INTRODUCTION

"Dhanam caje aṅgavarassa hetu,
aṅgam caje jīvitaṁ rakkhamāno;
aṅgam dhanam jīvitaṅcāpi sabbam;
caje mano dhammamanussaranto"\(^1\)

One should sacrifice one’s wealth for the sake of one’s limb. One should sacrifice limb for the preserving one’s life. One should sacrifice wealth, limb, life and everything for righteousness.

Visuddhimagga

My thesis entitled “The Ethics of Early Buddhism: Its Relevance in the Present Day” represents the idea embodied in the canonical Pāli literature which is the oldest and the most reliable source of information with regard to Buddhism. Buddhism is not a religion of faith; it is a religion based on morality (Silā), concentration (Samādhi) and wisdom (Pāññā). It leads mankind to peace, to the development of good morals, reasoning and logical thinking.

The original Pāli term for Buddhism is Dhamma,\(^2\) which, literally, means that which upholds. The Dhamma is that which really is. It is the Doctrine of Reality. It is a means of Deliverance from suffering and Deliverance itself. Whether the Buddha arises or not the Dhamma exists. It

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\(^{2}\) According to Nanatiloka, Dhamma literally means ‘bearer’, constitution, norm, law, doctrine; justice, righteousness; quality; things, objects of mind (āyatana) phenomenon. In all theses meaning the word “dhamma” is to be met with in the texts. The commentary of Dīgha Nikāya instances for application of this term guṇa (quality, virtue), desanā –Instruction, pariyyattī –text, nījīvatā –soullessness, e.g. ‘all dhamma, phenomena are Impersonal,’ etc. The commentary of Dhammapada has hetu –condition instead of desanā. Thus analytical knowledge of the law is explained as hetumhi Rāmaṁ –knowledge of the condition. The dhamma is summed up in the four Noble Truths. It forms one the three of gems and one of the ten recollections –anussati.
lies hidden from the ignorant eyes of men, till a Buddha, an Enlightened One, realizes and compassionately reveals it to the world.

The Buddha exhorts His disciples to depend on themselves for their deliverance, for both purity and defilement depend on oneself. The Buddha point out the path and it is left for us to follow that path to obtain our purification. “To depend on others for salvation is negative, but to depend on oneself is positive.” Dependence on others means a surrender of one’s effort. The Buddha states in Mahāparinibbāna Sutta of Dīgha Nikāya to depend on oneself:

“Attadīpā viharatha, attasarana anaññasaranā, dhammadīpā, dhammasaranā anaññasaranā.”

“Abide with oneself as an island, with oneself as a Refuge. Abide with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a Refuge. Seek no external refuge.”

Again said the Buddha in Dhammapada, “Attā hi attano nātho, ko hi nātho paro siyā, attanā hi sudantena, nāthaṁ labhati dullabhaṁ.”

“One indeed is one’s own refuge; how can others be a refuge to one? With oneself thoroughly tamed, one can attain a refuge (i.e., Arahatta Phala), which is so difficult to attain.”

The Buddha urged His followers not to take His Teachings on blind faith but to accept them only after close investigation and enquiry as to whether the Teachings are really acceptable according to one’s own intelligence and experience. In the kesamutti (kōlāma) Sutta of Aṅguttara Nikāya, the Buddha says:

“Do not accept anything on hearsay – mā anussavena (i.e. thinking that thus have we heard it from a long time). Do not accept anything by

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4 Dhammapada, verse, 160.
mere tradition – *ma parapparaya* (i.e. thinking that it has thus been handed down through many generations). Do not accept anything on account of mere rumors – *ma itikiraya* (i.e. by believing what others say without any investigation). Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures – *ma pitakasampadana*. Do not accept anything by mere supposition – *ma takkahetu*. Do not accept anything by mere inference – *ma nayhetu*. Do not accept anything by merely considering the reasons – *ma akaraparivitakkena*. Do not accept anything merely because it agrees with your pre-conceived notions – *ma diṭṭinijjhanakkhanyā*. Do not accept anything merely because it seems acceptable – *ma bhabbarupataya* (i.e. thinking that as the speaker seems to be a good person his words should be acceptable) Do not accept anything thinking that the ascetic is respected by us – *ma samaṇo no garūti*.5 (Therefore it is right to accept his word).

“But when you know for yourselves- these things are immoral, these things are blame worthy, these things are censured by the wise, these things, when performed and undertaken, conduce to ruin and sorrow- then indeed you reject them – *yadā tumhe kālāmā attanāva jāneyyātha ime dhammā akusālā, ime dhammā savajjā, ime dhammā viññūgarahitā, ime dhammā samattā samādinnā ahitāya dukkāya saṃvattanṭi. Atha tumhe kālāmā pajaheyyātha.*

When you know for yourselves- these things are moral, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise, these things, when performed and undertaken, conduce to well-being and happiness- then you live acting accordingly – *yadā tumhe kālāmā attanūva jāneyyātha “ ime dhammā kusalā, ime dhammā anavajjā, ime dhammā viññūppasatthā, ime

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Even though the Buddha wanted His followers to absorb the Dhamma, He did not want them to accept it without clarity of mind and complete understanding. The Buddha wanted all human beings to lead ideal lives—to be kind, compassionate and considerate to one another and to exercise patience, tolerance and understanding in all activities and relationships. Those who were unable to comprehend His Teachings or were not prepared to accept His Teachings, would rate His Teachings as too idealistic and incapable of achievement. Despite such assertions, His Teachings, if reduced to the simplest of terms, could be contained in just a few words: “Cattāri ariyasaccāni —four noble truths, Aṭṭhamāgikkomaggo —middle eightfold path.” The Buddha’s Teachings are designed to enable men and women to achieve fulfillment and satisfaction in this life through their own sustained efforts and to encourage them to create a social order conducive to the benefit and welfare of all mankind. If everyone does what is good for oneself and for others as well and completely shuns evil, that would affect others as well as oneself the world would definitely be a better place to live in.

The word ‘Ethics’ derived from Greek word ‘ethos’ which means character. Ethics is also called Moral Philosophy. Ethics, we may say, discusses men’s habits and customs, or in other words their character, the principles on which they habitually act, and considers what it is that constitutes the rightness or wrongness of these principles, the good or evil of these habits. It evaluates the voluntary actions and habitual actions of persons and considers their rightness and wrongness. It evaluates the character of persons and considers its virtuousness or viciousness.7 Ethics –

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one of the important branches of philosophy is a science which deals with morality as its subject.

One of our problems is that ethics is never a business issue or a social issue or a political issue. It is always a personal issue. People say they want integrity. But at the same time, ironically, studies indicate that the majority of people don’t always act with the kind of integrity they request from others. If we embrace ethical behavior, will it automatically make us rich and successful? Of course, it is not. Can it pave the way for us to become successful? Absolutely! Ethics + Competence is a winning equation. In contrast, people who continually attempt to test the edge of ethics inevitably go over that edge. Shortcuts never pay off in the long run. It may be possible to fool people for a season, but in the long haul, their deeds will catch up with them because the truth does come out. In the short term, behaving ethically may look like a loss (just as one can temporarily appear to win by being unethical). However, in the long term, people always lose when they live without ethics. Have you ever met anyone who lived a life of shortcuts, deception, and cheating who finished well?

King Solomon of ancient Israel reputed to the wisest man who ever lived, said it this way:

The ways of right-living people glow with light;

The longer they live, the brighter they shine.

But the road of wrongdoing gets darker and darker-

Travelers can’t see a thing; they fall flat on their faces.\(^8\)

U.S representative and educational rights advocate Jabez L.M. Curry observed, “A state to prosper must be built on foundations of a moral character, and this character is the principal element of its strength and the
only guaranty of its permanence and prosperity." The same can be said of a business. Or of a family or of any endeavor you wish to see thrive and endure. However, that foundation cannot be built by the organization as a whole. It must be built beginning with each individual. And it must be done in the face of continuous pressure to perform at the expense of doing the right thing.

Ethics plays a great role in shaping human society. If we observe the present situation in the world, we will find that the current problems such as health, economic, politic, and global warming etc...are through lack of moral behaviors. Moral degradation exists everywhere. What we urgently need today is a code of ethics and morality which will guide people not to seek blindly material progress alone but to look for spiritual enlightenment, not just for self aggrandizement but for the common weal.

Material gain without spiritual solace does not provide true and lasting happiness. Spiritual backing is absolutely necessary for man's spiritual upliftment, leading to tranquility of mind and everlasting happiness. Spiritual solace and materialism must go hand in hand to provide true happiness for all. At first, to be in tranquility of mind and true happiness, man needs morality or ethics —Ko cādi kusalānām dhammaṁ sīlaṅca suvisuddhanti. The need for ethics arises from the fact that man is not perfect by nature: he has to train himself to be good. Thus morality becomes the most important aspect of living. No being exists alone. The world community is a society of beings utterly dependent upon one another. To be good and peace in society, morality is necessary for us and its members must not cut spiritual corners. Morality is the first step in the path towards eternal bliss. It is the basic spiritual foundation. Without this base, there can be no human progress and spiritual advancement. Even worse is a person without virtue for he not only endangers himself but also others around him. After establishing the moral foundation, a person can

9 Ibid p. 12.
proceed to develop his mind and wisdom. Morality should be coupled with wisdom. The base of Buddhism is morality and wisdom is its apex.

According to Buddha, morality without knowledge is not useful as well as knowledge without morality just as practical performance without rationality or ideology is useless as well as rationality without practical performance. In Buddhism, there can be no real morality without knowledge, no real knowledge without morality. The Buddha, therefore, said in *Dīgha Nikāya, Sotāpanna Sutta*:

“Seyyathāpi Brahmaṇa hatthena vā hattham dhoveyya pādena vā pādam dhoveyya, evameva kho Brahmaṇa sīlapariṇītā paññā, paññāpariṇītā sīlam. Yattha sīlas tattha paññā, yattha paññā tattha sīlam. Sīlavato paññā, paññāvato sīlaṃ. Sīlapaññānañca pana lokasmīṃ aggamakkhayati” ¹¹

“As one washes one hand with the other and one foot with the other, morality is purified by wisdom and wisdom is purified by morality. Where there is morality, wisdom is there, and where there is wisdom, morality is there. Morality and wisdom are declared to be the best thing in the world.”

Moral and ethics form the core of the social, economic, political and religious ideals. If love is the blood of life, then surely morality is its backbone. Without virtue life is in danger, but without love life is dead. It is noteworthy saying of *Dhammapada*, “Yo ca vassasatam jīve dassiḷo asamādhiḥ ekāham jīvitaḥ sāya m ā sīla vantassa jhāyino – though one may live a hundred years with no morality and self control, yet better, indeed, is a life of one day for a man who is virtuous and who cultivates Tranquility and Insight development practice.” ¹² The quality of life is enhanced with cultivation of virtue and when virtue arise the vessel of love overflows. Since man is imperfectly by nature, he has to make an effort to develop virtue. The cultivation of morality is a very important aspect of life.

¹² *Dhammapada*, verse, 110.
As human beings we must have an aim in our life. A person not observing a righteous way of life will never find the aim of life and if he does not uphold some noble principles, he can even become a danger to society. However, a noble way of life is needed to maintain our human values and dignity. To understand the real purpose of life, it is advisable for a person to choose and follow an ethical-moral system that restrains a person from evil deeds, encourages him to cultivate good deeds, and enable him to purify his mind.

In the teaching of ethics and morality, religious labels are not important. Every religion has its own moral code designed to regulate human conduct so that people can live together as civilized human beings. The practice of a religion enables one to undergo spiritual transformation which arises from within, rather than from without. It is not external appearance that makes a person noble, but internal purification and an exemplary life. Rank, caste, color, even wealth and power do not necessarily make a gentleman. Only character makes a person great and worthy of honor. Morality stands as the fundamental practice in Buddhism, for a purified morality can pave the way for the attainment of sainthood. Morality is concern with the conduct of human beings and is needed to be practiced in daily life. So, at first, people need to develop morality to have good behaviour and conduct in their life.

In the Buddhist philosophy, we have an analytical study of ethical concepts and theories as well as positive recommendations to lead a way of life regarded as the noble path for the attainment of the summum bonum or the final goal, which is moral perfection as well as supreme freedom. In the other words, in the perspective of the Four Noble Truths, Buddhist ethics is not for its own sake but is an essential ingredient on the path to the final goal. This is well expressed in the following statement of the Buddha:

"Silavisuddhi yāvadeva cittavisuddhatta, Cittavisuddhi yāvadeva ditṭivisuddhatta, Dīṭṭhivisuddhi yāvadeva kaṅkhāvitaraṇavisuddhatta,"
Purity of virtue leads onward to purity of mind, this to purity of view, and this, through various stages of increasing spiritual insight, to utter Nibbāna without attachment, “unshakeable freedom of mind. It is emphasized that while each stage supports the next, the “whole life” is not lived for any of them expect the final one. This is because at any lower stage of spiritual progress, there is still attachment, thus barring further progress. The foundational importance of ethics for the rest of the path is, however, crucial:

So you see, Ānanda, wholesome virtues have freedom from remorse as object and profit; freedom from remorse has gladness; gladness has joy; joy has tranquility; tranquility has happiness; happiness has concentration; concentration has seeing things as they really are; seeing things as they really are has turning away and non-attachment; turning away and non-attachment have release by knowing and seeing as their object and profit. So you see, Ānanda, wholesome virtues lead gradually up to the summit.

"Iti kho ānanda kusalāni sīlāni avippatīsāratthāni avippatīsārānisaṃsāni, avippatīsāro pāmojjaṭṭho pāmojjānisaṃso, pāmojjaṃ pītatthaṃ pītānisaṃsāṃ, pīti passaddhatthā passaddhānisaṃsā, passaddhi sukhatthā sukhaṃsaṃsā, sukhaṃ samādhaththā samādhānisaṃsā, samādhhi yathābhūtaṃ nibbidavirāgatthāṃ nibbidāvirāgānisaṃsā, yathābhūtaṃ nibbidavirāgānisaṃsā, nibbidāvirāgā nibbiddāpattā nibbidāpattatthā nibbidāpattisaṃsā, yathābhūtaṃ nibbidāpattisaṃsā, yathābhūtaṃ nibbidavirāgā nibbidāpattatthā nibbidāpattisaṃsā, yathābhūtaṃ nibbidavirāgā nibbidāpattisaṃsā, iti kho ānanda kusalāni sīlāni anupubbena aggāya parenti."¹⁴

In this process of development, the cultivation of one stage is seen to lead naturally on to the cultivation of the next, so that the components of the path support one another and interact to form a harmonious whole. The basis for them all, however, like the earth for plants or a foundation for a building, is moral virtue (Sīla). Defilement such as greed, hatred and delusion are seen to exist in the form of unwholesome activities of body and speech, unwholesome thoughts, and the latent tendencies in the mind which are the root of all these. Moral virtue aims to restrain the external expression of the defilements, mediation aims to undermine active defilement in the mind, and insight, facilitated by meditative calm, aims to destroy defilements in the form of latent tendencies. These three levels of development can perhaps be seen in the popular verse:

"Sabbapāpassa akranāṁ, kusalassa upasampadā, sacittapariyodapanam. Etam Buddhāna sāsanam -Not to do any evil, to do good, to purify one’s mind, this is the Teaching of the Buddhas."

According to the above stanza, Buddhist Ethics has two aspects, negative as well as positive. It requires not only avoid evils but also cultivate good. According to the Buddhist standpoint, freedom is to be achieved by private and individual exertion. However, this freedom can be achieved by culturing one’s mind both in relation to society and to one’s own moral development. Buddhist ethics, therefore, has a close connection with a social philosophy as well. It is social unit made up of individuals with their mutual relation. Consequently, by serving society, individuals benefit. Therefore when taken as a whole, society is the medium in which Buddhist ethics truly becomes useful as well as meaningful.

16 Dhammapada, verse, 183.
Thus, Buddhist ethics popularly known as 'the way of life' not only has its personal or cosmic dimension as it helps man to attain the final goal if not in this very life, at least in the some subsequent life, but also it has social dimension as it assists the achievement of the well-being and happiness of the multitude or of mankind as a whole —bahujanahitāya, bahujanasukhāya. Ethics in Buddhism are traditionally based on the enlightened perspective of the Buddha. Moral instructions are included in Buddhist scriptures. The goal of the Buddhist ethics is to achieve, for a person who wants to lead worldly life, social and personal well-beings and to attain personal perfection for a person who wants renunciation. The Buddha is enlightened one and appears for the sake of all beings, therefore he taught Dhamma for forty five years for the benefit of all beings. The Buddha had passed away but his teachings are still applicable and harmonious in this modern era in regard to the social problems such as health, education, economic and politic that everyone faces day after day.

"Those who think that Buddhism is interested only in lofty ideals, high moral and philosophical thought and that it ignores the social and economic welfare of people, are wrong. The Buddha was interested in the happiness of men. To him happiness was not possible without leading a pure life based on moral and spiritual principles. But he knew that leading such a life was hard in unfavorable material and social conditions. Buddhism does not consider material welfare as an end in itself; it is only a means to an end- a higher and nobler end. But it is a means which is indispensable, indispensable in achieving a higher purpose for man's happiness. So, Buddhism recognizes the need of certain minimum material conditions favorable to spiritual success—even that of a monk engaged in meditation in some solitary place."  

There are really only two important points when it comes to ethics. The first is a standard to follow. The second is the will to follow it. I will talk

17 W. Rahula. What the Buddha Taught, p. 81.
about the Buddhist Ethical norms in my research work and also the Buddhist ethics which I will discuss later in the respective chapters are to learn and put into practice in the course of one’s daily life for without practice one cannot appreciate the truth.

I firmly hold that a principle is nothing worth until applied. To accept a principle as true without applying it in action is like buying food without eating it or taking a ticket for a required destination without getting into the train. Mere learning is of no avail without actual practice. According to the Buddha, the learned man who does not practise the Dhamma is like a colorful flower without scent —yathāpi rucirāṃ pupphaḥ, vanṇa vantam agandhakam, evaṃ subhāsitā vācā, aphlā hoti akubbato.¹⁸ He who does not study the Dhamma is like a blind man. But, he who does not practice the Dhamma is comparable to a library. The moral and philosophical teachings of the Buddha are to be studies and practice, and above all, to be realized. Therefore mere book knowledge without common sense and understanding is of no use to overcome our problems.

¹⁸ Dhammapada, verse, 51.