



Buddhism: A Way Of Life In The Modern World

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Abstract

Today Buddhism remains as a great civilizing force in the modern world. As a civilizing force, Buddhism awakens the self-respect and feeling of self-responsibility of countless people and stirs up the energy of many a nation. It fosters spiritual progress by appealing to the thinking powers of human beings. It promotes in people the sense of tolerance by remaining free from religious and national narrowness and fanaticism. It tames the wild and refines the citizens to be clear and sober in mind. In short, Buddhism produces the feeling of self-reliance by teaching that the whole destiny of humanity lies in their own hands, and that they themselves possess the faculty of developing their own energy and insight in order to reach the highest goal. For over two thousand years, Buddhism has satisfied the spiritual needs of nearly one-fifth of mankind. Today the appeal of Buddhism is as strong as ever. In this article, I would like to discuss about how would be more applicable of Buddhism as a way of life in today's world.

Keywords: *Buddhist ideology; Noble eight fold-path; Self-help; Middle way; Peace; Happiness; Way of life; Modern world*

Introduction

As human beings we must have an aim in our life. A person not observing a righteous way of life will never find the aim of life and if he does not uphold some noble principles he can even become a danger to society. No doubt scientists and psychologists have widened our intellectual horizon, but they have not likewise been able to give us a purpose in life, which only noble principles could do. Religion also originally developed as humanism to uphold humane qualities. Later, it was introduced as a divine law. However, a noble way of life is needed to maintain our human values and dignity. The noble way of life to be discussed here is a proven method wherein by cultivating the mind one could gain supreme wisdom. Countries in which attempts were made to supplant the noble principles of religion with socialism or materialism have been proved to be modern day failures. It is apparent that human beings must have some noble principles to gain confidence in life. Human beings must choose a rational and meaningful way of life based on their firm conviction and not one founded on mere mythological beliefs, traditional practices and

theories. One should not force anyone to accept any particular religious laws nor exploit his or her state of poverty, illiteracy or emotions to induce that person to accept their beliefs.

A person should be free to choose a reasonable way of life according to his or her understanding capacity. Following a religion blindly only abuses human intelligence and dignity. Human beings have common sense to distinguish between right and wrong. They can adapt themselves to changing circumstances. They should therefore choose a respectable way of life that is suitable and one that measures up to their expectations. They must be properly guided in this respect and then given a chance to decide for themselves without recourse to any fore of coercion.

The Middle-Way

The noble way of life that is being introduced here is a practical educational system of mental culture known to the world some twenty five centuries ago. The founder of this way of life was a most enlightened and compassionate teacher. This method is also variously known as the Middle-Path, a righteous way of life, an ethico-philosophical



system, a do-it-yourself method and also can be introduced as a path of freedom and reason. It teaches us to do three things; namely, to refrain from doing bad deeds, to be of some service to others and to maintain a healthy pure mind. This message is very meaningful and practical. Yet, people experience difficulties when they try to put them into practice. The reason for this is due to their own inherent human weaknesses. The moral conduct of human beings plays a most important part in this way of life. Its great teacher once said, **“My teaching is not to come and believe but to practice.”** It encourages people to study the teachings fully to allow them to judge for themselves whether they should accept the teachings or not. No one is asked to come and accept this way of life without first having had an understanding of its teachings. Superfluous rites and rituals, and animal sacrifices have no significance in this noble way of life. Superstitious beliefs, fear of supernatural beings and secret doctrines are not encouraged.

People have the liberty to investigate for themselves the teachings and to ask questions so as to clear their doubts. According to the teacher of this way of life, one should not believe help one to bear anything merely because the founder of this noble method happened to be a great sage or because it had all along been traditionally accepted by many; but only by reasoning and common sense can one decide to accept it. This teacher also advises any one not to accept nor to reject anything hastily on impulse but to investigate it thoroughly before coming to a final decision.

The Noble Eight-fold Path

The noble eight-fold path taught in this way of life is Perfect-understanding, Perfect-thought, Perfect-speech, Perfect-action, Perfect-livelihood, Perfect-effort, Perfect-mindfulness and Perfect-concentration. This unique middle path is a code of morality which paves the way for people to lead a noble and peaceful life. The middle path is neither a metaphysical nor a ritualistic path;

it is neither dogmatism nor scepticism; neither self-indulgence nor self-torture; neither eternalism nor nihilism; neither a law given by some divine authority nor a mere imagination of man. It is a path of Enlightenment, a means of deliverance from suffering or unsatisfactoriness. This way of life rejects the idea that human beings are suffering today because of their original sins. Every living thing, including plant life, experiences suffering. Every person carries his or her merits and demerits individually. Human beings are solely responsible for their own pain or pleasure.

One who follows the middle path should find real peace and happiness. One should be able to lead a respectable life without being a slave to any form of belief, thus contributing to one's peace and happiness by living in complete harmony with others and the environment.

Law of Karma: Reap What You Sow

This way of life satisfies humanity's most profound and lofty aspirations. Yet it is able to the stress and strain of everyday life, besides giving a purpose to life. It does not instill fear in people. Good begets good and bad begets bad. Every action has its reaction. These are universal laws. This way of life fully agrees with these fundamental laws and people have to abide by them and 'reap what they sow'. People perpetrate evil deeds out of greed, anger and ignorance. Such weaknesses can only be overcome through self-realisation. The fortunes and misfortunes people experience in this world are not due to some external influences but to the good and bad actions, words and deeds they themselves had previously committed. For this very reason, this teaching says: "We are the results of what we were, and we will be the results of what we are." That means we are responsible for everything in our life. Forgiveness of sin is not acknowledged in this way of life. One is solely responsible for one's own actions, good or bad. If one has committed evil, one has to face up to the consequences. The only way to purge the mind of evil is to do



only good. It is only through a long process of mental training that the mind could become purified.

This way of life teaches that death is not the end of life. A living being just a bundle of energies holding the elements together. The physical death of a being is just an interlude in the repeated cycle of birth and death. Therefore, a being 'not the same and not different' continues to live, life after life, until the aim of life is finally attained. According to this teaching, cause and effect play a very important part in our lives. In a cycle of cause and effect, a first cause is inconceivable for the cause ever becomes the effect, and the effect in turn becomes the cause. Everything that exists is interdependent.

The Buddha: A Great Teacher

The founder of this unique method is not a myth but a Great Teacher who actually lived in this world. He never tried to present himself as a supernatural being but as a human being who had himself realised the absolute truth: the cosmic or universal law, the secret of life and the real cause of suffering and happiness. He makes no claim to divinity. Today, this teacher is not only honoured by hundreds of millions of his followers but also by the cultured people and intellectuals throughout the world. Although this Noble Man, this Liberator, this Social Reformer, this Democrat and Inspirer had passed away, he left behind a noble message for humanity to follow in order to eliminate human suffering, misery, fear, worry and unsatisfactoriness. From his message one can gain happiness in this life and in the life hereafter: the ultimate liberation of all human suffering. This great teacher comforted the bereaved. He helped the poor who were neglected. He ennobled the lives of the deluded and purified the lives of criminals. He consoled the weak, united the divided, enlightened the ignorant, clarified the doubts of mystics, elevated those debased and dignified the noble. Both the rich and the poor, the saintly and the criminal loved him. Despotic or righteous

Kings, famous or obscure princes and nobles, generous or stingy millionaires, haughty or intelligent scholars, and destitutes, paupers, down-trodden scavengers, wicked murderers, cannibals, despised courtesans – all benefited by his noble way of life, wisdom and compassion.

His noble example was a source of inspiration to all. His serene and peaceful countenance was indeed soothing to the troubled. His message of peace and tolerance was welcomed by all with indescribable joy and was of lasting benefit to everyone who had the good fortune to hear and to practice it. His iron will, profound wisdom, universal love, boundless compassion, selfless service, brave renunciation, perfect purity, magnetic personality, exemplary methods employed to introduce his teachings and his final success all these factors have inspired about one fifth of the population of the world today to hail and honour this teacher as their supreme master. This noble teacher sacrificed his worldly pleasures for the sake of suffering humanity to seek the Truth and to show the path of deliverance from suffering. He visited the poor people whilst kings and ministers had to visit him. After his enlightenment he had dedicated 45 years of his life for guiding deluded human beings to lead meaningful, respectable and peaceful lives.

This great teacher feared none nor did he instil fear in others. This is one quality that should be cultivated by all in this war-torn world of ours where the most precious thing – life – is sacrificed at the altar of brute force and where armaments are creating fear, tension and hatred. He also did not create temptations of sensual pleasure as a means to introduce his noble way of life. He was the perfect scientist in the study of life; the perfect psychologist who analysed the nature of the mind to the extent that his teaching was acclaimed as a scientific method. Modern scientific discoveries never come in conflict with his teaching. To great philosophers and unbiased thinkers, he is a



teacher who understood worldly conditions in its proper perspective. To moralists his teaching was the highest code of discipline. He symbolizes perfection. 'He was the perfect model of all the virtues he preached.' To rationalists, he is the most liberal-minded noble teacher. To free-thinkers, he is a teacher who encouraged people to think independently to find out the truth. To agnostics, he is a very gentle and understanding teacher who guided humanity.

He was no doubt the most persuasive of all the great teachers. He never used compulsion or fear as a means of gaining converts. He has introduced a noble way of life without even attaching a religious label to it. What he wanted was to see people living in harmony as cultured, harmless and contented human beings by upholding his noble advice. He was the humble servant of humanity, unperturbed by either praise or blame. He did not ask people to come and worship him or pray to him in order to gain salvation. He did not introduce his message by means of charismatic techniques or so called miraculous powers but by educating and convincing the public.

Peace, Happiness and Salvation (Freedom)

Today, the message of peace of this Great Universal Teacher is more important than ever before particularly at a time when human beings are intoxicated with power, greed, jealousy, pride and craving for world domination. This teacher was born to this world to dispel the darkness of ignorance, and to save the world from its ills. It is common knowledge that throughout the world many people continue to live without practising any form of noble life. However, if they would only make an effort to study and understand what this Great Teacher had taught, they could clarify their doubts, and be convinced of his teaching that could best contribute to find the aim of life. Whether one believes in him or not, his teaching had a profound effect on all people. His message

was spread without any violence. It is a significant fact that not a single drop of blood had ever been shed in its name. This is indeed a most remarkable record in world history which could be written in letters of gold. This teaching illuminates the way by which humanity could cross from a world of unsatisfactoriness to a world of light, love, peace and happiness. The twenty five century old teaching of this great teacher is strong enough to face any challenge without flinching or having the need to reinterpret its original doctrines; because the doctrine he preached is for all time and is the absolute truth. The teaching considers virtue as one of the prerequisites for the attainment of liberation from worldly suffering. The other prerequisite is wisdom. Virtue is like a vehicle that brings one up to the gate of liberation, but the actual key that opens the gate is wisdom. They believe in the importance of self-exertion and in the efficacy of meditation for self-conquest, self-control, self-purification, and enlightenment. Meditation serves as a tonic for the body as well as the mind.

Atta deep bhava: One Can Mould One's Life

This method contends that mind is the all powerful force – the creator and destroyer of humankind as well as the architect of humanity's fate. Therefore, one should be capable of moulding anything if only one knows how to develop and make proper use of the mind.

In fact, this way of life has been an admirable beacon of light radiating on the hill for guiding humanity to fulfil the aim of life. Through this method people can dispel the darkness of ignorance. By following the guidance given in this way of life, people learn how to use their life to the fullest to be meaningful. It is true that the world today is riddled with racial, political, religious, communal and ideological differences. To solve these complex problems, people must exercise the spirit of benevolence and tolerance towards each other. This noble method inculcates ethical-moral co-



operation for the universal good. Humanity must realise that spiritual development is more important than material development for human happiness. Truth, service, charity and love must be practised if this world is to be turned into a better place for us to live in.

Credit to Human Intelligence

Instead of placing human destiny under the arbitrary control of an unknown external agency and becoming subservient to such a supreme power, this way of life has raised the status of humanity. It accorded human beings the intelligence that is their just due. It taught people how to cultivate their submerged human potential. This teacher tells us how to render selfless service to others. Those who follow this way of life abstain from evil not out of fear of retribution from some unseen being but out of self-realisation that evil would only bring about suffering to living beings. Their motive of doing good to help others is done not to please any supreme being in expectation of an ultimate reward, but out of feelings of compassion towards them in order to release them from their sufferings. In this way of life we can find a method to perfect goodness and wisdom. We can achieve the highest wisdom through realisation and not 'revelation'. We can attain redemption without the assistance of a vicarious redeemer. We can gain salvation within this life-time by the judicious exercise of our own faculties without waiting for the life hereafter. This way of life teaches that human beings are not for religion but that religion is for humanity. Without becoming slaves to any particular religion, human beings must make use of religion for their own betterment and liberation. In other words, people can practise this method as noble human beings without having to undergo suffering in the name of any form of belief. This way of life does not prohibit the experiencing of sensual pleasures in a reasonable and respectable way if it is conducted within the bounds of accepted noble principles. This noble way of life was not planned in heaven but nurtured in the purified human mind. It

was born in a long experimental process. This is a method to study, to practise, and to experience the results in the end. Its contribution to a real noble way of life is most ancient and yet most modern. Its teaching of causation, its relativism, doctrine of sense-data, pragmatism, its emphasis on morals, its disbelief in any permanent soul, its unconcern about a creator God, eternal heaven and eternal hell, its denial of rituals and its appeal to one's own experience, all tend to establish its superior claim to modernity.

Noble Life in a Modern Society

It has every quality required of a rational way of life to fit into the present and future world. It will be beneficial for anyone to study and to appreciate it in the modern world. It is acknowledged to be more scientific than science itself and more progressive than all the known progressive elements in spiritual development. It is one of the most effective means for the maintenance of world peace, harmony and understanding.

No Discrimination

It was this way of life which was the first to revolt against the degrading caste system. It taught humanity to accord equal opportunities for all to distinguish themselves in every walk of life. This way of life was also the first in giving freedom to women to study and to practise to achieve spiritual development. The Great Teacher declared that the gates to success and prosperity are open to all, in every stage of life whether high or low, saintly or criminal, who would care to seek and aspire for perfection. He did not make his followers slaves either to himself or to his teachings but instead granted them complete freedom of thought and investigation to gain self-confidence for themselves. This system classifies living beings into mind and matter which are in a state of constant change, not remaining the same for two consecutive moments. Mind and matter arise and perish and the continuous cycle goes on. Therefore nothing will remind permanently either in this world or elsewhere in the universe. Because



everything which exists in the universe is nothing but a combination of elements and energies, it is quite natural that these things will one day disintegrate and disappear. This teaching also tells us that every existing component thing is subject to change and conflict because of worldly conditions. The main principles recommended in this way of life are not commandments. By observing precepts such as abstaining from Killing, Stealing, Sexual Misconduct, Telling Lies and Taking drinks and drugs which cause infatuation and heedlessness, the followers of this noble way of life can purify themselves through good thoughts, good speech and good action, and thereby living in harmony with others or by allowing others also to live peacefully.

Conclusion

Buddhism aim is to enlighten people on how to seek inner peace and happiness and to practise their own noble way of life with firm conviction. We encourage people to practise their own way of life properly if truth, peace, happiness, wisdom and salvation can be found in it. What we want is for everyone to lead a respectable life without abusing one's innate human dignity. In fact, this way of life may be the answer to many of your spiritual and human problems. It may give fresh impetus and direction to your way of thinking on devotional and philosophical matters. It may also help you to understand your own way of life. You may find here the spiritual guidance the modern world badly needs. This teaching brought into the world a new spirit, a new hope, a new path, the truth and necessity of which is evident everywhere and felt today as it was in days of old. The way of life referred to here is **Buddhism** and its founder is none other than **Gautama the Buddha** – the Enlightened One. Therefore, be unbiased, avoid religious prejudices in your noble endeavour to find the ultimate truth and the aim of life. The aim of life is nothing but finding the end of physical and mental suffering.

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