse parents, elders, patients and others.

There are special schools on every Sunday in every temple in Sri Lanka from where every Buddhist child gets the knowledge of Buddhism as well as the basic knowledge of nursing and the treatment of patients, parents and so on. In addition to this on special occasions those children attend the programs called *Śramadāna* which are organized voluntary social service where they get experience of nursing by cleaning beds and hospital wards, and treating the patients.

In Sri Lanka when Buddhist people are not well they invite the Buddhist monks to their homes. They yearn very much for the Buddhist monks to chant *Paritta*. After chanting they drink chanted holy water and tie chanted holy threads in their right hands. This kind of ritual can be seen very often within Sri Lankan Buddhist society because they believe fervently that illnesses could be dispelled by it. Therefore the Buddhist religious functions, specially the *Paritta* chanting on the occasions of falling ill are popular and well-known among the Buddhists all over Sri Lanka. Buddhist monks also perform these services very compassionately without expectation of any reward.

Monks in Sri Lanka have unhindered access to patients at any time in any hospital to attend to their religious needs. The hospital administration does not obstruct them in this. Even some doctors want Buddhist monks to motivate patients by preaching *Dhamma* or chanting *Paritta*.

On the occasion of Bhikkhus falling ill, there are special wards in state hospitals and special attention by the staff is accorded them. In almost every hospital religious needs are cared for and there is a shrine-room with a statue of the Buddha or a *Bodhi* tree or both for patients to worship and calm their minds.

Notes

- (1) Dhammapada, No. 204
- (2) A. N. II. p. 144
- (3) Vinaya Mahāvagga I p. 303
- (4) Udāna p. 35
- (5) A. N. IV. p. 342
- (6) A. N. I. p. 128
- (7) Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā II. p. 267
- (8) Ibid. III. p. 432
- (9) Ibid. I. p. 129
- (10) A. N. A. II. p. 191

All the above primary sources are Pāli Text Society's Editions.

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