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## AN APPLIED ETHICAL STUDY OF NATURE AND BUDDHISM

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of morality in Buddhism is to create an environment in which everybody attain nirvana, "when a man gives , his merit will increase, no enmity can grow in the self-restrained. The skilled shun evil; they attain nirvana. By ending greed and hatred and delusion." Here the Buddha follows the path of deontological ethics in daily life.

### INTRODUCTION

A physical act should be undertaken only after repeated reflection; a verbal act should be undertaken only after repeated reflection; a mental act should be undertaken only after repeated reflection. If you, Rahuala, wish to undertake a physical act, you should reflect on that act so: 'That physical act which to do might lead to the harm of self, and that might had to the harm of others, and that might lead to the harm of both; this physical act is unskilled, its yield is anguish, its result is anguish' reflecting so should find: That physical act which I wish to do would lead neither to the harm of self nor to the harm of others nor to the harm of both; this act is skilled, its yield is happily, its result is happy'-a physical act like this, Rahula, may be undertaken by you."

The best action, according to the Buddha, is one in which the result of the action concerned should be gone to the favour of others and not forth doer. The action which never harms someone is ethically accepted in Buddhism.

## Ahimsa:

Like Jainism, Buddhism also believes in ahimsa. He suggests to follow this principle by mind, speech and act. For a householder ahimsa should be followed mildly. Buddhism is a middle path in this. A Korean Zen Master Ya Un says :

From the time of ploughing and sowing until the foot reaches your mouth and the clothes your body, not only do men and oxen suffer great pains in producing them but countless insects are also killed and injured. It is improper to benefit in this way from the hardships of others. Even more, how can you endure the thought that others have died in order that you can live? How can you who have an easy life complain of hunger and cold when the farmer is also hungry and cold and the weaving woman is inadequately clothed? A very heavy debt is incurred though wearing fine clothes and eating fine foods.

The Buddha does not stop the law of causation only to the domain of the evolution of the world but also every sphere of life. Even in the field of Karmas, such law is also applicable. He warned His disciples always to remember the traditional doctrine of Karma of India. According to Him, "for every action we perform we experience a similar result." The law of karma states that all our thoughts, words and deeds shape our experiences in the future. In his theory of Karma, He tries to show that our present life is the outcome of past life. It means, environmental pollution is the outcome of human's deed and they have to face this painful situation. No animal, no birds and other creatures have polluted the environment. Only the human beings, the crowns of the creation have deserted the land, polluted water and air. To pollute the environment is a kind of evil. "One who does not want to suffer, should not do evil deeds openly or secretly. Do evil now or later, you can flee from it, surely you will suffer sooner or later."

Central to grasp the process of Karmic cause and effect is the Psychological insight that all human actions begin in the mind. The quality of life, in terms of either our inner feelings or the external situations, we find ourselves with positive and negative attitudes of mind, motivate our actions. For this reason, disciplined attention to thoughts, meditation. The famous feelings and emotion is considered essential to the practice of opening lines of Dhammapada express this well:

Mind precedes all things, Mind is supreme, produced by mind are they. If one should speak or act with mind defiled, Suffering will follow. Just as wheel follows hoof of the drawing ox. Mind is supreme, produced by mind are they. If one should speak or act with purified mind. Well-being will follow, Like a never-parting shadow."

What we have seen in our thorough going paragraphs in the chapter is that no other living-being are as much discourteous as human-beings toward nature. Age before the astrophysics, in

which distance of stars are measuring in millions of light years, we have a universe. According to Buddhist, universe is beginning less or end and the number of galaxies is as vast as the sands of the River Ganges. Buddhist perceives universe as teeming with diverse living beings, longing not just to be, but to be something, to have something, to feel something, It translates itself into external environments complex of thoughts, feelings and impulses with the tragic habit of grasping themselves as separate, solid and permanent selves.

In our universe, there are only six forms of life and human life is one of them. Among them some are visible to the human eye, as with animals, but most are invisible, as with gods and ghosts. Man among the other creatures are not restricted to the planet-Earth, nor is the human species regarded as the best effort so far in evolutionary unfolding of nature. Existence as human is a rare event, for it is the kind of life most suited to finding out what is going on here. For all these renewal of human personality is necessary. Only by meditation human personality can be changed. But before starting the meditation one should know the four noble truths of Buddha.

The first Noble Truth states that there is suffering. The second, that there is a cause for the suffering which is delusion. The Third Noble Truth states that there is an end to the suffering and the fourth that there is a way or path to reach that end. To day we are encountering with environmental pollution. According to the law of causation, there must be a cause of pollution. Now, we shall see how these four Noble Truths work in the field of environment and its pollution.

### **Suffering and Its Cause:**

Every living being is suffering. There must be cause or causes of suffering. Therefore most important question is how to remove this suffering from the life of living beings. The centre of the living-beings is the man. If man becomes refined, suffering will vanish from the earth. To remove the suffering from one's life, it is necessary to uproot its cause i.e. ignorance. The cause of ignorance is separation. We are not ready to accept that we are bundle of thoughts, feelings and passions which are momentary. We think ourselves to be separate selves in an autonomous world full of isolated things. We each believe, we are solid and lending self. Even we feel a separate existence from our environment that maintains us and highs and dries from the things we daily use and enjoy. We never remember our identical relationship with nature.

It is ignorance which creates all problems of environment. Our sense of separation reinforces the idea that we are an important bit of ourselves and in this or that way we can survive independently and unchanging. We have attached ourselves with those things which are not essential for our life and ignore the things which are part and parcel of our life. We are busy to

collect cars, household appliances, clothes, hi-fi systems, fine art etc. to make ourselves well to do. It lures us into believing that the ability to control the world around us will one day cause a state of peace and happiness to arise within us.

Here we do not mean to say that all people readily admit to hold the above views. These views are not beneficial for us. On the rational scale, we all know that we are temporal beings utterly dependent upon the ecosystem of our planet and finally destined to die. But we should not make fool ourselves into believing the views of our intellect necessarily bear any relation to our behaviour. The delusion of which Buddhism speaks holds a way over us in a much deeper way than more ideas. We are in its grip almost physically, as though with our nerves, cells and chromosomes, it compels us to grasp hold of the world in a way that intellectually we would almost certainly reject.

So, from a Buddhist perspective, the ecological crisis we witness today is a predictable outcome of the kinds of illusioned behaviour described by Buddha far ago. According to Buddha greed, hatred and the human mind. The village politics of our days has poisoned quite easily stupidity are the 'poisons' which have now spilled beyond the confines of the rivers, the air and the earth itself. And the fire, if we use the terminology of Buddha, engulfing the world and its inhabitants in flames is now horribly visible in the form of nuclear explosions. Such discoveries and experiments smouldering rainforest, and psychologically apparent in the rampant consumerism of our times. Perhaps we need these disasters to prompt us to consider more deeply what the Buddha was saying all along. The ecological crisis is at root of spiritual crisis of self-centred greed, aided and abetted by ingenious technologies run amok.

## **The End of Delusion and The Path to It**

The Buddha has no doubt that there is delusion, so He has searched out the ways and means through which delusion can be vanished. For this The Buddha does not set a belief to adopt and with adopting purpose, one can free from delusion. He emphasizes on practice because the way we require urgent attention and action. Self-enquiry, discipline and insight are essential to transform ourselves at our very core, so that we are no longer blinded by that tight grip of delusion.

According to the Buddha, the universe is a scarless, undivided whole. Due to delusion it looks like separate pieces of things and beings. The Buddha tries to search this truth through his practice by which lost vision of wholeness of the universe can be recovered and we can put it back together. He behaves like a great physician and his teachings and their practices as again. Here

practice does not mean a new start, rather a kind of healing. So medicines. All who are helping in this field are either nurses or compounders.

The process of healing starts as soon as we put our life in order. We must conceive the damage we are causing to the world. Do we live in such a way that our life-style does not hamper other's life? In using the thing, do we think that it is not really not mine? Are we betraying and hurting others through our lusts? Are we leading a life of deceit and dishonesty, encouraging flattering fictions about ourselves and those we like and demeaning fictions about those we dislike? Do we drink and take drugs so that we distort the aesthetic outlook of ourselves and the world? All such behaviour only reinforces the sense of separation and division of the world. If we want to turn our life style in a radical way, we have to begin with a revision of actual harm we inflict upon ourselves, others and the world till date.

An ethical life as prescribed by the Buddha's teachings is also facilitating the healing of that mind. A healthy mind is one which has 'practice' that provides protection against the urges of a deluded mind while directed and channelled its energy away from cravings, excessive reactions, boredom and lethargy that higher insights into the undivided nature of life can then arise. This is the point of deep personal transformation, of enlightenment.

Nirvana, therefore, is not a mystical experience as taught by some other living religions, but a vision of unearthly bliss and a series of responses to the burning problems of the world: how are we to live in this world along with other creatures? This enlightenment is the earning of the individual and not a God awarded insight. The Buddha taught that all things in the universe come into existence, 'arise', as a result of particular conditions. There is no creator God as the first cause, because there is no beginning, "when that exists, this comes to be; on the arising of that, this arises. When that does not exist, this does not come to be; on the cessation of that, this ceases."

When we understand the nature of ourselves and the world in this way we are freed from the instinctive idea that we and other things somehow exist in our own right, independently and separately from everything else. One of the Buddha's earliest disciples said, "For one who truly sees the pure and simple arising of phenomena and the pure and simple continuity of conditioned things, there is no fear. When with wisdom one sees the world as just like grass and wood, not finding any selfishness, one does not grieve with the idea, 'this is not mine'.

The famous Buddhist Shunyavadin thinker Nagarjuna further developed this idea into what is known as the doctrine of Shunyavada. To affirm that all things are empty is not to deny that

they exist; it is simply to deny that they are self-existing. For Nagarjuna, the most convincing reason that things are empty of self-existence is that they are dependent upon external conditions to cause them to exist. He states, "Because there is nothing which is not dependently arisen, there is nothing which is not empty."

This doctrine was further developed by the followers of Shunyavada to emphasize how things do not merely depend for their existence upon their own immediate set of causes, but upon everything in the universe:

Just as the nature of earth is one While beings each live separately, And the earth has no thought of oneness or difference So is the truth of the Buddha."

In this way Buddhist realized how all things are intimately connected with each other. They called this the doctrine of the 'mutual interpenetration and interfusion of all phenomena'. Uisang, a monk from Korea put it in these lines of verse:

All dharmas (phenomena) are unmoving and originally calm. In one is all, in many is one One is identical to all, many is identical to one, In one particle of dust are contained the ten directions. And so it is with all particles of dust."

This philosophy of interpenetration had a great impact on the Zen tradition, where it found a less abstract assertion. Like many others Zen Master Gogen turned his enlightened attention toward the ordinary details of everyday life; "There are myriads of forms and hundreds of grasses through out the entire earth, and yet each grass forms itself in the shape of the entire earth", "It is not enough that there is water in the world, but there is also world in water. It is not just water. There is also a world of living things in water. There is a world of living things in air, in fire and on the earth. There is a world of living things in a blade of grass.

This of experiencing the world in which we live is uncannily way similar to much of the language of contemporary ecological thinking. In current period Vietnamese monk and poet Thich Nhat Hanch teaches his students to break out of their self-centredness so that the interconnectedness of all living things may be established.

When we look at a chair, we see the wood, but we fail to observe the tree, the forest, the carpenter, or our own mind. When we meditate on it, we can see the entire universe in all its interwoven and interdependent relation in the chair. The presence of the wood reveals the presence of the tree. The presence of the leaf reveals the presence of the sun. The presence of the apple blossoms reveals the presence of the apple. Meditators can see the one in many, and many in the one. Even before they see the chair, they can see its appearance in the heart of living reality. The

chair is not separate. It exists only in its interdependent relations with everything else in the universe. It is because all other things are. If it is not, then all others are not either.

Here we lose our belief in a permanent and eternal existent soul as everything has an interdependent existence. We are afraid of this view, because this false faith emboldens us inside the body. But fact is not so. This faith does not alienate our existence from the world rather opens the door of freedom which is our birth right. According to famous Buddhist thinker Vasubandhu, the world is created from intentions. The environment in which we find ourselves and the way we experience it are the consequences of how we have chosen and "greed to live. If our intentions are driven by self-centred greed and attachment, then that we will see it as a resource to be exploited to satisfy our attachment, then that will determine the way we perceive the external desires and protect us against the thing we fear. And since greed and attachment are short-sighted, mentally deadening and dehumanizing, the environment will reflect back those very qualities we inject into it.

Our above discussions penetrate towards a new look for ourselves. First of all we should make our life fit according to the external ideal. Buddhism strongly suggests that we must first protect the environment from ourselves. For though the hand that fells the tree may not be the same as the gilded one holding the toothpick, they work in league to feed the vanity of the self. For this purpose compassion and wisdom are necessary. Compassion and wisdom are arising with meditation. When we lose our belief in an eternal soul, we become one with our existence and existence of other things. Here our mind stops to wander in vacuum and concentrate on the earth and its things.

For meditation sitting calmly on a place with perfect position is an odd and old fashion. It will never help us to solve the current issues of environment. Ordinarily when we have a problem, we think to do something to solve it and do not sit at a place and do nothing. Meditation is something more than to meet our eyes. Meditation as the Buddhists have devised is a highly practical way of achieving a state of calm in which the seeker perceives reality in perfect clarity.

At every stage when we meditate we must actively 'do something' we must be aware of the movements of breath and the sensations that arise from it. This requires constant attention. We must guard against sleepiness or mental agitation. If we are successful in this, we develop an inner state of deep calm and clarity. Reaching this stage our mind does not go blank like a TV switched-off screen. Rather, our mind becomes so aware that the field of mental processing is removed and

our mind is able to perceive reality as never before. This model of meditation is the cornerstone of the Buddhist way of life that has assumed various forms throughout its history.

The consequence of long meditation and one's own retrospection develops two of the most important qualities in man, as Matrin Batchelor states, "Two of the most important qualities to be developed by Buddhists are loving-kindness and compassion. Loving-kindness is understood as the Wish for others to be happy and compassion as the wish to alleviate suffering."

Loving-kindness and compassion should be started with ourselves. It is possible only when we recognize our own suffering and also ready to eradicate its causes. It is better to understand deeply the origins of the suffering within ourselves than to help others. When we develop such capacity than we very easily can show others the path of freedom from their inner pain. Lastly we extend our loving-kindness and compassion to all living things, such as man, animals, plants and the earth itself.

The root of compassion is wisdom. Wisdom is not an introverted intellectual quality but, as the Buddha explains here, gives rise to a spontaneous concern for life. Anguttara Nikaya states this fact in the following manner, "In this, bhikkhu, wise person, one of great wisdom, does not intend harm to self, harm to others or harm to both self and others. Thinking in this way, such a person intends benefit for self, benefit for others, benefit for both, benefit for the whole world. Thus is one wise and of great wisdom"

Thinker like Aldous Huxley comments, "Elementary ecology leads straight to elementary Buddhism". Perhaps Huxley wants to refer the term Bodhisattva, as earlier mentioned by famous Buddhist thinker Nagarguna, "The essential nature of all bodhisattva is a great compassionate heart, and all living beings are the object of its compassion." Again Buddhist poet after getting bodhisattva put the matter like this:

I should dispel the misery of others Because it is suffering, just like my own  
And I should benefit others Because they are living things, just like myself.  
When I work in this way for the sake of others I should not let conceit or feelings of abasement arise  
It is just like feeling myself-I hope for nothing in return.

When Buddhism travelled across central Asia into China, Korea and Tibet, the vows of the Bodhisattva to help all beings were explained as the appropriate response to the fact that all beings have at one time or another been a parent of us:



Out of his compassion a child of the Buddha set living creatures free, Since all male creatures have at one time been our father, they should all be regarded as our father. And since all female creatures have at one time been our mother, they should be regarded as our mother. In each life they have been the ones who have given birth to us. Therefore all living things throughout the six realms (Devas, titans, humans, animals, hungry ghosts and of hell) can be considered as our father and mother. So to catch and eat any living creatures is surely equivalent to killing our own parents and eating our old body? Furthermore, the four great elements of earth, water, fire and air are the components of both our own and others' bodies. For these reasons, we should (give life to others) by setting them free.

Now we reach a high level human being i.e. bodhisattva, who can see the world with an apathetic attitude and kindful to all living beings.

### **Attitude towards Animal and Plant Life:**

Who is bodhisattva? One who desires the welfare of all living beings. Maximum happiness for the sake of maximum people. A true bodhisattva must follow the principles of Panchsila. It is a minimum code of ethics that even a layman Buddhist is expected to follow. The first principle is ahimsa i.e. non-injury to life. It is prohibited to have any kind of weapon for the purpose of killing living things. A true Buddhist will never indulge in the trade of meat.<sup>3</sup> In this context we should remember that the above code of ethics is constituted for householder. A more strict code of ethics is made for the Buddhist monks and nuns. They have been suggested even not to harm any living-being knowingly or unknowingly. For this reason, the Buddha himself followed the rule of Chaturmas (four months) rest in which all monks stay at the place where rainy season begins. Because during this season all insects come to the surface of earth due to wet weather." As in wet weather worms and insects may come under the feet during travelling. To follow the principle of ahimsa the Buddha prohibited his monks not to dig the ground, as it is a kind of violence against earth." Once a follower of the Buddha built a clay hut for himself and later he set it on fire, because it was not fine.

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