

THERAVADA BUDDHISM AND ITS APPROACH TO GLOBAL EDUCATION ON ETHICS

by R.G.D Jayawardena*

ABSTRACT

Expanding knowledge and diverse courses in the global education seems to be as supplementary of alternative approach of ethics for resolving the problems that humankind feels under the lack of ethical codes. It is remarkable that global education is moving from ethical dimension to material development. As a common thought it has been accepted that the approach of ethics into the global education is required. Considering this requirement, this paper examines and analyses to apply that Buddhist ethics into the global education. The Buddhist ethics both Mahayana and Theravada, and their sub sects have played an important role in the field of oriental education within the period of past more than 2500 years, contributing to the ethical teachings for the survival of humankind in the eastern world. However, Buddhist ethics point out in the Pali canon can be approached as most apposite principles for this requirement.

The combination of ethics with global education seems to be an emerging tendency for resolving the problems that humankind experiences because of the lack of a moral code. It is remarkable

*. Prof. Dr., Head of Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, Univrsity of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

that global education is moving from ethical dimension to material development. As a common thought it has been accepted that the approach of ethics into global education is required. The fundamental reason for emphasizing the need of ethics for global education is the serious disastrous nature in certain outcomes regarding human behavior which can eventually become harmful for the society. Moreover these unanticipated outcomes have been violently harming to the nature for centuries. Current education merely targets only the quality of education and vocational development in spite of the absence of ethics. Most secular curriculums aim for sensuous pleasures with material development.

The learning process based on such curriculums will change our society, culture, economy, and environment. New interpretations about learning process differ from old ones and these interpretations don't necessarily focus on the ultimate purpose of studying¹. According to Buddhist philosophy, the learning process should convey the welfare of all human kind as the ultimate aim of a proper education. Some denote that a set of ideas taught to enhance one's perception about the world is called global education². Another interpretation conveys that the change in our society in learning process based on the universal values of tolerance, solidarity, equality and justice, co-operation, non-violence. Though there are diverse interpretations, the practical value of global education has not resulted until the complement of ethics. Although the conceptual development of global education is getting advanced, the ethical values and attitudes of students are not well developed. The rate of crimes, human problems, and environmental pollution are the unexpected outcomes of this prevailing education system on the absence of proper ethics.

Considering this situation, this paper examines Buddhist ethics which helps to approach global education. Buddhist ethics in both Mahayana and Theravada, and their sub sects have played an important role in the field of oriental education more than 2500 years, while contributing to the ethical teachings in the eastern

1. Marvin D. Glock, 1971. p. 27

2. Ira J. Gordon. 1962. p. 143.

world. The Buddha's teaching considers morality and wisdom as the constituents on the way to resolve all sufferings of humankind.

The ethical principles of Theravada Buddhism could be utilized as an approach to global education with practical values. The contemporary education system should find a mean of including Buddhist ethics into many subject fields offered by schools and higher educational sectors. The ways of integrating ethics with global education based on Theravada Buddhism are needed to be investigated. With conceptual development, the students must advance themselves in ethical values and attitudes. Buddhism does not accept the curricular principles giving more prominence to material development at the cost of one's moral development. In such an educational system there are no right thoughts (*sammā saṅkappa*).

The attitudes and values of mankind are based on both ethical and conceptual development. Buddhism denotes that every concept which avoids morality causes our remorse. If curriculums are deprived of right views and thoughts (*sammā ditṭhi* and *sammā saṅkappa*), human actions based on such curricular methods may harm oneself and others. Human actions are based on views and thoughts they have learned. *Ambalaṭṭhika Rāhulovada sutta* mentions that our actions should be done with a proper examination about their consequences.

In this context global education needs to consider its consequences. Research indicates that in a certain stage of high school and college, youth might be in an immature stage of development³ In Buddhist perspective, the effectiveness of such curriculum should be investigated. Hence there is an urgent need for preparing curriculums of school and college to achieve material advance consistent with ethical teachings assimilated from traditions. Buddhism emphasizes that extreme sensuous pleasure gained from material phenomenon needs to be moderated. Earning and using of wealth must be based on ethics.

Buddhism does not accept the adequacy of sensuous pleasure and acquisition of material passions as the appropriate happiness.

3. Ira. J. Gorden. 1962. p. 364.

In the case of using natural resources and labor power, Buddhism applies the simile of absorbing nectar as a bee from a flower. As a bee gathers honey from the flower without injuring its colour or fragrance, even so the sage goes on his alms-round in the village⁴. Buddhism considers natural resources as common property of all beings. A simple and frugal life will conserve the other's rights regarding nature. Wealth should be used for one's welfare as well as that of others⁵. A modern curriculum with this concept may reduce one's selfishness. The perfection of giving is a practical ethic preserving the basic need of all beings. The integration of such Buddhist ethics with global education, hence, is a good approach to mental culture. Early Buddhist discourses mention the word "*cariyā*" which means behavior. The behavior of people depends on what they have learnt. Any ethical approach to global education should observe the impediments and traits of learners before applying relevant principles.

The lack of relaxation causes mental tension and dissatisfaction in an unethical education system. This is a result of material development. The effort of Buddhist ethical education is to establish the satisfaction of life. There should be no competition with the expectation of material development encouraged by new technology. As Buddhism perceives, the goal of global education must target the benefit and happiness of all beings. To improve human performance, ethical guidance is needed to be added into education. The objective of education must be the production of good citizens and supporters of human beings. The combination of Buddhist ethical thoughts into education seems to be the most successful suggestion as we have experienced from traditional Buddhist education systems in Asia. In Buddhist culture others' welfare has been considered more important than that of individual life.

Before launching his first mission, the Buddha exhorted the group of sixty Arahants "Go forth, O Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the goods, benefit, and happiness of gods, and men...

4. Acharya Buddharakkhita. Trans. 1985. p.10.

5. K. Sri Dhammananda. 1977. p. 0.

Preach, O Bhikkhus, the Dhamma, excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle, excellent in the end, both in spirit and in the letter, proclaim the Holy Life, altogether perfect and pure.”⁶ In Buddhist view, at the beginning, middle, and end of global education, ethics are necessary. Some harmful outcomes of these three steps of education indicate that there is a necessity of ethical approach into global education. The harmful incidents can be precluded by adding ten *puñña-kammas* or meritorious actions into education. There are also ten *akusala-kammas* or evil actions to be avoided from global education.

“Frequently mentioned educational objectives, pertaining to the acquiring of intellectual competence will ultimately fulfill a vocational aim.”⁷ Vocational aim will not succeed beyond ethical values. Therefore ethics must be an important part of any curriculum as the most effective constituent in human behavior. Most social problems emerge from the unethical behavior of people. Some pointed out that the modern scientific education has contributed in creating more problems rather than promoting peace, happiness, and security.⁸ To resolve the increasing amount of social problems, there is no other way than the combination of ethics into global education.

Buddhist ethics consider fundamental rights not only of humans but also of other beings. For this necessity Theravada Buddhism presents a moral code based on five precepts.

- i. Must not take the life of any living creature knowing.
- ii. Must not take anything not given.
- iii. Must refrain from lying and harsh frivolous speech.
- iv. Must guard against sexual misdemeanor.
- v. Must not take anything (like drugs and liquor) which causes to lose.

These precepts are observed by Sri Lankan students at the commencement of schools. The practice of five precepts can be

6. Narada. p. 47.

7. Marvin D. Glock. 1971. p. 57.

8. K. Sri Dhammananda. p.192.

applied to produce good citizens; a goal of global education. Five precepts are the base of development of positive attitudes such as love, sympathy, gratitude etc. The increasing amount of crimes implies the violation of rule in the absence of ethics. In Buddhist perspective, the amount of juvenile delinquency is unable to be changed without an ethical approach into global education. Buddhism denotes the importance of controlling the bodily, verbal, and mental behavior harmful to others. The first precept controls the forms of violent behavior involving bodily injury to other living beings. The second precept controls the violation of property rights of another being to satisfy one's own greed and selfishness. The other three precepts protect the human rights in same way.

In general, these precepts are respected, if not protected, by a number of Buddhist communities belonging to various traditions. They are originally mentioned in Pāli canonical texts which are considered with high esteem in Sri Lanka and some countries in South-east Asia. These precepts, nonetheless, are included in Bodhisattva precepts in North-east Asian Buddhist communities. The history of Buddhism itself has proven that five precepts are applicable in different contexts, implying that they are of universal significance. Even the Buddha did not attribute an exclusively "Buddhist nature" to those precepts. They can equally be followed by Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Any claim about the hard applicability of those precepts in global education, hence, is deniable on good grounds.

As Buddhism points out, whatever the knowledge we apply for physical development, there is an essential need of integrating ethics into it. For all systems of education *Mahākaruṇā* (great compassion) can be applied as a fundamental of ethics. The Buddha is a perfected and enlightened one with true knowledge (*vijjā*) and conduct (*caraṇa*). Buddhist ethics gets advanced from its foundational ethics to meta-ethics. In the basic stage, students may dedicate oneself for the happiness of all beings (*sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā*)⁹ with compassion. Education should consider others' lives (*sabbesaṃ jīvitam piyaṃ*) approaching such ethics.

9. Sutta-Nipāta. 1932. p. 36.

Generosity can be cultivated with the intention of helping others. When deprived of the quality of *Mahākaruṇā*, human values are in danger. In such a setting, children will not respect their parents and teachers.

Buddhist education is a form of lifetime education. For the benefit of all beings, it is important to apply ten perfections in Buddhist thought. Ten perfections are of intrinsic value for a beneficial global education. There are ten principles of beneficence based on perfections. The practitioners of perfections are obliged with a form of ethical universalism. Here good-will and conscience play a significant role in ethics. Ten perfections will uplift humanity in parallel to material development. It is possible to combine ten meritorious actions into education. This will assist to overcome the problems arisen with unethical global education system.

As mentioned in early Buddhist teachings, the investigation into the outcomes of any human action is required. *Ambalaṭṭhika Rāhulovāda sutta* consists of a criterion of investigating the consequences of our actions. The discourse presents a principle of being non-maleficent. Such an investigation into outcomes will preserve all human rights. In psychological perspective mankind is obsessed with “self-love”. (*sabbesaṃ jīvitam piyaṃ*) The consideration of others’ rights is a principal ethical teaching presented in Buddhism. There is no independent self-existence as everyone is a part of dependent origination. The respect and gratitude to others is an ethical teaching supportive to the existence all beings. The Buddha, throughout the second week after his enlightenment, as a mark of gratitude to the Bodhi tree that sheltered him during his struggle for enlightenment, stood gazing at it with motionless eyes.¹⁰

Ethical speech and language can be utilized to govern the emotional behavior of people and resolve social problems. There are four unethical verbal behaviors i.e. lying (*musāvāda*), slandering (*pisuṇāvācā*), harsh speech (*pharusāvācā*), and frivolous talk (*samphappalāpa*). In the eightfold path leading to liberation, right speech (*sammā vācā*) means trustworthy language. What we learn

10. Narada. 1992. p.29.

through language changes our attitudes and values either harmfully or fruitfully. The constituents in noble path can be taken as an approach to global education.

There are ten kinds of action called *puñña-kamma* or meritorious actions which could be applied as the basic requirement of global education. Following meritorious actions will bring values into human life.

- i. Generosity (*dāna*)
- ii. Morality (*sīla*)
- iii. Meditation (*bhāvanā*)
- iv. Reverence (*apacāyana*)
- v. Service (*veyyāvacca*)
- vi. Transference of merit (*pattidāna*)
- vii. Rejoicing in other's merit (*pattānumodanā*)
- viii. Hearing the doctrine (*dhamma-savaṇa*)
- ix. Expounding the doctrine (*dhamma-desanā*)
- x. Straightening of one's own views (*diṭṭhijjukamma*)

Buddhism points out ten *akusala-kammās* or evil actions to be avoided from global education.

- i. Killing (*pāṇātipāta*)
- ii. Stealing (*adinnādāna*)
- iii. Non-chastity (*kamesu micchācara*)
- iv. Lying (*musāvada*)
- v. Slandering (*pisuṇāvācā*)
- vi. Harsh speech (*pharusāvācā*)
- vii. Frivolous talk (*sampapphalāpa*)
- viii. Covetousness (*abhijjhā*)
- ix. Ill-will (*vyāpāda*)
- x. False views (*micchā diṭṭhi*)

By avoiding these ten evil actions, students will understand to protect the human rights UNA expect to establish today in law.

The Buddhist discourses are rich in ethical codes which guide to the success of laity's secular life. Earning and accumulating wealth without damaging and injuring others and nature has been approved by the Buddha as a form of righteous gaining. Selling animals, flesh, alms, and drugs are not the modes of righteous earning. Such a teaching in curriculum will less likely to plant greed, hatred, and delusion in the student's mind. Humanitarian attitude towards beings is a fundamental point of ethics which can be utilized in global education. In brief the Buddha proclaimed thus:

*All tremble at violence.
All fear death.
Knowing this,
One should neither strike,
Nor cause to strike.*¹¹

Global academic programs expect the existence of humankind with benefit. Humankind exists on ethical matters rather than on vocational knowledge. *Maṅgala sutta* presents precise instructions as the modes of highest blessing.

- i. To honor those who are worthy of honor
- ii. Much learning
- iii. Perfect handicraft
- iv. Highly trained discipline
- v. Pleasant speech
- vi. The support of father and mother
- vii. The cherishing of wife and children
- viii. Peaceful accusations
- ix. Liberality
- x. Righteous conduct

11. Acharya Buddharakkhita. Trans. 1985. p. 25.

- xi. Helping of relatives
- xii. Blameless actions
- xiii. Reverence
- xiv. Humility
- xv. Contentment
- xvi. Gratitude
- xvii. Patience
- xviii. Obedience
- xix. Self-control etc¹². Can be taken as a foundational approach into global education.

Usually the bad habits of a human cause his or her downfall. Global education does not point out the causes of downfall of students. *Parābhava sutta* denotes some bad habits which causes one's downfall as below.

- i. A hater of Dhamma is the declining one.
- ii. The vicious are dear to him. In the virtuous he finds nothing pleasing. He favors the creeds of the vicious.
- iii. The man is drowsy, fond of society, not industrious, indolent, and who manifest anger.
- iv. Whosoever, being rich, does not support his aged mother and father who have passed their youth.
- v. He who, by falsehood, deceives a Brahmin or an ascetic or any other mendicant
- vi. The man owns much property, having gold and food, but alone enjoys his delicacies.
- vii. The man takes pride in birth or wealth or clan, and despises his own kinsmen.
- viii. The man is a debauch, a drunkard, a gambler, and who squanders whatever he possesses.

12. Sutta-Nipata. Mangala Sutta. 1932. p. 64.

- ix. Not contented with one's own wives, one is seen amongst courtesans and the wives of others.
- x. The man, past his youth, brings a very young wife and sleeps not for jealous of her.
- xi. He places in authority an intemperate spendthrift woman, or a man of similar nature.
- xii. He, of warrior birth, with vast ambition, but of slender means, aspires to sovereignty¹³.

Abovementioned twelve causes of downfall consist of ethical values with socio-cultural and economic significance which brings a life philosophy for modern world where moral codes are increasingly in destruction.

When students reached their young age, they get married. Modern global education does not offer ethics for their family life. Before entering into family life, the young generation should be concerned on ethical matters which assist their mutual assistance with spouse. The Buddha's advice to a couple can be used as a good guidance in the fields of humanities and social sciences in global education. The following ethical guidance makes peace and harmony of family life. The wife should respect and treat her husband as below.

- i. Not harboring evil thoughts against her husband
- ii. Not being cruel or harsh or domineering
- iii. Not being spendthrift but being economical and live within her means
- iv. Guarding and saving her husband's hard earned earnings and property
- v. Always being attentive and chaste in mind and action
- vi. Being faithful and harboring no thought of any adulterous acts
- vii. Being refined in speech and polite in action

13. Sutta-Nipata. Prabhava Sutta, 1932, p. 26.

- viii. Being kind, industrious, and hardworking
- ix. Being thoughtful and compassionate towards her husband
- x. Being modest and respectful
- xi. Being cool, calm and understanding
- xii. Serving not only as a wife but also as a friend and adviser when the need arises.¹⁴

The husband also should respect and treat his wife with following ethical behavior.

- i. Honoring and respecting his wife
- ii. Being faithful to her
- iii. Giving her the requisite
- iv. Giving her authority to manage domestic affairs
- v. Giving her befitting ornaments.

The students who follow various disciplines, including those even of technology or science, need to understand the causes of downfall or success of their lives. The academic programs without ethical significance will lead humankind to destruct plants, water, beings, food chain, air, and ecosystem.

Each academic program should be based on a moral philosophy. Our academic programs need to consider that mind comes first of all. Buddhism indicates following moral codes which control numerous actions of bodily, verbal, and mental behavior.

To do good, not to do evil,

To purify the mind,

This is the teaching of all the Buddha's¹⁵.

However, when thinking about the mere utility of actions even in terms of well-being of doer and other beings, a large part of moral evaluation is dismissed. The most important thing which

14. Digha Nikaya. Singalovada Sutta, 1996, p.180.

15. Acharya Buddharakkhita, 1985, p. 34.

demarcates good from bad is the mentality of doer; not the utility of action. Hence taking a utilitarian ethical approach in global education will not and cannot make a great change in spite of some possible outcomes. The utility of actions, perhaps, is best to be considered by one who is at the 'beginning stage', and who finds oneself incapable of doing serious moral evaluations in many circumstances. Nonetheless, a more matured human possesses a source better than investigation into utility. By one's own intuition of virtues, such a person can take decisions and act according to it. In fact much of modern global education is based on utilitarian approach, i.e. "Will this action bring forth the well-being of many?" Some virtues may be denied by such an approach. Lying, for instance, may be evaluated as a morally good act with instrumental value which will result in a good end, such as keep harmony in wider society by hiding truth. Therefore, the utilitarian approach used by global education should not be heralded in same way by ethicists. Virtue is the best key of understanding goodness than utility. The Buddha's emphasis on the precedence of mind gets important here.

Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha can be viewed as the quintessence of Buddhist ethical doctrine. Right view, the first item of this path, draws attention to the ideological basis necessary for a satisfactory outlook on life¹⁶.

The constituents of noble eight fold path, i.e.

- i. Right understanding (knowledge with ethics),
- ii. Right thought (being free from sensuality, ill-will, and cruelty),
- iii. Right speech (usage of language free from falsity, gossip, harshness, and idle babble),
- iv. Right action (avoidance of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct),
- v. Right livelihood (occupation that harms no conscious living beings),
- vi. Right effort (training of the will),

16. Premasiri.P.D. 2002, p.11.

- vii. Right mindfulness (perfection of faculty of action), and
- viii. Right concentration (cultivation of higher mental states) can be utilized as a theoretical approach into global education based on values.

When combining these constituents of noble eight-fold path, they can be organized into three groups. The first two (i, ii) among above mentioned build up the wisdom (*paññā*) of individual. The next three (iii, iv, v) together work as the foundation of virtue (*sīla*). The last three (vi, vii, viii) are focused on concentration (*samādhi*). These three groups respectively stand for cognitive, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of education. They are, however, not isolated from one another in a clear-cut way. Indeed the Buddha often shows them in an order different from that of noble eight-fold path; as virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). This Buddhist teaching will be an invaluable insight into the modern educational theories with a serious concern on the balanced development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The precedence of virtue and wisdom in two different contexts implies the equal importance and inseparable nature of them. There is no virtue without wisdom; and no wisdom without virtue.

There are three causes which harm humankind through certain emotions emerge in mind: covetousness (*abhijjhā*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*), and false views (*micchā diṭṭhi*). Buddhism thoroughly emphasizes the necessity of the development of mind along with cognitive development. Hence an individual who gives heed to both the purification of mind from negative, evil thoughts and the development of his cognition is considered to be a properly educated individual who possesses a higher level of ethical code.

References

- Acharya Buddharakkhita. Trans. The Dhammapada. The Buddha's Path of wisdom. Buddhist Publication society. Kandy. Sri Lanka. 1985.
- Digha Nikaya. Vol. 111. PTS. 1996.
- Dhammananda, K. Sri. *Human Life and Problems*. The Buddhist Union, 28, Jalan Senyum, Singapore. 1997, p.20
- Ira J. Gordon, *Human Development: From Birth through Adolescence*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York. 1962, p.364
- Lee, Sun Keun, and Rhi, Ki Yomg (ed.), *Buddhism and the Modern World*. Dongguk University, Seoul, Korea.
- Leonard A. Bullen, *A Technique of Living Based on Buddhist Psychological Principles*. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1982.
- Marvin D. Glock (ed.), *Guiding Learning: Readings in Educational Psychology*. Printed in the United States of America, 1971
- Narada, *A Manual of Buddhism*. Buddhist Missionary Society, Buddhist Vihara, 123, Jalan Berhala, 50470, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1992
- Nyanaponika Thera, *The Four Sublime States (Brahma-vihāra)*. The Wheel No. 6, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.
- Nyanamoli Thera, *The Practice of Loving-kindness (Mettā)*. The Wheel No. 7, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.
- Premasiri, P.D. *Ethics in Buddhism*. Published by the Department of Buddhist Affairs, Ministry of Buddhasasana, Sri Lanka, 2002, p.11)
- Sutta-Nipata or Discourse –collection. Volume Thirty seven. Harvard University Press. 1932.
- Vimalo Bhikkhu, and Dr. C.B. Dharmasena, *Purification of Character*. The Wheel No. 39/40, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Muditā: The Buddha's Teaching on Unselfish Joy (4 Essays), The Wheel
No. 170, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka.