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MORAL VALUES AND EQUALITY IN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The moral values and equality are closely related to each other. The moral values are brought into being by man's conduct. The appearance of the moral basis in society brought into being a sort of moral code of a different kind. It is important for the man-kind.

These include man's general moral standards and the finest creations of literature and art. The ethical structure of each society is very complex. This is the basic idea that the Buddhism wishes to convey to the people who hanker after wealth and material properties. The moral basis of human society will not be maintained and developed unless people devotedly abide by responsibility. The Buddhist ethics is always of supreme value.

KEYWORDS: Buddhist Politics Mentioned, fundamental principle, Theravada Buddhist Texts.



INTRODUCTION :

The Buddhist ethical system sets up the service of one's fellowmen as the ultimate human goal. It holds that the individual can find his own highest goal in working for the good of all. In the Buddhist ethics is the only dependable guide to truth. The moral is the basis of all right understanding.

The Buddha laid an emphasis on responsibility, individual and social. He inspired people for attaining the highest achievement in life. The great value of Buddhism, in the present situation, peace and righteousness, among the peoples of the world. In the future society of the world, true man was to emerge, purified from greed because released from the corruption of private property and individualism. This is moral values and quality in humanistic basis of Buddha's Dhamma.

The Buddha's Teaching is 'The Light of Asia' shining over the whole world. Buddhism greatly values social harmony and cohesion, as seen in the value placed on the four foundation of social unity as found in the *Singlovada sutta*;

1. Dana: giving,
2. Piyavaca: kind speech,
3. Atta cariya: helpful action,
4. Samanattata: impartial treatment and equal participation.

As expressed by a noted Thai scholar monk: the most basic point to be made about Buddhist social is that in keeping with the Buddhist doctrine of dependent co-arising (Conditioned Arising) individual betterment and perfection on the one hand and the social good in the other are

fundamentally interrelated and interdependent.

Friendship is thus model for social harmony in the mundane sphere and the model for spiritual encouragement of the laity by the monks in the trans-mundane sphere. We might conclude that in Buddhist ethics everyone is a friend, meaning that everyone should be treated as a friend. A society of self-disciplined, self-reliant people will be peaceful, and in turn support individual growth and development. (Rajavaramuni, Thailand, 1990:31-36)

In this process, the importance of associating with good people is often stressed so that good qualities are stimulated, reinforced and spread. As regards social equality, the Buddha was critical of Brahmannical claim, associated with the system of four supposedly divinely ordained social classes.

Buddhism contains an excellent moral code, including one for the monks and another for the laity, but it is much more than an ordinary moral teaching. Morality (Sila) is only the preliminary stage and is a means to an end, but not an end in itself. Though absolutely essential, it alone does not lead to one's Deliverance or perfect purity. It is only the first stage on the Path of Purity. Beyond morality is wisdom (Panna). The base of Buddhism is morality, and wisdom is its apex. As the pair of wings of a bird are these two complementary virtues. Wisdom is like unto man's eyes; morality is like unto his feet. One of the appellatives of the Buddha is *Vijjacaranasampanna* endowed with wisdom and conduct. Of the Four Noble Truths that form the foundation of Buddhism, the first three represent the philosophy of the Buddha's teaching; the fourth ethics of Buddhism based on that philosophy. Morality in Buddhism not founded on any doubtful divine revelation, nor is it the ingenious invention of an exceptional mind, but it is a rational and practical code based on verifiable facts and individual experience. In the opinion of Prof. Max Muller the Buddhist moral code is one of the most perfect which the world has ever known.

Prof. Rhys Davids says: "Buddhist or no Buddhist I have examined every one of the great religious systems of the world; and in none of those have I found anything to surpass in beauty and comprehensiveness the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. I am content to shape my life according to that path." It is interesting to note that according to Buddhism there are deeds which are ethically good and bad, deeds which are neither good nor bad, and deeds which tend to the ceasing of all deeds. Good deeds are essential for one's emancipation, but when once the ultimate goal of the Holy Life is attained, one transcends both good and evil.

The Buddha says: "Righteous things (*Dhamma*) you have to give up: how much more the unrighteous things (*Adhamma*)." The deed which is associated with attachment (*Lobha*), illwill (*Dosa*) and delusion (*Moha*) is evil. That deed which is associated with non-attachment (*Alobha*), goodwill (*Adosa*) and wisdom (*Amoha=Panna*), is good. The deeds of an Arahant, a Stainless One, possess no ethical value as he has gone beyond both good and evil. This does not mean that he is passive. He is active, but his activity is selfless and is directed to help others to tread the path he has trodden himself.

His deeds, ordinarily accepted as good, lack creative power as regards himself. Unlike the actions of a worldlyling his actions do not react on himself as a Kammic effect. His actions, in Pali, are called *kiriya* (functional). Purest gold cannot further be purified. The mental states of the four types of supra-mundane Path consciousness, namely;

1. Sotapatti (Stream-Winner),
2. Sakadagami (Once-Returner),
3. Anagami (Non-Returner) and
4. Arahatta (Worthy).

Though wholesome (*kusala*), do not tend to accumulate fresh Kamma, but, on the contrary, tend to the gradual cessation of the individual flux of becoming, and therewith to the gradual cessation of good and evil deeds. In these types of supra-mundane consciousness, the wisdom factor (Panna), which tends to destroy the roots of Kamma, is predominant; while in the mundane types of consciousness

volition (Cetana) which produces Kammic activities is predominant.

What is karma? Karma is a Sanskrit word that literally means "action". The word is used to refer to volitional acts as well as the fruits or consequences that arise from these acts. The idea of karma had existed in ancient Indian philosophy before the time of Siddhartha Gautama, and it became an important element of Buddhist philosophy.

The Hindu and Buddhist concepts of karma are quite similar, although Hinduism makes a further distinction between different types of karma, such as present karma, latent karma, and future karma. In the understanding of both thought systems, the law of karma describes the connection between actions and the resulting forces, as follows: wholesome actions lead to wholesome states while unwholesome actions lead to unwholesome states, individually as well as collectively.

The Buddhist concept is subtly different from the classical Indian understanding, because it denies the existence of a self or a soul. In Buddhism, the idea of self is merely an illusion. Man wrongly identifies perception, consciousness, mind and body with what he calls self. In reality, there is no abiding entity that could be identified with a self, because the states of perception, consciousness, and mind and body constantly change.

What we are is determined largely by what we thought, said and did in the past, while what we are thinking, saying, and doing now will form our future. The karma of past, present, and future events are connected by the law of cause and effect.

For instance, if one generates bad karma by hurting or killing sentient beings, one will have to endure the negative consequences of these deeds in this or another lifetime. Similarly, if one generates good karma by observing the precepts, positive consequences will follow inevitably.

Buddhists understand karma as a natural law. There is no higher instance, no judgement, no divine intervention and no gods that steer man's destiny, but only the law of karma itself, which works on a universal scale. Deeds yield consequences either in the next second, in the next hour, day, month, year, decade, or even in the next lifetime, or in another distant lifetime. To illustrate this, consider the following example describing a sequence of volitional acts, which yield instant karmic results.

As long as there is delusion, greed, and aversion, and as long as passions are not extinguished, we generate karma. Because we eventually accumulate unmaterialized karma, there is a next lifetime in which the accumulated karma will take form. Only when all accumulated karma is realized and the generation of new karma is calmed, one can enter the stream that leads to Nirvana. This process continues until Nirvana is reached, which signifies the cessation of rebirth and, hence, the end of suffering.

It is notable that this also entails the avoidance of "good karma". Once the stream that leads to Nirvana is entered, creating wholesome karma is not an object anymore. Although wholesome karma leads to entering the stream, it does not lead to Nirvana, only the extinguishment of all karma leads to Nirvana.

Good and Bad Action; Wherever the three defilements - delusion, greed, and aversion - are present, they blur the view and increase the level of confusion in the individual or group. Consequently, if the defilements are present, there is a low level of skill in distinguishing between good and bad actions. Thus it makes sense to say that we have skilful (good) and unskilful (bad) thoughts, we speak skilful (good) and unskilful (bad) words, and we act either in a skilful (good) or in an unskilful (bad) way.

The Buddhist Precepts and the Ten Perfections give concrete meaning to good and bad and explain skilful and unskilful volitional acts in detail. Since everything in Buddhism is interrelated, the Eightfold Path must be seen in connection with the Four Noble Truths, the concept of karma, and the tenet of rebirth.

What is the standard of morality according to Buddhism? The answer is found in the

admonition given by the Buddha to young SamaneraRahula, "If there is a deed, Rahula, you wish to do, reflect thus: Is this deed conducive to my harm, or to others' harm, or to that of both? Then is this a bad deed entailing suffering. From such a deed you must resist. "If there is a deed you wish to do, reflect thus: Is this deed not conducive to my harm, nor to others' harm, nor to that of both? Then is this a good deed entailing happiness. Such a deed you must do again and again." In assessing morality, a Buddhist takes into consideration the interests both of himself and others—animals not excluded.

The moral dimension; To make this more intelligible, one has to account for (un)wholesome actions and (un)wholesome states and their respective meaning in Buddhism. The former is outlined in the Noble Eightfold Path. Action springs from volition, which springs from intention, which springs from thought, and so forth. The quality of actions can be described in ethical terms, simply as either good or bad, or both good and bad, or indifferent.

There are various grades of ethical qualities; and most people have an intuitive understanding that enables them to discern between good and bad, although the discerning ability depends on the person's state of mental development. A wise person at a high level of mental development can clearly discern mental activities and actions in an ethical dimension, while a deluded person has difficulties or is even unable to do so.

In the *Karaniya Metta sutta* the Buddha exhorts: "*Mata yathaniya mputta mayutaekaputta manurakkhe*, "As the mother protects her only child even at the risk of her own life; even so let one cultivate boundless towards all beings."

The *Dhamapada* states: "*Sabbetasantidandassa, sabbebhayantimaccuno, attanam pamam katva, nahaneyyanaghataye*". "All rear punishment, to all life is dear. Comparing others with oneself, let one neither hurt nor kill."

To understand the exceptionally high standard of morality the Buddha expects from His ideal followers, one must carefully read the *Dhammapada*, *SingalovadaSutta*, *VyagghapajjaSutta*, *MangalaSutta*, *Metta Sutta*, *ParabhavaSutta*, *VasalaSutta*, *DhammikaSutta*, etc.

As a moral teaching it excels all other ethical systems, but morality is only the beginning and not the end of Buddhism. The original Pali term for Buddhism is Dhamma. There is no proper English equivalent that exactly conveys the meaning of the Pali term. The Dhamma is that which really is. It is the Doctrine of Reality. It is a means of Deliverance from suffering and Deliverance itself. Whether the Buddha arise or not the Dhamma exist from all eternity. It is a Buddha that realizes this Dhamma, which ever lies hidden from the ignorant eyes of men, till He, an Enlightened One, comes and compassionately reveals it to the world. "Whether the Tathagatas appear or not, O Bhikkhus, it remains a fact, an established principle, a natural law that all conditioned things are impermanence (Anicca), sorrowful (Dukka) and that everything is soulless (Anatta). This fact the Tathagata realizes, understands and when He has realized and understood it, announces, teaches, proclaims, establishes, discloses, analyses, and makes it clear, that all conditioned things are impermanence, sorrowful, and that everything is soulless."

In the *MajjhimaNikaya* the Buddha says: "One thing only does the Buddha teach, namely, suffering and the cessation of suffering." This is the Doctrine of Reality.

In the *UdanaPali*: '*Seyyathapi, bhikkhave, mahasamuddoekarassolonarasso, evamevakho, bhikkhave, ayamdhammavinayoekarassovimuttirasso*'. "Just as, O Bhikkhus, the mighty ocean is of one flavour, the flavour of salt, even so, O Bhikkhus, this Dhamma is of one flavour, the flavour of Deliverance (*Vimutti*)." This is the Means of Deliverance.

This magnificentDhamma is not something apart from oneself. It is purely dependent on oneself and is to be realized by oneself. As such the Buddha exhorts: "*Attadipaviharathaattapatisarana*" - Abide with oneself as an island, with oneself as a refuge.

"*Dhammadipaviharatha, dhammapaaisarana, anannapatisarana*" - Abide with the Dhamma as

an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge. Seek not for external refuge.

CONCLUSION

Finally, as may be seen from the foregoing, Buddhist moral principles are very noble and in an ideal world their practice would lead to peace and harmony but, unfortunately, as the Buddha has taught, people are motivated by greed, hatred and delusion - even Buddhists. Basically, according to Buddhist teachings, the ethical and moral principles are governed by examining whether a certain action, whether connected to body or speech is likely to be harmful to one's self or to others and thereby avoiding any actions which are likely to be harmful. In Buddhism, there is much talk of a skilled mind. A mind that is skillful avoids actions that are likely to cause suffering or remorse. Buddhist ethics recognizes the objectivity of moral value. It brings great benefits to this life and the lives hereafter. Therefore, a person should try his best to observe the moral values and qualities with understanding as often as he can.

May Buddha's spiritual heritage spread every corner of the world.

May all beings be peace and happy in global harmony!

May all beings overwhelm any Dukka, sorrow and worries seriously!

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