

CHAPTER VI
CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHIST MORAL VALUE
TOWARDS MODERN LIFE

Modern life in itself is very difficult to define. One might say that 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 permits participation in the life of a larger cross-section of the world than one could have ever imagined. That would be one aspect of modern life. Related to that would be modern life understood in terms of science and technology. Man in his attempt to conquer nature, disease, natural barriers, has performed certain feats of a technological complexity which are quite mind boggling. 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, we have come face to face with several problems in terms of economic and political rivalry, pollution, population explosion, scarcity of resources and the indiscriminate use of resources that might not be replaced. With these come a host of other issues which can be plainly labelled as “survival.” In this chapter, the researcher continues to provide a comprehensive analysis of the

contribution of Buddhist moral value towards modern life. In this context, an attempt has been made to deal with some solutions for current crises such as environmental, ethical, educational, and morality crises, ect.

VI. 1. Buddhist Education in Modern Life

As we have known, Western standards are based on the objective measurability of one's knowledge and skills in a certain area, without much concern for the rest of the person's demeanour. In the Buddhist sense, however, the development of skills and understanding goes hand in hand with personal advancement in morality and concentration.”¹ Now, we would like to further investigate this rift between the two different value systems and offer some practical guidelines as to how to harmonize the two, seemingly incompatible, systems of education. The question is not how to assimilate, but how to integrate Buddhist Education into the modern educational system, while retaining its basic values and identity.

The ultimate goal of Buddhist education is to destroy ignorance, the root cause of suffering. Specifically, education in a Buddhist sense should seek to eliminate from the students' mind a variety of wrong views, which form the theoretical basis of ignorance. These purely conceptual contents of the mind comprise the so-called “imputed ignorance” (*parikalpita-avidyā*), as opposed to the “innate ignorance” (*sahaja-avidyā*). It is “conceptual” or “acquired” ignorance. Innate ignorance cannot be accessed until there is conceptual ignorance (or misconceptions), so first one has to eliminate the “imputed” ignorance, i.e. wrong views.

¹ Agocs, T, *A Vision of Buddhist Education from Central Europe, A Paper presented at the 1st International Conference of Buddhist Universities in Bangkok, 27 May 2007.*

Wrong views in the Buddhist sense contradict the three marks of conditioned existence, i.e. impermanence, suffering and selflessness. To think that there are any permanent phenomena in conditioned existence is certainly a wrong view, just as much as to think that there is any lasting happiness to be gained. However, the root of all wrong views is the belief in a concrete and permanent self, seeking to gain happiness. *Samsāra* revolves around a notion of self-the most difficult and impenetrable of all our misconceptions. This notion of the self is particularly important in modern Western society, and both socially and economically institutionalized, such that all our dominant institutions are dedicated to the personal and economic development of the self. Education does not escape this stranglehold.

The materialist view in the West that began with Descartes has evolved into the scientific view that the universe is an object out there, to be dominated and mastered.¹ Following this, most education processes imply that there is some kind of result to be gained from the process of learning. A student, for instance, studies a certain subject in order to master it and put it to use in his life, thus becoming more knowledgeable, wealthier, gaining higher status in society etc. This is what we may call the social value of education. This highly abstract value is concretized in the diploma or certificate issued on completion of one's studies. It is usually assumed that getting a diploma, one somehow becomes more valuable person and he can turn this extra value to his advantage. Many young people entering into higher education today are conditioned by such expectations. The value system of modern education obviously implies belief in a concrete and permanent self, which can become

¹ George Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, pp. 23-34.

“better” (more knowledgeable, educated etc.) and happier through education.

Increasingly, and perhaps alarmingly, in Western educational institutions, success is now measured in terms of how much money that institution earns- how many students attend courses, how much money has been brought in for research grants. The quality of the curriculum or dedication to learning about ourselves, in the world, is not a consideration. The education system becomes increasingly dominated by ‘market considerations’; the work of academics is measured in terms ‘customer satisfaction’ offered. For example, large multinational companies can sponsor courses, which raise significant questions about the objectivity and value of the final diploma. Students are less concerned about the skills they obtain, but more with the diploma they receive. Pioneering and critical thinking, the traditional driving force in educational establishments is costly, time-consuming and dangerous since it challenges the status quo.

Is there not then, a contradiction between the ultimate goal of Buddhist education, i.e. to attain liberation from the misconception of a permanent self, and the purpose of modern Western education, which is to strengthen and secure one’s mistaken sense of identity? How can we resolve this contradiction in the context of modern Buddhist education? The researcher would like to offer four interlinking approaches to solve the dilemma:

VI. 1. 1. Transforming Students’ Motivation

Modern society may put great stress on students to obtain some definite goal in life, such as a good job, social status, carrier etc. These social

expectations will inevitably affect students, even if they are well-motivated and genuinely interested in *Dhamma*. Many of them will wonder how to integrate their Buddhist learning with survival in modern society. Though there are different means to address this question, one important aspect of the solution is to transform students' motivation. Relying on the basic Buddhist truths of impermanence, 'suffering' and selflessness students' minds should be turned towards higher values: contentment, spiritual liberation and kindness to others -so that, rather than trying to conform with the expectations of modern society in order to gain something in return, they might begin to think about how they can contribute to well-being in their society. Their self-concern may thus be transformed into concern for others.

VI. 1. 2. Presenting Formal Education as Skilful Means

One of the ways to counterbalance the modern view of education as life investment is to emphasize its traditional Buddhist use as skillful means. Buddhist institutions and forms of education may appear in conformity with the world, but their main function is to provide the opportunity for studying the *Dhamma*, which is beyond this world. Any formal qualification (such as a diploma in Buddhist studies) is merely a by-product of one's study rather than an end in itself. Competence in matters relating to the *Dhamma* does not depend on any formal recognition, nor does a diploma obtained in 3-5 years of formal study guarantee such competence. Advancement in the higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom cannot be objectively measured or evaluated by the quantitative standards of modern education. While maintaining humility to the Buddhist tradition, *Dhamma* studies should be pursued in the spirit of free inquiry and free from the competitiveness that often

characterizes mainstream education. Through emphasizing the role of Buddhist education as skillful means, we can safeguard students against over-expectation and encourage them to use their precious study opportunity to the best of their abilities.

VI. 1. 3. The Importance of Meditation

In contrast with modern education, Buddhism values first-hand experience higher than theory. Buddhist education should be concerned with more than just handing over factual knowledge. The Buddha taught a path of personal inquiry to put an end to suffering, and that path depends on direct experience. Therefore, the traditional methods of Buddhist mind-training- contemplation, meditation- could be taught at schools. The Buddhist view on the integral nature of human experience, where the intellectual and emotional sides of mind are equally appreciated, is highly relevant in the modern world, which is overly fragmented. Buddhism presents a path of mind-training, and education is nothing but that path. Since the full meaning of the Buddhist texts and teachings is not fully understood before one has direct experience in meditation, meditation is an indispensable part of Buddhist education. In fact, Buddhist educational institutions, if they have not been tainted by the values of the West, could well define themselves as schools of mental training. The usefulness of mindfulness methods in developing the “seven factors of enlightenment” (such as peace, joy, concentration etc.) has been demonstrated even outside the context of Buddhist education. It has been found indispensable for realizing true education in general.¹

¹ Waldron, W, *Modern Education as Foundation of Buddhist Modernity*, pp. 239-252 in Prof. Le Manh That and Ven. Thich Nhat Tu (eds.): *Buddhist Education: Continuity and Progress*, Culture and Information Press, Hanoi, 2008.

VI. 1. 4. Opening up New Vistas of Learning

Finally, to encourage active Buddhist engagement in everyday affairs, we must open up new vistas of learning. Harkening back to spirit of the great Indian Buddhist universities such as Nalanda, we should try to apply the Buddhist principles in all walks of life, testing their truth in different disciplines. Just as Buddhist philosophy in India developed in constant dialogue with other schools of philosophy, we should also try to be at constant dialogue with science and the other religions. The Buddhist wisdom of dependent origination can bring new perspectives to many social, economical and ethical issues that humanity faces today. Moreover, it has been shown that scientific notions of cause and effect in the natural world agree with the Buddhist understanding, which can potentially enrich the natural sciences with an ethical dimension.¹ Buddhist education therefore should not be concerned with simply transmitting the knowledge and methods of the past, but should also be creative in the application of Buddhist principles. It is mainly the task of Buddhist institutions of higher education to keep the spirit of Buddhist wisdom alive and turn it to the benefit of humankind. Viewed from this perspective, Buddhist education has a practical role to play in the modern world.

In brief, Buddhism has a great deal to offer in terms of its insights into the mind, and hence into its development through education. With its emphasis on ‘things as they are’, it provides a path, an individual and collective means of inquiring into our minds, and the arising conditions that are invaluable in these days of global chaos. In this way, it can enable

¹ Waldron, W, *Modern Education as Foundation of Buddhist Modernity*, pp. 239-252 in Prof. Le Manh That and Ven. Thich Nhat Tu (eds.): *Buddhist Education: Continuity and Progress*, Culture and Information Press, Hanoi, 2008.

young people to work towards wisdom rather than knowledge, and find a way of working together harmoniously, co-creating institutions based on compassion rather than greed. With new motivation, meditation, and an emphasis on skillful means, Buddhism needs to find new forms for helping break through ignorance and open up new vistas of learning.

VI. 2. Building a Happy Married Life for Modern Society

VI. 2. 1. Moral Education of the Married Life

In view of what has been said about "birth and suffering," some people have criticized Buddhism saying that it is against married life. They are wrong. The Buddha never spoke against married life. However, he pointed out all the problems, difficulties and worries that people would have to face when they take on the responsibility of marriage. Just because he warned one against problems in marriage does not mean that the Buddha condemned marriage.

The act of marriage itself implies that a person is still more attached to the physical world and since our mental faculties are influenced by craving, attachment and human emotions, it is but natural that problems would arise. This happens when we have to consider the need of others and to give in to what others need.

A deep analysis of the nature of self is important to help us to understand the origin of our problems, worries, miseries and how to overcome them. Here, religious advice is important for maintaining a tranquil life. However, a man should not become a slave to any religion. Man is not for religion, religion is for man. That means man must know how to make use of religion for his betterment and for his happiness in a respectable way. Simply by following certain religious vows, precepts or

commandments with blind faith or by force, thinking that we are duty-bound to observe them will not develop proper understanding.

One important aspect of Buddhism is that the Buddha did not impose any religious laws or commandments. The Buddha was a unique teacher who had set out a number of disciplinary codes for us to uphold according to our way of life. Those who follow the precepts observe them voluntarily but not as obligatory religious laws. It is up to us to follow the advice through our own understanding and experience of what is good for us and for others. Through trial and error, we will learn to follow the advice which will give us just peace and happiness.

One should try to understand the nature of the worldly life. By knowing that we have to face problems, we will be able to strengthen our mind and be more prepared to face the problems that could arise if we get married. Religion is important to help us overcome our problems. Whatever we learned about religious principle when we were young can be adopted to avoid misunderstanding, disappointment and frustration. At the same time, certain good qualities such as patience and understanding which we learned through religion are important assets to help us to lead a peaceful married life.

Normally, it is due to a lack of mutual understanding that many married couples lead miserable lives. The result of this is that their innocent children also have to suffer. It is better to know how to handle our problems in order to lead a happy married life. Religion can help us to do this.

VI. 2. 2. The Buddhist Advices to an Ideal Family

As we have known, the family is the smallest unit or cell of a society. To tend a perfect society we should aim at building a perfect family in which parents, children are underlying the morality. According to the Buddha's teachings, the crisis of inter-personal relationship is the first and most important of all crises in modern world. And all crises come from crisis of mind that is understood as a crisis ethics.¹

VI. 2. 2. 1. Husband and Wife

One of more advanced type of advices given to householders is directly related to the relationship between husband and wife, since they were to be considered as *devas* by their children.²

The husband fulfills his duties towards the wife by respecting her, by not humiliating her, by being faithful, by handing over authority, and by presenting jewelry. As the Buddha preached: "In five ways should a wife as western quarter be ministered by her husband: by respect, by courtesy, by faithfulness, by handing over authority to her, by providing her with adornment."³

Apart from duties mentioned above, Hinduism adds further that the husband should go to his wife whenever she wishes even it is not obligatory to do so. And the best way to protect a woman is through love and devotion to her.⁴

¹ Dh. v1.

² In *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, "*Brahmā*," "Teachers of old," "*Devas* of old," "Worthy of offerings," are the terms denoting mother and father. Because, mother and father do much for children, they are bringing them up, nourishing and introducing them to the world. (A. II. 70).

³ D. III. 190 - 91.

⁴ B. K. Dalai, *Strī-Dharma and Puruṣa-Dharma*, in B.K. Dalai (ed.), *Dhamma Studies*, p. 60.

The wife in turn performs her duties well, extends hospitality to relatives all around (i.e. to hers as well as to her husband's), is faithful to her husband, protects what is earned and acquired, and is proficient and industrious in all duties.¹ In this manner, Manu also mentions wife's duties: the wife should be made to count exactly the money that is earned, to keep it secure by depositing it a chest to take decisions regarding expenditure, so much money for rice, so much for curry, so much for vegetables, etc., she should be encouraged to engage herself in religious worship, in cooking and taking care of the household.² In addition, the roles of wife are also declared in Manu. They can play and have traditionally played in creating and bringing up children, they are very distinguished, they ought to be worshiped, they are the light of the home, and women are the glory incarnate of the family. They bear children, of performance of rituals, of services in the household, of excellent sexual pleasure and even heaven for the husband and his ancestors. Where women are worshipped the gods are pleased with the home.³

Taken together the duties between children and parents and between husband and wife, the picture that emerges as the Buddha's ideal of family values and relations confirms deep concern in the stability of the home as the primary unit of society. If all these duties are performed by the house-holders, this will create a congenial atmosphere in each family and thus in turn in the society. This type of atmosphere will promote social harmony in due course since society is nothing but a conglomeration of different families. The performance of these duties is

¹ D. III. 190 - 91.

² B. K. Dalai, *Op. Cit.*, p. 59.

³ B. K. Dalai, *Strī-Dharma and Puruṣa-Dharma*, in B.K. Dalai (ed.), *Dhamma Studies*, p. 57.

not a one-sided affair only. Lord Buddha has prescribed a reciprocal set of five duties to be performed by the wife towards her husband:

“In these five ways does the wife, ministered to by her husband as the western quarter, love him: her duties are well performed, by hospitality to the kin of both, by faithfulness, by watching over the goods he brings, and by skill and industry in discharging all her business. Thus is this western quarter protected by him and made safe and secure.”¹

Aṅguttara Nikāya takes into account the case of the wife who fulfills her task perfectly, and here the Buddha enumerates four qualities by which woman wins power in this world and has this world in her grasp.² These are as follows: she is capable in her work; whatever her husband’s home industries, whether in wool or cotton, she is skillful, gifted with an inquiring mind into the work, and able to carry it out. She is able to manage her servants, knowing the duties of each and seeing these are carried out; further, she studies the approval of her husband and keeps safe whatever money, corn, silver, or gold he brings home. With these qualities, said the Buddha “she wins power and this world is within her grasp.”³

However, this does not establish her ultimate limitation. She may win power in the world beyond, have the world beyond in her grasp by establishment in confidence, virtue, charity, and wisdom. For confidence, she knows the arising of the *Tathāgata* and such and such is so.

¹ D. III. 190 - 91.

² A. IV. 269.

³ A. IV. 270.

She accomplishes the virtue by keeping the five precepts. She accomplishes in charity, living at home with though free from avarice, delighting in alms-giving. She is wise in the penetration into the rise and fall of things and in the complete destruction of suffering. With these four qualities she wins power and has the world beyond in her grasp.¹ Yet though these last four qualities contain realization of the destruction of suffering, her reward is only formally acknowledged as rebirth in the deva worlds.

In *Aṅgutarā Nikāya*, there is a story that when the Buddha visited the house of Anāthapiṇḍika, he heard an unusual uproar in the house and asked what it was about. The Buddha called Sujatā to him and spoke kindly to her about seven types of wives a man may have.² Hearing these words of the Blessed One, Sujata was ashamed of her past conduct and said, "From today onwards, let the Exalted One think of me as the one in the last example for I'll be a good and understanding wife."³ She changed her behaviour and became her husband's helper, and together they worked towards enlightenment. This *Sutta* is still relevant for its value in the modern life towards all ladies.

VI. 2. 2. 2. Children towards Parents

The duties of children to their parents were stressed in India from a very early date. In Hinduism, mother is regarded as a divinity who is greater than the mother earth.⁴ A mother is compared with the earth, the sustains

¹ A. IV. 271.

² The Buddha preached seven kinds of wives: One like a slayer, one like a robber, one like a mistress, one like a mother, one like a sister, one like a companion and one like a handmaid- in order to teach a married lady how to become a good wife in the husband's family. (A. IV. 92-93).

³ A. IV. 92-93.

⁴ *Mahābhārata*, 3.295.41.

of all.¹ And a mother is an image of the earth.² In a similar way, father is venerated as a god, for, he is higher than the sky.³ A person calls upon the father who is gracious.⁴ A father is an image of *Prajāpati*.⁵ *Rukkhadhamma Jātaka* expressed the value of the solidarity of a family, using the simile of the trees of a forest; these are able to withstand the force of the wind whereas a solitary tree, however large, is not.⁶ The Lord Buddha confirmed and emphasized family relationship, exhorting all persons who decided to remain in the worldly life to maintain ties together with the honor and dignity of the family as a social unit. For example, the Asoka Edicts concern themselves very much with the duties of children to parents: “Meritorious is obedience to mother and father;”⁷ “right conduct to mother and father is obedience;”⁸ “Obey mother and father;”⁹ “listen to mother and father.”¹⁰ These are, however, modifications of the *Upanisadic* dictum: “Be one to whom mother is a god. Be one to whom father is a god.”¹¹

The child has to nourish them in their old age, perform his or her duties toward them, preserve the family and clan (that is, by procreation), protect the heritage, and make offerings when they passed away and gone. Here, duties towards parents include parents also having their duties to their child. The Lord Buddha has prescribed a list of five essential duties which one ought to perform towards one’s parents:

¹ RV. 1.191.6; AV 12.1.12.

² ManuS. 2. 226.

³ *Mahābhārata*, 3. 295. 41.

⁴ RV. 1. 159. 2.

⁵ ManuS. 2. 226, 4.182.

⁶ J. I. 329.

⁷ Rock Edict, Girnar, III. line 4.

⁸ *Ibid.* XI. Line 2.

⁹ Rock Edict, Girnar, XIII. line 3.

¹⁰ Pillar Edict, Delhi Topra, VII. Line. 29.

¹¹ Quoted from H. Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics: Essence of Buddhism*, p. 131.

“In five ways a child should minister to his parents as the eastern quarter: Once supported by them I will now be their support; I will perform duties incumbent on them; I will keep up the lineage and tradition of my family; I will make myself worthy of my heritage.”¹

From this, we can see that laymen have to work in five ways to repay the merits of their parents. In daily life, the first important thing one should do to one’s parents is to support and serve them. This means that we should, for example, prepare meals for them, wash their clothes, make their company and always take care of them.

According to the Buddha’s teachings, there are two persons that could not be repaid by the children. Those are one’s mother and father. He teaches thus:

“Even if one should carry about one’s mother on one shoulder and one’s father on the other, and while doing so should live a hundred years, reach the age of a hundred years; and if one should attend to them by anointing them with balms, by massaging, bathing, and rubbing their limbs, and they should even void their excrements there- even by that would one not do enough for one’s parents, nor would one repay them. Even if one were to establish one’s parents as the supreme lords and rulers over this earth so rich in the seven treasures, one would not do enough for them, nor would one repay them. For what reason? Parents are of great help to their children; they bring them up, feed them, and show them the world.”²

¹ D. III. 189-190.

² A. I. 61-62.

However, there is meaningful way to repay our parents that sets them to dwell in the faith of *Dhamma*, observing moral discipline as in the following text:

“But, monks, one who encourages his unbelieving parents, settles and establishes them in faith; who encourages his immoral parents, settles and establishes them in moral discipline; who encourages his stingy parents, settles and establishes them in generosity; who encourages his ignorant parents, settles and establishes them in wisdom- such a one, monks, does enough for his parents: he repays them and more than repays them for what they have done.”¹

One should always remember that serving and supporting one’s parents is not a work that one does for material gain, to earn money or something one is forced to do. This should be done with all our heart, mind and voluntarily. Fortunately, one who have these benefits of serving their parents whose parents are alive. They have many chances to repay the debt they have incurred. To serve the parents is to serve the Buddha.² Rightly says Manu in his book on code of conduct:³ If one wants to become a good man but he does not serve his parents it is like cooking sand and hoping that it will become rice. In *Samyutta Nikāya*, the Buddha exalts a person who maintains one’s parents as under:

"In normal fashion whoso doth maintian

His mother or his father, in this life

Him for that cherishing the wise commend,

¹ A. I. 62.

² In the countries following *Mahāyāna* tradition they praise Mother and Father as the two living Buddhas in their families.

³ *Pitari pritimāpanne prīyante sarvadevatāṇ.*

And after death he wins the joys of heaven.”¹

In the family, if there is a son who has done these things properly he is equal to *Brahmā*.² And not only the son has to perform duties towards his parents but there are also some duties of the parents towards their sons and these are:

“In five ways, parents thus ministered to, as the eastern quarter, by their child, show their love for him: they restrain him from vice, they exhort him to virtue, they train him to a profession, they contract a suitable marriage for him, and in due time they hand over his inheritance.”³

Hence, the parents should save their sons from the evil actions such as killing, stealing etc. And thereby, they ward off the evil results of these immoral actions done by them. Parents should not only protect their sons from the evil activities but should induce them to perform good actions. Good actions (*punya kammās*) are those which lead to moral ends. Moral actions are those which keep a person away from killing, stealing and bad conduct. These moral actions give happiness here and hereafter. The persons who follow this advice lead a peaceful life. They rejoice on earth and in heaven. In this way, they should put their sons on the moral path. Keeping in mind the well-being of their sons, the parents provide them with the professional training. The professional training thus provided leads them to a successful life in this world and the next world. When the parents find that their sons have successfully completed themselves in all respects, they arrange for their union with a suitable wife who is

¹ S. I. 181.

² A. I. 132, II. 70.

³ D. III. 190.

accomplished with virtues-internal and external. When the parents realize that their sons have become suitable for a house-holder's life, they put on them their succession ship. Whenever these duties completed, the eastern quarter is made safe and secure.¹

We all know that the most precious gift that parents could make to their children is the happiness of the parents themselves. It is very crucial that parents should have time to take care of each other, not to allow themselves to be carried away by too much of work. Again in this regard, simple living is the answer. The practice of deep listening and loving kindness help preserve and restore communication. Children naturally learn from their parents as how to love and to take care. If parents smoke and get drunk, children will smoke and get drunk. Thereby, observing the first precept through body, speech and mind should be the code of ethics for family life. Family is the soil from which the tree of children grows. Without the practice of watering good seeds in each other, the skill of deep listening and loving speech, a couple cannot nourish their love and keep their communication alive. With the practice, transformation and healing is possible, and parents can avoid the sorrow of separation.

¹ The Buddha advises that there is a better way to serve the 'six directions': by proper actions towards six types of persons, so as to produce harmony in the web of relationships centered on an individual. A person should 'minister' to his parents as the 'eastern quarter' (where the sun rises), his teachers to the 'south', his wife to the 'west', his friends to the 'north', servants and employees 'below', and monks and Brahmins 'above'. In return, each of these should 'act in sympathy with' the person in various ways. (D. III. 180-193).

Regarding his parents, a person should think, 'Once supported by them, I will now be their support; I will perform duties incumbent on them, keep up the lineage and tradition of my family, make myself worthy of my heritage, and give alms on their behalf when they are dead.' In return, his parents 'restrain him from vice, exhort him to virtue, train him to a profession, contract a suitable marriage for him, and in due time they hand over his inheritance'. Elsewhere, it is said that 'Aid for mother and father, and support for wife and children; spheres of work that bring no conflict: this is a supreme blessing' (Khp. 3). The *Sutta* says that parents only win the honour and respect of children by their kindly help to them. The law of karma ensures that children get the parents they deserve, and parents get the children they deserve. Some people have 'bad' parents, but it is said that the only way to repay the debt owed to parents for their care during childhood, is to establish them in trustful confidence, virtue, generosity or wisdom. (A. 1. 61).

The Buddha requests monks to pray for the wellbeing of his parents and ancestors. The Lord teaches:

“*Sukhā matteyyatā loke, atho brahmaññatā sukhā.*

Sukhā sāmaññatā loke, atho Brahmaññatā sukhā.”

“Pleasant in this world is ministering to mother. Ministering to father too is pleasant in this world. Pleasant is ministering to ascetics. Pleasant too is ministering to the Noble Ones.”¹

Duties towards parents are not only to our parents but also to other human beings. We should encourage people to have sympathy to others. This sympathy should be expressed in giving alms, doing charity and releasing animals. If one does this one will get much benefit here and hereafter.

“Monks, by the release of the heart through amity, practised, made become, made much of, made a vehicle and a basis, exercised, augmented and set going, eight advantages are to be expected. What eight?

Happy one sleeps; happy one awakes; one sees no bad dreams; one is dear to humans; one is dear to non-humans; devas guard one; neither fire nor poison, nor sword affects one; and though one penetrate not the beyond, one reaches the *Brahmā*-world.”²

The duty of supporting one’s parents is included in the three good things proclaimed by the wise, the other two being the practice of charity (*dāna*), and going forth into the homeless life (*pabbajjā*):

“Giving and harmlessness and self-restraint,

¹ Dh. v.332.

² A. IV. 149.

Control of sense and service to the parents,
And holy ones who live the righteous life,
If anyone be wise to do these things
By good men favoured, he, an *Ariyan*
Clear sighted, will attain the world of bliss.”¹

In case, monks are the people who live homeless life and collect alms. They can live in the city or countryside without their parents or relatives. They concentrate on learning, practising and teaching *Dhamma*. To accuse them of infidelity to the tradition, is a misunderstanding of the nature of their work.

Based on this, we can say that in repaying their debt to parents, although monks do not stay at home to serve and to support parents in daily life, they are still great filial sons as they help their parents to get rid of the vicious circle of death and rebirth and attain happiness in this life and after.

The teaching of the Buddha offers diverse methods of minister in accordance with their capacity, condition and environment. Offering multiple options certainly demonstrates the Buddha’s acumen as a philosopher and psychologist. Moreover, his teaching of the four immeasurables can also be construed as bearing on the subject of filial piety.

In early Buddhism, parents are also considered as equal with *Brahmā*, therefore, the children should respect and pay them honours:

¹ A. I. 151.

“Monks, those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home are reckoned like unto *Brahmā*. Those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home are ranked with teachers of old. Those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home are ranked with the devas of old. Worthy of offerings, monks, are those families where mother and father are worshipped in the home.”¹

The similar *Upaniṣadic* context, *Taittirīya* runs as follows:

“One should not be negligent of duties to devas and fathers:

Become one to whom mother is as *deva*

Become one to whom father is as *deva* and so for ‘teacher’ and for ‘guest’.”²

In *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, “*Brahma*,” “Teachers of old,” “*Devas* of old,” and “Worthy of offerings,” are the terms denoting for mother and father. Because, mother and father do much for children, they bring them up, nourish and introduce them to the world.³ Hence, we should worship them and pay them honours due. We serve them with food and drink, clothing and bed, and anoint their bodies, bathe and wash their feet.⁴

And further, the Buddha says that there are these four bases of sympathy (charity, kind speech, doing a good turn, and treating all alike) his disciples should treat to his parents thus:

Charity, kind words, and doing a good turn

And treating all alike as each deserves:

¹ A. II. 70.

² TaitUp. p. 43.

³ A. II. 70.

⁴ A. II. 70.

These bonds of sympathy are in the world
Like to the linchpin of a moving car.
Now if these bonds were lacking, mother who bore
And father who begot would not receive
The honour and respect (which are their due).
But since the wise rightly regard these bonds,
They win to greatness and are worthy praise.¹

And again:

“He has the means to support his elderly parent but he fails to do so in their declining years. Such a person should be known as ill mannered. Be his own mother or father, his brother or sister his mother-in law or father-in-law; he uses violence against them, or hurts them with abusive language. Such person should be known as bad.”²

And in *Suttanipāta*, once again the Lord Buddha emphasizes to the lay man that the *Dhamma* for him is service to his parents.

“He should [dutifully] support his mother and father; he should engage in rightful trade. A vigilant householder living this way of life goes to (rebirth mong) the devas who are called *Sayampabha*.”³

According to Buddhist tradition, the debt to one’s parents is, in general, impossible to repay; it can be discharged only in a case where the child arouses in his parents confidence in the *Dhamma*, settles and

¹ A. II. 32.

² Sn. vv124-125.

³ Sn. v404.

establishes them in morality, replaces their meanness by generosity, or dispelling their foolishness, settles and establishes them in wisdom.

VI. 3. Moral Life towards a Healthy Environment

VI. 3. 1. Reducing Demands on the World's Resources

Modern man in his unbridled voracious greed for pleasure and acquisition of wealth has exploited nature to the point of near impoverishment. Meanwhile, Buddhism tirelessly advocates the virtues of non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion in all human pursuits. Greed breeds sorrow and unhealthy consequences. Contentment (*santuṭṭhi*) is a much praised morality in Buddhism.¹ The man leading a simple life with few wants and is easily satisfied is upheld and appreciated as an exemplary character.² Miserliness³ and wastefulness⁴ are equally deplored in Buddhism as two degenerate extremes.

The *Sigalovāda Sutta* (The Layperson's Code of Discipline) asks a householder to accumulate wealth in a way similar to the one adopted by a bee in collecting honey from a flower. Like a bee gathering honey to turn it into sweet honey without harming either the fragrance or the beauty of the flower.⁵ Similarly, a human being is required to make appropriate use of nature so that the continuity of a beneficial pattern of man-nature relationship is not threatened. Accordingly, in the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha taught to his disciples that they should not cause inconvenience to any when they were coming into the village for alms begging as following:

¹ DhP. v204.

² A. IV. 2, 220, 229.

³ DhP.A. I. 20 ff.

⁴ DhP.A. III. 129ff.

⁵ D. III. 188.

"Yathā' pi bhamaro purrham, vaṇṇagandham aheṭṭhayamm

Paleti rasamādāya, evaṃ gāme muni care."

"As a bee without harming the flower, its colour or scent, flies away, collecting only the honey, even so should the sage wander in the village."¹

Through above discussions, Buddhism gives us the way to control our desires, reduce demands by observing morality to protect our environment. It would seem obvious that a greater sense of proportion is needed between things spiritual and material, especially in our modern consumer society where a closer contact with nature may be regarded as an important foundation for the pursuit of spiritual development. A better sense of proportion and a withdrawal from exaggerated material needs should be regarded as essential ingredients to eco-development. The earth will never be able to satisfy a man's apparently insatiable longing for material things. Spiritual development, on the other hand, can serve both as an aim and as a means for achieving a greater sense of proportion in development.

The Buddhist emphasis on moral life is yet another instrument to preserve ecological balance. For the Buddha, the perfect man is one who "abstains from injury to seed life and plant life. Even the branch of a tree giving us shelter should not be destroyed."²

Escalating use of the world's natural resources, without sufficient recycling, both means that more and more land is used for dumping "rubbish," and future generations will have fewer resources. In the case

¹ Dh. v.49.

² S. II. 23, 47.

of fossil fuels, over-use also contributes to global warming. Buddhist values that seem relevant to this issue include those of contentment and the second lay precept, against “taking what is not given.”¹ While this directly relates to theft and cheating, one can also see its spirit as implying “not taking more than is one’s due” from the world’s pool of natural resources.

Perhaps a better way of establishing a basis for ecology in Buddhism is to emphasize the ecological aspects of the morality which are undeniably a central element in Buddhist teachings. Virtues such as loving-kindness, compassion, non-violence, and wisdom promote ecological concern by their very nature. Even though such virtues were not originally taught for this reason, they do tend to promote an outlook and a way of life that has much in common with the aims of the ecology movement. If so, it may be claimed that ecological concern is an implicit part of Buddhism’s teachings and that by adhering to its ethical injunctions a person simultaneously lives in harmony with the environment.

Buddhism commends frugality as a virtue in its own right. Once Ānanda explained to King *Udena* the thrifty economic use of robes by the monks in the following order. When new robes are received the old robes are used as coverlets, the old coverlets as mattress covers, the old mattress covers as rugs, the old rugs as dusters, and the old tattered dusters are kneaded with clay and used to repair cracked floors and walls.² Thus nothing usable is wasted. Those who waste is derided as

¹ Vin. III. 46.

² Vin. II. 291.

“wood-apple eaters”.¹ A man shakes the branch of a wood-apple tree and all the fruits, ripe as well as unripe, fall. The man would collect only what he wants and walk away leaving the rest to rot. Such a wasteful attitude is certainly deplored in Buddhism as not only anti-social but criminal. The excessive exploitation of nature as is done today would certainly be condemned by Buddhism in the strongest possible terms. As above mentioned, it is a striking example of “recycling”. Therefore, recycling and frugality are forms of reducing demands in order to protect natural resources.

VI. 3. 2. Universal Responsibility

How does Buddhism compare with contemporary ecological movements such as ‘deep ecology’ and ‘ecofeminism’? Although they have points in common, it is unlikely that the Buddhist perspective would coincide entirely with either of these. In contrast to deep ecology’s goal of ‘self-identification’, Buddhism does not teach or encourage identification with nature. It acknowledges the principle of dependent origination that certain causes lead to certain consequences and that everything that exists is subject to this law.² But this is not to claim there that exists a connection between all things in the sense in which this is understood in deep ecology. From that we fully understand above connection and have responsibility for environment.

An issue relevant to the focus of this part is that of universal responsibility. Environmental damage is generally the aggregate result of the actions of many people. We are all directly responsible for our own individual input into this process, and can certainly be seen as morally

¹ A. IV. 283.

² See ‘*Paticca-samuppada-vibhaṅga Sutta*’ (Analysis of Dependent Co-arising). (S. II. 2).

accountable for such actions that we now know are damaging in their effects. Is that all we are responsible for? No. Our actions may be influenced by the bad example of others, and in turn set a bad example for others. We are responsible for the example we set. Note how the *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda Sutta* sees shared effort in ethical action as uplifting society, and the story of Magha has him inspiring others to help improve the environment.¹ Moreover, we have reportedly stated that actions can be by body, speech or mind. If we tell someone else to do something we know is harmful to beings in the environment, or are one of a group of people who intend such harm, or speak in favour of such actions, or even mentally applaud them, even then we are generating negative *kamma*. An exception, though, would be if one is speaking of a case where greater benefit than harm comes—for example with fuel-hungry transport planes being needed to carry aid or help put out forest fires. Relevant here is the Dalai Lama’s idea of “Universal responsibility”:

“Our planet is our house, and we must keep it in order and take care of it if we are genuinely concerned about happiness for ourselves, our children, our friends, and other sentient beings who share this great house with us. If we think of the planet as our house or as our mother—Mother Earth— we automatically feel concern for our environment. Today, we understand that the future of humanity very much depends on our planet, and that the future of the planet very much depends on humanity. But this has not always been so clear to us. Until now, you see, Mother Earth has somehow tolerated sloppy house habits. But now human use, population, and technology have reached that certain stage where Mother Earth no longer accepts our presence with silence. In many ways, she is

¹ D. I. 26ff.

now telling us, “My children are behaving badly. “She is warning us that there are limits to our actions... Clearly this is a pivotal generation... Many of the earth’s habitats, animals, plants, insects, and even microorganisms that we know as rare may not be known at all by future generations. We have the capability and the responsibility. We must act before it is too late.’¹

So, each of us learn to work not just for his own self, family or nation, but for the benefit of all mankind. Universal responsibility is the real key to human survival. It is the best foundation for world peace, the equitable use of natural resources, and through concern for future generation, the proper care of environment. We will not survive if we go against nature. This blue planet of ours is the most delightful habitat we know. The Mother Nature is telling us to co-operate and its life is our life.²

VI. 4. Morality as the Basic Matter of an Ideal Society

Until now, writings on the traditional Buddhist understanding of the moral precepts could be said to be almost ubiquitous. However, serious consideration of their practical application to the crises of contemporary world is still in its infancy. Many philosophies and concepts fondly grasped by us in the past sometimes lose favour in the need to search for practical and realistic viewpoints that enable us to find better solutions to our social problems of the present day. Everyday worldly situations are all potential opportunities for assessing how the moral precepts can be practically applied. It is to that challenge that the

¹ *My Tibet, Text by H.H the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Photographs and Introduction by Galen Rowel*, pp. 79-80.

² Dalai Lama XIV, *The Global Community and the Need for Universal Responsibility*, p. 13.

researcher would like to direct the present discussion. Focusing on the context of contemporary society, the researcher would like to reexamine the meaning and application of the Moral Precepts as the basic matter of an ideal society.

VI. 4. 1. The Moral Life towards Conflicts and War

As we have known, the world cannot have peace until men and nations renounce selfish desires, give up racial arrogance, and eradicate egoistical lust for possession and power. Wealth cannot secure happiness. Religion alone can effect the necessary to change heart and to bring about the only real disarmament, of the mind. All religions teach people not to evil;¹ but unfortunately this important concept is conveniently ignored. Today, with modern armaments, man can kill millions within one second, that is, more than primitive tribes did in a century. Very unfortunately some people in certain countries bring religious labels, slogans and banners into their battlefields. They do not know that they are disgracing the good name of religion. We can happily say that for the last 2,500 years there has never been any serious discord or conflict created by Buddhists that led to war in the name of this religion. This is a result of the dynamic character of the moral life.

The Lord Buddha has pointed out to us that sense desires are the root-causes of quarrels, conflict, contentions, disputes, terrorists and wars. And another root cause of quarrels and disputes is this distinction between oneself and others, considering them to be equal, or superior or inferior to oneself. The Buddha taught:

¹ Dhp. vv116, 183.

“... with sense desires as cause, with sense desires as motives, kings are fighting with kings, *khattiyā* are fighting with *khattiyā*, *brāhmanas* are fighting with *brāhmanas*, householders are fighting with householders, mother is fighting with son, son is fighting with mother, father is fighting with brother, brother is fighting with sister, sister is fighting with brother, friend is fighting with friend. When they engage themselves in fighting, in quarrels, in disputes, they attack each other with hands, they attack each other with stones, they attack each other with sticks, and they attack each other with swords. Thus they are going to death.”¹

And again, in the same Sutta, the Buddha continues:

“... having taken sword and shield, having girded on bow and quiver, they leap on to the newly daubed ramparts, and arrows are hurled and knives are hurled and swords are flashing. Those who wound with arrows and wound with knives and pour boiling cow-dung- over them and crush them with the (falling) portcullis and decapitate them with their swords, these suffer dying then and pain like unto dying.

... they behave wrongly in body, they behave wrongly in speech, they behave wrongly in thought. These, having behaved wrongly in body, in speech, in thought, at the breaking up of the body after dying, arise in a sorrowful state, a bad bourn, the abyss, *Niraya Hell*. This, monks, is a peril in pleasures of the senses that is of the future, a stem of ill, having pleasures of the senses as the cause, having pleasures of the senses as the

¹ M. I. 86.

provenance, being a consequence of pleasures of the senses, the very cause of pleasures of the senses...”¹

Therefore, through above quotations, the Lord Buddha stated that this is a peril in the pleasures of the senses ... the very cause of pleasures of the senses.

In the light of early Buddhism, our enemies are in fact not men. Our enemies are hatred, greed and ignorance. Moral value tries to resolve the source of conflict; it also tries to transform the opponent by persuading them to the non-violent vision and to win them over to the side of the conflict. Moral value faces the evil doer with kindness and sympathy but also with determination with a view to transforming both sides so that in the end there will not be a winner or a loser but both will be transformed.

In Buddhism, conflict which originates from fancy perception is considered as a conditioned and unwholesome thing and it needs to be transformed. In his 45 years of preaching the *Dhamma*, the Buddha declared explicitly only two things: suffering and the cessation of it: “Formerly I, monks, as well as now, lay down simply anguish and the stopping of anguish.”²

Actually the true source of peace is not found in politics or in economics but in heightened ethical conduct and regard for religious faith. Similarly, the true cause of war is not in politics or economics but solely in the decline of ethical practices and in the derision of religious faith. The source of peace exists within our innate the Buddha-nature; the source of war, likewise, is nothing more than avarice and anger in the

¹ M. I. 84ff.

² M. I. 140.

human heart and mind. Religion nurtures inner peace in the minds of individuals and shows the path to eradicate the source of war from the mind.¹ And the Lord Buddha lays stress that there is no contending with anyone in the world for a wise person who is not obsessed by any perceptions:

“Whatever is the origin, monk, of the number of obsessions and perceptions which assail a man, if there is nothing to rejoice at, to welcome, to catch hold of, this is itself an end of a propensity to attachment, this is itself an end of a propensity to repugnance, this is itself an end of a propensity to views, this is itself an end of a propensity to perplexity, this is itself an end of a propensity to pride, this is itself an end of a propensity to ignorance, this is itself an end of taking of the stick, of talking of a weapon, of quarrelling, contending, disputing, accusation, slander, lying speech. In these ways, these evil unskilled states are stopped without remainder.”²

Such an attitude will put an end to quarrels, disputes, wars and all demerit things. More than ever before, we bear deep in mind the following teachings of the Great Teacher Lord Buddha: “Victory breeds hatred. The defeated live in pain. Happily the peaceful live, giving up victory and defeat”.³ That is why the Buddha never quarrels with others:

“... *Nāham bhikkhave lokena vivadāmi. loko va mayā vivadati.*
na bhikkhave Dhammavādi kenaci lokasmim vivadati ...”⁴

¹ Yumiko Miyazaki, *Tranquil is this Realm of Mine*, p. 46.

² M. I. 109-110.

³ Dhp. v201.

⁴ S. III. 138.

“I quarrel not with the world, brethren. It is the world that quarrels with me. No preacher of the Norm, brethren, quarrels with anyone in the world.”¹

For Buddhism, the roots of all unwholesome actions-greed, hatred and delusion are seen as the root of human conflict, terrorism and war. When gripped by any of them, a person may think “I have power and I want power”, so as to persecute others. Conflict, terrorism and war often arise from attachment to material things: pleasures, property, territory, wealth, economic dominance, or political superiority. The Buddha says that sense-pleasures lead one to desire for more sense-pleasures, which leads one to conflict between all kinds of people, including rulers, and thus quarreling and war. So conflict arises among living creatures, the sense of possession is the cause. Apart from actual greed, hatred and delusion, material deprivation is seen as a key source of conflict, terrorism and war.

VI. 4. 2. Killing and Respect for Life

The Lord Buddha has a respect for life, any life, even the life of an insect and of a plant. He sets Himself as example, not to throw remaining food on green vegetation or in the water where there are small insects.² He advises His disciples not to kill living beings to offer food to Him and to His disciples, because in doing so, they store up much demerit.

He makes it very clear that, killing living beings will lead to hell, to the animal kingdom and to the world of the petas. And the lightest evil result to be obtained is to be born as human being, but with very short

¹ S. III. 138.

² M. I. 13.

life. Moreover, killing living beings will bring up fear and hatred in the present, in the future, and pain and suffering in mind.¹

So the Lord Buddha advises us not to kill, because all sentient beings tremble at the stick, to all life is dear.² The first precept to be undertaken by a layman is this respect for life, this refrain from killing living beings. And a *brahmana* worthy of his name, a sage should be one that practises this respect for life, wholly and completely.

The Buddha makes it clear that, killing beings will not only bring up fear and hatred in the present and in the future, but also make pain and suffering in mind. Moreover, killing beings will lead to the hell, to the world of ghost, and to the animal kingdom. He taught: “Monks, taking life, when pursuer, practised, increased, brings one to the hell, to an animal’s womb, to the *Peta* realm; what is the very trifling result of taking life is the shortening of a man’s life.”³

Even anybody who kills living beings for the Lord Buddha’s sake or for the sake of the Lord Buddha’s disciples, in this case, there are five ways he stores up much demerit. As in the *Jivakasutta*, the Lord Buddha declared:

“Jīvaka, he who kills a living creature on purpose for a *Tathāgata* or a *Tathāgata*’s disciple stores up much demerit in five ways: In that, when he speaks thus: ‘Go and fetch such and such a living creature,’ in this first way he stores up much demerit. In that, while this living creature is being fetched it experiences pain and distress because of the affliction to its throat-in this second way he stores

¹ M. III. 165-166, 203-4.

² Dh. v.129.

³ A. IV. 169.

up much demerit. In that, when he speaks thus: ‘Go and kill that living creature’-in this third way he stores up much demerit. In that, while this living creature is being killed it experiences pain and distress, in this fourth way he stores up much demerit. In that, if he proffers to a *Tathāgata* or a *Tathāgata*’s disciple what is not allowable, in this fifth way he stores up much demerit.”¹

The Buddha lays stress that the lightest evil result of killing living beings is to be born as human being but with very short life.²He added that due to killing living beings, fear and hatred arise in the present, fear and hatred will arise in the future, thereby bringing up pain and suffering in mind. Therefore, if we refrain from killing living beings, fear and hatred do not arise in the present, will not arise in the future, there by not bringing up pain and suffering in mind. Those who refrain from killing living beings will calm down this fear and hatred.³

We are told in *Aṅgutara Nikāya*, the Buddha taught to the ariyan disciple thinks as follows:

“Up to the end of his life, the *Arahanta* refrains from killing living beings, gives up killing, lays aside stick, lays aside sword, has shame, endowed with loving kindness, living with consideration toward the happiness of all living beings and of all creatures. Today, this night and this day, I also refrain from killing living beings, give up killing, lay aside stick, lay aside sword, have shame, endowed with loving kindness, living with consideration toward the happiness of all living beings and of all creatures, In

¹ M. II. 371.

² A. IV. 247.

³ A. V. 183.

this matter, I follow the example of the *Arahanta*. I shall observe the day of the *uposatha*.”¹

There are five qualities to establish in oneself before accusing another of wrong doing. It is also the characteristic of an ascetic. The Buddha teaches:

“There are the five qualities, Upāli, of which a *bhikkhu* about to warn another should consider before he does so, whether they are within himself or not. ‘When, Lord, a *bhikkhu* who takes upon himself to warn another, is about to do so, how many qualities should he call up (establish) within himself before he does so?’.

A *bhikkhu*, Upāli, who is about to warn another, should call up within himself five qualities before he does so, (saying to himself): ‘At that right time will I speak, and not in harshness. To profit will I speak, and not in harshness. To profit will I speak, and not senselessly. In kindly spirit will I speak, and not in anger.’”²

A Buddhist monk is advised to enduce revilement (*akkosa*), physical injury (*vadha*), and imprisonment without any hatred (*aduṭṭha*).³ As in the story in *Samyutta Nikāya* is the dialogue between the Lord Buddha and Venerable Puṇṇa that is an evidence of non killing as a characteristic of a monk.

The story is that having instructed Puṇṇa, the Buddha asked where he would go, Puṇṇa answered that he would go to a district called *Sunāparānta* to spread the *Dhamma* among the people. The Buddha reminded him that the people there were fierce and harsh and might abuse

¹ A. IV. 249.

² Cv. IX. 5. 3.

³ Dh. v.399.

him by words. Puṇṇa replied that he would then consider the people to be very good that they do not smite him a blow with their hands. The Buddha countered that they might also strike him with their hands. Puṇṇa said he would, then, think that the people very good as they do not use weapons. But if they were to strike him with weapons he would think they were very good as they did not take his life. Even if they killed him, he would still think that they very good as they brought him release from his body without much difficulty.¹

In the *Kassapa-Sīhanāda*, the Lord Gautama states that when a monk has cultivated a loving mind and destroyed all the harmful influences (*āsava*) he can deservedly be called a ‘wanderer’ (*Samaṇa*) or a *Brahmin* (*Brāhmaṇa*).² Here Gautama takes loving kindness as the religious criteria necessary for an individual to be deservedly called a wanderer or *Brahmin* in the ultimate sense.

An ascetic who is so-called a great wisdom because he has understanding and great wisdom does not will (*ceteti*) for the harm of himself, of others, or of both. So willing, he wills for the welfare of himself, of others, of both, and of the whole world. Thus, monk, one has understanding and great wisdom.³

VI. 4. 3. Morality and Happiness

Happiness plays a central role in the Buddhist ethical system. For conduciveness to happiness is a principal criterion used in Buddhism to determine what is right or wrong. There are many philosophers who raise objections against basing morality on happiness on the ground that

¹ S. IV. 34-36.

² D. I. 235.

³ A. II. 179.

happiness is an extremely indeterminate concept. It is argued that statements about what constitutes happiness themselves turn out to be evaluative statements and that therefore the use of happiness as a criterion turns out to be a circular procedure. It is widely held that judgments regarding what constitutes happiness are themselves subjective, relativistic, attitudinal, emotive or prescriptive as much as moral judgments are. Buddhism appears to have taken a different position on this issue. Buddhism holds that people can be mistaken in their judgments about what constitutes happiness. It was the Buddha's position that most unenlightened ordinary beings are deluded in thinking that the life of sense pleasures constitutes happiness. The Buddha says that there is disagreement between the persons having the noble insight and others who do not have it on what constitutes happiness.¹

According to Buddhism, *avijjā*, (ignorance) is inability to understand what *dukkha* really is. One who mistakes the mill for *dukkha* or vice versa is said to suffer from perverted perception, perverted views and perverted mind.² *Dukkha*, according to Buddhism, is said to be one of the three fundamental characteristics of *saṃsāric* existence. It is the persistence of a certain psychological attitude towards the impermanent things of the world that, according to Buddhism, leads to *dukkha*. When the disturbing passions and the ceaseless thirst for the possession and enjoyment of impermanent things is completely gotten rid of, there occurs the happiness which Buddhism called the happiness of *nibbāna*. The Buddha's attempt was to bring a change in the human attitude which leads to *dukkha* stemming from contact with the impermanent things of

¹ S. IV. 127.

² A. II. 52.

the world. *Dukkha* is causal conditioned. The elimination of the causes of *dukkha* leads to the cessation of it. The psychological factors which cause unhappiness in this life, are precisely the factors that bring about a continued series of existence in the world. The Buddhist view is that *samsāric* existence brings along with it a whole mass of *dukkha*, which in the formulation of the four noble truths is described as follows: "Birth is *dukkha*, decay is *dukkha*, sickness is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*, association with those that one does not like is *dukkha*, separation from the beloved is *dukkha*, in brief the five aggregates of grasping are *dukkha*."¹

According to Buddhism, the life of sense pleasures consists of three aspects, all of which, a realistic assessment of human experience should not fail to take into account. Objects of sense produce delight (*assāda*). But they also have harmful consequences (*ādinava*). Pleasures at the level of sensuality can be transcended and a higher level of happiness can be attained. This is called *nissaraṇa* or freedom from the harmful consequences of the lower pleasures. With reference to the common pleasures of sense the Buddha says that they consist of little delight and much unhappiness and anxiety (*appassādā kāmā ... bahudukkhā bahūpāyāsa ādinavo ettha bhiyyo*.)² Unenlightened beings are said to suffer constantly from psychological distress, which is even more painful than physical sickness. It is, according to the Buddha, when a person attains *nibbāna*, that he or she becomes perfectly happy. The Buddha does not agree with the common assumption that happiness can be found only in sensuous enjoyment. Speaking from his experience of the higher states of mental culture, the Buddha affirms that in the states of

¹ S. V. 421.

² M. I. 132.

consciousness is attained in the highest states of *jhāna*. There is the possibility of experiencing far superior levels of happiness.¹

Although sensuous things can be productive of enjoyment, viewed from a wider perspective and taking into consideration their long range consequences, they are viewed as undesirable. The Buddha believes that a comprehensive understanding of the nature of sense pleasures and the realisation of a happiness which transcends the meager happiness which is found in sensuous delight makes an enlightened person to take a different view of the nature of sense pleasures. From the enlightened perspective of the Buddha it is claimed that the enjoyment of the pleasures of a sensuous kind is comparable to the infant's play with dirt.²

The relevance of happiness or well being to moral evaluation is clearly recognised in Buddhism. But the Buddhist position regarding what constitutes real happiness is based on its views about the nature of man and the human predicament. Consequently, although any secular morality may appeal to hedonic criteria for the moral justification of action, disagreement between the Buddhist position and the secular position is likely to occur on substantive moral issues due to the disparity that may exist regarding questions about the nature of happiness.

The Buddhist attempt can be seen as one of integrating an ideal of individual salvation with the concept of moral living. One who aspires for the goal of *nibbāna* is viewed as a person who leaves all commitments to society and leads a life of solitude. He is not one who mingles with society and uses his energy and ability to improve society. In brief, the accusation is that Buddhism preaches some path of enlightened self

¹ S. IV. 225f.

² A. V. 203.

interest and thereby falls short of a universally acceptable moral ideal. It is to be admitted that in Buddhism there is constant emphasis on the attainment of the individual's well-being or happiness. However, in most instances where moral concepts like *kusala* are explained in terms of happiness or wellbeing the Buddha's considerations are universalistic.

The Buddha speaks of four types of persons:

(1) Persons who engage neither in the pursuit of their own well-being nor in the pursuit of the well-being of others.

(2) Persons who are engaged in the pursuit of the wellbeing of others, but not in the pursuit of the wellbeing of themselves.

(3) Persons who are engaged in the pursuit of the wellbeing of themselves, but not in the pursuit of the well-being of others.

(4) Persons who are engaged in the pursuit of the wellbeing of themselves as well as that of others.¹

The Buddha's evaluation of the four types of persons is important in determining the Buddhist stand on egoism and altruism. He considers the first type of person as the most inferior. What may appear to be puzzling is the Buddha's evaluation that the second type of person is inferior to the third. Understandably, the fourth is judged to be the best. Why is it that the third type of person judged to be better than the second? The *Dhammapada* too, one of the principal texts presenting Buddhist moral ideas, maintains: "One should not abandon the wellbeing of oneself for the well-being of another."² Can this statement be correctly interpreted as a valuing self-interest more than altruism? The answer to

¹ A. II. 95.

² Dhp. v166.

this can be found in the *Sallekha Sutra* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. Here, addressing a person called Cunda, the Buddha says: "It is not possible, Cunda for him who is stuck in the mud to pull out another who is stuck in the mud. But Cunda, it is possible for one who is himself not stuck in the mud to pull out another who is stuck in the mud."¹

The important message of the Buddha contained in this statement is that those who suffer from moral depravity, and who are not at peace with themselves are incapable of serving society in any useful or meaningful manner. The most sublime and exalted form of service to society can be rendered only by people who have perfected their understanding and moral character. From the Buddhist point of view the Buddha and his disciples who attained moral perfection are such persons. According to Buddhism, the most effective manner in which one can serve society is by harmonizing the goal of one's personal spiritual life with social action. One's own happiness depends on the degree to which one diligently cultivates one's own inner purity. A wise man does not intend to harm himself, others or both; he intends his own good, the good of others, the good of both and the good of the entire universe.² The welfare of oneself and the welfare of others depend equally on what kind of person one is. If one is greedy, envious, selfish, and deluded, one's behaviour will do no good either to oneself or to the rest of humanity. The Buddha says: "Monks whether one wants to see that one's own good or the good of others, or the good of both should be brought about it is necessary to cultivate one's character diligently."³

¹ M. I. 45.

² A. II. 179.

³ S. II. 29.

“Monks, one who takes care of oneself takes care of others, and one who takes care of others takes care of oneself. How monks, is it that one who takes care of oneself takes care of others? It is by moral training, moral culture, and moral development. And how, monks, one who takes care of others takes care of oneself. It is by forbearance, by harmlessness, by good will and compassion.”¹

The point made here is that a person who is cultivating himself spiritually is by that very reason taking care of others. For spiritual cultivation involves elimination of greed, hatred and delusion and all other unwholesome states of mind which find expression in man's social behaviour, through acts such as violence, stealing, unchastity, false speech etc. Spiritual cultivation involves not only self-restraint and abstention from evil but also positive action which finds expression through compassionate deeds. This explains why, contrary to the opinion expressed by some critics that Buddhism is an escapist ideal, a self centred attempt for individual salvation, Buddhism became a missionary religion that worked with great zeal in establishing people in the path of righteousness. This was considered to be the major role of the Buddhist monk and especially of the Buddhist saint. It is with this purpose in mind that the practice of begging meals from house to house was adopted by the Buddhist spiritual community.

The Buddha considered morally and spiritually elevated beings to be a necessary component of society as they are the most qualified to give moral direction to society. Although the Buddha and the Buddhist saints renounced the material bonds with society, they did not abandon society. The perfected person is expected to live in society, like the lotus flower

¹ S. II. 169.

which grows in the muddy water and rises and stays untainted above the level of the muddy water.

Buddhism as a moral teaching insists that there must be a firm and secure moral foundation for all social action, including the regular performance of one's allotted social role under a given system of social organisation. People need to resolve their inner conflicts in order to live in peace with society. When an increasingly larger number of people having no mental composure, no moral discipline, take up positions that require the fulfillment of certain social roles that effect the community at large, they produce more harm than good. Even those who are overtly committed to social action are in need of some basic understanding of their own moral nature.

VI. 4. 4. Moral Life Specially Applicable to the Lay Buddhists

The Buddhist community is traditionally regarded as consisting of all the disciples of the Buddha who express confidence in the Buddha, his teaching (*Dhamma*) and the spiritual community (*Saṅgha*) established by the Buddha. The identity of the Buddhist lay person in the Buddhist community is established through the express pronouncement by him or her of the undertaking that he or she takes the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Saṅgha* as the refuge. Lay persons are referred to in the canonical tradition as householders who enjoy the pleasures of sense (*gihi kāma bhogino*). Buddhism considers the lay person as one leading a household family life, engaged in activity productive of material pleasures and comforts. The *Pāli* canonical scriptures contain many moral teachings which are specially directed to this lay Buddhist community. It was expressly admitted that the perfect life of *brahmacariya* is difficult to be lived by the lay person. However, the possibility of higher spiritual

attainments by lay persons was not denied. Although the Buddha did not attempt to regulate all aspects of life in lay society, he expounded a very valuable moral teaching in the interests of the lay community. He taught a basic morality which helps the lay person to lead a satisfactory, contented, useful and harmonious community life.

The Buddha's moral teachings for the lay community were determined to a large extent by the world view consisting of the *kamma* and rebirth doctrines. However, the doctrine of *kamma* has not resulted in preoccupation with life after death. Buddhism repeatedly emphasizes that its ethical teachings are for the conquest of this world as well as the world hereafter (*ihalokavijayāya, paralokavijayāya*). One needs to be victorious in this world as well as the next world. As far as the well-being of the lay person in this immediate life is concerned Buddhism pays much attention to the material welfare as well. Even the doctrine of *kamma* taught that a considerable portion of actions performed by the individual produce results in this immediate life itself (*diṭṭhadhammavedaniya*).

The layman is also considered to be capable of attaining the highest goal of Buddhism if he cultivates the threefold training or the eightfold path to its fullest perfection. But household life and its responsibilities are considered as an encumbrance to fulfil the requirements of the higher spiritual life. Therefore, depending on the aims and interests of the lay person who does not intend to give up the pleasures of sense altogether, the Buddha gave valuable moral guidance to make that kind of life a success to the higher stages of spiritual training. If the lay person's life is not properly guided, Buddhism maintained that there is a possibility of

regression into states of existence from which liberation would be very difficult.¹

The Buddhist teaching takes into account two main aspects of the life of the lay community: (1) the economic life; (2) the spiritual or moral life. Buddhist moral teachings are intended to strike a good balance between these two aspects. The greatest objection of Buddhism is against disregarding the moral aspect of life in favour of economic or material considerations. Moral values are considered in the Buddha's teaching as overriding values. They should not be subservient to any other values, economic, political or aesthetic. Moral value is considered in Buddhism as the supreme value of all human beings. It is not to be sacrificed in the interests of any other value.

The sense of real characteristic of the Buddhist teaching does not encourage people to disregard entirely the economic and material aspects of human living. Buddhism does not praise poverty, although it praises contentment and detachment towards wealth. Buddhism views poverty as an evil not only because people can suffer as individuals in poverty, but also because poverty brings about social instability and the general deterioration of moral standards of a society. It could bring about social upheavals, rebellions, catastrophic wars and, even eventually, the total destruction of human civilization).²

The *Pāli* canon refers to a person called Dighajinu who requests the Buddha:

¹ A. III. 353.

² The *Cakavattisihanāda Sutta* (D. III.) and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* (D. I.) contain the Buddha's teachings that poverty could be one of the major causes of moral degeneration.

“Lord, we householders are immersed in the round of pleasure; we are cumbered with bed-mate and sons; we delight in the muslins from Benares and in sandalwood; we deck ourselves with flowers, with garlands and cosmetics; we enjoy the use of both silver and gold. Lord, to such as us, let the Exalted One also teach *Dhamma*, teach the things which will be conducive to our advantage and happiness here on earth and to our advantage and happiness in the world to come.”¹

In response to this request, the Buddha speaks of four achievements which are conducive to happiness in this life: (1) *Uṭṭhānasampadā* (achievement in effort); (2) *Ārakkhasampadā* (achievement in variness); (3) *Kalyānamittatā* (having noble friends) and (4) *Samajivikatā* (balanced living).² Explaining *Uṭṭhānasampadā*, the Buddha says that it is the honest effort needed to earn one's living. One must be energetic and not given to laziness. By whatever occupation one earns one's living one must be energetic, tireless, of an inquiring turn of mind and capable of organising and carrying out one's work systematically and efficiently. Secondly, one should see that the wealth one has earned is duly protected (*ārakkhasampadā*). The third requirement refers to good company (*kalyānamittatā*). The human tendency is to imitate, and to be influenced by others around oneself. So the Buddha recommends that wherever a householder dwells he should associate with people who are virtuous, who are faithful, charitable and wise. One should attempt to emulate the character of noble friends. Fourthly, speaking of the balanced life (*samajivikatā*), the Buddha

¹ A. IV. 280.

² A. IV. 281.

recommends that one should neither be unduly extravagant nor unduly miserly in one's living. A proper balance in one's handling of the economic aspect of life is very important for satisfactory living. One should handle one's earnings in such a way that one's expenditure does not exceed one's income.

The Buddha points out four channels through which amassed wealth could flow away without being put into proper use: (1) looseness with women, (2) addiction to intoxicating drinks, (3) gambling and (4) companionship with evil minded people. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* gives a detailed analysis of the types of friends that one might encounter, distinguishing between those who are noble and vicious.¹ The Buddha recommended that a lay person should avoid these forms of conduct. Such conduct is considered in Buddhism to be ruinous to one's material as well as spiritual welfare.

Speaking of the spiritual aspect of a person's life which is especially important in promoting the welfare of one's life hereafter, the Buddha speaks of four principle achievements (1) *Saddhāsampadā* (faith in the spiritual path of the Buddha); (2) *Sīlasampadā* (cultivation of good practices like abstention from the five basic evils of a lay person's life, killing, stealing, unchastity, lying and the taking of intoxicating drinks; (3) *Cāgasampadā* (charitable action) which involves living with a mind freed from the stain of avarice and a person's readiness to share one's earnings with others; (4) *Paññāsampadā*, living wisely, cultivating detachment, reflecting the transient and fluxional nature of everything.²

¹ D. III. 184f.

² A. IV. 283f.

The Buddha speaks of four kinds of happiness that a lay person can attain. They are (1) the happiness of possessing abundant wealth (*atthisukha*), (2) the happiness of enjoying one's wealth making oneself, one's family, and one's friends and relatives happy (*bhogasukha*), (3) the happiness of not being in debt (*ananasukha*) and (4) the happiness of living a righteous life (*anavajjasukha*).¹ Out of these four types of happiness the last one is said to be the most important. All material wealth should be earned by righteous means, without indulging in wrong means of livelihood (*micchājīva*), without exploiting others to one's own personal advantage, or causing pain and suffering to other sentient beings. One who does not have the vision to improve oneself in material wealth nor to improve oneself morally is compared to a totally blind person, while one who has the vision to produce only material wealth disregarding the moral basis of one's economic life is compared to a single eyed person. One who is comparable to the person having unimpaired vision in both eyes is one who is capable of improving oneself both materially and morally.²

The *Sigālovāda Sutta* and the *Parābhava Sutta* contain detailed expositions of moral virtues that the lay person ought to cultivate and evil ways of living he ought to avoid both in his own interest and in the interest of the society. In the former is given an important social ethic which appears to have universal validity, consisting of the mutual performance of duties. It shows how people's rights are to be safeguarded by the mutual performance of duties. The moral prescriptions in this *sutta* concern the duty bound relationships between parents and children,

¹ A. II. 69.

² A. I. 128-129.

husbands and wives, teachers and pupils, lay community and the spiritual community. The emphasis here is on one's obligations. In fact Buddhism lacks an equivalent for the term "right" when used in the sense of a claim. Probably, Buddhism approached the problem of social injustice by emphasizing people's mutual duties instead of emphasizing "rights" in the sense of claims, due to its insistence on a philosophy of detachment and agelessness.

The family is considered in Buddhism as a social unit within which many Buddhist values can be put into practice, thereby achieving a considerable degree of spiritual progress. The institution of the family provides the lay person with the opportunity of satisfying one of the strongest of the urges for sensuous gratification within a social setting which promotes a responsible and dutiful relationship of mutual love and respect. The ideal recommended for lay persons in Buddhism in the sphere of sexual morality is the satisfaction of the sexual urge in a wholesome and lasting relationship between persons of the opposite sexes brought together by mutual love. Parental love and care which grows naturally within the family unit is to be consciously cultivated. Sexual relationship should not be degraded into a self centred pursuit of pleasure seeking. Parental care and love that children receive within the family is considered to be extremely important for the moral and psychological development of children. Buddhism considers parents to be worthy of respect. Caring for one's old and disabled parents is an important virtue for the children. The parents ought to be responsible for the moral and material well-being of the children in their formative years of growth. The parent-child relationship recommended in Buddhism is meant to promote a mutual sense of security to both parents and children. It is a

similar relationship of mutuality of respect in the performance of certain essential duties that is expected in Buddhism between teachers and pupils.

There is evidence that Buddhism attempted to have a distinct moral impact on society through a critique of existing social and political institutions. The *Brahmanical* value system was rejected by the Buddha by denying that the worth of a human being depends on his birth or caste. Buddhism maintained that the greatest man is one who is endowed with knowledge and ethical conduct (*vijjācaraṇasampanno so seṭṭhodevamānuse*).¹

The *Brahmanical* myth of creation which led to the belief that caste distinctions are divinely ordained is replaced in Buddhism with its evolutionary account of the world, society and social institutions. In presenting this evolutionary account, Buddhism attempts to uphold its ethical stand by showing that attachment or craving is the cause of regression from an excellent to a baser condition of human life. Buddhism maintains that the moral development of those exercising the highest authority in society such as the rulers (kings in the context of the widely prevalent monarchical order of society in which the Buddha preached) and administrators, is a prime requirement for a stable, harmonious and just society. When those exercising authority at the higher levels of society are morally corrupt, it affects the entire moral fabric society Buddhism maintains that immorality of the rulers can ultimately affect even the regularities of nature.² Rulers are called upon to abide by the ten virtues of rulership (*dasarājadhamma*) which are derived

¹ D. I. 199.

² A. II. 74f.

from the moral ideals of Buddhism. The *dasarājadhamma* are enumerated as *dāna* (giving), *sīla* (moral practice), *pariccāga* (liberality), *ajjava* (straightness), *maddava* (gentleness), *tapa* (restraint), *akkodha* (non-anger), *avihimsā* (non-injury), *khanti* (forbearance) and *avirodhana* (non-opposition). Although the widely prevalent political order of the time in which the Buddha preached was monarchical in structure, Buddhism attempted to show that in its origin kingship was necessitated by a societal need to serve the interests of the people. According to the Buddhist myth of Genesis, which relates the origin and evolution of society, the first king is said to have been elected by the people (*mahājānena sammato*).¹ The ideal monarchical structure recommended in Buddhism is described under the Buddhist notion of the universal monarch (*cakkavattirāja*) who conquers territory not by the might of arms but by means of moral principles (*adaṇḍena asatthena dhammena abhivijaya*). A *cakkavatti* (q.v.) ruler is said to be guided by principles of justice (*Dhamma*). The five moral precepts (*pañcasīla*) are held to be the moral basis on which the conduct of a *cakkavatti* ruler is governed. The Buddhist ideal of a stable and harmonious lay society built on the foundations of a sound spiritual and moral culture and a just and equitable economic order is presented through the *cakkavatti* ideal of kingship.

VI. 5. Practical Application of the Five Precepts in Daily Life

Focusing with the lens of the five moral precepts as they have been traditionally taught in Buddhism, the researcher shows how they can be applied in new ways to the complexities of modern life. Each precept is examined individually to explore its relevance to the problems of the contemporary world.

¹ D. III. 80f.

VI. 5. 1. Moral Precepts and Livelihood

As a student of Buddhism, one may realize that each person practices *Dhamma* according to his ability and the opportunities that arise. A policeman on duty patrolling a crime-infested street or a soldier at a border outpost surveying suspicious movements inside hostile territory will experience totally different circumstances in spiritual endeavor from a monk sitting peacefully in his cloistered cell. Yet, what they do have in common is the opportunity to perform their duty. Each must, therefore, understand how the morality can be best practiced, given the situation he is in. All of us are bound up with certain duties, one way or another. Where policemen and soldiers are concerned, it would be naive to deny that their duties do include the possibility of killing.

It cannot be overemphasized, however, that destruction of life is, from a Buddhist standpoint, never justified. But in discussing the issue under question it is hardly appropriate not to distinguish between spiritual objectives and those of national security and administration. The principles and purposes on which the police and military institutions were established are as far apart from those on which Buddhist spiritual training was formulated as anything can be. Yet, Buddhism and those secular institutions do coexist now, as they did during the time of the Buddha. Important military chiefs and dignitaries are known to have been the Buddha's most devout followers. One does not, therefore, make the mistake of concluding that a person cannot be a Buddhist, or keep the Buddhist moral precepts for that matter, if he serves in the armed forces or police establishment. As has been said before there are more opportunities to practice the precepts than not to practice; this is true even where the above-mentioned professions are concerned.

It is not true to say that fishermen, farmers, or hunters cannot observe the first precept. Like people in other trades and occupations, they may not be able to observe all the precepts all the time or in all circumstances, given their family obligations and livelihood, but they can certainly practice them on special occasions, like holy days, or when they are not actually engaged in their professions. In fact, there may be more opportunities to practice than at first seems possible. We observe the precepts in accordance with our abilities, training by degrees until we are able to make the precepts part and parcel of our lives.

In the time of the Buddha, there were people engaged in occupations that involved killing, such as hunters or fishermen. For all of these people, the precepts were there to be practiced, and some were better able to do so than others. Each person has the opportunity to practice to the best of his or her abilities until they become more mature and are spiritually ready to give up occupations or trades that involve unwholesome *kamma*.

One difficulty for some people is the use of alcoholic drinks. Some feel discouraged from keeping the fifth precept because some of their friends drink or because they have business dealings with people who drink. Peer pressure and business objectives may be an obstacle to the observance of this precept, but this is by no means insurmountable. Most people are reasonable and do understand religious conscience. Sometimes, citing physicians' opinions may add weight to an excuse not to drink, but it is always best to be honest. In any case, a serious *Dhamma* practitioner should not allow trivial things like this to prevent him from trying to keep the precepts. There is always an opportunity to exert oneself if one is earnest in the practice.

VI. 5. 2. The Two Aspects of Precepts: Positive and Negative

If one carefully studies the foregoing discussion on the five precepts, one will see that, although the *Pāli* texts are worded in the negative “... abstaining from...”, there is the positive commitment “I undertake to observe the precept...” in all of them. Negative expressions do not necessarily represent negative or passive attitudes of mind. Of course, misunderstandings may result from misinterpretations of the Buddhist moral precepts (as they arise in regard to other *Pāli* technical terms like *nibbāna*, *dukkha*, *santutthi*, and *anatta*).

From the practical perspective, Buddhist moral precepts do contain both positive and negative aspects. However, from the psychological point of view it is important for practitioners to first recognize that which is bad or wrong and which should be abstained from. Abstention from wrong or evil deeds is the most significant step toward real development in spirituality. Strangely enough, it often appears that people are so preoccupied with doing good, they forget the most important duty of refraining from evil. That is why even though one scientific accomplishment after another is being achieved, crime rates are soaring unchecked, and thinking people begin to question the benefits of those accomplishments. In religious circles, devotees passionately try to accumulate more and more merits without ever pausing to reflect whether there are things that should be cleansed from their minds. As long as this negative aspect is not attended to on a practical level, spiritual progress will not come about. On the other hand, consider a society in which people were determined not to do evil and who abstained from that which is bad and wrong; the result of such a 'negative' practice would indeed be most welcome. Even *nibbāna* is often negatively described as "the

abandoning and destruction of desire and craving," and "the extinction of desire, the extinction of hatred, and the extinction of delusion," although it is positively the highest good.

Once wrong and evil deeds have been abandoned, it becomes more natural to do good. Since life means movement and action, any human expression which rejects evil is bound to be good and positive. If false speech is given up, whatever is spoken will naturally be truthful. Giving up of falsehood, which is a negative act, therefore constitutes in itself not only a negation, but a positive attitude and commitment. As the Buddha himself has admonished his followers:

"Abandoning false speech, one speaks the truth, becomes dependable, trustworthy, and reliable, and does not mislead the world. Abandoning malicious speech, one does not repeat there what has been heard here, nor does one repeat here what has been heard there, in order to sow the seeds of discord. One reconciles and unites those disunited and promotes closer bonds among friends. Unity is one's delight and joy, unity is one's love, it is the motive behind one's verbal expression. Abandoning harsh speech, one employs a speech which is blameless, pleasant, acceptable, heart-touching, civilized, and agreeable. Abandoning frivolous speech, one uses speech which is appropriate to the occasion, correct, purposeful, and in accordance with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. One utters words that are worthy, opportune, reasonable, meaningful, and straightforward."¹

¹ D. I. 11-12.

One important reason why the Buddhist moral precepts are phrased in negative terms is because the negative mode of expression tends to convey clearer and more specific injunctions which can be followed with ease. From a practical point of view, "Do not kill" carries stronger impact and a clearer definition than "Be kind to animals" and can be more conveniently practiced. From experience, however, we will see that anyone who consciously and constantly observes the first precept will naturally develop kindness toward people and animals. The second precept, which says, "Do not take what is not given," covers all forms of wrong livelihood, whether by deception, fraud, bribery or theft. By earnestly observing this precept, one will naturally take a positive step in earning one's livelihood in a righteous way. Through constant awareness and direct control of greed and avarice, which motivate wrong livelihood, one learns to develop generosity, altruism, and selfless service. These and other positive virtues result from the so-called negative actions of observing the moral precepts, clearly demonstrating how the precepts laid down by the Buddha can bear positive results, despite their wording and expression.

VI. 5. 3. Moral Dilemmas

The first of the five Buddhist moral precepts is based on the altruistic concept of universal love and compassion. It is not only a way of life and an exercise in personal morality, but also a part of the much larger scheme in spiritual discipline of which purity of body, speech, and mind are indispensable ingredients. As such it makes no exception in its practice, given the lofty ideal to which it is designed to lead. However, in real life situations, we may need a more practical attitude of mind to approach the problem in a more realistic manner.

First of all, we must recognize the fact that destruction of life is a negative act and the volition involved is an unwholesome one. By being honest with ourselves and by impartially contemplating the results that such acts bring, we can realize the wisdom of the first precept and consequently try to abstain from killing in any form. Perfection in the practice comes with spiritual maturity, and until perfection is attained, one needs to be aware of possible imperfections in the practice and try to improve oneself accordingly.

Because perfection in morality requires considerable effort and training, few can achieve it in the beginning. One need not, therefore, feel discouraged, but should learn how progress in the practice can be made through a systematized and graduated process of training. For instance, one may begin by resolving to abandon any killing that is not absolutely necessary. There are people who find pleasure in destroying other creatures, such as those who fish or hunt for sport. This type of killing is quite unnecessary and only demonstrates callousness. Others are engaged in sports which involve pain and suffering to animals and may even cost their lives, such as bull fights, cock fights, and fish fights- all senseless practices designed to satisfy sadistic impulses. One who wishes to train in the *Dhamma* should avoid having anything to do with this kind of entertainment. One may also resolve to show kindness to other people and animals in an objective and concrete way whenever it is possible to do so.¹ While circumstances may prevent absolute abstention from killing, this may help to refine the mind and develop more sensitivity to the suffering of other beings. Trying to look for an alternative livelihood that does not involve destruction of life is a further step to be considered.

¹ D. III. 64ff.

Keeping one's home free of pests or bugs by not creating conditions for their infestation helps to reduce the necessity for exterminating them. Ecologically, this is a very commendable practice, since the adverse effects of chemical insecticides on the environment are well known. Prevention is, indeed, better than cure even concerning bugs and beetles.¹ Cleanliness of habitat makes killing in such cases unnecessary. Even in the field of agriculture, insecticide-free farming is becoming increasingly popular and commercially competitive.² If people are so inclined and compassion prevails, killing can be greatly avoided even in the real life situations of an ordinary householder with full family obligations and concerns.³

In the unlikely event that killing is absolutely inevitable, it may be advisable to note the obvious distinction between killing out of cruelty and killing out of necessity.⁴ A person who goes out fishing for pleasure is cruel. While he may love children or make big donations for charitable institutions, as far as spirituality is concerned his mind is not refined enough to be sensitive to the pain and suffering of the poor creatures living in the river. A man who hunts for a living does so because it is necessary to maintain himself and his family. It would seem quite understandable that in the latter case the unwholesome effects would likely be much lighter than the former. The same thing is true in the case of killing for self defense.⁵

¹ Sunthorn Plamintr, *Getting to Know Buddhism*, pp. 133-154.

² D. I. 173.

³ A. II. 41.

⁴ Vin. III. 81.

⁵ Regarding the nature of Buddhist ethics, it is often stressed that it is one of intention, karma being the impulse or act of will behind an action: "It is will (*cetanā*), O monks, that I call *kamma*; having willed, one acts through body, speech or mind." (A. III. 415). For many monastic rules, there is no offense if the relevant action was 'unintentional' (*asañcicca*). Thus, there is no

VI. 5. 4. Stealing from the Rich to Feed the Poor

One of the distinct features of the Buddhist moral precepts is the universal character in which they may be practiced with benefit by all members of society. For instance, non-stealing (second precept) can be universally observed with desirable results, and the practice will help to promote coexistence, peace, and harmony in society. If this precept were reversed and stealing were made a moral principle, we can immediately see that there would be so much conflict and confusion that society would eventually cease to function. Thus, stealing can never be made a moral act, no matter how ideal and noble motivation.

VI. 5. 5. Extramarital Sex

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 our 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. The teachings quoted below, from the *Pāli* canon, illustrate some of these concerns:

"Monks, these two bright qualities guard the world. Which two? Conscience and concern. If these two bright qualities did not guard the world, there would be no recognition of 'mother' here, no recognition of 'mother's sister,' 'uncle's wife,' 'teacher's wife,' or 'wife of those who deserve respect.' The world would be immersed in promiscuity, like rams with goats, roosters with pigs, or dogs

offense in killing a human if it was "unintentional...for one not meaning death."(Vin. III. 78). Cf. A.K. Singh, *Animals in Early Buddhism*, p. 43.

with jackals. But because these two bright qualities guard the world, there is recognition of 'mother,' 'mother's sister,' 'uncle's wife,' 'teacher's wife,' and 'wife of those who deserve respect.'"¹

Four things befall the heedless man who lies down with the wife of another: a wealth of demerit; a lack of good sleep; third, censure; fourth, hell.²

Extramarital sex is a rather complex issue involving ramifications in emotional, social, and moral fields. The problem is a cause for concern in modern times, especially in the West where materialism has for so long been the philosophy of life.

The third moral precept advises against all forms of sexual misconduct, which include rape, adultery, promiscuity, paraphilia, and sexual perversions. Actually, the Buddhist commentary emphasizes adultery more than anything else, but if we take into account the purpose and intention of the precept, it is clear that the precept is intended to cover all improper behavior with regard to sex. The broadest interpretation even purports to mean abstention from the misuse of the senses. The expression "misuse of the senses" is somewhat vague. It could refer to any morally unwholesome action committed under the influence of sensual desire or to the inability to control one's own senses. In any case there is no doubt that the third precept aims at promoting, among other things, proper sexual behavior and a sense of social decency in a human civilization where monogamy is commonly practiced and self-restraint is a cherished moral value.

¹ A. I. 51.

² Dhp. vv309-310.

For one reason or another, many young people in love are not able to enter into married life as early as they wish. While marriage is still some distance in the future, or even an uncertain quantity, these people enter into relationships, of which sex forms a significant part. This happens not only among adults, who must legally answer to their own conduct, but also among teenagers who are still immature, emotionally unstable, and tend to act in irresponsible ways. Peer pressure and altered moral values are an important contributing factor to the escalation of the problem. The trend toward extramarital sex has become so common that it is now virtually taken for granted. Concubinal arrangements are becoming increasingly popular, and marriage is relegated to a place of insignificance, jeopardizing in the process the sanctity of family life.

In the context of these developments, the third precept becomes all the more relevant and meaningful. Unlike killing, which certain circumstances seem to warrant, there is hardly any plausible excuse for sexual promiscuity, except human weaknesses and inability to restrain the sexual urge. However, there is a distinction between sexual promiscuity and sexual relationship based on mutual trust and commitment, even if the latter were a relationship between two single adults. Thus one may begin to practice the third precept by resolving not to be involved in sexual activities without an earnest intention and serious commitment of both parties. This means that sex should not be consummated merely for the sake of sexuality, but should be performed with full understanding within the people involved and with mutual responsibility for its consequences. A certain level of maturity and emotional stability is necessary to ensure a healthy and productive sexual relationship between two partners. With the realization that there is a better and more noble

path to follow than promiscuity, one may see the wisdom of self-restraint and the benefit of establishing a more lasting and meaningful relationship which, rather than impeding one's spiritual progress, may enhance it.

Finally, if anything else fails to convince people of the danger and undesirability of sexual promiscuity, perhaps the phenomenal AIDS epidemic will. This may seem besides the point, since moral precepts and moral integrity are matters that concern inner strength, fortitude, and conscientious practice, not fear and trepidation based on extraneous factors. It is, nevertheless, worthwhile to consider the connection between promiscuous behavior and the AIDS epidemic and realize how strict observance of the third Buddhist moral precept could greatly reduce the risk of infection or spread of this deadly disease. Acceptance of this fact may also lead to an appreciation of the value of morality and moral precepts as laid down by the Buddha, consequently strengthening conviction in the *Dhamma* practice.

In brief, the institution of marriage has largely broken down in many societies of the developed world, so that serial monogamy outside of marriage has become widely acceptable, as has childbirth outside of marriage. Divorce has become so common as to call into serious question the meaning of marriage itself. And these changes in social attitude are strongly reinforced by the social media. We may know that sexual misconduct leads to serious negative consequences not only for those involved but also for society as a whole, but very few contemporary societies restrict or censure its being portrayed as the norm and as being without consequences. In film, on video, and on the Internet, the norm has become portrayal of casual sex without mention of its dangers—pregnancy, disease, social disruption, and deep personal suffering.

Clear explanation by Buddhist teachers of the meaning and importance of this precept for the Buddhist laity and exhortation for them to make vows to follow this precept can be a strong force to heal this dangerous rent in the social fabric.

VI. 5. 6. White Lies

The traditional formulation of this moral precept is “I undertake to abstain from wrong speech: telling lies, deceiving others, manipulating others, using hurtful words.” The Buddha said:

"In the case of words that the *Tathāgata* [the Buddha] knows to be factual, true, beneficial, and endearing and agreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them. Why is that? Because the *Tathāgata* has sympathy for living beings."¹

The practice of the fourth precept aims at inculcating a respect for truth in the mind, implying both one's own obligations as well as the rights of other people to truth. This is one of the most important components in developing sound social relationships, and it makes all documents, contracts, agreements, deeds, and business dealings meaningful. When we resort to falsehood, we not only become dishonest but also show disrespect to the truth. People who tell lies discredit themselves and become untrustworthy.

It is true that sometimes telling lies may prove more profitable than truth, especially from the material point of view. Because such gains are unwholesome and may cause harm in the long run, and because material profits are likely to lead to more falsehood and fabrication, it is imperative that the practice of the fourth precept be duly emphasized.

¹ M. I. 395.

Where a person's reputation and feelings are concerned, discretion should be exercised. Of course, there are instances where silence is more appropriate than speech, and one may choose this as an alternative to prevarication and falsehood.

Motivation is an important element in determining if one is transgressing the fourth precept and whether a given verbal expression constitutes a kammically unwholesome act. For instance, when an event is fictionalized for literary purposes, this may not be regarded as falsehood as such for the intention of the work is obvious and there is no attempt at falsification involved. Another example is the case of an invective, where an abusive expression is used (such as angrily calling someone a dog). This is a case of vituperation rather than fabrication or falsification, although it is, nonetheless, a kammically unwholesome act. Also, there is a clear distinction between expressing untruth with a selfish intention and with a well-meaning motive, as when a concocted story is told for instructional purposes or a white lie is told in order to keep an innocent child out of danger.

These latter two instances are even accepted as illustrations of the employment of skillful means. A story is told of a mother who returns home to find her house on fire. Her little son is playing in the house, unaware that its burning roof could collapse at any moment. He is so engrossed that he pays no attention to his mother, who is now in great distress, being unable to get into the house herself. So she calls out to her child, "Come quickly, my little one, I have some wonderful toys for you. All the toys you ever wanted to have are here!"¹ In this instance the mother is using a skillful means that eventually saves the boy's life.

¹ H. Kern (tr.), *The Saddhamma Pundarika or The Lotus of the True Law*, p. 72ff.

Under certain circumstances, this may be the only alternative, but indiscriminate use of such means may lead to undesirable results. One needs to be judicious, therefore, in the practice of the precepts.

Sometimes speaking the truth may cause more harm than good, especially if it is done with malicious intent. A vindictive neighbor who spreads the scandals about the family next door may be speaking the truth, but she is neither doing anyone a service, nor is she practicing the *Dhamma*. A spy who sells his nation's sensitive classified information to an enemy may be speaking the truth, but he could cause much harm to his nation's security and jeopardize many innocent lives. The Buddha says, therefore, that one should speak the truth which is useful and conducive to the *Dhamma*, and should avoid that which is useless and is likely to cause unwholesome *kamma* to oneself and others.¹

VI. 5. 7. Intoxicants

The fifth precept covers all intoxicants, including narcotics, that alter the state of consciousness and are physiologically addictive. The danger and negative effects of narcotics, such as cocaine and heroin, are too well known to need any further elaboration. Today, they represent a serious health and social problem around the world. The most obvious danger of intoxicants is the fact that they tend to distort the sensibilities and deprive people of their self-control and powers of judgment. Under alcoholic influences, a person is likely to act rashly and without due consideration or forethought. Otherwise decent people may even commit murder or rape under the influence of alcohol, or cause all kinds of damage (such as fire, accident, and vandalism) to people or property. The Buddha

¹ Dh.p. vv100, 101, 176 & 281.

described addiction to intoxicants as one of the six causes of ruin. It brings about six main disadvantages: loss of wealth, quarrels and strife, a poor state of health (liability to diseases), a source of disgrace, shameless and indecent behavior, and weakened intelligence and mental faculties.¹

VI. 6. Closing Remarks

Morality plays a fundamental role in pursuit of liberation from the round of suffering. The practice leading to the liberation is systematically formulated by the Buddha as three-stepped trainings such as training of morality, training of concentration and training of wisdom. Among them, morality stands as the fundamental practice in Buddhism, for a purified morality can pave the way for the easy attainment of *Arahanthood*.

The historical Buddha Siddhattha Gautama legislated moral guidelines for both his monastic community and his lay disciples by combining the principles of *kamma* with Buddhist virtues in accordance with specific situations. His moral precepts protect us from committing bad *kamma* and safeguard our purity of mind and body. Some of his guidelines are easy to apply universally and others refer to social and historical situations that no longer exist. Likewise, the contemporary world is filled with everyday situations and occurrences that not only did not exist at the time of the Buddha, but also would have been inconceivable to ordinary people then. Buddhist ethics have been preserved in Buddhist cultures in the countries to which Buddhism has spread. Their strength lies in their ability to retain their fundamental values while being creatively and legitimately applied to the new circumstances of our contemporary world. This work of applying

¹ M. III. 204.

Buddhist moral values to our 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. Buddhist insights and their ethical frameworks contain common values that are effective tools for all good people who wish to work together to repair the moral fabric of society, lessen human suffering, and restore our natural world.

As one of the "three trainings" (*tisso-sikkhā*), morality has been a cardinal virtue of all Buddhists, and practices of restraint, cultivation of good qualities and ritual affirmation of and in some instances ritual confession of breaches, have been important aspects of praxis across the Buddhist world. Of course, the paradigmatic moral discipline is the Buddha's own lifestyle as codified in the *Vinaya* traditions of the different schools, which is treated separately, but laypeople also adopt moral codes which the early tradition systematized as the five, eight and ten precepts (*sīla*), and which have been developed into full-blown lay praxis through *Vinaya*, like texts for laypeople, have been expanded into vow-taking liturgies for advanced adepts, and have palpably shaped social etiquette in Buddhist cultures.¹

On the personal level, the observance of precepts serves as the preliminary groundwork for the cultivation of higher virtues or mental development. Morality is the most important step on the spiritual path. Without morality, right concentration cannot be attained, and without right concentration, wisdom cannot be fully perfected. Thus, morality not only enhances people's ethical values and fulfills their noble status as human beings, but it is crucial to their efforts toward the highest religious goal, *nibbāna*.

¹Damien Keown and Charles S. Prebish (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, p. 535.

On the social level, morality contributes to harmonious and peaceful coexistence among community members and consequently helps to promote social growth and development. In a society, where morality prevails and members are conscious of their roles, there will be general security, mutual trust, and close cooperation, these in turn leading to greater progress and prosperity. Without morality, there will be corruption and disturbance, and all members of society are adversely affected. Most of the problems that society experiences today are connected, directly or indirectly, with a lack of morality.

Questions of morality always concern the issues of right and wrong, good and evil. For a moral life to be meaningful, these issues must not remain mere theoretical principles, but translated into practice. Good must be performed, evil must be given up. It is not enough to know what is good or evil, we also need to take proper action with respect to them. We need concrete guidelines to follow, and these are provided by the Buddhist moral precepts. Even the oft-quoted Buddhist ideals of abstention from evil, implementation of what is good, and perfect mental purification can be initially actualized through a consistent practice of moral precepts. The precepts help us to live those ideals; they teach us to do the right things and to avoid the wrong.

Buddhist moral precepts provide a wholesome foundation for personal and social growth. They are practical principles for a good life and the cultivation of virtues. If we understand the objectives of morality and realize its benefits, we will see moral precepts as an integral part of life rather than as a burden that we are compelled to shoulder. Buddhist moral precepts are not commandments imposed by force; they are a course of training willingly undertaken in order to achieve a desired

objective. We do not practice to please a supreme being, but for our own good and the good of society. As individuals, we need to train in morality to lead a good and noble life. On the social level, we need to maintain peace and harmony in society and facilitate the progress of the common good. So the practice of moral precepts is essential in this regard.

Morality is woven into the fabric of Buddhist teachings and there is no major school or branch of Buddhism which fails to emphasize the importance of the moral life. The scriptures of Buddhism speak eloquently of virtues such as moral life, non-violence and compassion, and the "Golden Rule" is held up as the principle which should inform our relationships with others. Although newcomers to Buddhism are often struck by the variety of the different Asian traditions, as divergent in form as Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, at the level of moral teachings there is much common ground. Although some would disagree, it does not seem unreasonable to speak of a common moral core underlying the divergent customs, practices and philosophical teachings of the different schools. This core is composed of the principles and precepts, the values and virtues which were expounded by the Buddha in the fifth century BCE and which continue to guide the conduct of some 350 million Buddhists around the world today.

We have already seen that the Lord Buddha, in laying down the training rules for *bhikkhus*, was much concerned with the well-being of the laity. He had in mind, for instance, "being in sympathy with householders," "the pleasing of those not pleased (and) the increase of those pleased" (with *Dhamma*) alongside more monastic considerations.¹ In another passage of very frequent occurrence in the *Vinaya* collection,

¹ D. III. 191.

the Lord Buddha whenever he rebuked some erring *bhikkhu* would say: "It is not, foolish man, for the pleasing of those not pleased (i.e., outsiders, those of other faiths), not for the increase of those who are pleased (by their practice of *Dhamma-Vinaya*, i.e., Buddhists), but, foolish man, it causes displeasure among those who are not pleased as well as in those who are pleased, and it causes wavering in some"¹ (i.e., those who are interested in *Dhamma* but have not yet gone for the Refuge to the Triple Gem).² The very obvious effects which bad conduct by one in robes has upon lay-people, is here very strongly emphasized.

The converse is also true, since a *bhikkhu* who has been well-trained under good teachers and learned thoroughly the theory and practice of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* is indeed a great recommendation to the excellence found in the Conqueror's dispensation. A picture of such a *bhikkhu* is awakened in the mind's eye by *Dhammapada*:

“Calm in body, calm in speech,

Tranquil and composed of heart,

Whoso has spewed out worldly wants

'Serene' is such a *bhikkhu* called.”³

The *Dhamma* which all Buddhists revere as most precious and which is practiced by all who are truly followers of the Lord Buddha, has been preserved for the people of the present by the *saṅgha*. This community of *bhikkhus*, those (so to speak) who have specialized in *Dhamma*, has been preserved by close adherence to the training rules laid down in the *Vinaya*. That this sequence is true may be seen from several

¹ Vin. II. 18, 26.

² Vin. II. 18.

³ Dhp. v378.

instances in history when *bhikkhus* no longer paid heed to the *Vinaya* and so lost the respect and support of the laity. Not having this support, they drifted towards being householders themselves and having become priests with families, they could give less time to learning and practice of *Dhamma*. Books got lost and were not replaced and the tradition became steadily more degenerate until no teaching at all remained - only "protection-ceremonies" and the like, often performed in a language not understood even by the priest, let alone by the people. The present time, alas, could also show some "Buddhist" traditions of which these words are true.

This preservation of the *Dhamma* by *Vinaya* and hence by the *saṅgha* to whom the *Vinaya* applies, finds expression in a simile in the *Vinaya*-introduction where it is said: "Flowers loose upon a flat piece of wood, not tied together by thread, are scattered about, destroyed by the wind. What is the cause of that? Since they were not held together by thread..."¹ This is said to apply to the teachings of some former Buddhas who gave little of the *Dhamma* to their disciples and who did not lay down the *Vinaya* or make known the *pātimokkha*. It is a cause for rejoicing that Gotama Buddha has explained the *Dhamma* in detail, made known the *Vinaya* and pointed out the fundamental training rules of the *pātimokkha*. "It is as if, Sāriputta, various flowers placed on a piece of wood, tied together by thread (as a garland), are not scattered, whirled about, or destroyed by the wind. What is the reason for that? They are well tied together by thread."² This means simply that the winds of

¹ Vin. III. 9.

² Vin. III. 8.

impermanence cannot so easily destroy the various aspects of *Dhamma* when these are secured by the thread of the *Vinaya*.

This brings us to appreciate the reverence which the *Vinaya* collection is accorded by all true *bhikkhus* as well as by knowledgeable laymen. This collection is given first place among the three collections (*Piṭaka*) of the Buddha words, a fact which indicates that it is the support and mainstay of the other teachings. As it is said: "the *Vinaya* is the very life of the Teaching (*Sāsana*); so long as the *Vinaya* endures, the Teaching endures, therefore let us rehearse the *Vinaya* first" (at the First Council-*Sangayana*).

The researcher feels so happy and content in finishing this mission. From the bottom of his heart, he would like to wish peace and happiness to all beings. He also wishes that let the moral value lasts long and all sentient beings live in peace and harmony.

May all human beings live in harmony, spend compassion together, free from suffering in the cycle of rebirth, and attain Buddhahood through practicing the Buddhist morality.
