

# One Foot in the World

## Buddhist Approaches to Present-day Problems

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**BY**  
**LILY DE SILVA**

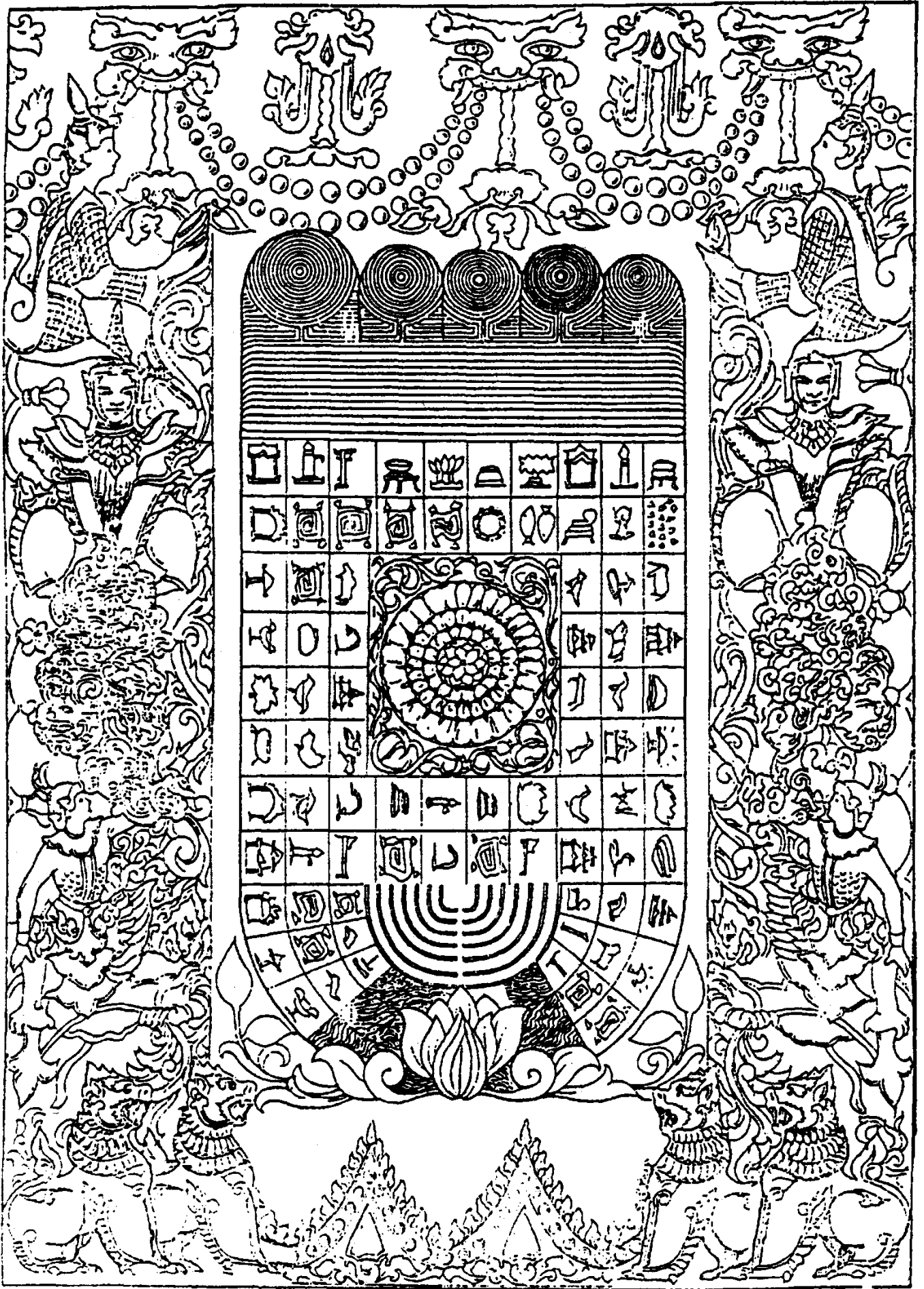
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## Preface

**T**HE DISPENSATION OF THE BUDDHA includes not only monks and nuns, but male and female lay followers as well. All these four groups comprising the Buddhist community have but one ultimate goal. That goal is the attainment of Nibbana.

Though Nibbana means final liberation from the world, while walking along the path to liberation a Buddhist has to live in the world and deal with the conditions of worldly existence. This problem is likely to be felt especially acutely by the lay Buddhist, who may find that the demands and attractions of secular life tend to pull him away from the path to deliverance. However, the Buddha was not unaware of or unconcerned about this dilemma confronted by his lay disciples, but gave it his careful attention. He taught his lay followers how to organize lay life in accordance with the ethical principles of the Dhamma and how to lead successful lay lives without deviating from the path of rectitude.

As lay Buddhists, we must be ever vigilant so that in our pursuit of worldly goals such as wealth, pleasure, and success we do not lose sight of our spiritual goal.

Care should be taken especially to avoid the violation of the basic moral principles summed up in the Five Precepts, as such violation leads to regression on the path. We must often remind ourselves that the first two of the four stages of holiness can be attained by those still leading a married life; that there have been non-returners of the third stage who continued to remain in lay life though observing celibacy; and that the texts record instances of laymen who even attained arahatship prior to their deaths. The Pali Canon contains ample evidence of exemplary laymen and laywomen, such as Anathapindika, Visakha, and the parents of Nakula, to mention only the most prominent. Therefore a layman should make every endeavor to follow the way to the end of suffering in this very life itself, by leading a life of moderation and self-discipline

and by practicing meditation with the aim of developing insight into the ultimate truths of life and death.

The essays in this booklet explore various facets of experience from lay life which require the attention of the lay aspirant to deliverance. They deal particularly with those which have become more pronounced and urgent in our contemporary materialistic and secularized world. My wish is to share these ideas with others who also may be attempting to follow the Buddha's path in the lay life, and are thus walking with one foot on the way to Nibbana and one foot still in the world. I hope these essays will assist them to understand and overcome the problems they may face in their day-to-day lives.



# A Layman's Happiness

LIFE IN THE MODERN AGE has become particularly trying and problematic. Though it remains a fact that the standard of living has generally improved, man is still suffering immensely under the weight of present-day living. The physical condition of man has been reduced to such a pathetic level that he succumbs to untimely death by killer diseases such as cancer, heart failure, diabetes, etc. to an unprecedented degree. Mentally, he is so tension-ridden that he has forgotten the art of relaxing, and he cannot even enjoy sound sleep without the aid of tranquilizers. In this set up interpersonal relations have become so brittle and vulnerable that the divorce rate has become alarmingly high, thus letting loose a whole series of other social problems such as uncared-for children, juvenile delinquency, suicide, etc. Thus life has become a problematic burden and a solution to make life more tolerable and enjoyable is a great pressing need.

As the world of the Buddha is of everlasting value and universal applicability, and as the Buddha preached not only to monks and nuns but also to the lay public as well, it is useful to find a teaching of the Buddha which is relevant to our present-day problems. In the *Pattakammavagga* of the Anguttara Nikaya (A II, 69) the Buddha preached a sutta to Anathapindika on the fourfold pleasures of a layman. It is our considered opinion that this sutta offers adequate insight to meet the demands of the present-day problems as well. The four types of pleasure listed there are: *atthisukha*, the pleasure of having material wealth; *bhogasukha*, the pleasure of enjoying material wealth; *ananasukha*, the pleasure of being debtless; and *anavajjaskha*, the pleasure of being blameless. Let us take these for discussion one by one and see how these sources of pleasure can be harnessed for leading a happy life in the present-day world.

*Atthisukha* — Man should not only have a righteous means of living, avoiding blameworthy trades such as dealing in meat, liquor, poison, firearms and slavery, he should also entertain a wholesome

attitude towards his righteous occupation. For instance, if a doctor welcomes epidemics in the locality in order to make much money, or a trader hopes for natural calamities to send market prices up, the money earned by such unscrupulous individuals is not righteous money as their intentions are impure and foul. Also one should not deceive or exploit others in carrying out one's occupation. Exerting oneself with great perseverance, one should earn one's living, and such hard-earned wealth is called righteous wealth (*dhammika dhammaladdha*). Again one could have great wealth, but if one does not experience a sense of contentment with what one has, one cannot really enjoy *atthisukha* or the pleasure of having. The amassing of wealth of such a person is like trying to fill a bottomless vessel. This is one of the widespread maladies we see in the present-day society. Inordinate expansion of wealth becomes a source not of happiness, but of anxiety. Such wealth exposes the possessor to the jealousies and maneuvers of other unscrupulous individuals, hence the occurrence of blackmailing and kidnapping from time to time. But if one does have a righteous means of earning one's living and the correct attitude to wealth, one can escape many of the hazards which money brings in its wake to modern man.

*Bhogasukha* — Wealth has only instrumental value and the proper enjoyment of wealth is an art which is worth carefully cultivating. Buddhism deplors both extravagance and miserly hoarding. One must maintain a healthy balanced standard of living according to one's means. If, in the enjoyment of wealth, one overindulges in sense pleasures, one is bound to run into health hazards in a very short time. If, for instance, one overindulges in food just because one can afford it, one will soon be overcome by diseases such as heart failure, high blood pressure and diabetes. Such a one will be faced with the situation of "cutting his neck with his own tongue." Moderation in food is a virtue praised in Buddhism and it is a health-promoting habit. Often in the name of enjoying wealth, man cultivates unhealthy habits such as smoking and drinking. It is paradoxical that man, who actually loves himself most,



should act as if he were his own worst enemy by indulging in habits which ultimately reduce him to a physical wreck. It is medically established that smoking causes the highest percentage of lung cancer, and that drinking causes irreparable damage to vital organs of the body. If only one pauses to ponder over one's own welfare, and if only one entertains at least some degree of compassion towards oneself, one would not get into the clutches of these vicious habits. Wealthy men often end up in the pitiful plight of the ant fallen in the pot of honey. Such men did not know the art of enjoying *bhogasukha*. They regard the body as an instrument for pleasure, and they wear out and debilitate the body's capacity for enjoyment in double quick time, long before the natural process of wear and tear sets in. If we love ourselves, we have to treat our bodies with proper care without taxing it with overindulgence and deprivation. It is with the body that we can enjoy not only the pleasures of the senses, but even the spiritual bliss of Nibbana. Another aspect of the joy of wealth is the art of sharing. Without being an *Adinnapubbaka*, a "never-giver," if one learns to share one's riches with the less fortunate have-nots, one will have the noble experience of being happy at the joy of another. At the same time one will learn the love and good will of others, instead of becoming the target of jealousy and intrigue.

*Ananasukha* — The pleasure of being debtless is the third quality discussed in our sutta. Economically if one can be completely free of debt, one is indeed a very fortunate person. To be really debtless in society one has to discharge one's obligations scrupulously. As a wage earner one has to discharge one's duties for which one is paid, otherwise one can be indebted to the wage one gets. As a parent one has to fulfill one's obligations to one's children. In our society children are taught to worship and look after their parents, and it is well to bear in mind that parents too have to qualify themselves for the honor they receive by being dutiful parents. It should be emphasized that fathers who neglect their families as a result of their addiction to vices such as drinking and gambling

fall far short of the ideal of debtlessness. One can have the satisfaction of being debtless only if one has fulfilled one's obligations in all social roles one has to perform.

*Anavajjasukha* — The satisfaction of leading a blameless life is the highest form of satisfaction that a layman can have. Every society has a code of ethics to be followed by its members. According to Buddhism the minimum code of ethics regulating the life of its adherents is the *pañcasila*, the Five Precepts.<sup>1</sup> If one practices these virtues, one can have the satisfaction of leading a righteous life to a great extent. Refraining from doing to others what one does not like others to do unto oneself is the basic principle underlying these virtues. Buddhism speaks of *hiri* and *ottappa*, the sense of shame and the fear to do wrong, as *deva dhamma* or celestial qualities. These are the basic qualities which separate man from the animal kingdom. Unlike the animals man has a conscience which makes him squeamish about doing wrong. Buddhism recognizes blameless mental activity as well. Mental activities which spring from greed, hatred and delusion are unwholesome and blameworthy. Let us see how such mental behavior is a source of unhappiness. Take for instance the case of a person who is angry. What are the symptoms of anger? Hard breathing, accelerated heart beat, faster circulation of blood, feeling hot, sweating, trepidation, restlessness, etc. — these are the physical manifestations of anger. These are certainly not comfortable physical experiences. Each time the cause of anger is remembered, even though the physical manifestations of anger may not be that marked, one feels quite restless and mentally ill at ease. We use expressions such as “boiling with anger,” “I got the devil on to me,” etc. to mean getting angry, and these sayings are literally expressive of the situation. It is just not possible for one to be angry and happy at the same time. An irritable person is truly a very sad person, and what is worse he infects others around him too with the same sadness. The cultivation of sublime modes of behavior such as loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy

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1. Abstinance from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and intoxicants.

and equanimity are truly conducive to happy living. Those who live with such attitudes habitually are pleasant and amicable people who can be happy alone as well as in company.

If we truly understand the significance of the four kinds of happiness elucidated in our sutta, and translate them into action, life will be much more pleasant and happy even in this modern age.



# The Mechanics of Bondage and Suffering

THE BUDDHIST TEXTS repeatedly describe man as being bound and fettered to suffering. Many Pali words are used to describe this pathetic situation, such as *samyojana*, *bandha* and *pasa*, meaning bond, fetter, and snare, respectively. One sutta employs a simple simile to illustrate the manner in which man is fettered to *samsaric* life. According to this simile a black bull and a white bull are tied together with a rope. In this situation it cannot be said that the black bull is a fetter to the white bull, or that the white bull is a fetter to the black bull. Actually it is the rope with which the two are tied together that constitutes the fetter. Similarly the external world is not a fetter to man, nor is man a fetter to the external world. It is the desire for pleasure with which man is bound to the external world that forms the fetter. Desire is a very strong fetter which chains man to the external world and thereby to the ever recurring cycle of births and deaths. This strong fetter has six strands emerging from the six sense faculties, namely, the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and the mental faculty. The last mentioned faculty is called *mano* in Pali and is regarded as the sense that unifies all other faculties.

The Pali word for sense faculty is *indriya*, a very interesting word which reveals much about our human situation. *Indra* means lord or king, and the sense faculties are called *indriyas* because they dominate us so much. They act as our lords or masters and we slavishly obey them. The eye wishes to see pleasant forms, the ear wishes to hear pleasant sounds, the nose to smell pleasant smells, the tongue to enjoy pleasant tastes, and the body to feel pleasant tactile objects. The mental faculty which unifies all other sense faculties, gets terribly disturbed as it is dragged in different directions by the different sense stimuli, while it has to deal with its own share of agitations in the form of hopes, memories, and imaginations. The *Chappanaka Sutta* of the Samyutta Nikaya beautifully illustrates the struggle of the six senses with an eloquent simile. According to this simile, six animals having different habits and diverse fields of

action are tied together in one knot by a strong rope. The six animals are a crocodile who tries to run to the water, a bird who tries to fly in the air, a dog who tries to run to a village, a fox who tries to flee to a cemetery, a monkey who tries to go to the forest, and a snake who tries to creep into an anthill. These six animals are constantly struggling to reach their respective habitats. Similarly, the six senses are constantly seeking gratification in their own spheres, and the man who has no control over his sense faculties becomes terribly confused.

Through our senses we are chained to sense stimuli. We are chained to pleasant sense stimuli by the way of greed. We love to see pleasant objects and we spend a great deal of time, energy, and money in our endeavor to procure as many pleasant objects as possible. We love to hear pleasant words; if someone speaks in praise of us once we will often recall it with pleasure and be attached to that pleasure. We love to eat tasty food. This is a great weakness in most of us. Even when rich food is detrimental to our health, the desire to please the tongue is so great that we indulge in food even at the risk of our precious lives. This is how we sometimes go to the extent of beheading ourselves with our tongues. Man's desire to gratify his sex desire is also so intense that he runs the gravest risk of suffering great pain and debility with social diseases. AIDS (Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome), the present dreaded disease which is taking a very heavy toll of human life in the West, is the latest severe penalty man is paying for his unrestrained greed for sensuality. The plight of modern man can be illustrated by the traditional simile of the ant fallen in the pot of honey, bogged down and drowning in the very pleasures he is trying to enjoy.

Just as much as we can become fettered by greed, so we can also get trapped by dislike and hatred. Our aversion is aroused by unpleasant sense stimuli. The stronger the aversion, the more tenaciously we become fettered to the unpleasant object. Let us take an example. Suppose we have seen a disgusting object just before or during a meal. Our aversion may grow so strong that we will reject

even the most delicious food. If we see a worm in a bean curry, our aversion to it may even make us give up eating beans altogether, for each time we see beans we would be reminded of the unpleasant experience. Let us take another example from auditory experience. If somebody abuses us in front of a gathering, we would indeed get very angry with the abuser. This incident would come to our mind often and each time it came up we would experience anger. When we recall the abuse over and over and inject negative emotions of anger and hatred into this memory, we should know that a fetter has been formed.

By these obsessions by greed and hatred generated through the instrumentality of the senses, man's freedom of activity is limited and demarcated. He becomes like an animal tethered to a post by a rope, with its range of activity limited by the length of the rope. Here egoism is like the post, as we are all tied to the idea of self or "I". The rope stands for desire or aversion, for the stronger the idea of self, the more selfish we become, and the more selfish we become, the stronger grow our desires, likes, and dislikes. So it goes on like a vicious circle. Let us work out the simile in greater detail: when the rope of desire is strong, the rope itself becomes short, restricting man's freedom of activity proportionally. The man with a very strong sense of ego is like the animal who is smothered by the tightness and the shortness of the rope. The nature of this desire-rope is such that when negative emotions of likes and dislikes are weak, the rope itself is not only weakened but also lengthened, giving the human animal greater freedom of activity. When negative emotions become weak, positive emotions such as love and compassion emerge, expanding man's scope of freedom. The entire message of the Dhamma can be summarized as a method of rescuing human beings from the trammels of egocentricity, negative emotions, and ignorance, and granting them complete and unlimited freedom. In the language of our simile, it is like cutting the rope and uprooting the post to which the animal is tied.

The suttas also speak of another human tendency with regard

to sense pleasures: dwelling on past sensual pleasures while even neglecting to enjoy present pleasures. The past sense objects have already passed away and changed, but we become attached to our memories of them and thus experience anguish. Another trap we fall into because of our enjoyment of sense objects is the generation of the three types of conceit. When we think that we have a greater share of sensual pleasures than others, we develop a superiority complex (*seyyamana*); by considering ourselves equal to others, we develop the equality complex (*sadisamana*); and by thinking of ourselves as being less fortunate than others in the enjoyment of sense pleasures, we develop the inferiority complex (*hinamana*). Thus, by using the measuring rod of sense pleasures to quantify status, we become more and more self-centered and suffer the consequences of all possible complexes. therefore the Buddha calls sense pleasures the “snare of Mara,” the Evil One.

A sutta in the Salayatana Samyutta explains the situation from a different angle. When the sense faculties are unrestrained, the mind gets corrupted, wallowing in the enjoyment of sense objects. Such a corrupt mind does not find *pamojja*, delight in those higher noble pursuits which elevate the mind.

When this *pamojja*, or spiritual delight is absent, pious joy (*piti*) is also absent. When pious joy is missing there is no *passaddhi*, physical and mental relaxation. He who is not relaxed, lives in tension, frustration, and misery. This is what is called in Pali *dukkha*, “suffering.” Thus suffering is traced to non-restraint in the sense faculties.

Looking at the problem from another perspective, the Salayatana Samyutta traces the origin of the world to sense experience. Depending on the sense faculties and sense objects there arises sense consciousness. The convergence of these three factors — sense faculties, sense objects and sense consciousness — is called contact (*phassa*). Contact generates feelings (*phassapaccaya vedana*). In other words, if the object is delightful we experience pleasure in making contact with it. Feelings give rise to craving

(*vedanapaccaya tanha*) as we tend to desire more and more of the pleasant feelings. Craving generates clinging (*tanhapaccaya upadanam*), when we try to possess the objects we crave for. Clinging nurtures the growth of personal factors (*upadanapaccaya bhavo*), which in turn causes birth (*jati*). Birth brings in its wake all the ills of old age, death, grief, lamentation, etc. This is called the arising of the world. Thus we construct our own private worlds through the instrumentality of our sense faculties.

All this material goes to show that we are trapped to *samsara* through the domination of our senses. If we allow them free rein, we allow them to control us. Bondage and suffering are proportionate to the extent that we allow our sense faculties to dominate us. If we desire freedom and happiness for ourselves we have to subjugate the senses and make them our servants.





# Understanding and Managing Stress

**S**TRESS is a term adopted from engineering science by psychology and medicine. Simply defined, stress in engineering means force upon an area. As so many forces are working upon us in the modern age, and we find it extremely difficult to cope under so much pressure, stress is called the “disease of civilization.” Philip Zimbardo in his *Psychology and Life* traces four interrelated levels at which we react to the pressures exerted upon us from our environment. The four are: the emotional level, the behavioral level, the physiological level, and the cognitive level. The emotional responses to stress are sadness, depression, anger, irritation, and frustration. The behavioral responses are poor concentration, forgetfulness, poor interpersonal relations, and lowered productivity. The physiological responses consist of bodily tensions, which may lead to headaches, backaches, stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, and even killer diseases. At the cognitive level one may lose self-esteem and self-confidence, which leads to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. At worst such a person may even end up committing suicide.

In order to understand stress let us consider the various environmental factors which exert pressure on modern man. In this atomic age the very survival of the species is threatened. Nuclear war threatens every single human being on earth, irrespective of whether one lives in a country with nuclear weapons or not. Population explosion threatens man with severe food shortages; at present even a large segment of human population is undernourished while still others are dying of starvation and malnutrition. Environmental pollution causes severe health hazards and mental and physical retardation. Unemployment among the skilled is a growing global problem. The pace of life has become so hectic that man is simply rushing from one task to another without any relaxation. This is really paradoxical in an age when labor-saving devices are freely available and are in use to an unprecedented degree. Competition for educational and employment opportunities is so severe that it

has contributed to a fair share to increase the rate of suicide. Enjoyment of sense pleasures has grown so obsessive that it has become like drinking salt water to quench thirst. Constant stimulation of the senses is today considered a necessity, and thus pocket radios with earphones, chewing gum, and cosmetics are marketed everywhere. Sense stimulation goes on unrestrained but satiation is far from achieved. It is no wonder that man, caught up in all this, is terribly confused and frustrated, and his life is intolerably stressful. This is the situation Buddhism describes as “tangles within and tangles without, people are enmeshed in tangles.”

While the above observations were made from the point of view of modern studies and contemporary conditions, Buddhism makes similar observations from a psychological perspective. Man experiences stress and suffering because of five psychological states which envelop his whole personality. They are called *nivarana* in the Pali language, meaning hindrances. They hinder happiness and overcloud man’s vision of himself, his environment and the interaction between the two. The thicker and more opaque these hindrances, the greater the stress and suffering man experiences. The thinner and more sparse these hindrances, the less his suffering with a corresponding increase in happiness. These five hindrances are the desire for sensual pleasures, anger, indolence, worry and doubt. The Pali Canon illustrates the effect of these hindrances with the help of five eloquent similes. The mind overpowered by the desire for sense pleasures is compared to colored water which prevents a true reflection of a thing on the water. Thus a man obsessed with the desire for sense pleasures is unable to get a true perspective of either himself or other people or his environment. The mind oppressed by anger is compared to boiling water which cannot give an accurate reflection. A man overpowered by anger is unable to discern an issue properly. When the mind is in the grip of indolence it is like moss covered water: light cannot even reach the water and a reflection is impossible. The lazy man does not even make an effort at correct understanding. When worried the mind

is like wind-tossed turbulent water, which also fails to give a true reflection. The worried man, forever restless, is unable to make a proper assessment of an issue. When the mind is in doubt it is compared to muddy water placed in darkness which cannot reflect an image well. Thus all the five hindrances deprive the mind of understanding and happiness and cause much stress and suffering.

Buddhism puts forward a methodical plan of action for the gradual elimination of stress and the increase of happiness and understanding. The first step recommended in this plan is the observance of the Five Precepts comprising the abstention from killing, stealing, illicit sex, falsehood and intoxicants. Stress is greatly enhanced by guilt, and these precepts help man to free his conscience of the sense of guilt. The *Dhammapada* says the evil-doer suffers here and hereafter; on the other hand, the man who does good deeds rejoices here and hereafter.

Buddhism firmly believes that evil increases stress while good increases happiness. In addition to the observance of the Five Precepts throughout life, Buddhism advocates the periodical observance of the Eight Precepts by laymen. These additional precepts attempt to train man for leading a simple life catering to one's needs rather than one's greeds. A frugal mode of life where wants are few and are easily satisfied is highly extolled in Buddhism. It is the avaricious and the acquisitive mentality that is responsible for so much stress that we experience.

The next step in the process of training is the control of the sense faculties. When our sense faculties are uncontrolled we experience severe strain. We have to first understand what is meant by being uncontrolled in the sense faculties. When a person sees a beautiful form with his eyes, he gets attracted to it; when he sees an unpleasant object, he gets repelled by it. Similarly with the other senses too. Thus the person who has no control over his senses is constantly attracted and repelled by sense data, as during waking life sense data keep on impinging on his sense faculties constantly. When pulled in different directions by sense stimuli, we become

confused and distressed.

Our sense faculties have different spheres of activity and different objects, and as each sense faculty is a lord in its own sphere, and as they can severally and collectively dominate man, they are called in Pali *indriyas*, meaning “lords” or “masters.” If we allow the sense faculties to dominate us, we get terribly confused. If we assert ourselves and control our sense faculties, we can have unalloyed pleasure (*avyasekasukha*), so called because this pleasure is uncontaminated by defilements. It is also called *adhicittasukha*, meaning spiritual pleasure. Whereas sense pleasures increase stress, this type of spiritual pleasure reduces stressfulness and increases peace of mind and contentment.

The third step in the management of stress is the cultivation of wholesome mental habits through meditation (*bhavana*). Just as we look after and nurture our body with proper food and cleanliness, the mind too needs proper nourishment and cleansing. The mind is most volatile in its untrained state, but when it is tamed and made more stable it brings great happiness. Buddhism prescribes two fundamental meditative methods of mind-training called *samatha* and *vipassana*, calm and insight. The former is the method of calming the volatile mind, while the latter is the method of comprehending the true nature of bodily and mental phenomena. Both methods are extremely helpful for overcoming stress. The *Samaññaphala Sutta* explains with the help of five appropriate similes how meditation reduces the psychological stress caused by the five hindrances. The man who practices meditation gains a great sense of relief and it is this sense of unburdening oneself that the similes illustrate. They are as follows: A man who has raised capital for a business by taking a loan, prospers in business, pays off the loan and manages his day-to-day affairs with financial ease. Such a man experiences a great sense of relief. The second simile portrays a man who has suffered a great deal with a prolonged chronic illness. He gets well at long last, food becomes palatable to him and he gains physical strength. Great is the relief such a man experiences. The third simile speaks

of the relief a prisoner enjoys after being released from a long term in jail. The fourth is the slave who gains freedom from slavery. The fifth simile speaks of a well-to-do man who gets lost in a fearful desert without food. On coming to a place of safety he experiences great relief. When the stress caused by the five hindrances is eliminated from the mind, great joy and delight arise similar to the relief enjoyed by the men described in the similes. The best and most effective way of overcoming stress is the practice of meditation or mental culture. But as a prelude to that at least the Five Precepts must be observed.

The cultivation of positive emotions such as loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) is another means of conquering stress. Strained interpersonal relations is one of the common causes of stress in household life and in the workplace. *Loving kindness* is the positive wholesome attitude one can cultivate with benefit for oneself and others in all interpersonal relationships. *Compassion* is the emotion with which one should regard and help those in distress. *Sympathetic joy* is the ability to rejoice in the joy of another. It is difficult for a man of mean character to entertain this attitude as the joy of another brings jealousy to the mind of such a person. Where there is jealousy there is no unity, and where there is no unity there is no progress. The cultivation of these positive emotions stands for both material and spiritual progress. *Equanimity* is the attitude to be adopted in the face of the vicissitudes of life. There are eight natural ways of the world that we have to face in life. They are gain and loss, fame and lack of fame, praise and blame, happiness and sorrow. If one trains oneself to maintain an equanimous temperament without being either elated or dejected in the face of these vicissitudes, one can avoid much stress and lead a simple life with peace and contentment. We cannot change the world so that it will give us happiness. But we can change our attitude towards the world so as to remain unaffected by the stresses exerted by events around us. Buddhism teaches the way to bring about this wholesome change of attitude. ☸

## The Buddhist Attitude to Gain and Honor

THE WORLD TODAY HAS EVOLVED various means of bestowing honor on individuals whom society recognizes as worthy of being honored. The Nobel Prize is considered one of the most prestigious, and there are various other prizes and honorific titles that are bestowed annually or from time to time on distinguished persons. In the scholarly world the publication of felicitation and commemoration volumes and the conferment of honorary degrees are the usual methods of honoring academic celebrities. In society at large we indulge in various devices in the public display of honor and appreciation. Often we resort to overtly ego-boosting methods. As the public display of honor and esteem has become such an important phenomena in our social life, given much publicity over all the media — the press, radio and television — it is timely to pause to understand the Buddhist attitude towards the display and acceptance of such public honor. The Pali Canon uses terms such as *labha*, *sakkara*, *siloka*, *puja* and *vandana* to mean various expressions of honor, esteem and reverence.

According to Buddhism the presence of ethical and spiritual qualities is the primary criterion for eligibility for honor. The Buddha, the Paccekabuddha, the arahant and the universal monarch rank as the highest personages who are worthy of honor and respect. Honor paid to those worthy of honor is listed as a great blessing in the *Maha-mangala Sutta* (*puja ca pujaniyanam etam mangalam uttamam*). The *Dhammapada* (vv. 105-6) declares that honor paid to a perfected saint is far better than a century spent in the performance of sacrifice. The same text reiterates that the merit of one who reverences those worthy of honor cannot be measured (v. 195). In the domestic sphere parents are greatly honored and esteemed. As they have done so much for the children, toiling through a whole lifetime, they deserve to be appreciated, honored and looked after by the children. There should be mutual honor and respect between husband and wife. This quality helps to weave

a cohesive relationship to build a happy home for the rearing of progeny. It is also a healthy age-old custom to honor and welcome guests as is, for instance, maintained in the *Canki Sutta* (M. II, 167). Respect shown to elders is also highly commended as is well illustrated by the parable of the *Tittira Jataka* (J. I, 218). Thus noble spiritual qualities, parentage and seniority are recognized as some of the main criteria deserving the display of honor and respect.

Now let us turn our attention to the attitude to gain and honor by those who receive them. Since the Buddha's immediate disciples were monks, who by reason of their religious status regularly received gains and honor from the laity, it is to be expected that his statements on this subject are addressed primarily to the monks and their concerns. Moreover, as the monks have committed themselves fully to the quest for deliverance, the Buddha's advice to them naturally takes their special vocation into account. However, while recognizing the differences in their position, lay people can take the Buddha's counsel to the monks as guidelines for their own attitudes towards gain and honor.

The Pali texts show that it is possible to adopt one of the following three attitudes: (a) One could eagerly appreciate and enjoy the honor one receives, even actively seek it. (b) One could turn away and refuse to accept the honor bestowed. (c) One could be indifferent and entertain an attitude of equanimity towards such honors. We shall take these one by one for discussion.

(a) The *Mahasaropama Sutta* (M.I, 192) elucidates the appreciative attitude to gain and honor with the help of a simile. If a monk who has entered the Order enjoys the gain and honor he receives and is satisfied therewith, he is like a man who, being in search of timber, is satisfied with the end trimmings of a huge tree. What he looked for is timber, but what he is satisfied with is just twigs and foliage. Devadatta (J.I, 186) is the classic example of one who fell into utter ruin by enjoying gain and honor. He had developed psychic powers, and he utilized these powers for convincing laymen of his spiritual development. The most influential layman who was

thus convinced was Ajatasattu. The unconcealed display of superhuman powers gave rise to much gain and honor for Devadatta, so much so that in his utter stupidity he wished to kill the Buddha and usurp Buddhahood, and he enticed Ajatasattu to kill his father and usurp the kingship. The Buddha pronounced that it is for Devadatta's utter ruin and downfall that he was endowed with so much gain and honor, just as the plantain tree bears fruit for its own ruin. (S.II, 241). The *Dhammapada* maintains that gain and honor is one thing and the path to the realization of Nibbana is another. Knowing this clearly a monk should not take delight in gain and honor (Dh. 75). According to the *Milindapanha* (p. 377), just as a ship has to withstand various forces such as the force of strong currents, thunder and whirlpools, even so a monk has to withstand the forces of gain, honor, fame and homage. If a monk relishes these and gets a bloated ego, he flounders and sinks just like a wrecked ship. The *Milindapanha* (p. 377) takes another simile from naval experience. A ship's anchor is able to hold a ship fast without letting it drift along, even in very deep waters, even so a monk must remain anchored to his purpose with great strength of character without letting the gain and honor that comes in the wake of virtue carry him adrift. It is no doubt the duty of the layman to honor and respect a virtuous monk, and also to provide him with the requisites. It is the responsibility of the monk to maintain a sane balanced attitude, without becoming elated. Buddhism maintains that it is difficult for a man of mean spiritual development to resist the enjoyment of gain and honor (*sakkaro kapurisenā dujjāho*, Thag. 1053). There is the great danger of spiritual erosion when a man indulges and basks in the glory of fame and honor. One develops a bloated ego and boastfulness creeps into his character in the most surreptitious ways. Such men also develop contemptuous attitudes towards others who do not get so much honor. The *Labhasakkara Samyutta* sarcastically compares him to the dung beetle who entertains contempt towards other dung beetles for having less dung. The *Anangana Sutta* (M. I, 29-30) shows the abhorrence and disgust towards a monk who



undertakes the religious life and difficult ascetic practices for the sake of public generosity and popularity. Such a monk is compared to one who places the carcass of a snake or a dog in a beautifully polished brand new metal bowl. The bowl of higher life (*brahmacariya*) is not meant for storing carcass-like immoral intentions.

Monks are advised in the most emphatic terms to guard against taking delight in gain and honor. The *Labhasakkara Samyutta* works out a number of similes in great detail to illustrate the point (S. II, 226-7). A young tortoise who defied the elders' advice is shot with a splinter to which a string is attached and he is bound to be caught by the hunter in no time. The hunter in the simile is none other than Mara himself. The splinter is gain, honor and fame. The string attached to the splinter is the monk's attachment to gain and honor. Again, gain and honor are compared to a bait which greedy monks might swallow to be utterly ruined in the hands of the trapper Mara.

(b) Now let us turn to the attitude of the monk who refuses gain and honor. Mahakassapa was an eminent monk who eschewed gain and honor, and found delight in helping the poor to earn merit by going to them for alms. Once the Buddha saw him begging his alms in a locality where poverty-stricken weavers lived, in spite of gods trying to procure for him a fine meal. On this occasion the Buddha gave expression to an inspired utterance (*Udana*, p.11) in appreciation of Mahakassapa's simplicity. Once a famous householder named Citta was impressed by the explanation of a knotty doctrinal point by a monk named Isidatta in a great assembly. Citta invited Isidatta to reside in the locality and promised him hospitality with all requisites. Isidatta seized the first opportunity to quietly leave the locality without informing Citta (S. IV, 286-8). Such was the scrupulous reticent behavior of those who understood the pernicious nature of gain and honor.

(c) Generally the Buddha and arahants do not fight shy of gain and honor. They face it with the same equanimity as they face loss and blame. The *Maha-Govinda Sutta* (D. II, 223) records that

gods rejoice in the Buddha because of his attitude to gain and honor. The Buddha has received gain and fame which a king would long to have, but with no trace of elation whatsoever he fares along partaking of only the basic requisites. The gods declare that there was never a teacher of such calibre before. The lotus, though born in the water, remains unsullied above the water. Similarly the buddha and arahants rise uncontaminated above the mundane conditions of family, prestige, gain, fame, and reverence (*Milinda*, p.375). “The Unique Ones (*asamasama*) are worshipped by gods and men. But they relish no honor. This is the norm of Buddhas” (*Milinda*, p.95). Cullasabhadda, an *upasika*, observes that while the world is elated and depressed by gain and loss respectively, the true monks maintain an equanimous attitude in the face of both.

Buddha declares that he has personally known, seen and understood (*samam natam samam dittam samam veditam*, *Itivuttaka*, p.74) that beings who have been overwhelmed (*pariyadinna*) by gain and honor, and also those who are obsessed by the lack of gain and honor, at the disintegration of the body are born in states of woe. The desire for honor and recognition is so insinuating that even normally upright individuals can succumb to it. The Buddha says that there are some who would not stoop so low as to tell a deliberate lie for the sake of silver and gold, a beauty queen, parents, children or even life, but who would do so to gain honor and prestige. So vicious and pernicious are the snares of gain and honor (S. II, 234, 243). Except arahants, those of the highest order who have reached the state of *akuppa cetovimutti* (S. II, 239) or unshakable mental emancipation, all those of lesser spiritual development are said to be vulnerable in this respect. It is no wonder that gain and honor is a powerful member of the army of Mara (Sn. 438-9). It should be recognized by all those who value spiritual progress as a disaster come in the guise of a blessing.



# Livelihood and Development

**R**IGHT LIVELIHOOD (*samma ajiva*) is the fifth factor in the Noble Eightfold Path. As a method of earning one's living is important to every human being, whether a member of the clergy or a layman, the correct understanding of right livelihood is crucial. For a monk, complete dedication to the higher life constitutes right livelihood. He then is rightly entitled to be supported by public generosity. In this essay we shall confine ourselves to an inquiry into the concept of right livelihood for the layman.

Right livelihood implies that one has to avoid a wrong means of earning a living, known as *miccha ajiva* in Pali. This includes trades which are directly or indirectly injurious to others, be they animal or human, such as trade in meat, liquor, poison, weapons and slaves. These are contrary to the basic five precepts which all lay Buddhists are expected to abide by. In the world today these trades, except perhaps the slave trade, are flourishing industries, and much of the revenue to governments comes from these industries. This shows to what an extent wrong livelihood is prevalent in the world today.

Even a blameless means of living can become blameworthy if practiced with inordinate greed and dishonesty. If a doctor in private practice makes mints of money exploiting his patients, he is guilty of wrong livelihood even though medicine itself is a noble profession. A vegetable dealer who cheats in weights and measures is similarly guilty of wrong livelihood. Honest scrupulous service rendered without exploiting the public is considered an essential feature of right livelihood.

Buddhism upholds the quality of having few wants (*appicchata*) and the ability to be satisfied with little (*santutthi*) as great virtues. One has to practice these virtues not only in consumerism but in production too; in the modern world, however, these virtues have been totally lost sight of in both these spheres. Therefore governments as well as the private sector aim at ever increasing

development. Such development, however, has no limit. Each time a target has been reached, the limit to possible growth recedes further like a mirage. More and more is produced, more and more is consumed. There is no satiation with development, nor with consumerism. This is a limitless race in a limited world with limited resources. Therefore mankind has to learn that the concept of development as it is understood today cannot go on forever, it is logically and practically impossible.

Nature seems to set its own limits to this process of escalated growth. It appears that there are biological, psychological, social and ecological limits to growth. The physical constitution of man seems to revolt against this limitless growth. There is an array of diseases man readily succumbs to today related to overconsumption and overindulgence. There are pressure-related diseases too, which affect both the human body and the human mind. Present-day development taxes man's endurance enormously and he becomes a psychological wreck due to the pressures of work, competition and maintaining standards. Interpersonal relationships have become superficial, brittle and sour, and this seems to be a sign that society cannot withstand the weight of its material development. In the external world too there are unequivocal signs which portend impending catastrophe unless man changes his course of action. There is air, water and land pollution everywhere, and this is extremely injurious not only to human life but to all forms of life in this planet. These are nature's ways of expressing her disapproval of the methods and rate of production and consumption man has chosen today.

Agriculture is recognized in Buddhism as a noble means of making a living, but what has happened in this sphere? Prompted by population pressures, and encouraged by the ever-expanding vistas of scientific knowledge, traditional methods of tilling the land have given way to mechanized industrial agriculture. Vast acres are plowed by machines; chemical fertilizers are applied freely; weedicides, insecticides and pesticides are used indiscriminately; and

large harvests are gathered. More and more research is going on in agricultural engineering to produce better seeds which promise higher yields. Though production has increased, prices remain at a constant high level. In some countries when the price level threatens to go down due to overproduction, the products are methodically destroyed or dumped into the sea despite the fact that large masses of people in the world today are undernourished and some are actually starving to death. It is blatantly clear that the whole industrialized agricultural policy is prompted by inordinate greed and it is far from right livelihood.

From the Buddhist point of view this whole system is wrong. On the one hand it has resulted in the erosion of moral and human values. It has deprived man of sympathy for his fellow sentient beings as is evident from the large-scale use of insecticides. Economic gain seems to be the only criterion by which man is prompted to action. Blinded by short-term economic gain, man seems to turn a blind eye to the long-term repercussions of his aggressive policies on this planet. In the wake of the avaricious and aggressive industrialization, the crime rate has risen to an unprecedented degree, and this is a clear index to man's moral degeneration. On the other hand, the natural ecological balance of the earth has been disturbed to an alarming degree. Chemical pollution of land and water has affected bacteria, insects and fish. While some of these forms of life useful to man have died or are dying, others, especially insects dangerous to man have become resistant to insecticides. As more and more effective chemicals are produced, these creatures become immune to them and the vicious circle goes on without any practical solution in sight. The natural fertility and the organic balance of the soil also diminish as more and more chemical fertilizers are applied throughout the years and thus a vicious circle gets formed there too.

All this evidence clearly shows that man cannot dominate and subjugate nature. In the long run nature emerges triumphant and man becomes the loser. Instead man must learn to co-operate with nature. Here we are reminded of an admonition given by the Buddha


that in amassing wealth man must exploit nature as a bee collects pollen. The bee harms neither the beauty of the flower nor its fragrance, similarly man must not pollute or rob nature of its richness, beauty and its rejuvenating and replenishing capacity. This is the real implication of right livelihood when it comes to the utilization of natural resources.

It should be reiterated that the whole modern concept of development, which seems to have nothing short of the sky itself as the limit, is severely antithetical to Buddhist values. Buddhism sets the limit at the other end: it advocates that we feed our needs and not our greeds. Man needs the basic comforts of food, clothing, shelter and medicine. It is the responsibility of the rulers to provide avenues of employment so that the average man can afford to have these needs satisfied with a fair degree of comfort. As man is naturally prone to greed, Buddhism emphasizes the value of having few wants (*appicchara*). Contentment (*santutthi*) is also a much valued virtue in Buddhism. Care is taken to see that these virtues do not degenerate into apathy and cause social stagnation. Buddhism encourages the layman to be industrious, to forge ahead in his chosen blameless occupation (*utthanasampada*). Wealth earned by sheer perseverance, by the sweat of one's brow, is highly praised as well gotten righteous wealth. It is even recommended that a layman should invest half of his earnings for improvement of his industry. Laymen are also exhorted to save (*arakkhasampada*) their hard earned money, and to lead a comfortable life consonant with earning capacity, avoiding both extremes of miserliness and extravagance/over-indulgence. Thus the tension between having few wants (*appicchata*) and contentment (*santutthi*) on the one hand, and industriousness (*arakkhasampada*) on the other, helps to keep society at a practically comfortable level of development which can be sustained for a long time. When these economic ideas are reinforced with the other moral values inculcated by Buddhism, a stable society with harmonious interpersonal relations can be expected.

The modern concept of large-scale industries and factories also

does not agree with the Buddhist concept of right livelihood. These large industries and mechanized labor have made a few people enormously rich and thrown millions of employable people out of employment. Thus wealth gets concentrated among a few factory owners and businessmen while millions can barely eke out an existence. Maldistribution of wealth is regarded in Buddhism as a social evil which paves the way to crime and revolution. Moreover machines have robbed man of his creativity and left him terribly frustrated. This may be one of the reasons why the youth of today have turned to drugs to find an easy escape route.

The concept of right livelihood works with the notion that man is the central concern in economy as producer as well as consumer, not the profit made in the process of products changing hands. The skills and talents of the producer should be enhanced in the process of production and he should have the satisfaction derived from his output. The producer, not an employer above him or a middleman, should get a fair return commensurate with his labor and sufficient to afford him a decent living. The consumer, on the other hand, should get quality and quantity for what he pays. In sharp contrast to this ideology, the profit made by the employer is the central concern today: both the producer and the consumer are subservient to the profit motive. Therefore right livelihood would opt for small-scale industries which would satisfy the creative instinct of man and the basic needs of many more people, and would also ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth in society. It is better to have a large number of skilled cobblers than a well equipped mechanized shoe factory.

As right livelihood is a part and parcel of the Noble Eightfold Path, when it is rightly practiced it leads to the elimination of greed, hatred and delusion (S. V, 5). Just as the river Ganges is inclined towards the east, he who practices the Noble Eightfold Path is inclined towards Nibbana. Thus the correct understanding of right livelihood is essential for the Buddhist layman who is bent on his spiritual welfare. 

## Facing Death Without Fear

DEATH IS THE ONLY CERTAIN THING IN LIFE. It is also the thing for which we are least prepared. We plan and prepare for various other things — examinations, weddings, business transactions, building houses — but we can never be certain whether our plans will materialize according to our wish. Death, on the other hand, can come any minute, sooner or later; it is the most certain event in life. Just as the mushroom raises itself from the ground carrying a bit of earth on its hood, so every living being brings with himself the certainty of death from the moment of his birth.

The Anguttara Nikaya (IV, 136) illustrates the uncertainty and the evanescent nature of life with the help of a few evocative similes. Life is compared to a dew drop at the tip of a blade of grass: it can drop off any moment and even if it does not fall off, it evaporates as soon as the sun comes up. Life is also as fleeting as a bubble of water formed by the falling rain or a line drawn on the water. The text points out that life rushes towards death incessantly like a mountain stream rushing down without stopping. The *Dhammapada* compares the fragility of the body to foam (v 46) and to a clay water pot (v 40). Thus with various similes the uncertainty of life and the certainty of death are emphasized over and over again in the Buddhist texts.

It is accepted as a general truth that everybody fears death (*sabbe bhayanti maccuno* — Dh 129). We fear death because we crave for life with all our might. It is also a fact that we fear the unknown. We know least about death, therefore we fear death for a duality of reasons. It seems reasonable to conjecture that the fear of death, or the fear of harm to life, lurks at the root of all fear. Therefore each time we become frightened we either run away from the source of fear or fight against it, thus making every effort to preserve life. But we can do so only so long as our body is capable of either fighting or running away from danger. But when at last we are on the deathbed face to face with approaching death, and the body



is no longer strong enough for any protest, it is very unlikely that we will accept death with a mental attitude of resignation. We will mentally try hard to survive. As our yearning for life (*tanha*) is so strong, we will mentally grasp (*upadana*) another viable place, as our body can no longer support life. Once such a place, for example the fertilized ovum in a mother's womb, has been grasped, the psychological process of life (*bhava*) will continue with the newly found place as its basis. Birth (*jati*) will take place in due course. This seems to be the process that is explained in the chain of causation as: craving conditions grasping, grasping conditions becoming or the process of growth, which in turn conditions birth. Thus the average man who fears death will necessarily take another birth as his ardent desire is to survive.

Let us probe a little further into the process of death, going from the known to the unknown. We know that in normal life, when we are awake, sense data keep on impinging on our sense faculties. We are kept busy attending to these sense data, rejecting some, selecting some for greater attention, and getting obsessed with still other things. This is an ongoing process so long as we are awake. In the modern age man is reaching out and seeking more and more sense stimulation. The popularity of the portable radio with or without earphones, chewing gum, cosmetics and television is a clear indication of the present trend for more and more sense stimulation. By all this we have become alienated from ourselves; we do not know our own real nature, or the real nature of our mind to be more precise. Moreover, we go about our business in social life wearing masks appropriate for each occasion. We often do not show our true feelings of jealousy, greed, hatred, pride, or selfishness. We hide them in socially accepted ways of formalized verbal expressions such as congratulations, thank you, deepest sympathies. But there are times when our negative emotions are so acute that they come into the open in the form of killing, stealing, quarreling, backbiting, and so forth. But generally we try to keep these venomous snakes of negative emotions inhibited.

Now let us see what happens at the moment of death. We believe that death is a process and not just a sudden instantaneous event. When the senses lose their vitality one by one and they stop providing stimulation, the inhibitions too fall away. The masks we have been wearing in our various roles get cast off. We are at last face to face with ourselves in all our nakedness. At that moment if what we see are the venomous snakes of negative emotions of hatred, jealousy, etc., we would be laden with guilt, remorse and grief. It is very likely that our memories too will become quite sharp, as all the sensory disturbances and inhibitions which kept them suppressed have fallen off. We may remember our own actions committed and omitted during our lifetime with unpretentious clarity. If they are morally unwholesome we would be guilty and grief stricken (S. V. 386), but if they are morally wholesome we would be contented and happy. The *Abhidhammattha Sangaha* speaks of the presentation of *kamma* or *kammanimitta* at the mind door on the advent of death. This seems to be the revival in memory of an actual action or action veiled in symbols at the onset of death. It is said that rebirth will be determined by the quality of thoughts that surface in this manner.

Death is as natural an event as nightfall; it is but one of the manifestations of the law of impermanence. Though we dislike it immensely we have to orient ourselves to accept its inevitability, as there is no escape therefrom. The Buddhist texts advocate the cultivation of the mindfulness of death often so that we are not taken unawares when the event does take place. To face death peacefully one has to learn the art of living peacefully with one's own self as well as with those around. One method of doing so is to remember the inevitability of death, which will deter one from unwholesome behavior. The practice of meditation is the best technique which will enable one to live peacefully with oneself and others.

The practice of loving-kindness (*mettabhavana*) is an effective method of meditation. One of its special advantages is the ability to face death undeluded (*asammulho kalam karoti*).

In one sutta (A. III, 293) the Buddha explains how to prepare for a peaceful death. One has to organize one's life and cultivate an appropriate attitude for this purpose. The instructions given there are as follows:

- (1) One should not be fond of a busy life involved in various activities.
- (2) One should not be fond of being talkative.
- (3) One should not be fond of sleeping.
- (4) One should not be fond of having too many companions.
- (5) One should not be fond of too much social intercourse.
- (6) One should not be fond of daydreaming.

Another sutta (A. I, 57-8) explains that if one avoids unwholesome wicked activities through body, speech and mind, one need not fear death. The *Maha-parinibbana Sutta* (D. II, 85-6) categorically states that those who are evil in character face death with delusion while the virtuous face death free from delusion. Thus if one leads a simple virtuous life one need not fear death.

Once Mahanama Sakka (S. V. 369) disclosed to the Buddha that he was worried where he would be reborn if he were to meet with a violent death in a road accident. The Buddha explained that those who have cultivated the qualities of faith, virtue, learning, generosity and wisdom for a long time need not entertain such fears. To illustrate the position further the Buddha employs a simile. If a pot of oil or ghee is broken in deep water the potsherds will sink to the riverbed and the oil or ghee will rise to the surface of the water. Similarly in such a tragic situation the body would be discarded and may be devoured by vultures and jackals, but the mind will rise and progress upwards.

The account of the illness of Nakula's father (A. III, 295) is another interesting episode regarding the Buddhist attitude to death. Once Nakula's father was seriously ill and his wife noticed that he was fretful and anxious. She advised him that death with anxiety is painful and is denounced by the Buddha. Therefore he must compose

himself. Comforting him, she said that he might be worried about the family income and the task of bringing up the children after his death. She assured him that she was capable of spinning and weaving and thus she could provide for the family and bring up the children. He may be anxious that she would remarry after his death. She said that he knows just as well as she that she has never been unfaithful to him ever since they were married at the age of sixteen, and she pledged that she would remain loyal to him even after his death. Perhaps he may worry about her spiritual development and she assured him that she would continue to be earnest in her spiritual welfare. Therefore he must face death, if need there be, with no anxiety. Such was her advice to her husband who was fatally ill. It is said that he regained self-composure and thereby good health too. The matter was later reported to the Buddha, who commended Nakula's mother for her wisdom and composure.

The suttas also discuss the advantages of the regular contemplation of death (A. IV, 46-48; S. V, 344,408). The mind gets divested from the love of life, and being intoxicated with the zest of life, men commit various atrocities. That can be prevented by the habit of practicing mindfulness of death. If we only remember that we have not come to this world to stay forever, we would take care to lead much better lives. If, when we take stock, we find wicked negative emotions such as lust, hatred and jealousy in us, we should immediately take steps to eradicate them as we would try to put out the flames if our head were to catch fire (A. IV, 320).

Thus the Buddhist texts tirelessly reiterate the positive benefits of the regular contemplation of the inevitability of death. It helps one to lead a more wholesome life and also to face death, the one and only certain event in life, with calm composure and fearless confidence.



# The Human Body

WHEN ALIVE THE HUMAN BODY is the most precious and the most mysterious object in the whole world. We regard it as beautiful and spend much time, energy, and money to make it more beautiful. We regard it as an instrument for pleasure and spend nearly all our lives in procuring objects of pleasure. We assume it is a vital part of ourself. It would be useful to discuss the validity of these attitudes and assumptions from the Buddhist point of view.

The human body is the most intricate machine in the world. Each human body is unique not only in appearance but also in its biochemical structure, sensitivity of sense faculties, disease resistance, disease susceptibility, etc., and hereditary laws alone are incapable of offering a satisfactory explanation. Buddhism holds that the body and its sense faculties have been so structured as the effect of former kamma. From the dawn of civilization man has tried to understand the mystery of the human personality and he has given rise to various sciences and religions. In one sutta the Buddha says that within this fathom-long sentient human body is found the whole world, its origin, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation. In a way this means that the world of experience is within the human body. In another sense it means that if one were to understand the mystery of the human body, that would amount to understanding the mystery of the world. In fact the external world is nothing but what we get to know through the instrumentality of our sense faculties. If we understand the sense faculties and sense data, we have understood everything.

The relationship of the body and the mind is most elusive. According to the *Samaññaphala Sutta* this relationship can be understood only after the attainment of the fourth *jhana*. The adept can then see consciousness established in the physical constitution just as one can see a colored thread running through the aperture of a transparent gem. Another sutta explains the interdependency of body and mind through the simile of two bundles of reeds placed against

one another supporting each other. Emotional changes in the mind affect body chemistry, and fluctuations in body chemistry affect the mind. As a gross example we can take the negative emotion of anger. Anger triggers off glandular secretions which alter body chemistry considerably to bring about changes such as trepidation, sweating, feeling hot, etc. On the other hand, changes in body chemistry produced, for instance by the intake of alcohol or drugs affect the mind to bring about appropriate mood changes, euphoria and hallucinations. According to a sutta in the Anguttara Nikaya (A. IV, 385 f.) all thoughts are translated into sensations (*sabbe dhamma vedanasamosarana*). This shows the extent to which the body is influenced by the mind. Buddhism has clearly recognized this interdependency and utilized that knowledge in its path to liberation. The body is disciplined through morality (*sila*) and is thus maintained at a reasonably healthy biochemical level. The mind is disciplined with meditation (*bhavana*) to produce healthy psychological changes and thereby reinforce a more healthy biochemical composition of the body. This process goes on until the attainment of arahantship, when the biochemical composition has undergone such a radical, irreversible change that an arahant is said to be incapable of certain physiological functions which are antithetical to spiritual development but normal in average human beings.

Though the sentient human body is most precious, no precious material goes into its composition. It is precious because, through its instrumentality, man is able to probe into the deepest mysteries of the universe and of himself, into the meaning of life and the enigma of death. When we stand by the ocean in the evening twilight and gaze at the vast ocean as far as the horizon, or at the star-studded firmament receding into infinity as far as the eye can see, we are awe-struck by the magnitude of the universe. Compared to that man is but an infinitesimal speck of dust in size. But when we pay attention to the potentialities of man, it is he who can even conceive of this mighty universe, it is he who can unravel its mysteries. Though part and parcel of the universe, though subject to natural

cosmic laws, man has the capacity to transcend the natural material world and can even reach Buddhahood. Therefore man is supreme and the sentient human frame is precious.

It is true that we generally look at the human body as a thing of beauty. We speak of beautiful eyes, teeth, face, hair, and figure. But Buddhism looks at the human body from a realistic point of view. The body is a bag of filth, it is full of impurities. The Buddhist texts dealing with the thirty-two parts of the body spell out in detail its foul material constituents. If we only pause a moment to consider attentively the state of the face prior to a wash in the morning, we can gain a fair idea of the body's repulsive nature. It exudes so much dirt from its major nine apertures and numerous pores that it needs constant cleaning. Just imagine how intolerable the body would be if we neglect to clean what it discharges from the outlets even for a single day, let alone for a long period. Great care has to be taken to keep the body clean, so that it is not offensive to oneself and others. If no regular cleaning is done, it can be the home of various parasites, and thus a public nuisance. We have to understand the real nature and the composition of the body in order to reduce and eliminate our infatuation with it.

We have to feed the body very carefully throughout life. However well the body is fed, it grows hungry over and over again. Hunger is the worst disease says the *Dhammapada*. There is no end to feeding the body until death. The stomach is like an open sore which needs careful periodical dressing. Gross food is but one of the nutriments the body needs according to Buddhism; contact with the environment (*phassa*), volition (*manosancetana*), and consciousness (*viññana*) are the other three nutriments. All these four forms of nutriment are essential for the continuance of the body in health. The body also needs to be protected from heat, cold, rain, injurious germs and external harm. We have to be ever alert to protect the body from these various sources of external danger. For these reasons Buddhism says that the body is a source of great anxiety — *bahudukkho ayam kayo*. Great is the hardship man has to

undergo just to keep the body viable, clean and healthy.

The body is endowed with sense faculties and they are ever in search of pleasure. The eye is in search of pleasant forms, the ear of pleasant sounds, the nose of pleasant smells, the tongue of pleasant tastes and the body of pleasant tactiles. Most of our life is spent in the pursuit of these pleasures. But it remains a fact that the body texture is such that it does not tolerate excessive pleasure. However desirable pleasure may be, the body falls ill when overloaded with them. For instance, however palatable rich food may be, when it is taken in excess, the body becomes a victim of killer diseases. Similarly, excessive indulgence in sex causes social diseases, of which the most dreaded today is AIDS. Acquired Immunity Deficiency Syndrome, for which a cure has not yet been found. Therefore restraint in the enjoyment of sense pleasures is the best course of conduct for those desirous of health and long life.

When we look at the body in its various postures of standing, sitting, walking and lying down, we realize that the body can tolerate these postures only for a very short time. Even if we are sitting in the most comfortable seat, we continue to remain in the same position without moving around only for a short time. Automatically we move about adjusting our limbs to more comfortable positions in a constant search for pleasure. But pleasure is short-lived; pain raises its head and we move and adjust ourselves again to eke out a little pleasure. Thus the search for pleasure goes on and we delude ourselves saying that we enjoy life. The basic truth is that the body is a source of misery, but we prefer to turn a blind eye to this fact and cling desperately to fleeting pleasures. The Buddha says that there is no doubt an iota of pleasure *appassada*, but the misery is far in excess of this pleasure, *bahudukkha*.

The body in its various stages of growth also brings much pain. Birth causes excruciating pain both to mother and babe. The infant is completely at the mercy of others around it. If its needs are not duly attended to, it experiences much misery, which it expresses by pitiful cries. Teething is a significant landmark in the series of



growing pains. All attempts to master the various physical postures contribute their own quota of hardships to infancy. Puberty and adolescence are also harassed by the growing pains appropriate to those ages. Old age is particularly notorious for aches and pains. The sense faculties are on the decline, sight fails, hearing becomes short and other senses too diminish in their acuity. Various joint pains and body aches become more constant and the body strength ebbs away. Even the Buddha in his old age said that his body was like an old worn-out cart which could be kept going only with much repair. He added that he enjoyed physical comfort only when he spent time in *jhanic* ecstasy. Such is the nature of the body in old age. We cannot forget that the body is prone to various diseases during all stages of its growth.

Though the body is thus a source of great misery we cannot afford to hate it. To have a healthy attitude towards the body we should avoid both extremes of being infatuated with the body and hating it. We should have *metta*, a friendly attitude towards the body. Realistically understanding its nature, we should avoid misusing it as an instrument only for pleasure. We should be very careful not to form habits which are injurious to the body, such as smoking, drinking, and the excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures. The body becomes a prey to self-inflicted diseases if we fail to cultivate an attitude of friendliness towards it. If we want to enjoy a reasonably healthy body as a vital part of our self. When we say: "I am tall, I am fat, I am fair, I am beautiful or ugly," we really mean that the body has these attributes. But as we keep on using the pronoun "I" we get caught in the grammatical subject and assume the existence of an ontological subject such as the soul or the ego. Therefore we establish a relationship of identity and possession with the body. Thus the body becomes a vital part of the self. The Buddha argues that if the body is really ours as we assume it is, it should behave according to our wishes. It should remain young, healthy, beautiful and strong as we always wish it to be. But the body hardly behaves according to our wishes and we come to grief when it goes against

our wishes and expectations. The Buddha points out that the body really does not belong to us, nor is it really our self or a part of our self. We should therefore give up craving for it, we should cease to identify ourselves with it. Giving up craving for the body results in much happiness and peace. In order to wean ourselves from our habitual identification and ownership we have to impress the repulsive and alien nature of our bodies into our minds with deep sensitivity, so that an attitudinal change takes place in us with regard to the body. Observation of the repulsive and misery-producing nature of our bodies repeatedly, over and over again, is one sure way of gaining the realistic perspective. This is the path leading out of misery.



# Sensualistic Social Trends and Buddhism in Modern Times<sup>2</sup>

## Causes for Sensualistic Social Trends<sup>3</sup>

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT has brought about widespread changes in the lifestyle of modern man. Changes have been so rapid and overwhelming during the 20th century, that this century seems to far outweigh all other centuries put together in this respect. Man's attitudes, values, goals and ideals too have undergone radical change. Scientific knowledge regarding the nature and evolution of the universe, man, society, culture and civilization has unsettled many of the old certitudes and undermined the very basis and authority of the Western theistic religious traditions. With the loss of respect for authority and tradition, the validity of moral values too came to be questioned. Ever renewing scientific knowledge, which exposed traditional beliefs one after another as superstitious or mythical, gave a halo of superiority to modernity. Nurtured in such an environment, the younger generation became alienated from the lifestyle of their parents and the age-old generation gap assumed unprecedented proportions.

While scientific knowledge rendered man a skeptic alienated from his cultural heritage technology robbed him of his creative ability. The machine with its vast powers of production reduced man to a button pusher and threw millions of workers out of employment. Their muscular and creative powers were left unharnessed, thwarted and frustrated. As a result the indigenous folk arts and crafts of all nations, which were in fact expressions of sublimated emotions, became almost extinct. Man in his admiration for creativity and feeble struggle for self-expression has now become an antique collector.

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2. Paper read at the Conference on Buddhism and the Modern World, Dongguk University, Seoul, Korea, 1976.

3. Works consulted are: Vance Packard, *The Sexual Wilderness* (London, 1968); Lord Annan *The Disintegration of an Old Culture* (Oxford, 1966).

The next force which completely overwhelmed modern man was the tyranny of commercialization and advertising. When production exceeded consumption man had to be persuaded into consuming more, lest trade suffer with a backlog of unconsumed stockpiles. Deliberate and calculated attempts were made to change traditional frugality into an ethic of consumption. Mass media were utilized to convince the people of the virtues and necessity of increasing consumption to maintain the newly acquired standard of affluent living. Research into motivational and behavioral psychology betrayed the susceptibilities of man, and advertising agents made capital by playing upon these weaknesses, namely, man's innate greed for sensual pleasure, personal property and social prestige. Unleashed as he was from his cultural moorings, and frustrated as he was in his creative urge, modern man succumbed to the attractive appeals of mass media and plunged into a life of self-indulgence.

### **Harmful Effects on Individual and Society**

Having thus briefly outlined the main causes responsible for modern sensualistic social trends, it is useful to glance at the effects they have produced on the individual and society of today. Venereal diseases have become rampant; it is reported that there was an increase of 300% within one decade in the United States. The ever widening field of psychiatry shows that mental health is rapidly deteriorating. Alcoholism and drug addiction are major health problems. The crime rate is ever mounting. Bonds of wedlock have become sadly brittle and the divorce rate is alarmingly high. The family as a viable institution is threatened, according to some sociologists, with extinction in the not too distant future. Disruption of family life has affected child life most pathetically. A British report of Health Economics published in January 1976 informs us that babies are the most common homicide victims in Britain since the early 1960s. They are battered to death at times of family stress. Teenage drug addictions and juvenile delinquency have become alarming problems of the day. These social phenomena are directly related

to man's attitude towards sense pleasure and serious rethinking seems most urgent today if man is to be saved from the imminent danger of self-destruction through sensuality.

### **Can Buddhism Help?**

Buddhism has been a great civilizing force and a guiding principle for millions of people during the last twenty-five centuries. It would be useful to see what light Buddhism sheds on the present chaotic situation, and what wisdom it offers for self-adjustment under modern conditions and for healthy family and interpersonal relations. Though criticism is often levelled that Buddhism is a life-denying ascetic ideal, and that it is antisocial and antipolitical, it should be remembered that Buddhism embraces in its dispensation not only monks (*bhikkhu*) and nuns (*bhikkhuni*), but also male and female lay followers (*upasaka*, *upasika*). The intellectual and disciplinary training of the laity is as important a concern in Buddhism as that of the monks. Therefore Buddhism offers a social and a political philosophy, the goal of which is the creation of a society where human rights are safeguarded, human enterprise is the key to success, resources are well distributed and justice reigns supreme. As Trevor Ling too maintains, Buddhism is not just a religion or a philosophy, it is in fact a whole civilization, a full fledged multi-faceted philosophy of life designed to meet the secular and spiritual needs of man.<sup>4</sup>

### **Sensuality and Human Ambitions**

According to Buddhism ambitions of man center on the acquisition of wealth, pleasure, fame, longevity and happiness after death. (A. II, 66-68). Accepting these as human aspirations and goals of human endeavor, Buddhism advocates a way of life to help man realize these aims. For the danger is ever present that man in his pursuit of pleasure will in the long run defeat those very aims. Wealth and sex are two important means of acquiring pleasure. A prudent attitude towards them would go a long way for the realization of

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4. Trevor Ling, *The Buddha* (London, 1973), pp. 17, 24 f.

the other three human ambitions as well. As most of the social ills of today are attributable to the mishandling of these two, a correct understanding of the Buddhist attitude towards them would be most profitable.

## **Wealth**

The Buddhist attitude towards wealth is such that it has never prescribed a ceiling on income. What it has prescribed is that wealth should be acquired through righteous means and expended also in a righteous manner. Wealth earned by the sweat of one's brow without harming, deceiving or exploiting others is highly commended. It is always emphasized that wealth has only instrumental value. It should be utilized for (a) living in comfort making one's family, parents, dependents and friends happy, (b) insuring oneself against possible calamities through fire, water, etc., (c) performing one's duties to relatives, guests and state, and for religio-cultural activities, and (d) patronizing those engaged in spiritual advancement. According to one's means, on a large or very small scale, one should try to make the best use of one's resources in the most righteous manner.

What is deplored in Buddhism is the excessive acquisitive greed and the hoarding habit. While niggardliness is held in contempt, frugality is extolled as a virtue. Wastefulness is a deplorable habit and it is even regarded as anti-social. Once Ananda explained to a king how the monks put the gifts offered to them to maximum use. When new robes are offered the old ones are taken as coverlets, the old coverlets are utilized as mattress covers, the former mattress covers are used as rugs, the old rugs are taken as dusters, the old tattered dusters are kneaded with clay and used to repair cracked floors and walls (Vin. II, 291). Such was the Buddhist monks' conscientious use of resources. The same frugality has influenced the laity too and the famous episode of a wealthy merchant who bade a servant to collect a drop of ghee off the floor, lest it be wasted, is a very fine example. The same merchant was so generous that

his largesse surprised the recipients (Vin. I, 271). Though frugality and generosity appear to be incompatible, they are recognized as commendable virtues in their own right to be cultivated by one and all. When these simple virtues are compared with the information revealed to us, for instance, by Vance Packard's epochmaking eye-opener *The Waste Makers*, one begins to wonder whether sanity and common sense have left the knowledgeable man of science today. Some investigators estimate that American consumption of the world's resources within forty years is equal to what mankind has consumed during the last 4000 years. As the earth's resources are not unlimited, it is high time that modern man did some rethinking and cultivated some economical Buddhist habits at least out of sympathy for posterity. It is true that oceanography opens unexploited resources to man, but it must be remembered that the ocean too is not unlimited, whereas man's greed knows no limit nor satiation.

## **Sex**

Buddhism recognizes the sex attraction as a universal reality. Among animals the sex impulse is regulated by nature and thus their mating and breeding are seasonal. Among humans there is no such natural mechanism, and man has by a long process of experiment and adjustment arrived at certain taboos, rules and regulations to handle his sex drive in a manner appropriate to himself and his fellow beings. Though these rules differ according to times and place, on the whole they have helped man to emerge from savagery to civilization.

According to Buddhism monogamy is the ideal form of marriage, while chastity and fidelity form ideal behavior before marriage. This alone is not sufficient for success in married life. Mutual confidence (*saddha*), morality (*sila*), self-denial (*caga*) and prudence (*pañña*) are emphasized as virtues which ensure conjugal happiness and success. In other words, mutual confidence means dependability, morality implies strength of character, self-denial or

the joy of selfless service to the beloved denotes emotional maturity, and prudence shows intellectual maturity. These qualities bring the spouses so close to one another, it is said, that the relationship could persist even after death in a future existence. Nakula's parents are portrayed in Buddhist literature as an ideal couple who, in their old age, expressed the wish that their love should survive death. The Buddha replied that the wish would materialize if the above qualities are equally shared by both partners (A. II, 61-61).

Marital bonds of modern man are so brittle and fragile because these cohesive emotional forces are lost in sensuality. Much emphasis is laid on carnal pleasure while personality adjustments and emotional involvement which call for sacrifices and selflessness respectively, are ignored or neglected. Though sex is an important basic requirement in marriage, it is certainly not the be-all and end-all of family life. Indulgence in sex for its own sake never brings satisfaction, whence fulfillment? The insatiability of lust is disdainfully illustrated in Buddhist literature by the traditional simile of a dog licking a bone to satisfy hunger. But sex as an expression of conjugal love is a satisfying emotional experience. If sex was the only concern, man need not have evolved an institution like the family. Animals too satisfy their sex instinct, but nothing compared to the human family has evolved in the animal kingdom. The important function of family life seems to be to teach man a great moral lesson to overcome his egocentric nature. Man starts life in his mother's womb as the most selfish parasite. He then passes through the emotional stages of self-love, conjugal love and parental love. As a mature man and a parent he completely loses himself in the service of his offspring. His self-denial is such he even relinquishes his personal possessions, acquired through the toil of a lifetime, in favor of them. Finally he makes an emotional self-sacrifice when he gets a partner for his child to love and cherish. In his old age he regards his offspring with equanimity and contentment. This emotional maturity and fulfillment is utterly impossible if sensuality is regarded as the goal of married life.



## **Fame and Longevity**

These two ambitions of man depend to a very large extent, as mentioned earlier, on the manner he handles his wealth and pleasure. Special mention should be made that liquor, like sensuality, is a great betrayer of all human ambitions. It has been aptly remarked that a man's conscience is soluble in alcohol. According to Buddhism both liquor and sensuality destroy man's physical and mental health, drain his resources, spoil his public image and distort his intellectual capacities (D. III, 182-184).

## **Happiness After Death**

In this age of material pleasure, man is not much concerned with a life after death. The Buddhist axiom is that a man reaps what he sows. If one has led a useful moral life and reached old age with a sense of fulfillment, contentment and equanimity, one has no regrets. A well-spent blameless life has, according to Buddhism, happiness beyond the grave. Such a person is said to progress from light to brighter light (*joti jotī parayano*, A. II, 86).

## **Sensuality and Intellectual Maturity**

Another noteworthy ill effect of self-indulgence is the inhibition of intellectual capacities. Buddhism emphasizes that obsession with sensuality prevents clear thinking, distorts vision, clouds issues, inhibits wisdom and destroys peace of mind. While these observations were made twenty-five centuries ago by the Buddha, the inhibitory effect of sex on brain activity seems to be indicated quite independently by medical research on the pineal gland.

In man, the pineal gland is a pear-shaped midline structure located at the back of the base of the brain. This gland synthesizes a hormone called melatonin which affects behavior, sleep, brain activity, and sexual activity such as puberty, ovulation and sexual maturation. While melatonin stimulates brain activity, it inhibits sexual activity. Again it has been recognized that light, dark, olfaction, cold, stress and other neural inputs affect the pineal function. Exposure to

light reduces the synthesis of melatonin and depresses pineal weight. On the other hand light accelerates sexual maturation activity.<sup>5</sup>

It will be useful to compare this medical information with Buddhist ideology. Buddhism maintains that sense stimuli disturb mental activity. If the sense doors are well guarded (*indriyesu guttad-varo hoti*), i.e., if visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile inputs are controlled, a corresponding degree of concentrated mental activity becomes possible. *Cittassa ekaggata* or the ability to fix the mind on one point is greatly determined by the control of the sense faculties. In terms of physiology it seems to mean that such sense control helps the synthesis of melatonin in the pineal gland, which stimulates brain activity and retards sexual activity. Thus, with the help of medical research it seems possible to confirm the buddhist point of view that sensuality inhibits intellectual maturity.

### **Sensuality and Culture**

According to the *Aggañña Sutta*, which gives an account of the evolution of the world and society, the earliest inhabitants of the earth were mind-made and self-luminous beings who subsisted on joy and moved about in the sky. After a long time they tasted something extremely flavorsome and were delighted with this new gustatory sense experience. Craving entered into them and they went on tasting food in this manner. Consequently their bodies became coarser and coarser; they lost their radiance and the ability to subsist on joy and to traverse in the sky. (D. III, 84-86).

Now what is important for us here is not the authenticity of this evolutionary process, but the point that sensual desire has caused the loss of higher mental and physical capacities which man is supposed to have once possessed.

The *Cakkavattisihanada Sutta* (D. III, 69-74) deals with the problem of social change. As a result of the unequal distribution of wealth, poverty becomes widespread and moral standards

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5. See G.E.W. Wolstenholme and Julie Knight, eds., *The Pineal Gland* (London, 1971).

deteriorate rapidly. With moral degeneration there is a corresponding decrease in physical beauty and length of life. As time goes on and immorality settles down, society comes under the grip of three derogatory phenomena, namely, perverted lust (*adhammaraga*), wanton greed (*visamalobha*) and a wrong sense of values (*micchadhamma*). Disrespect for family, religious and cultural traditions becomes an accepted social phenomenon. When moral degradation continues thus a time will come when the life-span is reduced to ten years and the marriageable age goes down to five. By that time food will undergo so much change that delicacies such as ghee, butter, honey, etc. will vanish, and what is considered coarse today will be a delicacy of that time. All concepts of morality will disappear and language will have no word to denote morality. Immorality will reign supreme with social sanction. There will be no marriage laws nor kinship, and society will fall into a state of utter promiscuity, as among animals. Among such humans keen mutual enmity will become the rule, and they will be overcome by passionate thoughts of killing one another. A world war will break out and large-scale massacre would be the result. After this mass blood bath, the few destitutes who are left behind will find solace in each other's company and they will begin to regard one another with kindly thoughts. With this change of heart there will be a gradual re-evolution of moral values. Step by step the good life will be restored, physical beauty will reappear and the life-span will increase. Mental potentialities too will gradually develop.

Such are the Buddhist ideas of social change. Society stands or falls with the rise or fall of moral values.

It is noteworthy that some present-day sociological studies too have revealed that morality and culture are causally connected. William Stephens observes that primitive tribes have great sexual freedom, premarital as well as extramarital, when compared with civilized communities which have tight sex restrictions.<sup>6</sup> Dean Robert Fitch has connected the decline of the Roman civilization

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6. *The Family in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York, 1963), pp. 256-259.

with the deterioration of their sexual morality.<sup>7</sup> The most important contribution in this respect is made by J.D. Unwin in a study called *Sex and Culture*.<sup>8</sup> He has conducted a survey of the sexual behavior and the level of culture of eighty uncivilized tribes and also those of six known civilizations. He concludes that there is a definite relationship between permissiveness and primitiveness, and sex restrictions and civilization. Sexual freedom gives rise to what he calls a zoistic (dead level of conception) culture where people are born, they satisfy their desire, they die and are forgotten after the remains are disposed of. They are not able to rationally find out the causal connection between events. When afflicted by illness, for instance, they resort to witchcraft and nothing more. When a certain degree of sex restriction, occasional, premarital, or post-nuptial, is present, the result is a manistic culture where ancestors are worshipped at times of crisis, but without a definite place of worship. Strict sex regulations as in monogamy produce a deistic culture with definite places of worship. Culture in the sense of the external expression of internal human energy resulting from the use of human powers of reason, creation and self knowledge becomes possible only with strictly enforced monogamous sex mores. The mechanism of this operation is not known, just as it is not known how carbon placed under different settings turns to coal or diamond.<sup>9</sup> All that can be said is that there is a definite causal link between sexual behavior and the culture pattern. As Unwin comes to this conclusion after conducting exhaustive methodical investigations, it is possible to maintain that scientific inquiries too have confirmed the Buddhist point of view regarding the relationship between morality and culture.

### **Sensuality and Environment**

The Anguttara Nikaya (I, 160) maintains that rainfall decreases when society comes under the sway of perverted lust, wanton greed and

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7. Quoted by Packard, *The Sexual Wilderness*, p.417.

8. London: Oxford University Press, 1934.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 424, 417, 412, etc.

wrong values. Drought causes famine as a result of which the mortality rate goes up. Though it is difficult to establish a direct connection between immorality and lack of rain, an interpretation of the five natural laws mentioned on the commentaries might offer a plausible explanation.

In the cosmos there are five natural laws or forces, namely *utun-iyama* (lit. season law), *bijaniyama* (lit. seed-law) *cittaniyama*, *kammaniyama*, and *dhammaniyama*.<sup>10</sup> These can be translated as physical laws, biological laws, psychological laws, moral laws, and causal laws. While the first four laws operate within their respective spheres, the last law of causality operates within them as well as among them. Thus the physical environment or ecology affects living organisms, i.e., biology; this influences psychology, which determines the moral force. The opposite process also operates with harmful or beneficial results depending on the nature or the forces at work. Perhaps the operation can be illustrated with a concrete example. Man's greed for luxury, wealth and power has caused the setting up of vast factories. They created the problem of air, water and noise pollution, which have adversely affected both fauna and flora.<sup>11</sup> The inadvertent modifications of atmospheric properties and processes caused by human activities is intensively studied by scientific bodies today. It is complained that although the effects of pollutants and smog upon people, plants and economic activities have been extensively studied, relatively little attention has been paid to the effects of pollution and smog upon climatic patterns. It is well known that many climatic elements such as radiation, cloudiness, fog, visibility and the atmospheric electric field are affected by pollution. Temperature and humidity are influenced indirectly and effects on precipitation are also suspected.<sup>12</sup> Science will reveal in the course of time whether pollution is definitely responsible for

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10. *Atthasalini*, PTS ed., p.272.

11. Mitchell Gordon, *Sick Cities* (New York, 1963), pp. 92, 80.

12. *Weather and Climate Modification: Problems and Prospects*, Vol. II (National Academy of Sciences, Washington, 1966) pp. 82–108.

weather and climatic change, but it remains a fact that the world is already confronted with an acute shortage of water.

It is no secret that man uses his inherent powers of reason, intelligence and creativity to change his environment for his advantage. But man is not aware that the moral force he himself creates brings about corresponding changes in his environment to his weal or woe whether he likes it or not.



## Conclusion

CONCLUDING THIS ESSAY, it should be emphasized that there is a Cosmic Moral Force which profoundly influences man. According to Buddhism it is this Cosmic Moral Law or Force which makes the world and mankind go on: *kammāna vattati loka, kammāna vattati paja* (Sn. v 654). This Cosmic Moral Force is generated by none other than man himself, for the Buddha maintains that human thoughts are a moral force (*cetanāham bhikkhave kammam vadāmi*, A III, 410). It is also more directly said that thoughts (or ideologies) make the world go on (*cittena ni yato loka*, S. I, 39). Therefore man has to discover his own inherent powers which are, at present, mostly dissipated on alcohol and sensuality. The discovery of the potentialities of *The World Within* is the most urgent need of today as modern man living in *Sick Cities*, lost in a *Sexual Wilderness*, unaware of *The Hidden Persuaders*, is being slowly but surely reduced to a *Naked Ape*.<sup>13</sup>



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13. References are to the titles of works by Gina Cerminara (New York, 1957), Mitchell Gordon, Vance Packard (op. cit. and London, 1957), and Desmond Morris (New York, 1967).

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