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## Buddhist ethics: Two aspects for a healthy and happy lifestyle

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### Abstract:

Moral personality is a typical issue that is attracting attention in today's society, where there are so many concerns for health, peace, and happiness amid widespread humanitarian crises. It is assumed that one needs to re-evaluate the ethical values in human culture. There, Buddhist ethics may open up a wonderful solution to lasting peace, health, and happiness. This article introduces two aspects of ethics, i.e., personal and social, for the healthy and happy life as suggested in the training system of Buddhism.

**Keyword:** Buddhist ethics, moral personality, happy life, healthy lifestyle, peaceful life, human personality

### Introduction

For Buddhism, morality is the foundation of both individual and society. Human personality is confirmed in the performed morality. A healthy and happy lifestyle, therefore, must be a virtuous and moral way of life. Buddhism introduced two aspects of morality that every human being needs to perfect: (1) his own moral perfection; and (2) the moral perfection of society. Practicing Buddhist ethics is the achievement of these two aspects. Here, the question arises: What is the moral perfection of oneself? And what is the moral perfection of society?

In the Pāli canon as well as the Mahayana scriptures, the Buddha advised his disciples to live in the spirit of morality, which serves as the foundation for building a harmonious, healthy, and happy lifestyle. Further, Moral righteousness is a step forward on the path of wisdom and enlightenment.

In Buddhist traditions, virtuous qualities are established on the principles of morality (*Sīla*), concentration (*Samādhi*), and wisdom (*Pañca*), which is considered the motto of Buddhist practice. Efforts to implement and extend Buddhist ethical practices and guidelines for health and building a happy life are developed on the following principles:

- orientation (not dominated by greed, anger, or delusion; always lucid and clear),
- self-control (build a good moral personality for oneself),
- equality (anyone who practices it achieves happy results regardless of discrimination),
- selflessness (knowing to love, forgive, and be willing to share).

These principles are both a direction of action and a goal to create a healthy and happy life for a long time.

Modern scholars are looking for a new direction, solution in dealing with the crisis of ethical and happy life of the temporary world. They confirmed for the relation of Buddhist ethics with a healthy and happy life that based on two aspects of perfection. Research evidence from different fields shows that people with moral personalities lead a friendly, healthy, harmless, and happy lifestyle. K.T.S Sarao shows that: "For one's own sake, or for the sake of another, one should not long for a son, wealth or a kingdom. He who does not long for success through immorality would be virtuous, wise, and righteous." (Sarao, 2009: 104)<sup>[10]</sup> Rahula states that ethical conduct built on the Buddhist concepts of loving-kindness and universal compassion for all sentient beings can bring peace and lasting happiness to the world. (Rahula, 1978: 46)<sup>[8]</sup> Harvey states that a particular world formed on moral qualities provides an impetus for action consistent with its growth. (Harvey, 2000: 1)<sup>[5]</sup> Keown identified that the perfection of human potential, maintaining a healthy lifestyle cultivating compassion and wisdom, and the goal to perfect moral personality is part of the Buddha's teachings. (Keown, 2008)<sup>[6]</sup>. With this understanding, let consider two aspect of Buddhist ethics for happy and healthy life.

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### Perfection of oneself

On the way to realizing happiness and liberating from all suffering, the Buddha taught people the basic direction to turn inwards and rely on themselves in the present reality. At Savatthi, the Buddha taught his disciples that: "Bhikkhus, dwell with yourselves as an island, with yourselves as a refuge, with no other refuge; with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, with no other refuge. (Bodhi, 2000: 882-883)<sup>[1]</sup>.

"Dwell with yourself," and "dwell with Dhamma," is the basic foundation for perfecting human morality. According to the Dhammapada, the Buddha taught three aspects that a person need to be perfected: "Avoidance all evils, gathering of merit, purifying one's own mind." (Sarao, 2009: 227)<sup>[10]</sup>.

To "avoid all evils" is to refrain oneself from doing evils and encourage others not to do evils. Evil in this context is understood as actions, words, and thoughts contrary to human morality and ethics. In other words, "avoid evil" is the very five basic principles that the Buddha taught:

- (a) The first principle is not to kill life. With pity for all sentient beings, do not harm mercilessly. (Bodhi, 2000: 994-995)<sup>[1]</sup> In Dhammapada, it points out the reality that "All tremble at punishment; all fear death. Having made the comparison with oneself, one should not kill or cause to kill." (Sarao, 2009: 161)<sup>[10]</sup> Everyone wants to be happy, healthy, and peaceful in life, and so do all sentient beings. The Buddha did not praise killing and harming others. (Bodhi, 2012: 430-431)<sup>[2]</sup> In contrast, he extols compassion, exalts equality, and respects life. (Bodhi, 2012: 1111)<sup>[2]</sup>
- (b) The second principle is not to steal. Without stealing, the idea of stealing will not arise. Whether big or small, things that are not yours, or if they are not given by others, then do not intentionally take, do not arbitrarily appropriate. (Bodhi, 2012: 729)<sup>[2]</sup>
- (c) The third principle is not to engage in sexual misconduct. Apart from the legal marriage relationship, one should not give rise to lewd thoughts or actions with other people. (Bodhi, 2012: 439)<sup>[2]</sup> This is the minimum moral foundation to protect a happy and peaceful family life and social relationships.
- (d) The fourth principle is not to lie. In this context, lie consists of double-tongued, nonsensical, vulgar, or divisive speech. (Bodhi, 2012: 466)<sup>[2]</sup> On the contrary, one should practice speaking words that are truthful, harmonious, gentle, beneficial, and loving-kindness. (AN 5.198 – Bodhi, 2012: 816)<sup>[2]</sup>
- (e) The fifth principle is not to use stimulants such as beer, opium, alcohol, narcotics, etc., which confuses the mind, reduces clarity, and causes diseases leading to harm.

Committing these principles are contrary to good morality, human personality, and security for society. Therefore, with a perfect personality, we need to be conscious of the five basic principles that functioned as the foundation for perfecting a human personality. The Buddha summarizes these principles as follows:

There is a man in the world  
who does not destroy life,  
speak falsely, take what is not given,  
go to the wives of others,  
or indulge in liquor and wine.  
Having abandoned the five enmities,  
he is called virtuous.

With the breakup of the body,  
that wise person is reborn in heaven. (Bodhi, 2012: 788)<sup>[2]</sup>

Householder Dīghajāṇu asked the Buddha about the issue of living a healthy and virtuous life while he is still in the midst of ordinary life:

Bhante, we are laymen enjoying sensual pleasures, living at home in a house full of children. We use sandalwood from Kāsi; we wear garlands, scents, and unguents; ... Let the Blessed One teach us the Dhamma in a way that will lead to our welfare and happiness in this present life and future lives. (Bodhi, 2012: 1194)<sup>[2]</sup>.

The question is relevance for the modern day, functioned as an orientation for education, as it is a focal point for a happy and peaceful life. In response, the Buddha suggests the four principles should be applied:

1. Accomplishment in an initiative: Have a profession that allows for right living. He should have a skillful thinking, professional orientation, and effectively make legal property. (Bodhi, 2012: 1194)<sup>[2]</sup>
2. Accomplishment in protection: properties are legally produced by our efforts. He knows how to use and protect them from being robbed or damaged by unworthy things. (Bodhi, 2012: 1194)<sup>[2]</sup>
3. Good friendship: Have a close relationship with the wiser, good people. He should not hang out with bad friends. (Bodhi, 2012: 1194)<sup>[2]</sup>
4. Balanced living: He should live not too stingy or liberal. He knows how to balance assets in spending and not waste unnecessarily. (Bodhi, 2012: 1194)<sup>[2]</sup>

Further, the Buddha also taught four dharmas whose value and benefits are happier than above, good for present as well as future life: "(1) accomplishment in faith, (2) accomplishment in virtuous behavior, (3) accomplishment in generosity, and (4) accomplishment in wisdom." (Bodhi, 2012: 1196)<sup>[2]</sup> In terms of the value of ordinary life, the Buddha's teaching leads to the perfection of personal, the criterion of "gathering of merit", as Confucius (孔夫子), a great Chinese philosopher, called "self-correction" (修身). More broadly, it is the achievement of virtuous actions stemming from loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

Typically, the most important factor in building one's moral character is "purifying one's mind." Mind is the source of all actions; if, with a pure mind, the result will be happiness; if with a polluted mind, the result will be suffering. (Sarao, 2009: 1-3)<sup>[10]</sup> Suffering or happiness depends on the purification of one's mind. Pragmatically, the Buddha taught suffering and the path to the end of suffering, which is the teaching about happiness and how to live a happy life, physically and mentally, right in the present, here, in this world. (Bodhi, 2000: 1843-1847)<sup>[1]</sup>.

It is with a positive mindset, which has a constructive character on every word and deed and is not dominated by greed, anger, or delusion, that the mind becomes gentle and holy. That holiness brings many benefits to oneself and others. Therefore, when a person is virtuous, he or she will have a generous mind knowing how to share and sympathize. The origin of morality and ethical standards varies from culture to culture and ideology. Because of different views on people, the world, values, and happiness, there are differences in moral origins and ethical standards. (Thiën, 1993)<sup>[11]</sup> However, those who perfects himself in terms of personality, and good qualities (*kusala*), all values will be true for all

world cultures. That perfection is based on goodness in thought, speech, and actions.

In short, to perfect one's moral character, one must refrain from stealing, killing, adultery, and speaking dishonestly; abstain from the cause of the four motives of greed, anger, delusion, and fear; avoid bad habits such as drunkenness, gambling, infatuation with prostitutes, bad friends, loitering, wasting time and smoking drugs.

### Perfecting the social-person

The perfection of a social person is based on those social relationships. As recorded in many suttas compiled in the Nikayas, Agamas, such as *Siṅgālasutta* (Walshe, 1995: 461)<sup>[12]</sup>, and the *Cakkavattisutta* (Walshe, 1995: 395)<sup>[12]</sup>, the Buddha taught about the true meaning of personality in society.

The first and foremost moral relationship of each person is the family relationship. A family is where each person grows up and returns to take refuge. A family as such is a miniature society. Moral standards related to the institution of the family are often reinforced by the community in which the family belongs. Family members usually protect each other from the fear of criticism that their family lacks morals. (Ratnapala, 1993: 26-27)<sup>[9]</sup> The first relationship is between parents and children, and briefly introduced by the Buddha with such values and responsibilities as follows:

- Parents raise their children and give them good education and orientation.
- Prevent their children from doing evil and encourage them to practice morals.
- Guide career orientation for their children to create the future.
- Help with the marriage of their children to be happy, and at the right time, give them inheritance property. (Walshe, 1995: 467)<sup>[12]</sup>

And vice versa, children have such responsibility towards their parents as:

- Children have the duty to take care of their parents, and respect and obey them.
- Preserve the good traditions of the family and do not dishonor the reputation of parents.
- Protect parents' property and do not waste and destroy it.
- Carry out the wishes of the parents before the parents pass away. (Walshe, 1995: 467)<sup>[12]</sup>

These are typical ethical relationships between parents and children that the Buddha taught to build a harmonious family life. The *Sabrahmaka sutta* teaches that parents are like the first teachers who bringing up their children and bringing them into the world. Therefore, children need to know how to be gracious and respectful to their parents. (Bodhi, 2012: 227-228)<sup>[2]</sup> The *Khīra sutta* compares the mother's milk that we drink in *samsara* to more than the water of all the four oceans. (Bodhi, 2000: 653)<sup>[1]</sup> Therefore, honoring parents is a sacred moral accomplishment and a great personality.

In the relationships between husband and wife, the Buddha suggests to be built and preserved with following values:

- The husband should respect his wife,
- Love and help his wife,
- Be loyal to his wife,
- Giving assets in the family to the wife to keep,
- Occasionally buy gifts for his wife. (Walshe, 1995: 467)<sup>[12]</sup>

And vice versa, the wife also has such duty to her husband as:

- Practice well the wife's duties in the family,
- Skillfully welcome parents and relatives of the husband's family,
- Be loyal to her husband,
- Maintain family property,
- Skillfully take care of household chores. (Walshe, 1995: 467-468)<sup>[12]</sup>

These are considered the basic virtues to maintain a long and happy marriage and family. The *Dutiyasamvāsa sutta* teaches such types of husbands are considered unworthy as: a husband who is an evil man, who beats and scolds his wife, unfaithful, miserly. (Bodhi, 2012: 443)<sup>[2]</sup> The *Bhāriyā sutta* teaches about the seven types of wives that "(1) one like a killer, (2) one like a thief, (3) one like a tyrant, (4) one like a mother, (5) one like a sister, (6) one like a friend, (7) one like a slave." (Bodhi, 2012: 1064)<sup>[2]</sup> Buddhist ethics about marital relationships is entirely different from the polygamy ideas in ancient cultures. The fidelity in the husband-and-wife relationship confirms that Buddhism only encourages a monogamous, healthy, and happy lifestyle. (Ratnapala, 1993: 27)<sup>[9]</sup>

The Buddha also teaches about the relationship between teachers and students, relatives, and friends that:

- Teachers treat students well, teach well, orient and transfer their professions to students, and choose good friends to introduce. (Walshe, 1995: 467)<sup>[12]</sup>
- Students must study hard and obey the teacher's teachings and help the teacher when he needs it. (Walshe, 1995: 467)<sup>[12]</sup>
- Between brothers, relatives, and neighbors, the Buddha says that it is necessary to keep friendly feelings, help each other when they have difficulties such as illness, accident, etc., and not leave each other in danger. (Walshe, 1995: 463-465)<sup>[12]</sup>

Any place where a person with a moral personality live, he will bring benefits, peace, and happiness. (Bodhi, 2012: 667)<sup>[2]</sup> Moral personality or humanity is often expressed in social relationships. When being well built in those relationships, it brings individuals closer to each other, more peaceful and happier. The Buddhist path of ethical practice aims to build a mind that is stable, clear, harmless, peaceful, compassionate, and illuminated by sincere wisdom. This is a concrete and fundamental contribution to humanity. If a person perfects himself with these qualities, and balances relationships, he or she will have robust health and happy life.

Here, Buddhism teaches us that the moral character of individual is closely related to the society in which he exists. That association is established on the moral principles prescribed by that society. However, a healthy morality will bring lasting happiness and peace to humanity. That morality must be grounded on non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion, compassion, altruism, and non-self (*anattā* or *anātman*).

### Conclusion

The criterion of Buddhist ethics is to achieve liberation from all suffering by seeing the world as it really is and abandoning vague and unrealistic thoughts. Improve thoughts, words, and actions in a positive direction on three fronts: abstaining from evil deeds, practicing good deeds, and keeping a clear and calm mind. A happy or suffering, healthy or sickly lifestyle, depends on each person's moral personality. No one can decide for others which lifestyle when they don't want to. The

destruction and struggle only happen to people who lack morality and do not have a healthy lifestyle. Whether the world has peace or war is depended on whether the moral qualities of people. (Bodhi, 2000: 177-178) <sup>[1]</sup> The world peace and happiness can be built on the moral foundation of each individual guided by the path, the positive and practical teachings introduced by the Buddha.

The Buddhist teachings highlight the nuances of compassion and harmlessness, which are also the nuances of the peaceful and well-being teachings. The essence of Buddhist practice is to eliminate greed, hatred, and delusion, which are the primary factors that give rise to wars. This is the teaching that eradicates the root of suffering, the element of sickness and sin. Buddhist ethics with these two aspects for healthy and happy life dedicate to humanity, right now for all classes of people and world cultures.

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