

BUDDHISM : RIGHTS, JUSTICE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

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The violation of Human Rights

If we observe the present situation in the world, we will find that the current problems are very different from those we faced two decades ago. At that time, tensions between East and West were very high and it seemed as if a nuclear war might break out tomorrow! People had a lot of fears and anxieties, and the leaders of great nations worked hard to overcome the world climate of fear and suspicion. Now the situation has changed, we no longer have fear or anxiety for those reasons, however, we are facing great problems, not between countries, but from within our own societies: 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 read the reports of Amnesty International and other Human Rights organizations, we will see that such violations are indeed occurring everywhere. Although, the 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 practice the Buddha's teachings and fulfil their duties and responsibilities as Buddhists, there would not be violation of Human Rights and injustices, instead the people would live in harmony and enjoy justice and their rights fully.

The Meaning of Human Rights

Although the term Human Rights entered into Western Philosophy in the 17th century in the works of Grotius and Locke, it was first invoked and practised in America and France creating a new society and political order in 1776 and 1789 respectively. It was formally asserted that human beings had certain fundamental rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was accepted by most members of the United Nations in 1948. Many Nations agreed on a common text, expressing in quasi-legal language ideals relating to human dignity which were held to be universally valid. The declaration, harking back to "barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind", speaks of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. These rights are held to be the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. Subsequently, the phrase ' Human Rights' has come to denote those legal rights established in

customary law. As Julia Hausermann, the secretary for Rights and Humanity has stated, " Human Rights are not limited to freedom from torture and physical oppression, or the rights to freedom of conscience, thought and belief. Human Rights are those rights essential not just for human security but for human survival and dignity. These thus include the fundamental rights to earn a living, have adequate food, shelter, and other necessities for life as well as the rights to enjoy and participate in spiritual, intellectual, and cultural activities."

Human Rights activists in the West also stress the importance of Human Rights in relationship to responsibilities. As Sidney E. Bailey said, "The twin concepts of rights and responsibilities covers almost all aspects of moral and social life. Rights and responsibilities belong together. Minority rights imply majority responsibilities." According to Buddhist ideology, rights and responsibilities are a non-dualistic concept; without the one, the other cannot exist. As much as we have rights in society, to that degree do we also have responsibilities, and we will be able to gain our rights only when we honour our responsibilities. According to Buddhist doctrine, the Dhamma or natural law exists whether it is applied or not. If we do not fulfil our duties, then we will lose our rights. If we study the Dhamma thoroughly, we will come to know that it is not only the path to our final liberation, but also the way to fulfil our responsibilities, therefore Human Rights are not merely a Western concept, but are in fact the Dhamma or natural law.

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.

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 practice of the Dhamma. 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 gaṃmi*). 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 beings 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."*

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 realisations, 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. So that a man and only a man can become a Buddha. Every man has within himself the potentiality of becoming a Buddha, if he so wills it and endeavours. 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 dāṭṭaṃ) but not the One who gives salvation (mokkha dāṭṭaṃ). 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.¹ 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"*

Rights and Equality

Hinduism, traditionally prohibited women, low caste members and untouchables from practising for their spiritual attainment and salvation, however, the Buddha gave permission to ordain women and practise the Dhamma. There were many low castes, untouchables and criminals who entered into the Sangha and achieved their final goal, to name as example; Upaṇḍi-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 to grow more aware of the similarities between men and women, and the position of women became honourable. 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.

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"¹.*

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 (Upaḍaḥna). 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 Paññā- wisdom or purification of the mind.

The Threefold 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."²

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 (Pañcasila) 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 that 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 that 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.

Wisdom (Panna) and Morality (sila)

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 sila, morality is more important than Panñā, 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, "*¹

Wisdom(Panna) and Compassion (Karuna)

There are some different opinions in Buddhism which have had divided its followers of into two schools. One says that only wisdom (panñā) is the foundation of Buddhism and the other says only compassion (karuna) 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 be perfect two essential qualities equally, compassion (karuna) on the one side, and wisdom (Panñā) 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.¹

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 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 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.*²

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.

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." ¹

Kamma literally means action, the Buddha defined it as mental volition, cetana. He said:-

"It is volition (cetana), O Bhikkhus, that I called kamma. Having willed one acts through body, speech or mind." ²

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.

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 a 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."*³

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 conduce to loss and sorrow, then, indeed, you should reject them. And when you know for yourself that certain things are profitable, blameless and conduce to profit and happiness, then indeed you should accept them and abide by them."*¹

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.²

The 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 the understanding that Siha would continue to support his former teacher too. This attitude of the Buddha made Siha respect the Buddha even more.³ 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 is important, and therefore, there should be no conflicts in the name of religion, or because of religion.

In the third century BC, the Buddhist Emperor Asoka, the Great, honoured and supported all other religions in his vast empire, the following this 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 honour others religions, does not honour his own; the one who does honour others, honours his own".⁴

Nowadays, we are working with other faiths, learning to live together with neighbours 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.

The Goal

The aim of Buddhism, according to the Theravadin tradition, is to attain everlasting happiness and the realization of Nibbana. Mahayana Buddhism, in general, has the aim to reach the state of Buddhahood. However, the goal is Bodhi or enlightenment for both. There are three modes of enlightenment (Bodhi). An aspirant may choose one of them, according to his or her particular temperament. They are Savaka-bodhi or the enlightenment of a disciple, this is known as the Arahant ideal; Pacceka-bodhi or the independent enlightenment and sammāsambodhi or the supreme enlightenment, that is a fully self-enlightened One. In Mahayana Buddhism, there are further developments and different definitions concerning these three modes of Bodhi. Nevertheless, all aspirants have to fulfil the perfections (Paramita) accordingly, unless there is the fulfilment of the perfections no one will reach their goal. They are Dāna-generosity, Sila-morality, Nekkhamma-renunciation, Paññā-wisdom, Viriya-energy, Khanti-patience, Sacca-truthfulness, Adhitthana-determination, Mettā-loving-kindness and Upekkhā-equanimity. These virtues should be cultivated with great compassion, guided by reason, uninfluenced by selfishness and unsullied by misbelief or any feelings of conceit.

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 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 upekkha-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 has latent in it 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.

Metta, Loving-kindness

What is metta ? It is loving-kindness, 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 are 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.

Karuna- Compassion

What is Karuna? It 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.

Mudita- Sympathetic Joy

Mudita is pure sympathetic joy, and boundless, infinite and unconditioned sympathetic joy. If we feel sympathetic-joy or happiness, if our nearest and dearest are successful and happy, then that is not mudita, pure sympathetic joy, 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 than 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.

Upekkha- Equanimity

This 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 equanimity, 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.

Ecology

Ecology is concerned with the growth of populations, with plants and animals, and with resources available to them. Ecology also concerns itself with the structure of communities and their relationship to the environment which is always

in a state of flux. Ecologists say that there are many possible kinds of relationship between organisms (plants, animals and other living things like viruses) and that part of the non-living world in which they occur. Most relationships between plants, animals and their environment are baffling in their complexity and it is virtually impossible to make assumptions about the outcome of a deliberate change in or interference with the natural environment. Nevertheless, ecology as a scientific study is concerned with the complex relationships between plants and animals; according to ecological analysis everything in this world is related to everything else, this includes the growth and the decrease of populations, individual and environmental changes and organic development, etc. Human beings are not the only living beings in this world, other beings also have a right to live and to develop themselves. Human beings must understand that they cannot live on the earth by themselves and are dependent upon animals and plants. However, as much as the human population grows it destroys the natural environment. The Buddhist scriptures say that in the beginning of this aeon the life span of human beings was very long, because the nutrition of plants and vegetables was of the highest standard. When people developed anger, greed and delusion, these mental forces governed their physical bodies and their vibrations affected the plants and animals. The quality of nutrition in the plants was consequently reduced and the human life span also became shorter. The whole universe is inter-related, so when we generate wholesome or unwholesome energies it will effect others. We, therefore, should generate and develop pure energies, so that everyone in the world including animals and plants will receive our pure energies.

The Environment

The concept of the environment covers just about everything associated with living organisms and includes other organisms and the non-living part of the world in which life occurs. This has the same meaning as surroundings. In industrial countries, the over population resulting from industry and from agriculture is harmful to people and to the surroundings in which they live. Therefore people these days speak about an environmental crisis.

The environment is a thing which we have created and is a designation of the natural process that has moved and developed through countless ages and inconceivable causes. The natural world, in fact, itself is conditioned by innumerable causes in the infinite past, therefore, it is an always undergoing a process of change. These changes, whether people recognise them or not, occur continuously. The Buddhist perspective of the environment is an individual's relationship with the natural world and our transformations of the world. It is in this context that Buddhism expounds on the wholeness of all things in inter-relationship. In the doctrine of dependent origination (paticcasamuppada) nothing is created or can exist apart from this network of inter-relationships. This network is not a static process but one of dynamic motion with infinite potential in the infinite universe. Responsibilities

The Buddha appreciated democratic ideologies and taught the means to develop equality of status, civil rights and justice within society. However, there are a few countries in which the majority of people are so called Buddhists, which are abusing fundamental human rights and social justice. It is because the majority of these Buddhists are keen only to do rites, rituals and traditional ceremonies, but are not practising the Buddha's main teachings and their own specific duties, as a result, national morality has declined. Therefore, it would be unfair to blame any individual person or group, we all have to accept our own responsibilities. The main cause of these problems is the human mind, the impure or wicked mind is the creator of all the world's crimes, violence and undesirable situations. So that it is necessary for us to practice the Buddha's main teachings of not harming any living being, doing good and purifying our minds through the practice of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic-joy and equanimity.

The Buddha said:- *" Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal law."*¹

What humanity need today is not hatred or anger, but loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic-joy and equanimity, so that every living being in the world can live happily and harmoniously enjoying fully their rights, social justice and human dignity.

Sabbe satta sukhita hontu-----May all beings be happy

Abbreviations

A.N. Anguttara nikaya
M.N. Majjhima nikaya
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