

Workshop - Global Ethics (3rd, 4th, & 5th Jan 2014)

Spirituality For Sustainability (Buddhist Perspective)

Introduction

More than 2,500 years have passed since the Buddhist understanding of life was first taught by Siddhartha Gautama. Today, the spirituality he breathed into the world may be more vital than ever. Buddhist spirituality is imminently practical. It provides discipline for the mind and the body, for treating others and oneself. It does not merely say, "Love others"; it shows us how to love others.

Spirituality: In Buddhist Perspective , spirituality means , purity, i.e. purity of heart which is the inner light within every person, and it is within the reach of every person. The enlightened essence, already exists within every person, awaiting discovery, awaiting its opportunity to shine forth into the world. Purity (spirituality) is to be obtained by getting rid of the root cause of three unwholesome action (bad actions / *akusalamula*) viz. passion / greed (*raga*) , enmity (*dosa /dvesa*) and delusion(*moha*).

Buddhist spirituality, furthermore, promotes a form of life that provides an antidote to the stresses of modern living. Embracing and looking deeply, insight will come and our anger and restlessness will diminish. We will feel much better, and we will be motivated to go back and help the other people. Our anger will have been transformed into the energy of loving-kindness.¹ A passage in *Majjhimanikaya*² shows a very comprehensive concern with verbal behavior. It says- one who slanders and uses harsh speech is said to have a tongue which is like an axe, by using it he causes much further suffering not only for others but for himself.

“Compassion is the real antidote for anger. Nothing can heal anger except compassion. This is why the practice of compassion is a very wonderful practice.”³ The term '*samma*' used in all the eight fold path shown by Tathagata(Buddha) has its significance which means 'to put together', 'to concentrate', (equalize)refers to a certain state of mind.⁴

Yet Buddhism is not an otherworldly spirituality. It does not recommend that one live oriented toward a future world to come. The time for living is now, the present moment. A future-orientation makes us prone to suffer by generating expectations that may not be fulfilled. How

¹ *M N*, p. 87

² *Ibid.* III.49

³ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁴ Paravahera Vajirañña Mahāthera, *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, p. 17. Buddhist Missionary Society, Colombo, 1975

often does the future turn out like we planned? Buddhist spirituality is not about absencing oneself from this reality but rather fully, completely, and courageously facing it. Birth, i.e. Illness(*jati*), old-age,(*jara*) and death (*marana*) are genuine features of life, and it does us no good to act as if they are not. Every being undergoes this cycle of birth and death (*samsara*)and are subjected to all these three- *jati*, *jara* and *marana*.

Buddhist spirituality does not ask anyone to believe what he or she cannot believe. Buddhism requires no leaps of faith. The individual need only hold as true what is confirmed by experience. If we must hold beliefs or opinions, they ought to be held lightly, lest they become objects of attachment (leading to greediness - *tanha*).

What are the major inequality issues in India, from your point of view? What problems are created by the widening these inequality gaps?

- **Social Issues**
 1. Caste system in the society
 2. Gender Issues
 3. Religious practices
 4. Religious Leader or A role model for humanity
 5. Leadership

All these subject matters are the social issues of today's society. The Buddha's way of giving solutions to these problems is the best way to undertake and tackle the society and the prevalent social values. Buddha handled the issues in an eternal way appealing to the rationality and truth, elucidating the basics and fundamentals, explaining in the simplest way which is understood by the common man and taking into consideration the human psychology, which is unchanged through centuries.

• **What Buddhist ethical principles and values are needed as a platform for a change towards a more equal society?**

- **Social Values**
 - i) Equality
 - a. gender equality
 - b. caste equality

c. religious equality

Buddhism greatly values social harmony and cohesion. It believes that life and religion do not stand apart. They are the organic parts which create a fruitful whole.

Man must hold man in complete respect, resulting from genuine friendliness and absence of hostility. It also implies that no one should do anything that jeopardizes the interests of other.⁵ The good of self and others is seen inter-twined. The Buddha says – “And how, monks, guarding others, does one guard one self? It is by tolerance, by non-violence, by having a mind full of loving kindness, and by caring nature”.⁶

Equality

The first social value for social harmony is equality among the people. At the time of the Buddha, caste was a fundamental principle in the social life. The lowest rank of the fourfold caste system was occupied by the *Sudras* and no equal opportunities were available to them. The Buddha’s contribution is that he kept the doors of his order open for all the people irrespective of their caste, creed, race and gender. The Buddha admitted Upali, the barber, into the community of monks and so also Sunita who, was a scavenger.

- **Dr.Ambedkar , the follower of Buddhist principles thus brought in such equality in the society for Dalits. Gave them equal opportunity and status in the society.**

In *Assalayana sutta*,⁷ the Buddha advances a clear-cut argument to disprove the caste theory held by the Brahmins. He supports his argument thus – ‘**Would a fire lighted by a person belonging to a Brahmin caste be different from a fire lighted by a man of another caste? The value of a human being lies not in birth but in the attainment of skills, knowledge and moral behavior**’⁸ It is sufficiently evident as Prof. Rhys Davids⁹ points out in the introduction to *Ambattha sutta*, from the comparative frequency of the discussion on the matter of Brahmin pretension that the subject of caste was a burning question at the time of the compositions of *Nikayas*. No other social problem is reflected so often; The *Brahmayu sutta* of *Majjhimanikaya*., *Brahmana Samyutta* of the *Samyutta nikaya*, the *Janussoni sutta* of *Anguttaranikaya* give the characteristics of a true *Brahmin*. As regards with social equality, the Buddha was critical of Brahmanical claim associated with the system of four social classes, that certain people were

⁵ *Ibid.* I. 416– *Ambalattika Rahulovada sutta*

⁶ *S.N.*. V. 169

⁷ *M.N.* II. 193

⁸ *Ibid.* II.148 – 154

⁹ *Dailogues of the Buddha* Vol 1 pp. 97

superior or inferior by birth. The *Agganna suttā* establishes that good conduct is higher than caste.

In *Ambattha suttā*¹⁰, a *brahmin* youth's pride was broken down and he was admonished that no caste is superior. **The Buddha developed five main arguments against caste. They are biological, evolutionary, sociological, ethical and spiritual unity of mankind. It was not by birth that one becomes a merchant, soldier or king but by actions that one performs or the job one does. Spiritual salvation is possible for men and women of all castes, irrespective of the fact that they are born high or low. Moral and spiritual development makes one a *Brahmin*, a term used in the sense of a truly noble, spiritual person.**

Further more, the law of Karma works in the same way for all without any distinction as to one is of high and low caste. According to the law of karma reward and punishment are strictly in proportion to good and evil done and one's birth or caste has no relevance in this context. He also told that human race was one species and not four¹¹ and the four classes of society (*brāhmin*, warrior nobles, farmers / traders and servants) which evolved gradually, were equally capable of good or bad actions and would reap Karmic results accordingly¹².

Right relationship for Social Harmony

A code of layman's morality and ethics for social harmony, domestic happiness and economic wellbeing is explicitly quoted in the well-known *Sigalovada suttā*¹³ Regarding this *suttā* Buddhaghosa says- ' Nothing in the duties of a householder is left unmentioned and so it is passed as '*gihivinaya*' (duties for householders).

In this discourse, it is told that the Buddha ,once comes across Sigala, a householder, once worshipping the six directions in pursuance of his father's wish. The Buddha counsels him that there is a better way to serve the directions by proper actions towards six types of people, which will produce sound social relationships.

The best way to guard the six quarters is by good deeds to men around him

1. to his parents as the east.
2. to his teachers as the south.
3. to his wife and children as the west.

¹⁰ *D.N.* I. 3

¹¹ *M.N.* II. 196- 97

¹² *D.N.* III. 93-95

¹³ *D.N.* III. 180- 93

4. his friends and relatives to the north.
5. to men devoted to the religion like *Brāhmanas* and not *Sramañias* as the upper clime.
6. to his servants and dependents as the lower clime.

A set of duties is enumerated here and the first relationship dealt with is the child -parent one.

Relationship between Parents and children

The parents should restrict their children and restrain them from vice; train them in virtues. Have them taught arts or sciences; provide them with suitable wives or husbands and give them their inheritances. The children should support their parents who supported them, should perform family duties incumbent upon them and should guard their property. They should make themselves worthy to be their heirs. In *Mangalsutta* also the Buddha says –“Aid for mother and for father and support for wife and children, a livelihood that brings no conflict, this is the highest blessing.”¹⁴

It is worth here that the Buddha advises parents to avoid discriminating against their daughters and tell them to be aware of her true value. In the *Dhitisutta*¹⁵ there is the story of King Pasenadi who visits the Buddha and grumbles because his Queen, Mallika, has given birth to a daughter. And the Buddha then tells him – ‘A daughter may prove even better than a son. For she may grow up wise and virtuous, and become a faithful wife (who respects her mother- in- law) by giving birth to a son like who would be cherished by the society. ’

Husband and wife¹⁶

The husband should cherish his wife by treating her with respect and kindness; by being faithful to her, by causing her to be honored by others, by giving her suitable ornaments and clothes. The wife shows her affection for her husband when she is hospitable to his kinsmen and friends; when she is a chaste wife; by being a good house keeper; by showing skills and diligence in all she has to do.

Men and women are viewed by the Buddha as equal partners who take joint responsibilities for their social and family roles. The Buddha supports the empowerment of women and improvement of their social status by advising the husbands their duties.

Pupils and Teachers¹⁷

*All the references are taken from *Sigolavada Sutta*,

¹⁴ *Khuddakapatha* 3

¹⁵ *S.N.* I. 83 ,86

¹⁶ *D.N.II.8.269*

The pupil should honor his teachers, by rising in their presence, by ministering them, by obeying them, by supplying their wants, by attention to their instruction. The teacher should show his affection to his pupils by training them in all that is good, by teaching them to hold knowledge fast, by instruction in science and language, by speaking well of them to their fiends and companies, by guarding them from danger.

Friends and companions¹⁸

One can maintain harmonious relationship to friends and companions by courteous speech, by promoting their interest by treating them as his equals, by giving presents, by offering him a refuge in danger, by adhering to him in misfortune; by showing kindness to his family.

Master and Servants¹⁹

The master should provide for the welfare of his servants and dependents, by providing work to them according to their strength, by supplying suitable food and wages; by attending them in sickness and by sharing with them delicacies, The servants would show their attachment to his master by rising before him, by retiring later to rest, by working cheerfully and thoroughly; by being content with what is given; by speaking well of him.

Layman and monks²⁰ (**Religious Leaders**)

A layman can show his respect for monks/ religious leaders by affection in acts, in words and in thought; by giving him a ready welcome by supplying his temporal wants. The monks / religious leader should show their affection by dissuading him from vice, by exhorting him to virtue, by instructing him in religion, by pointing the way to heaven.

By thus acting, the six quarters are preserved in peace and free from danger. He who worships these six quarters will be competent to the duties of householder and shall be exalted. If one remains in the household life, one must fulfill these duties.

The discourse places the lay person at the centre of a society and gives guidelines for how to ensure that these are mutually enriching. The Buddha showed by his own example that a monk also acts as good friend to laity by giving formal advice, by chanting protective chants for them.

¹⁷ *D.N.II.8.268*

¹⁸ *Ibid..270*

¹⁹ *Ibid..271*

²⁰ *Ibid.272*

Marriage Values

It is also worth considering as to which values have been prescribed by the Buddha for married couples. Though Buddhism has a monastic emphasis, marriage and family life are seen as highly suitable for those who cannot commit themselves to celibacy and as arena in which many worthwhile values are nurtured. Though the canonical texts refer to a variety of kinds of marriages existing in India at the time of the Buddha²¹ generally parents are seen as arranging a marriage out of love for their daughter.²² *Samyuttanikaya*²³ says that a wife is a man's best friend. (*parama sakha*)

In *Uggaha sutta*²⁴, Buddha is requested to advise the daughters of Uggaha who are on the verge of getting married, on how to conduct themselves after marriage in their husband's house. Then Buddha tells them in a beautiful manner about the values and the behavior of a married woman as follows:

1. Regarding her husband the married woman gets up before him and retires after him, willingly does what he wants, is loving in her ways and gentle in speeches not being one to anger him
 2. She honors all whom her husband respects whether relative, or monk or Brahmins
 3. She is deft (skillful) and nimble (agile) in her husband's home craft.
 4. She watches over servants and work people with care and kindness.
 5. She looks after the wealth her husband brings home. A married woman should train herself to inculcate these values in her.
- What has been said by Buddha in regard to married woman is applicable today for married men too as in the present scenario both are working for economic comfort
- Early Buddhism responds with a clear, well organized and systematic schema for lay religious life, including teaching on proper relationship, good conduct and values to make the easiest and most opportune way for his lay followers commitments to be effective.

Royal Values (Leadership Quality)

During the Buddha's time, the whole India was divided into small kingly states. It is sufficiently evident from the Pali texts that many kings figured prominently among his followers. Hence it is

²¹ Horner I B- *Women under Primitive Buddhism* Delhi 1990 p. 35-71

²² A.N. IV. 265

²³ *Ibid.* I.37

²⁴ *Ibid.* *Pancaka nipata.*

worth knowing what values does the Buddhist tradition expects from the kings who desired to follow the teachings of their master.

Maintaining law and order

It was the duty of the kings to serve his subjects by ensuring law and order. In *Agganna*²⁵ *sutta* the origin of human society has been described and here the king is said to have been chosen by the subjects who was capable of punishing the wrong doers.

In this connection *the Cakkavatti- Sihanada sutta*²⁶ is very relevant because it enumerates the duties of a king.

1. The king should look after his subjects, including monks and Brahmins and also animals and birds
2. He should prevent crime and give to those who are rule with compassionate justice.
3. He should revere ‘Dhamma’ – moral norms and rule with compassionate justice.

Such kings are seen as world emperors, not by force of heaped but by their ideals.

King (Political / National Leader) as a role- model

In *Anguttaranikāya*²⁷. it is said that when kings act un-righteously, (*adhammika*), this bad example spreads through the people. Hence the sun and the moon, go wrong in their course; seasons and years are out of joint, the winds blow wrong. This being so, there is no bestow and sufficient rain. Thus crops are poor and the humans who live on them became weak and short lived. Thus, it is king’s responsibility to see and maintain through his action the moral values of society and nature, as his moral behavior has direct bearing on natural surrounding

Ecological values / Communion with the Nature

The Buddha discovered from his own experience that natural surrounding is the best place for a monk to undertake contemplation, leading to enlightenment and then to salvation, At the end of a discourse, the Buddha would often advise his disciples to resort to the roots of the trees (*rukhamula*) or an empty place (*sunagara*)²⁸ In *Ariyapariyesana sutta* the Buddha refers to his search for a suitable place for his striving in a delightful piece of land or a soothing forest

²⁵ *D.N.III.4*

²⁶ *Ibid III. 3*

²⁷ *A.N. II. 74 - 76*

²⁸ *M. N.I. 118.*

grove.²⁹ The members of the order used to dwell under trees in forest caring for flora and fauna around them which became also their source of sustenance .

All the big monasteries mentioned in the *Tipitakas* were built in the gardens with shady trees to enable the *Bhikkhus* to dwell in solitude and silence and undisturbed by city hustle and bustle they could zealously engage themselves in meditation.

Nurturing

The Buddha has spent most of his life in forest which in turn, has a great impact on his thinking and life style, both as a man and as a teacher. All important events in the life of Buddha- his birth, his enlightenment, his first sermon and his final demise – have taken place in close communion with trees. With such a beginning, it is not surprising that the Buddha and his disciples continued to encourage respecting, nurturing and preserving the natural environment.

One can hardly say that Gautama the Buddha was not aware of the Vedic thoughts of gods inhabiting natural phenomena such as fire, wind and rain. But he spoke of gods residing in pleasancess (*arama*), in groves (*vana*), in trees (*rukha*) and in medicinal herbs (*osadhi*) so that the people would respect natural vegetation,³⁰ Those who are involved in planting of pleasancess (*aramaropa*) and forest grove are said to acquire spiritual merit (*punna*) and near heaven (*sagga*) This also indicates his encouragement to horticulture³¹

In *Agganna sutta* of *Dighanikaya*.³² the moral deterioration is linked with the man's tendency to exploit excessively the natural resources. The *sutta* refers to the world's passage through alternating cycles of evolution and dissolution indicating that natural processes are directly affected by human morals. When there is deterioration of human morality, the excessive exploitation of nature takes place: In *Cakkavatti simhanada sutta*³³ it is stated – gradually the wealth of people will deteriorate and so will the life. At that time all delicacies will have disappeared from the earth and poorest, coarsest food of today will become a delicacy of that time.' Thus, the Buddha lays emphasis that the moral code of conduct has direct bearing on the natural environment.

²⁹ *Ibid.* I. 163, 166.

³⁰ *M.N.* I. 306

³¹ *S. N.* I. 33

³² *D.N.* III. 4

³³ *Ibid* III.3

Conservation of natural resources

In *Anguttaranikāya*³⁴ the person who wastes natural resource is compared to a fig eater, who shakes the branch of a tree and grounds all the fruits, both ripe and unripe, but eats a few and allows rest to waste. This wasteful attitude is not only anti-social but also criminal. Conservation of natural resources and using them properly, both are equally important as far as the protection of plant life is concerned. According to Buddha even the branch of a tree giving shelter should not be destroyed³⁵

Man- nature relationship (Interdependence / *paticasamuppanna/ praptyasamutpada*)

In *Sigalovada sutta*,³⁶ the Buddha asks the householders to accumulate wealth in a way similar to the one adopted by a bee in collecting nectar from a flower. In other words human beings are expected to make an appropriate one of nature so that the beneficial pattern of man- nature-relation is not threatened. Also Buddha's consistent emphasis on non-violence can be interpreted in terms of his awareness to preserve ecological balance. The destruction of plant life for reclaiming land and animal life for sacrifices and dietary habits poses a serious threat to man-nature relationship.

- **What is the role of business, public sector, NGOs, academic research for addressing the inequality issues in India and globally'**

It is not an exaggeration if we say that the Buddha is van-guard of globalization. Buddhism has become the world religion not at cost of blood-shed or on the path of war but purely on universal compassion.

We talk of global warming . What happens in one part of the world that affects the whole globe.

Sustainability- exploring natural resources without destroying the ecological balance of an area., i.e. within oneself which reflects on the outer. For sustainability is the most basic form of conservation. It means not taking from the earth, from the world, from society, from each other, from life, more than we give back.

The core of the idea of community are basic principles i.e. wholesome/ good (*kusala*) action, wholesome speech, wholesome livelihood, and wholesome effort which are not only important, but also helpful in thinking about a more sustainability for the present , here and now.

³⁴ A.N. IV. 285

³⁵ S.N. II. 23,47

³⁶ D.N.III.8.266

In the Buddhist view, wisdom (*prajna*) and compassion (*karuna*) are intrinsically linked together. One cannot be truly compassionate without wisdom. Wisdom--seeing the world as it really is--reveals the deep interrelatedness (*paticcasamutpada*)and impermanency (*anicca*) of all things. When we genuinely recognize this, compassion is our natural response. When we have wisdom, we cannot help but feel compassion. By the same token, practicing compassion helps us to realize our fundamentally wise natures. Living compassionately means to think and act without putting ourselves at the center of the universe, without believing that "It's all about me." To recognize that the whole of existence does not revolve around these little entities we call our selves is the beginning of wisdom. Thus wisdom and compassion arise together. As we become more compassionate, we gain wisdom; as we become wiser, our compassionate natures are more fully revealed.

Wisdom (*prajna*) and compassion(*karuna*) are also innate. Our fundamental nature as persons is to be wise and compassionate, but years of social and self conditioning have obscured those qualities. We have learned to act and think in self-centered ways for so long that selfishness now seems natural. We need, think Buddhists, a practice, a discipline for reversing the effects of years of conditioning to return us to our true selves. Yet because our habits of self-centeredness are so deep and ingrained, the discipline needs to be gradual and gentle. We cannot expect radical transformation to happen overnight, nor can we expect to be the persons we wish to be simply by willing. Willing must be accompanied by acting. By acting compassionately and wisely, it becomes easier to will to be compassionate and wise. Buddhist spiritual practice, therefore, is a matter of training: learning and acting to be the persons we truly are.

- **What are your observations as best practices to help addressing the inequalities and what are the recommended actions.**

In its simplest definition , meditation is a practice of mental concentration that brings the two elements of 'calm' and 'realism' to a perturbed, blind and confused mind. Thus an individual who meditates is able to face squarely all life situations with a full grasp of reality and with a spirit of benevolence.

The Noble Eight fold path is thus a practical way shown by Buddha for a tranquil and peaceful life. It is a self- discipline of body, word and mind. It is a path of self purification. The essence of the path has been put forth in one verse by the Buddha-

'Abstinence from all evils

Fulfillment of all good.

Purification of one's mind.
This is the teaching of the Buddha³⁷

Forbearance and forgiveness

In *Samyuttanikaya*³⁸ a story of Vepacitti is told to describe the value of forbearance and forgiveness. Vepacitti, the defeated leader, is once brought before Sakka, the leader of the gods and he curses Sakka. When Sakka was not angry, his charioteer asks whether he forbears from fear or weakness but Sakka replies, that the words of a fool, his anger and verbal onslaught are best stopped by remaining calm and not by harsh measures.

In another context in the same *Nikaya*,³⁹ a Brahmin insults and abuses the Buddha because a relative of his has become a Buddhist monk. Then the Buddha tells him he who reviles again when reviled is the worst person. He who does not, when reviled, revile again, wins a twofold victory. He seeks the welfare of both himself and others, who having known the anger of others mindfully maintains his peace.

Self Control and Contentment

Self control of well directed mind is insisted from time to time. With self control one has to overcome greed and attachment, hatred and delusion, which are seen as the roots of unwholesome actions and the key causes of suffering. Destruction of all craving conquers all sorrows which is the aim of Buddhism. The fact that the second noble truth says that craving leads to suffering, clearly underlines the importance of self- control. Desire, greed and attachment are seen as leading to quarrels and war⁴⁰ The Buddha has emphatically stated that the greater is the degree of dissatisfaction and desire, the greater is the amount of suffering; the minimization of desire is the minimization of the amount of suffering. Such minimization has been suggested to the extent to remain satisfied with the simple food to maintain body and simple cloths to cover it by total. The sense of contentment should emerge from within, with saturation with the flavor of sublime ideals of the virtuous life⁴¹.

³⁷ *Dh. P.* 183

³⁸ *S.N.* I. 220-222

³⁹ *Ibid.* I. 162

⁴⁰ *D.N.* - II. 58-9

⁴¹ *D.N.* III. 139-142

Mindfulness and self help

In *Mahasatipattana sutta* of *Dighanikaya* the Buddha urges his disciples to set up mindfulness (*Sati*). The Noble path is obtained by practicing mindfulness only.

The last words of the Buddha were ‘Decay is inherent in all component things. Work your salvation with diligence’⁴².

There is no need to emphasize that right mindfulness , if practiced , can substantially enrich the life level of any individual in the contemporary society. A person who is self – collected is not distracted . His thoughts are not dispersed . He is not preoccupied with unimportant things. His thoughts are always focused on the right targets. He , in consequence , is in a constant state of peace and mental rest.

Attadipa or *atta-sarana* are the recurring themes of Buddhism. Spiritual experiences are not granted but they should be achieved and experienced with strenuous discipline and self control. Gautama, the apostle of self control and endurance became the Buddha, with his own hard work.

‘Emotional life is transient. Strive ahead with attentiveness’⁴³.

The Buddha entwines good conduct (*sila*) with *prajna* (wisdom/ intuitive insight). He was extremely practical in his approach. The oft-quoted parable will certainly clear this.⁴⁴ If a man is hit by a poisonous arrow, the immediate action required is to take away that arrow. It would be unwise to discuss who shot it, whether a woman or man, a *Brahmin* or *Vaisya* or *sudra*, whether he was tall or short and so on. In the same way, rather than wasting our time and energy on vain speculations, we should focus only on removal of pain by moral development. The Buddha emphasized tremendously on practice of good conduct (*caritta dhamma*). The *Bahitika Sutta* teaches us that behavior whether of act or of word or of thought, is wrong which is blameworthy, malevolent and which ripens into ill and which conduces to the harm, either of one’s self or of others .That behavior is right which is divested of all these evils. Thus our actions are to be directed towards the goal of attaining moral excellence and spiritual progress.

⁴² *Ibid.*, II .3

⁴³ ‘*appamada* ’ literally ‘ non-negligence’ has been used by the in the same sense as ‘*sati*’ – attentiveness.

⁴⁴ *M. .N. Cula Mālunkya sutta.* II. 63

Abbreviation

Anguttaranikaya_ AN

Dighanikaya- DN

Kuddhakanikaya_ KN

Majjhimanikaya - MN

Samyuttanikaya- SN