CHAPTER-4

BASIC PHILOSOPHY OF BUDDHA

4.1 Introduction:

The theme of this chapter is the central philosophy of Buddhism, and I will discuss this from two perspectives, one from the conventional understanding of many Buddhist groups and the other from Stephen Bachelor’s contemporary work, as outlined in his book “Buddhism without Beliefs”.

4.1.1 A Philosophical Reading of his Life:

Although neither the Buddha’s immediate followers nor the Buddhist tradition ever saw fit, whether accidentally or by design, to preserve and present the facts of his life as a continuous biography, the fact remains that what we do know about his life is that at some point, rather precipitously and unexpectedly, he completely and irrevocably abandoned his safe, orderly, and predictable life for the life of a homeless and wandering samana. Moreover, every recent account\(^1\) of the historical Buddha’s life includes a detailed description of his renunciation and radical departure from his former way of life and his subsequent quest for enlightenment in a completely new and different kind of life. What this seems to indicate, among other things, is that at least one of the most important facts of his life and character was his willingness to change his thinking and not accept the usual, common, habitual, and expected way of living that seemed to him and many of his contemporaries to lead inevitably to suffering, pain, anxiety, and frustration. In other words, at the level of his own life, the Buddhist tradition thought it important to point out that the historical Buddha abandoned what any ordinary Indian male would have desired and pursued as a good and successful life, in order to realize the most basic truth about the world and himself – the most fundamental truth of the Dhamma – that both we and the things we perceive are a function of how we see them, and not the other way around. Understood in that way, the life of the Buddha and the context in which he lived it both serve as

points of instruction to help us see what the Buddha himself saw, that “things,” including ourselves and the people and the material objects around us, do not exist in the ways we ordinarily think they do, at least not as we take them to be according to common sense. They are not, strictly speaking, even “things” (i.e., discreet, self-contained, independently existing units or beings or substances) in the ordinary sense of that word. They literally are or at least minimally ought to be thought to be, instead, events or processes or happenings that causally interact with other “events” or “processes” or “happenings” in the same ways that the Mississippi river is a happening, or members of a community interacting with each other and the environment in which they live are processes or events.

Just to set the scene - the man called Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as The Buddha, lived around 2,500 years ago in northern India near the border of Nepal. He grew up a wealthy prince, married and had a son, but left this short life of affluence for a spiritual journey to find answers to the questions of suffering, ageing and death.

He felt that these were the main questions about living. We all face suffering - I think it would be safe to say that everyone here, at some time, has suffered. Despite cosmetic surgery and face creams, we all age. I’d like you to put your hand up if you are intending to live forever! So we all are touched by death. And that was Siddhartha’s quest, to find meaning in living. Out of that journey, Siddhartha Gautama developed a teaching known as the “Dharma”.

After several years of learning from the teachers of his day, and living a very austere and meditative life, Siddhartha reached an understanding, called “enlightenment”, and became known from this point as “the Buddha”, meaning the “awakened one”. For the next 50 years, he travelled around India talking to people, discussing and sharing what he had learned.

What he taught was a guideline, not a set of rules, for successful living, and the Buddha never claimed divinity, nor did he teach about a higher or divine presence. This teaching spread across Asia and, over time, became different schools, just as we have many styles of Christian practice. After two hundred years, the world of dharma teaching split into two - the more traditional
Theravada and the newer Mahayana school, from which today we have several Zen and Pure Land styles of teaching. A much later evolution produced a third stream called Vajrayana and this resulted in four Tibetan schools. Most people associate His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, with Buddhism as a whole group, but he is the spiritual leader of just one of the Tibetan Buddhist schools and does not represent all Buddhists, just like the Pope who represents Catholics but not all Christians.

The Buddha taught a process of thinking - he actually used a parable of a raft to tell us to use that thinking - like a raft - to take us to another level, and then - if it no longer meets our needs, (Shock horror) - to let it go! -to move on to another level.

This is not the stuff of religion where a security of fixed belief is paramount. However, as happens, over time, Buddhism, in most of its various forms, developed into religious communities with belief systems. In this modern time, across the world, Buddhist leaders are invited to join in interfaith meetings, as “clergy”.

But is Buddhism a religion? It does not teach about a personal God. And the founder said that what he showed was a path, he was like the man pointing at the moon. And that we should not look at the pointing finger, (not at him) but we should all look for the moon.

What are the main teachings of Buddhism? The primary teaching of the Buddha, the dharma, centres around what is known as The Four Noble Truths, The Eightfold Path and Dependent Origination. Buddhism also has this cool practice of meditation, a listening within, which I will not discuss today, as this really is a full topic on its own.

The Four Noble Truths, which the Buddha understood at the enlightenment, is a logical process of seeing life, seeing all actions, not as we wish to see them, but as they really are.

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\[2\] Mary Hendriks, April 29 *The Philosophy behind Buddhism - A contemporary view of Buddhism with reference to the contemporary Buddhist author Stephen Batchelor from his book “Buddhism without Beliefs”.*
The first truth is that life always incorporates suffering or Dukkha as it was called then. Dukkha has a broader meaning than suffering. It can be the feeling you experience when you encounter pain, old age, sickness, loss, or separation from loved ones, but it can also represent a general unsatisfied feeling. If you feel that your life is like pushing a supermarket trolley, which always wants to go in a different direction, then that’s dukkha.

The second noble truth is that suffering in its broad sense, comes from desire, and specifically, desire for meeting our expectations and for self fulfillment as we see it. By desiring for ourselves rather than the whole, we will always have suffering.

In our society, we are raised on the principle of desire, it’s what makes our society the way it is, and we are encouraged to desire, to want more, to acquire and then to then move on to another desire. All the time, our lives are only temporarily satisfied.

These two truths are the bad news! But Buddhism is a positive philosophy, and the next two noble truths give an optimistic message.

The third noble truth tells us that if our attachment to desire ends, so too will the suffering. Specifically, if we change our perception and reduce our attachment to desire, suffering will also reduce. This is not intended to lead to a cancellation of the zest for life, but to an understanding of the nature of life and to controlling those desires, which come from that lack of understanding. And I see this as a significant truth for our society, that once we come to a deeper understanding then we begin to see the nature and origin of our desires and our expectations -expectations about marriage partners, about children, about our desire for new goods, a bigger house, a faster car, about our desire for travel, for entertainment, and always seeking something new. Once we realize that we are attached to that continuous cycle of desire, we can then begin to let go of that attachment. This process of letting go is the key to freedom from suffering.

The fourth noble truth is a practical set of understanding and ethics to help us to reduce suffering. The Buddha called this the middle way, and it’s a set of eight guidelines called the Eightfold path. The Eightfold Path outlines guidelines for day-to-day living, a system of right understanding and right action. There is
some analogy here with the Ten Commandments in Christianity, but the Eightfold Path was meant as a guideline and a course of action, rather than a set of strict rules.

The Buddha reached this middle way after himself living the extremes of life. In his early years, he was surrounded by luxury, as a local Prince, given access to all pleasures available at that time. In his search, he lived the opposite life, one where he deprived himself of even the essentials, and faced death. The Noble Eightfold path leads to a way, which embraces life and is neither indulgent nor austere.

The other main teaching of Buddhism is the concept of Dependent Origination, which sounds complex, but is really quite simple. It’s one of the most important concepts of the Buddhist teaching and I think, the one which defines Buddhism as an agnostic philosophy.

The Buddha said, that to become enlightened, you need only to understand The Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination.

Dependent Origination is also called the law of causality. It teaches that nothing exists on its own, but has always come from earlier circumstances. Therefore, there is no divine intervention.

A piece of paper does not come into existence spontaneously. It is made from wood pulp and water. The wood comes from trees, which comes from seeds from earlier trees. If you burn paper, it becomes smoke and ash, so it has not disappeared but transformed. The essential components of that piece of paper were always there, and will always be there. A pot is made because once a potter took clay and formed it on a wheel and then fired the pot. Many circumstances and components were needed for the process.

In the same way, we did not spontaneously come into existence at birth. We are the result of our parents, of the circumstances of their meeting, and of all that happened before. You are alive today because you were once born, as a result of your parents meeting at an earlier time. Everything is always a consequence of something before, that is, the origin of everything is not unique, and everything depends on a particular set of circumstances having happened. This is a changing
reality, and the Buddha did not see us as having anything fixed. That includes no
fixed soul. We have a spiritual nature, but that is dynamic and flowing, neither
something that we acquire at birth, nor something we are stuck with, but a
spiritual nature that is changing, from moment to moment. We are the result of
our genetics, our environment, our parents, our societies, and of our own choices
and actions. And this is not fixed.

If you begin to see everything as dependent on everything else, then you
will need to look to the larger picture, where everything we think and do affects
the future. As in the writing of the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, “the
world is woven of interconnected threads”. So we are living in a world that is the
result of previous generations, and our actions add to the shape the world of the
future. We are individually and collectively responsible.

In essence, the Buddha did not see a separate and benevolent creator who
could act on our behalf. He saw the interdependence of all life and the cause and
effect of actions, which create their own future.

Buddhism therefore is not about humans having dominion over nature - we
are just one part of the process of life. The Buddha was revolutionary in his
teaching. He taught that women were equal and could teach that slavery was
wrong and he also questioned ownership of animals. How could one part of life
own another?

This is why Buddhism, at its inception, was more of a way of life than a
religion. However, now it is practiced more as a religion by many followers who
worship in the temples and seek divine guidance from the Buddha nature.

4.1.2 Fundamentals of the Social Philosophy of Buddhism:

As Buddhism presents the path for individual Liberation, there is no social
aspect of Buddhism, examine this statement. With the progressive universality of
the social and scientific outlook and the humanitarian temper among the educated
peoples of all countries, we create the establishment of living world community
inspired by common ideals based on social norm, political liberty and economic
equality. Individuals and nations are becoming increasingly united in their common allegiance to the sovereignty of the world. Now we should create the establishment of the universal brotherhood of a man as a social and historic reality in the world today. With regard to the concept of unity of mankind as relevant today as, for the world community of people, the modern emphasis on socialism must be directly related to the honest recognition, not for merely the unity but the sanctity of the individual. In this respect the social philosophy of the Buddha could offer a much-need corrective to the one-side emphasis of the importance of the mass to the neglect of the unit of the personality and individualism.³

The term “Society” in the modern sense is defined as follows:

“The totality of social relationships among human beings. A group of human beings broadly distinguished from other groups, by mutual interest, participation in characteristic relationships, shared institutions, and a common culture. The institutions and culture of a distinct self-perpetuating group.” [Reader’s Digest Universal Dictionary]⁴

In any given society, the parts are individuals. Society does not become meaningful without individuals. So Buddhism always emphasizes the importance of individual. The term “Society” applies to the relationships among the individuals. The relationship of man is nothing but social norms, customs, beliefs, rites, rituals and duties and obligations etc. Social norms are agreed upon by a group of people in a given society. Society is given or united by individuals. There is no society without individuals. It is clear that Buddhism accepts individual man as a social being. Man was born in society, brought up in society and continues to live in society until his death. Individual man has to fulfil social duties, responsibility and obligations. No one on the earth can develop his personality without the help of human society. Man cannot live in isolation. Thus, individual and society cannot be separated from each other. So life as historically manifested is two-fold, individual and social as well.

³ http://www.hinduwebsite.com/buddhism/buddhist_philosophy.asp
⁴ What the Buddha Taught, W Rahula, Buddhist Missionary Society, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – 1978
There are many differences in society based on race, language, caste, creed etc., but Buddhism does not make any division among the mankind. According to Buddhism, this division is based on good and bad actions. During the time of the Buddha, Indian Society was mainly divided into four groups based on caste system. They are known as :(1) Kshatriya = the ruling class (2) Brahmana = the religious class (3) Vaishya = normal public and (4) Suddha= the slaves.

There were struggles among the four classes, or groups. Some groups were regarded as higher while the other are lower. The high class neglected the others. They did not look after the well-being and happiness of others. The high class always tries to become more prominent in the society. The lowest caste was considered as one who should not be given the privileges in the society. They deprived of social and religious freedom. The lowest caste was highly depressed and oppressed by high class. According to Buddhism, this oppression is unfair and unreasonable. Buddhism says that all members of society of human must equally enjoy an exercise their freedom in the society. The Buddha did not accept these unreasonable divisions in the society. He taught all classes of men and women-kings and peasants, Brahmins and outcasts, bankers and beggars, holy men and robbers -without making the slightest distinction between them. He recognized no differences of caste or social groupings, and the way he preached was open to all men and women who were ready to understand and to follow it.

However, it is not denied that there are higher and lower classes in the society. Buddhist idea is that status of a human being should be based on his ethical behaviour. In the Buddhist context it is only the ethical behaviour of human beings that accounts for a higher status. This is the famous statement in the Vasala Sutta of Suttanipata that “not by birth does one become an outcaste, not by birth does one become a Barhamin; by deeds or one’s actions one become an outcaste(Vasala), by deeds one becomes a Brahamin(higher person). In this Sutta, the emphasis is more social obligations. Buddhism does not deny the status of beings as Brahamin or outcaste in the society but suggests that such division of upper of lower classes should be based on ethical behaviour of people in the
society. And then, it also suggests indirectly that the social status based on ethical behavior promotes the moral aspects of society and never becomes a cause for injustice and downfall. The Buddha emphasizes that it is the working of moral principles that can keep society going in good order.

In the Buddhist society, ethics or ethics of division can be divided into three main sections depending on their specific features, not any the basis of higher of lower classes:

1. Ethics related to lay-life or lay society
2. Ethics related to the life of Sangha or monk society or monastic society
3. Ethics related to the career of Bodhisattvas.

Herein, our aim is to clarify the common characteristics of ethical teachings related to lay life or lay society in both individual and social. As to the above-mentioned points, individual life is more important than social life as far as its efficacy is concerned. The success of social life depends on the success of individual life because society is merely a concept superimposed on the relationship among the individual people. Although the lay-life and monastic life are mutually different social institution due to their careers, the final aim, the realization of Nibbana is the same. The monks in the monastic society dedicate their whole life to achieve final liberation while lay-people are engaging in sensual pleasures and various household activities in the world. Lay people also gradually reach final aim, Nibbana.

The lay people in society must necessarily follow the daily virtues called five precepts. By keeping them, he or she is conducive to achieve not only material prosperity but also spiritual progress. According to Buddhism, it is very important to have these two aspects namely (1) material prosperity or material well-being and (2) spiritual advancement or spiritual progress.

The Buddha considered economic welfare as requisite for human happiness, but that He did not recognize the progress as real and true happiness, if it was only material, devoid of a spiritual and moral foundation. Buddhism always lays great stress on the development of the moral and spiritual character for a
happy, peaceful and contented society while encouraging material progress. Therefore, the both aspect should be balance in the society according to Buddhism. The Buddha presented five precepts which help to have these two aspects.

As far as the individual ethics of lay people are concerned, abstaining from the unwholesome actions, as mentioned in the Agganna Sutta of (D.N. III) occupies an important role or place. The ten unwholesome actions are mentioned in the Sutta as follow:

(1) Killing living beings
(2) Stealing other’s things
(3) Unlawful engagement in sensual pleasure
(4) Lying
(5) Slandering
(6) Using rough words
(7) Gossiping
(8) Greediness
(9) Malevolence
(10) Holding wrong view

These ten deeds are related to the physical, verbal and mental behaviour of people in the society. These ten deeds are extremely harmful to the individual as well as to the society. So, the individual in society should restrain himself first in regard to those unwholesome actions because they create many problems in maintain social harmony. On the contrary, it is clear that abstain from ten evil deeds becomes an essential requirement for a person as a member of any society. Especially these ten positive wholesome actions (Dasakusala-dhamma) are more beneficial in creating harmony and peaceful environment in the society. Anyway, these moral rules are extremely essential in the sense that the responsibility of observing them properly depends on the person himself.

Now, let’s turn to the ethical teachings related to the social life of lay people. As we know, human society is more complexes than the community of Samgha. So, special attention should be focused on the social ethics relevant to the lay society.
Although the Theravada tradition has laid more emphasis on the monastic life throughout the history, there are a large number of discourses in the Canon deal with a systematic ethical system for the laity. The limited number of discourses such as Mangala Sutta, Vasala Sutta, Parabhava Sutta, Singalovada Sutta, Vyaggapajja Sutta, Agganna Sutta, Cakkavattisihanada Sutta and Kosala samyutta has been analyzed repeatedly to clarify the social ethics for lay-society. And then the Jataka stories also reveal mostly the ethical importance and service rendered by Bodhisatta (the Buddha to be), as a lay-man. The life of the Buddha is again a remarkable record of a fully developed social norms, consciousness etc.

According to Buddhism lay-life, his personal obligation, related to the above mentioned ten wholesome deeds to be performed and the unwholesome deeds to be refrained from. Although he observes these precepts as an individual, he is closely related to the other members of society.

Thus, if any one or any society follows these principles presented by the Buddha, it will become an ideal society in which all the members are delighted.5

4.2 Contemporary View of Buddhism:

Now let me start with the first proposition of Buddhist social philosophy, namely the pañcasīla or the Code of Five Moral Precepts. It is not unusual to hear occasional rumblings from our midst, from all manner of people, about the difficulty of observing these simple basic injunctions which are rooted in an awareness of fundamental human rights. A clear and unconfused knowledge of basic Buddhist teachings would reveal to any one the intense degree of social concern and social relevance they embody. They uphold a person’s right for the safety of his life and a person’s right over his possessions. These are universally acclaimed human rights. In any country where Buddhism has contributed to the formation of the cultural milieu, one has to take serious notice of the above remarks about the insistence on the moral order before attempting to examine or analyse the socio-economic problems of that country.6

5 Early Buddhist Theory Of Knowledge, K.N. Jayatilake, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi-1980
6 Causality : The central Philosophy of Buddhism, D.J.Kalupahan, Honolulu, The University Press of Hawai –1975
4.2.1 Buddhism as Philosophy:

Mark Siderits wrote an entire book defending Buddhism as a philosophy, and it may be helpful to sketch out a few of his key points to help situate the reader to my project’s ‘Buddhism as philosophy’ lens. Buddhism is a religion in the sense that it is a set of teachings addressing stereological concerns. But being a Buddhist does not entail simply accepting all of the Buddha’s claims at face value. Instead, liberation (synonymous with nirvana and Enlightenment) is attained through an individual’s rational investigation into the nature of the world and his/her own mind. Each Buddhist practitioner is expected to examine the Buddha’s teachings and then determine for him/herself whether these claims are true. Siderits outlines the practice as such: the teachings of Buddhism are based on objective facts about the nature of reality and our place in it. These facts are thought of as things that human reason can apprehend without reliance on superhuman revelation.

The Buddha was, at first, simply an ordinary man who sought a solution to his mental suffering. He discovered this solution for himself through a path he called ‘The Middle Way’, and then taught this path others based on his own experiences. Integral to understanding Buddhism as a philosophy is remembering that the ‘point’ of Buddhist practice is to attain Enlightenment.

One might wonder how to even study Buddhism as a philosophy? It primarily involves studying the Buddha’s sutras and teachings. Many of his teachings were given orally, and have been passed down for generations. Buddhist practitioners receive oral transmissions from current enlightened beings who are, it is thought, reincarnations of prior enlightened beings. Like any religion, Buddhism has several seemingly non-sensical rules that ordained monks and nuns must follow. However, Buddhism is, according to philosopher Owen Flanagan, “first and foremost a complex philosophy about the nature of reality, the self and morality.” The Buddha presented many of his teachings more like scientific facts, rather than spiritual words of a higher power. He aimed to reveal the truth, through teachings his followers the path to end suffering.
The Buddha referred to his teachings simply as Dhamma-vinaya — “the doctrine and discipline” — but for centuries people have tried to categorize the teachings in various ways, trying to fit them into the prevailing molds of cultural, philosophical, and religious thought. Buddhism is an ethical system — a way of life — that leads to a very specific goal and that possesses some aspects of both religion and philosophy:

**It is a Philosophy:**

Like most philosophies, Buddhism attempts to frame the complexities of human existence in a way that reassures us that there is, in fact, some underlying order to the Universe. In the Four Noble Truths the Buddha crisply summarizes our predicament: there is suffering, it has a cause, it has an end, and there is a way to reach the end. The teachings on kamma provide a thorough and logically self-consistent description of the nature of cause-and-effect. And even the Buddhist view of cosmology, which some may at first find farfetched, is a logical extension of the law of kamma. According to the Dhamma, a deep and unshakable logic pervades the world.

**It is not a Philosophy:**

Unlike most philosophical systems, which rely on speculation and the power of reason to arrive at logical truths, Buddhism relies on the direct observation of one’s personal experience and on honing certain skills in order to gain true understanding and wisdom. Idle speculation has no place in Buddhist practice. Although studying in the classroom, reading books, and engaging in spirited debate can play a vital part in developing a cognitive understanding of basic Buddhist concepts, the heart of Buddhism can never be realized this way. The Dhamma is not an abstract system of thought designed to delight the intellect; it is a roadmap to be used, one whose essential purpose is to lead the practitioner to the ultimate goal, nibbana.
It is a Religion:

At the heart of each of the world’s great religions lies a transcendent ideal around which its doctrinal principles orbit. In Buddhism this truth is nibbana, the hallmark of the cessation of suffering and stress, a truth of utter transcendence that stands in singular distinction from anything we might encounter in our ordinary sensory experience. Nibbana is the sine qua non of Buddhism, the guiding star and ultimate goal towards which all the Buddha’s teachings point. Because it aims at such a lofty transcendent ideal, we might fairly call Buddhism a religion.

It is not a Religion:

In stark contrast to the world’s other major religions, however, Buddhism invokes no divinity, no supreme Creator or supreme Self, no Holy Spirit or omniscient loving God to whom we might appeal for salvation. Instead, Buddhism calls for us to hoist ourselves up by our own bootstraps: to develop the discernment we need to distinguish between those qualities within us that are unwholesome and those that are truly noble and good, and to learn how to nourish the good ones and expunge the bad. This is the path to Buddhism’s highest perfection, nibbana. Not even the Buddha can take you to that goal; you alone must do the work necessary to complete the journey:

“Therefore, Ananda, be islands unto yourselves, refuges unto yourselves, seeking no external refuge; with the Dhamma as your island, the Dhamma as your refuge, seeking no other refuge.” [Digha Nikaya 16]

Despite its non-theistic nature, however, Buddhist practice does call for a certain kind of faith. It is not blind faith, an uncritical acceptance of the Buddha’s word as transmitted through scripture. Instead it is saddha, a confidence born of taking refuge in the Triple Gem; it is a willingness to trust that the Dhamma, when practiced diligently, will lead to the rewards promised by the Buddha. Saddha is a provisional acceptance of the teachings, that is ever subject to critical evaluation during the course of one’s practice, and which must be balanced by one’s growing powers of discernment. For many Buddhists, this faith is expressed and reinforced
through traditional devotional practices, such as bowing before a Buddha statue and reciting passages from the early Pali texts. Despite a superficial resemblance to the rites of many theistic religions, however, these activities are neither prayers nor pleas for salvation directed towards a transcendent Other. They are instead useful and inspiring gestures of humility and respect for the profound nobility and worth of the Triple Gem.

4.2.2 Is Buddhism a Theory or a Philosophy?

*The enlightenment of the Buddha is not a product of mere intellect.* During the time of the Buddha there were many learned men in India who pursued knowledge simply for its own sake. These people were full of theoretical knowledge. Indeed, some of them went from city to city challenging anyone to a debate and their greatest thrill was to defeat an opponent in such verbal combats. But the Buddha said that such people were no nearer to the realization of the truth because in spite of their cleverness and knowledge they did not have true wisdom to overcome greed, hatred and delusion. In fact, these people were often proud and arrogant. Their egoistic concepts disturbed the religious atmosphere.

According to the Buddha, one must first seek to understand one’s own mind. This was to be done through concentration which gives one a profound inner wisdom or realization. And this insight is to be gained not by philosophical argument or worldly knowledge but by the silent realization of the illusion of the Self.

Buddhism is a righteous way of life for the peace and happiness of every living being. It is a method to get rid of miseries and to find liberation. The Teachings of the Buddha are not limited to one nation or race. It is neither a creed nor a mere faith. It is a Teaching for the entire universe. It is a Teaching for all time. Its objectives are selfless service, good-will, peace, salvation and deliverance from suffering.

Salvation in Buddhism is an individual affair. You have to save yourself just as you have to eat, drink and sleep by yourself. The advice rendered by the
Buddha points the Way to liberation; but His advice was never intended to be taken as a theory or philosophy. When He was questioned as to what theory He propounded, the Buddha replied that He preached no theories and whatever he did preach was a result of His own experience. Thus His Teaching does not offer any theory. Theory cannot bring one nearer to spiritual perfection. Theories are the very fetters that bind the mind and impede spiritual progress. The Buddha said, ‘Wise men give no credence to passing theories. They are past believing everything they see and hear.’

Theories are product of the intellect and the Buddha understood the limitations of the human intellect. He taught that enlightenment is not a product of mere intellect. One cannot achieve emancipation by taking an intellectual course. This statement may seem irrational but it is true. Intellectuals tend to spend too much of their valuable time in study, critical analysis and debate. They usually have little or no time for practice.

A great thinker (philosopher, scientist, metaphysician, etc.) can also turn out to be an intelligent fool. He may be an intellectual giant endowed with the power to perceive ideas quickly and to express thoughts clearly. But if he pays no attention to his action and their consequences, and if he is only bent on fulfilling his own longings and inclinations at any cost then, according to the Buddha, he is an intellectual fool, a man of inferior intelligence. Such a person will indeed hinder his own spiritual progress.

The Buddha’s Teaching contains practical wisdom that cannot be limited to theory or to philosophy because philosophy deals mainly with knowledge but it are not concerned with translating the knowledge into day-to-day practices.

Buddhism lays special emphasis on practice and realization. The philosopher sees the miseries and disappointments of life but, unlike the Buddha, he offers no practical solution to overcome our frustrations which are part of the unsatisfactory nature of life. The philosopher merely pushes his thoughts to dead ends. Philosophy is useful because it has enriched our intellectual imagination and diminished dogmatic assurance which closes the mind to further progress. To that extent, Buddhism values philosophy, but it has failed to quench spiritual thirst.
Remember that the chief aim of a Buddhist is to attain purity and enlightenment. Enlightenment vanquishes ignorance which is the root of birth and death. However, this vanquishing of ignorance cannot be achieved except by the exercise of one’s confidence. All other attempts, especially mere intellectual attempts are not very effective. This is why the Buddha concluded: ‘These [metaphysical] questions are not calculated to profit; they are not concerned with the Dhamma; they do not lead to right conduct, or to detachment, or to purification from lusts, or to quietude, or to a calm heart, or to real knowledge, or to higher insight, or to Nibbana.’ (Malunkyaputta Sutta - Majjhima Nikaya) In place of metaphysical speculation, the Buddha was more concerned with teaching a practical understanding of the Four Noble Truths that he discovered: what Suffering is: what the origin of Suffering is; what the cessation of Suffering is; how to overcome Suffering and realize final Salvation. These Truths are all practical matters to be fully understood and realized by anyone who really experiences emancipation.

Enlightenment is the dispelling of ignorance; it is the ideal of the Buddhist life. We can now clearly see that enlightenment is not an act of the intellect. Mere speculation has something alien to it and does not come so intimately into contact with life. This is why the Buddha placed great emphasis on personal experience. Meditation is a practical scientific system to verify the Truth that comes through personal experience. Through meditation, the will tries to transcend the condition it has put on itself, and this is the awakening of consciousness. Metaphysics merely ties us down in a tangled and matted mass of thoughts and words.

4.2.3 Is Buddhism Pessimistic?

_Buddhism is neither pessimistic nor optimistic but a realistic religion._

Some critics argue that Buddhism is morbid, cynical, hovering on the dark and shadowy side of life, an enemy of harmless pleasures, and an unfeeling trampler on the innocent joys of life. They see Buddhism as being pessimistic, as fostering an attitude of hopelessness towards life, as encouraging a vague, general feeling that pain and evil predominate in human affairs. These critics base their
views on the First Noble Truth that all conditioned things are in a state of suffering. They seem to have forgotten that not only had the Buddha taught the cause and end of Suffering, but he had taught the way to end Suffering. In any case, is there any religious teacher who praised this worldly life and advised us to cling to it?

If the founder of this religion, the Buddha, was such a pessimist, one would expect His personality to be portrayed on more severe lines than has been done. The Buddha image is the personification of Peace, Serenity, Hope and Goodwill. The magnetic and radiant smile of the Buddha which is said to be inscrutable and enigmatic is the epitome of His doctrine. To the worried and the frustrated, His smile of Enlightenment and hope is an unfailing tonic and soothing balm.

The Buddha radiated His love and compassion in all directions. Such a person can hardly be a pessimist. And when the sword-happy kings and princes listened to Him, they realized that the only true conquest is the conquest of the Self and the best way to win the hearts of the people was to teach them to appreciate the Dhamma - Truth.

The Buddha cultivated His sense of humor to such a high degree that His bitter opponents were disarmed with the greatest ease. Often they could not help laughing at themselves. The Buddha had a wonderful tonic; He cleaned their systems of dangerous toxins and they became enthusiastic thereafter to follow in His footsteps. In His sermons, dialogues and discussions, He maintained that poise and dignity which won for Him the respect and affection of the people. How can such a person be a pessimist?

The Buddha never expected His followers to be constantly brooding over the suffering of life and leading a miserable and unhappy existence. He taught the fact of suffering only so that He could show people how to overcome this suffering and move in the direction of happiness. To become an Enlightened person, one must have joy, one of the factors that the Buddha recommended us to cultivate. Joy is hardly pessimistic.
There are two Buddhists texts called the *Theragatha* and *Therigatha* which are full of the joyful utterances of the Buddha’s disciples, both male and female, who found peace and happiness in life through His Teaching. The king of Kosala once told the Buddha that unlike many a disciple of other religious systems who looked haggard, coarse, pale, emaciated and unprepossessing, His disciples were ‘joyful and elated, jubilant and exultant, enjoying the spiritual life, serene, peaceful and living with a gazelle’s mind, light-hearted.’ The king added that he believed that this healthy disposition was due to the fact that ‘these Venerable Ones had certainly realized the great and full significance of the Blessed One’s Teachings’ (*Majjhima Nikaya*).

When asked why His disciples, who lived a simple and quiet life with only one meal a day, were so radiant, the Buddha replied: ‘They do not repent the past, nor do they brood over the future. They live in the present. Therefore they are radiant. By brooding over the future and repenting the past, fools dry up like green reeds cut down [in the sun]” (*Samyutta Nikaya*).

As a religion, Buddhism preaches the unsatisfactory nature of everything in this world. Yet one cannot simply categorize Buddhism as a pessimistic religion, because it also teaches us how to get rid of this unhappiness. According to the Buddha, even the worst sinner, after paying for what he has done, can attain salvation. Buddhism offers every human being the hope of attaining his salvation one day. Other religions, however, take it for granted that some people will be bad forever and have an eternal hell waiting for them. In that respect, such religions are more pessimistic. Buddhists deny such a belief.

Buddhism is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. It does not encourage man to look at the world through his changing feelings of optimism and pessimism. Rather, Buddhism encourages us to be realistic: we must learn to see things as they truly are.

### 4.2.4 Is Buddhism Atheistic?

Atheism is associated with a materialistic doctrine that knows nothing higher than this world.
The Buddha has condemned godlessness by which He meant the denial of worship and renunciation, the denial of moral and social obligations, and the denial of a religious life. He recognized most emphatically the existence of moral and spiritual values. He acclaimed the supremacy of the moral law. Only in one sense can Buddhism be described as atheistic, namely, in so far as it denies the existence of an eternal omnipotent God or God-head who is the creator and ordained of the world. The word ‘atheism’, however, frequently carries a number of disparaging overtones or implications which are in no way applicable to the Buddha’s Teaching. Those who use the word ‘atheism’, often associate it with a materialistic doctrine that knows nothing higher than this world of the senses and the slight happiness it can bestow. Buddhism advocates nothing of that sort.\(^7\)

There is no justification for branding Buddhists as atheists, nihilists, pagans, heathens or communists just because they do not believe in a Creator God. The Buddhist concept of God is different from that of other religions. Differences in belief do not justify name-calling and slanderous words.

Buddhism agrees with other religions that true and lasting happiness cannot be found in this material world. The Buddha adds that true and lasting happiness cannot be found on the higher or supramundane plane of existence to which the name of heavenly or divine world is given. While the spiritual values advocated by Buddhism are orientated to a state transcending the world with the attainment of Nibbana, they do not make a separation between the ‘beyond’ and the ‘here and now’. They have firm roots in the world itself, for they aim at the highest realization in this present existence.\(^8\)

### 4.3 Compassion (Karuna) and Mindfulness :

Loving-kindness is a Buddhist practice of primary importance that integrates the theory of karma with the principle of interdependence in order to limit self cherishing. An acceptance of the ubiquity of suffering is necessary for compassion to arise. Loving-kindness, often translated as compassion, involves

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\(^7\) History of Buddhist thought, E.J.Thomas, London-1953  
\(^8\) The Buddha’s Anciient Path, Piyadasi Thera, Taiwan-1995
cultivating an attitude of universal, unconditional acceptance. With this attitude, essentialist boundaries that define self and other tend to dissipate as one develops compassionate equanimity toward all living beings. Compassion is defined as active caring, in contrast to the more passive connotations of pity or sympathy⁹ (Gyatso, 1994).

We become aware of the limitations of our compassion in attempting to apply it in everyday life. Generating awareness of these limitations is an essential foundation for the development of mindfulness. In the cognizance of our limitations, a compassionate, accepting attitude toward us forms the foundation for mindfulness while strengthening a compassionate stance toward others. Mindfulness is therefore an extension of a compassionate attitude, while at the same time compassion is necessary for mindfulness. Indeed, mindfulness and compassion are frequently discussed as two intertwined aspects of practice in Buddhist literature.

Mindfulness is a primary practice used in Buddhist meditation techniques. On a basic level, it involves following the rhythmic motion of the breath with an attitude of nonjudgmental, present-centred awareness¹⁰ (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). This awareness is directed toward all thoughts, feelings, and sensations that occur during practice. Frequently referred to as distractions, they form the basis for developing equanimity and acceptance. The practice of mindfulness does not seek to “empty the mind”; instead, it is a much greater feat to observe, with acceptance, how full the mind actually is. When applied sporadically, mindfulness can be extremely relaxing. However, when applied regularly, mindfulness can be a revolutionary and transformative cognitive, emotional, and spiritual experience.

It is paradoxical that in order to facilitate mindfulness of our own thoughts, feelings, and sensations, we must first enable ourselves to be more compassionate toward others. However, this paradox lies at the heart of the Buddhist path that

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seeks freedom from suffering for all beings, and does not distinguish between self and other. Additionally, the fact that compassion for others precedes mindfulness of one’s own behaviours is further verification of the interconnectedness of all beings.\textsuperscript{11} (Rinpoche, 1991).

The information summarized in this paper should not be confused with a comprehensive presentation of Buddhism. Indeed, the Buddhism presented here may itself be an empty phenomenon constructed to suit the needs of 21st-century psychotherapy. It should be noted that this particular construction has occurred by the author’s own experience with Tibetan Buddhism, and so should not be confused as a universal guide to Buddhist practice for the clinical psychologist. Instead, only an attempt was made at presenting some of the relevant foundation stones in the Buddhist context. There may be disagreement by some readers as to the value of certain terms and the exclusion of others. Additionally, this presentation lacks many of the lengthy lists common to presentations of Buddhism. This was a deliberate choice by the author to present a focused snapshot of a complex developmental journey without excessive jargon. This also emphasizes the relative diversity of Buddhist phasizes traditions, and the construction of a newer, emerging American Buddhism.

There is neither sufficient space for a discussion of different Buddhisms, nor is this the appropriate forum for such a discussion. Instead, the concepts presented in this paper can be used to guide the clinical psychologist in further explorations in the subsequent articles. As Buddhist concepts and practices gain greater acceptance in current therapy practice, it is important to gain an understanding of the original context of this knowledge. Such an understanding will undoubtedly be enriching for both Buddhism and psychology, as both strive to improve the human condition.\textsuperscript{12}


4.4. Concept of Social Justice in Buddhism:

Social justice means right and fair behavior or treatment to all people in a given society. It refers to a concept of a just society, where “justice” refers to more than just the administration of laws. It is based on the idea of a society which gives individuals and groups fair treatment and a just share of the benefits of society. Different proponents of social justice have developed different interpretations of what constitutes fair treatment and a just share. Social justice is both a philosophical problem and an important issue in politics and economics such as binary economics. It can be argued that everyone wishes to live in a just society, but different political ideologies have different conceptions of what a ‘just society’ actually is. The term “social justice” itself tends to be used by those ideologies who believe that present day society is highly unjust - and these are usually left-wing ideologies, advocating a more extensive use of income redistribution, a more egalitarian society. The right-wing has its own conception of social justice, but generally believes that it is best achieved through the operation of a free market, and the promotion of philanthropy and charity. Both right and left tend to agree on the importance of rule of law, human rights, and some form of a welfare safety net.

Social justice is a subject widely talked about and very much needed but yet so elusive. Most people want to have justice done to them; unfortunately they hardly stop and ponder for a while if what they are doing is justice to other people. This is, in accordance with Buddhist teaching, due to their selfishness and delusion.

In today’s world, though the advancement of technology is unprecedented, yet men are facing numerous problems such as the increase of crime rates and violence in developed countries and also the serious violation of Human Rights and social injustice in all corners of the world. If we just tune in to the news now, we will see that such violations are indeed occurring everywhere. Although, the

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Buddha taught the development of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity among living beings, we also see that the countries in which the majority of people are Buddhists have been suffering from the abuse of their Human Rights and social justice. The people in these countries have been deprived of their fundamental rights and justice for many decades. In fact, if they truly practice the Buddha’s teachings and fulfill their duties and responsibilities as Buddhists, there would not be violation of Human Rights and injustice, instead the people would live in harmony and enjoy justice and their rights fully. Let us now discuss some salient features of the Buddha’s teaching with regard to social justice.

4.4.1. Men are Born Equal:

Brahmanism taught that men were created by the Almighty Brahma from different parts of his body, and according to their castes they are assigned duties to perform. Those who were born into low castes had to do all the menial jobs and were downtrodden by the high caste people. The Buddha taught that men are born equal but their actions alone which distinguish them:

“One is not a brahmin by birth,
Nor by birth is one a non-brahmin
By action (kamma) is one a brahmin.
By action is one a non-brahmin.
For men are farmers by their acts
And by their acts are craftsmen too.
And men are merchants by their acts
And by their acts are servants too.
And men are priests by their acts
And by their acts are rulers too.” (Vasetthasutta, MN)

4.4.2. Buddhism and Human Rights:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights promotes universal respect for, and the observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without
distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. The purpose of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are development of freedom, equality, dignity, justice, rights and the spirit of brotherhood in the world. These are in complete accord with Buddhist principle and we have to say that these are nothing new to Buddhism. The Human Rights ideal in Buddhism emerges from two basic assumptions: philosophical and ethical. In fact, according to the Buddhist view, human beings are born with complete freedom and responsibility. They are subject only to non-deterministic causal laws, but not being the creations of a Creator, their destinies are therefore in their own hands. The Dhamma taught by the Buddha has various implications and meanings. It includes the philosophical and ethical doctrines which consider moral principles, rights and duties. The Buddha did not teach any politics but taught domestic and social ethics, which offered individuals the opportunity to acquire status in society regardless of caste, class or gender without discrimination between householders or ordained monks. If we study the Buddha Dhamma thoroughly we see that the Dhamma means the universal law which is applicable to all mankind.

4.4.3 Equality and Dignity:

At the time of the Buddha, the religious and philosophical situation in India was not yet one of a clearly established system, it was in fact chaotic. There were many teachers, sages and recluses, who declared their own philosophies and ‘ultimate realities’, but all differing from each other, so that religious and philosophical debates were very common. If we look at the social situation at that time we discover that the concept of social equality did not exist. There were at least four classes in society, a large percentage of the people belonging to the lowest castes or untouchables; these people were deprived of all spiritual, social rights and justice. The status of women at that time was also very low, and they knew no equality. It was common for animals to be killed in sacrifice in the name of religion for the sake of particular people. In those days, acceptance of the caste system and the sacrificial killings in the name of a god represented adherence to a religion or a doctrinal practice. The Buddha, after his Enlightenment, discovered
the truth for himself and taught the Dhamma which contradicted these traditional concepts. The Buddha himself said that his teachings were against the prevalent current of belief (patisota gami). It is, in deed, vital to understand that the Buddha’s Dhamma is not a kind of religious sermon given to please or appease super beings or God, but a path to develop wisdom and compassion towards all living beings. In Buddhism, the freedom of human begins at their birth itself. Therefore, Buddhism recognized human equality in dignity and rights and responsibilities. The Buddha said; “Oneself is one’s own refuge; what other refuge can there be?” “Purity and impurity depend on oneself. No one can purify another.”

4.4.4. The Position of Man:

After His Enlightenment the Buddha taught the Middle Path, free from the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification or excessive ascetic practices, which He himself had followed before he discovered the Middle Path. The Middle Path is not a kind of religious teaching but the way to freedom from human suffering and the attainment of Enlightenment. He attributed all His realizations, attainments and achievements to human endeavour and practice. The Buddha-dhamma is applicable to all classes of men and women: kings and peasants, high castes and low castes, bankers and beggars, holy men and robbers without any distinction between them, it is opened to all men and women who are ready to understand and to follow it. The Buddha was not born as a Buddha, but he was born as a human person.

He understood human problems; then he discovered the truth and became a Buddha. Every man has within himself the potentiality of becoming a Buddha, if he so wills it and endeavors. The Buddha, unlike other founders of religion, did not claim himself to be anything other than human or assign himself a special role in Buddhism. According to Christianity, Christ claimed himself as the Messiah of Christianity and the son of God. One must accept Christ as the Son of God, if not, one is not entitled to the salvation he offered. In Islam, Mohammad claimed that he was last prophet sent by God, there is no salvation unless one accepts him as
the last prophet. But the Buddha said that I am a guide to show you the path (magga data) but not the One who gives salvation (mokkha data). Man’s position, therefore, according to Buddhism, is supreme. Man is his own master, and there is no higher being or power that sits in judgment over his destiny. The Buddha spoke of individual responsibility, and encouraged and stimulated each person to develop himself or herself to work out one’s own emancipation, for man himself has the power to liberate himself from all bondages through his own personal effort and intelligence. Thus, Buddhism offers full human rights, justices and responsibilities.

“You should work for your own liberation,
for the Tathagatas only show the way”

4.4.5. Rights and Equality:

Hinduism traditionally prohibited women, low caste members and untouchables from practising for their spiritual attainment and salvation. But the Buddha gave permission to ordain women and practice the Dhamma. There were many low castes, untouchables and criminals who entered into the Sangha and achieved their final goal, to name as example; Upali-the barber, Sunita- the sweeper, Sopaka and Suppiya- the untouchables, Angulimala- the robber etc. Though the status of women in Buddhist countries, in these days, is not yet satisfactory, however, because of Buddhism women have come to enjoy more equality, greater respect and authority than ever before. The exclusive supremacy of men has begun to give way before the increasing emancipation of women. This change was also accelerated by the innate intelligence of women who showed that they were responsible, rational beings with intelligence. This caused women to cease regarding themselves as inferior and to grow more aware of the similarities between men and women, and the position of women became honorable. The great service to humanity of the Buddha was his condemnation of the caste system which makes distinctions between men based on birth or racial origins. The Buddha asserted that all men are equal in their right to an open path to the highest truth they could all attain. He taught that men become noble by virtuous conduct
and charitable deeds and they become outcastes only by misconduct and miserliness, not by birth. Thus Buddhism offered rights, responsibilities, justice and human dignity to society.

4.4.6. The Path of Purification:

Buddhism, truly speaking, is not a religion in the sense commonly understood, but it is a path of purification open for all without any discrimination. Whether one accepts the Buddha or not, it doesn’t matter for the Buddha’s compassion is extended equally to all living beings. The main cause of human problems and suffering, according to Buddhism, is the human mind itself in which greed, anger and delusion are latent as mental dispositions, because of these one cannot understand right or wrong and then accumulates unwholesome actions. If the mind is pure and influenced by loving kindness, compassion and wisdom, one’s actions become pure and wholesome. The sad truth is that the human mind is not always filled with loving kindness, compassion and wisdom, whether one likes it or not, the mind always has reacted according to its mental dispositions. As the Buddha fully aware of this situation, said:

“Not to do any evil,
To cultivate good,
To purify one’s mind.
This is the teaching of the Buddhas”

With regard to the concept and practice of human rights, which is no less susceptible to do good or to do evil according to the states of mind on the part of particular individuals, classes, and nations. And as with the human heart, the concept of human rights no less needs to be cleansed of all the parochialism and sectarian prejudices so as to be able not to do any evil and to cultivate good. This is the most basic problem with which the Buddha was concerned. The Buddha explained further the reason for the human situation and the violation of human rights, justice and dignity as being rooted in attachment (Upadana). There are four kinds of attachments: attachment to sensual objects, to ideas or view, to rites and rituals and to self or personality. To eradicate these attachments and purify the mind he laid down three kinds of training: sila- morality, samadhi- controlling of the mind and Pannawisdom or purification of the mind.
4.4.7. The Three fold Training:

The main goal of Buddhism is to attain the state of Nibbana through the path of purification. This goal is not easily attained, but one has to reach it by treading the path gradually. The Buddha said:

“I, o monks, do not say that the attainment of profound knowledge comes straight away; nevertheless, monks, the attainment of profound knowledge comes by a gradual training, a gradual doing, a gradual course.”

Sila—morality, the foundation of training, includes all the virtues of the honest respectable person, it has been identified with virtues in general, and purification of the body, speech and mind by refraining from unwholesome actions. It is usually understood as five moral precepts (Pancasila) which constitute the layman’s definitive code of practical ethics. Man is a social being and develops his character in relation to the society in which he belongs, so whatever he does, leaves its impression not only on himself but also on his society. The practice of the moral precepts must, therefore, also leave their impression. The five fundamental moral precepts are:

1. Abstaining from the harming or taking of life
2. Abstaining from taking what is not given
3. Abstaining from misusing the senses or sexual misconduct
4. Abstaining from false speech
5. Abstaining from taking intoxicating drinks or drugs.

The moral conduct or precepts are built on the vast conception of loving-kindness and universal compassion. It will establish friendliness and the value of life not only between men, but also with all living beings.

Samadhi—concentration is purity of the mind (citta-visuddhi). Through the practice of concentration one can maintain a good standard of morality. It is a very essential practice to discipline one’s own mind. Whatever crimes, violence or cruelty happen in the world are because of untrained or untamed minds. So the practice of concentration is very important to live harmoniously in society.
Panna- wisdom is the right understanding of life as being impermanent, suffering and as the absence of a soul or ego, through wisdom one can uproot all traces of impurities which are latent in the mind as mental dispositions. It, therefore, is total purification of the mind. When the mind is pure and free from ignorance, then one experiences the bliss of Nibbana and realises the truth within.

4.4.8. Wisdom and Morality :

It is true to say that wisdom is necessary, but morality is more necessary. For wisdom without morality is dangerous, mere wisdom is dangerous. Wisdom is like a sword in the hand of a man. In the hand of a man with morality it may be used for saving a man from danger. But in the hand of a man without morality it may be used for murder. That is why morality is more important than wisdom. The reason why the Buddha gave greater importance to morality than to wisdom is obvious. The use of wisdom depends upon a man’s morality. Apart from morality, wisdom has no value. Nowadays, we see immorality or injustice, crime and violence are due to a lack of morality.

According to the Buddha, Sila, morality is incomparable in this world. And the Blessed One said:

“Sila is the beginning and the refuge. Sila is the mother of all good. It is the foremost of all good conditions. Therefore, purify your Sila”.

4.4.9. Wisdom and Compassion :

There are some different opinions in Buddhism which have divided its followers into two schools. One says that only wisdom is the foundation of Buddhism and the other says only compassion is the foundation. In fact, if we study the teachings of the Buddha in detail, we will see that one should develop in order to perfect two essential qualities equally, compassion on the one side, and wisdom on the other. Here compassion represents love, charity, kindness, tolerance and such noble qualities on the emotional side, or qualities of the heart, while wisdom would stand for the intellectual side or the qualities of the mind. If one develops only emotional qualities and neglects the intellectual ones, one may
become a good-hearted fool; while to develop only the intellectual side neglecting the emotional may turn one into a hard-hearted intellectual without feeling for others. Therefore, to perfect oneself one has to develop both equally. That is the aim of the Buddhist way of life. Nevertheless, in Mahayana Buddhism, a Bodhisattva is said to be dominated by two forces: compassion and wisdom. Compassion governs his conduct towards his fellow beings, wisdom is his attitude to reality. So that it is essential to develop both compassion and wisdom. Furthermore, Compassion and Wisdom are two sides of reality. Without wisdom there will be no compassion, without compassion, no wisdom. Wisdom is not the same as discursive knowledge, it is intuitive knowledge, which perceives through experience; it is also called transcendent wisdom, which realized the oneness of the universe. We speak of wisdom and compassion as two different things, in fact, there is no dualism here, for wisdom is compassion and compassion is wisdom. Therefore it is said in the Lankavatara Sutra: “Great wisdom is absolute compassion. Compassion comes out of wisdom, Wisdom is compassion.” This is the essence of Mahayana teaching.

4.4.10. The Concept of God:

Both the concept of God and its associated creation myths have been protected and defended by believers who need these ideas to justify their existence and usefulness to human society. All the believers claim to have received their respective scriptures as Revelation; in other words, they all profess to come directly from the one God. Each God-religion claims that it stands for Universal Peace and Universal Brotherhood and other such high ideals.

However great the ideals of the religious might be, the history of the world shows that the religions up to the present day have also helped in spreading superstitions. Some have stood against science and the advancement of knowledge, leading to ill-feelings, murders and wars. In this respect, the God-religions have failed in their attempt to enlighten mankind. For example, in certain countries when people pray for mercy, their hands are stained with the blood of the morbid sacrifices of innocent animals and sometimes, even fellow human
beings. These poor and helpless creatures were slaughtered at the desecrated altars of imaginary and imperceptible gods. It has taken a long time for people to understand the futility of such cruel practices in the name of religion. The time has come for them to realize that the path of real purification is through love and understanding.

Dr. G. Dharmasiri in his book ‘Buddhist critique of the Christian Concept of God’ has mentioned, ‘I see that though the notion of God contains sublime moral strands, it also has certain implications that are extremely dangerous to the humans as well as to the other beings on this planet.

‘One major threat to humanity is the blindfold called ‘authority’ imposed on the humans by the concept of God. All theistic religions consider authority as ultimate and sacred. It was this danger that the Buddha was pointing at in the Kalama Sutta. At the moment, human individuality and freedom are seriously threatened by various forms of authorities. Various ‘authorities’ have been trying to make ‘you’ a follower. On top of all our ‘traditional’ authorities, a new form of authority has emerged in the name of ‘science’. And lately, the mushrooming new religions and the menace of the Gurus(as typified by Jim Jones), have become live threats to the individual’s human freedom and dignity. The Buddha’s eternal plea is for you to become a Buddha, and He showed, in a clearly rational way, that each and every one of us has the perfect potentiality and capacity to attain that ideal.’

God-religions offer no salvation without God. Thus a man might conceivably have climbed to the highest pinnacle of virtue, and he might have led a righteous way of life, and he might even have climbed to the highest level of holiness, yet he is to be condemned to eternal hell just because he did not believe in the existence of God. On the other hand, a man might have sinned deeply and yet, having made a late repentance, he can be forgiven and therefore ‘saved’. From the Buddhist point of view, there is no justification in this kind of doctrine.

Despite the apparent contradictions of the God-religions, it is not deemed advisable to preach a Godless doctrine since the belief in god has also done a
tremendous service to mankind, especially in places where the god concept is desirable. This belief in god has helped mankind to control his animal nature. And much help has been granted to others in the name of god. At the same time, man feels insecure without the belief in god. He finds protection and inspiration when that belief is in his mind. The reality or validity of such a belief is based on man’s understanding capacity and spiritual maturity.

However, religion should also concern our practical life. It is to be used as a guide to regulate our conduct in the world. Religion tells us what to do and what not to do. If we do not follow a religion sincerely, mere religious labels or belief in god do not serve us in our daily life.

On the other hand, if the followers of various religions are going to quarrel and to condemn other beliefs and practices -- especially to prove or disprove the existence of God -- and if they are going to harbor anger towards other religions because of their different religious views, then they are creating enormous disharmony amongst the various religious communities. Whatever religious difference we have, it is our duty to practise tolerance, patience and understanding. It is our duty to respect the other man’s religious belief even if we cannot accommodate it; tolerance is necessary for the sake of harmonious and peaceful living.

However, it does not serve any purpose to introduce this concept of god to those who are not ready to appreciate it. To some people this belief is not important to lead a righteous life. There are many who lead a noble life without such belief while amongst believers there are many who violate the peace and happiness of innocent people.

Buddhists can also co-operate with those who hold this concept of god, if they use this concept for the peace, happiness and welfare of mankind but not with those who abuse this concept by threatening people in order to introduce this belief just for their own benefit and with ulterior motives.

For more than 2,500 years, all over the world, Buddhists have practised and introduced Buddhism very peacefully without the necessity of sustaining the concept of a creator of God. And they will continue to sustain this religion in the same manner without disturbing the followers of other religions.
Therefore, with due respect to other religionists, it must be mentioned that any attempt to introduce this concept into Buddhism is unnecessary. Let Buddhists maintain their belief since it is harmless to others and, let the basic Teachings of the Buddha remain.

From time immemorial, Buddhists have led a peaceful religious life without incorporating the particular concept of God. They should be capable of sustaining their particular religion without the necessity, at this juncture, of someone trying to force something down their throats against their will. Having full confidence in their Buddha Dhamma, Buddhists should be permitted to work and seek their own salvation without any undue interference from other sources. Others can uphold their beliefs and concepts, Buddhist will uphold theirs, without any rancor. We do not challenge others in regard to their religious persuasions; we expect reciprocal treatment in regard to our own beliefs and practices.

4.4.11. The Buddhist Concept of Heaven and Hell

The Buddhist concept of heaven and hell is entirely different from that in other religions. Buddhists do not accept that these places are eternal. It is unreasonable to condemn a man to eternal hell for his human weakness but quite reasonable to give him every chance to develop himself. From the Buddhist point of view, those who go to hell can work themselves upward by making use of the merit that they had acquired previously. There are no locks on the gates of hell. Hell is a temporary place and there is no reason for those beings to suffer there forever.

The Buddha’s Teaching shows us that there are heavens and hells not only beyond this world, but in this very world itself. Thus the Buddhist conception of heaven and hell is very reasonable. For instance, the Buddha once said, ‘When the average ignorant person makes an assertion to the effect that there is a Hell (patala) under the ocean he is making a statement which is false and without basis. The word ‘Hell’ is a term for painful sensations. ‘The idea of one particular ready-made place or a place created by god as heaven and hell is not acceptable to the Buddhist concept.
The fire of hell in this world is hotter than that of the hell in the world-beyond. There is no fire equal to anger, lust or greed and ignorance. According to the Buddha, we are burning from eleven kinds of physical pain and mental agony: lust, hatred, illusion sickness, decay, death, worry, lamentation, pain (physical and mental), melancholy and grief. People can burn the entire world with some of these fires of mental discord. From a Buddhist point of view, the easiest way to define hell and heaven is that wherever there is more suffering, either in this world or any other plane, that place is a hell to those who suffer. And where there is more pleasure or happiness, either in this world or any other worldly existence, that place is a heaven to those who enjoy their worldly life in that particular place. However, as the human realm is a mixture of both pain and happiness, human beings experience both pain and happiness and will be able to realize the real nature of life. But in many other planes of existence inhabitants have less chance for this realization. In certain places there is more suffering than pleasure while in some other places there is more pleasure than suffering.

Buddhists believe that after death rebirth can take place in any one of a number of possible existences. This future existence is conditioned by the last thought-moment a person experiences at the point of death. This last thought which determines the next existence results from the past actions of a man either in this life or before that. Hence, if the predominant thought reflects meritorious action, then he will find his future existence in a happy state. But that state is temporary and when it is exhausted a new life must begin all over again, determined by another dominating ‘kammic’ energy. This repetitious process goes on endlessly unless one arrives at ‘Right View’ and makes a firm resolve to follow the Noble Path which produces the ultimate happiness of Nibbana.

Heaven is a temporary place where those who have done good deeds experience more sensual pleasures for a longer period. Hell is another temporary place where those evil doers experience more physical and mental suffering. It is not justifiable to believe that such places are permanent. There is no god behind the scene of heaven and hell. Each and every person experiences according to his
good and bad kamma. Buddhist never try to introduce Buddhism by frightening people through hell-fire or enticing people by pointing to paradise. Their main idea is character building and mental training. Buddhists can practise their religion without aiming at heaven or without developing fear of hell.

4.4.12. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity:

In a 1954 speech, shortly before his death, Ambedkar said that “positively, my social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality, and fraternity.” Understanding the obvious implication of this trisected, he added, “Let no one, however, say that I have borrowed my philosophy from the French Revolution.” He goes on to explain how Buddha interpreted the relationship between these three ideals. But if he recognized the origin of this phrase, then he clearly was referencing the French Revolution, and more generally Enlightenment principles. It is curious that Buddha, whom he calls his “master” in this speech, is only an interpreter for the French motto. In his other writings, Ambedkar uses “liberty, equality and fraternity” as the three chief signs of humane and just religion: they represent to him everything that Hinduism is not. Is this a sign that he held European values more highly than Indian values, and wished to make over India in the image of Europe? Certainly this has been an active strain of criticism about his life’s work, and the debate over the Hindu Code bill was largely a question of Indianness versus international opinion. .” Fraternity is the cutting edge of Ambedkar’s Buddhism and the new Buddhist movement. Fraternity is sangha, the community of practitioners, and the wider community of all beings, and as such, it is linked to equality. However, fraternity is a challenge for the Dalit community. It challenges them just like race, class, and diversity challenge Western Buddhists. The social realities of India draw clear lines between all the religions—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, and Buddhist; between caste and noncaste; and, most critically, between the many Dalit groups themselves within the system of “graded inequality,” each group scrambling for the tiniest privileges of social position, economic opportunity, and political power. Fraternity is what connects us.14

14 Paper presented to an interreligious seminar on “Concept of Social Justice in Religions” organized by Cambodian Interreligious Council and Konrad Adenauer Foundation, August 17, 2007, Sunway Hotel, Phnom Penh. The author would like to express his profound thanks to the organizers for the warm invitation.
The proposed reforms for Hinduism play into this argument easily, because they seem to be partially an attempt to rewrite Hinduism from scratch in order to model it after Christianity. Rather than a diverse bundle of contradictory sacred texts, which different strains of Hinduism honor in different orders and ways, Ambedkar would have a group compile “one and only one standard book of Hindu Religion” which would become the only legal text for teaching Hinduism in the country. He does not mention the word “Bible”, but the parallel is obvious. Meanwhile, he would eliminate the caste distinctions which render all Brahmins priests by birth, and instead outlaw preaching or holding ceremonies without accreditation, and allow any Hindu to become a priest if they pass an examination. This resembles the method by which some sects of Christianity accredit priests.

However, a closer look reveals some clear discrepancies with how Western nations treat religion, and suggests that Ambedkar was modeling his ideal Hinduism on his understanding of Buddhism. *The Buddha and His Dhamma* is his “one standard book”, specifically written to encourage a single orthopraxy and the elimination of “not-dhamma” popular beliefs, and in this aspiration it resembles Theravada Buddhism. In Ambedkar’s Buddhism, we find a set of open standards for the priesthood similar to those laid out in *The Annihilation of Caste*: the Sangha is free of all barriers of caste, sex, and status, and monks are certified by oral examination. This, too, accurately reflects how Theravada is practiced in Southeast Asian countries, with the exception that the nun’s lineage died out in the medieval era.

Additionally, and more bizarrely to Western eyes, the state plays a large role in the proposed reform. The priest is required to be “the servant of the State”, the number of priests will be fixed by the state, and the state will draw up an examination which all priests will be required to pass. This system does not seem to be a blueprint for a religion so much as an parallel agency to the Indian Civil Service, the immense administrative and education bureaucracy mentioned by Ambedkar. Since the separation of church and state was an issue long since settled by Ambedkar’s time, he could not be said to be drawing on any contemporary Western source. Rather, these reforms must point deeper, to Ambedkar’s understanding of the nature of Hinduism itself.
Hinduism as Non-Religion:

If our understanding is correct, then Ambedkar imagined an egalitarian Hindu reform which would ground it in Buddhism, and enforce this reform across the nation by law. This would be an ambitious program indeed. But doesn’t regulating religiousness undermine one’s capacity for free expression, the entire basis of the “new paradigm”? Ambedkar’s statement of personal philosophy, given many years after this speech, reaffirms this: “Law is secular, which anybody may break while fraternity or religion is sacred which anybody must respect.” This statement portrays religion as a matter of voluntary association (“fraternity”) which could not be manufactured by the law. There is the possibility that Ambedkar had completely reversed his position on Hinduism after going through the ordeal of the Hindu Code Bill and preparing for his own conversion to Buddhism. Even if that is the case, how do we resolve the initial contradiction?

The answer is in Ambedkar’s conception of Hinduism, and this answer may also supply us with a resolution for some of the remaining problems with his proposed reforms. Ambedkar, deriving his understanding of religion from Max Muller, recognized that “in all ancient Society, Law and Religion were one.” He therefore recognized the Manusmriti as a “Code of Laws”, but not as a “book of Religion” in the modern sense, because it did not fulfill his requirements for modern religion—namely, it lacks social utility, justice, and the “fraternity” associated above with religion, not to mention equality and liberty. He wrote that “what Hindus call Religion is really Law”, a statement that seems clear enough given his legal background and legalistic critique of Hinduism, but appended a clear denunciation of claims to religious status: “Frankly, I refuse to call this code of ordinances, as Religion.”

In Ambedkar’s perception, the Manusmriti must be reread, not as an expression of transcendental order, but as a Draconian and fundamentally unjust code of laws originating in the mind of the “hireling” Manu in order to serve “the interests of a class ... whose title to being supermen was not to be lost even if they lost their virtue.” This condemnation mirrors the description of the modern
priestly class as one that “recognizes no duties [and] knows only of rights and privileges.” By placing the Manusmriti in historical context and reevaluating it as a self-serving tract, Ambedkar delegitimizes and desanctifies. Of course, just because it is a legal system that favors one group over another does not necessarily mean it is uninspired. The legal system of the Qu’ran is justified today as being the direct command of God, and likely some Brahmins would defend the Manusmriti with a similar argument. In response, Ambedkar points to the less than divine origins of the book, as a production of a minor class of guru, to show that rather than deserving the protection of “religious freedom”, it ought to be treated as a legal text and regulated in that way.

It is not difficult to see the connection from this line of argument directly to Ambedkar’s proposals for Hindu reform. In these proposals, Ambedkar is minimizing the theological implications of reform in order to focus in on legal changes. If the role a Brahmin plays in a village is that of a sort of rogue lawyer, rather than a metaphysical teacher, it is easier to understand why he cannot be allowed to enforce his laws without earning and receiving the approval of a government authority. Such unjust laws as those in the Manusmriti, too, could not possibly be certified for enforcement in a democratic nation; it is better to set up a single law-book, which regulates the behavior of local lawyers, and does not allow gross contradictions from town to town. When he says that “to my mind there is nothing revolutionary in this”, he means that he is only applying the same standards to Hinduism as he would to his own profession as lawyer and legislator.

4.4.13. The Law of Kamma :

There is an order in the physical world; i.e there is a certain order in the movements and actions of the starry bodies, a certain order by which seasons come and go in regular sequence and by which seeds grow into trees and trees yield fruits and fruits give seed. Buddhists named them as Niyamas, laws which produce an orderly sequence such as Ritu, Bija niyama. Similarly, there is a moral order in human society. How it is produced? How is it maintained? Those who believe in a creator God have no difficulty answering these questions. For them
the moral order is maintained by God. He is the creator and the supreme Governor of the world. He is also the author of moral as well as of physical laws. According to the Buddha it is the Kamma niyama and not God which maintains the moral order in the universe. The moral order of the universe may be good or it may be bad, it depends on man and no one else. If man does good actions (kusala-kamma), the moral order is good. If the moral order is bad it is because man does bad actions (akusala-kamma). This is the law of kamma (kamma-niyama). Kamma means man’s actions and Vipaka means its result. According to this law the effect of the deed was bound to follow the deed, as surely as night follows day.

According to the Buddhist doctrine of causal relations, phenomena or events are not the product of a single cause, but of a multiplicity of causes or conditions. There is no single cause, nor first cause which conditions any particular effect. The question of the cause of a first event does not arise because a first event did not ever exist.

4.4.14. Inequality:

According to Buddhism, the inequality one sees in the world is due not only to heredity, environment, nature and nurture, but also to the operation of the law of kamma, or in other words, it is result of our own inherited past actions and as well as our present doings. We ourselves are responsible for our own happiness and misery. We create our own heaven and our own hell. We are the architects of our own fate. We ourselves, in short, are our own kamma. As the Buddha said:- “Every living being has kamma as its owner, its inheritance, its origin, its kinsman, its refuge. Kamma also differentiates beings into low and high states.” Kamma literally means action, the Buddha defined it as mental volition (cetana). He said: “It is volition, o monks, that I call kamma. Having willed one acts through body, speech or mind.” Any action one performs with pure intention, is called wholesome kamma, if the intention is impure, then it is called unwholesome kamma. Kamma, therefore, is not merely the affair of external or visible deeds, but it is the motive or volition involved in thinking, speaking or
doing. Any deed devoid of will or intention cannot properly be called kamma. Any kamma one performs intentionally has its result of happiness or sorrow which will follow according to the nature of one’s intention as the law of kamma.

4.4.15. Freedom of Thought:

It is stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18) that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Buddhism from its very inception, commenced with recognition of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The freedom of thought allowed by the Buddha is unheard of elsewhere in the history of religions. The Buddha-dhamma is open to all without any discriminating of castes, class or colour and is not to be accepted on blind faith, but it invites one to come and see - Ehipassiko to test its truth and validity before accepting it. Although the Buddha said “ekayano maggo, this is the only path” to emancipation, but if its claims are disproved or unsubstantiated, one is free to search for the truth elsewhere. A doctrine calling upon the peoples of the world to test its truth for themselves certainly stands for freedom of thought. The Dhamma taught by the Buddha is ‘to be understood individually by the wise.’ This also is not possible without freedom of thought.

Conscience is the moral sense of right and wrong and is recognized as such in Buddhism as well. Conscience has a role to play in deciding the moral worth of an action. Buddhism measures the moral worth of an action in terms of its results. Thus one’s conscience must be free to take all possible consequences of one’s actions into account. The Buddha advised Rahula: “To make sure that a proposed course of action should always lead to good and never to harmful results either to oneself or to others or to both.”

The most important teaching on the freedom of thought and conscience is also to be found in the Buddha’s advice to the Kalamas: “Come, o Kalamas, do not be led by report, by tradition or by hearsay or by the authority of religious texts; or by claims of knowledge and truth that are based on any type of reasoning or speculation, or on the basis of the reliability of the person, or by the respect for your teacher. Rather, Kalamas, when you know for yourself these things are
unprofitable, blameworthy and conducive to loss and sorrow, then, indeed, you should reject them. And when you know for yourself that certain things are profitable, blameless and conducive to profit and happiness, then indeed you should accept them and abide by them.”

4.4.16. Freedom of Religion

The right to the freedom of religion and tolerance allowed by the Buddha is astonishing to those who study the history of religion. The Buddha advised his followers to respect all other religious orders. Upali, for instance, a prominent, wealthy householder and well-known lay disciple of Nigantha Nathaputta, was convinced after discussing them that the views of the Buddha were right and those of his teacher were wrong. So he begged the Buddha to accept him as one of his lay disciples (Upasaka). But the Buddha asked him to reconsider it, not to be in a hurry, for ‘considering carefully is good for well-known men like you’. When Upali expressed his desire again, the Buddha requested him to continue to respect and support his old religious teachers as he was used to.

General Siha of Vesali who was also a disciple of Nigantha Nathaputta, after having conversed with the Buddha declared himself a follower of the Buddha, but the Buddha accepted him only on condition that Siha would continue to support his former teacher too. This attitude of the Buddha made Siha respect the Buddha even more. This shows clearly that Buddhism is also concerned with the social impact of religion and considers that religion should serve not as a divisive but as a unifying force for spiritual uplift, the immediate happiness and well-being of people. Therefore, there should be no conflicts in the name of religion, or because of religion.

In the third century BC, the Buddhist Emperor Asoka honored and supported all other religions in his vast empire. Intending his subject to follow the noble example of tolerance and understanding, he had carved on rock one of his Edicts, the original of which one may read even today. The Emperor declared; “the one who doesn’t honor others religions, does not honor his own; the one who does honor others, honors his own.”

Nowadays, we are working with other faiths, learning to live together with neighbors in harmony, so we should apply this spirit of sympathetic understanding and tolerance. This spirit of tolerance and understanding has been from the beginning one of the most cherished ideals of Buddhist culture and civilization.

4.4.17. The Sublime States (*Brahma-vihara*)

There are four sublime states which are called *Brahma-vihara*, the literal meaning is living as Brahma. According to Buddhist cosmology Brahma is the highest being in the order of beings. As a result of the attainment of meditative absorptions one is reborn into the Brahma realm, who always practises metta loving kindness, karuna-compassion, mudita-sympathetic joy and upekkhā equanimity. Any one, in this world, who practises these meditations is said to be living as Brahma or sublime living (*Brahma-vihara*). The human mind is latent with both virtuous and evil tendencies. Whenever one accumulates any virtuous deeds, these pure volitional forces lie latent in the mind as perfections (*paramita*); if one accumulates any evil actions, then impure forces lie latent in the mind as defilements (*kilesa*). Those who wish to be great, noble and service, who wish to sublimate themselves in order to serve humanity, endeavour their best to remove the latent vices and to cultivate the perfections with persistent effort and enduring patience. The Buddha, therefore, taught these sublime meditations to get rid of the latent impurities and develop love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, so that one can live happily, peacefully with oneself and with others.

**Loving kindness (Metta)** is pure love, infinite love, boundless love and unconditioned love. If the love is based on some kinds of selfishness or attachment, that is not metta. Metta should be given freely, without expectation of some thing in return and it should not be discriminated or limited to only a few people. There are many kinds of love in human society; a husband’s love for his wife, a wife’s love for her husband; a parent’s love for their children, children’s love for their parents; brotherly love, sisterly love.

Love between men and women and between friends, none of these forms of love can be called metta, because all of these loves are based on attachment and
selfishness. Metta can be developed properly if one gives it to boundless beings. The object of metta meditation should be infinite beings, it also called illimitable (appamañña). Therefore metta should be extended towards all beings without exception. May all living beings be well and happy, it embraces all living beings. Through metta meditation one softens one’s heart.

It is defined as the sincere wish for the welfare and genuine happiness of all living beings without exception. There are at least forty kinds of meditation object described in Theravada Buddhism, according to the individual temperament and need. Some of them are suitable or beneficial for some people depending on their own temperament, but the metta meditation is suitable for all kinds of temperament and all time.

**Compassion (Karuna)** is pure compassion, infinite compassion; it is boundless and unconditioned compassion. If compassion is based on selfishness or attachment, that is not karuna. It should be developed toward all beings without exception, or limitation. Whatever compassion one develops toward certain people, such as parents, friends, family etc. is not Karuna, because it is discriminatory. The object of karuna meditation should be boundless beings, it also called illimitable (appamanna). So that karuna should be extended toward all living beings. “May all living beings without exception be free from all kinds of suffering”, it therefore embraces all beings. The practice of karuna, makes one’s good heart quiver when others are seen to be subject to suffering. It is the wish to remove the woes of others and compels one to serve others with altruistic motives. The one who practises compassion lives not for himself but for others. He always seeks opportunities to serve others expecting nothing in return, not even gratitude.

**Sympathetic Joy (Mudita)** is pure sympathetic joy, and boundless, infinite and unconditioned sympathetic joy. If we feel sympathetic-joy or happiness when our nearest and dearest are successful and happy, then that is not mudita, for it is based on selfishness and attachment, and it also limited. Therefore we should practise sympathetic joy towards all living beings without exception. This is a very effective practice to destroy our jealousy. It is jealousy that endangers our whole social constitution. In one way mudita is concerned more with oneself that
with others as it tends to eradicate jealousy which ruins oneself. It is true that the
practice of metta and karuna is easier than the practice of mudita which demands
great personal effort and strong will power. Therefore, one should practise
sympathetic joy if one wishes to uplift oneself and be internally happy.

Equanimity (Upekkha) is the most difficult and the most essential sublime state.
It is the highest state of the mind which one can experience after the attainment of
the meditative absorptions. However, the etymological meaning of the term
Upekkha is ‘discerning rightly,’ ‘viewing justly,’ or ‘looking impartially’, that is
without attachment or aversion. This is a very effective meditation practice for
those who have to live in an unbalanced society amidst fluctuating circumstances.
Society is so constituted that the good and the virtuous are often subject to unjust
criticism and attack. The worldly vicissitudes of loss and gain, fame and defame,
praise and blame, pain and happiness, affect all humanity. The one who practises
equanimitiy, amidst these vicissitudes of life, stands unshakeable, sorrowless,
stainless and secure, this is highest blessing in life. Thus, Metta embraces all
beings, karuna embraces all suffering beings, mudita embraces the prosperous,
and upekkha embraces the good and the bad, the loved and the unloved, the
pleasant and the unpleasant. The one who wishes to be divine in this life itself
must cultivate these four sublime virtues daily.

4.4.18. Shunning Prejudices

It is an acknowledged fact that injustice occurs with varying degrees in
every society and nation. According to Buddhist teaching, this kind of social evil
happens due to craving in the mind of men. The Buddha said, “from craving
springs sorrow, from craving springs fear; when craving ceases, there is no sorrow
and from where does fear.” The Buddha also pointed out four causes which make
people have prejudice (agati) in making decisions or in social dealings. As they
have prejudice, they commit injustice in society. The four causes are:

1. Prejudice due to love
2. Prejudice due to hatred
3. Prejudice due to delusion, and
4. Prejudice due to fear.
When people have these four causes, their actions will always end up in committing injustice. As one has love for somebody, one will look for reasons to do him a favor. When a person harbors hatred toward somebody, he will try to cause troubles or inflict injury upon him. Delusion makes one blind, unable to see clearly whether things are right or wrong, good or bad, wholesome or unwholesome, etc. Therefore, we all have to eradicate these four causes of prejudice if we want to establish justice in our society. The Buddhist practice of caring and sharing is a very important element of social justice. In order to have social harmony and justice, Buddhism teaches to us practice four principles i.e., generosity, kindly speech, useful conduct and equal treatment. If these four principles, particularly the principle of equal treatment, are strictly adhered to by all the people, there will not be any injustice carried out in society.¹⁶

4.4.19. The Buddha on the Caste System:

At the time of the Buddha the caste system was firmly established in India. According to this system, a person’s position in society was determined from the time he was born and there was no way to change his lot in life. There were four castes, or classes, of people in society:
- The Brahmans or priests, who claimed to be the highest caste and the purest of peoples
- The warriors
- The merchants and traders
- The untouchables, who were considered the lowest class. They became workers and servants who did all the menial jobs, and were treated as slaves.

The Buddha condemned the caste system, which he considered unjust. He pointed out that there existed wicked and cruel people as well as virtuous and kind people in every caste. Any person who had committed a crime would be punished accordingly by his karma no matter what caste he belonged to. He said a person may be considered to have come from a high or low caste according to his good and bad deeds. Therefore, according to the Buddha it is the good and bad actions of a person and not his birth that should determine his caste.

The Buddha introduced the idea of placing a higher value on morality and the equality of people instead of on which family or caste a person is born into. This was also the first attempt to abolish discrimination and slavery in the history of mankind.

The Buddha said:

- By birth one is not an outcaste;
- By birth one is not a Brahmin;
- By deeds alone one is an outcaste;
- By deeds alone one is a Brahmin.