



Exploring the Ethical Principles of Buddhism in the Pali Sutras

Nguyen Mong Thao Nguyen¹, Dr. Arvind Kumar Singh²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, School of Buddhist Studies and Civilization, Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, UP, India
Email: chucbao87db@gmail.com, Ph. +919818729739

²Under Supervisor, Director International Affairs Cell Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, UP, India

ABSTRACT

Morality might be considered the paramount determinant in our life. Presently, we are confronted with several challenges and anxieties. Advancements in science and technology have enabled us to make significant strides in achieving practical and beneficial material circumstances. However, when we contrast the growth of exterior material aspects with the development of interior spiritual aspects, it becomes evident that the progress of the latter is much sluggish. The prevalence of crisis issues such as terrorism and murder is on the rise in several nations. There is widespread concern over the decline in moral standards and the rise in criminal activities... Each individual has the obligation to the whole of mankind, seeing all individuals as kin and providing assistance in surmounting their challenges. Avoid or evade experiencing pain or distress. To do this, we just need to engage in the process of examining and acquiring knowledge about the doctrines and ethical principles imparted by the World-Honored One. The article titled "Buddhist Ethics in the PaLi Canon¹" facilitates a deeper comprehension of the authentic teachings as articulated by the Buddha. In order to promote universal well-being and tranquility, it is imperative to prioritize the construction of a promising future and devote more consideration to the fundamental rights of all individuals.

CONTENT

1. The concept of ethics

Ethics is a term that pertains to the moral principles and values that guide human behavior. Widely prevalent and readily comprehensible, depending upon one's proficiency level. Human conduct is governed and influenced by ethical ideals. Ethical code or set of moral principles guiding conduct. To achieve perfection, individuals must possess the ability to achieve harmony within themselves as well as with others, their family, society, and nature. Human beings are alone responsible for defining and establishing the notion of morality within the confines of their existence.

The word "morality" in Western languages is derived from the concept of "customs".² It is important to understand that morality goes beyond mere words. It is in customs and traditions that the true essence of morality is unveiled. These customs and traditions are the result of long-term development and shape the way people live and behave. They serve to uphold the community's preferred way of life, safeguarding its identity and even ensuring its survival.

The term "ethic" in English refers to the moral ideals that govern or impact an individual's conduct. *Moral principles that control or influence a person's behavior. A system of moral principles or rules of behavior*³. Human conduct is governed and influenced by ethical ideals. Ethical principles or moral guidelines for conduct.

As per Venerable Thich Quang Do, morality may be described as the set of rules that governs human conduct in terms of distinguishing between good and evil, right and wrong. The Latin term for ethics is "mors," which is synonymous with the term "ethos" meaning customs. This is because traditions serve as the fundamental basis for morality and law. The law refers to the regulations governing social activities, while morality represents the essential standard for individuals within the framework of human social existence.⁴

The Graw Hill Book dictionary defines: "Ethics is the subject of evaluating good and evil human actions expressed through body, speech, and mind and carried out by the will, emotions, and will."⁵

¹ These sutras are part of Theravada Buddhism and focus on past events and the idea of truth. Their view of Buddha is that he is a physical being, just like other people. Notably, they put a lot of effort into studying the moral theory that covers all of human life in the context of people, groups, and nature.

² Latin "moralis" comes from "mos, moris"—customs and traditions. The German word "Sittlichkeit" comes from "Sitten"—customs. The Greek language has a similar etymology. G.Bandzeladze, 1985, page 48.

³ Oxford University, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary Of Current English, 2000, page 125.

⁴ Translated from Thich Quang Do Dictionary, 2000, pp. 1621-1622.

⁵ Will Durant, 1971, pp.132

So, Ethics refers to positive inclinations inside our thoughts that manifest as outward expressions and behaviors, resulting in transformative, joyful, and beneficial outcomes for others in our vicinity. Ethics pertains to the assessment of moral principles and the distinction between right and wrong, as well as the concepts of virtue and immorality in human existence. Individuals have the ability to modify their actions in accordance with societal moral standards and values. These concepts are manifested in many ways, including conscience, responsibility, obligation, and so on. Ethics arise organically from societal demands and interests that are universally embraced.

2. Moral formation in Buddhism

- **According to the principle of causality**

One distinctive aspect of Buddhist ethics is the acceptance of the law of cause and effect, known as karma, which regulates the consequences of one's moral conduct. Hence, the Buddha affirmed that persons had agency over their karma⁶ and were also the beneficiaries of their karma. Karma is the consequence of our own mental actions, and we inevitably experience the effects of that karma without any possibility of avoidance. Put simply, individuals exhibit proactive behavior and assume accountability for their current and future circumstances without attributing them to God or any supernatural entity. Human beings have sole responsibility for their own contentment or suffering in life.

*"By oneself, indeed, is evil done; by oneself is one defiled. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself, indeed, is one purified. Purity and impurity depend on oneself. No one purifies another."*⁷

Therefore, action is of the highest relevance since it is the driving force behind the consequences that people experience, regardless of whether those consequences are favorable or unpleasant. Karma is something that is always being generated by individuals, who are the genuine builders of their karma. Once karma has begun to work its way through the world, it is impossible to avoid its consequences.

*"Not in the sky, nor in mid-ocean, nor in a mountain cave, is found that place on earth where abiding, one may escape from (the consequences of) one's evil deed."*⁸

Given the presence of karmic principles that control cause and effect, it is of the utmost importance to recognize that all happenings in life, regardless of how desirable they may be, are not impacted by divine intervention or random coincidence, but rather by circumstances that have been planned. The culmination of the karma that we have collected throughout the course of our history has finally arrived. As a consequence of this, the existence or absence of pleasure or pain is not dependent on the favorable or unfavorable instances that take place. If our present life is marked by spiritual enlightenment and direction from the Dharma, then our future will be distinguished by grandeur and calm. If the past has a substantial influence on our current existence, then our current existence will determine our future. Our joy and satisfaction stem from the fact that life is now available to each and every person. This is the root of our overall happiness.

Keeping a watchful eye on everything we do, say, and think is very necessary. It is necessary for us to have the capacity to self-regulate, which means that we must not only abstain from expressing destructive words or participating in bad conduct, but we must also refrain from letting such negativity to penetrate our most fundamental being. Even if it's simply a fleeting experience with a thought, sensation, or notion that is abhorrent from a fundamental moral standpoint. The phrase "purifying one's own mind" is used in Buddhism to describe the process of purifying and refining one's own ideas and awareness in order to attain a state of purity. A level of awareness, clarity, and the capacity to perceive the genuine essence of things can only be attained by a mind that is fully free of any and all forms of evil.

- **Expressed through relationships in life**

In order to describe human life and the universe in a way that is extremely scientific, the Buddhist Sutra system continuously depends on the concepts of dependent origination and selflessness. In order to provide evidence that all phenomena manifest themselves as a consequence of the conditions and causes that are present. Therefore, the existence of people, homes, and communities is not free from the ideas that have been discussed before. We are now shifting our emphasis to another realm, which is the question of what function Buddhist ethics may play and how it relates to the task of establishing a society that is virtuous. This is because we are considering the perspective of Buddhist ethics in terms of achieving personal pleasure and well-being.

An ideal society is one that not only respects the dignity of the person but also guarantees the preservation of basic human rights and opposes any kind of social privilege. Furthermore, it provides support and encouragement for all areas of the culture and civilization of the community. For a society to be considered perfect, the interpersonal ties that people have with one another must be marked by both virtue and a tremendous wealth of human love. The moral characteristics that were stated by the World-Honored One after more than two thousand five hundred years have not lost their actual importance.

⁶ "Karma" is Creation includes behavior, deeds, and volition from the body and mind. It may also refer to will-created activities. Karma, when combined with cause and effect, is the energy from past actions that continues into the future. Karma also includes the good and bad effects of one's actions, such as happiness or suffering. It also includes the belief in reincarnation in the past, present, and future. India and Buddhism employ karma to motivate people to achieve goals.

⁷ The Dhammapada, K.Sri Dhammananda, pp.342

⁸ Ibid, pp.276

- **Family ethics based on Buddhism**

Family is society's microcosm. To be happy, family members must completely embody and integrate Buddha's moral teachings and fulfill their tasks. Therefore, everyone must thoroughly identify and explain their roles and commitments according to the Buddha's teachings to sustain perfect home bliss. The Buddha recommended the following Dharma precepts for family happiness. In the Sigalaka Sutta (Advice to Lay People): "The six actions that lead to the loss of wealth are: excessive alcohol consumption, gambling, leading a dissolute lifestyle, being excessively passionate about music, associating with wicked individuals, and being lazy."⁹ The Buddha focused on family economics and wickedness that depleted riches. The following flaws are evaluated:

Alcohol has six bad effects: loss of property, sickness, disputes, general reputation harm, increased irritability, and a progressive drop in IQ.

Gambling has six errors. Depletion of assets; Winning causes animosity; Intelligent people find humor in circumstances; Lack of etiquette; keeping away from others; leading to stealing.

Six offenses are related with promiscuity: Self-care neglect; wealth loss. Cannot financially sustain children and grandchildren; often fear malevolence and suffering that would constrain the physical self; often lie.

Six mistakes make up a love of music: singing, dancing, being hooked to the enemy, loving spicy flute, wanting to play drums, and loving the trumpet.

Befriending evildoers leads to dislike, prefers secret places, attracts family, conspires to steal, makes money, and promotes indolence. Enjoys pointing out mistakes.

Laziness takes six forms: refusing to work when wealthy, impoverished, cold, hot, early morning, and evening.¹⁰

In the Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha was questioned about the specific practices that lead to present pleasure. In response, he mentioned four practices, namely resourcefulness, protection, cultivating positive relationships, and maintaining a comfortable dwelling environment. To be resourceful is to properly comprehend one's trade. It is essential for everyone to possess a career in order to earn a livelihood and excel in that chosen field. The second is protection, that is, you must carefully safeguard the assets you have gained from your labor in line with the law. The property generated by that dharma needs protection and vigilance, ensuring it remains unharmed by fire and unseized by corrupt successors. Being friends with goodness is being friends with people who have faith to learn faith, being friends with people with virtue to learn virtue, being friends with people who are diligent in giving alms to learn almsgiving, being friends with people who are intelligent. for intellectual learning. Living in harmony entails maintaining a surplus of income over expenses, adopting a moderate lifestyle, avoiding both excessive frugality and excessive extravagance, and striving for a well-balanced and harmonious existence. After acquiring property, the Buddha provided guidance on using it to cultivate pleasure and tranquility for oneself, one's spouse and children, those who serve, as well as friends and family. Possessing assets does not imply accumulating them just for the purpose of becoming wealthy, nor does it entail depriving oneself of sustenance in order to amass them. The Buddha advocated for the ethical use of wealth to foster personal and collective pleasure, therefore enabling society to mitigate prevalent issues such as corruption, injustice, and fraud.

- **Parent-child relationship**

This is a revered bond deserving of reverence. The essence of bowing is to recommit to actualizing the following principles: Parents nurture their children with the aim of providing them with a quality education. Upon reaching adulthood, I want to establish my residence in a location of high value and merit. As parents age, they transfer ownership of their assets to their offspring. Children exhibit deference and comply with the authority of their parents. Devote yourself to diligent academic pursuits. Assist parents as necessary. Provide diligent care for your parents throughout their elderly years. Adhere to norms and traditions while arranging the funeral for your parents.

- **Marital relationship**

Each husband is obligated to cherish his wife. Be faithful to his wife. Ensure that your material life is healthy. Pay homage to the family of your wife...

Having a loving and respectful relationship with her spouse like a wife does. A faithful wife to her husband. Effective management of the family unit. Effort should be made. Be kind to the members of your husband's family and friends.

- **Relationship between teacher and student**

The educator is able to communicate information to his students in an efficient manner. It is important to equip students with vocational training so that they may acquire the skills essential to find job and maintain their financial stability in their future efforts.

From the student to the instructor: Ensure that you study diligently and put in a lot of work. Make sure that you follow the directions that the teacher has provided. When it is required, provide assistance to the teacher.

⁹ Digha Nikaya – The Long Discourses of the Buddha, 31. Sigalaka Sutta – Advice to Lay People, A translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi, pp.461

¹⁰ Ibid..

- **Relationships with siblings and neighbors**

Even in the face of difficult situations, be sure to maintain your loyalty and commitment to one another. In times of sickness and difficulty, it is important to support one another.

- **Relationship between owner and worker**

Superior to subordinate: Compensate employees according to their job responsibilities. Periodically provide more incentives. Provision of medical care and assistance during illness.

Worker to owner: Devote yourself to your task with complete dedication. Faithful to the proprietor. Service characterized by integrity and truthfulness.

Throughout our lives, we find ourselves involved in several interconnected interactions. Hence, the manifestation of one's individuality via ethical conduct consistently has significant significance. In the aforementioned sutra text, Buddha imparted teachings on the essential ways that individuals must possess in order to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities within both their own lives and the larger social group. These social interactions are exemplary and ideal, with enduring significance. Over the course of more than 25 centuries, from the time of Buddha's appearance till the present, the Indian civilization has undergone significant changes. It is important to acknowledge and appreciate the enduring spirit of equality that transcends these historical shifts. The Buddha's teachings on social ties between individuals give rise to concepts of equality and humanity.

3. Buddhist ethics builds practical happiness for humanity

All ethical and equitable social interactions has inherent moral worth. However, the presence of morality is directly correlated with the presence of happiness. Morality is always present in the presence of delight. Morality and enjoyment are inherently intertwined, akin to the inseparability of water and milk. During the Buddha's lifetime, when the Vajji and Magadha Republics were on the brink of conflict, King Ajatasattva sent the esteemed minister Vassakara to speak with the Buddha. The Buddha responded indirectly by imparting the following teachings: "If a nation possesses the following seven qualities, it will experience a growth in population among both the young and the elderly, enjoy enduring peace, and remain impervious to invasion." Convene regularly to deliberate about political affairs; Emphasize reverence for authority, while acknowledging the need of yielding to others (to foster a sense of unity). It is crucial to consistently adhere to legal regulations, comprehend national restrictions, and exhibit courteous behavior (to honor cultural customs). Exhibit filial piety towards your parents and show deference towards your elders; Show reverence for temples, honor the presence of spirits and deities; One should strive to be sincere, untainted, and uncorrupted, even in the most lighthearted and casual interactions, refraining from any sexual desire (women and girls should remain chaste). It is important to show reverence and support to monks and others who adhere to moral principles, diligently safeguarding and never becoming weary of their well-being (similar to the duty of honoring Arhats).¹¹

The Buddha's teachings on the Vajji country embody the principles of equality, humanism, and democracy. The instruction continues to be an important and relevant lesson for contemporary individuals, society, and the country.

CONCLUSION

In the event that science is used for the purpose of achieving peace and improving the lives of all sentient beings, the current era would be free of conflicts, and people would not be willing to give their lives in order to achieve pragmatism a sense of right and wrong. When it comes to ethics, it is very necessary for people to regain their conscience. Buddhist ethics, which is based on humanistic principles and seeks to promote human well-being, provides a novel approach to the promotion of peace among individuals.

As a result, in the current global setting, Buddhism, which places a strong focus on humanistic ideals, functions as a guiding principle for social initiatives. The most effective method for individuals to protect their own enjoyment is to abstain from inflicting damage upon other people and to promote their moral principles to all humans and animals. It is necessary for everyone to constantly know that this is the most effective approach to protect their own happiness. It is of the utmost importance that we gain the information and skills necessary to live a life that is morally straight and simple, that we abandon our primitive cravings, and that we strive to live a life that is full of tranquility and virtue. Maintaining a morally upright way of life would unquestionably bring about a sense of personal fulfillment, in addition to being beneficial to one's family, society, and the whole of humanity in the current day.

References

-
1. Anguttara Nikaya, Raga Sutta (The Subduing of Pasion), Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1998.
 2. Andrew M Colman, Dictionary of Psychology (Oxford: Oxford University, 2001)
 3. Rahula, Walpola. 2006. The Buddha's Teachings (Nedimala, Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Centre)
 4. Nyanatiloka, and Nyanaponika Thera. The Buddhist Dictionary: A Guide to the Doctrine and Philosophies of Buddhism (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society), 2011.
 5. Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2007, Discourses on the views of the Brahmajāla Sutta on online forums and all commentaries (Buddhist Publications Association).
-

6. Samyutta Nikaya - Pali Text Society, edited by M.Leon Feer, Published for the Pali Text Society by Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press Warehouse, Amen Corner, E.C,1894.
7. Phillips, D.C, Philosophy of Education, In International Encyclopedia of Education, Torsten Husen and T.Neville Postlethwaite, 1985.
8. Rhys Davids, Buddhist Psychology: An Inquiry into the Analysis and Theory of Mind in Pali Literature, London:Luzac and Co, 1924
9. Earl V,Pullias and James D.Young, A Teacher is many things, fawcett Publication, Inc.1968.
10. Phillips, D.C, Philosophy of Education, In International Encyclopedia of Education, Torsten Husen and T.Neville Postlethwaite, 1985.