

Caring for Our Planet

Buddhism and the Environment



By the Venerable Bhikkhu Buddharakkhita

Foreword by Professor P.D Premsir

Caring for Our Planet:

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Bhikkhu Buddharakkhita

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| | |
|-----|--------------------------------|
| A | Aṅguttara Nikāya (PTS Edition) |
| D | Dīgha Nikāya (PTS Edition) |
| Dhp | Dhammapada |
| Jā | Jātaka |
| Khp | Khuddakapāṭha |
| M | Majjhima Nikāya (PTS Edition) |
| MN | Majjhima Nikāya |
| Pāc | Pācittiya Pāli |
| PTS | Pali Text Society |
| S | Samyutta Nikāya (PTS Edition) |
| SN | Samyutta Nikāya |
| Sg | Saṅghādisesa |
| Sk | Sekhiya |

The Buddha

The gift of the Dhamma exceeds all other gifts.
The flavor of the Dhamma exceeds all other flavors.
The delight in the Dhamma exceeds all other delights.

This Dhamma book is dedicated to the academic staff and non-academic staff of Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy, including but not limited to the following: Dr. Upali M. Sedere (Rector), Ven. Dr. Bhikkhu Analayo, Professor Frank J. Hoffman, Ven. Dr. Vaskaduve Suvimalee, Prof. P.D. Premasiri, Mr. A.B. Mediwake, Ms. H. Y. Dahanayake, Ms. Iromi Ariyaratne, Ms. Sajani Serasinghe, Ms. Buddhi Ariyaratne, Dr. Thurairajah Manoharan, Mr. Senadheera, Rev. Derangala Kusalagnana, Ven. Mahawela Rathanapala, Mr. Sarath Chandrasekara, Mr. J. Polgaspitiya, Ms. Mirani Werellagama, Ms. Naomi Subasinghe, and all visiting lecturers for their kindness and academic support.

May they attain true happiness, inner peace and *Nibbāna*
(final liberation).

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I am indebted to all of you.

May all beings attain true happiness, inner peace, and ultimate *Nibbāna* (ultimate liberation).

Venerable Buddharakkhita

Introduction

The modern world is in dire need of direct solutions to combat continued environmental degradation and exploitation. We can no longer afford to confront only the symptoms while leaving the disease uncured. In this booklet, I will attempt to summarize the ancient wisdom of the Buddha's teachings and show how Buddhist philosophy can help us protect and preserve our natural world.

In the ancient language of northern India, *Buddha* means 'awakened one'. The Buddha, who was born as Siddhattha Gotama, was deeply connected to the environment; *he was born under a tree, enlightened under a tree, and passed away into final Nibbāna under a tree. After his awakening he expressed great gratitude for the Bodhi tree that gave him shelter and shade while he strove in meditation. The Buddhist attitude towards the environment is one of stewardship, compassion, thankfulness, and restraint—you could call it green enlightenment!*

The Buddha's sublime set of teachings, known as the Noble Eightfold Path, is not only a guide to personal enlightenment but also a blueprint for a healthy and responsible relationship with our natural world. The purpose of this booklet is to demonstrate how Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration can help heal the planet. Climate change and ecological devastation can be addressed using the profound wisdom of the Enlightened One, the Buddha. Without skillful mind and wholesome action, we cannot hope to save this planet we call home.

This booklet consists of seven chapters. The first chapter, **'The Origins of the World: a Comparative Study'**, details the Buddhist understanding of the world's origin and offers a comparison with other religions and philosophies found around the world. The second chapter on the **'Five Natural Laws'** offers a description of the various laws and mechanisms that guide and control the environment, while the third chapter on 'The Four Wheels of Success : a Buddhist Perspective on Man and the Environment' shows how the two can interact in wholesome and unwholesome ways. The fourth chapter on **'Buddhist Moral Philosophy'** provides a Buddhist framework for ethical behavior and its application to environmental stewardship.

The fifth chapter, **'Ecological Aspects of Vinaya'**, illustrates how the rules of conduct for Buddhist monastics are based on an ethic of wise and responsible environmental interaction, and how such guidelines can be applied by anyone who wishes to improve their relationship with the natural world. The sixth chapter on the **'Ecological Aspects of Jātaka Tales'** discusses many tales of the Buddha's previous lives, highlighting the emphasis on non-violence and compassion that they demonstrate. Lastly, the seventh chapter deals with **'The Comparative Study of Selfless Love'** or loving kindness, an incredibly important aspect of a healthy physical, social, and mental environment. We cannot protect the world around us without first examining how we treat both ourselves and others.

We must remember our interconnection with and responsibility toward the world around us - the environment protects one who protects the environment! It is my hope that this booklet can help guide the reader towards a reverence for nature and provide insight into the loving and generous ways one

can relate to their social, spiritual, and physical environment. I sincerely hope that my efforts aid those who desire to set up a secure and firm foundation for cultivating virtue and harmony with other beings in the spirit of loving- kindness and compassion.

Venerable Bhikkhu Buddharakkhita
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May 6, 2014

Foreword

It is evident today humans have been compelled to think deeply about the environment for no other reason than that their actions and modes of living have caused considerable damage to the environment in which they live thereby endangering their own survival. Human behaviour which is not regulated by insight inevitably leads to disastrous consequences, and the current environmental crisis may be seen as one that exemplifies this.

The unwholesome psychological roots from which humans generally conduct themselves are, according to the teaching of the Buddha, greed, hatred, and delusion. These roots, if unchecked, have been operative in the past, are operative in the present, and will be operative in the future. The special danger in present circumstances is that humans have developed their technological skills to such unprecedented heights, enabling them to tread the path of effective self-destruction in attempting to act on the dictates of these unwholesome roots. Modern science and technology has equipped people with a certain kind of knowledge, but not with the kind of insight that gives them a world view, along with a system of ethical values, thereby leading to a desirable transformation of their behaviour.

Buddhism is relevant to problems relating to the environment precisely because the Buddhist worldview and the ethical values associated with it are conducive to the promotion of a highly desirable kind of interaction between humans and their environment. If we expect modern science and technology to find solutions to environmental crises, which really are a consequence of the misuse of the very skills that mankind has acquired through them, that expectation is bound to be

unfulfilled. The reason is that what we need at the present juncture not more scientific knowledge and technological skills, but wisdom that directs us on a path that helps us to use them in the best possible way for achieving human well-being. It is the lack of an awareness of the role that a sound philosophy of life, and a system of ethical ideals that adversely affect human well-being.

To remedy this situation Buddhism is undoubtedly resourceful for deriving such a philosophy of life along with a system of ethical values.

The philosophy of life represented in Buddhism denies that human happiness and well-being can be effectively achieved by striving endlessly to satisfy proliferating wants associated with material things that gratify the senses. Such an attitude leads inevitably to overexploitation of natural resources while irreparably harming our natural environment. Material goods, consumed without foresight and understanding, feed human greed, and the competition to acquire them feeds hatred. Greed and hatred are the root causes of conflict occurring at different levels of the social life of humans. The modern technology associated with war contributes to environmental damage caused by numerous activities associated with unrestrained desire for the production of material goods to satisfy proliferating human wants.

Buddhism teaches that the greatest wealth that human being can acquire is contentment. Buddhism also recognizes a wider realm of ethical relationships that includes, within the scope of ethics, the whole of nature. Ethical relationships are to be recognized not only between human, but also between

humans and the whole of nature. No part of nature is to be disenfranchised from the realm of moral relationships.

It is encouraging to see that in the present anthology of writings on Buddhism and the environment, an appreciable attempt has been made to highlight this philosophy of life and the ethical values contained in the ancient body of Buddhist wisdom. Where relevant, an attempt has also been made to draw comparisons with other systems of traditional religious wisdom with a view to revising those core values that mankind appears to be paying less heed to due to the impact of the development of the technocratic mentality of the present time.

I believe this anthology has the capacity to awaken us to the realities of the present predicament regarding the relationship of humans to our environment while educating us about the applicability of a body of ancient wisdom to the solution of the current social problems needing our urgent attention.

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The Origins of the World: a Comparative Study

Since the beginning of time many scientists, philosophers, and religious figures have been obsessed with the nature of man and the origin of the universe. Like all human societies throughout time that have put forward speculative theories and myths in order to answer this eternal question, so too does Buddhism have a rich collection of creation myths – although, as we'll see, these explanations are unique among most world religions.

Drawing from the Pāli canonical literature, the post-canonical literature, and other secondary sources, this chapter attempts to compare different theories regarding the creation of the universe posited by various religious traditions, as well as specific scientific theories. Such a comparative study is very important for gaining a deeper understanding of how different schools of thought address questions such as: Where did we come from? Where are we going? Does the universe have a beginning? Who created it? What was there before the universe? Was there a single beginning cause, or not? Furthermore, this

chapter will cover different religious concepts of eschatology, as well as scientific findings regarding evolution and human development. For the sake of clarity and contrast, the umbrella term of prophetic religion has been used to include all religions that believe in prophets and/or God as their creator. Islam, Judaism, and Christianity fall into this category, while non-prophetic religions include Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism do not.

In the Beginning: The Presence of Darkness

Most religious traditions, such as Christianity and Judaism, believe that there was total darkness at the beginning of the universe. According to the Christian Bible, God created the universe in six days: *“At the beginning, the God created the sky and the earth. At that time, the earth was empty, and it was dark and covered with a mass of water, and the spiritual soul of God moved through the water.”*¹

This passage offers a very close parallel with the Buddhist views of the presence of darkness and water in the evolution of the world, recorded in the Aggañña sutta of Dīgha Nikāya: *‘At that time, O Vāsettha, it was a mass of water and darkness. There appeared neither the sun, the moon, nor constellations, nor the stars. The night and day were not visible. Even the seasons were not known then.’*²

¹ *Holy Bible: New International Version*. Minto: The Bible Society in Australia, 2007. Genesis 1:7. p. 8.

² *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Trans. Maurice Walshe. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1987, 1995. p. 85. *“ekodakībhūtam kho pana, vāsettha, tena samayena hoti andhakāro andhakāratimisā. na candimasūriyā paññāyanti, na nakkhattāni tārakarūpāni paññāyanti, na rattindivā paññāyanti, na māsaddhamāsā paññāyanti, na utusavaccharā paññāyanti, ...* PTS:D.III.80

In addition, Islam also speaks of a primordial darkness. In the Islamic holy book, the Qur'an, it is said: '*Then He directed Himself to the heaven while it was smoke and said to it and to the earth, 'Come (unto being) willingly or compulsion.'*'¹³ In Islamic theology, the earth, and heaven above, were formed from this same smoke, suggesting a lack of clear space. The world was obscured by smoke. Interestingly, the presence of smoke in the beginning of the universe finds support with the science of modern cosmology. According to experts in the field, '*At one point in time, the whole universe was nothing but a cloud of 'smoke' (i.e. an opaque, highly dense, and hot gaseous composition).*'¹⁴

Greek Philosophical Views

The question of the first element which brought about the universe was a major preoccupation for many ancient Greek philosophers. Prior to Thales, most people believed in Greek gods and goddess, and the general consensus was that the gods had a hand in the creation of the universe. Considered to be the father of western philosophers, Thales had the view that everything was instead made of water. According to the Philosophy Book, '*The idea that everything in the universe can be ultimately reduced to a single substance is the theory of monism...Thales reasoned that the fundamental material of the universe had to be something out of which everything else could be formed, as well as being essential to life, and capable of motion and therefore change.*'⁵

³ *The Qur'an*. Riyadh: Al-Muntada Al-Islami Trust, 2001-2010. p. 474.

⁴ Ibrahim, I.A. *A brief illustrated guide to understanding Islam*. Houston: Darussalam, 1997. p.14.

⁵ Buckingham, Will. *The Philosophy Book*. New York: DK Publishing, 2011.

However, another Greek philosopher, Anaximander, opposed Thales on the grounds that water was limited and the universe was unlimited. How could a limited cause have an unlimited effect? To Anaximander the world is boundless, and therefore the first cause should be boundless. It seems later that philosopher Anaximenes was not fully convinced about the earlier findings of his predecessor; he propounded the view that air was the first element. Another philosopher, Heraclitus, disagreed with him, arguing that fire was the first element. He was the first philosopher to introduce the concept of impermanence.

Being a great mathematician, Pythagoras maintained that the first element in the universe was numbers. Again, according to the Philosophy Book, *'Pythagoras has now proved not only that the structure of the universe can be explained in mathematical terms - 'number is the ruler of forms' - but also that acoustics is an exact science, and numbers governs harmonious proportions.'*⁶ He also believed in the concept of rebirth.

Unconvinced by the earlier findings of his predecessors, Empedocles maintained that the four elements of fire, water, air, and earth were the first elements in the universe. There are two other Greek philosophers, Democritus and Leucippus, who thought the universe to be made of atoms. They developed the first atomic theory, which now underlies much of modern science: *'The theory that Democritus and Leucippus devised offered the first complete mechanical view of the universe, without any recourse to the notion of a god or gods.'*⁷

⁶ Buckingham, 29.

⁷ Ibid., p. 43.

Yet Anaxagoras maintained that the first element in the universe was '*Nous*', meaning 'universal mind'. The last three of the twelve Pre-Socratic philosophers, namely Zeno, Parmenides, and Xenophanes, thought that the first element in the universe was '*being*'. The Greek philosophers contributed many ideas about the origin of the universe, some invoking God and others existing on purely mechanical systems.

The Creator of the Universe

Most of the Abrahamic religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, believe that God was the creator of the universe. In Islam there is nothing in this world which is not the handwork of God, Allah. The Qur'an states [39:5], '*He (Allah) created the Heaven and Earth in Truth. He wraps the night over the day and wraps the day over night and has subjected the sun and the moon, each running (its course) for a specified term.*'⁸ This passage highlights the power God has over His creation. This concept of God as the ultimate power that moves universal events is common in prophetic religions. In Christian religious tradition, God created the universe in six days, resting on the seventh.

The procedure appears in the order, according to the book of Genesis in the Holy Bible⁹: On first day, he created Day and Night; on the second day, he created the Sky; on third day, he created the Earth and Sea as well as vegetation; on the fourth, he created the Moon (small light) for night, and the Sun (large light) for day; on the fifth day, he created fish, aquatic animals, and

⁸ Qur'an, p. 455.

⁹ Holy Bible, Genesis 1:7 p.8.

birds; on sixth day, he created quadrupeds, reptiles, and Man and Woman; finally, on seventh day, Sunday, he rested. For this reason, it is called the Sabbath, or day of rest.

Similarly, this order of creation appears in Islam, albeit not in a systematic manner like in the Holy Bible. According to the Holy Qur'an, *'It is He who created the night and the day, and the sun and the moon; all (heavenly bodies) in an orbit are swimming.'*

This concept of God as an almighty creator brings to light important questions, many of which theologians throughout time have dedicated serious scholarship towards. Many wonder who, or what, is responsible for the creation of God Himself, and, if He is uncreated, why the universe could not also be uncreated. Others have worried that a Being powerful enough to create the entire universe, an act that is literally incomprehensible for human beings, would be impossible for humans to even comprehend.

Buddhism offers a different view of creation. To the Buddha, the question of the nature and extent of the world is not only epistemologically meaningless, but also pragmatically irrelevant. Refusing to focus on speculative questions, he maintained that his teaching has only one taste: that of freedom. Questions that did not aid in the quest for freedom¹⁰

¹⁰ *Seyyāthā pi mahāsamuddo ekaraso lonaraso, evam eva kho ayam dhammavinayo ekaraso vimuttiraso.* - Vin.II.237

from suffering were rejected.¹¹ The Buddha specifically stated that questions about the origin of universe did not lead to peace, and final awakening: enlightenment.

However, on many occasions, the Buddha did meet with Brahmins who had fixed ideas about the creator of the universe. Consequently, he attempted to explain what could be referred to as the 'relative origin' of the universe. In the Aggañña sutta, there is no mention about the ultimate first beginning of universe, but instead an explanation of the evolution of the world and society. It is laid out in four periods: a period of contraction; a period of expansion; the descent of beings from the Ābhassara Brahma realm; and a period of natural environmental development. The Buddhist conception of the world's beginning lacks any concept of God as a creator, or sustainer.

These periods define the beginning and end of a world cycle, but not the ultimate start, or end, of the cosmos itself; a question that the Buddha emphatically rejected as inherently

¹¹ Cūḷamālūṅkya sutta [MN 63]. PTS: M.I.426: These positions that are undeclared, set aside, discarded by the Blessed One –

- i. The cosmos is eternal (*sassato loko itipi*)
- ii. The Cosmos is not eternal (*asassato loko itipi*)
- iii. The Cosmos is finite (*antavā loko itipi*)
- iv. The cosmos is infinite (*anantavā loko itipi*)
- v. The soul and the body are the same
- vi. The soul is one thing and the body another
- vii. After death a Tathāgata exists
- viii. After death a Tathāgata does not exist
- ix. After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist
- x. After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist

unknowable. According to the Acintita Sutta¹², the Buddha advised that one should not spend time contemplating the origin of the universe. Unlike his contemporaries, the Buddha was more concerned with the practical path to liberation, rather than empty philosophical speculation.

Interestingly, the Jain philosophy bears some similarities with Buddhism regarding the absence of a creator, and the indiscernible beginning of the world. According to Masih. Y, '*Jains believe that the world is eternal and did not have any beginning.*'¹³ Hindus also take this world to be cyclical in nature, but ultimately eternal. They believe, again according to Masih.Y, '*There is a periodic creation and also a periodic dissolution.*'¹⁴ Such ideas bear some similarities to the Buddhist concept of world cycles.

Creation of the Universe in Hindu Mythology

Based on the Ṛg Veda, the Hindu sacred and authoritative text, the environment has divine power. Like any other creation story, the Hindu explanation is filled with myth and legend. According to Puruṣa Sūkta, an element of the world is a being named *Puruṣa*. The gods offered *Puruṣa* as a sacrificial offering, and as a result of that sacrifice the world was created. The Ṛg

¹² Acintita Sutta (PTS: A 4.77):

“Conjecture about [the origin, etc., of] the world is an unconjecturable that is not to be conjectured about, that would bring madness and vexation to anyone who conjectured about it.

“*Lokacintā bhikkhave acinteyyā na cintetabbā, yam cinto ummāda vighātassa bhāgī assa.*”

¹³ Masih, Y. *A Comparative Study of Religion*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1990. p. 64.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

Veda holds that absolute reality is both imminent and transcendent: '*A thousand heads had Puruṣa , a thousand eyes, a thousand feet; He holding earth enclosed about, extends beyond, ten fingers length.*'¹⁵ Furthermore, Puruṣa was made of pure splendor; all human beings were made from a quarter of him, and immortals in heaven are of the remaining three quarters.

Before sacrificing, three-quarters of him were raised from the earth. As the gods were cutting Puruṣa into pieces, the natural environment of the world was created by different parts of his body. When the gods spread the sacrifice, Spring was the ceremonial clarified butter, Summer was the fuel, and Autumn was the oblation. From that sacrifice, in which everything was offered, the clarified butter was obtained, and they made it into birds of the air and beasts of the Earth. Horses, pigs, sheep, and cows were born from the verses and meters used in sacrificial chants.

Finally, there was a dismembering of the Adhi Puruṣa into many parts. From his mouth, the Brahmins arose; from the shoulders, the Khattiyas; from his thighs, the Vessas; and from his feet, the Suddas. These body parts represent the social classification of people according to Vedic school of thought. Furthermore, from his mind, the moon arose; from his eyes, the sun; from his mouth, the Indra (lightning or thunder), and the Agni (fire); from his breath, the air; from his navel, the atmosphere; from his head, the sky; from his feet, the earth; and from his ears, the directions arose.

¹⁵ Rg Veda. X. 90. 1

Scientific Universe

Scientific examination has led to the formation of many different theories regarding cosmology and the ultimate nature of the universe. Like Buddhism, these theories focus on natural laws and mechanisms instead of the intervention of any Gods.

In regards to the origin of the universe, the universally accepted theory is known as the Big Bang Theory. This theory states: *'The present universe came into being from a point called a 'singularity'...at the beginning, this singularity exploded causing universe to expand.'*¹⁶ This theory does not make any solid claims about the ultimate destiny of our universe; one of the most commonly accepted scientific theories regarding this unanswered question is known as the expanding universe theory. According to Einstein and his General Theory of Relativity, the world came into being due to expansion. He maintained that because *'the universe is expanding...All the stars and galaxies will eventually die.'*¹⁷ Einstein's theory was supported by scientists using Hubble's Law to measure the rate of expansion of the universe. The expanding universe theory maintains that all celestial bodies are moving away from each other and creating empty space around them.

However, this theory cannot predict whether or not the universe will expand forever. Another possibility is the Steady State Theory, which states: *'Although the universe is expanding, it*

¹⁶ Ibid.,p. 234.

¹⁷ Dhammadassi, Bhikkhu, and Kenneth B. Gunatunge. *What is Reality? (A compendium of Scientific Discovery and The Buddha's Discovery)*. Colombo: Authors, 2010. p. 116.

*does not change its overall outlook over time.*¹⁸ Because this theory does not posit a general beginning, or end, to the universe, it is similar to both Buddhism and Jainism.

Other scientists believe in what is sometimes known as the Many Bangs Theory, which states: 'When the right conditions are present, there can be many mini-bangs: where another mini-universe can be formed.'¹⁹ This conception of multiple universes is based on the Multiverse Theory, which states that the Big Bang was simply the creation of one universe in a 'multiverse' of huge numbers of disconnected separate universes. According to the theory, *'instead of one singularity, there may be many which give rise to different universes.'*²⁰ It could be that these many different universes are what ancient Buddhist texts refer to as 'other realms of existence.'

Another interesting idea that is becoming popular is the Cyclical Model. Based on the most recent modern science and Quantum Physics, the theory suggests the universe undergoes expansion and contraction in an endless cycle.²¹ This theory argues that the Big Bang will lead to a Big Crunch, where the universe contracts back into a singularity until it explodes once again. This model is very similar to the traditional Buddhism, Jain, and Hindu conceptions of the cosmos.

Evolution of Species: The Creation of Human Beings

Exactly how human beings came to be is an important question in both science and religion. In Islamic theology,

¹⁸ Ibid.,p. 236.

¹⁹ Ibid.,p. 237.

²⁰ Ibid.,p. 237.

²¹ Ibid.,p. 237.

mankind was created by God. For Muslims, praying five times a day is mandatory in order to praise God for his creation, and to ask for forgiveness. Prayer is one of the five pillars in Islam. The Qur'an clearly states, *'O Mankind! Worship your Lord, who created you and those who came before you, that you may become righteous.'*²² Christians similarly believe that God is the creator of human beings, having created man in his own image. The first man, Adam, was created from dust. The first woman, Eve, was then created from his rib. According to the Bible, all humans are descendants of Adam and Eve.

In almost all prophetic religions man is the highest creation of God. Other lower creations, such as animals, trees, and insects, are made for man; however, God still holds ultimate power over all of them. According to the Qur'an, *'Allāh begins creation; then He will repeat it; then to him you will be returned.'* Therefore, Islamic theology suggests that death is, in some sense, a 'returning' to God.

In Buddhist philosophy, human beings were not created by God, but instead driven through dependent origination based on craving. According to the Buddhist creation myth, beings were at one point mind-made (*manomayā*), living in the *Ābhasara* Brahma world as the world began to expand. After feasting on the delicious earth, they began to grow coarse and with physical bodies, having lost their luminosity due to the impurity of their craving.

Scientifically, Charles Darwin claimed that natural selection is the scientific basis for the evolution and

²² Holy Qur'an, 2:21 p.4.

diversification of species. Darwinists assert the notion of survival of the fittest: whereby those who develop advantageous genetic mutations outlive their competitors to pass on their genes to a new generation. As Weerasinghe puts it, *'The problem of the mechanism of evolution is to find a theory that can explain evolution, one that can explain adaptation, and one that fits the facts of heredity. The one which passes all three tests according to the scientific establishment is natural selection.'*²³ By demonstrating this mechanism, Charles Darwin showed that all species, including humans, had not been separately created but instead descended from common ancestors.

In addition to general questions regarding the origin of human life, many religious and scientific explanations exist for the development of specific human traits from conception onwards. The Qur'an elaborated on the process of human embryonic development: *'We created man from an extract of clay. Then placed him as a sperm-drop (a zygote) in a firm lodging (the womb). Then we made the sperm drop into a clinging clot, and we developed the clot into a lump (of flesh), and we made (form) the lump, bones, and we covered the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation. So blessed is Allāh, the best creator.'*²⁴

However, Buddhist accounts offer a very practical biological process that has nothing to do with God. The Buddha said there are three conditions which have to be present for conception to take place: First, the mother-to-be must be fertile;

²³ Weerasinghe, Mahinda. *The Origin of Species According to the Buddha: The Sensory Becoming*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publication, 2007. p.124.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 327.

second, sperm must be present; and third, the *gandhaba* (a being to be born) must be present. Human beings are not created by God, but instead through a natural biological process.²⁵

Other World Systems

Although the Buddha rarely engaged in speculation regarding the nature of the universe itself, he sometimes acknowledged the existence of other world systems. He mentioned in one passage, 'A thousand times the world, in which the sun and moon revolve and light up the quarters with their brightness, is called a thousand-fold minor world system(*cūlanikā lokadhātu*).'²⁶ The Buddha went on to define a medium-sized(*majjhimikā lokadhātu*)world system comprised of a thousand minor world-systems, and the major world (*mahāsahassī lokadhātu*) system comprised of a thousand medium-sized world systems.

²⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñāṇamoli (MN 20: Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta, p.358)

²⁶ *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012. (Abhibhu Sutta 80, p. 313.)

Yāvata ānada candimasuriyā pariharanti, disā bhanti virocana, tāva sahasadhā loko. Tasmim sahasadhā loka sahasam candānam, sahasam suriyānam, sahasam sinerupabbatarājānam, sahasam jambudīpānam, sahasam aparagoyānānam, sahasam uttarakurūnam, sahasam pubbavidehānam, cattāri mahāsamuddasahasāni, cattāri mahārājasahasāni, sahasam cātummahārājikānam, sahasam tāvatimsānam, sahasam yāmānam sahasam tusitānam, sahasam nimmānaratīnam, sahasam paranimmitavasavattīnam, sahasam brahmalokānam. Ayam vuccatānanda sahasī cūlanikā lokadhātu.– PTS: A.I.126

According to the Theravada tradition, there exist thirty-one Planes of Existence. First, there is the Sense-Sphere Realm, named so because the most common experience is that of sensuality. Secondly, Hell forms the lowest realm in this system, but humans and animals find themselves in the Sense-Sphere Realm as well. Above the Hell realm lies the Form Realm, consisting of sixteen planes of existence. One can live in this realm for a maximum life span of up to sixty-four years. Thirdly, the Formless Realm, where beings have no physical bodies, consists of four planes of existence. The maximum lifespan of being there is eighty-four thousand eons.²⁷ This cosmology serves both as a practical way of organizing different beings as well as a powerful metaphorical and literary tool for expressing the nature of various spiritual states.

Conclusion: The End of the World

To those who believe in a final end to existence the fear of impending Armageddon can be intense. The prophetic religions, especially Christianity and Islam, preach a violent and destructive cataclysm through which God destroys sin and comes to rule the universe directly. Many believe this will occur in the near future, but theologians from these religions have been predicting such events repeatedly since the time of Christ and Muhammad himself!

²⁷ *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: An Anthology of Suttas from the Anguttara Nikāya*. Trans. Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1999. p.16.

In contrast, Hinduism teaches that there will not be any ultimate end for the universe: *'The cycle of creation and dissolution [is] without a final end... In fact, the Jains and Mimamsakas teach the eternity of the world.'*²⁸ Buddhism also teaches that there will be no final end to the universe, only cycles of expansion and contraction that continue indefinitely. Many scientists teach this as well, although others believe that the universe will lose all heat and enter into what is known as 'heat death.' Still others think that the universe will be violently ripped apart as the very atoms that we are made from fall apart!

It is quite clear that different religions, scientific theories, and philosophies have wildly differing views on where this world came from, and where it is going; however all of these ideas are meaningful attempts to explain the fundamental mystery that human beings are confronted with regarding their origins. Buddhism has many answers to these questions as well, but the Buddha is unique among world religious figures for his emphasis on dealing with pragmatic, personal discovery instead of meaningless speculation and theorizing.

²⁸ Masih, p. 151.

II

The Five Natural Laws

Let me recount a story I once heard: Long ago in India, there was an old sage well known for his profound wisdom. One day, two women came to him with a newborn child, each one claiming that the baby was theirs.

'This child is mine!' shouted the first woman.

'No, she is a thief!' cried the second woman. 'He's mine!'

The wise man did not speak, but instead drew a line in the dirt below him and sat the baby along it. The sage told each woman to grab one of the child's arms and pull. The one who could drag the baby over to her side would be declared the mother and allowed to take the child home.

As the women pulled, the baby began to cry. The second woman immediately let go, in tears herself, but the first woman

did not stop. She pulled the child to her side and shouted that the baby was hers.

'No!' the sage replied. 'You are not the mother!' The first woman stared at him in confusion and began to protest, claiming that she had won the contest fairly and deserved the child. But the sage shook his head. 'The second woman could not bear to see the baby hurt, so she let him go. This is the compassion of a mother. But you just saw the child as an object, something to win. You showed no love. How could you be a mother?' And so, with a smile, the wise man returned the child to his real mother.²⁹

As human beings, we can learn much from this story. We fight over our Earth, treating it as an object to be used instead of a living thing to be respected and cared for. In our quest to lay ownership to the resources of this planet, we hurt the world around us like the woman who violently pulls the child to her side. However, just as the child truly found its home in the arms of the woman unable to harm it, this Earth truly belongs not to those who can wrestle it into submission, but instead to all who treat it with compassion and respect.

Environment and Natural Laws

In Buddhist philosophy, the name for the physical world, *loka*, also refers to the physical and mental nature of human beings. Whereas many Western concepts consider man to be *in* the world, the Buddha's teachings consider human beings to be

²⁹ Zangpo, Shebphen, and Francis Huang. *Sangha Talk English Conversation Textbook for the Buddhist Sangha*. Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2002.p. 43.

inseparable from the natural world. Much like a coin, human beings are separate from, but still part of their larger environment.

According to I. Ariyaratne³⁰ our environment is three-fold: Physical, mental, and social. Examples of our physical environment are well known –the flora and fauna, the surrounding terrain, climate, and other natural elements of the physical world. Our mental environment includes the conditions that either help, or hinder, intellectual, spiritual, religious, and ethical development. Finally, our social environment is defined by our relationship with other humans, as well as the larger community around us. In addition to these three environments, ancient Buddhist commentaries break up their functions into five groups of natural laws:³¹ Physical, or inorganic laws, organic laws, moral laws, psychological laws, and causal laws.

***Utu Niyāma* and *Bīja Niyāma* – Organic and inorganic physical laws**

The first two of the natural laws describe how physical things, including the four elements of fire, water, earth, and air, can interact. Things like climate, seasonal changes, natural disasters, and other purely physical systems fall into this category,

³⁰ Suvimalee, Bhikkhuni, Wie Ming, Iromi Ariyaratne, and Hasanthi Dahayake. *Sri Lanka International Journal of Buddhist Studies*. Vol. 1. Kandy: SIBA-DCI Research Centre, 2010.p. 240.

³¹ *The Atthasālinī: Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Dhammasaṅgani* . Ed. Edward Muller. London: The Pali Text Society, 1897. p. 272.
Imasmim pana thāne pañcavidhaniyāmam nāma ganhimsu bījaniyāmam utuniyāmam kammaniyāmam dhammaniyāmam cittaniyāma ti.

along with the plant life that we depend on to survive. Together, these laws not only guide our physical environment, but also have a huge impact on our social and mental environments as well. Climate can affect the way people structure their communities and even influence our psychological health. Countries in colder, darker areas of the world often have much higher suicide rates. In addition, we depend heavily on things like the ozone layer that keeps us safe from harmful rays of the sun, or the forests that purify our air. While physical laws are only one part of the larger Buddhist understanding of the world, they are very important!

Physical laws are often the easiest to understand, but they also bring great suffering when they are ignored. Whenever human beings exploit the natural world through irresponsible and dangerous practices like overfishing, deforestation, and environmental contamination, we break these laws. Often the results are famine, drought, and irreversible ecological devastation.

Seeing man's ability to do great harm to the world, the Buddha offered wise advice for dealing with nature, advising his monks: *'Just as a bee gathers honey from the flower without injuring its color or fragrance, even so, the sage goes on his alms round in the village.'*³² The bee needs the flower to make its food, and yet it does so without hurting the flower. In fact, the bee cross-pollinates the flower in the process; both the bee and the flower benefit. In the same way, human beings should earn their wealth without harming and exploiting the physical environment.

³² *The Dhammapada*. Trans. Achariya Buddhārakkhita. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007. (Verse 49, p. 33)

Kamma Niyāma – Moral Laws

Moral laws, sometimes referred to collectively as the law of kamma (or karma), are the laws that govern the potential results of our actions. Simply put, our kamma is the sum of all our actions. When we act in ways that hurt the world, we commit bad kamma and must deal with the results; when we act with kindness and wisdom, we generate good kamma and enjoy the benefits both in the present and future.

Selfishness and greed are unwholesome states of mind that lead to great suffering in our world. When we act out these desires, we bring great unwholesome kamma to ourselves. When we see our lakes and rivers polluted, and our forests burned down, that is due to our past kamma – the actions we took to contaminate and destroy. Civil war, ethnic conflict, and even genocide are all horribly negative actions, and the kamma that comes from them is terrible. Many innocent civilians have lost their lives and property because of ignorant people acting in ways that produce terrible, terrible kamma. Racism, intolerance, bigotry, and fundamentalism are all caused by ignorant and unwholesome mind states; those who engage in them reap terrible suffering for themselves and others.

However, when we resolve to act in ethical ways, we enjoy a peace that follows us like a shadow. Generosity, universal compassion, and wisdom all lead to skillful action, which in turn bring us great kamma. The responsible use of resources is good kamma for us and all beings, and we all enjoy the results. If we understand the law of kamma, seeing it not as a fatalistic system of punishment and reward, but instead as a natural law that brings good things from good action and bad things from bad

action, we can work together to behave in ways that are skillful and constructive.

Citta Niyāma – Psychological Laws

The Citta Niyāma are the laws that govern our minds, as opposed to our bodies. The processes of consciousness, sensation, thought, and focus are all governed by these laws, which help us comprehend and make sense of the outside world. The six senses³³ – sight, taste, touch, smell, sound, and mind – are linked to their respective sense objects; just like you need a match and a striking pad to make a flame, you need an object in the world and one of your senses to make sense-consciousness. From these contacts, all mental objects arise.

Understanding and respecting our psychological laws can create both superb mental health, as well as a healthy social environment. Those who fill their minds with thoughts of good will, generosity, kindness, and restraint, add a great deal of security and stability to their communities. According to M. Emoto,³⁴ positive thinking might even affect the formation of physical things like ice crystals!

³³ PTS: M.III.216

Salāyatana: (Salāyatanavibhanga sutta MN 137)
cakkhāyatanaṃ sotāyatanaṃ ghāṇāyatanaṃ jivhāyatanaṃ kāyāyatanaṃ manāyatanaṃ. Give rise to:
rūpāyatanaṃ saddāyatanaṃ gandhāyatanaṃ rasāyatanaṃ phoṭṭhabbāyatanaṃ dhammāyatanaṃ

³⁴ Emoto, Masaru. *The Hidden Message in Water*. Oregon: Beyond Words Publications, 2004. p. 4.

Dhamma Niyāma - Causal laws

The causal laws guide the interaction between all other laws, linking them in a complex web of codependent arising and ceasing. For example, cutting down forests may lead to the arising of poor air quality, which leads to the arising of sickness and discomfort. On the other hand, a kind deed towards a neighbor may lead to the arising of thoughts of kindness and compassion, which can in turn lead to the arising of a healthy and vibrant community. Through an understanding of the causal laws that guide our interaction with the world, we can come to act in wise and productive ways, always knowing the consequences of our action and working towards creating conditions for the arising of a safe and loving world.

The Dhamma itself is the natural law that links us with everything else that exists in the natural world. Because of this unending chain of cause and effect, we are not isolated beings independent from other people, but instead just small parts of a larger world in which the entirety of existence is reflected. Knowing this with wisdom and direct experience helps us treat our natural world with tender care, boundless loving-kindness, and deep compassion.

Conclusion

Organic, inorganic, moral, psychological, and causal laws together guide the universe and everything in it, connecting all things in a large web of cause and effect. If we understand this truth deeply and directly, we can begin to act in ways that are in tune with these natural laws. If we are ever going to live in harmony with nature, we must banish our excessive greed and selfish desire

and invite generosity, cooperation, and contentment with what is suitable, available, and within our means. If we are ever going to create healthy and just societies, we must abandon hatred and cruelty and embrace universal love, tolerance, forgiveness, and compassion for all beings. And most importantly, if we are ever going to bring about spiritual growth and development in our individual hearts and minds, we must cast out our ignorance and delusion and realize the truth of our own interconnectedness. Through our universal responsibility, we can *save* our planet, *heal* our communities, and *transform* our minds.

As I started with a small story, I will end with a short saying. 'Just take the *h* in '*heart*' and move it to the end. You'll get *Earth*.' Our heart is connected to our Earth! Let us protect our Mother Nature and preserve her as we would preserve the most precious part of our bodies. It is not too late. The best time to take action is now! You and I are responsible for the destiny of our Mother Earth, and for creating a world of compassion.

III

The Four Wheels of Success: a Buddhist Perspective on the Relationship between the Man and Environment³⁵

The term *environment* is a very broad concept, including everything both physical and non-physical that we encounter in our daily life. It includes both natural and non-natural phenomena, as well as, and perhaps most importantly, the interaction between the two. According to I. Ariyaratne,³⁶

'Human relationships, being dependent on the environment, occur through the following three factors: Namely, physical environment, mental environment, and social environment.'

³⁵ PTS: [Cakka Sutta] A4.31

Katamāni cattāri? Patirūpadesavāso, sappurisupassayo, attasammāpanidhi, pubbe ca katapuññatā.

³⁶ Ariyaratne, Iromi, et al. p. 240.

This definition fits well with one of the Buddha's most valuable discourses, the Discourse on the Four Wheels of Success.³⁷ Discussing strategies for spiritual growth, the Buddha states: *'Monks, there are these four wheels, possessed of which on devas and mankind there rolls a four-wheeled prosperity: possessed of which both devas and mankind in no long time attain greatness and increase in propensity. What are the four? They are: dwelling in a fitting place, association with the worthy ones, and perfect application of oneself, and merits done aforetime...'* These "four wheels," which the Buddha refers to as the greatest blessing, are noteworthy not only for their wise advice, but also for their relation to the Ariyaratne's three factors of an environment; the first three of the Buddha's four wheels – dwelling in a fitting place, association with the worthy ones, and perfect application of oneself – encapsulate, respectively, one's physical, social, and mental environment.

Residing in a suitable place

The first wheel, one's physical environment, refers to the climate and terrain as well as man-made objects that one is surrounded by. The four requisites: food, clothing, shelter, and medicine, are aspects of this environment. Seeing how important one's relationship with his or her surroundings is, the Buddha laid down practical and compassionate guidelines relating to the wise use of resources. For instance, monastics are encouraged to never consume food for enjoyment or sensual pleasure, but instead to only take that which is needed for their health. The Buddha also advised his monks not to eat after noon, making sure that they

³⁷ *Anguttara Nikāya: The book on the Gradual Sayings*. Trans. F.L. Woodward. Vol. II. London: Pali Text Society, 1973. p.35.

would neither exhaust their supporters nor overeat. The Buddha encouraged modesty in food consumption by admonishing his followers not to fill their stomachs, but instead to leave four mouthfuls of space to later fill with water.

These teachings show us that we have the duty to develop and maintain our environment with which we share such an intimate bond. The thoughtless and greedy exploitation of our surroundings through industrial pollution and over-farming have led to serious damage to the balance of our planet. Through climate change and ecological devastation our actions have come back to threaten us as well. This should not come as a surprise to those who know the Buddha's teachings; in many discourses, he emphasized the idea that we will be protected and supported by nature only if we protect and support it.

To help us develop a compassionate and wise relationship with the world around us, the Buddha developed the five precepts, the training rules that all Buddhists take in order to better themselves and their environment. The first precept, the precept against taking life, allows us to form a kind and trusting bond with those around us while preventing the needless destruction of flora and fauna. Monastics are even forbidden from digging holes or cutting down trees! In the same vein, the second precept, which forbids the taking of what is not ours, allows us to develop contentedness and generosity; without these valuable attitudes it is all too easy for people to overuse and exploit the natural world.

A suitable environment also refers to a place where the Buddha's teachings are flourishing, or a place we, virtuous monks, nuns, lay men and women may be found. Such a suitable place

helps us to practice generosity (*dāna*), ethical conduct (*sīla*), and mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) without distractions. For this reason, most Buddhist meditation centers are constructed either in, or near, a forest so as to allow for the peaceful and productive flourishing of the Dhamma. The construction of a dedicated and wise community leads to the second wheel: one's social environment.

Association with the wise

In the Pāli language, the second wheel is defined as, '*Asevanā ca bālānaṃ paṇḍitānaṃ ca sevanā*.'³⁸ Put simply, this means avoiding association with unskillful, untrained, or uninstructed people, and associating with skillful, trained, or instructed people. Those in the first category, who are often referred to in the Pāli Canon as 'fools,' are those who think, speak, and act in a way that leads to both their suffering and the suffering of others. The wise person is one who thinks, speaks, and acts in a way that leads to happiness. It is important to remember that avoiding association with fools doesn't mean rejecting anyone outright, or looking down on people with derision. Instead, it means interacting with people in a skillful and compassionate way, making sure to avoid their negative influence and teaching the Dhamma when it may be helpful. Non-association is a wise psychological distance and not any kind of rude, or condescending, physical separation.

As we search for those who are wholesome creators of happiness, we must also remember to cultivate in ourselves the wise intentions that attract others to us. With a mind of

³⁸ PTS: Khp.I.3

generosity, loving kindness, and intelligent discernment, we can be sure that the company of other skillful beings will find us. As Professor Dhammakosajarn³⁹ has pointed out, '*To be associated with good people is to search for such a good social environment.*' The Buddha himself told his disciple Ananda that good friendship, good companionship, and good comradeship was 'the entire spiritual life,' continuing, '*When a monk has a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate the Noble eightfold path.*'⁴⁰ On another occasion, the Buddha told his disciple Meghiya that admirable friends and companions were capable of bringing an immature person to greater spiritual development.⁴¹ This clearly shows that, as a suitable physical environment leads to a constructive social environment, so too does a constructive social environment lead to a healthy mental environment.

Perfect Application of Oneself

The perfect application of oneself refers to a wholesome mental environment where a person is able to make all the effort necessary for spiritual development. A mental environment includes a person's perceptions and experiences pertaining to any particular other environment. In the Buddhist post-canonical

³⁹ Dhammakosajarn, Bhikkhu. *Dhamma and Environment Preservation*. Ayutthaya: Mahachulalongkornvidyala University, 2011. p. 7.

⁴⁰ *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*. Trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000. (p. 1543, The Discourse on Spiritual Friendship.)
"Kalyānamittassetam, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno pātikankham - ariyam atthangikam maggam bhāvēssati, ariyam atthangikam maggam bahulīkarissati."

⁴¹ PTS: A.IV.354

literature, a physical environment such as a forest, the root of a tree, or an empty hut is correlated with a corresponding mental environment, such as peacefulness, or wisdom. Moreover, in many discourses the Buddha explicitly instructs his disciples to find a suitable place for meditation before attempting mindfulness with breathing: '*...Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or a root of a tree or an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established in mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out...*'⁴²

With the presence of a favorable physical environment, and a suitable social environment, it is very easy to cultivate and purify the mind. However, when we live without wise or spiritual friends, surrounded by the unwholesome or distracting, our mind will lose its ability to be tamed. In this way, the first two wheels of success support and encourage the third, allowing us to have a secure and healthy base for our spiritual lives. When we have these things, we can set ourselves on the right path towards spiritual development. This path is the Noble Eightfold Path, which the Buddha called, 'the Middle Path which the Perfect One rediscovered and expounded, which gives rise to vision and

⁴² Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñānamoli (MN 10: Mahāsatipatthāna sutta, p. 145)
“*Kathaṇca, bhikkhave, bhikkhu kāye kāyānupassī viharati? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu araṇṇagato vā rukkhamūlagato vā suñṇāgāragato vā nisīdati, pallṅkam ābhujitvā, ujum kāyam paṇidhāya, parimukham satim upatthapetvā. So satova assasati, satova passasati. Dīgham vā assasanto 'dīgham assasāmi'ti pajānāti, dīgham vā passasanto 'dīgham passasāmi'ti pajānāti, rassam vā assasanto 'rassam assasāmi'ti pajānāti, rassam vā passasanto 'rassam passasāmi'ti pajānāti, 'sabbakāyapatisamvedī assasissāmi'ti sikkhati, 'sabbakāyapatisamvedī passasissāmi'ti sikkhati, 'passambhayam kāyasankhāram assasissāmi'ti sikkhati, 'passambhayam kāyasankhāram passasissāmi'ti sikkhati.*”

- PTS: M.I.55

knowledge, which leads to peace, wisdom, enlightenment, and Nibbana.' It includes the eight factors of *Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration*.

Previous merit and wholesome action

The fourth wheel of success, previously performed as wholesome deeds that bring merit, is less a factor of the environment and more a way for one to develop even more respectable qualities in the future. It refers to the results of past action that is only now coming to fruition. They are the rewards for our good action, helping us to perform even better action in the present.

It is important to make sure that there are wise standards for what action is considered good and wholesome, or bad and unwholesome. Many people have different ideas about what is ethical, and without a logical way to decide, we can't work to earn such merit. Luckily, the Buddha taught us a simple rubric: An action is immoral if it leads to the suffering of oneself, others, or both, and it is moral if it leads to the happiness of oneself, others, or both. This simple, but universally applicable, measure allows each individual to decide what is good and bad without having to rely on any external authority or tradition.

The fourth wheel of success highlights the workings of kamma. Because of our good deeds in the past, we are able to find a suitable place and associate with wise friends. The act of establishing ourselves in these places, and with these people, makes it possible to establish ourselves on the right path in the

ethical conduct, and wisdom, we can perform actions that lead to even greater happiness in the future. Each wheel is the cause and condition of the other, and once they are sent spinning, they cannot be stopped!

Conclusion

A person is indivisibly connected with their physical, social, and mental environment; each one building on the other in order to make one spiritually healthy and in tune with the world around them. We must work to create strong and stable ecosystems for our physical environment, compassionate and kind responsible communities for our social environment, and spiritually-focused and wise minds for our mental environment. Through the Buddha's wise teachings on these three wheels of success, combined with the fourth wheel of positive action and wholesome kamma, we can together create a world that brings happiness and joy to many.

IV

Buddhist Moral Philosophy and the Environment

The field of environmental ethics, as a subset of a larger environmental philosophy, considers the intimate connection between human beings, their ethical choices, and their natural environment. The Buddhist perspective on this interrelationship is best summed up by Iromi Ariyaratne, who has accurately considered the Buddhist perspective on environment from three angles: '(i) physical environment (ii) social environment [and] (iii) spiritual environment.'⁴³

Before the relationship between environment and ethics can be accurately examined, we must also define the latter term; according to Prof. Padmasiri de Silva, 'the term 'ethics' may be used in three different, but related senses: (i) a general pattern, or way of life; (ii) a set of rules of conduct, or moral code; [and] (iii) an

⁴³ Ariyaratne, Iromi, et al. p. 239.

inquiry about ways of life, rules of conduct, and terms used in the evaluation of human behavior, such as good or bad, right or wrong, etc.⁴⁴

The Buddha's central teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path (referred to as 'the Path') offers an indispensable framework for both understanding and putting into practice Buddhist environmental ethics. Though the Path is geared towards attaining final liberation, its value in promoting a healthy physical, social, and spiritual environment can not be overstated. The Path is defined in the *Saccavibhaṅga Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* as Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.⁴⁵ The Buddha discouraged his disciples from engaging in behaviors contrary to this set of values, e.g. wrong view, wrong speech, wrong action, and so on. He clearly spelled out what constitutes the right, wholesome, and skillful, as opposed to wrong, unwholesome, and unskillful path. This framework not only helps us to understand the field of environmental ethics, but also realize inner peace, true happiness, and final liberation. This account delves into the Buddhist position on environmental ethics using the Buddha's teachings as spelled out in both the Pāli canon and post-canonical literature.

⁴⁴ Sandell, Klas. ed. *Buddhist Perceptive on the Eco-crisis*. By Dalai Lama. Kandy: Buddhist Publication, 1987.p.38.

⁴⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñānamoli (MN 141: *Saccavibhaṅga -sutta*, p. 1100) “*Katamañcāvuso dukkhanirodhagāminī patipadā ariyasaccam: ayameva ariyo atthagiko maggo, seyyathīdam: sammāditthi sammāsankappo sammāvācā sammākammanto sammāājīvo sammāvāyāmo sammāsati sammāsamādhi.*” – PTS: M.III.248

Right Understanding

The practice of Right View (or understanding) informs of the Buddhist approach to environmental ethics, just as a clear understanding of environmental ethics in turn informs right view. Central to Right View is the Buddha's teaching on Dependent Co-arising, which states that nothing is self-sufficient, but that all existent things arise and cease together in a mutual web of cause and effect.

The symbiotic, relational interaction between different components in an ecological system is a prime example of the Buddha's emphasis on the reliance all things have upon one another in classical Buddhist theory. The understanding that all living beings are organisms inter-dependently existing within the environment is a heavily stressed element of Right View. To view human beings as separate from, or otherwise 'above', the environment shows a serious misunderstanding of this fundamental law.

From a mistaken approach to a relational understanding of human-environmental interaction leads to a drive to dominate, and subdue, the physical world. This kind of wrong understanding leads to misuse, and abuse, of the physical environment, often manifesting in the unwise over-exploitation of natural resources. The knowledge of our inseparable ties to the physical environment, expressed through a conceptual understanding of our interdependence within our surroundings, and informed by Buddhist theory, can begin to allow for a reconnection with our larger eco-system. Moreover, this understanding can motivate us to take sensible action in the future to heal, and preserve, the environment.

Yet another aspect of right view includes the understanding of wholesome states of mind and their roots: non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion. Also included in this system is the understanding of the unwholesome states of mind and their roots: greed, hatred, and delusion. These unwholesome roots have wreaked havoc on the world since the dawn of time. Terrorism, religious antagonism, intolerance, and ecological devastation can all be traced back to a fundamental misunderstanding regarding our inherent relationship with all that is around us.

However, when we cultivate Right View, our actions can lead to the formation of a safe environment, marked by true peace and inner happiness. Without a fundamental understanding regarding the reality of our inter-reliant relationships with other beings as well as the Earth itself, there can be no impetus for change. The ability of correctly applied Right View to cultivate both inner and outer peace is clearly demonstrated in the *Kosāmbiya Sutta*, where the Buddha addresses monks who have given into quarreling and infighting:




*A bhikkhu dwells both in public and in private possessing with his companions in the holy life that right view that is noble and emancipating, and leads one who practices in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering.*¹⁴⁶



Secondly, the right understanding of the Law or Karma is very important in the Buddhist environmental ethic. The law of



⁴⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñānamoli (MN 48: *Kosāmbiya Sutta*, p. 42),
 (Puna ca param bhikkhave) bhikkhu yāyam diṭṭhi ariyā niyyānikā niyyāti takkarassa sammā dukkhakkhayāya, tathārūpāya diṭṭhiyā diṭṭhisāmaññagato viharati sabrahmacārīhi āvī ceva raho ca.' – PTS: M.I.320

kamma dictates that the results of human behavior manifest themselves through a causal relationship in the social, spiritual, and physical environment of the actor. If one relates to the environment in unwholesome ways, acting with selfish desire or excessive greed, overpopulation, pollution, deforestation, poverty, famine, and global warming result as the negative fruit of the initial unwholesome action.

On the contrary, when we relate to the natural world with skillful mind states based on generosity and compassion, positive results manifest themselves in proper stewardship, forestation, the production of renewable energy, and the restoration of our land, water, and air.

Right Thought


In the Buddha's teachings, Right Thought refers to the skillful intentions that drive our words and deeds; these wholesome thoughts are often tied to the three wholesome roots, i.e. non-greed, non-hatred, and non-ignorance. From an environmental perspective, non-greed refers to thoughts of generosity, specifically the desire to be more generous with our Earth by entering into a mutually beneficial relationship with the environment. Actions motivated with a spirit of generosity have the ability to generate a new life for the world around us, while thoughts of greed and excess motivate deforestation and abuse. The Buddha emphasizes the wholesomeness of this generosity-focused approach in the *Kosāmbiya Sutta*:




'A bhikkhu uses things in common with his virtuous companions in the holy life; without making reservations, he shares with them any gain of a kind that accords to the


*Dhamma...including even the contents of his bowl. This too is the principle of cordiality that creates love and respect, and conduces to cohesion, to non-dispute, to concord, and unity.'*⁴⁷


In the same way, thoughts of non-hatred correspond mainly with *mettā*, the Buddhist term for loving kindness. The misery that has sprung from thoughts of ill will is observable throughout the world: social instability and chaos, ethnic violence, civil wars, political unrest, and the death of millions throughout history. In contrast, universal thoughts of love result in a harmonious social environment marked with mental and social stability.

According to the *Cūlagosinga*  *ta*, when the Ven. Nandiya, Ven. Anuruddha, and Ven. Kimbāra asked how they had been able to live in harmony without bickering, '*blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kind eyes*',⁴⁸ Ven. Anuruddha answered:

 '*I maintain bodily acts of loving-kindness towards those venerable ones both openly and privately; I maintain verbal acts of loving-kindness towards those venerable ones both openly and*

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.420.

 '*(Puna ca param bhikkhave) bhikkhu ye te lābhā dhammikā dhammaladdhā antamaso pattapariyāpannamattampi, tathārūpehi lābhehi appativibhattabhogī hoti sīlavantehi sabrahmacārīhi sādharana bhogī. Ayampi dhammo sārāṇīyo piyakarano garukarano sangahāya avivādāya sāmaggiyā ekībhāvaya samvattati.'*

 ⁴⁸ "*Kacci pana vo anuruddhā samaggā sammodamānā avivadamānā khīrodakībhūtā aññamaññam piyacakkhūhi sampassantā viharathāti?*" – PTS: M.I.205

*privately;I maintain mental acts of loving-kindness towards those venerable ones both openly and privately.*⁴⁹

When it comes to resolving social conflicts and issues that arise in communal dwellings, the Buddha offered in the *Kosāmbiya Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* three ways of maintaining cordial relationships: *Mettā* through bodily, verbal, and mental actions.⁵⁰ Though many people are adept at extending love and respect to other human beings, our society pays little, or no, attention towards cultivating love and respect for plants, animals, and the physical environment that sustains them. Through *mettā* we can begin to love the physical environment, to the point where we begin to view Earth as we view a good friend.

According to the *Mettasutta* of the *Suttanipāṭa*, if one wishes to attain that state of peace, one should be '*able, upright, extremely upright, affable, gentle, and not conceited, contented, easy to support, with few obligations, frugal in his way of life, with faculties serene, prudent, not obstructive, or greedily attached to families.*'⁵¹

⁴⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñānamoli (MN 31: Cūlagosinga sutta, p. 302)

"Tassa mayham bhante imesu āyasmantesu mettā kāyakammāṃ paccupatthitā āvī ceva raho ca. Mettā vacīkammāṃ paccupatthitā āvī ceva raho ca. Mettā manokammāṃ paccupatthitā āvī ceva raho ca."– PTS: M.I.205

⁵⁰ Ibid., (MN 48: Kosāmbiya Sutta, p. 420)

"Bhikkhuno mettā kāyakammāṃ/vacīkammāṃ/manokammāṃ paccupatthitā hoti sabrahmacārīsu āvī ceva raho ca. Ayampi dhammo sārāṇīyo piyakarano garukarano sangahāya avivādāya sāmaggīyā ekībhāvāya samvattati."– PTS: M.I.320

⁵¹ *Suttanipāṭa: Text and Translation*. Trans. N.A. Jayawickrama. Kelaniya: Post Graduate Institute of Pāli and Buddhist studies, University of Kelaniya, 2001. p. 57.



Right Speech

Right Speech, as defined in the Buddha's teaching, is best defined by pairs: truthful speech as opposed to false speech, gentle speech as opposed to harsh speech, harmonious speech as opposed to divisive speech, and meaningful speech as opposed to useless speech. To truly practice Right Speech, we must not only watch our words and see that they align with these standards, but also speak in ways that encourage others to do the same. We should abstain from giving out misinformation, or leading others to unwholesome action through misrepresentation, or unspoken implication. The entirety of the Buddha's teachings is aimed at the discovery of the truth; to turn our speech towards any other goal is to subvert the entire purpose of the Noble Eightfold Path.

Right Action

Right Action forms an integral part of the Buddhist moral system; to facilitate clear, and internally consistent moral judgment, the Buddha laid out sound guidelines to determine the worth of an action. First and foremost, the Buddha instructed us to examine the intention behind the action. Should the action be motivated by greed, hatred, or delusion, it can be said to be inherently wrong; conversely, Right Action can be defined as an action with genesis in generosity, compassion, and wisdom. As a helpful series of training rules, the Buddha laid down the five precepts for the laity. They include not killing living beings; not taking what is not freely given; not indulging in sensual misconduct; not lying; and not consuming intoxicants.

Although Buddhism has a heavy emphasis on deontological ethics, the Buddha also gave serious consideration

to action's consequences as a measure of moral worth. According to the Buddhist ethical model, if an action leads to happiness for oneself, others, or both, then the action is wholesome. In the same way, if an action leads to suffering for oneself, others, or both, then that action is wrong.

In the *Ambalatthika Rāhulovāda Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha introduced what is commonly known as the mirror of the Dhamma. The Buddha used this simile to teach Ven. Rāhula the importance of reflection before, during, and after all action:



*So too, Rahula, an action with the body should be done after repeated reflection; and action by speech should be done after repeated reflection; and action by mind should be done after repeated reflection.*⁵²

If, upon reflection, the action is seen to be wholesome, then one is encouraged to joyfully pursue it to conclusion. If, however, an unwholesome intention leads one to attempt an unwholesome action, one is advised to stop immediately; if a wrong action is committed, the only viable proposition is to acknowledge it, reflect on appropriate ways to act in the future, and amend any resultant issues in accordance with the Dhamma.

The Pāli Canon contains within it a self-consistent and edifying set of environmental ethics. Underlying this system of ethical conduct is the principle of mutual respect for all living

⁵² Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñānamoli (MN 61: Ambalatthikarāhulovāda-sutta, p. 420)

beings and a belief in the equality of life, as well as the value of reciprocity. The *Dhammapada* underpins the egalitarian attitude of Buddhist environmental ethics in its 129th and 130th verses:



*'All tremble at violence, all fear death/life is dear to all. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause to kill.'*⁵³

Consequently, Buddhists hold the protection and preservation of all forms of living beings as the highest goal of an environmental ethic. We may take this virtue to its logical conclusion by adopting positive ecological goals, such as eliminating, or reducing, the consumption of red meat, a major contributor of carbon emissions, and the deterioration of the environment, as well as putting strict regulations on the emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants, so as to ensure a healthy and sustainable environment for the positive development of all sentient beings.

This effort to not only abstain from violence and destruction, but also proactively encourage compassionate interaction between beings, underscores the Buddhist ethic that treats human beings as social animals, and holds cordial, positive social relationships in high regard. According to the *Kosāmbiya Sutta*:



Here a bhikkhu dwells in public, and in private, possessing in common with his other companions in the holy life those virtues that are unbroken, untorn, unblotched, unmottled, liberating,



⁵³ Achariya Buddharakkhita (The Dhammapada, Verse: 129-130, p. 88.)

“Sabbe tasanti dandassa, sabbe bhāyanti maccuno/ sabbesam jīvitam piyam; Attānam upamam katvā, na haneyya na ghātaye.”

*commended by the wise, not misapprehended, and conducive to concentration.*⁵⁴

The Buddha mentioned clearly the duties of the lay devotee for protecting the environment in the Aṅguttara Nikāya IV, Kula sutta of the Sutta Piṭaka:

'There are four facts, which lay people, who are using limited resources of environment, should pay attention to, namely: refraining from limitless usage of natural resources; restoring natural resources; reproduction of natural resources; and assigning a virtuous person as a guardian of natural resources.'⁵⁵ Certainly, the above passage echoes the four-fold right effort.

This ethical foundation of restraint and simplicity leads not only to a peaceful and harmonious society, but also to a wonderful sense of contentment in daily life. This simple joy is, according to the Buddha, the highest pleasure. To stay within the boundaries of our needs instead of giving into greed and acting in destructive, unwholesome ways are held at bay.



⁵⁴ Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñānamoli (MN 48: Kosāmbiya Sutta, p. 420)

'(Puna ca param bhikkhave) bhikkhu yāni tāni sīlāni akhandāni acchiddāni asabalāni akammāsāni bhujissāni viññuppasatthāni aparāmatthāni samādhisamvattanikāni, tathārūpesu sīlesu sīlasāmaññagato viharati sabrahmacārīhi āvī ceva raho ca.' – PTS: 1320

⁵⁵ "Nattham gavesanti, jinnam patisankharonti, parimitapānabhojanā honti, sīlavantam itthim vā purisam vā ādhipacce thapenti." – PTS: A.II.249

Right Livelihood

It mainly refers to the skillful ways of earning one's living. The Buddha gave a beautiful simile on how to earn one's living in a healthy way, or how to accumulate one's wealth from the natural environment. According to the Dhammapada,

*'As a bee gathers honey from the flower without injuring its color or fragrance, even a sage should go on his alms round in the village.'*⁵⁶

While collecting nectar and pollen, the bee makes the best possible use of them by turning them into sweet and health honey for itself and others. Symbiotically, the bee helps to pollinate the plants that eventually produce even more pollen.

The simile of the bee gives some idea of how to live our life without harming the environment.

Furthermore, the Buddha gave sound guidelines for lay people on how to earn their living by avoiding the five kinds of trades that are unskillful, or harmful, to oneself, society, and the environment: not dealing in the slave trade (included here is getting cheap labor in developing countries); not dealing in poison, this would include cutting back fossil fuels use because it emits greenhouse gases, a kind of poison-like gas; not dealing in meat butchery; not dealing in intoxicants like harmful alcohol and illegal drugs; not dealing in weapons.

⁵⁶ Ācariya Buddharakkhita (*The Dhammapada*: verse 49, p. 33)

“Yathāpi bhamaro pupphaṃ vaṇṇagandhaṃ ahethayam paleti
rasamādāya, evaṃ gāme munī care”



Right Energy

The first form of right effort is to prevent unskillful states of mind such as greed, hatred, and delusion from arising. The effort to prevent the environment from degradation requires us to prevent excessive greed that leads to actions such as over-fishing, over-forestation, air-pollution, and water-pollution.

The second form of effort is to overcome unskillful mental states of mind such as greed, hatred, and delusion. For instance, we should try to cut down carbon emission in the air, burning of fossil fuels, and eliminating any other contributors of environmental pollution.

The third form of effort is to develop skillful mind states such as generosity, loving-kindness, and compassion that nurture the environment. The Buddha recommended reforestation as a way of preserving the environment.

The forth form of effort is to maintain skillful states of mind such as generosity, loving-kindness and compassion. To the Buddha, the effort to maintain the purity of the earth and the monastery is considered with utmost importance.

Right Mindfulness

The Pāli word '*sati*' means not only to recollect the past but also to remember the present moment. It is non-judgmental, present moment awareness of the body, feelings, mind states and mental objects. It plays a key in the environmental ethics. In a stock passage that appears in the Mahāgosiṅga sutta,



The Gosiṅga Sāla Tree wood is delightful, the night is moonlit, the sāla trees are all in blossom, and heavenly scents seem to be floating in the air. What kind of Bhikkhu, friend



*Ananda, could illuminate the Gosiṅga Sāla tree Wood?'*⁵⁷

Interestingly, each of the monks gave different answers to the question, including the Buddha himself. To the Buddha one who can illuminate the Gosiṅga forest is a bhikkhu.



*'Having returned from almsround, sets his body erect, and establishing mindfulness in front of him. Resolves: I shall not break this sitting position until, through not clinging, my mind is liberated from taints.'*⁵⁸

From this account, a person who has eradicated all mental defilements not only illuminates the forest but also the entire world. Such are the benefits of constant heedfulness and mindfulness. Environmental preservation requires constant mindfulness. On the other hand if we are mindless and forgetful, all our actions are counter-productive and damaging to the environment.

Right Concentration

It includes four various stages of meditative absorption (Jhāna), named numerically according to the degree of refinement. In

⁵⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñānamoli (MN 32: Mahāgosīṅga sutta, p.307)
'Ramaṇīyam, āvuso ānanda, gosīṅgasālavanam, dosinā ratti, sabbaphāliphullā sālā, dibbā, maññe, gandhā sampavanti; kathamrūpena, āvuso ānanda, bhikkhunā gosīṅgasālavanam sobheyyā'ti?' – PTS:M.I.212

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.312



these states, the mind is said to be focused on one particular theme, with the dedicated support of other wholesome mental states that will ensure mental power.

The Buddha was aware of the debilitating effects of noise pollution on the mind, and therefore he recommended the practice of noble silence (*ariya tunhībhāva*), which takes place in meditative absorption. The Buddha said,



*Moggallāna, do not be negligent regarding noble silence, Brahmin. Steady your mind in noble silence, unify your mind in noble silence, and concentrate your mind on noble silence.'*⁵⁹

To the Buddha, noble silence happens in the second Jhāna when the two Jhānic factors of 'initial application' and 'sustained thought' have subsided. Clearly, the Buddha cherished a peaceful mental and natural environment free from sound or noise pollution. Excessive noise from external polluters should be minimized or eliminated in order to cultivate tranquility. The Buddha admonished his monks that:

*'When you gather together bhikkhus, you should do either two things: hold discussion on the Dhamma, or maintain noble silence.'*⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi (SN 21.1: Kolita sutta, p.713)

moggallāna, moggallāna, mā brāhmaṇa, ariyam tunhībhāvaṃ paṃādo. Ariye tunhībhāve cittaṃ santhāpehi. Ariye tunhībhāve cittaṃ ekodim karohi. Ariye tunhībhāve cittaṃ samādhā"ti.' – PTS: S.II.273

⁶⁰ Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñānamoli (MN 26: Ariyapariyayesaṇa-sutta, p.254) *Sannipatitānaṃ vo bhikkhave dvayaṃ karaṇīyaṃ: dhammī vā kathā, ariyo vā tunhībhāvo.* – PTS: M.I.160

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Buddhist environmental ethics are embedded in the central teaching of the Buddha namely:right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness,and right concentration. Those who follow the Path bring under control their ethical behavior. To the Buddha this is the only direct way, or path, that leads to peace, happiness, and final enlightenment.

V

Ecological Aspects of Vinaya



The Vinaya Piṭaka contains the rules laid down by the Buddha to guide monks and nuns on the path towards liberation. A special section of these rules, dealing with the use of the four requisites, expresses a conservationist ethic based on ecological values that even modern environmentalists can admire, and work to apply, in the current ecological crisis.



Drawing from the Vinaya Piṭaka of the Pāli canon, as well as the post-canonical literature, the present paper attempts to explore the different ecological aspects of the Buddhist monastic code of conduct, examining their relevance not only to monastic communities, but also to all people who wish to preserve the environment in order to overcome the current ecological crises and challenges facing the modern world.

There are a number of instructions and precepts in the Vinaya Piṭaka which prevent monks from harming, or otherwise exploiting, their environment. Portions of the Senāsana-



kkhandhaka, Vattakkhandhaka, and Khuddhakavatthukk handaka of Cullavaggapāli; Cammakkhandhaka of the Mahāvaggapāli; and Pācittiya-pāli, recommend practical steps for environmental stewardship. In these texts, the Buddha recommends the limited usage of water, preservation of forests and vegetation, maintenance of monastery property, and strict limits on activities that lead to air pollution.

At the core of monastic life are the four requisites: food, robes, shelter, and medicine. They are the essential possessions without which one cannot survive and must be used only to meet basic needs without overindulging. Therefore, their proper use and moderation is very important, both from an ecological, and spiritual, point of view.

In the same way, the preservation and protection of the four elements – fire, earth, water and air – is necessary for the health of all living beings. Therefore, the monastic code makes clear that both internal and external elements should be preserved. In addition, the Vinaya is also very concerned with protecting both flora and fauna in the natural world. We will take each aspect in turn.

Modification and Contentment with the Four Requisites

Mahavaggapali, Mahakhandhako

The Buddha says: “I prescribe, O bhikkhus, that he who confers the upasampadā ordination (on a bhikkhu), tell him the four resources:

1. The religious life has morsels of food given alms for its resource. Thus you must endeavor to live all your life. Meals given to the Saṅgha, to certain persons, invitations,

food distributed by ticket, meals given each fortnight, each Uposatha day (i.e. the last day of each fortnight), or the first day of each fortnight, are extra allowances.

2. The religious life has the robe made of rags taken from a dust heap for its resource. Thus you must endeavor to live all your life. Linen, cotton, silk, woolen garments, coarse cloth, hempen cloth are extra allowances.
3. The religious life has dwelling at the foot of a tree for its resources. Thus you must endeavor to live all your life. Viharas, addhayogas, storied dwellings, attics, and caves are extra allowances.
4. The religious life has decomposing urine as medicine for its resource. Thus you must endeavor to live all your life. Ghee, butter, oil, honey, and molasses are extra allowances.”

“Anujānāmi, bhikkhave, upasampādentena cattāro nissaye ācikkhitum -

1. Pīndiyālopabhojanam nissāya pabbajjā, tattha te yāvajīvam ussāho karanīyo; atirekalābho - saṅghabhaddam, uddesabhaddam, nimantanam, salākabhaddam, pakkhikam, uposathikam, pātipadikam.
2. Pamsukūlacīvaram nissāya pabbajjā, tattha te yāvajīvam ussāho karanīyo; atirekalābho - khomam, kappāsikam, koseyyam, kambalam, sānam, bhangam.
3. Rukkhamūlasenāsanam nissāya pabbajjā, tattha te yāvajīvam ussāho karanīyo; atirekalābho - vihāro, addhayogo, pāsādo, hammiyam, guhā.
4. Pūtimuttabhessajjam nissāya pabbajjā, tattha te yāvajīvam, ussāho karanīyo; atirekalābho - sappi, navanītam, telam, madhu, phāṇita'nti.

Monks and nuns of the Buddhist monastic community are taught first and foremost to be content. They should be satisfied

with what is allowable, available, and within one's means. Based on these three principles of contentment, monks and nuns live a very simple life. Regarding the four requisites, the Buddha reminded his monks, *'These, bhikkhus, are the four insignificant things, easily obtained, and blameless. Bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is content with these things which are insignificant and easily obtained, I say of him that he has the constituents for samanaship.'*



When dealing with clothing, The Buddha recommended that monastics make their robes from discarded cloth, preferably from a charnel ground. This counsel was given in order to make sure monks and nuns lived out the command to make their requisites insignificant, easily obtained, and blameless. This emphasis on recycling is more important in the present time, as resources are often overexploited and wasted. The Buddha's emphasis on simplicity, and re-use, in regards to requisites can guide the modern world on a path towards sustainable and responsible utilization of resources.

Venerable Ānanda once explained to King Udena a simple system for getting the most out of robes: when new robes are received, old robes are used as coverlets, old coverlets as mattress covers, old mattress covers as rugs, and old rugs as dusters. Old tattered dusters are kneaded with clay and used to repair cracked floors and walls.⁶¹ This system insured that no offered requisites went to waste.



*Tāni mahārāja kottetvā cikkhallena madditvā paribhandam
limpissāmā' ti.*—Vin.II.291

Those who wasted their resources were often derided as 'wood-apple eaters.' A man shakes the branch of a wood-apple tree and all the fruits, ripe as well as unripe, fall. The man would collect only what he wants, and walks away leaving the rest to rot. Such a wasteful attitude is certainly condemned in Buddhism, not only as anti-social, but also as incredibly unwholesome. The very heart of Buddhism condemns today's excessive exploitation of natural resources in the strongest possible terms.

The Buddha saw that even stricter rules regarding clothing were required in order to ensure both a commitment against wastefulness, as well as immodesty and excess. For this reason, he set standard measurements for making robes and accessories for monastics. The Pācittiya Pāli of Vinaya Piṭaka states, *'When a bhikkhu is making a sitting cloth, it is to be made according to the standard measurement. Here the standard is this: two spans—using sugata span ---in lengths. 1 ½ in width, the border a span. In excess of that it is to be cut down and confessed'*.⁶² It goes on to mention, *'When a bhikkhu is making a skin-eruption covering cloth, it is to be made according to the standard measurement. Here the standard is this: four spans—using sugata span ---in lengths, two in width. In excess of that it is to be cut down and confessed'*.⁶³ Bathing cloths were held to a similar standard, being at most six spans in length and 2 ½ spans in width,

⁶² *nisīdanam pana bhikkhunā kārayamānena pamānikam kāretabbam. Tatr' idam pamānam: dīghaso dve vidatthiyo sugatavidatthiyā, tiriyaṃ diyaddham. tam atikkāmayato chedanakam pācittiyaṃ ti. - Pāc. 89*

⁶³ *kandupaticchādim pana bhikkhunā kārayamānena pamānikā kāretabbā. Tatr' idam pamānam: dīghaso catasso vidatthiyo sugatavidatthiyā, tiriyaṃ dve vidatthiyo. tam atikkāmayato chedanakam pācittiyaṃ ti. - Pāc. 90*

while a robe is allowed to be nine spans in length, and six spans in width.⁶⁴ Other rules forbidding upholstery on benches, as well as high and luxurious beds demonstrate the Buddha's commitment to simplicity and responsible use of resources, both for spiritual, as well as practical reasons.

The Buddha's emphasis on responsible use of resources also extends to shelter. When building a monk's hut, special rules were put in place, above all a prohibition on any construction activity that may involve the destruction of life. Other monks were required to inspect the site, and make sure it did not exceed twelve sugata spans by seven sugata spans.⁶⁵ When building a larger vihāra, inspection was also required, and any action that might cause damage to living beings, or the proximity around the vihāra was forbidden.⁶⁶ In other areas of the Vinaya, the Buddha

⁶⁴ [91] *Vassikasātikam* ...: *dīghaso cha vidatthiyo sugatavidatthiyā, tiriyaṃ*

addhateyyā... [92] *Yo pana Bhikkhu sugatacīvarappamāṇam cīvararm*
kārāpeyya atirekam vā, chedanakam pācittiyam. Tatr' idam sugatassa
sugatacīvarappamāṇam : dīghaso nava vidatthiyo sugatavidatthiyā, tiriyaṃ
cha vidatthiyo, idam sugatassa sugatacīvarappamāṇan ti.- Pāc. 91, 92

⁶⁵ *Saññācīkāya pana bhikkhunā kutim kārayamānena assāmikam attuddesam*
pamānikā kāretabbā. Tatr' idam pamāṇam : dīghaso dvādasa vidatthiyo
sugatavidatthiyā tiriyaṃ satt' antarā. Bhikkhū abhinetaḍḍā vatthudesanāya,
tehi bhikkūhi vatthum desetabbam anārambham saparikkamanam. Sārambhe
ce bhikkhu vatthusmim aparikkamane saññācīkāya kutim kareyya bhikkū vā
anabhinēyya vatthudesanāya pamāṇam vā atikkāmeyya, samghādiseso'ti. -

Sg. 6

⁶⁶ *Mahallakam pana bhikkhunā vihāram kārayamānena sassāmikam*
attuddesam bhikkhū abhinetaḍḍā vatthudesanāya. Tehi bhikkhūhi vatthum
desetabbam anārambham saparikkamanam. Sārambhe ce bhikkhū
vatthusmim aparikkamane mahallakam vihāram kāreyya bhikkhū vā
anabhinēyya vatthudesāya, samghādiseso'ti. - Sg. 7

was even more austere, saying: The Going Forth has a place to sit, and sleep, at the foot of a tree as its support. You should make an effort with that for the rest of your life.⁶⁷

In reference to the requisite of food, the Buddha had a nuanced approach, discouraging self-mortification and starving, as well as overindulgence. The vast majority of Vinaya rules related to food and eating exist to ensure this balance is well-kept. To this end, the Buddha mandated that his monks live on alms food; such a mendicant lifestyle guarantees that all food consumed will be insignificant, easily obtained, and blameless. In today's world, where many are starving while many others overeat, the Buddha's teaching on restrained, but realistic, consumption is more necessary than ever.

In the Vinaya Piṭaka, the Buddha sets down very specific rules for what kind of meat can, and cannot, be eaten. *Monks, one should not knowingly make use of meat killed on purpose (for a monk). Whoever should make use of it, there is an offence of wrong-doing. I allow you, monks, fish, and meat that are quite pure in three respects: if they are not seen, heard, or suspected (to have been killed on purpose for a monk)'.*⁶⁸ This rule ensures that monks do not ever cause another to kill an animal on their behalf.

⁶⁷ Vin.I.58.

⁶⁸ *Na bhikkhave jānam uddissakatam mamsam paribhuñjitabbam. Yo paribhuñjeyya, āpatti dukkatassa. Anujānāmi bhikkhave tikotiparisuddham macchamamsam adittham asutam aparisaṅkitan ti.* – Vin.I.237-8
See also MN.55 Jīvaka Sutta, (PTS:M.I.370)

The meat of humans, as well as elephants, horses, dogs, snakes, lions, hyenas is also forbidden.⁶⁹ These rules highlight the Buddha's twin commitments to both moral purity and ecological protection. By disallowing meat killed specifically for monks, and by forbidding uncommon, or dangerous, animals completely, the Buddha made sure that his monks were living harmlessly for the benefit of all living creatures.

Preserving the Four Elements

The Buddha's teachings on the preservation of the elements form an early ecological ethic that is still very much applicable today. His multifaceted approach to dealing with fire, earth, water, and air purity advocate a compassionate and responsible relationship with the natural world, based out of mutual respect and contentment instead of exploitation and domination.

⁶⁹ *Na bhikkhave manussamamsam paribhuñjitabbam. Yo paribhuñjeyya, āpatti thullaccayassa. Na ca bhikkhave appativekkhitvā mamsam paribhuñjitabbam. Yo paribhuñjeyya, āpatti dukkatassā' ti.*
Na bhikkhave hatthimamsam paribhuñjitabbam. Yo paribhuñjeyya, āpatti dukkatassā' ti.
Na bhikkhave assamamsam paribhuñjitabbam. Yo paribhuñjeyya, āpatti dukkatassā' ti.
Na bhikkhave sunakhamamsam paribhuñjitabbam. Yo paribhuñjeyya, āpatti dukkatassā' ti.
Na bhikkhave ahimamsam paribhuñjitabbam. Yo paribhuñjeyya, āpatti dukkatassā' ti.
Na bhikkhave sīhamamsam paribhuñjitabbam. Yo paribhuñjeyya, āpatti dukkatassā' ti.
Na bhikkhave taracchamamsam paribhuñjitabbam. Yo paribhuñjeyya, āpatti dukkatassā' ti.

– Vin.I.128-219



Unlike the other elements, the Buddha encouraged a more negative attitude towards the element of fire due to its destructive qualities. Without intervention, a man-made forest fire can quickly cause great damage to the natural world, harming both the natural world, as well as property and even human life. This is why the Buddha mentioned in the Khuddakavagga that monks should not set fires in a forest. Should a fire start, the Khuddakavagga also instructs the monks to take steps to stop its spread. In another passage in Pācittiya of the Vinaya Piṭaka, The Buddha classified lighting a fire, or having one lit, in order to warm oneself as an offense.⁷⁰ Although fires are occasionally allowed when a monk is very ill, on the whole such monastic rules clearly exist to make sure that the environment is never damaged by carelessness or irresponsibility.

The Buddha was much more protective of the earth element. Knowing how destructive excessive construction can be towards the earth and the creatures living in it, he encouraged his monks to build small huts, making overbuilding an offence.⁷¹ Burning or digging the ground is also forbidden for monks.

The Buddha, on the whole, was probably most protective of water. Although water is a free resource, most people take it for granted and misuse it. Seeing this dangerous quality, the Buddha set up many rules in order to ensure proper water use. Some rules, such as those that prohibit taking overly long, or

⁷⁰ *Yo pana bhikkhu agilāno visibbanāpekkho jotimsamādaheyya vā samādahāpeyya vā aññatra tathārūpapaccayā, pācittiyaṃ ti.* – Pāc. 56

⁷¹ *Mahallakam pana bhikkhunā vihāramkārayamānena yāva dvāraḥkoṭṭhā aggalatthapanāya āloka sandhiparikammāya dvittichadanassa pariyaṃ appaharite thitena adhiṭṭhātabbam. Tato ce uttari appaharite pi thito adhiṭṭhaheyya, pācittiyaṃ ti.* – Pāc. 19

unnecessarily frequent, baths were originally stipulated for other reasons (in this case, not inconveniencing King Bimbisara), it is clear that such prohibitions can help guide monks towards more responsible water use.

Other rules exist specifically to maintain a wise relationship with the water element. Several Vinaya rules prohibit monks from polluting green grass and water with saliva, urine, or feces (Vinaya IV.205-206). Two of the ātimokkha rules specifically do not allow such behavior: *'Not being ill, I will not defecate, urinate, or spit on living crops: is a training rule to be observed'*⁷² and *'Not being ill, I will not defecate, urinate or spit on water: is a training rule to be observed'*.⁷³

Because the Buddha spent so much of his life outside, he understood how important clean air was for a healthy world. Even inside, however, he made sure to implement rules to keep air clean. *If dusty wind blows from the east, the eastern windows should be closed. If dusty wind blows from the west the western windows should be closed. If dusty wind blows from the north the northern windows should be closed. If dusty wind blows from the south the southern windows should be closed.*⁷⁴

Noise pollution is another problem that the Buddha instituted rules to help curb. In today's world, the proliferation of unnecessarily loud and harsh noises in our public spaces cause great stress and irritation, breeding resentment and sapping

⁷² *Na harite agilāno uccāram vā passāvam vā khelam vā karissāmīti sikkhā karanīyā.* - Sk. 74

⁷³ *Na udake uccāram vā passāvam vā khelam vā karissāmīti sikkhā karanīyā 'ti.* - Sk. 75

⁷⁴ PTS: Vin.V.294

energy from those who endure the distracting and unsettling clamor. Even in Buddhist countries, too often loudspeakers blare out messages in areas where silence would be far more appropriate.

To this end, the Buddha set up many prohibitions on noisy and distracting behavior. The *Paṭimokkha* contains many rules regarding speech and quietude. These include *'I will not go laughing loudly in inhabited areas: a training rule to be observed'*,⁷⁵ *'I will not sit laughing loudly in inhabited areas: a training rule to be observed'*,⁷⁶ *'I will go (speaking) with a lowered voice in inhabited areas: a training rule to be observed'*⁷⁷; and *'I will sit (speaking) with a lowered voice in inhabited areas: is a training rule to be observed'*⁷⁸. Instructions to refrain from smacking lips while eating⁷⁹, and avoiding slurping noises⁸⁰ also exist.

Protecting and Preserving the Fauna

At the heart of any environmental ethic is the commitment to protect, and cherish, all living beings. The Buddha understood that all beings desire life, and thus went to great lengths in order to make sure no living beings were harmed in his community. In reference to the most highly evolved beings,

⁷⁵ *Na ujjhaggikāya antaraghare gamissāmīti sikkhā karanīyā.* – Sk. 11

⁷⁶ *Na ujjhaggikāya antaraghare nisīdissāmīti sikkhā karanīyā.* – Sk. 12

⁷⁷ *Appasaddo antaraghare gamissāmīti sikkhā karanīyā.* – Sk. 13

⁷⁸ *Appasaddo antaraghare nisīdissāmīti sikkhā karanīyā.* – Sk. 14

⁷⁹ *Na capucapukārakam bhuñjissāmīti sikkhā karanīyā.* – Sk. 50

⁸⁰ *Na surusurukārakam bhuñjissāmīti sikkhā karanīyā.* – Sk. 51



humans, the Buddha laid down especially stringent rules for monastics, prohibiting absolutely any kind of violence. According to the Pārājikāpāli of the Vinaya Piṭaka, the Buddha said, 'Should any bhikkhu intentionally deprive a human being of life, or search for an assassin for him, or praise the advantages of death, or incite him to die (thus): 'My good man, what use is this wretched, miserable life to you? Death is better for you than life'...he is defeated and no longer in communion'⁸¹. One immediately ceases to be a monk, or nun, the moment he, or she, uses any means in order to cause the death of another human being, whether through direct, or indirect, means.

The Buddha also saw the wisdom in the older Vedic tradition of not travelling during the rainy season in order to prevent damage to living beings who surfaced during wet weather. There are specific rules that forbid one to journey throughout this period.⁸² Rules against digging in the ground were

⁸¹ *Yo pana bhikkhu sañcicca manussaviggham jīvītā voropeyya satthahārakam vāssa pariyeseyya marnaavannam vā samvanneyya maranāya vā samādapeyya ambho purisa kim tuyh' iminā pāpakena dujjivitena matan te jīvītā seyyo 'ti, iticittamano cittasamkappo anekapariyāyena maranavannam vā samvanneyya maranāya vā samādapeyya, ayam pi pārājiko hoti asamvāso 'ti. - Pārājika 3*

⁸² *Anujānāmi bhikkhave vassam upagantun ti [I allow you, monks, to enter upon the rains.]. Na bhikkhave vassam upagantvā purimam vā temāsam pacchimam vā temāsam avasitvā cārikā pakkamitabbā. Yo pakkameyya, āpatti dukkatassā'ti [Monks, having entered upon the rains, but not having kept either the first three months or the last three months, one should not set out on tour. Whoever should (thus) set out, there is an offence of wrong-doing.]. Nā bhikkhave vassam na upagantabbam. Yo na upagaccheyya, āpatti dukkatassā'ti [Monks, one should not enter upon the rains. Whoever should not enter upon (them), there is an offence of wrong-doing].- Vin.I.137*

instituted for similar reasons, and drinking unstrained water is specifically forbidden out of the Buddha's compassion for even the smallest living creatures in a situation where a water strainer is not obtainable, monks are encouraged to use a corner of their robe in order to ensure that they do not accidentally consume insects in the water.⁸³ The rules further state: *Should any bhikkhu knowingly make use of water with living beings in it, it is to be confessed*'.⁸⁴ In addition, pouring out water knowing that it will lead to the death of living creatures is also a breach of Vinaya.⁸⁵

A story from the Vinaya highlights how dedicated the Buddha was towards the compassionate avoidance of violence. In this account, a monk, who was a potter prior to ordination, built for himself a clay hut and set it on fire to give it a fine finish. The Buddha strongly objected to this because many living creatures taking residence in the clay would have been burned in the process. The Buddha demanded the hut be torn down to prevent

⁸³ *Sace na hoti parissāvanam vā dhammakarako vā, samghātikanno pi adhitthātabbo iminā parissāvetvā pivissāmīti*: If there is not a strainer nor a regulation water-pot, then a corner of the outer cloak should be determined upon with the words, 'I will drink (water) having strained it with this.'- Cullavagga

V.13.2

Yo pana bhikkhu jānam sappānakam udakam paribhuñjeyya, pācittīyan ti. – Pāc. 62

⁸⁴ *Yo pana bhikkhu jānam sappānakam udakam tinam vā mattikam vā siñceyya vā siñcāpeyya vā, pācittīyan ti.* – Pāc. 20

Monks, a hut consisting of nothing but mud should not be made. Whoever shall make one –there is an offence of wrong-doing.

Na ca bhikkhave sabbamattikāmayā kutikā kātabbā. Yo kareyya, āpatti dukkatassā'ti.

⁸⁵ *Yo pana bhikkhu sañcicca pānam jīvītā voropeyya, pācittīyan ti.* – Pāc. 61

it from creating a bad precedent for later generations (Vin.III.42).⁸⁶ These many prohibitions against harming even the smallest insects demonstrate the incredible strength of the Buddha's environmental compassion.

Although violence against non-human creatures is not grounds for immediate dismissal from the monastic order, it is still strongly condemned. The Vinaya states *'Should any bhikkhu knowingly deprive an animal of life, it is to be confessed'*.⁸⁷ The Buddha also forbid using bone, ivory, or horn, for different products in order to ensure that rare and majestic animals such as rhinos and elephants were not harmed.⁸⁸ Other rules include, *'One should not enter a village while wearing leather footwear. Whoever should enter: an offence of wrong doing'*; ⁸⁹and *'Leather footwear embellished with lion skin should not be worn...with tiger skin...with panther skin...with black antelope skin... with otter skin...with cat skin...with squirrel skin... with flying fox skin should not be worn. Whoever should wear them: it is an offence of wrong doing'*.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Monks, a hut consisting of nothing but mud should not be made. Whoever shall make one –there is an offence of wrong-doing. *Na ca bhikkhave sabbamattikāmayā kuttikā kātābbā. Yo kareyya, āpatti dukkaṭassā'ti.*

⁸⁷ *Yo pana bhikkhu sañcicca pāṇaṃ jīvitaṃ voropeyya, pācittiyaṃ ti.* – Pāc

⁸⁸ *Yo pana bhikkhu atthimayamvā dantamayam vā visānamayam vā sūcigharam kārāpeyya, bhedanakaṃ pācittiyaṃ ti.* – Pāc. 86

⁸⁹ *Na bhikkhave saupāhanena gāma pavisitabbo. Yo paviseyya, āpatti dukkaṭassā'ti.* - Mahāvagga V.12

⁹⁰ *Na bhikkhave sīhacammaparikkhatā upāhanā dhāretabbā, vyagghacammaparikkhatā upāhanā dhāretabbā, dīpicammaparikkhatā upāhanā dhāretabbā, ajinacammaparikkhatā upāhanā dhāretabbā, uddacammaparikkhatā upāhanā dhāretabbā, majjāricammaparikkhatā upāhanā dhāretabbā, kālakacammaparikkhatā upāhanā dhāretabbā, ulakacammaparikkhatā upāhanā dhāretabbā. Yo dhāreyya, āpatti dukkaṭassā'ti.* -Mahāvagga V.2.4

Yo pana bhikkhu kosiyaṃissakam santhatam kārāpeyya, nissaggiyaṃ pācittiyaṃ ti. - Pāc. 11 *Bhūtagāmapātabyatāya pācittiyaṃ ti.*

Protecting and Preserving Flora

The Buddha's attempt to stamp out all forms of violence and to promote environmental responsibility even extends to plant life. According to the Buddha, *'damaging a living plant is to be confessed'*.⁹¹ The Buddha has established these rules because monks were fond of cutting down trees. During the Buddha's time, trees were also cut down for sacrificial poles during ceremonies. These activities are strictly forbidden by many Vinaya rules (Vin.IV.34).⁹² In the Cāṇḍīya-makkhandhaka of the Mahāvaggapāli, the Buddha established rules for monks to prevent the making of cots from the shells of trees, splinters of bamboo, palm leaves, and grass. The Buddha also instructed, *'Wooden footwear should not be worn. Whoever should wear them: it is an offence of wrong doing'*.⁹³ Palmyra-leaf footwear, and bamboo footwear, is also forbidden in the Mahāvaggapāli.⁹⁴

The Buddhist monastic code also contains guidelines for the use of plant seeds. The Vinaya Piṭaka states: *'If [a monk] thinks that it is a seed, when it is a seed, (and) cuts it, or has it cut, or breaks it, or has it broken, or cooks it, or has it cooked, there is an offence of expiation. If he thinks that it is not a seed when it is a seed (and) cuts it (and so on) ... there is no offence. If he thinks that it is a seed when it is not a seed, there is an offence of wrong-*

⁹¹ *Yo pana bhikkhu kosiyaṃissakam santhatam kārāpeyya, nissaggiyam pācittiyaṃ ti.* - Pāc. 11

⁹² *Bhūtagāmapātabyatāya pācittiyaṃ ti.*

⁹³ *Na bhikkhave katthapādukā dhāretabbā. Yo dhāreyya, āpatti dukkatassā' ti.* Mahāvaggapāli V.6.4

⁹⁴ *Na bhikkhave tālapattapādukā dhāretabbā. Yo dhāreyya, āpatti dukkatassā' ti.* [2]

Na bhikkhave velupattapādukā dhāretabbā. Yo dhāreyya, āpatti dukkatassā' ti. [3] - Mahāvaggapāli. V. 7.2-3

doing. If he thinks that it is not a seed when it is not a seed, there is no offence.' This clearly demonstrates the role of intention, or *cetanā*, in determining whether or not an offense is committed. In addition to these rules, the Buddha did not allow his monks to accept fresh and uncooked grains in order to prevent the destruction of seeds; fruit is allowable only if 'damaged by fire, by a knife, by a finger-nail, or if it is seedless, or its seed(s) are removed.'


The Preservation of a Seed

"Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders."

Henry David Thoreau

Knowing the importance of a seed, the Buddha offered ways of preserving them. The Buddhist monastic code also contains guidelines for the use of plant seeds.

In fact, the meaning all the attributes of a seed can be likened to the dhamma as: Medicine and food to us, the way to pass on good life from generation to generations, the word that harnesses our living environment, the word of wisdom that ushers in happiness, peace and well-being of the world around us, which if it died the world would be a state of extinction.

Even a cursory examination of the  Vinaya Piṭaka reveals the lengths to which the Buddha went in his mission to cement an ethic of non-violence, compassion, and environmental responsibility. Through conservation of the four elements,

contentment with requisites, and dedication to the protection of all living creatures as well as plants and seeds, the monastic rules provide an organic response that frames compassion for the natural world as both a spiritual, and ecological, necessity. Far from being outdated, the Vinaya Piṭaka is perhaps more applicable now than ever before in our age of irresponsible, and exploitative, environmental practices. A deeper understanding of the Buddha's wise, and rational, approach to the world and its creatures can help guide us towards a future free of unsustainable pollution, ecological abuse, and unmindful consumption.

VI

Ecological Aspects of Jātaka Literature

Included in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*, the Jātaka literature contains some 547 different tales relating to the previous births of the Bodhisatta, each one presenting a larger ecology steeped in the cultural and socio-economic background of ancient India. According to Ven. Gnanananda, the Jātaka literature originated in the central region of India, or *Jambudīpa*, known as *Majjhimapadesa*. Because of this cultural framework, it is not surprising that a Vedic undercurrent regarding the transmigration of souls can be found. Moreover, the stories attest to a rich tradition of ecologically-centered folk history and mythology in which the line between human and nature is often blurred.



The Jātaka, or birth stories, can be found throughout the traditional scriptures of both the Mahayana and Theravada traditions. These stories involve a vast array of beings, from monkeys and deer to the trees and streams themselves, each



illustrating the experience of the Bodhisatta during his various rebirths before enlightenment.

In this account, an attempt will be made to emphasize the significant ecological focus behind many of the Jātaka tales, in which exists a broad environmental moral philosophy of respect for all living things, with a heavy emphasis on renunciation, effort, patience, wisdom, and recognition of the inter-dependence and interconnectedness of life. The Jātaka tales highlight the folly of cruelty, the appropriate utilization of nature for medicine, food, and shelter, and the value of loving-kindness, compassion and gratitude. Other, deeper, Buddhist doctrinal concepts such as Buddha nature, the law of karma and rebirth, and the path to spiritual progress and enlightenment are also hinted at. While all these themes are interconnected, this account will take each theme separately and explore it in the light of the Jātaka tales. The objective and surroundings used in the stories, such as *Mahākapi Jātaka*, *Kapi Jātaka*, *Nimi Jātaka*, and others, include a vast environmental philosophy that can deepen our understanding of the relationship between human beings and nature.

Bodhisatta Living as a Tree Spirit



Most Jātaka literature depicts the Bodhisatta living as a tree-spirit. Although this may sound odd to some, the majority of those in ancient India had reverence for certain trees because they believed that the tree was an abode of corresponding spirit. Interestingly enough, these venerated trees were almost never cut down. According to Brahminism and Jainism, trees are considered to be “one-faculty life”. Therefore, cutting a tree means killing a living being! Though Buddha did not consider the tree as a one-faculty life; however, he acknowledge that plants

and trees are home of other living beings. Accordingly, he referred to plants as *Bhūtagāma* (home of beings) and *Bijagāma* (home of seeds). Buddhists do not cut tree in order to preserve the life of other beings. Due to overlapping beliefs in many East Asian religions, the trees are considered as home for spirits or having a soul. Thus, trees are worshipped in many places in Asia. The tree worship resulted in the saving of many trees. Even today, monks in Cambodia ordain trees by tying robes around them, and foresters treat such trees with the utmost respect. By associating himself with trees, and by extension, the natural world, the Bodhisatta showed a compassionate, reverential approach to viewing the natural world.

The Nature of Unenlightened Beings

Many tales of the Bodhisatta depict the unwholesome states that arise within an unenlightened mind, as well as elucidating their roots. Greed, hatred, and delusion are often the driving forces behind the suffering illustrated in the Jātaka tales. In particular, tales just as the Kanavera-Jātaka [Jā:318],⁹⁵ which details a courtesan's betrayal of her husband and subsequent punishment, highlight the dangers of lust and inappropriate sensual indulgence.

Interestingly, there are many places in the Pāli canon where the Buddha admitted to a defiled mind during his previous lives as the Bodhisatta, including the statement: *'Before my enlightenment, while I was still an unenlightened Bodhisatta, I too considered thus: 'remote jungle-thicket resting places in the forest*

⁹⁵ *The Jātaka: Or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*. Ed. E.B. Cowell. Vol. III-IV. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2008. Reprint. p. 39-42.

are hard to endure...the jungles must rob a bhikkhu of his mind, if he has no concentration'.⁹⁶ He later stated, 'Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still an unenlightened Bodhisatta, I too, being myself subject to birth, sought what was also subject to birth...and defilement.'⁹⁷

Clearly, the Bodhisatta encountered fear and dread, as well as misguided attachment, as he embarked on his spiritual journey still possessing an unenlightened mind. After his enlightenment however, he taught the Path to the elimination of unwholesome states of the mind and their roots through the development of non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion.

It is important to note that the Buddha's first experience with Jhāna, as well as his enlightenment, occurred mainly in a forest, at the foot of a tree. Many of the most important events on the spiritual path of the Buddha occurred in proximity to the forest, underscoring the connection between the Buddha and nature.

The Bodhisatta Ideal

In Buddhism, the Bodhisatta ideal refers to the choice to postpone one's enlightenment until other beings are saved. When the Bodhisatta inclined his mind towards this path, he treated all beings as members of a large spiritual community. The Buddha ended up having to suffer in many ways whenever he tried to save others. It is clear that taking the Bodhisatta vow comes with moral responsibility. He had to sacrifice his own life

⁹⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñānamoli (MN 4: Bhayabhaveva Sutta, p.102)



⁹⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñānamoli (MN 26: Ariyapariyesanā Sutta, p.256)

and learn many painful lessons. Of course, ordinary beings may not live up to the lofty goal of saving all beings from suffering, but the motivation itself can serve as a foundation for protecting and preserving other beings while one strives on the spiritual path. Therefore, the Mahayana school of Buddhism in particular draws great inspiration from the Bodhisatta ideal.

Buddha Nature Belief

Coupled with the Bodhisatta ideal is the belief in Buddha Nature. This refers to the potential that all beings have in the attainment of Buddhahood. When Buddha Nature is taken into consideration, we begin to see that all beings may at one point in the future become Buddhas. In turn, knowing that a cow may one day become the next Buddha may bring one to reconsider killing it. Although this view helps us to develop compassion, we should not take it too far by refusing to walk on grass due to its possibility of not attaining enlightenment.

Compassion Towards all living Beings

Animals in Jātaka literature often display their ability to be deeply compassionate towards others. Compassion is the quality of the heart and mind which quivers when faced with the suffering of others. It means being able to feel the suffering of others without corrupting such empathy into self- or other destructive emotions. According to the Mahākapi-Jātaka [Jā: 407],⁹⁸ the hisatta was born of a monkey's womb. He grew up with stature and stoutness, with a retinue of 8,000 monkeys in the Himalaya. Along with his retinue, they went to eat some mangoes

⁹⁸ Cowell (Vol. III-IV, p. 225-227)

while jumping from one branch to another. The King was disappointed and ordered his subjects to kill all the monkeys. Filled with fear and terror, other monkeys tried to escape in vain. The Bodhisatta made himself into bridge and all monkeys managed to escape death. However, Devadatta, a monk who would later antagonize the Buddha in his final lifetime, was a monkey at this time as well. He made a spring and fell on the Bodhisatta's back. The king, who was Ananda in the Buddha's own life time, rescued the Bodhisatta, but not before he was mortally wounded.

Such an example brings to mind the highest perfection of compassion: sacrificing one's own life in order to save others. There are many such similar stories of compassion, such as the Kapila Jataka [Jā:404].⁹⁹ All these stories teach us how to be deeply compassionate towards other fellow beings.

Loving-kindness Underlies Many Jataka Tales

All human beings want to be treated with kindness. Surprisingly, this principle applies to plants also – in a recent scientific study in India. Plants which had tender care, with soft music, produced abundant yields compared to others that were neglected.

The Buddha stated many times, *'having seen that all beings like oneself have a desire for happiness, one cultivates loving-kindness for all beings.'* According to the Vimāka-Jātaka [Jā:160],¹⁰⁰ animals are afraid to live near human beings, or in rural

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 218-219.

¹⁰⁰ *The Jātaka: Or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births.* Ed. E.B. Cowell. Vol. I-II. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2008. Reprint. p. 26-28.

areas where human beings are likely to hunt them for food. Many monastics have noticed this when they encounter terrified deer or other hunted animals who come to their monasteries for safety. According to the Nandivisara Jātaka [Jā:28],¹⁰¹ animals respond favorably to beings who treat them with love and care.

Appreciation and Gratitude towards the Environment

The healthiest relationship between humans and nature is one of gratitude. The Arisa Jātaka [Jā:124]¹⁰² recounts a tale in which there were 500 hermits who lived in the forest. In the time of drought, the animals did not have enough water to use, so one of the hermits' masters, the Bodhisatta, who was very kind and clever, made a trough out of a tree and provided water for all the animals. Unfortunately, he had no time left to get food and drink for himself. Noticing how skinny he was, the other animals decided to meet. They resolved that each time they came to drink water they would bring one piece of fruit to the hermit, out of gratitude for providing them with enough water. Finally, there was enough fruit to feed 500 hermits!

The Buddha's first teaching to the world was that of gratitude. Two weeks after his enlightenment, he stood up and stared, without blinking, at the Bodhi tree which had given him protection from the elements during his struggle for enlightenment. It is common knowledge that trees give us oxygen, and in turn we give them carbon dioxide. Therefore, Buddhists should, and must, express our gratitude to them.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 71-72.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 273-274.

Ethical or Moral Conduct Forms the Backbone of Ecology

This means the practice of non-violence to all forms of life. The Mahāśāṇava-Jātaka [Jā:51]¹⁰³ states, *A good king meets evil with good. Refusing to sanction a war, he is captured and buried alive in a charnel ground. He escapes jackals, acts as umpire for ogres, and regains his sovereignty.'*

Owing to lack of moral fear and moral dread, humans indiscriminately kill other living beings for food, and even sport. Hunting, fishing, and trapping have recently grown drastically in so-called developed countries. Strangely, hunters use euphemistic terms, such as 'harvesting' or 'processing' animals in order to soft-pedal their evil actions. Moreover, they express their pride of being part of the food cycle. The Nimi-Jātaka [Jā:54-1]¹⁰⁴ *killing animals is sinful. One who does such evil act will ascent to Vetarani Hell.* Perhaps the idea of rebirth in a hell realm can sharply remind people not to kill living beings.

Of course, unrestrained killing disrupts biodiversity and harms the ecosystem, which in turn leads to ecological crises. For instance, we see that bee populations are dropping around the world. If we drive these beings into extinction through our unwholesome treatment of the environment, then human crops, like corn, will not be pollinated, and there will be potential food shortages for animals, and humans as well. Such food crises can lead to wars, based on competition for scarce resources, as well as increased hunting and fishing. The Lakkhaṇamiga -Jātaka [Jā:11]¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Cowell (Vol.I-II, p. 128-133)


¹⁰⁴ *The Jātaka: Or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births.* Ed. E.B. Cowell. Vol. V-VI. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2008. Reprint. p. 53-68.

¹⁰⁵ Cowell (Vol. I-II, p. 34-36)

alludes to similar ideas of killing wild animals for food. Undoubtedly, the ethical teachings presented in the Jātaka literature not only consider the moral behavior between humans, but also builds a strong moral relationship between humans and nature at large, especially when the large scale of biodiversity presented is considered.

Patience and Tolerance in Regards to Nature

The Buddha taught often that patience, with the characteristic of wise acceptance and endurance, is the highest austerity. It is imperative that human beings cultivate a sound attitude of tolerant acceptance towards other beings, and the environment. When faced with difficult situations and the complex, often dangerous, emotions that they generate, we too often turn to ill-will and anger instead of patience and endurance. How often do we kill mosquitoes, sometimes even before they land on our body? How often do we kill rats the moment they enter our houses? Even simply hearing another person make an unpleasant noise can generate incredibly negative emotions within us.

 The mental quality of patience appears prominently in the Khantivādi-Jātaka [Jā:313].¹⁰⁶ It recounts the story of a wicked king who, upon waking from sleep, found women from his court missing. He soon found out that they had gone to listen to the Bodhisatta's sermon. Burning with anger, the King angrily questioned the ascetic, asking him first what he taught.


'I preach patience, your Majesty,' the ascetic replied calmly. The king inquired as to what patience entailed. 'Patience is

¹⁰⁶ Cowell (Vol. III-IV, p. 26-29)

not getting angry when you are abused or beaten,' the ascetic replied. And so the king decided to test the ascetic's patience, summoning an executioner to beat him horribly. Afterwards, the King asked the ascetic, 'Do you still practice patience ascetic?' The ascetic replied that he still did.

The King then ordered his subjects to dismember the ascetic. His nose and ears were cut off. The King asked the ascetic again if he was still patient. The ascetic replied, 'Your Majesty, please do not think that my patience lies in body parts. My patience lies in my heart.' This heroic and rather poignant story culminates with the ascetic declaring, 'He who caused my hands and feet, nose and ears, to be cut off, may that King live long! Men like us never get angry.'¹⁰⁷

Generosity

All ecological endeavors should be based on  desire to utilize nature without causing harm. The Saṅkhaṇḍa -Jātaka [Jā:524]¹⁰⁸ mentions a rabbit that leaps into the fire in order to offer its meat to others, so that they may not come to harm. The Buddha compared this quality of the heart to a bee. It collects nectar from the flower without harming its fragrance or color. Interestingly, the bee gives back to the flower by way of cross-pollination. Such a symbiotic relationship is a very important aspect of ecology. Conversely, greedily harvesting natural resources undermines our bio-diversity. Therefore, the practice of renunciation has been praised by all wise people. Renunciation

¹⁰⁷ Wimalajothi, Ven.K. *The Ten Perfections*. Kandy: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 2004. p.36.

¹⁰⁸ Cowell (Vol. V-VI, p. 84-91)

helps to reduce desire and craving. This quality of the heart appears in one of the most popular tales, the Vessantara-Jātaka [Jā:547]¹⁰⁹ where the Bodhisatta is said to have renounced the white elephant in order to end a war in Kalinga Kingdom. Finally, he renounced his consort and two children and left for the city for Mount Vimka. Before reaching the village, he gave away his four horses and a charioteer to a Brahmin.

The Conservation and Preservation of Nature



In the **Sāma-Jātaka** [Jā:440]¹¹⁰, King Piliyakkha comes to the forest seeking the flesh of animals, but according to the **Mahājanaka-Jātaka** [Jā:539]¹¹¹, humans should only use the forests for basic needs, such as herbs, fruit, grain, flowers, and medicinal ingredients. The **Mugapakkha-Jātaka** [Jā:538]¹¹² states that it is cruel and inhumane to cut down trees, or even the tree's branches, as they give shade and protection to beings.

The Equality of all Living Beings

Ecologically, recognizing the equality of all living beings is an important step on the path toward a non-violent ecology. This principle does not mean that humans must adopt the lifestyles of animals or insects, but that we should have a reverence and respect for all life. On the evolutionary scale, we might be at a different stage; however, when it comes to our actual life force, we share the same common denominator with other beings. The Buddha repeatedly reminded his followers that all beings hold life

¹⁰⁹ Wimalajothi, p.6.

¹¹⁰ Cowell (Vol. V-VI, p. 38-52)

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 19-37.




¹¹² Ibid., p. 1-19.

dear. Even the smallest insect desires to avoid suffering and death!

Jātaka literature illustrates this point often. The **Bodhisatta** himself chose to be reborn in various life forms, including a king, an ascetic, a tree spirit, student, servant, outcast, hare and animal. To the **Bodhisatta**, all life is an evolutionary process leading to ultimate liberation. He took on different bodies in order to strengthen different traits, such as taking birth as a monkey to learn patience. It is clear that, instead of seeing humans as rulers over other animals, the Buddha saw all life as interconnected.

Kamma and Rebirth

The whole of the Jātaka stories revolve around a philosophy based upon actions, and their results. We see similar principles in ecology. Our actions have the potential to bring about certain results in accordance with their conditions. Moreover, knowing the possibility of rebirth as beings at many different points along the evolutionary scale, we can learn to value and respect all forms of life.

Drawing on ncient Indian thought, the Buddha's teachings on Kamma contain many  Vedic undercurrents. However, many wrong views of kamma, such as rigid determinism, can be very counter-productive to one's spiritual quest. When understood properly, the law of kamma can lead to self-restraint and an increased awareness of the consequences actions carry. It helps to be patient with other beings, and gain a self-confidence born from the knowledge that we control our own future through the present moment actions we take.

Inter-dependent Origination

Ecology is heavily based on the idea of interdependence and the link between organisms and their environment. The Buddha summed this approach up perfectly when he stated, *'When this is, that is; when this is not, that is not; with this arising, that arises; when this ceases, that ceases.'* The Jataka stories highlight this web of cause and effect often.

The Law of Impermanence

Nature clearly illustrates the impermanent nature of all forms. From seasons and weather patterns, to forests and mountains, everything is in constant flux. The perception of impermanence is captured very well in the *Susīma Jātaka* [Jā:163]¹¹³, where a king becomes an ascetic upon seeing his first grey hair.

Wisdom and Understanding

Wise courses of action can help to preserve the environment. Making heedless decisions motivated by greed, hatred, delusion, and fear leads to unwholesome results. In fact, confusion, or a lack of knowledge when it comes to dealing with the environment, is a recipe for disaster. The *Kukkura Jātaka* [Jā:22]¹¹⁴ relates a story where the Bodhisatta was born as a dog due to his past kamma. The King, Brahmadatta, put out an order to kill all the dogs that were supposedly eating the leather work and traps of the Majesty's carriage. The Bodhisatta was alarmed

¹¹³ Cowell (Vol.I-II, p. 31-34)

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 58-61.

by the King's unwise decision to kill all but the palace dog. To the Bodhisatta, such biased, aggressive, and ignorant actions were un-kinglike. He went to discuss the matter with his Majesty. The King asked the Bodhisatta to use his wisdom so that he may discover the truth. As it turned out, the palace dog himself had been eating the leather! The king was overjoyed. From that time on, out of wisdom and understanding, the king began to preserve the life of all creatures, and lived a long life due to his merit. From an ecological point of view, this tale demonstrates the value of wisdom and knowledge in regard to a compassionate, helpful course of action.

Conclusion

To summarize, by studying the ecological aspects of the Jātaka literature, such as compassion, kindness, gratitude, tolerance, and wise behavior, it becomes abundantly clear that the birth stories of the Buddha-to-be help to underscore Buddhist views on the relationship between humans and the environment. To the Buddha, all life is intricately interwoven and inseparable. Certainly, the birth stories offer real life experiences and spiritual qualities, which not only inspire us to protect the environment, but also serves to demonstrate the values and actions that allow us to progress on the path to liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

VII


A Comparative Study of Loving-Kindness

In Judeo-Christian thought, unconditional, or non-self-oriented love, is an unselfish and benevolent dedication to others. It is presented to them without qualifiers, and is not based on external conditions. In the Christian New Testament, Christ encourages his followers to practice this kind of love, which is also occasionally referred to as loving-kindness. This term appears once in the Hebrew Bible where God declares to His people, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you with loving-kindness.'¹¹⁵ The phrase 'loving-kindness' can be used interchangeably with unconditional love, unselfish love, universal love, and other terms as well.


Loving-kindness is a central doctrine both to Christianity and Buddhism. The Buddha instructed his followers repeatedly to develop good will and compassion for all beings, while Christ

¹¹⁵ Holy Bible, Jeremiah 31:3, p. 829.

considered loving one's neighbor to be the highest law. Because of this parallel in the teachings of the Buddha and Christ, many philosophers have claimed that Christianity and Buddhism are essentially the same. However, while they do share many common themes, they also differ in fundamental ways.

In this count, an attempt is made to explain the Discourse on Loving-Kindness (as taught by the Buddha in the **Mettasutta** of the **Sutta Nipāta**) and compare it with many teachings from the Holy Bible, including the Sermon on the Mount. For the sake of clarity and brevity, the Discourse on Loving-Kindness can be divided into five parts, namely: the purpose of practicing loving-kindness; the prerequisites to the practice of loving-kindness; the meditative cultivation of loving-kindness; the intensification, and expansion of loving-kindness; and turning loving-kindness towards wisdom. These five sections, specifically the prerequisites for loving-kindness, will then be compared to the Judeo-Christian conception of unselfish love.

The Purpose of Practicing Loving-Kindness

In the first lines of the ourse, the Buddha states that loving-kindness, also known as mettā in Pāli, the ancient language in which the discourse is recorded, should be undertaken by a person who is 'skilled in the good' ¹¹⁶, and desirous of inner peace. The Buddha taught that once one realizes that every living being desires happiness, one should set their mind on developing good will for all sentient creatures. It is interesting to note that the Buddha considered peacefulness to be the highest happiness,

¹¹⁶ *atthakusalena*

and the bringing of peace to others as the greatest gift, while Jesus is well known for his statement in the Gospels, 'Blessed are the peacemakers.'

Prerequisites to the Practice of Loving-Kindness

Before one can spread loving-kindness to all beings, he, or she, must first cultivate other wholesome states. For this reason, the Buddha instructed his followers to maintain a certain code of conduct that allows them to live at peace with others. Without a moral life, one lacks a sound foundation for the development of universal love and respect. The Buddha laid down some fifteen mental qualities, or attitudes that should be developed and refined by anyone who wishes to acquire the happiness that comes from inner peace. According to the Discourse on Loving-Kindness, one who is desirous of peace should be:

'Able, extremely upright, affable, gentle, not conceited, content, easy to support, few obligations, frugal, serene faculties, prudent, unobstructive, or greedily attached to families. He should not commit any slight misdeeds that the wise might find fault with.'¹¹⁷

This collection of fundamentals for the cultivation of loving-kindness echo the Apostle Paul's classic definition of love itself 'Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not

¹¹⁷ Jayawickrama, p.57.

*"Sakko ujū ca sūjū ca suvacocassa mudu anatimānī.
Santussako ca subhara ca appakicco ca sallahukavuttī,
Santindriyo ca nipako ca appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho."*

easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices in truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.' ¹¹⁸ Jesus' disciple John, who is sometimes referred to as the Apostle of Love, adds, 'God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.' ¹¹⁹ By taking each ethical quality recommended by the Buddha, and comparing it with the teachings of Christ and his disciples, we find many similarities.

Ability (Sakko)

The Buddha said that his teaching was available for all to practice. For this reason, the Dhamma is often referred to as a 'come and see' ¹²⁰ teaching, where all are able to explore and utilize it. However, those who do not live moral lives, or those who do not desire to improve themselves, will find the Dhamma very difficult to practice. The Buddha referred to himself as a tamer of the tamable; if one is 'untamable' due to their unwholesome actions and desires, their progress will be slow, and they will be unable to move forward.

This is echoed in the many Bible verse where the Christian God teaches those who He finds receptive, but turns away from those who have hard hearts, incapable of being swayed. God also instructs His followers to be teachers: 'Command and teach these things ... devote yourself to preaching and to teaching.' ¹²¹ Without

¹¹⁸ Holy Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, p.1209; Ibid., 13:13, p.1208.

¹¹⁹ Holy Bible, 1 John 4:16, p.1295.

¹²⁰ *Ehipassiko*

¹²¹ Holy Bible, 1 Timothy 4:11-13, p. 1254.

the ability to do what is required, neither a Buddhist, nor a Christian, will develop spiritually.

Upright and Straightforward (Ujū)

The Buddha taught that one must be both upright and straightforward before cultivating loving-kindness. It is very important to speak the truth and communicate with others in a way that is not deceptive or misleading. To the Buddha, straightforwardness lays a solid foundation for cultivating loving-kindness. One should not be crooked. Unfortunately, many people are motivated by delusion and act in unwholesome ways. This destroys the seeds of loving-kindness.

We should remember that truthfulness is not merely the absence of false speech but also the presence of honesty and openness. Truthfulness means not pretending to be what you are not or refusing to accept things as they really are. Jesus also encouraged honesty in his followers, even going to so far as to call Satan the father of all lies. To the Christian God, truthfulness is a blessing. He says to His people in the Book of Jeremiah: “And if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, 'As sure as the Lord lives,' the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory.”¹²²

To those in the Judeo-Christian tradition, truth is sacred. Moreover, Jesus highlighted the freedom that truthfulness brings to us when he said that the truth shall make us free. Experiencing freedom from remorse, worry, and delusion makes truthfulness a joy through which we create a foundation for loving-kindness.

¹²² Holy Bible, Jeremiah 4:2, p.796.

Not Proud (anātimānī)

Most people are very proud of themselves, letting their conceit inflate their ego until they lose their humility completely. A lack of modesty has created great misery and conflict between individuals throughout history, including modern day. Pride is surely a recipe for suffering in the world! The Buddha declared pride to be a very dangerous obstruction on the path to liberation. Most people are habitually preoccupied with measuring, or judging themselves against others. They tend to put themselves in categories, either as superior, inferior, or equal to others. The Buddha, however, taught that all these categories are unhelpful for someone seeking spiritual growth.

On the mundane level, being appropriately proud of one's country, family, or personal success is not fatal, as it motivates us to acquire more worldly things. However, conceit, or arrogance, is one of the higher obstacles to enlightenment in Buddhism. Should one wish to obtain final enlightenment, it must be eliminated.

Jesus famously taught that we should not judge others unless our own behavior is in line with what is wholesome: 'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.'¹²³ This does not mean, of course, that we can never call something wholesome, or unwholesome. However, we must be judicious and compassionate in our differentiation, instead of proud and judgmental. We must always look to ourselves and our actions before discussing the faults of others, judging only their actions and not the intent of their hearts.

¹²³ Holy Bible, Mathew 7:2, p. 1018.

Easy to Speak to (Suvaco)

This quality is related to a lack of pride, as most arrogant, or conceited, people are difficult to speak to. One must be on eggshells at all times as to not challenge their delusions! Those who wish to develop spiritually must instead be open to constructive criticism, and always willing to discuss issues kindly with others. Jesus stated this beautifully when he asked, 'Why do you look at the speck of dust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own?' ¹²⁴ Most people are fault-finders; they always look for other's rough spots, and ignore their own. Such people are very difficult to communicate with, and their ability to cultivate loving-kindness is limited by their self-obsession.

Meek (Mudu)

One who is gentle and mild paves the way for loving-kindness to arise. The Buddha declared that the wise delight in harmlessness, while Jesus famously stated, '*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*' ¹²⁵ Those who are aggressive and manipulative, they sabotage their ability to generate good will for those around them; their actions are rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion. Instead, the wise act with concern for others, not wanting to harm, or impose, upon others.

We must remember that meekness is not passivity, or a refusal to take a stand. More often than not this refusal of responsibility is rooted in passive aggressive anger, or fear.

¹²⁴ Holy Bible, Mathew 7:3, p.1018.

¹²⁵ Holy Bible, Mathew 5:5, p.1015.

Meekness means acting in ways motivated by generosity, loving-kindness, compassion, and wisdom, even when we must do difficult, or unpopular things. Meekness is not defined by a certain type of action, but instead by a mindset of tolerance and harmlessness.

Contented and Easy to Support (Santussako, Suvaro)

Contentedness is valued by many spiritual traditions, including Buddhism. One must be satisfied with the content of their life. Those who are wealthy and comfortable, but not content, will be spiritually unfulfilled and constantly unhappy as the fear of losing their treasure, and the desire for more and more overwhelms them. No amount of money or possessions can bring the joy that contentment brings; for this reason, The Buddha referred to contentment as the highest wealth¹²⁶. In the same way, Christ warned against those who harbored material wealth at the expense of their spiritual development. He also pointed at the futility of the constant worry and anxiety that comes with great riches by asking, 'Who among you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?'¹²⁷

Instead of spending our time gathering possessions, we should be content with what is available, suitable, and within our means, this way we are easy to support as well. People with endless needs and insatiable wants, on the other hand, are difficult to satisfy, and can be a great burden. When we are caught up in the past or the future, it is impossible to cultivate unselfish love. The whole teaching of loving-kindness requires us to be in the present moment.

¹²⁶ *santutthi paraman dhanan- Dhp.Verse.204*

¹²⁷ Holy Bible, Mathew 6:27, p.1018.

Not Involved with Families (Kulesu ananugiddho)

Being overly attached to one's family comes at a heavy price. Although we must have respect and love for our family members, we cannot let our dedication towards those closest to us get in the way of our spiritual development. The Buddha realized this when he decided to leave his wife and child in order to strive for enlightenment. It was not a selfish act, but one of ultimate kindness, done out of service to the world. He gave up mundane attachment to his family in order to bring a more valuable spiritual presence to the world.

Christ says much the same thing when he tells a crowd, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be my disciple.'¹²⁸ Does this mean that Christ really wants his followers to hate their families? Of course not! Instead, Jesus is telling us that our dedication to the goal of spiritual development must be so great that we let nothing get in the way.

Neglecting our responsibilities is not loving-kindness. The Buddha taught that one should honor and care for his, or her, parents, while Jesus said that a man who abandons his family is worse than an unbeliever. However, compassionate attention to the needs of one's family should be done with strict boundaries so that, in our quest to care for those who mean so much to us, we do not sacrifice our spiritual lives.

Light in One's Activities (Appakicco)

We should be mindful whenever we use material resources, never taking more than we need. Too many people on

¹²⁸ Holy Bible, Luke 14:26, p. 1098.

this Earth consume with extravagance and heedlessness. The responsible use of our limited resources is very important, not only for us, but for future generations. We must live simply so that others may simply live! Our consumption should be guided by loving-kindness for all future generations.

In the Dhammapada, the Buddha advised his monks: 'As a bee gathers honey from the flower without injuring its color or fragrance, even a sage should go on his alms round in the village'¹²⁹

While collecting nectar and pollen to create honey, the bee does not harm the plant. In fact, the bee helps to pollinate the plants so that they can continue to live and grow! The simile of the bee highlights some idea of how to live our life without harming others.

In the Book of Matthew, Christ discusses the importance of searching for the spiritual before seeking the material: 'But seek first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you.'¹³⁰

With Calm Sense Faculties (Santindriyo)

The Buddha taught us to calm our six senses. Without mindfulness at the six sense-doors, outside stimulation leads to either greed, in the case of pleasant experience, hatred, in the case of unpleasant experience, or bewilderment, in the case of

¹²⁹ Buddharakkhita, Achariya, p. 33

*Yathāpi bhamaro puppham vaṇṇagandham aheṭṭhayaṃ
Paleti rasamādāya evaṃ gāme munī care.*

¹³⁰ Holy Bible, Mathew 6:33, p.33.

neutral experience. Sadly, many people in our society encourage us to cultivate greed and craving for sensual pleasures as a way to happiness. The Buddha, however, taught over and over again that there are two paths ¹³¹, one that leads to worldly sensual pleasures, which are a recipe for suffering and stress and the other that leads to liberation, the ultimate happiness of Nibbāna.

When we are not mindful of our senses, greed can not only hurt us terribly, but also lead to great pain in the world. In the Book of James, it is said: 'What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet... You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, why? Because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.' ¹³² When we indulge ourselves in such a way, suffering is never far behind.

Discreet

To be discreet is to possess pragmatic wisdom. The Buddha, when discussing the qualities of the Dhamma, stated that *it is to be realized by the wise*. ¹³³ A wise person is one who cultivates wholesome states of mind through ethical behavior in body, speech, and mind. It is a wise man who follows the path to happiness. By contrast, the unwise person is the one who

¹³¹ *Aññā hi lābhūpanisā, aññā nibbānagāmini; Evametam abhi aññāya, bhikkhu buddhassa sāvako; Sakkāram nābhinandeyya, vivekamanubrūhaye.*

—Dhp. Verse.75.

¹³² Holy Bible, James 4:1-3, p. 1282.

¹³³ *Paccataṃ vedītabbo viññuhi*

cultivates unwholesome states of mind through immorality. He, or she, follows the path that leads to suffering. To be discreet means to possess discerning wisdom that can help cut through delusion.

Interestingly, Jesus had a similar insight: 'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; know and the door will be opened to you.'¹³⁴ Jesus recognized the need to be wise. Endowed with wisdom, a person can ask, seek, and know. Conversely, the unwise person does not seek enlightenment.

Not Impudent

To prepare ourselves for loving-kindness, we must be polite, yielding, and not bold. This flexibility, and deference, requires great courage. Being rigid, or disrespectful, in one's life can cause tension and conflict with others. We have to learn to accommodate the needs of those around us with compassion and understanding.

Not Greedily Attached to Families

To the Buddha, greed is the near enemy of loving-kindness. If we are not wise, attachment to other people can disguise itself as loving-kindness. However, this is not really selfless love; a person cannot be attached and practice real loving-kindness at the same time. You cannot have your cake and eat it, too! This is why Jesus told his followers, 'No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve

¹³⁴ Holy Bible, Mathew 7:7, p.1018.

both God and money.' ¹³⁵ When we are attached to one thing, our loving-kindness is no longer universal.

Abstaining from What the Wise Would Criticize

The Buddha repeatedly stated, '[One] should not commit even the slightest misdeed, that the wise might find fault.' ¹³⁶ Ethical behavior is the cornerstone of any spiritual practice. In Buddhism, the five precepts are considered the minimum standard for the development of a virtuous life, and an assurance of happiness for all beings who undertake them. They are a pledge to not destroy innocent life; to not take what is not given; to avoid sexual misconduct; to speak truthfully; and to avoid intoxication.

In this world of immorality and self-destructive desire, the precepts provide protective armor for ourselves, as well as our families, our society, and the entire world in which we live. We should not do any slight thing that the wise would later censure. To fulfill this noble aspiration, we must orient our actions in daily life towards the preservation, and protection of the life and property of others, respecting the commitments we've made, and maintaining a mind free of obstruction and desire.

In Judeo-Christian thought, many of the Ten Commandments aim towards this goal as well: 'You shall not kill; You shall not steal; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor; You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or maidservant, or his ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.' ¹³⁷ These

¹³⁵ Holy Bible, Mathew: 24, p.1018.

¹³⁶ Jayawickrama, p.57.

¹³⁷ Holy Bible, Exodus 20: 13, p. 86.

commandments, like the five precepts, are designed to help us act with selfless love towards those around us. They are a gift of peace, and compassion, to others.

The Meditative Cultivation of Loving - Kindness.

The Buddha enjoined us to develop loving-kindness towards all beings in a type of meditation known as mettā meditation. Generally, we do this by radiating loving-kindness to various types of beings in a specific order. The meditator moves from generating it for himself, or herself, then on to many different types of beings, often organized by their physical characteristics, and relationship to the meditator, before eventually spreading loving-kindness towards all beings in the entire universe. A common mantra for this activity is, 'May all beings be well, safe, and secure.'

The Buddha taught that spreading loving-kindness to all living beings was one of the most important things a spiritual seeker could do. When we open our hearts and minds, there is no limit to the number of beings towards whom we can send these thoughts. This is why the Buddha called loving-kindness, or mettā, boundless, or limitless Love. In the Discourse on Loving - Kindness, the Blessed One instructs his disciples: 'Let him cultivate Mettā towards the whole world, above, below, and all around, unobstructed, free from hatred and enmity.' ¹³⁸

This is very similar to what Jesus said when he gave the Sermon on the Mount: 'Love your enemy, and pray for those who

¹³⁸ *Mettam ca sabbalokasmim mānasam bhāvaye aparimānam uddham adho ca tiriyañca asambādham averam asapattam*

persecute you, that you may be the son of your Father in heaven. He sends his son to rise on the evil, and the good, and sends his rain to the righteous, and unrighteous'¹³⁹ Even on the cross, as he was being tortured to death, the Christian Savior asked God the Father to forgive those who were killing him. This is a perfect example of universal and unconditional love.

Turning Loving-Kindness to Wisdom

The Buddha ends his Discourse on Loving-Kindness with a short addendum: 'Not approaching erroneous views, endowed with virtue and insight, abandoning greed for sensual pleasures: one does not take rebirth in a womb.'¹⁴⁰

This shows that one who has cultivated loving-kindness is in a strong and secure position for eliminating greed, hatred, and ignorance, once and for all through the development of perfect wisdom.

In Christianity, there are three types of wisdom: the wisdom of God (I Corinthians 2:6-7), the wisdom of the world (I Corinthians 2:6), and the wisdom of man (Ecclesiastes 1:16-18). The Bible teaches that this ultimate wisdom is granted by God, and cannot be discovered through intellectualizing, or studying. In Buddhism, there is also a concept of worldly and otherworldly, or supramundane, wisdom. While worldly wisdom is easy to find through logical argument and rational discussion, the ultimate knowledge of the nature of things can only be found through

¹³⁹ Holy Bible, Mathew 6:45, p. 1017.

¹⁴⁰ *Ditthiñca anupagamma sīlavā dassanena sampanno Kāmesu vineyya gedham nahi jātu gabbhaseyyam punareṭṭi.*

direct experience. While the Buddha and Christ disagreed about the source of this wisdom, they both agreed that a strong base of ethical behavior, and loving-kindness, was needed before it could develop.

When one takes a look at the different doctrines of loving-kindness found in both Christianity and Buddhism, it becomes abundantly clear that the two religious traditions both hold the same mental state of unconditional, non-self-interested love in high esteem. However, it is only the Buddha who elevated the concept of loving-kindness to its highest philosophical level through the advent of mettā meditation. But regardless of the differences in terminology and metaphysics, it is clear that both Jesus Christ, and the Buddha, taught with a strong emphasis on the transformative power of good will and love towards others. It is my sincere hope that these teachings lead to the spiritual development and enlightenment of Christians and Buddhists, as well as all men and women from all religious traditions on this Earth we share.

APPENDIX

1. MAHĀMAṄGALA SUTTA: THE GREAT DISCOURSE ON BLESSINGS ¹⁴¹

Evam me sutam: ekam samayam bhagavā sāvattthiyam viharati jetavane anāthapindikassa ārāme. Atha kho aññatarā devatā abhikkantāya rattiyā abhikkantavannā kevalakappam jetavanam obhāsetvā yena bhagavā tenupasaṅkami, upasaṅkamitvā bhagavantam abhivādetvā ekamantam aṭṭhāsi, ekamantam tthitā kho sā devatā bhagavantam gāthāya ajjhabhāsi.

Bahu devā manussā ca mangalāni acintayum, Ākaṅkhamānā sotthānam brūhi maṅgala muttamam.

Asevanā ca bālānam panditānañca sevanā, Pūjā ca pūjanīyānam etaṃ maṅgalamuttamam.

Patirūpadesavāso ca pubbe ca katapuññatā, Attasammāpanidhi ca etaṃ maṅgalamuttamam.

¹⁴¹ PTS: Khp.5

*Bāhusaccañca sippañca vinayo ca susikkhito,
Subhāsītā ca yā vācā etaṃ mangalamuttamaṃ.*

*Mātāpitū upatthānaṃ puttadārassa saṅgaho,
Anākulā ca kammantā etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

*Dānañca dhammacariyā ca ñātakānañca saṅgaho,
Anavajjāni kammāni etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

*Ārati virati pāpā majjapānā ca saññamo,
Appamādo ca dhammesu etaṃ mangalamuttamaṃ.*

*Gāravo ca nivāto ca santuṭṭhi ca kataññutā,
Kālena dhammasavaṇaṃ etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

*Khantī ca sovacassatā samanānañca dassanam,
Kālena dhammasākacchā etaṃ mangalamuttamaṃ.*

*Tapo ca brahmacariyañca ariyasaccānadassanam,
Nibbāṇasacchikiriyā ca etaṃ mangalamuttamaṃ*

*Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi cittam yassa na kampati,
Asokaṃ virajaṃ khemaṃ etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

*Etādisāni katvāna sabbattha maparājitā,
Sabbattha sotthiṃ gacchanti taṃ tesam maṅgalamuttamanti.*

English Translation:

*Thus I have I heard. One time the exalted One was living
near Savathi, in Jeta's Grove, the monastery of Anathapindika.*

Then, in the middle of the night, a certain deity of astounding beauty, lighting up the entire Jeta's Grove, approached the Exalted One. Drawing near, she paid homage to the Exalted One and stood to one side. Standing thus the deity addressed the Exalted One inverse:

*"Many deities and humans
Have poured on blessings,
Desiring their well-being.
Tell me the blessings supreme"*

(Buddha's reply)

*To associate not with the foolish,
To be with the wise,
To honor the worthy ones
This is a blessing supreme.*

*To reside in a suitable location,
to have good past deeds done,
to set oneself in the right direction
this is a blessing supreme.*

*To be well spoken, highly trained,
well educated, skilled in handicraft,
and highly disciplined,
this is a blessing supreme.*

*To be well caring of mother, of father,
to look after wife and children,
to engage in a harmless occupation,
this is a blessing supreme.*

*Outstanding behavior, blameless action
open hands to all relatives
and selfless giving,
this is a blessing supreme*

*To cease and abstain from evil,
to avoid intoxicants,
to be diligent in virtuous practices,
this is a blessing supreme.*

*To be reverent and humble,
Content and grateful,
To hear the Dhamma at the right time,
This is a blessing supreme.
To be patient and obedient,
to visit with spiritual people,
to discuss the Dhamma at the right time,
this is a blessing supreme.*

*To live austere and purely,
to see the noble truth*

*and to realize nibbana
this is a blessing supreme.*

*A mind unshaken when touched
by the worldly states, sorrowless, stainless, and secure,
this is a blessing supreme.*

*Those who have fulfilled all these
are everywhere invincible;
they find well-being everywhere,
this is the blessing supreme.*

1. KARAṆĪYA METTA SUTTA (THE LOVING- KINDNESS DISCOURSE) ¹⁴²

Karaṇīyamatthakusalena yaṃ tam santaṃ padaṃ abhisamecca,
Sakko ujū ca sūjū ca suvacocassa mudu anatimānī.

Santussako ca subharo ca appakicco ca sallahukavuttī,
Santindriyo ca nipako ca appagabbho kulesu ananugiddho.

Na ca khuddam samācare kiñci yena viññū pare upavadeyyuṃ
Sukhino vā khemino hontu sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā

Ye keci pāna bhūtatthi tasā vā thāvarā vā anavasesā
Dīghā vā ye mahantā vā majjhamā rassakāṇukathulā

Ditṭhā vā yeva additṭhā ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre
Bhūtā vā sambhavesī vā sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā

¹⁴² PTS:Khp.9

Na paro param nikubbetha nātimaññetha katthaci naṃ kañci
Byārosanā paṭighasaññā nāññamaññassa dukkhamiccheyya

Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttaṃ āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe
Evampi sabbabhūtesū mānaṃ bhāvaye aparimānaṃ

Mettaṃ ca sabbalokasmiṃ mānaṃ bhāvaye aparimānaṃ
Uddhaṃ adho ca tiriyañca asambādhaṃ averaṃ asapattaṃ

Tiṭṭhaṃ caraṃ nisinno vā sayāno vā yāvatassa vigatamiddho
Etaṃ satim adhiṭṭheyya brahmametaṃ vihāraṃ idhamāhu

Diṭṭhiñca anupagamma sīlavā dāssanena sampanno
Kāmesu vineyya gedhaṃ nahi jātu gabbhaseyyaṃ punaretīti.

English Translation:

One skilled in good, wishing to attain that state of peace should
act thus: One should be able, straight, upright, obedient, gentle,
and humble.

One should be content, easy to support, with few duties, living
lightly, controlled in senses, discreet, not impudent, unattached
to families.

One should not do any slight wrong for which the wise might
censor one.

May all beings be happy and secure!

May all beings have happy minds!

Whatever living being there may be without exception, weak or
strong, long, large, middling, short, subtle or gross,

Visible or invisible, living near or far,, born or coming to birth,
May all beings have happy minds!

Let no one deceive another, nor despise anyone anywhere.

Neither in anger nor enmity should anyone wish harm to
another.

As a mother would risk her own life to protect her only child,
Even so towards all living beings
One should cultivate a boundless heart.

One should cultivate for all the world

a heart of boundless loving-kindness,
above, below and all around,
unobstructed, without hate or enmity.

Whether standing, walking, or sitting,
lying down or whenever awake,
one should develop this mindfulness,
this is called divinely dwelling here.

Not falling into erroneous views,
but virtuous and endowed with vision
removing desire for sensual pleasures,
one comes never again to birth in the womb.

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BUDDHISM/PHILOSOPHY

It is encouraging to see that in the present anthology of writings on Buddhism and the environment an appreciable attempt has been made to highlight the philosophy of life, and ethical values, contained in the ancient body of Buddhist wisdom. Where relevant, an attempt has also been made to draw comparisons with other systems of traditional religious wisdom, with a view to revising those core values that mankind appears to be paying less heed to, due to the impact of the development of technology at the present time. I believe this anthology has the capacity to awaken us to the realities of the present predicament regarding the relationship of humans to their environment, and to educate us about the applicability of a body of ancient wisdom to the solution of current social problems that need our urgent attention.

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