

## Buddhism and innovative sustainable development

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### Introduction

The understanding of the basic of Buddhist teaching leads to the better understanding of many social science theories both in politics and in economics. And the understanding of both Buddhism and science is complementary in order to enable any individual to live a full and meaningful human life.

### Buddhism and sustainable development

Just as in a market economy, life and how we make choices with our life dictates what is right and what is wrong. It is not right or wrong because it is illegal or forbidden. But it is right or wrong because it will either lead our life into suffering or lasting happiness. The teaching of Lord Buddha on leading life along the middle path is therefore a teaching on making a choice in life. The practice of the middle path consists of eight deeds of righteousness. They are the righteousness in perception, thought, speech, work, earning the living, diligence, conscience, and determination. Simply put, this is the teaching of the science of making a choice in life for a sufficing and moderate living, the science of learning to make the right choice and observe the distinction between what choice is right and what choice is wrong. Teachings in the *patikasamuppada* are the guiding principles toward learning how to make a choice that will produce the outcome beneficial to life, to last and to sustain for they will constantly keep the people far away from the unbounded desires.

Non-violence is a fundamental tenet in Buddhism. *Ahimsa* (non-violence) promotes non-harming attitudes to fellow human beings and eco system. Reverence for all forms of life is a crucial practical virtue in this tenet. Gentleness in all actions of body, speech and mind creates a healthy cultural and religious value that celebrates sustainable environment. Nowadays, it is just not possible to discuss anything without touching upon the issues of the environment and climate change. Their impacts on our daily life are becoming immeasurable both through natural calamities of greater and more unpredictable scales and through direct manmade disasters. Highlighting the significance of religious teachings on the ecology, recently an *Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* has been produced by drawing attention to ecological concerns. We certainly need one and a half more of this planet earth if we are to sustain our natural resources at the present exploitation rate.

The Buddha, with great compassion for the world, required his followers to practice the four boundless states (*appamanna*) of loving kindness (*metta*), of compassion (*karuna*), of sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and of equanimity (*upekkha*). This practice of 'metta' or universal love, begins by suffusing one's own mind with universal love (*metta*) and then pervading it to one's family, then to the neighbors, then to the village, country and the four corners of the Universe. It is time we all took the middle path in using our natural resources. We could no longer senselessly overexploit our resources and use up our natural energy without sustaining them for the future generations.

Buddhism teaches us the manner in which to consume these elements. To a monk who has newly been initiated into the *sangha*, the knowledge of such matter is fundamental to the learning to the learning and practicing of the Buddhist precepts. It teaches him to use his

intellect to examine carefully the objects being consumed and their end results. He is trained to be vigilant over the five sensual organs. Once fully understood how these senses interact on the mind, he is made to learn have command over them so they do not veer from the desired path. I have no doubt in my mind that the Buddhist middle path is the way to solve many of today's world crises. But the sufficiency economy is the philosophy that has been developed based on both the Buddhist middle path principle and the practical understanding of the modern economy.

We can witness Buddhist teaching at work and hope to leave our children and their children with a better economy and environment; an economy that is more humanly sound, and an environment that is more sustainable and safer for every being on this planet earth.

We are in an ecological crisis. What is happening all across the globe shows that we, human beings and the natural environment are in crisis - due to the lack of some careful and forward thinking? Environmental scientists have shown that the globe is in crisis now: ice is melting in Iceland and the ozone-layer is damaged. Recent activities such as Kyoto protocol direct us to take effective measures to overcome global crisis. Plenty of signs in natural disasters demonstrate that earthly resources are also limited and the development process in many developing nations that aims at eliminating poverty from the globe can move smoothly only to a limited extent. When the planet is in crisis, we are obligated and forced to rethink our actions in the past and present and take creative precautions to prevent the imminent disaster.

Over the centuries, Buddhism as a religion has shaped society, social customs, practices and way of thinking in many nations in Asia. In shaping morals and ethical concerns of these nations, Buddhism has contributed substantially. The rapid growth of science and technology, trends of secularization, individual and profit driven capitalism, increasing influence of consumerism are gradually challenging the values and ethos of Buddhist civilization and lives. The most venerable Professor Dr. Phra Dharmakosajarn, the rector of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and the chairperson of the committee, stated that the United Nations and the ideals of Buddhism are sharing the same objective, which is to bring world peace. As for the sustainable development issue, he commented that beside from concentrating on economic and social developments, humanity has to keep the environmental factors in mind.

According to Buddhism, conflict, intolerance and disharmony arise out of desires, hatred and ignorance. To develop confidence, tolerance, and harmony it is important to cultivate common values or universal ethics. Therefore, promotion of education, dialogue, social and economic development would lead for sustainable development of peace in the world. The Buddha welcomed teachers of other religions, but he never attempted to convert any or urged anyone to change their beliefs, traditions or teachers. In this regards, we find evidence throughout the Pali Canon where wandering ascetics, sophists and philosophers come to meet the Buddha and discussed or exchanged their different views concerning the way of spiritual practice and liberation.

There is a story that Mahatma Gandhi was once asked what he thought of British civilization. He replied, "I think it would be a good idea." I venture to suggest that Buddhist non-violence too would be a good idea. We cannot pretend that we do not know what is going on next door. If anyone in this assembly has any influence, let them use it. Buddhism is a religion of peace, harmony, social welfare, social justice, love, compassion, amity, friendship, brotherhood, morality, non-violence, tolerance and dedication. Hence it is a religion of mankind, their benefit and happiness. Buddhism has a respect for all living beings and approaches them with loving kindness. Buddha was born to dispel and darkness of ignorance

and to show the world the path of peace and the path to be free from sufferings. The Buddha's way is a way to enlightenment, in knowledge and education. His message enabled man to think freely and wisely. His teachings is still today influencing the destinies of humanity and illuminating the world with loving kindness.

Buddhism teaches us to analyze the nature of life as a law which functions according to a cycle of three different periods: birth, change and death. That is also the cosmic law. Nothing escapes from this rule. So, can the human fear for death help men pass the crisis of terrorism? If the answer is no, is it meaningful for us to concentrate all our feeling on it? Therefore, we'd better concentrate on the improvement of our virtuous, wise, honest and valuable life in order to develop all meritorious forces necessary to life.

We are human beings with extraordinary potentialities. Noble virtues and criminal nature are latent in our minds, spirits and hearts. These may arise in our lives at any time without any interference from external or any supernatural power. These are dormant within us in various degrees. Within our minds we find a treasure house of virtue and rubbish heap of wickedness. With the flourishment of these characteristics, we may become either a blessing or a curse to humanity. If we want to engage ourselves in the noble service of humanity we must endeavor our best to uproot the latent evils by sowing the dormant seeds of noble virtues.

In environmental circles, the Buddhist tradition has often been viewed in a more positive light compared to other religious traditions. The attitude to nature and environment in the Buddhist traditions significantly varies from South Asian Theravada Buddhism to East Asian Mahayana Buddhism. In mixing with the native traditions of those countries that Buddhism spread into - through cultural interaction - Buddhism has produced rather creative responses and activities in using nature for its teachings and practices. Buddhism is often characterized as a religious philosophy, very much in tune with nature and environment. There are many things that concern us when we want to explore the issues of sustainability. A Little Book of Hope identifies twelve items that need our attention: (i) transport, (ii) habitat, (iii) energy, (iv) Water, (v) economics, (vi) biodiversity, (vii) organization, (viii) food, (ix) health, (x) oceans, (xi) peace, and (xii) education. For all these concerns, cultural values are useful and insightful both in understanding their value and in preserving them without harming them and without exploiting them with selfish motives.

## Conclusion

Virtues cultivated in human minds generate new awareness and care that is essential to overcome during planetary crisis. By these means we can minimize our negative impact on earth resources. We can prevent certain dangers. By protecting the natural environment, we respect the natural right to life of all of earth's living things. Our challenge is to reduce the degradation of the planet. Sustainable earth is our challenge.

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