BUDDHIST ETHICS AND ITS IMPACTS ON MODERN TIME

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Abstract

Buddhism is a unique religious system that is not only considered as a religion to follow but also is a way of attaining enlightenment in life. Buddha shows people a path following which they can reach the ultimate goal that is liberation afterlife. Buddha's whole approach is going through an ethical system that enriches the human mind with love and wisdom as well as prepares the human body to attain liberation. Buddhism is mainly based on the Buddha's four noble truths and noble eight-fold path which are the foundations of Buddhist ethics. This thesis concerns Buddhist ethics and its impacts on modern time. It emphasizes the fact that Buddhist ethics and morality can be the aid of all inhuman activities of the modern world. Buddhist ethical teachings are the pole star, not only for the monks-nuns or lay people rather for all human beings. In the introductory chapter, the history and background of Buddhism with the significance of Buddhist ethics in modern life have been demonstrated shortly. The next two chapters go through the introduction of Buddhism and Buddhist ethics. Buddhist values and attitudes along with the three *puñña*: *dāna*, *śīla* and *bhāvnā* have been discussed thoroughly in the fourth and fifth chapter respectively. It is impressive that whenever one will explain Buddhism, there must be magnified the Buddhist ethical views. Moreover, this thesis is all about Buddhist ethics and its relevance in human life; so, the sixth chapter is regarding the Buddhist perspective of the natural world and human life. Those perspectives of Buddha influence modern human life and its crisis. The seventh chapter has dominated Buddhist ethics as virtue ethics lighting upon contemporary perspectives. Finally, the study concludes that Buddhism and Buddhist

ethics is no way can be antiquated. Buddha's sweeping thoughts regarding life and the world has a timeless existence. If Buddhist ethical directions can be maintained in modern time by everyone then, in near future the world will be more sustainable for all sentient beings. And Buddha's five precepts are a complete guideline to lead a moral life that will consummately take a true follower to his or her actual destiny of liberation through right mindfulness.

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Chapter One
Introduction

1.1 Prologue

Human beings wish to lead their life through the light of their knowledge regarding themselves and the world. So, it is a human's rational nature to desire knowledge. And, Philosophy literally means 'love of wisdom' or 'pursuit of knowledge'. Therefore, Philosophy is a way of satisfying this very reasonable quest for knowledge. It is a truism that Philosophy is an attempt to achieve the rational concept of reality as a whole. It enquires into the nature of the universe in which we live, the nature of the human soul and its destiny, and the nature of God or the Absolute thought, and their relation to one another. It also investigates the nature of matter, time, space, causality, evolution, life, and mind, and their relation to one another. In short, Philosophy is the art of thinking all things logically, systematically, and persistently.[1] Philosophy is not a mere luxury, but a necessity. As an eminent English writer, Aldous Huxley puts it:

> Men live in accordance with their philosophy of life, their conception of the world. This is true even of the most thoughtless. It is impossible to live without a metaphysic. The choice that is given us is not between some kind of metaphysic and no metaphysic; it is always between a good metaphysic and a bad metaphysic.[2]

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[1] Jadunath Sinha, *Introduction to Philosophy*, (Third Edition; Calcutta: Sinha Publishing House, 1961), p.1.

[2] Quoted by Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, (Seventh Edition; Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1968), p.1.

It is generally true that Philosophy is built upon wonder or doubt and speculation. Western Philosophy is guided by theoretical interest. Its foundation is the independent reflection untrammeled by authority. It is not guided by practical considerations of morality and religion. But Indian Philosophy is actuated by spiritual motives. It is a speculation on the nature of reality with a view to attaining liberation which is the *Summum Bonum* of human life.[3]

Indian philosophy is the philosophical speculations of all Indian thinkers, ancient or modern, Hindus or non-Hindus, theists or atheists. According to a traditional principle of classification, adopted by most of the orthodox Hindu thinkers, the schools or systems of Indian philosophy are divided into two broad classes named orthodox (āstika) and heterodox (nāstika). The six chief philosophical systems addressed Mīmāṁsā, Vedānta, Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, and Vaiśeṣika belong to the first group. These are regarded as orthodox (āstika), not because they believe in God, but because they accept the authority of the Vedas. Under the other group of heterodox (nāstika) systems, the chief three are the schools of the materialists like the Cārvākas, the Buddhas, and the Jainas. They are called heterodox (nāstika) because they do not believe in the authority of the Vedas.[4]

Morality and ethics can exist apart from religion, for example in humanism or utilitarianism, or ethics can be integrated into a religious system. The second thing happens with Buddhism. Buddhism flourishes through the ethical perspectives of the Buddha. Morality is woven into

[3] Jadunath Sinha, *Introduction to Indian Philosophy,* (Agra: Educational Publisher, 1949), p.1.
[4] Chatterjee and Datta, *op. cit.,* p.5.

the fabric of Buddhist teachings and there is no major branch or school that fails to emphasize the importance of the moral life. The core of Buddhism is composed of the ethical principles and precepts as well as the values and virtues expounded by the Buddha.[5]

According to the history of philosophy, the system of early Buddhism is one of the most original. In its fundamental ideas and essential spirit, it approximates remarkably to the advanced scientific thought of the nineteenth century. As Buddha teaches the opposite truth of what Upanisads or Vedas taught. Buddha finds that everything is impermanent (anītya). There is no permanent self (anātman). All is suffering (duḥkha). The self is an impermanent mind-body-complex (samudāya). There is no God or the Absolute as Creator of the world. It is self-existent. It is without beginning or end. It is unsustainable (nissatta) and soulless (nijjiva). There are no permanent substances. There are only impermanent qualities (dhamma) or phenomena. They are subject to the inexorable law of becoming or dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda). They are produced by their causes and conditions. The law of causation is subservient to the moral law. It is the law of karma. It is the law of righteousness (Pali: dhamma, Sanskrit: dharma).[6]

So, according to Buddha, Life is full of suffering and suffering is due to craving or will-to-live (tṛṣṇā). Will-to-live is due to ignorance (avidyā). Ignorance is false knowledge of the impermanent as the permanent. It is a delusion of individuality. It is the root of the cycle of birth and death. Ignorance cannot be killed by philosophical knowledge. Buddha adopts

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[5] Damien Keown, *Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.3.

[6] Jadunath Sinha, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Volume-II, (Calcutta: Central Book Agency, 1952), p.280.

an anti-metaphysical attitude which can be termed as moral pragmatism. His teachings aim at the total extinction of suffering and attainment of *nirvāṇa* here on earth. *Nirvāṇa* is the perfect peace and equanimity. It is perfect enlightenment (bodhi). The way to *nirvāṇa* is the eight-fold path (āṣṭāṅga-mārga) of right conduct (śīla), concentration (samādhi), and insight (prajñā). The delusion of individuality or egoism must be extirpated. When egoism is eradicated, will-to-live (tṛṣṇā) or craving is destroyed. The wheel of birth and death is ended and *nirvāṇa* is attained.[7]

Again, *ahiṃsā* or non-injury in thought, word, and deed are the cornerstones of moral life. Universal goodwill and friendship (maitrī), compassion (karuṇā) for the distressed, joy (muditā) for the virtuous, and indifference (upekṣā) to the vicious are inculcated. The purity of inner life is emphasized. The purity of overt actions is not enough. The religion of animal sacrifice, ritualism, ceremonialism, and legalism is condemned. Hereditary caste distinctions are condemned. Buddha teaches neither being nor non-being but becoming. He teaches neither self-indulgence nor self-mortification, but the middle path of right view, right speech, and right conduct. He teaches the religion of *ahiṃsā*. Buddha asks his disciples not to depend upon authority but on reason. He asks them to be a light unto themselves (ātmadīpa), a refuge to themselves. He turns the wheel of the law (dharmacakra) which is irresistible. He lays the foundation of the kingdom of righteousness.[8]

Nowadays, there is a condition of the social existence of a powerful set of cultural, political, economic, and spatial relationships that is significantly different from all the *past* forms of human experience which can be

[7] *Ibid.,* pp.280-281.
[8] *Ibid.,* p.281.

termed as modernity. And, no religion has a greater claim to embodying modernity than Buddhism. Before explaining this, let's have a concise account of the term modernity that derives from Latin *modernus*, which itself derives from the adverb *modo*, a term that since the fifth century C.E. was equivalent to *nunc* (now). During the European Middle Ages, one's status as *modernus* required distinguishing oneself from the antique. Modernity, then, is to be understood as requiring an act of self-conscious instantiation from a past in which ignorance prevailed. More specifically, modernity has required moving from an organic to a mechanic conception of the cosmos and society, from hierarchy to equality, from the corporate to the individual, and from an understanding of reality in which everything resonates with everything else to an understanding built around precision and the increasing differentiation of domains. Ultimately, modernity has had to do with the perpetual questioning of one's presuppositions.[9]

In this modern era, Buddhist experts from several Asian and Western nations address a number of ethical problems from the Buddhist perspective, including medical and environmental ethics, feminism, the social impacts of materialism, and ethnic minorities. Many modern Buddhists tend to dismiss the traditional principles to solve the problems, replacing them with abstract Western principles that are more harmful to society and the world. Whereas, early Buddhism can help effectively to address the critical challenges of modern life. The four noble truths and noble eight-fold path as well as the five precepts of Buddhism have all the answers to keep checking out the difficulties of the present time. The

[9] Gustavo Benavides, "Modernity and Buddhism," *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. by Robert E. Buswell Jr., et. al. Volume Two: M-Z, (New York: Macmillan Reference USA™, 2004), p.544.

ethical guidelines that are embodied in the moral precepts are lenses that help everyone focus on their understanding and these act as guards that keep them from generating karma that will lead to increased dissatisfaction in everyone's lives.

Buddhist ethics are based on knowledge of the relation between one's intentional actions (physical, verbal, and mental) and their consequences. Ultimately, from a Buddhist perspective, morality is based on the purification of the mind. As one's mind is purified, one's actions are purified. As a result, not only do mental attitudes that are dissonant or harmful to the natural world disappear, but new mental states lead directly to more enlightened actions in relation to the natural world and more enlightened influence on others about the natural world. Both wholesome and unwholesome intentional actions arise from the mind. Unwholesome ones are easier to curtail if one is aware of those when those are just sprouting into consciousness.

Intentional activity is the definition of karma, so Buddhist ethics can be said to be karma-based. Buddhist teachings can act as an aid in clarifying and magnifying muddled situations and can encourage all to try to clarify and shorten the causal chains of the everyday transactions of life. In Buddhist societies, the prohibition against sexual misconduct traditionally meant celibacy for monastics and adherence to the cultural norms of marriage for lay disciples. The moral precept against sexual misconduct directs everyone's attention to the negative effects of outflows of sexual energy for Buddhist practice and also acknowledges the potential disruptive effects that improper sexual activity has on society and on basic social values. Nowadays, people are routinely deceived and harmed by other people both in practical and virtual life. Using the lens of the

precept, it easily becomes clear where corrective action needs to be taken. Among the general public, there is little recognition of the Buddhist insight that the methods of avoiding pain and suffering just cover over the real problems, lead to more suffering, and do not get at the root causes. Drugs cannot replace the curative effects of introspection, repentance, and change of one's mental and physical habits that cause suffering in the first place. Therefore, it is clear that truly following the precepts can be a strong force to heal all the dangerous rent in the social fabric. The Buddha legislates moral guidelines for both his monastic community and his lay disciples by combining the principles of karma with Buddhist virtues in accordance with specific situations. His moral precepts protect people from committing bad karma and safeguard their purity of mind and body.

Buddhist ethics have been preserved in Buddhist cultures in the countries to which Buddhism has spread. Buddhist insights and their ethical frameworks contain common values that are effective tools for everyone who wishes to work together to repair the moral fabric of society, lessen human suffering, and restore the natural world.

Chapter Two

Buddhism: The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eight-fold Path

2.1 Introduction

Buddhism is a path of practice and spiritual development leading to insight into true nature of reality. Buddhism is the world's fourth largest religion with over 520 million followers, or over 7% of the global population, known as Buddhists. Buddhism encompasses a variety of traditions, beliefs and spiritual practices largely based on original teachings attributed to the Buddha and resulting interpreted philosophies.[10] The goal of Buddhism is a state of lasting, unconditional happiness known as enlightenment. To bring people to this state, Buddhism points them to lasting values in this impermanent world, and gives them valuable information about how things really are. Everyone can tap into their potential to realize the ultimate goal of enlightenment through understanding the law of cause and effect, using practical tools like meditation to gain insight and develop compassion and wisdom.

2.2 Gautama Buddha

The world saw the Light of Asia in the sixth century B. C. who is the perfect embodiment of knowledge, courage, love and sacrifice, whose heart overflowed with purest emotion on seeing that human life was essentially fraught with misery and pain. In that deep pessimism, a sallow optimism was rooted. Prince Siddhartha moved by that spectacle to seek a remedy for men's ills, at the age of twenty-nine, boldly left not only the

[10] Edward D. Andrews, *Reasoning with the World's Various Religions: Examining and Evangelizing*, (Cambridge: Christian Publishing House, 2018), p.60.

material luxuries of the Shākya kingdom but also his beloved wife and new-born son. While he lay emaciated under a tree near Gaya, he found enlightenment after his six years' rigorous religious austerities. The enlightenment which dawned upon the mortal Siddhartha and transformed him into the immortal Gautama Buddha, serves us even today. Chandradhar Sharma well-portrays the impact of Buddhism in his book, '*A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*' saying:

> Buddhism was embraced by the rich and the poor, the high and the low, the intellectual and the dull alike. It spread like wild fire far and wide from the lofty Himalayas to Cape Camorin and raged beyond the frontiers of its homeland to Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Malaya, Java, Sumatra and then again to Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia, Korea, China and Japan. It became a world-religion and a great cultural force at least in Asia.[11]

2.3 Teachings of Buddha

The message of Buddha's enlightenment laid the foundation of both Buddhist religion and philosophy. Buddha was primarily an ethical teacher and a social reformer than a theoretical philosopher. However, he referred to a number of metaphysical views prevalent in his times and condemned them as futile. Whenever metaphysical questions were put to him, he avoided them saying that they were neither profitable nor conducive to the highest good. He repeatedly told his disciples: "Two things only, my disciples, do I teach – misery and the cessation of misery." Human existence is full of misery and pain. Our immediate duty, therefore, is to get rid of this misery and pain. If instead we bother about barren metaphysical speculations, we behave like that foolish man whose

[11] Chandradhar Sharma, *A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), p.69.

heart is pierced by a poisonous arrow and who, instead of taking it out whiles away his time on idle speculation about the origin, the size, the metal, the maker and the shooter of the arrow.[12] It will appear from this that Buddha himself was not concerned so much with the problems of philosophy as with the practical problem how human misery can be removed. But he could not avoid philosophical discussions altogether. Therefore, among his teachings, the findings of early literature imply that there is nothing that exists by itself but are conditional. Owing to the change of the conditions on which they depend, all things are subject to change. Nothing is permanent. There is neither any soul nor God nor any other permanent substance. As a tree generates another tree through its seed, by the law of karma, there another life that continues while the first withers away.

2.4 Followers of Buddha

The germs of philosophical theories contained in Buddha's teachings were being developed by the later followers of Buddha in India and outside. That is why many schools came into existence. The four schools that became well known in Indian philosophy are:

i. The Mādhyamika or Śūnyavāda School

ii. The Yogācāra or Vijñānavāda School

iii. The Sautrāntika School

iv. The Vaibhāṣika School

Besides these, on religious matters, Buddhism is divided into the two well-known schools, Hīnayāna or Theravāda which is flourishing now in

[12] *Ibid.*, p.70.

the south, in Ceylon, Burma, and Siam, and Mahayana that is found now in the north, in Tibet, China, and Japan. These two schools differ in the object of *nirvāṇa*. The Hīnayāna holds that *nirvāṇa* should be sought so that the individual may put an end to his or her misery. On the other hand, The Mahayana thinks that the object of *nirvāṇa* is not to put an end to one's misery but to obtain perfect wisdom with which the liberated can work for the salvation of all beings in misery. The first two of the four philosophical schools, the Mādhyamika or Śūnyavāda school and the Yogācāra or Vijñānavāda school come under the Mahayana and the last two, the Sautrāntika school and the Vaibhāṣika school come under the Hīnayāna. The literature of Hīnayāna or Theravāda school is vast and is written in Pali. It is claimed to be more orthodox and faithful to the teachings of Buddha. Mahayana adopted Sanskrit for philosophical discussion and thus enormous Buddhist literature in Sanskrit came to be developed. Most of this literature was translated into Tibetan and Chinese and thus became naturalized in the lands in which Buddhism flourished.

2.5 Literature of Buddhism

Like all great teachers of ancient times Buddha taught by conversation, and his teachings were also handed down for a long time through oral instruction imparted by his disciples to successive generations. Our knowledge about Buddha's teachings depends today chiefly on the *Tripiṭakas* or the three baskets of teaching which are claimed to contain his views are reported by his most intimate disciples. These three canonical works are named *Vinayapiṭaka, Suttapiṭaka* and *Abhidhammapiṭaka*. The first work deals chiefly with rules of conduct for the congregation (sangha), the second contains Buddha's sermons and dialogues, and the third contains expositions of philosophical theories. All these three

contain information regarding early Buddhist philosophy.[13]

2.6 The Four Noble Truths

The Buddhist philosophy arose out of the teachings of Gautama Buddha, the well-known founder of Buddhism. Buddha always tried to enlighten persons on the most important questions of sorrow, its origin, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation. Because, as he puts it: "This does profit, has to do with fundamentals of religion, and tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom and *nirvāṇa*."[14]

The answers to the four questions noted above constitute, as we know, the essence of Buddha's enlightenment which he is eager to share with all fellow-beings. These have come to be known as The Four Noble Truths[15] (Pali: Chattari-ariya-saccani, Sanskrit: Chatvari-arya-satyani). They are:

1. Life in the world is full of suffering (duḥkha);
2. There is a cause of this suffering (duḥkha-samudaya);
3. It is possible to stop suffering (duḥkha-nirodha);
4. There is a path which leads to the cessation of suffering (duḥkha-nirodha-marga).

All the teaching of Gautama center round these four.

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[13] Chatterjee and Datta, *op. cit.*, pp.115-116.
[14] *Ibid.*, p.119.
[15] *Loc. cit.*

2.6.1 The First Noble Truth

Life is full of misery and pain. The first noble truth about the existence of misery is admitted by all in some form or other. But with his penetrating insight Buddha saw that misery is not simply causal; it is ordinarily present in all forms of existence and in all kinds of experience. Even what appears as pleasant is really a source of pain at bottom. Poverty, disease, old age, death, selfishness, meanness, greed, anger, hatred, quarrels, bickerings, conflicts, exploitation are rampant in this world.[16]

2.6.2 The Second Noble Truth

Regarding the second truth, Buddha's conclusion is deduced from his analysis of causation. He points out that the existence of everything in the world, material and mental, is caused by some other thing. There is nothing which is unconditional and self-existent. Everything has a cause. Nothing comes out of nothing – *ex nihilo nihil fit.* Being a fact, suffering must have a cause. It must depend on some conditions. 'This being, that arises', 'the cause being present, the effect arises', is the causal law of Dependent Origination (Pratītyasamutpāda).[17] There are twelve links in the chain of causation. These links are sometimes interpreted to cover the past, the present and the future life which are casually connected, so that present life can be conveniently explained with reference to its past condition and its future effect. The twelve links are, therefore, arranged with reference to the three periods in the following way proceeding from cause to effect:[18]

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[16] Sharma, *op. cit.*, p.71.
[17] *Ibid.*, pp.71-72.
[18] Chatterjee and Datta, *op. cit.*, p.122.

1. Ignorance (Avidyā),
2. Impressions (Saṃskāra), } Past Life

3. The initial consciousness of the embryo (Vijñāna),
4. Mind and body, the embryonic organism (Nāma-rūpa),
5. Six organs of knowledge (Ṣaḍāyatana),
6. Sense contact (Sparśa),
7. Sense-experince (Vedanā),
8. Thirst (Tṛ́ṣṇā),
9. Clinging (Upādāna),
10. Tendency to be born (Bhāva), } Present Life

11. Rebirth (Jāti) and
12. Old age, death etc. (Jarā-maraṇa). } Future Life

Out of these twelve links, the first two are related to past life, the last two to future life and the rest to present life. This is the cycle of birth and death. This is the twelve-spoked wheel of Dependent Origination (Pratītyasamutpāda).[19]

2.6.3 The Third Noble Truth

The third noble truth that there is cessation of suffering follows from the second truth that misery depends on some conditions. If these conditions are removed, misery would cease. The third noble truth is the complete destruction of thirst, craving, or will-to-live. It is renunciation from thirst,

[19] Sharma, *op. cit.*, p.74.

separation from it, freedom from it, giving no room to it. Verily, it is the destruction in which no passion remains, of this very thirst; the laying aside of it, the getting rid of it, the being free from it, the harboring no longer of this thirst. This is the noble truth concerning the destruction of suffering.[20]

Nirvāṇa is inscrutable, inexplicable, and unchangeable way to cease all the suffering. The term *nirvāṇa* literally means 'blowing out'. *Nirvāṇa* is often compared with the extinction of the flame of a lamp. Just as a lamp when it becomes extinguished goes nowhere but, utterly blows out on account of the oil being consumed; similarly, a person obtains *nirvāṇa* when the desires and the passions have been consumed; that person goes neither this way nor that, but obtains utter peace.[21] The delusion of individuality, desire for mind-body-complex (nāma-rūpa), and egotism are the causes of suffering. Destruction of egoism and will-to-live leads to the extinction of attachment, aversion, delusion, and suffering. *Nirvāṇa* is the extinction of desire, doubt and sensual pleasure based on the reflection of nothingness. It is the absolute elimination of suffering, decay, and death. It is grasping at nothing and possessing nothing. It is the perfect calm and tranquility undisturbed by desires and passions like the depth of the ocean.[22] All desire for this life and the next life are extinguished in it. He or she who overcomes this fierce thirst, sufferings fall off from him or her like water-drops from a lotus leaf. Dig up the root of the thirst, that the tempter may not crush anyone again and again. When the perfect control of passions and constant contemplation of truth

[20] T. W. Rhys Davids (trans.), "The Foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness," *Sacred Books of the East* (*Buddhist Sutrâs*, Vol. 2), (Oxford: Clarendon, 1881), p.7.
[21] Sharma, *op. cit.*, p.81.
[22] Sinha 1952, *op. cit.*, p.283.

lead a person through the four stages of liberation to perfect wisdom, he or she is no longer under the sway of worldly attachment. He or she has broken the fetters that bound him or her to the world. That person is, therefore, free or liberated. He or she is said then to have become an Arhat or a venerable person.[23] Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in their book, '*The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha*' explain that there are four planes or stages of liberation or *nirvāṇa*. The four planes of liberation are being shown in Table-1.

Table-1: The Four Planes or Stages of Liberation[24]

<table>
<tr><th>Stage's fruit</th><th colspan="2">Abandoned fetters</th><th>Rebirth(s) until suffering's end</th></tr>
<tr><td>stream-enterer</td><td rowspan="2">1. identity view (Anatman)
2. doubt in Buddha
3. ascetic or ritual rules</td><td rowspan="3">lower fetters</td><td>up to seven rebirths in human or heavenly realms</td></tr>
<tr><td>once-returner</td><td>once more as a human</td></tr>
<tr><td>non-returner</td><td>4. sensual desire
5. ill-will</td><td>once more in a heavenly realm (Pure Abodes)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Arahant</td><td>6. material-rebirth desire
7. immaterial-rebirth desire
8. conceit
9. restlessness
10. Ignorance</td><td>higher fetters</td><td>no rebirth</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (*Majjhima Nikāya*), (1995).

[23] Chatterjee and Datta, *op. cit.*, pp.123-124.
[24] Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (*Majjhima Nikāya*), (USA: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp.41-43.

2.6.4 The Fourth Noble Truth

The fourth noble truth is the way to the extinction of suffering. There is an ethical and spiritual path by following which misery may be removed and liberation attained. This is the Noble Eight-fold Path. The Noble Eight-fold Path[25] consists of eight steps which are:

1) Right Views (Samyagdṛṣṭi),
2) Right Resolve (Samyaksaṅkalpa),
3) Right Speech (Samyagvāk),
4) Right Conduct (Samyakkarmānta),
5) Right Livelihood (Samyagājīva),
6) Right Effort (Samyagvyāyāma),
7) Right Mindfulness (Samyaksmṛti), and
8) Right Concentration (Samyaksamādhi).

This is open to clergy and the laity alike.

When the four noble truths are grasped, that which leads to birth is destroyed and there is no more birth. The four noble truths are suffering, the origin of suffering, the destruction of suffering and the eight-fold way of destruction of suffering. The noble eight-fold path is the best way to freedom from suffering. It leads every aspirant to the complete extinction of suffering. Buddhism is pessimism in so far as it looks upon life as suffering. But it is optimism in so far as it aims at extinction of suffering in this life.[26]

[25] Sharma, *op. cit.*, p.72.
[26] Sinha 1952, *op. cit.*, p.284.

2.7 The Noble Eight-fold Path

The Noble Eight-fold Path is known as the 'Middle Way' because it steers a course between a life of indulgence and one of harsh austerity. This gives in a nutshell the essentials of Buddhist Ethics. This path is open to all, monks as well as laymen. The noble path consists in the acquisition of the following eight good things:[27]

Right Faith/Views (Samyagdṛṣṭi): It is natural that the first step to moral reformation should be the acquisition of right views or the knowledge of truth as ignorance with its consequences, namely, wrong views (mithyādṛṣṭi) about the self and the world, is the root cause of all suffering. Right view is defined as the correct knowledge about the four noble truths which, according to Buddha, helps moral reformation and leads everyone toward the goal of *nirvāṇa*.

Right Resolve (Samyaksaṅkalpa): A mere knowledge of the truths would be useless unless one resolves to reform life in their light. The moral aspirant is asked, therefore, to renounce worldliness (all attachment to the world), to give up ill-feeling toward others and desist from doing any harm to them. These three constitute the contents of right determination.

Right Speech (Samyagvāk): Right determination should not remain a mere pious wish but must issue forth into action. Right determination should be able to guide and control one's speech, to begin with. The result would be right speech consisting in abstention from lying, slander, unkind words and frivolous talk.

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[27] Chatterjee and Datta, *op. cit.,* pp.127-131.

Right Conduct (Samyakkarmānta): Right determination should end in right action or good conduct and not stop merely with good speech. Right conduct includes the *Pañca-śīla*, the five vows for desisting from killing, stealing, sensuality, lying and intoxication.

Right Livelihood (Samyagājīva): Renouncing bad speech and bad actions, one should earn his or her livelihood by honest means. The necessity of this rule lies in showing that even for the sake of maintaining one's life; one should not take to forbidden means but work in consistency with good determination.

Right Effort (Samyagvyāyāma): While a person tries to live a reformed life through right views, resolution, speech, action and livelihood, he or she is constantly knocked off the right path by old evil ideas which were deep-rooted in the mind as also by fresh ones which constantly arise. One cannot progress steadily unless he or she maintains a constant effort to root out old evil thoughts and prevent evil thoughts from arising a new. Moreover, as the mind cannot be kept empty, he or she should constantly endeavor also to fill the mind with good ideas and retain such ideas in the mind. This four-fold constant endeavor, negative and positive, is called right effort. This rule points out that even one high up on the path cannot afford to take a moral holiday without running the risk of slipping down.

Right Mindfulness (Samyaksmṛti): The necessity of constant vigilance is further stressed in this rule, which lays down that the aspirant should constantly bear in mind the things he or she has already learnt. He or she should constantly remember and contemplate the body as body, sensations as sensations, mind as mind, and mental states as mental states. If one is not mindful, he or she behaves as though the body, the mind,

sensations and mental states are permanent and valuable. Hence there arise attachment to such things and grief over their loss and one becomes subject to bondage and misery. But contemplation on the frail, perishable, loathsome nature of these helps one to remain free from attachment and grief. This is the necessity of constant mindfulness about truth.

Right Concentration (Samyaksamādhi): One who has successfully guided his or her life in the light of the last seven rules and thereby freed himself or herself from all passions and evil thoughts is fit to enter step by step into the four deeper and deeper stages of concentration that gradually take him or her to the goal of his or her long and arduous journey – cessation of suffering. He or she concentrates his or her pure and stoic mind on reasoning (vitarka) and investigation (vicāra) regarding the truths and enjoys in this state, joy and ease born of detachment and pure thought. This is the first stage of intent meditation (Sanskrit: dhyāna, Pali: jhāna). When this concentration is successful, belief in the four-fold truth arises dispelling all doubts and therefore, making reasoning and investigation unnecessary. From this results the second stage of concentration, in which there are joy, peace and internal tranquility born of intense, stoic contemplation. There is in this stage a consciousness of this joy and peace too. In the next stage a concentration is made by him or her to initiate an attitude of indifference, to be able to detach himself or herself even from the joy of concentration. From this results the third deeper kind of concentration, in which one experiences perfect equanimity coupled with an experience of bodily ease. He or she is yet conscious of this ease and equanimity, though indifferent to the joy of concentration. Lastly, he or she tries to put away even this consciousness of ease and equanimity and all the sense of joy and elation he or she previously had. He or she attains

thereby the fourth state of concentration, a state of perfect equanimity, indifference and self-possession without pain, without ease. Thus, he or she attains the desired goal of cessation of all suffering, he or she attains to arhatship or *nirvāṇa*. There are then perfect wisdom (prajñā) and perfect righteousness (śīla).

2.8 The Division of Noble Eight-fold Path

The noble eight-fold path is the middle way that the Buddha described during his first sermon, the way between the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification. The eight limbs of the path consist of right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. These are not sequential, because each one depends upon the other. They are meant to be followed and practiced in cooperation with one another. One cannot fully perfect the first step (for example, right views) until the last one, right concentration, is perfected. When all are practiced and perfected, then one attains enlightenment. Each of these components of the path is right in the sense that it is an ideal that should be undertaken and practiced seriously. One should follow the path not just because the Buddha taught it but because this is the way to attain the same perfection and enlightenment that Gautama Buddha reached while sitting under the bodhi tree. The word for right in each of the compounds that are found in the fourth truth can be translated as right, proper, or good; the meaning becomes clearer when contrasted with its opposite which means wrong, bad, or even evil.

The most famous and prolific of the Pali commentators and exegetes, Buddhaghosa grouped the noble eight-fold path into three different stages, as shown in Table-2.

Table-2: Buddhaghosa's Three Stages of the Eight-fold Path[28]

Buddhaghosa's three stages of the eight-fold path	
Right wisdom	right views right intention
Right ethical conduct	right speech right action right livelihood
Right concentration	right effort right mindfulness right concentration

Source: Carol S. Anderson, "Four Noble Truths," *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Volume One: A-L, (2004).

2.8.1 Right Wisdom

According to Buddhaghosa, right view means having *nirvāṇa* as one's goal through eliminating ignorance. One should strive to see clearly, always envisioning reaching *nirvāṇa* in one's mind. Other commentaries have explained that right view means understanding the four noble truths. Right intention (sometimes translated as right thought) involves thinking according to the Buddha's teachings, and always directing one's intentions and thoughts toward *nirvāṇa*, with keen attention to the proper ways of understanding the world. If one has abandoned wrong intentions or thoughts, then one knows that one is on the way to developing right intention. Some commentaries also explain that right intention involves the cultivation of *maitrī* (lovingkindness) toward all other beings. Taken together, Buddhaghosa wrote that both right view and right intention

[28] Carol S. Anderson, "Four Noble Truths," *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. by Robert E. Buswell Jr., et. al. Volume One: A-L, (New York: Macmillan Reference USA™, 2004), p.297.

make up right wisdom, for one is then focused on the ultimate goal of the Buddha's teachings, which is *nirvāṇa*.

2.8.2 Right Ethical Conduct

The second group, right ethical conduct (sometimes translated as right morality), is more readily understood than the first. Right speech means not lying, not engaging in gossip, not slandering others, and not speaking harshly. Right action involves not killing living things, not stealing, and not engaging in sexual misconduct. When one practices right livelihood, one avoids careers or jobs that harm others. Specifically, one should not earn a living by engaging in trading weapons, slaughtering animals, dealing in slavery, selling alcohol or other intoxicants, or selling poisons. When one practices right speech, right action, and right livelihood, one lays the proper ethical foundation for the other remaining stages of the path.

2.8.3 Right Concentration

The third and last group of the eight-fold path, right concentration, includes right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Each of these limbs of the path requires focus and deliberate cultivation of certain meditative practices. Right effort means deliberately preventing undesirable mental attitudes, such as sensual desire, hatred, sluggishness, worry and anxiety, and doubt, as well as deliberately letting go of such attitudes if they have already arisen. Right effort means bringing about and maintaining positive mental attitudes, such as the seven factors of enlightenment: mindfulness, investigation of phenomena, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. Right mindfulness means cultivating awareness of one's body, one's feelings, one's mind, and of

mental objects. It involves simply watching and observing, for example, one's body or mind. Right mindfulness is then accompanied by meditative practices of right concentration, which enable one to develop one-pointedness of mind. By closing the doors of the senses to the outside world, one focuses on one of a variety of objects that are designed to enable the practitioner to attain specific mental states that lie beyond one's usual daily consciousness.

2.9 Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the four noble truths and the noble eight-fold path are emblematic of all of the Buddha's teachings. Because the Buddha is said to have taught these in his first sermon, they represent the most fundamental teachings of Buddhism. The four noble truths are woven throughout all of the Buddhist worlds. The eight-fold path, too, is representative of the path to enlightenment. The eight stages of the path are broadly designed to take a practitioner from the initial steps of right intention and right view being properly focused on the attainment of *nirvāṇa* to the more strenuous meditation practices that enable one to cultivate awareness and insight. The four noble truths are often employed as an organizing principle to describe the more detailed and complex set of teachings that are the framework for more specific meditation practices. As a representation of the enlightenment that the Buddha reached, and as an illustration of the path that others might follow to gain enlightenment, the four noble truths are the most significant teaching in all of Buddhism's varied schools and traditions.

Chapter Three

Buddhist Ethics

3.1 Introduction

In the disintegration of beliefs and systems, Buddha revived the feeling of happiness through the Four Noble Truths called *Ārya-Satyās* as well as through the Noble Eight-fold Path called *Aṣtāṅga-Mārga*. The Buddhist philosophy has envisioned that man can overcome their problems by leaving behind the desires hidden. Buddha raised his voice in protest against superstition and unreason. He laid stress on the values of truth, goodness, and beauty. It was the privilege of Buddha to start a religion independent of dogma and priest hood, sacrifice and sacrament which would insist on an inward change of heart and system of self-culture. He made it clear that the attainment of enlightenment depends upon the perfection of character and devotion to the good but not on the acceptance of doubtful dogmas or indulging in the deeds of darkness.

Buddha is humanistic in a sense that Buddhism is a religion of love and values. Buddha gave voice to all the inarticulate forces that were working against the established order and the ceremonial religion. It stood for the uplift of poor, the lowly and disinherited. Radhakamal Mukherjee says that: "Buddhism has shown not only a marked spirit of socialism and humanitarian service for the have-nots but also forbearance, mutual accommodation and co-existence in several regimes and cultures in Asia without reference to its remarkable organizational power."[29]

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[29] Radhakamal Mukherjee, *The Way of Humanism – East and West*, (Bombay: Academic Books, 1968), p.205.

Buddhism represented a progressive world outlook and expressed in its own distorted manner the discontent of the oppressed people and their aspirations for social equality and a better life. Dale Riepe says, "Buddhism is humanistic since it believes in the ability of the individual to achieve ethical goals in this world without non-human aid."[30]

The gospel of the Buddha is sometimes said to be summarized in the following verse of the Dhammapada: "Not to do any evil (pāpa), to cultivate the good (kuśala), to purify one's mind (citta); is the teaching of the Buddhas."[31] It is the fact that for every negative virtue there is corresponding positive one. The terms can be arranged in negative or positive form such as one may conquer anger by love (akkodha), but conquer evil (asādhu) by good (sādhu).

3.2 Ethics

Ethics is the philosophical study of morality. Ethics can be viewed as understanding the foundation and structure of morality regarding how one ought to live. The terms 'moral' and 'ethics' denote the idea of custom. Although these terms have different origins, philosophers use these terms interchangeably. Ethics is defined as systematic understanding of moral concepts and justifies the theories and principles of right behavior that guides individuals and groups on how to behave in the society. According to Peter Singer: "An ethical issue is relevant if it is one that any thinking person must face."[32]

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[30] Dale Riepe, *The Naturalistic Tradition in Indian Thought*, (India: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964), p.176.

[31] Nārada Thera (trans.), *The Dhammapada* (*Dhammapada* Th.), (London: John Murray, 1954), p.183.

[32] Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. vii.

Ethics is not a bunch of principles that everyone should follow in society, rather, ethics guides and allows as a rational agent in society. The interesting fact about ethics is that it is not a scientific study and at the same time even scientific study comes under ethical scrutiny. Ethics is not a scientific study in the sense that there is no scope for proof and demonstration as in science and mathematics. At the same time, ethics can be over and above science for we pass value judgments on scientific discoveries and inventions. The general notion about all areas of knowledge is that if it is not scientific or demonstrable, then there is no use of it. Ethics breaks this dogma. Even in scientific discipline an ethical orientation becomes inevitable. But that simply does not mean that ethics is a code of prohibitions. In the pre-modern period ethics was in the hands of theologians and they used it as hegemonic tool. It has been rapidly changing in modern time. The scope and definition are being broadened along with modern society. Prominence and importance of ethics is increasing day by day. As no society is static and problems related with it are also not static, ethics is not static and has been addressing ethical issues with different perspectives. Like, moral philosophers were traditionally engaged in analyzing moral semantics and other issues in meta-ethics.

3.3 Buddhist Ethics

Buddha talks about flexible creeds, and rational rites and ceremonies. He promotes such a golden mean that guides a disciple to gain the highest good or liberation through pure living and thinking. The Buddhist ethical teachings demand no blind reliance from its followers. As Buddha told his disciples:

> Do not believe in anything (simply) because you have heard it. Do not believe in traditions just because they have been handed down for many generations. Do not believe in anything merely because it is spoken and reported by many. Do not believe in anything only on the authority of your teachers and elders. Even you should not believe in anything (simply) because it is found written in your religious books. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is complimentary to the good and benefit of one and all then accept and live up to it.[33]

In the philosophy of the Buddha, we have an analytical study of ethical concepts and theories as well as positive recommendations to lead a way of life. This way of life is considered both possible and desirable because human and the universe are just what they are. It is, therefore, justified in the light of a realistic account of the nature of the universe and of human's place in it. While this way of life in its personal or cosmic dimension, as it were, helps us to attain the highest good, if not in this very life, at least, in some subsequent life, it also has a social dimension in so far as it helps the achievement of 'the well-being and happiness of the multitude or of mankind as a whole' (bahujana-hita-bahujana-sukha). The well-being of mankind is another end considered to be of supreme, though relative, value in the Buddhist texts and this well-being and happiness is conceived of as both material and spiritual welfare.

Buddhist ethics, therefore, has a close connection with a social philosophy as well. We have in the Buddhist texts an account of the nature and origin of society and the causes of social change. There is also an account of the nature and functions of government, the form of the ideal social order and how it is likely to be brought about.

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[33] F. L. Woodard and E. M. Hare (trans.), *The Book of Gradual Sayings* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* I Th.), 5 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1932-1936), p.188.

Buddhist ethics are not arbitrary standards invented by human for his or her own utilitarian purpose. Nor are they arbitrarily imposed from without. Man-made laws and social customs do not form the basis of Buddhist ethics. For example, the styles of dress that are suitable for one climate, period or civilization may be considered indecent in another; but this is entirely a matter of social custom and does not in any way involve ethical considerations. Yet the artificialities of social conventions are continually confused with ethical principles that are valid and unchanging.

Morality in Buddhism is essentially practical in that it is only a means leading to the final goal of ultimate happiness. On the Buddhist path to emancipation, each individual is considered responsible for his or her own fortunes and misfortunes. Each individual is expected to work his or her own deliverance by his or her understanding and effort. Buddhist liberation is the result of one's own moral development and can neither be imposed nor granted to one by some external agent. The Buddha's mission was to enlighten man as to the nature of existence and to advise them how best to act for their happiness and the benefit of others. Consequently, Buddhist ethics are not founded on any commandments which men are compelled to follow. Dharmasiri Gunapala writes:

> The Buddha advised men on the conditions which were most wholesome and conducive to long term benefit for self and others, rather than addressing sinners with such words as ‘shameful’, ‘wicked’, ‘wretched’, ‘unworthy’, and ‘blasphemous’. He would merely say, “You are unwise in acting in such a way since this will bring sorrow upon yourselves and others.”[34]

[34] *Loc. cit.*

It is universally recognized that Buddhism can claim to be the most ethical of religio-philosophical systems of the world. No less an authority than Professor Radhakrishnan himself calls it 'Ethical Idealism' and says that the Buddha gave an 'ethical twist' to the thought of his time. 'We find in the early teaching of Buddhism', he remarks, 'three marked characteristics, an ethical earnestness, an absence of any theological tendency and an aversion of metaphysical speculation.' Even Albert Schweitzer, a leading Western philosopher and one of the most astute critics of Indian thought has not grudged the Buddha the honor of being 'the creator of the ethic of inner perfection'.[35]

3.4 Buddhist Ethics and Western Ethical Systems

Buddha wished to build ethics on the rock of facts. According to Buddha, if a person sees things as they really are, he or she will cease to pursue shadows and cleave to the great reality of goodness. If ethics is made to rest on the shifting sands of metaphysics or theology, it has an uncertain tenure. So, the early Buddhism resembles positivism in its attempt to shift the center from the worship of God to the service of human being.

Early Buddhism suggests the outline of a philosophy suited to the practical wants of the present day and helpful in reconciling the conflict between faith and science. Some significant concepts can be mentioned in this regard such that Schopenhauer and Hartmann's modern pessimistic philosophy is only a revised version of early Buddhism. Again, it is evident that Buddhism is a splendid prophecy of the creative evolutionism of Bergson as far as the dynamic conception of reality is

[35] Prof. O. H. de A. Wijesekera, "Buddhist Ethics," *Pathways of Buddhist Thought: Essays from the Wheel*, ed. by The Venerable Nyanaponika Mahathera, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1971), pp.49-50.

concerned.[36]

Similarly, according to Peter Harvey, a better broad Western analogue to Buddhist ethics is Aristotelian ethics, as argued by Keown, supported by Tatz and Shaner for Mahayana ethics and Mahayana-shaped Japanese ethics respectively in their books. Both Aristotle and Buddhism aim at human perfection by developing a person's knowledge and character, his or her head and heart. In both Aristotelian and Buddhist ethics, an action is right because it embodies a virtue which conduces to and participates in the goal of human perfection. Both are teleological in that they advocate action which moves toward a *telos* or goal with which they have an intrinsic relationship.[37]

Another possible Western analogue for Buddhist ethics is Kantian ethics, which sees what is good as residing in a good will, which respects other people as ends in themselves rather than as means to one's own ends. Moreover, duty is not a concept foreign to Buddhism; it is simply that what one should do is also seen as what is enriching and rewarding.[38]

Again, some scholars suggest that Buddhist ethics is a form of consequentialism. Consequentialism covers a range of ethical theories which share the common view that the moral value of an act should be assessed by the goodness of its consequences. The most famous consequentialist moral theory, utilitarianism, in its classic form took up the Epicurean idea that pleasure and happiness alone are inherently good, and pain and unhappiness, alone, inherently bad. According to the

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[36] S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Volume-I, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.342.

[37] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.50.

[38] *Ibid.*, pp.50-51.

principle of utility – the greatest good for the greatest number – proposed by Jeremy Bentham, an act is good to the degree that it promotes as much good as possible for as many as possible.

A key aspect of Western ethical systems is that moral prescriptions should be universally applicable to all people who can understand them. Buddhism, though, is generally gradualist in approach, so while it has ethical norms which all should follow from a sense of sympathy with fellow beings (such as not killing living beings), others only apply to those who are ready for them, as their commitment to moral and spiritual training deepens. This most obviously applies to the monastic level of commitment as compared with that of an ordinary lay person. A monk or nun vows to follow over 200 precepts or training rules, as compared with the usual five of lay people. The level of morality and general conduct of a monk or nun is expected to be of a higher level than that of a lay person, because he or she has made the commitment to be ordained.[39]

3.5 Conclusion

According to Buddha, ignorance of truth is the cause of all misery. We find in the early teaching of Buddhism three marked characteristics, an ethical earnestness, an absence of any theological tendency and an aversion to metaphysical speculation. Systems of thought and practice are only working hypotheses by which successive ages try to satisfy the aspirations and harmonize the results of advancing knowledge and growing insight. Buddha stood forth as the spokesman of the age. He was deeply influenced by the reaction setting in against the popular beliefs. There is no mistaking the fact that he merely accelerated what the stream

[39] *Ibid.*, p.51.

of events was already rolling onward. He was at once the prophet and the exponent of the time spirit. Hegel compares the man of genius in relation to his age to one who places the last and the locking stone in an arch. Many hands help to build the structure, but it is in his hand alone that it becomes a complete work, sure and self-sustained. Such a master's hand was that of Buddha, one of the greatest of India's thinkers. Buddha's relation to his predecessors is analogous to that of Socrates to the Sophists.[40]

In addition, the theory of Buddhist ethics finds its practical expression in the various precepts. These precepts or disciplines are nothing but general guides to show the direction in which the Buddhist ought to turn to on his or her way to liberation. Although many of these precepts are expressed in a negative form, one must not think that Buddhist morality consists of abstaining from evil without the complement of doing well.

[40] Radhakrishnan, *op. cit.*, pp.358-359.

Chapter Four
Buddhist Values: *Dāna*, *Śīla* and *Bhāvnā*

4.1 Introduction

In all areas of Buddhism, followers look to the three treasures for guidance: the Buddha as teacher, the dharma as the teaching, and the sangha as the community that transmits the dharma. With these three treasures, Buddhists have rich resources on ethical thinking, especially in the written materials communicating the dharma. The three major divisions of the Buddhist scriptural canon, all contain ethical materials. The Sutras contain moral teachings and ethical reflection; the *Vinaya* gives moral and behavioral rules for ordained Buddhists, and the *Abhidharma* literature explores the psychology of morality. In addition to canonical literature, numerous commentaries and treatises of Buddhist schools contain ethical reflections.

The ethical teachings of scripture can be confirmed by one's own reflection. The Sutra's story of the Kalamas is often cited to show the Buddha's emphasis on personal reflection. In this tale, the Buddha tells the Kalamas that they should not blindly accept teachings based on tradition, instruction from a respected teacher, or from any other sources without confirming these teachings through their own experience. He helps them see for themselves that actions motivated by greed, hatred, or delusion are unethical, and those motivated by the opposite of greed, hatred, or delusion are ethical.[41] While greed, hatred and delusion are seen as the roots of unwholesome actions, with their complete destruction

[41] Buddhism and Religions, *Buddhism*, [Online], (Red Zambala, 2013), 17/03/2020, https://buddhism.redzambala.com/buddhism/philosophy/buddhist-ethics.html

being equivalent to *nirvāṇa*, non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion are regarded as the roots of wholesome action, and can thus be seen as the central values of Buddhism. While expressed negatively, they are equivalent to generosity and non-attachment; lovingkindness and compassion; and wisdom, in the sense of clear seeing of the nature of life and the absence of delusion or disorientation.

4.2 Moral Discipline

Buddhist canonical texts have no term that directly translates into the English word Ethics. The closest term is *śīla* (moral discipline). *Śīla* is one of the three-fold disciplines, along with *prajñā* (wisdom) and *samādhi* (mental cultivation or concentration), which constitute the path leading to the end of suffering. The path is sometimes conceived of as a three-fold training in which *śīla* provides the foundation for *samādhi* and *prajñā*. *Śīla* refers to overall principles of ethical behavior. In the noble eight-fold path, *śīla* includes the practices of right action, right speech, and right livelihood. The practice of moral discipline is supportive of the other practices in the path. There are several levels of *śīla*, which correspond to 'basic morality' (five precepts), 'basic morality with asceticism' (eight precepts), 'novice monkhood' (ten precepts) and 'monkhood' (vinaya or patimokkha).[42] *Śīla* is most closely identified with the widely known five moral precepts (pañca-śīla) of lay Buddhists: not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not to have inappropriate sex, and not to use intoxicants. The Buddhist tradition has a notion of voluntary and gradualist moral expectations. Lay Buddhists may choose to take the five (in some Buddhist areas fewer) precepts or to take temporarily eight or ten precepts; novices take ten precepts and

[42] Robin Mcmahon, *On the Origin of Diversity*, (UK: Filament Publishing Ltd., 2011), p.217.

ordained monks and nuns take over two hundred precepts.

For lay Buddhists the foundation for leading a moral life is two-fold: the restraints on behavior called for in the five permanent (or eight or ten temporary) precepts and the encouragement to selfless giving called for in the primary moral virtue of giving (dāna). In the Buddhist way of life, the way the Buddha described does not end with only the precepts. Besides, there are three things that each person is expected to do, namely *dāna*, *śīla* and *bhāvnā*. The Buddha saw that human beings get overwhelmed by greed, anger and delusion. They cause harm to themselves and each other. One might say it becoming inhumane or subhuman. Buddha also recognized that most human beings possess the ability to act unselfishly, with kindness and compassion. The human mind is able to become clear and concentrated. In addition, the Buddha uniquely saw that it's within human capacity to develop special knowledge through higher mental training. Out of compassion, he then devised three systematic trainings, known in the Pali language as *puññas* (meritorious deeds) that support to full humanity, give everyone a clear human mind and develop special human knowledge or insight wisdom.

Practicing *puñña* is the foundation of an elevated, purified human life. The three types of *puñña* are *dāna* (generosity), *śīla* (morality) and *bhāvnā* (meditation) which can be further split into concentration and insight. *Dāna* would mean liberality, generosity – the act of giving. It is very important that Buddhism begins with *dāna* as the first virtuous act which one should engage in, in order to put oneself on the correct path, because giving is an act of sacrifice. To be able to give something is to prepare one's mind fully to give up something that one has, something that one treasures, something to which one is attached. Thereby that

person counters one of the biggest causes of all the problems which, in Pali, is called *lobha* (desire or greed). It is very interesting to see how the way of life is presented to oneself in a manner that in following it step by step that person gets rid of some of the human weaknesses and characteristics that cause tension, and the boredom that is bothering most of the people today. So, liberality is to counteract desires, the greediness, and the clinging nature.

4.3 First *Puñña*: *Dāna*

The primary ethical activity which a Buddhist learns to develop is giving or generosity (*dāna*) which forms a basis for further moral and spiritual development. Giving done with thought for karmic results is not as good as giving that is performed because it is valued in itself. Giving done selflessly further lessens the false concept of self and thus moves the giver closer to wisdom. The key focus of giving is the monastic sangha or community, whose 'homeless' way of life depends for its material support on the laity, to encourage their humility and to ensure that they do not become isolated from the laity. This supportive relationship is not a one-sided one, however, for while the laity provide the sangha with such items as alms-food, robes, medicine, and monasteries to live in, the monks and nuns, by their teaching and example, return a greater one, for "The gift of dhamma excels all gifts."[43] Such acts of mutual giving thus form a key feature of the lay-monastic relationship.

Generosity is not only practiced toward the sangha, but, as a pervading value of Buddhist societies, is also practiced toward family, friends, work people, guests, the poor and homeless, and animals. In many countries,

[43] Thera, *op. cit.*, p.354.

Buddhists demonstrate a great concern for doing karmically fruitful actions by deeds of giving, such as contributing to ceremonies on occasions like an ordination, a funeral, a sickness, or a festival. Karmic fruitfulness is generated not only by an individual's own giving, but also by rejoicing at the gifts of others. Giving fosters not only moral development, but also spiritual progress, because of its aspect of renunciation and non-attachment. It is also the first of the ten Bodhisattva perfections in both the Mahayana and Theravada traditions.

4.4 Second *Puñña*: *Śīla*

Śīla is adherence to certain precepts, or ethical or moral conduct. Buddha was fully aware of the fact that one could not set rules and regulations for everybody in the same manner. So, there are a few rules for the lay people. There are a few more for those who want to enter into a committed religious life, and still more for monks or nuns, who have committed themselves to adhere to a very strict path of discipline and purification. So, the *śīla* is a graduated thing, so that each person picks up that which he or she is able to follow for the present. Each one of the precepts, which lay Buddhists take, is a promise unto themselves of their own free-will.

On a basis of developing *dāna*, the Buddhist goes on to develop his or her ethical virtue, or *śīla*, by observing the self-discipline of keeping certain precepts. Indeed, keeping any of these precepts is itself seen as a form of giving – the best kind of great gifts to others such that lack of fear and ill-will, as they feel unthreatened by a precept-keeper. It is said that sub-human rebirths can be avoided by the practice of *dāna* and *śīla*. Moral restraint and self-control are much emphasized as means of protecting

others and purifying one's own character.

4.4.1 The *Pañca-Śīlani* or the Five Precepts

The most commonly observed set of precepts followed by lay people are the 'five precepts' (properly, the 'five virtues': pañca-śīlani). Their translated meanings from Pali canon are:[44]

1. I undertake the training-precept (sikkhā-padam) to abstain from onslaught on breathing beings.
2. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from taking what is not given.
3. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from misconduct concerning sense-pleasures.
4. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from false speech.
5. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from alcoholic drink or drugs that are an opportunity for heedlessness.

Each precept is a 'training-precept', the same term as that for an item of the monastic code, though while the monastic code goes into great detail on rules for monks and nuns, the lay precepts are left, in the *Suttas*, fairly general and non-specific. It has been left to later commentators, and the advice of the sangha in various cultures, to make them more specific. And the way the precepts are worded is because one is the master of his or her own destiny and it is that only person who should decide which kind of life he or she should lead.

Emphasis is sometimes laid on the need for a 'middle way' in keeping the

[44] Harvey, *op. cit.*, p.67.

precepts, avoiding the extremes of laxity and rigid adherence. In any case, Buddhism does not encourage the developing of strong guilt feelings if a precept is broken. Regretting misdeeds is wholesome, but Buddhism emphasizes a future-directed morality in which one always seeks to do better in the future, taking the precepts as ideals that one is seeking to live up to in an increasingly complete way.

Closely related to keeping the precepts are the concept of 'right livelihood', a factor of the noble eight-fold path. This refers to making one's living in a way that does not involve one in habitually breaking the precepts by bringing harm to other beings, but that is, it is hoped, helpful to others and an aid to the development of one's faculties and abilities.

4.4.1.1 The First Precept: Non-injury

The first precept corresponds to the Hindu and Jain concept of *ahiṃsā* or non-injury, and is generally regarded as the most important one. Taking the first precept rules out the intentional killing of any living being, human or otherwise. The spirit of this precept is expressed thus: "Laying aside violence in respect of all beings, both those which are still and those which move . . . he should not kill a living creature, nor cause to kill, nor approve of others killing."[45]

Abandoning onslaught on breathing beings, he abstains from this; without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living-beings.[46] This implies that the object of this precept is not limited to humans, as all sentient beings share in the same cycle of

[45] K. R. Norman (trans.), *The Group of Discourses* (*Sutta-Nipāta* Th.), Volume I, (London: Pali Text Society, 1984), p.394.

[46] I. B. Horner (trans.), *Middle Length Sayings* (*Majjhima Nikāya* I Th.), 3 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1954-1959), p.345.

rebirths and in the experience of various types of suffering. It is, however, worse to kill or injure a human than an animal, or a larger or more highly developed animal than a lesser one. The first precept is broken even if a being is killed by someone else being ordered to do this, when both the orderer and the agent break the precept, unless the agent mistakenly kills a being other than the intended one, when only he or she is responsible. The first precept has many potential implications for behavior, and these will be traced on nature, war, suicide and euthanasia, and abortion etc.

4.4.1.2 The Second Precept: Avoiding Theft and Cheating

The second precept is seen as ruling out any act of theft. In the equivalent rule for monks, a monk is completely defeated in the monastic life if he steals an amount that makes him liable to prosecution. Something is seen as the property of someone else, and thus not to be taken, if that person can do what he or she wants with it without punishment or blame. Theft is seen as worse according to the value of what is stolen, but also according to the virtue of the person stolen from.

The second precept also covers fraud, cheating, forgery and falsely denying that one is in debt to someone. The *Upāsaka-Śīla Sūtra* sees it as broken by claiming more compensation for a theft than is appropriate (cf. fiddling an insurance claim), accepting the gift of two robes when one only needs one, and giving to one monk what one has promised to another.[47]

[47] Heng-ching Shih (trans.), *The Sutra on Upāsaka Precepts* (*Upāsaka-Śīla Sūtra* My.), (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai, 1994), pp.172-173.

4.4.1.3 The Third Precept: Avoiding Sexual Misconduct

The monastic ideal of Buddhism involves celibacy, but it is acknowledged that not everyone feels able or willing to follow this ideal: "The wise man should avoid the uncelibate life (abrahmacariyam) like a pit of burning coals. But if he is incapable of living a celibate life, he should not transgress against another's wife."[48]

The third precept relates primarily to the avoidance of causing suffering by one's sexual behavior. Adultery, going with the wife of another, is the most straight forward breach of this precept. The wrongness of this is seen as partly in terms of its being an expression of greed, and partly in terms of its harm to others. The first of these is seen in the following verse: "Not to be contented with one's own wife but to be seen with prostitutes or the wives of others – this is a cause of one's downfall."[49]

What counts as adultery varies according to the marriage patterns of different societies, though, and Buddhism has been flexible in adapting to these. Adultery with a woman without her husband's knowledge, or with his compliance, still breaks the precept on account of the malicious nature of the act. Moreover, the precept is extended to intercourse with any woman who is, in modern parlance, in a relationship with another man.

The third precept does not relate only to not having sex with someone else's wife or partner. It is said that a man breaks the precept if he has intercourse with women who are engaged, or who are still protected by any relative or young girls not protected by a relative, this being seen as an offend. Clearly, rape and incest are breaches of the precept. A breach

[48] Norman, *op. cit.*, p.396.
[49] *Ibid.*, p.108.

is worse according to the virtue of the woman in which she keeps the precept.

4.4.1.4 The Fourth Precept: Avoiding Lying and Other Forms of Wrong Speech

The first three precepts relate to physical actions and keeping them is equivalent to the 'right action', factor of the eight-fold path. Keeping the fourth precept is equivalent to the 'right speech', for while the precept specifically refers only to avoiding false speech, it is generally seen to entail avoiding other forms of 'wrong speech', which cause mental turmoil or other forms of suffering in oneself or others. This reading is reasonable in the light of unwholesome mental action, such as covetousness, malevolence and wrong views etc.

The fourth precept is generally seen as the second most important one (after the first precept): "It is said that a person who has no shame at intentional lying is capable of any evil action."[50] The gravest way to break any precept would be lying so as to cause a schism in the sangha. On the other hand, there is the idea that an asseveration of truth in the form of the solemn affirmation of a moral or spiritual truth, or the truthful admission of a failing, has a power to save the utterer, or someone else, from danger.

Of course, even truth can be harmful if spoken at the wrong time, so it should be withheld if to give it would lead to wholesome states of mind declining and unwholesome ones increasing in those one speaks to. Accordingly, well-spoken, unblameworthy speech is said to be "spoken at the right time, in accordance with truth, gently, purposefully, and with a

[50] Horner (*Majjhima Nikāya* I), *op. cit.*, p.415.

friendly heart."[51] This does not mean, though, that one should never say anything that would be disagreeable to the hearer. It is said that the Buddha only spoke, at the appropriate time, what was true and spiritually beneficial, whether or not it was disagreeable to others.

4.4.1.5 The Fifth Precept: Sobriety

This precept is not listed under the path-factors of either 'right action' or 'right speech', but can be seen to act as an aid to 'right mindfulness'. When one is intoxicated, there is an attempt to mask, rather than face, the sufferings of life, there is no mental clarity or calm, and one is more likely to break all the other precepts. Buddha says that breaking the fifth precept leads to six dangers: "Present waste of money, increased quarrelling, liability to sickness, loss of good name, indecent exposure of one's person, and weakening of one's wisdom."[52] Drinking intoxicating liquors adversely affects one's ability to remember. It also becomes an obstacle to the good path, decreasing as well all great virtues, mundane and supra-mundane.

In a monastic rule whose wording is very close to the fifth lay precept, there is an offence if even the amount of alcoholic drink that a blade of grass can hold is taken, though a small amount of alcohol is permissible as an ingredient in a medicine. Nevertheless, in following the fifth lay precept, while some people seek to avoid any intoxicating or mind-altering substances, except for genuine medicinal purposes, others regard intoxication and not the taking of a little drink, as a breach of the precept;

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[51] F. L. Woodard and E. M. Hare (trans.), *The Book of Gradual Sayings* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* III Th.), 5 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1932-1936), pp.243-4.

[52] T.W. Rhys Davids and C. A. F. Rhys Davids (trans.), *Dialogues of the Buddha* (*Dīgha Nikāya* III Th.), 3 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1899-1921), pp.182-183.

or regard any drinking as breaking the precept, but take a drink nevertheless.

4.4.1.6 Extension of *Pañca-Śīlani*

As an extension of the usual five precepts, a set of eight precepts may be taken by lay people. These go beyond purely moral concerns related to that which is, or may be, reprehensible by nature to forms of self-discipline that reduce stimulating sense-inputs that disturb calm and concentration, and develop non-attachment. The difference between the eight and five precepts is firstly that the third precept is replaced by an undertaking to avoid abrahmacariya, unchaste conduct or conduct not of the holy life, that is, sexual activity of any kind. Three more precepts are then undertaken after the usual fifth one which are:[53]

6. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from eating at an unseasonable time.

7. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from seeing dancing, music vocal and instrumental, and shows; from wearing garlands, perfumes and unguents, from finery and adornment.

8. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from high or large beds (or seats).

An extension beyond the eight precepts is found in the ten precepts. These are the same as the eight except that the seventh is split into its two parts, and there is the addition of an undertaking to abstain from accepting gold and silver. While the difference seems a small one, in practice it is large, for the ten precepts are not taken temporarily, but only

[53] Norman, *op. cit.*, pp.400-402.

on a long-term basis. The extra precept precludes the actual handling of money, as in the case of monks. The ten precepts are those observed by novice monks.

4.5 Third *Puñña*: *Bhāvnā*

Finally, comes the most significant, and the one to which someone will be preparing to proceed immediately after this, that is *bhāvnā* or meditation. *Bhāvnā* means the training of the mind. The word itself etymologically means development, a further development of the mind. The Buddha believed, and he is one of the earliest to state it in that manner, that everything emanates from the man's mind. The organization that he represents has as the preamble to its constitution that as wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed. A pure mind, a trained mind, a well-developed mind, a mind that can be controlled at will, a mind that does not go on to subjects that are conducive to tension and boredom, but keeps alert, keeps on developing itself, discovering itself and within itself the secret of life, the problems of life and the reality of life, is man's greatest treasure.

4.6 Conclusion

Without *śīla* as a base, it isn't easy to concentrate the mind and develop higher knowledge. As we practice controlling our actions, we will feel how dangerous and painful the tendencies of greed, anger, and delusion are. Dāna weakens these tendencies. But in order to thoroughly clean and uplift our minds, the Buddha offers a third kind of meritorious practice. This is *bhāvnā* or mental development. If we undertake training in concentration, we will find our mind becoming clean and clear. One who develops concentration is said to have a clear human mentality. From the

basis of concentration, one can go on to develop wisdom, special human knowledge. *Dāna* is the foundation for *śīla* and *śīla* is the medium of concentration and wisdom. But of the three *puññas*, surely the most important one is *śīla* since *śīla* protects one's individual world as well as the larger world around oneself.

Chapter Five

The Buddhist Ethical Approach to Inter-personal Relationship

5.1 Introduction

In the ethical development of a Buddhist, importance is attached to the development of heart-felt feelings of lovingkindness and compassion, as outgrowths from generosity, as aids to deepening virtue, and as factors undercutting the attachment to 'I'. Lovingkindness (mettā) and compassion (karunā) are the first two of a set of four qualities which also include empathetic or appreciative joy (muditā) and equanimity (upekkhā). These are known as the immeasurables or as the divine abidings (brahma-vihāras), for when developed to a high degree in meditation, they are said to make the mind immeasurable and like the mind of the loving Brahma gods. Lovingkindness is the aspiration for the true happiness of any, and ultimately all, sentient beings, for all these are like oneself in liking happiness and disliking pain. It is the antidote to hatred and fear, and is to be distinguished from sentimentality. Compassion is the aspiration of beings becoming free from suffering, feeling for them; it is the antidote to cruelty, and is to be distinguished from sadness. Empathetic joy is joy at the joy of others, happiness at their good fortune; it is the antidote to envy and discontent and is to be distinguished from giddy merriment. Equanimity is an even minded, unruffled serenity in the face of the ups and downs of life – one's own and that of others – and comes from developing the reflection that beings suffer and are happy in accordance with their own karma. It is the antidote to both aversion and approval, but should be distinguished from

indifference. It also ensures impartiality toward all beings, so that lovingkindness etc. is felt toward all equally.

The Buddha as a guide had shown certain fundamental weaknesses, or faults, that one should try to avoid. The second cause of most of the problems people have is their animosity or hatred to others. *Śīla* is one of those antidotes for this second cause of all the weaknesses as mentioned in previous chapter. When someone follows *śīla*, he or she controls, or rather completely eliminates the cause of hatred. The Buddha was one of those who were very conscious of the many effects of hatred. He had seen people ruining themselves as a result of hatred. That is what made it possible for him to state very categorically that hatred never ceases by hatred, the more one hates, the worse it becomes. The hatred keeps on increasing to a point where people burn themselves in their mutual hatred, and to the Buddha the only way to solve it is that someone must stop. Because without one party or better still both parties, trying to conquer hatred with friendship, hatred with non-hatred, this sequence of hatred would never cease. One way of dealing with it is based on the entire doctrine of the virtuous life of Buddhism. Because a virtuous life is attacking the second cause of the weaknesses, namely hatred, that have in Buddhism a most interesting, and again a timeless doctrine, of lovingkindness. Lovingkindness, which is the cornerstone of Buddhism, (the foundation on which the Buddhist doctrine is built) has not been taken by the Buddha as merely a simple ethical principle. He had analyzed the principle of lovingkindness into sublime life. Lovingkindness is stressed in such verses as, “Conquer anger by lovingkindness; conquer evil by good; conquer the stingy by giving;

conquer the lie by truth."[54]

5.2 Principle of Lovingkindness

Mettā– One of the most important teachings of Buddhism is lovingkindness. Lovingkindness is the type of love that is always gentle and meek. It is not self-seeking, but rather giving and kind. It only seeks the welfare of one's love. Lovingkindness is also the way we should treat all sentient beings. It is the path of gentleness to those people and beings considered as nothings of society.

Karunā– Then comes *karunā* or compassion. Compassion is more easily generated. One sees somebody in trouble, somebody who needs help, one's heart moves toward that person and one rushes to help him or her. That quality of rushing to somebody's help, feeling sorry for the other who is suffering, that is another aspect of lovingkindness.

Muditā– Then comes a third aspect of it which is more difficult to practice, and that requires tremendous love and pain, that is called *muditā* or empathetic joy that is, to share in others' happiness, to wipe out from mind all traces of jealousy and envy, so that one enjoys the well-being of the other person, one's neighbor, even one's enemy.

Upekkhā– Last of all comes the fourth aspect of lovingkindness and that is total equanimity, *upekkhā*. One has no friends, no enemies, no one higher, and no one lower. That person has absolutely no distinctions between one person and another, and one is totally merged in a kind of unity with all beings, all things, and all situations. So once someone is able to live a life in which all these four characteristics govern his or her

[54] Thera, *op. cit.,* p.223.

actions, there is no place for hatred, there is no place for rivalry, there is no place for competition.

5.3 Inter-personal Relationship

Buddhist texts devote more attention to behavioral norms for ordained members of the sangha, but social and political ethics for the rest of society are not ignored. One of the best visions for social relationships is found in the *Sigalovada-Sutta* (advice to Sigala), in which the Buddha explains the value of mutually supportive and respectful relationships between parents and children, students and teachers, husbands and wives, friends and associates, employers and employees, and householders and renunciants. This particular text lays out the foundations for a harmonious lay community just as the *Vinaya* texts do for a harmonious monastic community.[55]

While Buddhism emphasizes a personal lay ethic of giving, moral restraint and right livelihood, and a more elaborate monastic code, it by no means neglects the area of lay inter-personal and social relationships. Nevertheless, discourses to the laity are not generally given in the form of disciplinary rules, as the wider lay society was so open to changing circumstances of space and time that the monks did not consider it as a subject appropriate for fixed rules. Consequently, only some basic rules and general principles were stipulated as a basis for people to work out more specific codes in their circumstances. How this has worked out in practice varies considerably from culture to culture, but some central emphases of Buddhist social ethics can be outlined.

[55] Buddhism and Religions, *Buddhism*, [Online], (Red Zambala, 2013), 17/03/2020, https://buddhism.redzambala.com/buddhism/philosophy/buddhist-ethics.html

5.3.1 Outline of Inter-personal Relationship in *Sigalovada-Sutta*

An important text is the *Sigalovada-Sutta*, described by the Emperor Asoka and Buddhaghosa as the *Vinaya*, or code of discipline (usually meaning the monastic code), of lay people. Here, the Buddha comes across Sigala, worshipping the six directions in pursuance of his father's dying wish. The Buddha counsels him that there is a better way to serve the directions that is by proper actions toward six types of persons. Before outlining these appropriate actions, he first teaches Sigala the proper way for a layperson to conduct himself in general.[56] One should keep the precepts and not act from partiality, enmity, stupidity or fear. The Buddha then outlines how the six directions are to be protected, so as to produce sound social relationships. Placing the lay person at the center of a web of relationships such as parent-child, teacher-pupil, husband-wife, friends-families, master-servants etc., Buddha gives guidelines for how to ensure that these are mutually enriching. In these relationships, a person has no right to expect certain behavior from others unless they are treated appropriately by him or her.

5.4 Social and Political Relationship

Buddhism greatly values social harmony and cohesion. A society of self-disciplined, self-reliant people will be peaceful, and in turn support individual growth and development. In this process, the importance of associating with good people is often stressed, so that good qualities are stimulated, reinforced and spread. As regards social equality, the Buddha was critical of Brahmanical claims, associated with the system of four supposedly divinely ordained social classes – the Varnas of the so-called

[56] Harvey, *op. cit.*, p.97.

caste system – that certain people were superior or inferior by birth. He taught: "Not by birth does one become an outcaste, not by birth does one become a Brahmin. By (one's) action one becomes an outcaste, by (one's) action one becomes a Brahmin."[57]

A number of texts outline an ideal for a Buddhist ruler to follow so as to ensure a peaceful and harmonious society, free of poverty. Nothing is said on the duty of subjects toward their ruler, but Buddhism has generally not encouraged rebellions, on account of its emphasis on non-violence, respecting collective decision making, concord, tradition, elders, women, religion, and holy men and women. The importance of social principles was such that Buddha saw them, or adapted versions of them, as ensuring the flourishing of the monastic sangha.

A consideration of politics leads on to reflection on the idea of human rights, inalienable, fundamental rights to be treated in certain ways, usually cited in contexts in which a government or quasi-government is seen as abusing its citizens. A good place to start in a Buddhist consideration of this is with the *Aggañña Sutta's* simple social-contract model of kingship. To say that someone has a right means that others have a duty to treat a person in a particular way. If the right is a circumscribed one based on contract and transactions, such as a right to have a loan repaid by someone who borrows from one, then the duty falls on the borrower.[58] Nevertheless, the state then has a duty to make the borrower carry out his or her duty if he or she fails to do so of his or her own accord, and there can be said to be an abstract right that anyone who lends things should have them returned by the borrower unless he or she

[57] Norman, *op. cit.*, p.136.
[58] Harvey, *op. cit.*, p.118.

abrogates this right. Human rights can be negative ones to freedom from something, such as arbitrary arrest or positive ones, to something, such as an adequate education. The first kinds of rights are negated by being abused, and the second by being neglected. Buddhism is strong in this area because of its emphasis on non-harming. When it comes to the rights to positive benefits, Buddhism's emphasis is somewhat less strong, seeing such things less as entitlements and more as something that it is good for others to choose to provide.

5.5 Conclusion

Buddhist values are rooted in the project of overcoming greed or attachment, hatred and delusion, which are seen as the roots of unwholesome actions and the key causes of suffering. This project begins with moral virtue, but also entails the other aspects of the Buddhist path which are meditative development and the cultivation of insight. It has implications for individual conduct as well as inter-personal relationships, social and political ethics.

Chapter Six

Buddhist Ethical Attitude toward Natural World and Human Life

6.1 Introduction

The world today is in a state of turmoil. Valuable ethics are being upturned. The forces of materialistic skepticism have turned their dissecting blades on the traditional concepts of what are considered human qualities. Yet, any person who has a concern for culture and civilization will concern himself or herself with practical and ethical issues. For ethics has to do with human conduct. It is concerned with human relationship with fellows as well as with other natural creatures. Moreover, the central theme of the Buddhist ethics is the cultivation of mindfulness. A developed mental attitude of complete and selfless awareness necessarily influences the manner in which one acts toward other living beings.

The need for ethics arises from the fact that man is not perfect by nature; he or she has to train himself or herself to be good. Thus, morality becomes the most important aspect of living. Buddhist ethics finds its foundation not on the changing social customs but rather on the unchanging laws of nature. Buddhist ethical values are intrinsically a part of nature, and the unchanging law of cause and effect (Pali: kamma, Sanskrit: karma). The simple fact that Buddhist ethics are rooted in natural law makes its principles both useful and acceptable to the modern

world as well. The fact that the Buddhist ethical code was formulated over 2,500 years ago does not detract from its timeless character.[59]

Buddhist ethics finds its practical expression in the various precepts. These precepts are the guidelines to the path of liberation. Many current ethical issues are related to the first Buddhist precept: not to harm other beings. The first precept is central to Buddhist discussions of abortion, war, euthanasia, animal rights, and environmentalism. Likewise, the economic ethics is relevant to the second and fourth precepts and those discussions on sexual equality and homosexuality are relevant to the third precept. Besides these, there are many more ethical issues discussed in Buddhism.

6.2 Sentient Beings

Karaṇīya-metta Sutta lines up, "May all beings be happy and secure."[60] Buddhism does not see humans as a special creation by God, or as having been given either dominion or stewardship over animals etc. Like all other sentient beings, they wander in the limited, conditioned realm of *samsāra*, the wheel of rebirths. Humans are seen as having an effect on their environment not only through the purely physical aspects of their actions, but also through the moral or immoral qualities of these. The environment is held to respond to the state of human morality; it is not a neutral stage on which humans merely strut, or a sterile container unaffected by human actions. This clearly has ecological ramifications. Humans cannot ignore the effect of their actions on their environment. While communal monastic life has always been important in Buddhism, time alone in the forests and mountains has also been so. It is an

[59] Dharmasiri, *op. cit.*, p.27.
[60] Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (trans. with its commentary), *Minor Readings and Illustrator* (*Khuddaka-pāṭha* Th.), (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), p.8.

opportunity for developing certain qualities away from the support and hindrances posed by other humans. For all their positive potential, humans can also have many negative traits. Consequently, a time in the company of animals and nature may be an aid to spiritual development. The Buddhist ideal for human relationship with animals, plants and the landscape is one of harmonious co-operation. Buddhism emphasizes a disciplining and overcoming of the negativities within the conditioned nature of the human heart. Such an approach goes hand-in-hand with a friendly attitude to the environment.

6.2.1 *Ahiṃsā* or Non-injury

As an example of the pan-Indian value of *ahiṃsā*, or non-injury, the first of the five precepts is to abstain from onslaught on living beings. While it is difficult to follow this fully, clearly a Buddhist should strive to minimize intentional injury to living beings. One cannot intentionally harm beings without this bringing harm to oneself at some time. In the monastic code of discipline, it is an offence requiring expiation if an animal is intentionally killed. This is a lesser offence than killing a human, which requires permanent expulsion from the order, but an offence nevertheless. An offence requiring expiation is also committed if a monk uses water while knowing that it contains breathing creatures that will be killed by his action;[61] to avoid this, a water-strainer is part of the traditional kit of a monk.[62] Again, it is an offence to sprinkle water on the ground if it is known that there are living creatures there that will be harmed by this.[63]

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[61] I. B. Horner (trans.), *The Book of the Discipline* (*Vinaya Piṭaka* IV Th.), 6 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1938-1966), p.125.

[62] I. B. Horner (trans.), *The Book of the Discipline* (*Vinaya Piṭaka* II Th.), 6 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1938-1966), p.118.

[63] Horner (*Vinaya Piṭaka* IV Th.), *op. cit.*, pp.48-49.

6.2.2 Animal Killing

An obvious abuse of animals during the day of Buddha was the killing of them as part of elaborate Brahmanical sacrificial rituals. The Buddha, along with leaders of other non-Brahmanical renunciant groups, was very critical of this, both because of the cruelty involved and because it did not bring about the objectives the Brahmins hoped for. The Buddha p raised Brahmins of old for not sacrificing animals. In the *Kutadanta Sutta*, describes a sacrifice which he had himself conducted for a king in a past life. In this, no animals were killed, no trees were felled to act as sacrificial posts, workmen were not forced to help, and the only offerings were items such as butter and honey.[64]

6.2.3 Prohibition in Meat Eating

The main reason why animals are killed is to provide food. Buddhist texts, and the actions of Buddhist leaders, have sought to discourage this. However, the Buddha would have frequently eaten blameless meat given as alms. Monks and nuns may eat meat. The Buddha said: "Monks, I allow you fish and meat that are quite pure in three respects: if they are not seen, heard or suspected to have been killed on purpose for a monk. But you should not knowingly make use of meat killed on purpose for you."[65]

However, there are some meats which are specifically prohibited for monks to eat: human meat, for obvious reasons; meat from elephants and horses as these were then considered royal animals; dog meat as this was

[64] T.W. Rhys Davids and C. A. F. Rhys Davids (trans.), *Dialogues of the Buddha* (*Dīgha Nikāya* I Th.), 3 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1899-1921), p.141.
[65] I. B. Horner (trans.), *The Book of the Discipline* (*Vinaya Piṭaka* I Th.), 6 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1938-1966), p.324.

considered by ordinary people to be disgusting; and meat from snakes, lions, tigers, panthers, bears and hyenas because, one who had just eaten the flesh of such dangerous jungle animals was thought to give forth such a smell as to draw forth revenge from the same species.[66] These prohibitions were both to preserve people's faith in the sangha, which was good for both the monks and lay people, and to protect monks from danger, a prudential, not moral, reason.

6.2.4 Pest Control

The elimination of pests clearly presents an ethical problem for Buddhists. Where possible, there is often a preference for removing pests to a safe distance and then releasing them. This is done with rats, mice, insects and even snakes, except the most vicious and deadly ones. The Buddhist ideal of non-injury to animal life clearly has implications for the use of animals in product testing, and in medical research and training. From a Buddhist perspective, this might be seen as analogous to the animal sacrifices of ancient Brahmanism.

As all sentient beings like happiness and dislike pain, however much their specific desires and sensitivities vary, the *Karaṇīya-metta Sutta* speaks of radiating lovingkindness to all types of beings.[67] Both humans and animals respond better to those who they feel are friendly, so that lovingkindness is seen to protect a person.

6.2.5 Non-harming of Seeds and Plants

From the beginning of Buddhism, the forest has represented the ideal place for meditation for monks. For lay people, forests may not be so

[66] *Ibid.,* pp.219-220.
[67] Harvey, *op. cit.*, p.170.

inviting, but there is karmic fruitfulness in planting groves and fruit-trees for human use. The Buddha is described as having avoided harm to seed and plant life, and there are monastic rules against harming trees and plants.

For Buddhism, humans are a part of the community of sentient beings in a conditioned world where suffering is endemic. Humans are not seen as set over non-human nature as stewards, but as neighbors to other, less intelligent, sentient beings. The spiritual potential of humans means that they are to be more valued than members of other species, but that very potential is expressed and enhanced by compassionate regard for any being. To kill or harm another being deliberately is to ignore the fragility and aspiration for happiness that one has in common with it. When it comes to indirectly causing harm to sentient beings, Emphasis of Buddhism on an ethic of intention means that such actions are not necessarily blameworthy. Yet its positive emphasis on compassion means that the removal of causes of harm to beings is praiseworthy.

6.3 Economic Justice

The 'right livelihood' factor of the eight-fold path entails that one's means of livelihood should not be dishonest or otherwise cause suffering to other living beings. Being an arms salesman, keeping animals for slaughter, being a slaughterer, meat salesman, hunter or fisherman, alcoholic drink or poison seller. Such trades, especially being a slaughterer or hunter are socially despised in Buddhist societies, and are said to lead to a bad rebirth. These are considered as 'Wrong livelihood'. Wrong livelihood is also seen as any mode of livelihood that is based on trickery or greed, that is, which entails breaking the second precept: stealing, directly or by deception.

6.3.1 Buddhist Teachings regarding Wealth

In his teachings, the Buddha included advice to the laity on how best to generate and use their income. It is praiseworthy to make wealth in a moral way without violence, and blameworthy to do the opposite. One should use the product of one's work to give ease and pleasure to oneself. Correspondingly, it is blameworthy to be miserly with oneself or mean with others. Even if wealth is made morally, and used to benefit oneself and others, one is still blameworthy if one's attitude to others' wealth is greed and longing, with no contentment or heed for spiritual development.

6.3.2 Use of Wealth

Buddhists can show a considerable concern with generating karmic fruitfulness by generous deeds, such as – bringing happiness to oneself, one's family, friends, comrades, servants and employees; protecting one's wealth against loss; giving offerings to relations, guests, dead relatives and gods and gifts to virtuous renunciants and Brahmins: the best type of giving, leading to a heavenly rebirth. For Buddhism, wealth is not evil. The important thing is how it is made and used. Yet even if wealth is made in a moral way, and used to benefit oneself and others, one should not have a greedy attitude to it. A verse of Dhammapada says, "Riches ruin the foolish, but not those in the quest of the Beyond; through craving for riches, the foolish one ruins himself as (if he were ruining) others."[68]

Generally speaking, Buddhism encourages the adoption of a 'middle way' between the extremes of poverty, where people have insufficient means for a becoming life and a materialistic seeking of riches for their own sake. Though, societies at many different levels of wealth would be

[68] Thera, *op. cit.,* p.355.

acceptable to Buddhism, but not a continuous striving for more for its own sake. The virtues of contentment and fewness of wishes are praised, and it is said that "contentment is the greatest wealth."[69]

6.4 Non-violent Reflections on a Violent World

According to Dhammapada, "Enmities never cease by enmity in this world; only by non-enmity do they cease."[70] This is an ancient law. Buddhism is generally seen as associated with non-violence and peace. These are certainly both strongly represented in its value system. For Buddhism, the roots of all unwholesome actions – greed, hatred and delusion – are seen as at the root of human conflicts. When gripped by any of them, a person may think of having and wanting power, so as to persecute others. Conflict often arises from attachment to material things: pleasures, property, territory, wealth, economic dominance, or political superiority. According to Buddha, sense-pleasures lead on to desire for more sense-pleasures, which leads on to conflict between all kinds of people, including rulers, and thus quarrelling and war. Wherever conflict arises among living creatures, the sense of possession is the cause. The Buddha also often referred to the negative effect of attachment to speculative or fixed views, dogmatic opinions, and even correct views if not personally known to be true.

Among the central values of Buddhism are those known as the divine abidings: lovingkindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity. Allied to these is the virtue of patience or forbearance (Pali: khanti, Sanskrit: kṣānti), as exemplified in the *khanti-vādi-jātaka*. All such values are directly relevant to defusing conflicts, and their practice will

[69] *Ibid.,* p.204.
[70] *Ibid.,* p.5.

make these less likely to occur in the first place.[71] An enemy should be looked on as like a beneficial treasure, for he or she gives one a good opportunity for practicing patience, and should be venerated accordingly. Having thus practiced patience in the face of provocation, one should share the spiritual fruits of this patience with those who attack one. Besides these, certain scriptural passages recommend the strength and transformative potency of forbearance and forgiveness.

6.5 Suicide

While Buddhism emphasizes that there is much *dukkha* in life, this can, paradoxically, help dissuade a Buddhist from giving in to despair. Someone faced with some weighty suffering might kill himself or herself in the hope of something less intolerable after death; yet there is no guarantee that matters may not be made worse by this act. From the Buddhist perspective, the next rebirth might be as an animal preyed on and eaten by others, as a frustrated ghost, or in a hell. So, suicide may lead on to something more intolerably painful than the present life. Even in the case of a human rebirth, there are many possible forms of severe suffering. So, as an attempted escape from the sufferings of life, suicide is, according to Buddhist principles, totally ineffective. It will only be followed by a further rebirth, probably lower than a human one, in which the sufferings will probably continue unabated if due to karma and perhaps be intensified. In fact, while human life contains many difficulties, to cut it short means that the potential for spiritual development which is present in a rare precious human rebirth will have been thrown away. Not only does suicide waste this opportunity for oneself, but it also deprives others of benefits that one may bring to them.

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[71] Harvey, *op. cit.*, p.243.

Even for a not particularly virtuous person, suicide is an act which will bring grief to friends and relatives, and so, if for no other reason, is to be avoided.

In addition, as Buddhism sees acts which harm oneself as morally unwholesome, and suicide can be seen in this way, one would expect so. While textual discussions of the first precept rarely mention suicide, killing oneself is just as much an act of killing as killing another person, so there seems little reason to see suicide as not breaching this precept.

6.6 Euthanasia

'Euthanasia', which is derived from the Greek words *eu* and *thanatos,* literally means a 'good death'. As defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1976), it means 'Gentle and easy death; bringing about of this, esp. in case of incurable and painful disease'. Though dying while receiving care and comfort in a hospice might be seen to come logically under the definition, this is not how the term is normally used, for it is seen to apply to cases involving the sick where death is the intended result of some action or inaction, hence the terms 'active euthanasia' and 'passive euthanasia'. Active euthanasia is intentionally hastening death by a deliberate positive act, such as giving a lethal injection. Passive euthanasia is intentionally causing death by a deliberate omission, such as by withdrawing food, including intravenously administered nourishment, or withholding or withdrawing medical treatment which would otherwise have delayed death.[72]

At a certain point in terminal illness, though, it may be appropriate to abstain from futile treatments that reduce the quality of life on its last

[72] *Ibid.,* p.293.

short lap. It may also be appropriate to deal with mounting pain in such a way that death is a known but unintended, and unsought, side-effect of increasing dosage of drugs. Any help for the dying that does not include the intention of bringing death is acceptable in Buddhism. The central Buddhist response is one of aiding a person to continue to make the best of his or her precious human rebirth, even in very difficult circumstances, rather than prematurely ending this.

From a Buddhist perspective, death is the most important and problematical life crisis, as it stands at the point of transition from one life to another. Within the limits set by a person's previous karma, his or her state of mind at death is seen as an important determinant of the kind of rebirth that will follow. Buddhism thus supports many of the ideals of the hospice movement, directed at helping a person to have a good death. The ideal is to die without anxiety regarding those one leaves behind and in a conscious state which is also calm and uplifted. Thus, it would be preferable not to die in a drugged, unconscious state. To die in a calm state, free of agitation, anger or denial, and joyfully recollecting previous good deeds rather than regretting one's actions, means a good transition to a future life. Clearly it is best to know that one is dying, for then one can come to terms with death and talk to one's family freely about it, with an open and mutual sharing of feelings, uninhibited by a desire not to talk of the coming death. In Buddhist cultures, family and friends of a dying person do their best to facilitate a good death. Buddhist monks may be invited to chant calming chants, to help inspire a tranquil and joyful state of mind. The dying person will also be reminded of good deeds that he or she has done in his or her life, so that he or she can rejoice at these, contemplating goodness. Monks may also be fed on his or her behalf, so

that he or she approaches death while sharing in a karmically fruitful act.

6.7 Abortion

The Buddhist scriptural tradition is clear in its opposition to abortion. It considers abortion as worse when the fetus is older and when the reason for considering an abortion is weaker. It always considers it as worse than killing an animal in parallel circumstances. Buddhist principles indicate that those having abortions should recognize their action as evil to some degree; otherwise, it will be an even worse action. Buddhists are more willing to condemn abortion on moral grounds than to oppose legalization of it, often being more permissive in practice than in their outlook. Yet classical Buddhist textual views of the function of law and government do not support the notion that abortion is wrong but should be allowed by the law. We have seen that Buddhists have accommodated themselves to abortion to varying degrees, and that there are those who argue that the not infrequently permissive practice of Buddhists is the best ground on which to base a Buddhist position. The trouble with this is that a classical Buddhist idea is that people's moral practice declines over the ages, and permissive practice on abortion could simply be seen as a sign of this, not of any true expression of Buddhist principles. It is clear, at the very least, that the great majority of Buddhists agree that abortion is killing a human being, and is an evil that should be avoided. However, the approach to abortion most in tune with central Buddhist principles that encourage –

a) reflection on the value of human life,

b) responsible use of contraception for minimizing the chances of women even having to consider an abortion,

c) the non-use of contraceptives which actually cause early abortions,

d) the development of more effective contraceptives which do not do this,

e) adoption services with giving up a child for adoption being seen as a form of *dāna*, and

f) legal abortion only where the case for its being a 'necessary evil' is strong, or where the fetus is badly impaired.

6.8 Sexual Equality

Sexual equality covers a range of issues on which religion can have a direct or indirect bearing. Access to religious teachings and practices, and encouragement to follow them; images of spiritual potential of men and women; opportunity with regard to specialist religious roles, and status within them; status, authority and respect within the family; equality of legal status with regard to such matters as inheritance and divorce; access to educational and other resources, and encouragement to use them; opportunity with regard to work and earnings; opportunity with regard to political power and rights; the actual achievement of equality as allowed/facilitated by a religion or culture etc. are affected by the way a culture construes the differences between men and women. Biological differences of sex are used as a basis for a set of differing expectations and characterizations of male and female genders. In most cultures, any sexual inequality is usually at the expense of women; thus, the issue is generally focused on the status of women.

From a Buddhist perspective, is whether a particular idea, attitude or practice conduced to an increase or decrease for both men and women in such qualities as generosity, non-attachment, calm, kindness, compassion, clarity of mind, and awareness of, and insight into, the nature of mental

and physical states. The aim, then, is true human welfare, judged by criteria that are not regarded as gender-specific. The extent to which this inclusive goal needs to take account of real differences between men and women has, and does, receive different answers from Buddhists. The emphasis on individual karma of Buddhism lessened the need for sons to perform the funeral rites of a person. The destiny of a person after death was due to his or her own karma, perhaps with a little help from that shared with him or her by others, male or female. In general, the Buddhist era was one in which women commanded more respect and ranked as individuals. They enjoyed more independence, and a wider liberty to guide and follow their own lives, so that women's position was one of approximation to equality with men. Early Buddhism did not just look on women as child-bearers, and marriage was not their only aim. To be an unmarried adult woman was a legitimate role, and women might also become Buddhist nuns. It is said that the faithful laywoman should encourage her beloved only son to emulate the best laymen or monks, and her beloved only daughter to emulate the best laywomen or nuns.

The Buddha is said to have won enlightenment for the sake of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen, and to have taught dharma to all four. The virtues and vices of all four groups are said to have an analogous effect on the persistence or disappearance of Buddhist knowledge and practice. Thus, the sangha is illuminated by a monk, nun, layman or laywoman who is accomplished in wisdom, disciplined, confident practicing according to dharma, and the same set of virtues or vices leads to hell or heaven for a man or woman. Women may have both the same spiritual limitations and the same spiritual powers as men. Nuns may develop to the same extent as monks. The Buddha said that he would not die until he

had monks, and nuns, and laymen, and laywomen who could teach dharma. The Buddha gave the same teachings to both sexes, and sometimes went out of his way to teach women.

6.9 Homosexual Instances

Early Buddhist texts refer to the sex of a person as something that can change within one life, as well as between lives. In the *Vinaya*, there is reference to a monk in whom the sexual characteristics of a woman appeared, and a nun in whom the sexual characteristics of a man appeared.[73] In both cases, the Buddha appears to accept this and simply say that the ex-monk nun should follow the rules of the nuns, and the ex-nun monk should follow the rules of the monks. In commentarial literature, the sex of a person is seen as determined at conception, but as subject to possible change.[74] Causes of sex-change are seen as karmic in nature. The Dhammapada commentary tells of a man instantly turning into a woman when he is sexually attracted to a monk; after marrying and giving birth, she then turns back to a man when she asks the monk's forgiveness, and goes on to become an arahat.[75] Sex-change, then, is not seen as limiting spiritual potential.

In outlining the variety of sexual types, whether among humans or animals, the *Vinaya* talks of females, males, hermaphrodites and *pandakas*. While the hermaphrodite has the sexual characteristics of both genders, it appears that the *pandaka* is seen as one who has the characteristics of neither

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[73] I. B. Horner (trans.), *The Book of the Discipline* (*Vinaya Piṭaka* III Th.), 6 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1938-1966), p.35.

[74] Pe Maung Tin (trans.), *The Expositor* (*Atthasālinī* Th.), 2 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1920 and 1921), p.322.

[75] E. W. Burlingame (trans.), *Buddhist Legends* (*Dhammapada Commentary* Th.), 3 Vols., Harvard Oriental Series, (Cambridge: Mass., Harvard University Press, 1921), pp.325-332.

gender.[76] A hermaphrodite is one having the sexual characteristics of both sexes (ubhato-byañjanaka).[77] "In the *Vinaya*, it is said that because of the possibility of a hermaphrodite enticing a fellow monk or nun into having sex, hermaphrodites should not be ordained."[78] A *pandaka*, or one without testicles, is often discussed in similar contexts to the hermaphrodite. The term has generally been translated as 'eunuch'.[79] It is applied to a man who lacks the normal characteristics of maleness, or occasionally to a woman who lacks the characteristics of femaleness.

A *pandaka* monk approached some young monks, then some fat novices, then some mahouts and grooms, asking each in turn to defile him. While the first two groups sent him away, the last group agreed to his request. They then spread it about that Buddhist monks were *pandakas*, or that those who were not *pandakas* nevertheless defiled *pandakas*.[80] That is why, "The Buddha is said to have prohibited the ordination of any *pandakas*, and required the disrobing of any who were already ordained."[81] This indicates that a *pandaka* was seen as some kind of promiscuous passive homosexual.[82]

The *Milindapañha* sees hermaphrodites as among those who are obstructed and so cannot attain understanding of dharma, even if they practice correctly.[83] On the other hand, it is true that penetration of a man or a *pandaka* is seen as no worse an offence for a monk than penetrating a

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[76] Harvey, *op. cit.*, p.414.
[77] *Ibid.*, p.412.
[78] Horner (*Vinaya Piṭaka* I Th.), *op. cit.*, p.89.; Horner (*Vinaya Piṭaka* II Th.), *op. cit.*, p.271.
[79] Harvey, *op. cit.*, p.413.
[80] *Ibid.*, p.416.
[81] *Ibid.*, p.415.
[82] *Ibid.*, p.416.
[83] *Ibid.*, p.413.

woman, that is homosexual penetration is seen as no worse than heterosexual penetration, for a celibate male. Yet the state of being a (passive-homosexual) *pandaka* is seen as one with various spiritual disabilities.[84]

6.10 Conclusion

The world passes through alternating cycles of evolution and dissolution, each of which endures for a long period of time. Though change is inherent in nature, Buddhism believes that natural processes are affected by the morals of human beings. Buddhism, a faith practiced all over the world, is marked by individualism, equality and concern for the welfare of the earth and all sentient creatures. Cultivating a non-harming attitude toward self, other people and also to all living things means being kind, gentle, considerate and respectful toward self and others. It means moderation of behavior. To state what is non-harming is the same as to state what is construed as good conduct. Good conduct is construed as conduct which either does no harm or which does good to all living things. It is interpreted as good conduct, good thoughts and good words. This includes love, compassion, kindness, and giving, delight in the joy of others and all acts of selflessness and generosity.

[84] *Ibid.*, p.417.

Chapter Seven

Contemporary Applications of Buddhist Ethics

7.1 Introduction

Rational standard maintained in the methods of modern science and the materialist outlook associated with it are the most dominant influences on the intellectual life of modern man. A large section of modern intellectuals subjected to these influences have rejected metaphysics and dogmatic religion along with a host of traditional moral values. Scientific rationality has undoubtedly resulted in tremendous material progress. It cannot, however, be claimed that human beings in the modern world live more contented lives, feeling safe and secure, and that their interests will not be unjustly harmed by fellow human beings. Armed conflicts are rampant in the modern world. Acts of terrorism, violation of human rights, racial and other types of discrimination, violence against innocent human beings are some of the horrendous moral crimes that everyone frequently witnesses in many parts of the world. Poverty and destitution are not uncommon.

In Buddhist terms, scientific and technological progress has in no way resulted in the reduction of the unwholesome roots of human behavior, namely, greed, hatred and delusion. As long as these roots of unwholesome behavior are not drastically reduced or are kept within reasonable limits, it would not be possible to think of peace, harmony, happiness and contentment in society. The relevance of Buddhism to the modern social context lies in the fact that it offers a philosophical middle way that recognizes in principle the norms of scientific rationality, while rejecting both the extreme materialist world-view of modern science and

the metaphysical and dogmatic fundamentalism of traditional religion.

Modern science does not provide us with the knowledge of what is morally right or wrong, good or bad. When human beings are not concerned with such knowledge, and do not care to pursue the principles of a morally good life, social interaction among humans is not likely to become very different from that among brutes. One of the most important features that distinguish life among humans from life among brutes is that human beings desire not only to live but also to live well. They search for meaning in life, and seek to attain rationally justifiable moral ideals and goals. In this respect, Buddhist morality has much to offer to modern man.

Buddhism can be considered as a path of moral perfection. The entire path is comprised of gradual stages of ethical purification. This is the reason why it was traditionally described as a *visuddhimagga*. The goal of Buddhism is a modification of a person's behavior and a transformation of a person's emotive and cognitive constitution. The consequence of this modification and transformation is that the person concerned overcomes the ills of existence and ceases to produce suffering to others. The goal of Buddhism is defined purely in psychological terms. It is not merging with God or Brahman or surviving to eternity in some incomprehensible realm of Being, but becoming free from greed, hatred and delusion.

7.2 Buddhist Ethics and Modern Era

The ethical teaching of Buddhism advocates an ideal of moral perfection as its ultimate goal. Moral perfection is attained when the unwholesome psychological roots of human behavior, namely, greed, hatred and delusion are eradicated. Buddhism recognizes a valid basis for the people

to make distinctions between what is morally right or wrong and good or bad. According to the Buddhist teachings, a valid basis for making moral judgments has to be discovered with reference to human experience, but not with reference to any metaphysical reality. The conditions under which human beings become happy and contented and the conditions under which they find life miserable are generally the same. Factual information about those conditions is directly relevant to our moral life. They are to be discovered by means of observation and experience. To live morally is to live paying due regard to the moral point of view, which involves the avoidance of the creation of misery to oneself and others as well as the easing of the suffering of others. As long as people pay attention to human experience itself, they need not lose faith in the importance of morality. To be concerned with morality is to be concerned with human good and harm, happiness and unhappiness, ill and well-being.

The significance of Buddhism to modern society is that it does not seek to determine the issue of what is right and wrong by tying the moral life to a set of metaphysical dogmas from which moral precepts are derived, or to the moral commandments of a sectarian God. People who have given up metaphysics and religious dogma in preference to the modern scientific, materialist and deterministic view of existence have moved toward a skeptical viewpoint on the nature of moral values. They tend to associate morality with metaphysics and religion. The consequence of this attitude is the creation of a moral vacuum in their lives. Under such circumstance's greed, hatred and delusion become the motivating forces of their behavior.

The materialist and determinist ideology associated with modern science, which is seeking to displace metaphysics and religious dogma, attempts to transform society by effecting changes in the material conditions of living. The scientific world-view attaches no significance to the importance of morality. Morality is considered as a matter of attitudes and emotions. Moral values are considered to be relative and subjective. According to this view, only empirical facts have objectivity. Man is considered merely as a stimulus-response mechanism. Man's capacity to understand and control the inner motivational roots of behavior appears to gain little recognition in terms of the mechanistic world view of material science. Human behavior is explained in terms of the external conditions that determine it. If external factors alone determine human behavior, people cannot be responsible for their moral failings. They cannot be blamed for what they do. Such a view of the nature of human action encourages the renunciation of personal responsibility for what people do.

The problems of modern society may be explained from the Buddhist standpoint as a consequence of the separation of scientific knowledge and technological skill from moral wisdom. There is ample evidence of the proliferation of greed and hatred at all levels of social interaction in modern society. It has created economic disparity, poverty and destitution. The lack of concern for the cultivation of sympathetic concern for the well-being of others is leading to increased social conflict and tension. The ultimate goal of the Buddhist way of life is the eradication of greed, hatred and delusion. If much of the psychological insanity that produces moral crisis in modern society is the consequence of the proliferation of greed, hatred and delusion, then the Buddhist ideal

of moral perfection can be said to be directly relevant to the social life of modern man.

7.3 Contemporary Perspectives of Buddhist Ethics

The Buddha's teaching was authoritatively divided in early times into three groups named *śīla* (morality), *samādhi* (deep meditation) and *prajñā* (transcendental wisdom), but they were interdependent facets of one process leading to deliverance (vimutti).[85] Each of the three facets of self-cultivation evolved appropriate practices: of moral intention, behavior and correction; of meditational method and mapping; of transformative shifts of consciousness. We may speak of these practices as the moral, contemplative and transformative *pāramitās*. The moral *pāramitās* involve practices in which good intentions are aroused and acted upon in the light of a right understanding of good and of situations. With repetition and correction these practices severally and together nurtured the dispositions, both karmic and salvific, that together constitute the character of a person according to the Buddhism. The aim of the ethics of Buddhism is the highest stage of the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva is one who must give up egoism altogether and rise above anger, hatred and error to gain the virtues of conviction and compassion, benevolence and disinterestedness. Since, moral intentions are always elastic; they need shaping by forms and disciplines, taught by teachers and learned in communities. The virtuous practices that in Buddhism characterize a good person were often defined as at least the six *pāramitās* of generosity or gift-giving (dāna), morality or the five precepts (śīla), patience and forgiveness (kṣānti), courage and vigor

[85] Damien Keown, *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics*, (UK: Curzon Press, 2000), p.24.

(vīrya), concentration (dhyāna) and wisdom (prajñā).[86] So, Buddhist ethics is essentially an 'ethics of virtue'.

Buddhist ethics can be evaluated on the basis of virtues. Virtue ethics mainly focus on the character of a person. Its concern is to understand the nature of a person on the basis of the actions of that person. Early Buddhism also focuses on the person's attaining enlightenment through virtuous acts. Buddha consistently emphasizes to follow the virtues and stay away from the vices. He spends his whole life preaching the noble truths and eight-fold path showing people the way of enlightenment from sorrows or sufferings. Buddhist ethics is a form of practicing virtues in daily life for making us righteous person in order to achieve the ultimate liberation. Even, Buddha gives priority to the intention of a person to consider a deed or practice of any virtue to be good or bad. Because it is the intention of a person that leads to the action. Buddha says, "Monks, I say intentional action is *kamma*. Having intended, *kamma* is done by body, by speech, by thought."[87] These words of Buddha can be simplified mentioning an example from *Nikāyas* that, one who gives for the sake of giving earns greater rewards than one whose motive is the reward itself. The latter goes to heaven but returns to the drudge of *saṃsāra*. But the person whose motive is selfless and who gives because he values the act of giving goes to heaven and does not so return.[88] So, the right intention is also significant in Buddhist ethics. Buddhist ethics addresses various virtues that can be practice to develop one's character. A virtuous person is more inclined to lead toward the higher spiritual states than a vicious

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[86] *Loc. cit.*

[87] Woodard and Hare (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* III Th.), *op. cit.*, p.415.

[88] F. L. Woodard and E. M. Hare (trans.), *The Book of Gradual Sayings* (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* IV Th.), 5 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1932-1936), p.61.

one. A person who does righteous habitually, he or she is more capable to focus on the pathways of enlightenment rather than the one who constantly does wrong deeds. However, that does not mean that the vicious cannot lead toward enlightenments. A vicious person with repentance if starts practicing virtues onwards can achieve the ultimate liberation. The various *pāramitās* including three treasures of Buddhist ethical teaching has different sphere of application in human mind as well as socio-economic life and natural world. Some of virtue practicing create impacts on human thoughts and emotions, some other have impacts on the behavior of a person toward other human being and natural world. Social and civic organization industry also demands moral development and self-restraint. Buddhist ethics gives great significance to compassionate, generosity and gratitude. Moreover, *śīla* or morality signifies value-oriented guidelines. Cultivating these moral disciplines and good habits one can care for oneself and other sentient beings. *Samādhi* or meditation enhances mental disciplines in oneself. Character can be developed not only by morality but also through meditation. *Prajñā* or wisdom accelerates insightful thinking that reveals one's true inner self as well as real nature of anything else. Being integrally linked these three ethical teaching facilitates the cultivation of each other in human life. So, cultivating the three groups of Buddhist teaching and other virtues in life can obliterate the vices. Thus, only the permanent eradication of unwholesome acts will accept a person as a righteous one to hold the highest spiritual status. The practice of virtues not only warrants right intention toward action but simultaneously ensures the progress of spiritual path of enlightenment in such a way that a person can touch all aspects of life through it.

The early Buddhist ethics is a form of virtue ethics which implies the environmental ethics in Buddhism as an approach of ethical virtue. When the virtue ethics approach functions with reference to matters of the environment and focuses on what motivates environmental choices of an individual that can be considered as an environmental virtue ethics. Thus, the character of an individual is as essential as it is in a virtue ethics, in such a way that a subtle shift occurs displacing the centrality of environmental consequences and environmental duties themselves. In all the focus of an environmental virtue ethics is on identifying character traits that affect the natural world such that not only does the environment gain, but also that the character of an individual gets transformed in a positive manner in general. Environmental virtue ethicists lay down certain virtues or qualities that are required for cultivating a healthy respect for nature such as humility, self-acceptance, fostering feeling of love and appreciation etc. The cultivation of humility is suggested in early Buddhism in many contexts, and is one of the defining characteristics that are sought by monks. The virtue of humility, undoubtedly, figures in a significant sense in early Buddhism. It is said that if this virtue is not cultivated (hirī natthi), monks will not be able to attain wholesome states, and will only decline in this respect.[89] It is also said that those who are not restrained by modesty (hirī nisedhā) will not reach the end of suffering.[90] To explain self-acceptance in the view point of environmental virtue ethics, Thomas E. Hill Jr. writes:

[89] C. A. F. Rhys Davids and F. L. Woodard (trans.), *The Book of Gradual Sayings* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* II Th.), 5 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1917-1930), p.206.

[90] C. A. F. Rhys Davids and F. L. Woodard (trans.), *The Book of Gradual Sayings* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* I Th.), 5 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1917-1930), p.7.

> My suggestion is not merely that experiencing nature causally promotes such self-acceptance, but also that those who fully accept themselves as part of the natural world lack the common drive to disassociate themselves from nature by replacing natural environments with artificial ones.[91]

Cultivating mindfulness through meditation is a great way to learn about oneself. Through mindfulness one can free himself or herself from stress, anxiety, improper thoughts, and calm him or her down as well as find stability and tranquility in mind. Deep meditation helps oneself to understand basic notions of reality as well as to grow a true connection with nature. Its constant and dedicated practice leads to the revelation of the real nature of entities – both physical and psychical. The idea of meditation is to build a temperament that guides the practitioner toward enlightenment. Once the real nature of things is realized by oneself the mind becomes ever purer; the pollution of ignorance is dispelled. With the benefit of such a realization, one can imbibe and accept what he or she truly is. The barrier to the knowledge that the egoism had created dissipates and that person is able to truly accept the co-evolution, causality, and continuity of what he or she shares with the rest of creation. Thus, one increases the power of understanding and therefore of self-acceptance.

The four sublime virtues are universal love (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), sympathetic joy (muditā) and equanimity (upekkhā).[92] These sublime virtues of Buddhist ethics aim to nurture love and appreciation that is a

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[91] Thomas E. Hill Jr., "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments," *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works,* ed. by David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.196.

[92] Roderick Hindery, *Comparative Ethics in Hindu and Buddhist Traditions*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), pp.27-28.

must nowadays, according to environmental virtue ethicists to respect nature. Each sublime virtue has its intrinsic way to value nature, which can compress in the lovingkindness principle. Of love in general it has been said,

> Love is an other-centered emotion. To love something is in part to see it as having value that goes beyond what it can do for you. Certainly, it does serve our interests . . . But to love something is in part to deny that its value is just a matter of its serving your interests. Thus, love by its very nature encompasses other beings selflessly. And therefore, Buddha establishes the ethical principle of lovingkindness into sublime life that extends to all of nature.[93]

The virtues point to a way of life. They point to character building and appeal to that which is good and noble and honorable in man. They provide a universal formula for thought and action very simply that is about being good and doing the right thing. Virtue ethics widens immediate horizons considerably and allows space for a modern-day problem to be treated in a modern-day manner.

7.4 Anthropocentric and Non-anthropocentric Viewpoint

Anthropocentrism is a much-mentioned term in environmental literature. Anthropocentrism comes from the Greek words *anthropos* meaning man or human being and *kentron* meaning center.[94] Anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism are the two approaches to environment in Environmental ethics.

Anthropocentrism holds the view that humans alone are the superior beings; are at the center of the universe; are the only beings with a moral

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[93] Pragati Sahni, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism: A Virtues Approach*, (London and New York: Routledge-Taylor and Francis Group, 2008), pp.120-121.
[94] *Ibid.*, p.80.

status; all others exist for instrumental purpose; have no intrinsic worth and are thus not worthy for any kind of moral status. In this approach man's relation to the non-human world is only in terms of their utility. Non-anthropocentrism on the other hand seeks to recognize the intrinsic value of the non-human world. It does not regard a thing to be of value because of its utility but considers being of value despite its utility. This approach considers the non-human world as possessing an intrinsic value in itself and does not consider utility as the criteria for value; it extends moral status to non-human life forms.

Over the years these two approaches have taken up different positions under different philosophers, environmentalists, moralists and thinkers. For example, under anthropocentrism there are those who uphold the view in its strongest sense, yet there are others who make an attempt to slightly reconsider the non-human life form in spite of retaining man's position as the superior being. Similarly, in non-anthropocentrism there are some who extend morality only to those that can feel pain and pleasure, like humans and animals, some to all living beings that includes plants, trees, etc., and some go to the extent of including the land, soil, rocks, ecosystem, etc.

Emphasizing Buddhist discipline and meditation the *Sedaka Sutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* states,

> And how is it, monks, that by protecting oneself others are protected?
> By the continuous practice and cultivation of meditation . . . .
> And how is it, monks, that by protecting others oneself is protected?
> By forbearance, non-violence, universal love and sympathy. . . .[95]

[95] C. A. F. Rhys Davids and F. L. Woodard (trans.), *The Book of Gradual Sayings* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* V Th.), 5 Vols., (London: Pali Text Society, 1917-1930), p.169.

These statements point out that a person must cultivate deep meditation to attain enlightenment that will protect himself or herself from the sufferings.

Piyadassi Thera has commented:

> To protect oneself is not egoism, not selfish security, but self-discipline, self-training, both moral and mental training. To the extent we are mentally strong and confident, so can we help others. If we are weak and diffident, we can help neither ourselves nor others. Altruism, as a principle of action, is based on our character and mental development.[96]

So, by establishing an example of a gainer through practicing discipline and meditation, one can also help others to be protected from being the sufferers. Besides these, a person must practice patience, harmlessness, lovingkindness, and sympathy through which he or she can protect others. By protecting others, one protects himself or herself as these qualities are essential for liberation. Buddhist ethics does not only focus on human liberation through practicing moral disciplines, but it also focuses on the well-being of other living beings as well as the natural world. The eight-fold path of Buddhist teaching talks about the right action and right livelihood with the right intention. These paths demand a commitment to cultivate the right attitudes, behave peacefully and harmoniously, refrain oneself from stealing, killing, and overindulgence in sensual pleasure, avoid making a living in ways that cause harm, such as exploiting people or killing animals, or trading in intoxicants or weapons.

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[96] Piyadassi Thera, *The Buddha's Ancient Path*, (London: Rider and Company, 1964), p.179.

As discussed earlier, anthropocentrism maintains that human beings are the only entities that have value or the highest value and so their interests must be served irrespective of other interests. Anthropocentrism can be said to imply the centrality of the interests of human beings so that all else comes to have instrumental value. Thus, anthropocentrism is deeply related to the questions of value. The logical culmination of this position may lead to an allowance of the use of natural resources in an unsustainable way and cruelty toward animals. Due to this and the above reasons, anthropocentrism is frequently condemned by environmental scholars as discriminatory and narrow-minded. Often this position is also referred to as strong anthropocentrism in deference to the existence of other positions. Thus, anthropocentrism in its strong form is generally adjudicated as inequitable because it refuses to value anything other than human beings. This is a one-dimensional understanding of anthropocentrism and its complexity. Two other anthropocentric claims ought to be considered: that of weak anthropocentrism and human perspective. Some environmentalists claim that anthropocentrism is really about knowing and understanding the world from a human perspective and through human-based values and so it cannot be ignored. Again, weak anthropocentrism, as opposed to strong, suggests that even though moral choices are made with human beings in mind, non-human beings are deserving of moral concern too; the difference being that the intensity of morality in the latter case is diluted in comparison. This makes sense of the fact that to human beings their interests are important but it also makes altruism more real. Weak anthropocentrism, it has been noted, is not compatible with strong anthropocentrism precisely for the reason that the latter contains no proviso for altruistic actions. Thus, weak anthropocentrism is a position that says that human beings do not need to neglect their wider interests and at the

same time human beings can encourage and reflect respect for others in their moral choices. On the other hand, non-anthropocentrism considers the world not in terms of its utility but as that which possesses intrinsic worth. It holds the view that human beings are not superior and members of all species are equal. Non-anthropocentrism grants moral standing to such natural objects as animals, plants, and landscapes.

In his book '*Ethical Philosophies of India*' I. C. Sharma says, Dr. Radhakrishnan has rightly remarked that –

> The Buddha does not want a suppression of emotion and desires, but asks for the cultivation of true love for all creation. This glowing emotion must fill the whole universe and result in an overflow of goodwill. The adoption of universal love, tenderness and compassion has been advocated in the well-known Buddhist work, *Majjhima Nikāya*, which reads as follows: "Our mind shall not waver, no vile speech will we utter, we will abide tender and compassionate; loving in heart, void of secret malice; and we will be ever suffusing such a one with the rays of our loving thoughts, and from him forth going we will be suffusing the whole world with thought of love, far-reaching, grown great and beyond measure, void of ill-will and bitterness."[97]

In Buddhist ethics, there is no distinct disposition between human life and the natural world regarding priority. However, throughout the texts of Buddhist literature, human beings should respect nature out of being egoistic and make a living coherence with sentient beings and the world. So, it will not be justified to categorize Buddhist moral teachings as anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric.

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[97] I. C. Sharma, *Ethical Philosophies of India*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963), p.155.

7.5 Conclusion

Buddhist ethical principles are very noble and in an ideal world their practice would lead to peace and harmony as the Buddha has taught, but, unfortunately, people are motivated by greed, hatred and delusion, even Buddhists. Expansion of technological development, languages and communication; misinterpretations on Buddhism as well as lack of institution for both theory and practical studies; thinking style of human beings is becoming non-ethical and always is focused on authority, power, domination. Consequently, stressful mind, health problems, residence problems, problems of peace and harmony are coming out day by day. Many a people are money minded and looking for better life with it. Modernize Buddhist traditions are reconstructions and a reformulation with emphasis on rationality, meditation, compatibility with modern science about body and mind. In the modernistic presentations, Buddhist practices are detraditionalized, in that they are often presented in such a way that occludes their historical construction. With the intension of facing modern challenges, Buddhism must be changed according to the time being protecting its main aspects. Buddhist attitudes on modern world such as seeking bad consequences of technology should be optimistic and positive. Hiriyanna said,

> When we describe Buddha's teaching as pessimistic it must not be taken to be a creed of despair. It does not indeed promise joy on earth or in a world to come as some other doctrines do. But it admits the possibility of attaining peace here and now, whereby man instead of being the victim of misery will become its victor.[98]

[98] M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1994), p.136.

Buddhism expresses its ethical requirements in the form of duties. The most general moral duties are those found in the five precepts, such as the duty to refrain from killing, stealing, and so forth. These apply to everyone without exception. Although the precepts are of great importance in Buddhist morality, there is more to the moral life than following rules. Rules must not just be followed, but be followed for the right reasons and with the correct motivation. It is here that the role of the virtues becomes important, and Buddhist morality as a whole may be likened to a coin with two faces: on one side are the precepts and on the other the virtues. The precepts, in fact, may be thought of simply as a list of things which virtuous person will never do.[99]

Encounters of Buddhism with modernity provide occasion for examining applied ethics, as Buddhist values and principles come to be applied to situations that traditional authorities may not have fully anticipated. Impact of modernity in East is generating several distinct but related transformations. The rise and preeminence of a scientific rationality and the fruits of scientific and technological inquiry (in medicine, warfare, and industry), new alignments of power, beginning with colonialism through much of East and yielding eventually to nationalism and independent nation-states, the advent of new political and economic ideologies and sometimes bloody experimentation with communism, socialism, and totalitarianism, the rise of Western hegemony through global capitalism and consumerism, with their often exploitative relationship to human labor and ecosystems, and new ideas from the West about gender equality, human rights, and democracy. These challenges

[99] Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.99.

and opportunities have given rise to much creative work that we can do based on Buddhist ethical thought to cease or at least limit it. Modern developments offer insecurity and competitiveness as well as tensions and boredom associated with them. Buddhism offers a few very simple and efficacious methods to combat that. When one thinks of modern life one can think in terms of a great degree of optimism and an equal degree of pessimism. One can be so pleased that we live today at a time when there seems to be nothing that man cannot conquer, except few diseases and places in the universe, however the pessimistic aspect is that we have, in the process, lost something. Buddhism has an application today and has a place in modem life because of its timeless relevance, emanating from a set of eternal values.

Chapter Eight
Conclusion

8.1 Concluding Observation

Buddha rejects both being and non-being and believes in becoming. He adopts the metaphysical mean. He rejects both self-indulgence and self-mortification, and enjoins the ethics of moderation. He preaches the doctrine of the ethical mean. He lays down the four noble truths and noble eight-fold path. Buddhism emphasizes purity of the inner life. Mere pure external conduct does not suffice. The mind must be purged of all impurities. Greed, hatred, delusion, anger, envy and jealousy must be rooted out. All passions that ruffle the calm of the mind must be extirpated. The mind must be sanctified.

Though *nirvāna* is the highest good of an individual, it is realized through universal good-will and love. Everyone should pervade the whole world with love, pity, sympathy and equanimity. Universal love, compassion for the distressed, joy for the virtuous, and indifference to the vicious are enjoined. Love generates compassion, joy, and indifference, and is consequently higher than these. So, the Buddhist ethics is altruistic.

The ethics of non-injury (ahiṁsā) is the keynote of Buddhism. Hatred should be conquered by love and harm should be conquered by good. Evil recoils upon one who offends a harmless, pure, and innocent person. Hatred generates hatred. A harsh word excites a harsh word. Patience is the highest virtue. One should be tolerant with the intolerant, mild with fault-finders, free from passion among the passionate. One should not offend anyone by body, word or thought. Someone is not just, if he or she

carries a matter by violence; he or she is just, if he or she leads others, not by violence, but by law and equity. Non-injury, in thought, word, deed, love, good-will, patience, endurance, and self-purification constitute the Buddhist morality.

Buddhist morality is the mean between self-indulgence and self-mortification. Gautama Buddha underwent severe penances and self-torture which proved fruitless. Self-torture emaciates the body and fills the mind with evil thoughts. If fire of lust, hatred, and delusion are not quenched, self-mortification can lead someone nowhere. Craving for pleasure springs from egoism. When egoism is rooted out, craving for worldly and heavenly pleasures is quenched. On the other hand, self-indulgence is enervating and degrading. But to satisfy hunger and thirst, to keep the body in good health, to protect it from heat and cold, to save it from fatigue, to cover it comfortably and decently are necessary to keep the mind strong and pure. This is the middle path that avoids both extremes. The Dharma rejects both pursuit of pleasures and self-mortification. It aims at purity of heart, purity of conduct, equanimity, peace, and enlightenment. Buddhism preaches compassion toward all living creatures and charity for the poor, but more fundamentally it prescribes mindfulness and simplicity. This is the Buddhist middle way for overcoming the miseries of life, which are due to people's cravings and excesses.

In this modern age, humans have become alienated from themselves and nature. When science started opening new vistas of knowledge revealing the secrets of nature one by one, humans gradually lost faith in theistic religions. Consequently, they developed scanty respect for moral and spiritual values. With the advent of the industrial revolution and the

acquisition of wealth by mechanical exploitation of natural resources, humans have become more and more materialistic in their attitudes and values. In their greed for more and more possessions, they have adopted a violent and aggressive attitude toward nature. Moral degeneration is a double-edged weapon, it exercises adverse effects on psycho-physical well-being of human being as well as on nature.

Moreover, modern life is characterized by the fact that the world is getting smaller; that people are having greater access to each other; that communication barriers are fast disappearing; that it is possible for one to know what happens everywhere in the world within a short-time, and thereby participation in the life of a larger cross-section of the world than one could have ever imagined. That would be modern life understood in terms of science and technology. Humans in their attempt to conquer nature, disease, natural barriers, have performed certain feats of a technological complexity which are quite mind-blowing. That is another aspect of modern life. Perhaps a more disturbing aspect of modern life, is that with the world getting closer, communication barriers breaking away, and scientific and technological advance becoming so rapid, everyone has come face to face with several problems in terms of gender as well as human discrimination, economic and political rivalry, pollution, population explosion, scarcity of resources and the indiscriminate use of resources that might not be replaced. The strength of Buddhist ethics lies in the ability to retain the fundamental values while being creatively and legitimately applied to the new circumstances of modern life.

The work of applying Buddhist ethics to new circumstances of daily living is not only of utmost importance for the Buddhist community, but it also can have widespread benefits to society as a whole. The

unwholesome actions such as greed, anger, hatred, delusion etc. are the main reasons that unenlightened living which is fundamentally unsatisfactory. Despite of the interpretive difficulties, the precepts are the living heart of Buddhism. A key aid to moral development is the formal avowal of moral precepts, which are seen to strengthen one's moral vision and help to increase the momentum of moral development. These help to enact and refine human understanding of human interrelationship with all beings, and serve as antidotes to the fragmented individualism, self-centeredness, and acquisitiveness that are the scourges of modern life. These are pointed toward the engaged, compassionate regard for others which is the hallmark of the enlightened way. Focusing with the lens of the five moral precepts as these have been traditionally taught in Buddhism can be applied in new ways to the complexities of modern life. Everyday worldly situations are all potential opportunities for assessing how the moral precepts can be practically applied. It is time to focus on the context of modern society and reexamine the meaning and application of the five moral precepts, which embody the fundamentals of the Buddhist ethical teachings, using the framework of karma, which can be understood as the network of intentional actions that lead to specific consequences. The characteristic of Buddhism of being timelessness comes from the fact that it had understood that everything continues, but continues in a flux, in a process of continuing change and evolution. That is why, Buddhism was able to adjust to different times and civilizations. Therefore, without any hesitation the world can approach any aspect of Buddhist ethical teachings as something relevant and applicable to modern time.

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