

EARLY BUDDHIST MORAL THEORY FOR GLOBAL EDUCATION IN ETHICS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Buddha's teaching found in the Pāli discourses discusses individual's moral responsibility, efficacy of willed human action, efficacy of human effort and self-initiative in moral self-transformation here and now. It reveals, people are free to choose which way to go, either along the path to peace and happiness or along the path to conflict and misery. If they choose to follow a path of hoarding, possessing, and acquiring wealth, it is likely to result in dispute, conflict and war and subsequently in poverty and unhappiness. However, if they choose to follow a path of giving, abandoning and letting go, it will result in peace, prosperity and happiness. If we ask why this seemingly paradoxical relationship between cause and effect, the answer is simple: It is how the law of *kamma* - intended mental, verbal and physical actions -grounded on the law of dependent co-arising works. When the mind is emancipated from greed, anger and delusion, the emancipated one experiences release, peace and happiness. As the greedy are never satisfied, they often go after more, and as a result, they end up in unhappiness. Anger and lust constantly inflame us within. Giving a gift, saving a life, receiving another's genuine love and care will generate happiness; stealing, killing, forcing another to make love

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will not. To be truly happy, one's conduct must truly be good, directed to one's own and others' goodness. How to be truly good depends on how to do good deeds in tune with the workings of the principle of the efficacy of intentional action (*kamma-vāda*).

The principle of the efficacy of intentional actions is one of the three principles that comes to constitute the early Buddhist moral theory. The other two are the principle of the necessity for doing good deeds (*kiriya-vāda*) and the principle of exercising energy to do morally good actions (*viriya-vāda*). The Buddha reveals the three principles in a discourse (AN I, p.287) as follows: "At present I am the *Arahat*, the Fully Enlightened One, I teach [three principles]: principle of [intentional] action, principle of [doing good] deeds, principle of [exercising] energy." On this point, Karunadasa (2013, p. 75) comments: "These three principles... bring into focus the three important dimensions of the Buddhist teaching on the theory of moral life. What they seek to show is that the advocacy of moral life in itself is not adequate. To be meaningful, the advocacy of moral life must be supplemented, first with a rational explanation as to the efficacy of moral actions, and secondly, with a justification for the necessity and desirability of the role of human effort in the practice of the moral life." The principle of intentional action recognizes that there is a moral order according to which deliberate human actions entail certain consequences. It claims that there is a correlation between what we do (our actions) and what we reap (consequences) and that one is responsible for one's actions. The principle of doing good deeds recognizes the need to do morally wholesome acts and to refrain from morally unwholesome ones.¹ It advocates that we lead a morally good life, accepting the moral norms and the efficacy of the intentional actions. The principle of exercising energy to do good deeds recognizes the efficacy, necessity and the desirability of the role of human effort in the pursuit of moral life. Thus the structure of the early Buddhist moral theory could be likened to a triangle, in which the three principles referred above are connected to each other like the three lines of the triangle. If we emphasize one over the other two, it is likely that we

1. See Dhammapada verse 183 (Norman 2004, p. 28): "The avoidance of all evil; the undertaking of good; the cleansing of one's mind; this is the teaching of the awakened ones".

misunderstand and misinterpret the structure of the moral theory, and in turn the moral theory itself. For a holistic understanding of it, it requires that we take into account all three dimensions.

In the traditional Buddhist lands, however, the Buddhist moral theory is defined to be one-dimensional, that is, only by means of the principle of the efficacy of intentional actions or the teaching of *kamma*. This has resulted in that the Buddhists in these lands understand the Buddha's moral theory merely to be a ritualistic and political tool for earning merits and justifying social disparities present in their communities.² Therefore, the traditional Buddhists tend to perform some selected group of moral acts such as food offerings to the Buddha images and the monastic members ritualistically with the aim of gaining material goods and human or heavenly life in the next life. The effect of such misunderstanding has caused the Buddhists to neglect moral practice in tune with the early Buddhist moral theory. This paper, therefore, aims to point out that if the moral theory as understood in the early Buddhist teachings is to be used in global education in ethics, it must be approached holistically, taking into account all three principles: the principle of intentional actions, the principle of doing good deeds, and the principle of exercising energy. To achieve this aim, the paper discusses all three principles one by one. It aims to arrive at a conclusion that all three principles are required not only to define the early Buddhist moral theory but also to get an accurate picture of how moral law in life and world actually works. Such undertaking will undoubtedly take us to find out the appropriateness of the early Buddhist moral theory over that of the traditional one for global education in ethics.

2. See King 2005, p. 22 & p. 84. The traditional Buddhism in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma tends to encourage passivity with regard to the status quo. As Sulak says (p. 22): "Established Buddhism explains this oppression as the working of *karma*, saying that both peasants and the landlord are reaping the results of their actions in former lives; the peasant of bad deeds and the landlord of merit achieved by building temples and images of the Buddha." Suu Kyi states (p. 84): "Some people think of *karma* as destiny or fate and that there's nothing they can do about it. It's simply what is going to happen because of their past deeds. This is the way in which *karma* is often interpreted in Burma."

2. KAMMA-VĀDA

The principle of intentional action is one of the three principles of the early Buddhist moral theory. It gives emphasis not to the past actions but to the present actions. What works for transforming one's life or reaching one's either mundane goals or spiritual heights is what one does at present rather than what one did in the past or will do in the future. As that past has already gone, no one can return to it. What this means is that present actions are central to present life. What distinguishes humans into low and high now is the actions that they perform now. It is the actions that define who we are and who we will be (MN III, p. 203): "Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior." Even though the past actions have contributed in definitive ways to shape our present birth, as text points out (Sn, v. 650), "not by birth does one become a brahman (priest, superior person); not by birth does one become a non-brahman." If so, how? It is "by action one becomes a brahman; by action one becomes a non-brahman." This is also the case when it comes to categorize people into other conventional occupations. As the same text states (Sn, vv. 651-652): It is "by action one becomes a farmer; by action one becomes a craftsman; by action one becomes a merchant; by action one becomes a servant. By action one becomes a thief; by action one becomes a fighting-man; by action one becomes a sacrificer; by action one becomes a king." Therefore, it is necessary that we understand action and its result as they really are, to be dependently arisen. "Thus the wise, seeing conditioned origination, knowing the fruit of action, see this action as it really is. By action the world goes on; by action people go on. Beings have action as their bond, like the linchpin is the bond of a chariot as it goes along" (Sn, vv. 653-654; Norman 2004). Ability of the present actions to transform our present state is remarkable. The actions that people do now not only have a direct impact on their present experience but also contribute to shaping the experiences yet to have.

The workings of the principle of intentional actions is no different from the workings of the law of dependent co-arising. The former

is about the functioning of the moral law and the latter is about the functioning of the general causal law, applicable to all aspects of life and world. The popular aphorism concerning this law is (SN I, p. 227): “As the man sows, so he reaps.”³ In this moral theory, the effects of the past actions are not denied but we are told that they are not static and that they do not affect deterministically. The Buddha points out our connection to past actions in the following terms (MN I, p. 390): “The birth of one who has become is from one who had become; whatever one does, by it one arises. When one has arisen, contacts touch one. Thus I say, beings are recipients of [their own] actions.”⁴

With every moral action performed, the doer grows. How does this happen? A good action performed purifies the mind; a bad action performed defiles it. Again, the purity and impurity of the mind also determine further actions and behavior. This mutually reinforcing link between action and the state of mind in turn shape one’s attitude and character. As the Buddhist moral theory informs us, intention is the motivational force behind an action and it determines the moral quality of that action. All moral and immoral conduct spring from intentional action. Only intentional acts are ethically significant. For this reason, the Buddha identifies action to be really mental (AN III, p. 415): “It is intention (*cetanā*) that I call *kamma* (morally efficacious acts); for having intended, one acts by body, speech, or mind.” The intensity of the act depends on the extent to which it is performed deliberately (*sañcicca*). As such, the moral quality of an act lies in the intention behind it. Good intention is the good motive behind the action and it characterizes good action; bad intention is the bad motive which in turn characterizes bad action. One performs actions either with good motives or with bad motives. Greed, hate and delusion are defined to be bad motives and they always contribute to producing evil behavior. The opposites of greed, hatred and delusion are given

3. “Whatever sort of seed is sown, that is the sort of fruit one reaps: The doer of good reaps good; the doer of evil reaps evil. By you, dear, has the seed been sown; thus you will experience the fruit” (Bodhi 2000, p. 328).

4. *iti kho puñña bhūtā bhūtassa upapatti hoti; yaṃ karoti tena upapajjati, upapannam enaṃ phassā phusanti. evaṃ pāhaṃ puñña kammaḍāyādā sattā ti vadāmi* (Kukkuravatika-sutta).

as non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion, and they are identified to be good motives that come to produce morally good behavior. Once one removes greed, hatred and delusion, the natural state of mind would be qualified to be called a state of non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion, and they bear positive qualities that are inherent in the natural mind. Numerous patterns of bodily, verbal and mental behaviors are the natural expressions of these good and bad motives (MN I, p. 489): “Vaccha, greed is unwholesome, non-greed is wholesome; hate is unwholesome, non-hate is wholesome; delusion is unwholesome, non-delusion is wholesome. In this way three things are unwholesome and the other three things are wholesome.”

As the law of dependent co-arising teaches, human behavior is conditioned by causes, and that behavior is followed by correlated consequences. Considering the workings of the link between action and result, a discourse classifies actions into four types (MN I, pp. 389-391: dark action with dark result, bright action with bright result, dark-and-bright action with dark-and-bright result, and action that is neither dark nor bright with neither-dark-nor-bright result. The first link, dark action with dark result, could be observed from the case of a man who afflicts others and as a result arises in an afflictive world where he meets with afflictive contacts and in turn experiences the ensuing afflictive feelings, exclusively painful. The second link, bright action with bright result, is to be seen from the case of a man who does not afflict others and as a result arises in a non-afflictive world where he meets with non-afflictive contacts and in turn experiences the ensuing non-afflictive feelings, exclusively pleasant. The third link, dark-bright action with dark-bright result, is to be seen from the case of a man who both afflicts and does not afflict others and as a result arises in an afflictive and non-afflictive mixed world where he meets with both afflictive and non-afflictive contacts and in turn experiences the ensuing both afflictive and non-afflictive feelings, mingled pleasure and pain. The fourth link, action that is neither dark nor bright with neither-dark-nor-bright result, refers to the destruction of action, that is, the intention to abandon all three types of action mentioned in the first three. The human actions are a mixed batch, and as such we are also entitled to experience pleasant feelings as well as unpleasant feelings.

For consequences of the actions to be felt or come to fruition, it may take time. This is valid for both good and bad actions. Therefore, we should not rush to negate the principle of intentional actions, as the nihilists do. As it is expressed in a didactic text (Dhp, vv. 121-122), “Think not lightly of evil, saying, ‘It will not come to me.’ Drop by drop is the water pot filled. Likewise, the fool, gathering it little by little, fills himself with evil. Think not lightly of good, saying, ‘It will not come to me.’ Drop by drop is the water pot filled. Likewise, the wise man, gathering it little by little, fills himself with good.” In principle, when actions come to maturity, one is destined to reap their results. This is highlighted with regard to the consequences of evil actions (Dhp, v. 127): “Neither in the kingdom of the air, nor in the middle of the sea, nor if you hide in a mountain cave, nowhere on earth will you find a place where you can escape the fruit of your bad actions.” What this implies is that one is responsible for one’s own actions and that the result of an action is to be experienced by the doer himself. This is clearly expressed in a narrative passage in a discourse (MN III, pp. 179-180): “But this evil action of yours was not done by your mother or your father, or by your brother or your sister, or by your friends and companions, or by your kinsmen and relatives, or by recluses and brahmans, or by gods. This evil action was done by you yourself, and you yourself will experience its result.”

The doctrine of *kamma* expresses that there is a correlation between action (*kamma*) and result (*phala/vipāka*). However, as it indicates, when it comes to the exact workings of this relationship, it is to be understood that the relationship operates in accordance with the law of dependent co-arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). Thus, the early Buddhist moral theory identifies the relationship between action and result to be not deterministic. This relationship between action and result could clearly be summarized as: “Dependent upon the nature of action and the circumstances in which it is committed, there would be appropriate consequences.” What this intends to state is that the early Buddhist moral theory denies not only strict determinism (*niyati-vāda*) but also strict indeterminism (*ahetu-appaccaya-vāda / adhicca-samuppanna-vāda*). The latter two positions are non-Buddhist and are identified by speculative theories that lend ethical life of the individual and society to be meaningless. The deterministic theory of cause and effect

relationship states a person experiences the result of an action in precisely the same way that he created it. A discourse presents (AN I, p. 249) this position as: “Just as a man does a deed, so does he experience its consequences.” Such a rendering advocates complete determinism between action and result. If it is the case, as the Buddha points out, religious life is meaningless because there is no opportunity for the complete destruction of suffering. The correlation between action and result that the Buddha points out, however, is said to render the undertaking of the Buddhist religious life meaningful. This new perspective is expressed in the text (AN I, p. 149) as follows: “Just as a man does a deed whose consequences would be experienced in a certain way (*yathāvedaniyam*), so does he experiences its consequences (*assa vipākam*).” If this is the case, religious life is meaningful, and there will be an opportunity for the complete destruction of suffering.

Furthermore, according to this Buddhist moral theory, actions will generate results, but these results are not the same all the time. There are various other conditions that can interfere in the determination of the causal relationship between action and result. This conditionality of the result is illustrated by the Buddha with the following simile (AN I, p. 250): If a man puts a grain of salt into a small cup filled with water, the water in the cup soon becomes salty and undrinkable because of that grain of salt. However, if he were to throw a similar grain of salt into the river Ganges, because of the great mass of water therein the water would not become salty and undrinkable. Similarly, the Buddha says (AN I, p. 250), some trifling evil deed committed by one person may lead him to hell. But similar trifling evil deed committed by another person may bring consequences experienced in this very life that may be barely noticeable. Why is this difference? The Buddha explains: A certain person has not properly cultivated his body, behavior, thought, and intelligence; he is inferior and insignificant and his life is short and miserable; of such a person even a trifling evil deed done leads him to hell. However, in the case of a person who has properly cultivated his body, behavior, thought and intelligence, who is superior and not insignificant, and who is endowed with long life, the consequences of a similar evil deed are to be experienced in this very life, and sometimes may not appear at all. What this textual explanation

conveys is that depending upon the present situation of the doer, the effect of certain actions may sometimes be so insignificant that they are not even perceived. According to the Buddhist moral theory, sometimes the consequences of an action may be experienced in this very life, and sometimes in a future existence.

3. KIRIYA-VĀDA

The second principle of the early Buddhist moral theory is *kiriya-vāda* and it encourages people to do morally good actions. The Buddha says that his moral theory instigates people to moral action while those of others to moral inaction or non-doing (*akiriya*). For example, the strict-determinism advocated at the time of the Buddha states (AN I, p. 173): “Whatever this person experiences—whether pleasure, pain, or neither-pain-nor-pleasure—all that is caused by what was done in the past” (*pubbekata-hetu-vāda*). The Buddha questioned the validity of this view by stating that such a moral theory leads people to moral inaction. He also criticized the theological view of moral causation that advocated (AN I, p. 173): “Whatever this person experiences, all that is caused by God’s creative activity” (*issara-nimmāṇa-vāda*). For the Buddha, this view too causes people to take up a life of moral inaction. Also, he rejected indeterminism that professed (AN I, p. 173): “Whatever this person experiences, all that occurs without a cause or condition” (*ahetu-appaccaya-vāda*). For the Buddha, holding of this theory too results in moral inaction.

The Buddha’s moral theory aim to encourage people not only to accept the efficacy of action but also do good actions selectively. His dictum was that one can become great by doing great things. In the words of a discourse, it reads (SN II, p. 29): “One attains to greatness by doing great things, not by doing low things.” The great actions are synonymous with morally wholesome actions (*kusala-kamma*); hence the encouragement here is to do wholesome actions. The discourses present various types of wholesome actions that we could do. Among them, a list of ten actions are popularly listed and discussed in the texts. They are presented as abstentions from unwholesome actions of body, speech and mind. The abstention from unwholesome actions itself creates an opportunity for the

performance of wholesome actions. Thus, there are three wholesome bodily actions, and four verbal actions and three mental actions.

The three wholesome bodily actions are given as follows (AN.V, pp. 266-268):

- i. "One abandons and abstains from killing living beings; lays aside rod and weapon; becomes gentle and kind; abides compassionate to all living beings."
- ii. "One abandons and abstains from taking of what is not given; does not take by way of theft the wealth and property of others in village or forest."
- iii. "One abandons and abstains from misconduct in sensual pleasures; avoids sex with females protected by a parent or parents, siblings or relatives; married, engaged or legally protected".

The four wholesome verbal actions are:

- i. "One abandons and abstains from false speech; does not lie when questioned as a witness; does not in full awareness speak falsehood for one's own ends, or for another's ends, or for the sake of some trifling gain."
- ii. "One abandons and abstains from malicious speech; does not repeat elsewhere what one has heard here in order to divide those people from these, nor does one repeat to these people what one has heard elsewhere in order to divide these people from those; unites those who are divided; becomes a promoter of friendships; enjoys concord, rejoices in concord, delights in concord; is a speaker of words that promote concord."
- iii. "One abandons and abstains from harsh speech; speaks such words as are gentle, pleasing to the ear, and loveable, as go to the heart, are courteous, desired by many, and agreeable to many."
- iv. "One abandons and abstains from gossip; speaks at the right time, speaks what is fact, speaks what is beneficial, speaks on the dhamma and the discipline; at the right

time one speaks such words as are worth recording, reasonable, moderate and advantageous”.

The three wholesome mental actions are:

- i. “One is not covetous; does not covet the wealth and property of others thus: ‘Oh may what belongs to another be mine!’”
- ii. “One’s mind is good will; one has intentions free from hate thus: ‘May these beings be free from enmity, affliction and anxiety! May they live happily!’”
- iii. “One has right-view, undistorted vision, and believes in the efficacy of actions, good and bad actions; good and virtuous people who have themselves realized by direct knowledge and declare this world and the other world.”

Can a person do morally wholesome actions in his own initiative? When this issue was raised, the Buddha answered positively: “Yes, one can.” The texts indicate that people are generally free to think and act, though with some self-imposed limitations at the initial stages of one’s practice. However, as the disciples make progress in understanding the Buddha’s teaching, these self-imposed limitations start to dissolve. Through understanding and practice, one can enhance one’s capacity to think and do freely. For instance, a key aim of the Buddhist path and practice is to be able to control our mind (AN IV, p. 34): “A monk makes the mind turn according to his will and he turns not by the mind’s wish.” At the end of the day, the practitioner should be able to claim himself or herself (SN I, p. 132): “I am the master of my mind.” In this way, the early Buddhist moral theory advocates the fact that doing of great or low things is up to the individual. When it comes to practice, one is one’s master (Dhp, v. 165): “By oneself is evil done; by oneself is one defiled. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one made pure. Purity and impurity depend on oneself; no one can purify another.”

A key principle in the pedagogy of early Buddhist moral theory is the factor of motivation. It understands the necessity of motivating people. Once motivated, some become faster and focused. For example, the early discourses show instances where the Buddha motivate his disciples to develop positive attitudes (SN V, pp.

417-418): “Do not entertain negative unwholesome thoughts; do not let the negative unwholesome mind to lead your life.” We find plenty of discourses in which this motivational tone of the Buddha to be noticed. For example, the Buddha gives advice to disciples to abandon evil with following words (AN I, p. 59): “Abandon evil, O disciples! One can abandon evil, disciples. If it were impossible to abandon evil, I would not ask you to do so. But as it can be done, therefore, I say, ‘Abandon evil!’ If this abandoning of evil would bring harm and suffering, I would not ask you to abandon it. But as the abandoning of evil brings well-being and happiness, therefore, I say, ‘Abandon evil!’” Similarly he advises his disciples to cultivate the good (Ibid. p. 59): “Cultivate the good, O disciples! One can cultivate the good, disciples. If it were impossible to cultivate the good, I would not ask you to do so. But as it can be done, therefore, I say, ‘Cultivate the good!’ If this cultivation of the good would bring harm and suffering, I would not ask you to cultivate it. But as the cultivation of the good brings well-being and happiness, therefore, I say, ‘Cultivate the good!’”

The Buddha’s moral theory also discusses the criteria for determining moral and immoral actions, what actions ought to be done and what actions ought not to be done. How can we know whether an action is good or whether it is bad? There are some criteria to consider in deciding the moral quality of an action. For instance, a discourse lists three such criteria (AN I, p. 147): One must think whether one’s own self censures in performing that action (*attādhīpateyya*); whether the wise would disapprove it (*lokādhīpateyya*); or whether it is against the law of the community (*dhammānupateyya*). However, in many contexts, we find the Buddha taking a consequential approach to moral life (SN I, p. 57): “One should properly do the deed one knows leads to one’s own welfare.” It is mostly the consideration given to the immediate as well as the long term consequences of action. The Buddha’s golden rule in moral decision making is presented as follows: “I do not want X to be done unto me. Others too who are like myself do not want X to be done unto them. I ought not do unto others what I do not like done unto myself. Therefore, I ought not do X.” This golden rule is reflected in his moral instructions to the disciples. For example we read in a text (Dhp, vv. 129-130): “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 another to kill. One who, while himself seeking happiness, oppresses with violence other beings who also desire happiness, will not attain happiness here after.” This pattern of moral reasoning is further detailed in a discourse as follows (SN V, pp. 353-354): “What, householder, is the Dhamma exposition applicable to oneself? Here, householder, a noble disciple reflects thus: ‘I like to live. I do not like to die. I desire happiness and dislike unhappiness. Suppose someone should kill me, since I like to live and do not like to die, it would not be pleasing and delightful to me. Suppose I too should kill another who likes to live and does not like to die, who desires happiness and does not desire unhappiness, it would not be pleasing and delightful to that person as well. What is not pleasant and delightful to me is not pleasant and delightful to the other person either. How could I inflict upon another that which is not pleasant and not delightful to me?’ Having reflected in this manner, one refrains from killing; encourages others too to refrain from killing; speaks in praise of refraining from killing. Thus, one’s bodily conduct becomes pure in three ways.”

4. VIRIYA-VĀDA

The whole practice of the Buddhist path depends on our commitment to practice. As a text puts it (Dhp, v. 276): “You yourself must make the effort; the *Tathāgatas* (Buddhas) are only teachers. The meditators who tread the way are released from the shackles of death”. Furthermore, in another context, the Buddha states (SN II, p. 29): “Not by that which is low, may the highest be won; by that which is highest may the highest be won. Worthy of praise is this holy life. The teacher has come to you face to face. Wherefore stir up energy that you may win what is not won, that you may attain what is not attained, that you may realize what is unrealized.” The third principle of the Buddhist moral theory is *virīya-vāda*, the principle of exercising energy, and it is about one’s commitment and application. It recognizes the generation of a threefold energy for bringing an endeavor to a fruitful conclusion. At the commencement of an endeavor, what is required is that we apply “initiating energy” (*ārambha*). Commencement of an act brings us joy (*assāda*). This is also the reason that we like to venture

on many new endeavors. However, during the continuity of an endeavor, as it is normally the case, we confront many difficulties and obstacles (*ādinava*). Therefore, at this stage, what is required is that we apply “passing over energy” (*nikkama*). Finally, for reaching a successful ending (*nissarana*) to the endeavor, it is required that we possess “getting beyond energy” (*parakkama*) for it is due to not applying this energy type that we often see people giving up their pursuits close to the reaping of results. As the Buddha points out, humans possess all these three motivational energies and more. For instance, a discourse identifies six energy types (AN III, pp. 337-338): element of initiation, element of persistence, element of exertion, element of strength, element of continuation, and element of force. It is due to the presence of these energies, we can observe people initiate activities, persist in activities, exert themselves in activities, act with strength, continue in an action, and act with force. This discourse records an interesting dialogue that took place between the Buddha and a brahman. The latter comes to the Buddha and says: “Master Gotama, I hold such a thesis and view as this: “There is no self-initiative (*natthi attakāro*); there is no initiative taken by others (*natthi parakāro*).” The Buddha’s immediate response was: “Brahman, I have never seen or heard of anyone holding such a thesis and view as this. For how can one who comes on his own [will] and returns on his own [will] say (*kathañhi nāma sayam abhikkamanto, sayam paṭikkamanto evaṃ vakkhati*): “There is no self-initiative; there is no initiative taken by others?”” He further questioned the brahman and made him understood that humans possess various types of energies.

“What do you think, brahmin? Does the initiation-energy (ārabha-dhātu) exist?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“When the initiation-energy exists, are beings seen to initiate activity?”

“Yes, Sir.”

When beings are seen to initiate activity because the initiation-energy exists, this is the self-initiative of beings; this is the initiative taken by others”.

In this case, the initiation-energy refers to the energy that functions by way of beginning an activity.

“What do you think, brahmin? Does the persistence-energy (nikkama-dhātu) exist?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“When the persistence-energy exists, are beings seen to persist in activity?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“When beings are seen to persist in activity because the persistence-energy exists, this is the self-initiative of beings; this is the initiative taken by others”.

The persistence-energy here refers to the energy type that is needed to persist in an action.

“What do you think, brahmin? Does the exertion-energy (parakkama-dhātu) exist?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“When the exertion-energy exists, are beings seen to exert themselves in activity?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“When beings are seen to exert themselves in activity because the exertion-energy exists, this is the self-initiative of beings; this is the initiative taken by others”.

The exertion-energy refers to the energy type that is needed to consummate an activity.

“What do you think, brahmin? Does the strength-energy (thāma-dhātu) exist?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“When the strength-energy exists, are beings seen to be possessed of strength?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“When beings are seen to be possessed of strength because the

strength-energy exists, this is the self-initiative of beings; this is the initiative taken by others”.

Even though humans possess these energy types, if they have not developed the proper skills to apply them at the right time and to the right measurement, they fail to achieve their intended goals. Therefore, what is required is that we develop skills to apply these innate energies not only at the right time and place but also to the right measurement.

The Buddha’s discourses contain immense instructions given to his disciples to exercise energy. One discourse has the Buddha stating the following (SN II, pp. 28-29): “The Dhamma has thus been well expounded by me, elucidated, disclosed, brought to light, stripped of patchwork, it is enough for a clansman who has gone forth out of faith to stir up his energy thus: Willingly let skin, sinews and bones remain and let the flesh and blood dry up in my body, but I will not relax my energy so long as I have not attained what can be attained by human strength, by human energy, by human exertion! The lazy person dwells in suffering, soiled by evil unwholesome states, and great is the personal good that he neglects. But the energetic person dwells happily, secluded from evil unwholesome states, and great is the personal good that he achieves. Not by that which is low, may the highest be won; by that which is highest may the highest be won. This holy life is a beverage of cream. The teacher has come to you face to face. Therefore, disciples, arouse your energy that you may win what is not won, that you may attain what is not attained, that you may realize what is unrealized”.

Even though the disciples are encouraged to work hard on achieving their goal, one must find the right balance in application of energy. Therefore, the Buddha always prescribe (MN III, pp. 159-160) the balanced application of energy (*virīya*) avoiding the two extremes of too much exertion (*accāradḍha-virīya*) and too little exertion (*atīlīna-virīya*). One with too much exertion is compared to a man who takes such a tight grip of a quail that it dies then and there. One with too feeble an energy is compared to a man who takes such a loose grip of a quail that it flies up out of his hand. The Buddha’s advise to Soṇa also illustrates this point (AN III, p. 375):

“Tell me, Soṇa, in the past when you lived at home, weren’t you skilled at the lute?”

“Yes, I was”.

“What do you think, Sona? When your lute’s strings were too tight, was your lute well-tuned and easy to play?”

“No, Sir.”

“When your lute’s strings were too loose, was your lute well-tuned and easy to play?”

“No, Sir.”

“But, Soṇa, when your lute’s strings were neither too tight nor too loose but adjusted to a balanced pitch, was your lute well-tuned and easy to play?”

“Surely, Sir.”

“So too, Soṇa, if energy is aroused too forcefully this leads to restlessness, and if energy is too lax this leads to laziness. Therefore, Sona, resolve on a balance of energy, achieve evenness of the spiritual faculties, and take up the object there”.

The exemplary Buddhist life is characterized as a life of doing and practice with a vision to achieve one’s goals here and now. Vision without action is just a dream. As the Buddha points out, the disciples should not expect reaching their goals by mere prayer or wish. There are five desirable, pleasant and agreeable but rare things in the world: long life, beauty, happiness, fame, and good rebirth. However, these things cannot be obtained by mere prayer or wish. The Buddha says (AN III, pp. 47-48): “I do not teach that they are to be obtained by prayer (*āyācanā-hetu*) or by wish (*patthanā-hetu*). If one could obtain them by prayer or wish, who would not pray or wish for them?” He continues: “For a noble disciple who wishes to have long life, it is not befitting that he should pray for long life or take delight in so doing. He should rather follow a path of life that is conducive to longevity. By following such a path he will obtain long life, be it divine or human.” The same applies to the other four.

As it could be seen from the discourses, the Buddha’s teaching carries with it a strong positive thought of encouraging disciples

to develop a positive attitude towards their practice. For example, the developing mindfulness of death is mainly given to develop of a sense of urgency in practicing the Buddhist path. As one discourse has it (AN IV, pp. 320-322), one should reflect on every morning/evening: “I still have evils; if I were to die today/tonight it will be a great loss to me. Therefore, before morning/night I must exercise intense resolution, effort, endeavor, and exertion, struggle, mindfulness, self-possession for putting away those evil and unwholesome states of mind.” As we could see from the discourses themselves, the disciples of the Buddha are a positive and active group of people who tend to work hard refusing to be lazy. For them, every bit of time is of value because their target is to achieve their spiritual advancements within this life, before death. The disciples are to consider the shortness of time left for them and the golden opportunity that they have now got by being born as human beings at a time when a Buddha has appeared in the world. The Buddha energizes his disciples with such statements as (Sn, vv. 331-333): “Arise! Sit up! What need have you of sleep? For what rest is there for the sick, pierced by the barb, and hurt. Arise! Sit up! Train yourselves hard for attaining peace.... Let not opportunity pass you by; those who have missed the opportunity now grieve.”

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, my aim was to introduce the early Buddhist moral theory by examining the early discourses of the Buddha in relation to the three principles of the efficacy of intentional action, doing good deeds and exercising energy to do good deeds, and to inform the reader that the early Buddhist moral theory is well-qualified to be used in global education in ethics. The main argument was that the early Buddhist moral theory covers three dimensions of the moral theory but that of the traditional Buddhist lands, only one. In the traditional Buddhist lands, the type of Buddhism that is practiced is *kammatic* for its primary aim is otherworldly, to direct the followers to selfishly accrue merits to be born in heavens in their next lives. Therefore, the moral theory of the traditional Buddhism lacks the humanistic spirit displayed in the early Buddhist teachings. The latter values “humanity” and promotes the ideas of “global citizens” and “global community,” that acknowledge

diversity and accept that individuals, groups and communities with different interests, languages, convictions and lifestyles, that is, with different cultural identities, can co-exist and interact with each other with mutual respect and tolerance. On this background, it is to be observed that the moral theory advocated in the contemporary traditional Buddhism calls for exclusivism and nationalism while the early Buddhist moral theory calls for inclusivism, plurality and humanity. Hence, it could be concluded that it is the early Buddhist moral theory that will qualify for global education in ethics, not the one that is practiced in the traditional Buddhist lands.

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