

## **The Clearest Signs of a Happy Life**

*Theme: The many different aspects of the spiritual life*

This is what we have been told. One beautiful night, while the Buddha was living at a monastery in a grove of trees near Savatthi, he was visited by a noble, holy woman, who lit up the whole woodland with her splendour.

She saluted the Buddha with respect, and said to him, 'Reverend Sir, many people, rich and poor, high and low, all searching for well-being and happiness, have wondered, "What is the clearest sign of a happy life?" So tell us: what is the clearest sign that someone's life is leading to happiness?'

The Buddha replied as follows.

'Having as friends only those who are wise, and respecting only those who are worthy of respect – this is the clearest sign of a life that is leading to happiness.

'Living in pleasant surroundings and knowing that in the past you have acted wisely and kindly – this is the clearest sign of a life that is leading to happiness.

'Being well trained in knowledge, making things that are useful or beautiful, and always speaking kindly – this is the clearest sign of a life that is leading to happiness.

'Looking after your elderly parents, cherishing your children and wife or husband, and having a job or way of life that promotes peace and well-being – this is the clearest sign of a life that is leading to happiness.

'Acting with generosity and respect, doing good, and helping relatives – this is the clearest sign of a life that is leading to happiness.

'Avoiding harmful actions, avoiding drinks that cloud the mind, and carrying out actions that are helpful to other beings – this is the clearest sign of a life that is leading to happiness.

'Acting with respect, modesty, contentment and gratitude, and listening regularly to the Dharma teachings – this is the clearest sign of a life that is leading to happiness.

'Acting with patience and obedience, keeping company with people who follow the Dharma teachings, and taking part in discussions about the nature of truth and wisdom – this is the clearest sign of a life that is leading to happiness.

'Acting with mindful self-control, understanding how to bring and end to our suffering and reaching the peace that comes from Enlightenment – this is the clearest sign of a life that is leading to happiness.

'If your mind is free of sorrow and guilt, tranquil, and not upset by either praise or blame, winning or losing – this is the clearest sign of a life that is leading to happiness.

'People like this need have no fear – these are all the clearest signs that they can be sure of gaining happiness.'

### Questions

1. Why do you think the Buddha says that each of his replies is 'the clearest sign' of a life leading to happiness instead of 'one of the signs'?
2. Do you think his replies are of equal importance, or are some more important than others?
3. How are the Buddha's early replies different from the later ones?

### *Dharma Issues:*

- *The importance of all the many different aspects of the spiritual life – the teachings, the spiritual community, the ethical precepts, ethical livelihood, care for others, etc*
- *Different individuals have their own path of spiritual progress, their own starting point.*

*Based on the 'Mahamangala Sutta', in Sutta Nipata, Routledge-Curzon, 1994, II, 4*