

HOLISTIC BUDDHIST APPROACH TO GLOBAL EDUCATION IN ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

Education is one of the most misunderstood words in the English language. To compound matters, educators and policy makers differ in their perception and definition on what an education system ought to constitute. It is little wonder that the systems of secular education around the world today are very much wanting and grossly questionable? Numerous indices point to a failure of secular education systems. Beyond question, the formulation and implementation of a sound education system represents a highly critical and urgent challenge facing the world today. It is against this backdrop that Buddhist Education and Pedagogy is presented as a holistic approach to global education in ethics.

A critical starting point is for us to first of all have a right understanding of education and what the term embodies. Education is to draw out the human being in us. An underlying concern of education is the success, well-being and happiness of all people. These overriding objectives of education are to be secured, among other avenues, through the formulation and implementation of a sound education system. In this regard, it is to be noted that a Holistic Buddhist Education is well geared to ensure the total development of a people. Indeed, such a holistic education which embodies a Buddhist approach to global education in morals, ethics, human values and righteousness would most certainly help

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people to live purposeful and happy lives, regardless of their religious beliefs, cultural background, ethnicity, gender, social status and station in life.

We need to recognize that by merely teaching morals and ethics and what is righteous or unrighteous in the conventional way does not automatically transform a person's thinking, speech and behavior. If so, then every student should put into practice whatever he or she had learnt in school. This is certainly not the case for a person does not automatically become what he or she has been taught. That is why, so very often, we come across persons who know all about the undesirable effects of social ills and the painful consequence of committing a crime, yet, may think and behave in such ways which are diametrically contrary to what they know. This is because their minds have remained uncultured and untrained. Unfortunately, in most education systems, skillful cultivation of the mind is not included in the curriculum. This fundamental pre-requisite of the cultivation of the mind which is entrenched in Holistic Buddhist Education is to be gainfully implemented in the Buddhist approach to Global Education in morals, ethics, human values and righteous living.

Aside from highlighting the relevance of Holistic Buddhist Education in ensuring success, well-being and happiness, the paper outlines the rich history and dynamism of the Supremely Self-enlightened Buddha's Pedagogy or teaching methods and techniques. It is significant to note here that the Buddha's Taxonomy of Learning of *pariyatti*, *patipatti* and *pativeda*, preceded by over 2,500 years, Bloom's Taxonomy of the three domains of learning, namely cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain, which is regarded as the cornerstone of modern secular education. Holistic Buddhist Education incorporates a number of other significant guidelines for educating and grooming our younger generation. These include the paramount importance of cultivating a wholesome mental culture which is glaringly absent in modern secular education. Equally significant, is the Buddha's pedagogy of teaching by example. The Buddha's stress on the cultivation and progressive purification of the mind has been amply validated by modern science and researches. This again can indeed be gainfully incorporated into the

Buddhist approach to global education in morals, ethics, human values, wholesome righteous living. In addition, the social, cultural and civilizational dimensions of Holistic Buddhist Education may be adopted and adapted in all climes given their intrinsic values to all humankind. It must be stressed that many invaluable guidelines may be drawn from a better understanding and appreciation of Buddhist Education and Pedagogy. These can be readily adopted and adapted into the systems of education on a global footing. Thus, Holistic Buddhist Education and Pedagogy are presented with a tremendous opportunity to address the serious failures in education systems in general, and specifically, to imbue morals, ethics, human values and righteous living among peoples, regardless of the climes. This task obviously calls for a pooling of expertise, resources, educational materials, teaching tools, research, training and various forms of co-operation among Buddhist organizations and institutions from all around the world.

One of the most striking features of today's world is the vastly higher quality of life. Among other visible aspects is that more children receive a basic education. Also, educational facilities and other inputs are far superior. However, the systems of secular education around the world have generally failed. The failure is all the more paradoxical when we consider that the underlying purpose of education is to promote wholesome thinking and behaviour by ensuring rational, competent, responsible, contented, humane and happy citizens. The unprecedented exacerbation of social ills and crimes among all strata of society is glaring evidence of this. The burgeoning number of adolescents, youths and adults who are guilty of delinquent behavior underscores the need to meet the real goals and expectations of education. The foregoing cogent facts compel an urgent and critical re-evaluation of the curriculum content as well as the pedagogy of contemporary secular education systems as a matter of global priority. Herein lays the significance, and indeed, the imperative of advancing the Buddhist approach to Global Education in morals, ethics, human values and wholesome living. Buddhist Education and Pedagogy are well endowed to effectively imbue morals, ethics, human values and wholesome righteous living among people which are desperately needed in contemporary society. In this regard, many invaluable guidelines may be drawn from

a better understanding and appreciation of Buddhist Education and Pedagogy. Further, the rich Buddhist heritage can be readily adopted and adapted into contemporary secular education systems. This clarion call demands a pooling of expertise, resources, educational materials, teaching tools, research, training and various forms of co-operation and collaboration among educational organisations and institutions.

Given the limitation on wordage prescribed, this paper perforce can only outline some of the more significant elements of this global challenge, which also significantly presents a challenge, and at the same time, a great opportunity for the global Buddhist fraternity to make a profound contribution for the benefit of all humankind.

1. FAILURE OF SECULAR EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Modern secular education systems are plagued by serious shortcomings. Foremost is the failure to draw out fully the wholesome human qualities innate in students and enable them to realise their full inborn potential. This represents a fundamental goal of education in the correct meaning of the term. Regrettably, despite the vastly greater spread of educational opportunities and facilities available today, progressively increasing numbers of adolescents and youths are found to be unethical, immoral and delinquent in thinking and behaviour. Ever-increasingly frightful numbers are involved in substance abuse, gangsterism, sexual misconduct and other serious social ills and crimes. Equally alarming is the fact that today the age of offenders recorded is shockingly as low as 9 years old, who invariably drop out of school and the education system. They usually get into all sorts of problems and troubles with the school authorities and the law. Also, though morals, ethics, civics and religious studies may be included in curriculums, often they are not effectively taught and thus have failed to pre-empt the steep degeneration in contemporary society.

2. ADVANCING FROM KNOWING TO BEING VIDE CULTIVATION OF THE MIND

The general expectation of education is to produce responsible, cultured and socially equipped citizens of sound character. It logically follows that those who are educated would avoid actions

that are harmful to them and to others. But while students may be taught to distinguish between wholesome and unwholesome thoughts, speech and actions, it does not necessarily follow that they have imbued these elements, especially since the wherewithal of *'being'* or *'living'* righteously is overlooked. *'Knowing'* about the dangers of the various social ills and crimes does not mean that a person would automatically avoid unwholesome activities. We need to just ask any youngster who abuses drugs or indulges in any social ill or commits a crime as to whether he or she was aware of the wrongdoing. The response in almost every case is an unequivocal yes. The same goes with various other serious breaches in morals and ethics, despite the offenders having been taught these subject-matters.

By teaching morals and ethics and what is righteous or unrighteous does not necessarily condition students' thinking, speech and actions. If this was so, then every student should scrupulously live according to what is taught in school. That is why, so very often, we come across persons who know all about the undesirable effects of social ills and the serious consequence of committing crimes, yet act diametrically contrary to what they know. This is principally because their minds have remained uncultured and untrained, notwithstanding the education they received. Copious other examples abound of people whose thinking and behaviour run contrary to the knowledge they possess about the various wrongdoings they commit. A classic illustration is found among medical doctors. Many of them smoke though they know only too well about the serious damage this causes to one's health and also to others who are subjected to secondary smoking. We frequently come across obese nutritionists and dieticians whose very profession is to regulate among patients a balanced diet and so on.

The point to note is that these wrongdoers know about the impropriety of their actions. They committed the wrongs not due to a lack of teaching, or learning, or knowledge, but because of the failure to internalize a righteous wholesome life through the cultivation of a wholesome mental culture. They would then think, speak and act righteously in accordance with the moral, ethical and righteousness compass that is implanted through a trained or cultivated mind. A right understanding of the mind and

the cultivation of a wholesome mental culture as stressed by the Supremely Self-enlightened Buddha thus should form an integral of the global education in morals, ethics and righteousness and wholesome living.

It is most unfortunate that in most education systems, skillful cultivation of the mind is not included in the school curriculum. Cultivation of the mind, among other important goals of education, enhances mindfulness of all our thoughts, speech and actions. This fundamental goal of education which is deeply entrenched in Holistic Buddhist Education may be gainfully incorporated into modern secular education systems.

3. TOWARDS A RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF EDUCATION

It would be useful at this juncture to examine briefly the correct meaning and purpose of education. This will enable us to better appreciate how best we can address the serious flaws in modern education systems, including the pitfalls that are evident in teaching morals, ethics, human values and righteousness. A primary goal of education is to draw the innate capabilities, talents and skills in individuals and to help them to develop as well groomed, responsible, righteous human beings. This entails their total development, which includes their physical, emotional, social, psychological, cultural and spiritual make-up in preparation for future adult life. As such, education should not be concerned with merely providing knowledge on various secular subject-matters falling within the prescribed curriculum, but also aim to bring about a holistic development of students to include the cultivation of the mind and imbuing morals, ethics, civics, human values, righteousness and living.

It is to be noted that since the agricultural and industrial revolutions, virtually all secular education systems derived from the Western world have failed to adhere to this underlying goal of education. This is because their primary objective of education was to produce employable persons for to meet the workforce for the ever-expanding agricultural and industrial enterprises. This narrow concept of education continues to be promoted through rout learning and the '*paper chase-job orientated*' education systems and culture which are clearly evident across the world.

It is gratifying to note that in sharp contrast a holistic approach to education which is deeply embedded in Buddhist Education goes well beyond the narrow objective of obtaining a paper qualification in order to be gainful employment. Without question, education should not aim to simply churn out what may be termed as '*human robots*'. No doubt facts, data and information are essential for one to evaluate matters and to make objective and balanced actionable decisions. But this should not be the primary goal of education systems. However impressive a person's knowledge may be, if she or he cannot utilise his or her thinking ability and innate personal skills and talents to contribute towards a safer, sustainable, enriching world, then the education received would be of limited relevance to society.

A Holistic Buddhist Approach to Global Education in ethics significantly entails the development of a complete human being. The overriding goal is to produce well-adjusted rational citizens who harmoniously relate with and feel for other members of society and Nature around in a wholly humane, moral and ethical and righteous ways. This involves the painstaking preparation to live successful, purposeful lives guided by sound moral and ethical conduct and an ever-abiding sense and responsibility to live accordingly. Based on the foregoing understanding of holistic education, schools would eschew unhealthy features and trends such as pressurizing students to rely on rote learning and memorization in order to score as many straight A's. Regrettably exaltation of super-scores in prescribed examinations typifies contemporary secular education systems. Instead, due attention should be placed on right understanding and thinking, enhancement of living skills and innate potential, and, the development of sound emotional, social, cultural and spiritual make up through cultivation of the mind. Such a holistic education would create a society characterised by humanism, high morals and ethics and a deep commitment to social responsibility. This means that schools would function as nurturing and caring environments where children are seen, accepted and treated as special in their own making. In addition, schools would provide learning environments that enable students to develop at their own pace, according to their particular personality and the innate talents and skills they possess individually.

4. HOLISTIC BUDDHIST APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

A quick glimpse of Buddhist Education and Pedagogy would serve to provide a better understanding and appreciation of holistic education that may be gainfully incorporated into the envisaged Global Education in Ethics, regardless of the clime. In a sentence, Buddhism is a practical and disciplined way of life that is steeped in morals, ethics, human values, and above all, the cultivation of a wholesome mental culture to ensure righteous thinking and wholesome living. The Dhamma the Buddha unraveled spells out in precise terms daily practices that are to be ingrained for living a fulfilling life. Indeed, the Buddha's Teaching provides in clear precise terms a comprehensive education and a self-training framework to help us to actualize a meaningful, peaceful and happy life. That is why it is often asserted that Buddhism is a practical as well as a self-directed complete education and comprehensive training program for actualizing one's innate potential in life and lasting happiness. Simultaneously, by understanding and practicing the Buddha Dhamma through the holistic education system, we would be able to face the wide spectrum of aversions, anxiety-producing tensions, worries, fears and stresses which we constantly encounter in the high-pressured and hurried modern world we live in.

Typical of the Buddha's approach to teaching, learning and training is the practical way He taught the Sublime Dhamma. His pedagogy or teaching and training methods and techniques are applicable to all human beings, regardless of their religious beliefs, cultural background, gender, ethnicity, social status or station in life. The Buddha's Teaching had a singular orientation to the present existing condition one invariably is confronted in life. Further the Buddha advised us to have a Right Understanding or Right Perspective, in particular of the realities of human existence and Nature all around us. Realism and reality are cornerstones of Buddhist Education. Reason and logic are deeply embedded in the Buddha's holistic approach to teaching and stress on self-directed learning and training. True to the rational being the Buddha personified, he emphasised that by merely resorting to external worship, ceremonies and prayers and to supplication from an

almighty Creator God, one cannot expect to progress and realise one's full potential. He likened this to one wishfully asking the opposite bank of the river to move closer in order to get across to the other side. Without the commitment of one's positive, personal effort to cross the river one will not be able to get to the yonder bank. In the same vein, without a firm commitment and right effort or *virīya* to rightly understand and practice the Dhamma, one cannot expect to realise a successful, wholesome, happy and peaceful life. These principles of holistic education are as relevant today as in the time of the Buddha and need to be infused in the Global Education in Ethics.

Based on the foregoing brief insight, Holistic Buddhist Education represents a practical, clear-cut and comprehensive tried and tested comprehensive education as well as a complete self-directed training program that is to be practised in daily life. It encompasses a method and technique of living that help us to effectively meet the various problems and challenges we face in life and to make the best of the limitless opportunities that life offers.

Buddhist Education is far from being an academic pursuit to satisfy one's intellectual gratification. On the contrary, Buddhist Education calls for resolute self-effort and a firm commitment to skilfully train oneself by '*living*' the Dhamma. Towards this end, Buddhist Education engages one's emotions as much as one's mental culture by emphasising the wholesome cultivation and purification of the mind. The Buddha did not want us to blindly follow His Noble Teaching. It was for this reason that He consistently laid stressed on self-reliance, self-effort, self-inquiry, intellectual curiosity, intellectual freedom and intellectual integrity as among the cardinal requirements for us to actualize success, wellbeing, happiness and inner peace here and now in this very life. Imbuing of morals, ethics and the cultivation of a wholesome mental culture etc. are ingrained in Buddhist Education and Pedagogy. These ingredients of holistic education and can readily be incorporated into the Global Education in Ethics.

5. CULTIVATION OF A WHOLESOME MENTAL SELF-CULTURE: THE KEY

Thus, a primary object of the Buddhist Approach to Global

Education in Ethics is to develop *sila* (virtues), *samadhi* (a wholesome mental self-culture through purification of the mind) and attain *panna* (Insight Wisdom). The purification of one's mind forms its very kernel. In recognising the pivotal role of the mind, the Buddha placed high emphasis on understanding its nature and the need for us to develop mindfulness through self-discipline and meditation. This fundamental Teaching is underlined in the very first two passages of the Dhammapada:

The mind precedes all mental states.

The mind is their chief;

They are all mind-wrought.

If, with impure mind a person speaks or acts,

Suffering follows like the wheels that follow the hoofs of an ox.

The mind precedes all mental states.

The mind is their chief;

They are all mind-wrought.

If, with pure mind a person speaks or acts,

Happiness follows him like his never-departing shadow.

6. DYNAMICS OF BUDDHIST PEDAGOGY TO GLOBAL EDUCATION IN ETHICS

The paramount importance given to the development of a wholesome mental self-culture which is unique to Buddhist Education is also distinctly evidenced in the importance given to the psycho-motor domain of learning. Buddhist approach to Global Education in morals, ethics, human values and righteousness can be effectively imbued through the Buddha's unique Pedagogy. According to modern teaching psychology as outlined in Bloom's Taxonomy of Learning, three domains are identified. These are referred to as the cognitive, affective and psycho-motor levels of learning. The cognitive domain deals essentially with cognition such as bare information, facts, figures, data and theories which is essentially geared towards acquiring, memorising and regurgitating what is taught at prescribed examinations. The thinking processes, emotional intelligence, inter-being, reflection, lateral thinking etc. remain largely untapped and consequently are not developed. It is

because of these inherent limitations in learning psychology that the cognitive domain is described as '*passive learning*'.

In contrast, the affective domain involves, among other things, critical observation, self-reflection, self-analysis and the synthesis of facts and information, originality, thinking out of the box etc. The thrust is for one to develop a deep, probing, inquiring mind. This is similar to the penetrating, analytical and objective, mental make-up and thought process that characterised the Buddha persona since childhood. Briefly, in this domain the learner has to establish what is significant, analyse the facts and synthesize them to form his or her viewpoint. The learner hence progresses from just having knowledge of a subject to developing observational skills and the ability to reflect, sieve, conceptualise and evaluate information and facts. In this way objectivity is sharpened which enables the learner to think critically. Affective learning also stimulates and inspires creativity, originality and the development of ones latent talents, skills and aesthetic sense.

The psycho-motor domain advances a learner to yet a higher rung in the learning process. As the term suggests, this level of learning deals with the total person, that is, the body as well as mind are involved concurrently in the learning process. That is to say, both the psychological (meaning the thinking, attitude, mental make-up, emotions, sentiments and feelings) and the behavioural (in regard to personal skills, talents, conduct and volitional actions) aspects of learning are simultaneously engaged. This helps to condition thinking, attitude and behaviour as the learner advances from '*knowing*' to '*being*' what is taught and learnt and so internalizes and '*lives*' what is learnt.

7. THE BUDDHA'S TAXONOMY OF LEARNING

Over 2,550 years ago, long before Bloom's Taxonomy of learning was espoused in 1956, the Buddha had identified three distinct domains of learning, namely *pariyati*, *patipatti* and *pativeda*. *Pariyati* constitutes the theoretical foundation required for understanding the Dhamma. The Buddha had pointed out that knowledge *per se* does not constitute a pre-requisite or pre-condition for moral, ethical, righteous development and spiritual uplift. He stressed that

a person could still experience emancipation without having to be erudite in the scriptures or religious texts, or be able to recite the *sutras* eloquently and to quote them by chapter and verse. Buddhist scriptures are replete with examples of how disciple monks and lay followers possessing relatively average intelligence could realise high moral, ethical and spiritual attainment.

A theoretical study of the sacred scriptures hence is not to be looked upon as the be-all-and end-all of Buddhist Education for this will limit one to only a superficial understanding of the Buddha's Teaching which focuses among other important aspects of wholesome life, on the realities of human existence and of Nature. Accordingly one is encouraged to advance to the *patipatti* domain of learning, which is, the actual practice of the Dhamma in daily life. The Buddha had consistently stressed that in order for one to come to grips with the realities of life and progress, one has to advance beyond the theoretical plane and textual knowledge. He pinpointed that we must immerse ourselves in practicing and applying the Dhamma in daily life with Right Understanding. Further, we should develop important human qualities such as *shraddha* or confidence, *viriyā* or wholesome energy and *vinaya* or discipline to actualize excellence in our endeavours and to experience wellbeing and real lasting happiness. The Buddha laid emphasis on treating the Eternal Doctrine as a way of wholesome living steeped in moral, ethical and spiritual practice rather than as an esoteric philosophy for theorizing ideas and concepts.

Patipatti (the affective) and *pativeda* (psycho-motor domains of teaching and learning) relate to the 'living' or 'being' aspects of Buddhism where the individual lives the Dhamma while simultaneously developing his or her wholesome mental culture. A primary focus of learning and training is on developing one's moral and ethical fibre and cultivating human values and virtuous humane qualities such as *metta*, *karuna*, *muditha* and *upekkha*. Putting the Dhamma into practice in one's daily life, whereby one not only knows the Dhamma but lives it daily, is absolutely necessary in order to progress to the *pativeda* domain of learning and training. In this way, one would be able to attain *panna* or Insight Wisdom. What this means is that the teaching and learning of morals, ethics, human

values merely as cognitive subjects to be memorised and subsequently tested at year-end examinations as conventionally observed in modern secular education should not be the goal. More important still, is the practice and practical application of these in daily life.

8. BUDDHA'S PEDAGOGY OF TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

The Buddha admonished that a *bhikkhu* who has simply learned a great deal and only talks about the Dhamma is not one who is well versed in the Doctrine. Whereas a *bhikkhu* who has learnt if only a single stanza, but is able to fully comprehend the Buddha's Teaching and is ever mindful of his thoughts, speech and actions is the one who is truly well versed in the Dhamma. This underlying principle of the Buddha's Pedagogy is so very much wanting in contemporary systems of education. The Buddha's pedagogy of by example underlines a cardinal principle in education which has witnessed severe erosion in modern secular education systems. In the context of the Buddhist Approach to Global Education in morals, ethics, human values and inculcation of righteousness, it calls upon parents, elders and teachers to reinforce teaching the younger generation by internalising and practising what they teach.

The superb role model the Buddha portrays as an Enlightened Teacher provides guidance as well as inspiration to all of humankind and not just to those engaged in education. The Buddha's Pedagogy of teaching by example bears great importance in underlining another significant, if not indeed a critical maxim, in the proposed Global Education in Ethics. The Buddha lived by example and reinforced his Teaching through example. His pedagogy of teaching by personal example of practising what He preached and preaching what He practised, stands out as one of the most powerful timeless illustrations in the history of education.

9. INTERNALIZING MORALS, ETHICS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

The systems of secular education we witness around the world are very much marooned in the cognitive domain of learning as evidenced in their pre-occupation with the mere assimilation of knowledge, information and facts and multiple choices testing of lessons taught. This essentially passive approach to teaching and learning has been further diluted as a result of glorifying the

memorization of prescribed texts in the syllabus which students are expected to regurgitate. It is not surprising therefore that though morals and ethics are taught in schools; these are hardly internalized in students through practice in everyday life. They are merely studied just like other subjects. As a consequence the learning is not ingrained in their thinking, speech and behaviour.

By internalizing morals, ethics and human values we are able to reinforce positive thinking and responsible behaviour in children from a young age. This in turn helps them to strengthen their *shraddha* in the moral and ethical practices and reinforce their self-image, self-worth, self-reliance etc. Operating in combination, these positive human qualities would form a strong bulwark against negative influences from various external sources/stimuli while growing up. On the other hand, a child devoid of *shraddha* is inclined to be timid, withdrawn and lack initiative. Such a child would find it difficult to socialise and interact freely with peer groups from both inside and outside the school environment.

10. THE BUDDHA'S PEDAGOGY OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

It is to be duly appreciated that Buddhism is a religion of 'being' and not one of just 'knowing' the religious texts and scriptures. The Buddha had consistently maintained that 'knowing' the Dhamma alone is inadequate. We should truly 'live' the Dhamma if we are to experience its richness and benefit therefrom in multifarious ways here and now in this very life.

The Dhamma is likened to a flower of beauty, radiance and fragrance. However, we should always remind ourselves that the value, benefits and richness to be drawn from the Dhamma can be experienced only by 'living' the Buddha's Sublime Teaching. He advised that a brief life laced with virtue and wisdom is far better than a long life filled with unwholesome thoughts, speech and actions thus, "*Though one should live a hundred years without wisdom and self-discipline; yet better, is a single day's life of one who is wise and meditative.*" (Dhammapada 111). In line with this fundamental Teaching of the Buddha, we should progress from just 'knowing' to 'being' the Dhamma. Likewise morals, ethics, human values and righteous living are to be practised in daily life and ingrained in a

person from a young age. As such a primary goal of the Holistic Buddhist Education Approach to Global Teaching in ethics, morals, civics etc. is to internalize these human values so that they become an integral part of students. Only then will they feel and experience directly the Dhamma's true meaning and purpose and thereby enjoy the blissfulness that this invariably evokes.

It is also noteworthy that the Buddha taught this fundamental principle through His typical anecdotal-style of communicating complex ideas and concepts in an easily comprehensible way to the ordinary masses. He likened a beautiful thought or concept or ideal that is not accompanied by corresponding wholesome deeds to a bright and beautiful flower that has no fragrance and so fails to realise its innate productive potential. Such a flower is only good to look at. Beyond this, it does not serve much purpose. For, beautiful though to look at and admire, it will not form into a fruit. Being devoid of a sweet fragrance it would not attract insects and butterflies necessary for pollination and its ultimate fruition. On the other hand, a flower even if unattractive, but possesses a sweet fragrance would attract insects, get pollinated and become a fruit. The illustration which serves as an excellent example of the Buddha's Pedagogy of Experiential Learning is an equally pivotal ingredient of the Buddhist Approach to Global Education in morals, ethics and righteousness.

11. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DYNAMISM OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY

Among other notable contributions, Buddhist Education helped to engender a powerful burst of creative energies which were largely evoked through a culture of freedom of thought and free expression torched by the religion. The free human spirit had encouraged creativity and the flowering of innate, talents, skills and genius, in a variety of fields of human endeavour. The social and cultural dynamism which Buddhist Education and culture sprang forth have been amply borne out throughout Buddhist history and civilization. The liberal outlook of Buddhist Education and the creative impulse they triggered added to the richness and vibrancy of the cultures among the peoples from different climes who embraced

the religion. Wherever Buddhism spread, creative genius found expression in a variety of art forms literature and scholarship. These rich heritages of creativity and originality are truly inspiring not only in terms of their artistic beauty, but also in the magnificence of their expressions in art and other human and other pursuits.

Evidence of the creative genius that blossomed in the lands touched by Buddhism is as pervasive as they are awe-inspiring. These glorious showcases of creative excellence are magnificently depicted in the world-renowned well springs of Buddhist art, architecture, sculpture, literature and culture. They boast of an array of captivating temples, monuments, images, stupas and a host of other awe-inspiring artistic works which bespoke brilliantly of the creative dynamism that Buddhism spawned among peoples who embraced the Buddha Dhamma.

Viewed from a broader sociological and cultural perspective, the positive impact of Buddhist Education on human society is equally impressive. In its organised form, Buddhism brought tangible social and cultural spin-offs to the larger community. The religion's many ceremonies and festivals incorporated a wide variety of customs and traditions wherever the religion traversed. This largely explains the rich social and cultural expressions we find in traditional Buddhist countries. Examples abound in many countries since historical times such as during the period of the Tang and Sung Dynasties in China, ancient India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and other regions in Asia where Buddhism profoundly inspired the literary and creative genius and the adventurous spirit of peoples. The volumes of Buddhist scriptures and commentaries produced by thousands of Indian, Chinese, Sri Lankan, Japanese, Korean, Burmese, Tibetan, Mongolian, Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Malay and Indonesian scholar-monks, nuns and pilgrims, speak volumes on how Buddhism profoundly inspired peoples from these climes. Many had to brave great hardships and grave personal dangers in pursuing their religious zeal and in spreading the Sublime Dhamma and its glorious heritage, including Buddhist Education and Pedagogy. So deep and abiding was their *shraddha* in the Buddha Dhamma that many of them dedicated their entire adult lives to teach the religion

and produce invaluable scriptures and other erudite religious accomplishments.

It is therefore hardly surprising that the social and cultural dynamism which Buddhist Education spawns are self-evident and impressive. Children in particular are encouraged to cultivate Buddhist customs, traditions, human values and a positive outlook as they familiarise and live a Buddhist way of life. This is realised by encouraging them to participate in or observe Buddhist ceremonies and activities from a young age. Youths and adults too gain profoundly from their involvement in the religious, cultural and social activities which is entrenched as a way of life among Buddhist communities. In organising, managing and participating in these functions, noble Buddhist values, morals, ethics, cultural traits and customs are progressively ingrained and eventually becomes second nature.

It is also worthwhile to note that Buddhist Education is strongly orientated towards fostering a wholesome and harmonious family life. Since the time of the Buddha, fathers, mothers, sons and daughters all flocked to the viharas to learn the Dhamma. The practice of the Dhamma was encouraged as a total family commitment for the benefit of the entire family and not just as a Doctrine confined to monks and nuns. The emphasis on the family as a unit based on clearly understood duties and responsibilities for each member had been yet another impressive feature of Buddhist Education. The *Sigalovada Sutta* and numerous other discourses of the Buddha explicitly underline this noteworthy social and cultural significance in Buddhist morals, ethics and culture.

The religious functions, celebrations and ceremonies observed among Buddhist communities generally took the form of family get-to-gathers on some auspicious occasion or happy event. To this day, community-based social and cultural celebrations often are combined with religious observances. Major events in the life of devotees were likewise laden with Buddhist practices and ceremonies. The conception of a child, spiritual fortification of expectant mothers, the birth of a new born, the naming of a child, infant learning and development, '*home education*', child development and upbringing of children, marriage, the loss of loved ones etc. incorporated numerous religious ceremonies and traditions, which are

practiced to this day, form an integral of informal education.

Furthermore, the community activities and the sermons that were associated with religious ceremonies and celebrations formed an essential platform for religious upbringing for the entire family as well as for the community, in particular among the younger generation. Such religious rearing or grooming among Buddhist communities was accorded importance as informal education for the community as a whole. Though informal, the community-based functions and religious ceremonies constituted an important process of inculcating Buddhist values and practices and the learning of the Dhamma from the outset of one's formative years. The thinking, attitude and mental make-up of the young as regards morals, ethics, human values and righteous living were thereby shaped and channelled along a positive path through such informal Buddhist Education and upbringing from childhood.

It can thus be asserted with confidence that Buddhist Education and Pedagogy provide a fertile nursery for the seeds of creativity inherent in every child to germinate and blossom into brilliance. Children are also motivated to realise a more wholesome and self-fulfilling life-experience. These positive elements in turn would trigger a forward momentum for learning well beyond what is normally extended in contemporary education systems. For indeed, in Buddhist Education and Pedagogy we find learning to include the broadening and enrichment of the mind and imbuing of morals, ethics, human values and righteousness as key ingredients of wholesome human development and progress.

12. BUDDHIST EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY REVISITED

It is gratifying to note that in the past few decades, progressively increasing numbers of people from all across the world have become interested in Buddhism because of the happiness and inner peace the religion offers. However, for many the interest has been largely confined to the study of the religion than on understanding the Dhamma and applying the Buddha's Sublime Teaching in daily life which is the more challenging but profoundly beneficial path. One could gather all the facts and information about the life of the Buddha and His Teaching, but this would not be very much different

from learning about other historical personages. In learning about the life of the Buddha one would no doubt come to appreciate His Supreme Self-Enlightenment. This does not necessarily mean that one would diligently practice the Dhamma and experience the far more beneficial results one can expect if one was to do so. What this implies is that the emphasis in Buddhist Education and Pedagogy is not on providing and acquiring knowledge of the Dhamma as a matter of academic interest or as a subject to be studied for an examination. The focus instead should be on the practice and practical application of the Buddha's Noble Teaching in daily life.

The Dhamma is a noble and complete practical guide for peaceful, harmonious, fulfilling wholesome living. Buddhism is therefore not to be merely read and studied as an academic subject. The Buddha in fact repeatedly reminded us not to just study the Dhamma, but to *'breathe'* and *'live'* His Noble Teaching and thereby benefit from it in this very life. In His very words, *"it is better for a person to live a day in accordance with the Dhamma than to chant a thousand suttas a thousand times over."* This is simply because the Dhamma is a complete system of learning and skilful self-training of one's body and mind to experience *sukha* or real lasting happiness. Further, the Dhamma is wholly rooted in internalizing morals, ethics, human values and righteousness in one's life journey. This holistic Buddhist approach is proffered in the Global Education in Ethics, morals and human values.

In summation, we need to be mindful that Buddhist Education and Pedagogy stresses imbuing of morals, ethics, human values and righteousness vide a holistic education system incorporating a tried and tested highly successful training programme for personal self-development. The Sublime Teaching of the Buddha is not meant to be studied and passed in a prescribed examination. The stress in the Sublime Teaching of the Buddha should remain anchored on *'living'* and *'being'* the Dhamma and not on just seeking knowledge about the belief-system. In line with this principle, the method, manner, means and the technique which one is to employ to put the Dhamma into practice have to be accorded top priority. Just gaining knowledge about the Buddha and His Noble Teaching would not be sufficient for one to be *"awakened"* from the slumber

of ignorance of the realities of life and Nature all around us. As the Buddha had succinctly advised, *“Even if a man recites a hundred verses but does not practice them, he is like a spoon which carries the honey but does not know its taste”*.

A major challenge set before the world Buddhist fraternity is to produce educational tools that could be gainfully incorporated into the modern education systems. This will profoundly enable the global community to effectively realise the goals of education in its true definition, meaning and purpose. At a personal level, I have made a modest endeavour to produce text books for teaching English and Buddhism concurrently, based on the principles of Holistic Buddhist Education and Pedagogy. These include the publication of, *“My Alphabet Book: Buddhist Pedagogical Approach, My First Word Book: Buddhist Pedagogical Approach, Siddhartha: My First Story Book, Angulimala: Transforming Life, Matu-Posaka : Joy of Honouring Parents, SIDDHARTHA: Prince of Peace and King Bimbisara the Great: A Father’s Unremitting Love”*. These works represent mere samples of what can, and indeed must be done by Buddhist organisations, institutions and erudite scholars to promote Buddhist Education and Pedagogy as an integral of the global education of ethics. It is my fervent prayer that the expertise, scholarship and talents which are in abundance among the Buddhist fraternity would be inspired by these modest efforts to pool resources and expertise for the larger good. Hopefully they would be motivated to soon produce a reservoir of educational resources and tools for the benefit of all humankind. I dare say that their efforts would serve to ensure a peaceful and happier world for not only the present generation, but also for those who are yet to come.

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