The Benefits of Buddhism toward Sustainable Society

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Abstract—Buddhism founded in India 2,500 years ago remains the dominant religion of the Far East and is increasingly popular in the West. Over its long history Buddhism has developed into a wide variety of forms, ranging from an emphasis on religious rituals and worship of deities to a complete rejection of both rituals and deities in favor of pure meditation. But all share in common a great respect for the teachings of the Buddha, “The Enlightened One.” Given the association of Buddhism with the meditating monk, one might well assume that Buddhism emphasizes practices over beliefs. It is true that right practices are important in Buddhism, but the faith really centers on correct understanding of human nature and ultimate reality. The Buddha, after all, was called the “Enlightened One.” After he became enlightened, he taught that the way to eliminate suffering begins with understanding the true nature of the world. However, the Buddha considered knowledge important only insofar as it remains practical. He rejected speculation about such matters as God, the nature of the universe, and the afterlife, urging his followers to focus instead on the Eightfold Path by which they can free themselves from suffering. Buddhists usually followed the above principles as a basis for environmental ethics in their daily actions, either monks or laymen then it seems likely that the consequences would promote a nonviolent ecology. if we learn to love and respect nature by ethic virtue, with its goal of enlightenment.

Keywords— Buddhism emphasizes practices, Enlightened One, respect nature by ethic virtue.

I. INTRODUCTION

We are in the changing world. It is well-known that Buddhism teaching have been changed to the current world. An important part of the Noble Eightfold Path relates to the development the current world; for many a layperson Buddhist practice consists mainly in the "keeping of the precepts"; many Bhikkhus see in the Vinaya rules the essence of the religious life; and even many of the paramitas expected of those aspiring to Buddhahood are ethical in nature. Yet to present the teaching of the Buddha as being solely and exclusively concerned with ethics could serve as a distraction from the real objective of the Buddha-Dhamma, which is to serve as a path or vehicle leading to Enlightenment. While conforming to the norms of Buddhist ethics is essential for this purpose this alone will not guarantee the elimination of ignorance, which is the real meaning of Enlightenment. The tendency of some exponents of the Dhamma to represent Buddhism as just another ethical system is misleading, especially when put before a newcomer to the Dhamma who may not be able to distinguish between Buddhist ethics and the precepts of other ethical teachers, and may conclude that Buddhism has nothing new to offer.

II. DESTINATION OF BUDDHISM

As a major spiritual tradition, Buddhism has been described as containing values similar to those necessary for a sustainable society. Buddhism has the Significant to provide the society such as:

1. Buddhism have offers a credible, ethical critique of the dominant paradigm and its fundamental freedom beliefs.
2. Buddhism provides a comprehensive worldview consistent with emerging scientific understanding by oneself.
3. It supports a higher purpose for human existence.
4. It contains a psychological framework, including essential practices and techniques, for human transformation to the best wisdom on the basis of Ethic and Morality by concentration practice.

In contrast, a disequilibrium society is characterized by uncontrolled growth in population and resource consumption with marked environmental degradation. During recent centuries, through European colonization and industrialization, and particularly with economic development and modernization and industrialization, and particulary with economic development and modernization since World War II, the world has increasingly undergone the ecological transition from equilibrium to disequilibrium. Some insights into the ecological transition for Buddhist can be obtained indirect by comparing the archaeological chronology for successive types of economies with their corresponding level of population density as documented in the ethnological record and the earliest and longest stages of human adaptation in Buddhist must have involved much lower population density, technological capacity, resource consumption, and environmental impact.

The Earth Charter as Part of Buddhist Studies: From “Buddhist Perspectives on the Earth Charter” published by the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century in 1997, various contributions addressing specific Buddhist traditions are included. An overview of the Earth Charter’s development is provided by Steven Rockefeller who is steeped in Buddhist teaching and was instrumental in the formulation of the Earth Charter. In providing Buddhist perspectives on the Earth
Charter, the first paper by David Chappell calls attention to the need to focus not only on individual actions, but also on collective actions. The second paper by Susan Darlington points to ecological conservation being addressed in the context of a growing number of Thai ecology monks. The next paper by Rita Gross encourages movement from wanting more to seeking greater contentment from less. The need to focus on world peace is addressed from a Nichiren tradition in the next paper by Yoichi Kawanda. Stephanie Kaza focuses on a Zen perspective addressing the karma of violence, the next paper by David Chappell calls attention to the need to protect the weak, consistent with the Buddhist principle of compassion. Finally, the paper by Donald Swearer recognizes our mutual interdependence through the Earth Charter as a set of responsibilities as opposed to a set of rights.vii

Virtues and Virtue Ethics in Buddhism is the Professions: A virtue is a trait or quality deemed to be morally excellent and thus is valued as a foundation of principle and good moral being. Personal virtues are characteristics valued as promoting individual and collective well-being. The opposite of “virtue” is “vice”. In Buddhist teachings, virtues that are cited include: Generosity, Morality, Renunciation, Transcendental Wisdom, Diligence, Forbearance, Honesty, Determination, Loving-Kindness, and Serenity etc.

TABLE I
BUDDHIST PRACTICE AS OUTLINED IN THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH CAN BE REGARDED AS A PROGRESSIVE LIST OF VIRTUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Right View</th>
<th>Realizing the Four Noble Truths</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right Intention</td>
<td>Commitment to mental and ethical growth in moderation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Speech</td>
<td>One speaks in a non hurtful, not exaggerated, truthful way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Action</td>
<td>Wholesome action, avoiding action that would do harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Livelihood</td>
<td>One’s job does not harm in any way oneself or others; directly or indirectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Effort</td>
<td>One makes an effort to improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Mindfulness</td>
<td>Mental ability to see things for what they are with clear consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Concentration</td>
<td>Mental ability to see things for what they are with clear consciousness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the many ethical theories that form the tool kit for moral philosophers (including, Normative, Utilitarian, Deontological, Egalitarian, Relational, Libertarian) is that of Virtue Ethics. Virtues do not replace ethical rules in general nor in the professions in particular. Rather, as discussed among epidemiologists, an account of professional ethics is more complete if virtuous traits of character are identified.viii

Table: VIRTUOUS TRAITS OF CHARACTER OF ETHICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humility</th>
<th>Respect the input and opinions of others / Self-effacement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>Honor one’s commitments / Promote trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Act fairly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>Take time to hear others’ viewpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Do your level best / Excel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veracity</td>
<td>Tell the truth / Be honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Empathize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Demonstrate good moral character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serve</td>
<td>Protect the most vulnerable / Serve the public interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prudence</td>
<td>Err on the side of caution / Demonstrate good judgment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Buddhism One important response to the problems of modernization in the Buddhist nation has been a growing movement to revitalize Buddhist culture. Some of these movements are concerned with solving problems resulting from the ecological transition triggered by modernization such as deforestation and restoring a greater degree of ecological equilibrium and social harmony.x

III. BUDDHISM FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOCIETY

Buddhism is based on personal experience, rationalism, practice, morality, and insight. There is no need to propitiate gods or priests, no blind adherence to useless dogmas, rituals, holy books, or myths. The foundations of Buddhism are not so much tenets of faith as demonstrable principles of perceptual science. Buddhism can be approached in many different ways. It is commonly referred to as a religion, and it can be used in that way to feel a connection to divinity and inspire faith. But because Buddhism does not include the idea of worshipping a creator God, some people do not see it as a religion in the normal in the Western sense, but instead as a philosophy. If a brief overview will be seen that Buddhism has dominant features:

Firstly, Buddhism does not support the dominant paradigm of economism. Indeed, it critiques the present situation of unsustainability as the result of moral decline, the escalation of the three poisons of greed (craving), hatred (ill-will) and ignorance (delusion). As de Silva writes: When mankind is demoralized through greed, famine is the natural outcome; when moral degeneration is due to ignorance, epidemic is the inevitable result; when hatred is the demoralizing force, widespread violence is the ultimate outcome. If immorality grips society, people and nature deteriorate; if morality reigns, the quality of human life and nature improves. The greed, hatred, and delusion produce pollution within and without.xi

De Silva’s comments seem to reflect accurately a world inundated by a never-ending series of social and ecological crises as he emphasises the connection between the mind and the condition of the world such as a state of immorality.
supports many collective, erroneous beliefs that serve to heighten the impact of greed, hatred and delusion. xi According to the monk scholar, P.A. Payutto have thinking about three erroneous beliefs form the basis of modern society:

1. The perception that mankind is separate from nature, that mankind must control, conquer or manipulate nature according to his desires.

2. The perception that fellow human beings are not ‘fellow human beings’; thus focusing on the differences among people rather than the common situation.

3. The perception that happiness is dependent on an abundance of material possessions. xii This view is shared by many Buddhist scholars, for example. Payutto asserts that it is this third erroneous belief that has especially wreaked havoc onto the world: because humans seek happiness from greater material possessions, they must destroy nature and other humans who compete for the same thing, and that the first two erroneous beliefs become the justification for unlimited violence. Thus, Payutto believes in the primary importance of realigning life’s purpose towards happiness that is independent of the material world - hence denying the need for its manipulation - in remedying the problems of unsustainability. xiv

Secondly, Buddhist worldviews are becoming recognised as being consistent or parallel with theories, philosophies and sciences such as Gaia, xv deepecology, xvi phenomenology, xvii transformational learning, xviii cognitive psychology, xix neuroscience, xx evolutionary biology, xx and quantum physics. xxi For example, Buddhism views the ‘true reality’ of the self as something deeply conditioned, interdependent and ultimately embedded within the social and natural surrounding. xxi This view has gained currency in science and is regarded as converging with the perceptual theories of Merleau- Ponty and J. J. Gibson, where perception is regarded as converging with the perceptual theories of world”.xxiv This is mirrored by developments in neuroscience in which understandings of human thinking, derived from research at the neural activity level, are found to be remarkably similar to Buddhist theory. xxv

Thirdly, Buddhism regards enlightenment (nirvana) as the ultimate goal of human existence. Thus, Buddhism supplies the higher spiritual purpose that deems vital to the project of sustainability. However, enlightenment has often been described historically in a negative form, for example, as the “Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed”. xxvi This makes it very difficult to comprehend the nature of enlightenment other than that it is the antithesis of cyclic existence (rebirth). Perhaps, a better way of understanding enlightenment is as the re-orientation of interpersonal relationships. As Hershock explains that:

Liberating happiness (i.e. enlightenment) is not something achieved or gained; it is a quality of relationship through which our entire situation is suffused with compassion, equanimity, loving-kindness and joy in the good fortune of others. Ultimately, there is no freedom or happiness to be attained. There is only the happiness of relating-freely in deep and mutual enrichment ‘stress in original’. xxvii Such a positive view of enlightenment provides a glimmer of the possibilities of human purpose, to transcend the mundane and douse the fire of conflict burning in the world at the expense of human flourishing and nature.

Fourthly, Buddhism offers both a comprehensive psychological framework and an array of psychotherapeutic techniques compiled over 2,500 years. As Watson, Batchelor and Claxton assert: Buddhism offers not only theory, a philosophy of process much in tune with contemporary Western discourse, but, most importantly, a way. This is a way of practice, a cultivation, a path towards change and clear sight leading to happiness, authenticity and connection. xxviii Therefor when we have considerations to the conclusion that the environments and societies which are related in the Buddhist principle, and thus a conservative ecology is not limited of western ideals. Buddhism can certainly be pertinent for such an effort. Disregarding the variation in Buddhist orthodoxy and orthopraxy at the generic level there are several important principles inherent in Buddhism which can be applied by individuals and societies for the creation and maintenance of a nonviolent ecology. Of course these principles are most relevant to Buddhist individuals and societies. Granted, these principles may not be sufficient, but they provide one useful place to start. Here they are offered as possibilities for consideration rather than as any rigid doctrine.

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