

PASSING INHERITANCE OF BETTER WORLD TO OUR YOUNGER GENERATIONS

by Tin Tin Lay*

ABSTRACT

Man is depended upon the nature for his food, clothing, shelter and other requisites. These are the basic necessity for man. Later he demoralized the world not for his survival to live but for pleasure and material comfort. Hence, people of nowadays are using many materials that are far away from their essential needs for living. Use, use and yet use as they are persuaded by stimulating their desire largely driven by consumption led growth. Over consumption senselessly exploit resources without sustaining them for the younger generations.

As a result, we are confronting with environmental deterioration leading to natural disasters because of the limited resources upon which man relies. That's why we should utilize these natural resources with understanding of difference between need and greed because the world can provide enough to man's need but not to man's greed. Man must learn to satisfy his needs and not feed his greed. The depletion of natural resources resulted from over exploitation which in turn is arising out of over consumption which is stimulated by believing wrongly that man's happiness and well-being lie in the material needs and sensual desires. So we can say that the root cause of the present day suffering worldwide is the man's unquenchable greed. Again this greed is enhanced by hatred and delusion.

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As the current environmental deterioration through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil; the destruction of ecosystem and the extinction of wildlife continue to be worse at an alarming rate then the world will eventually no longer be able to sustain all its inhabitants to accommodate. If so happen we, people of present day not to feel quite embarrassed when we pass the empty or let me say the chaos world as an inheritance to our younger since we have obtained the pleasant world full of natural resources from our ancestors.

It needs urgent response to combat this situation. So we have to launch an initiative to tackle it through Buddhist approach. Buddhists believe that man and nature are interdependent. Man's morality impacts on the deterioration and flourishing of the world. Moreover, man's true happiness is not solely depending on the material things.

In this paper a humble attempt is made to contribute a possible way towards the pleasant and resourceful world through the teachings of the Buddha. Buddhism encourages simplicity, a balanced lifestyle with moderation in consuming, responsible consumption and sustainable development with modesty. So let's pass the inheritance of better world to our younger generation with moderation of consumption in all aspects, not to be greedy for other's possessions, contented with what we have, sharing what we possess and there will be love and affection, peace and prosperity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The world we all living in is now suffering loads of various diseases. Actually it is facing a lot of crises such as environmental crisis, financial crisis, social crisis, political crisis, moral crisis, educational crisis and etc. As the current environmental crisis, deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil; the destruction of ecosystems and the extinction of wildlife continues to be worse at an alarming rate, then the world will eventually no longer be able to sustain all its inhabitants to accommodate. It needs urgent response to fight against this situation.

The world we are living at present age, indeed, is an inheritance obtained from our former generations such as our parents, grandparents, and elder ancestors. When we got it from our ancestors the

world was full of resources like clean water and air, trees and forest, and fauna and flora in full bloom. Our former generations handed over the resourceful world as the inheritance in due time and they fulfilled one of their duties well as they deserved to be respected by present day people.¹

Now we are in the place of our former generations it is not sooner to handing over the inheritance to our younger generations. How do we give them the world suffering from several diseases as an inheritance to our younger generations? They have their right to get a healthy and productive world which is pleasant and safe to live in. Moreover, we do not want to be blame worthy ancestors passing the inheritance of diseased or in other words empty and chaos world to them.

It is necessary try to find out the possible, effective, and pragmatic solution for the diseased world to get recovery through the teachings of the Buddha. Buddhism encourages simplicity, a balanced lifestyle with moderation in consuming, responsible consumption and sustainable development with modesty.

I would like to highlight what diseases that our world is suffering from, examine their manifestations and investigate the etiology and try to give medication to cure through Buddhist effective treatment to overcome.

2. DISEASES OF THE WORLD AND THEIR MANIFESTATIONS

First it is needed to know what the manifestations of the disease that the world, the inhabiting place for all beings animate as well as inanimate is suffering from. Diseases of the world can be sketched out as global warming and climate change, desertification and deforestation, population growth, water and food scarcity and, acid rain, ozone layer depletion and increasing the size of the hole in ozone layer and biodiversity degradation.

Alarming reports about contaminated waterways, polluted air and depletion of natural resources reach us with increasing frequency. Today, it is becoming customary to talk in terms of a

1. <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.ksw0.html>. Retrieved 27 Jan 2019.

crisis, an “excocrises,” in matters concerning society and its relation to the natural environment.²

Environmental problems were occurred, are occurring and will occur not only in developing countries but also in developed countries, though in different forms. In the developing countries population growth and natural resources are out of balance and resulting in unsanitary living conditions, deforestation, desertification, erosion and declining ground water supplies, etc. Moreover, poverty and ignorance are the pivotal roles for these problems in the developing countries. In industrialized countries, however, the air, water and soil are polluted as a result of the existing system based on mass production.³

3. ETIOLOGY OF THE WORLD’S DISEASES

Man is depended upon the nature for his food, clothing, shelter and other requisites. So man has to learn how to get better quality and larger quantity of natural resources to reach his need of requisites for survival. This learning must be accompanied by moral restraint if he is to enjoy the benefits of natural resources for a long time.⁴ But later he demoralized the world not for his survival to live but for pleasure and material comfort. It is said that modern man in his search for pleasure and affluence has exploited nature without any moral restraint to such an extent that nature has been rendered almost incapable of sustaining healthy life by Lily de Silva in her article entitled “The Buddhist Attitude towards Nature.”⁵ The natural resources upon which man relies are not unlimited hence he should utilize these natural resources with understanding of difference between need and greed. Man must learn to satisfy his needs and not feed his greed. The resources of the world are not unlimited whereas man’s greed knows neither limit nor satiation.⁶ It is augmented by the words of Mahatma Ghandi as follows: “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need; but not for every

2. Klas Sandell, *Introduction- The Ecocrisis*. (Buddhist Publication Society, 1987), 5.

3. Ibid.

4. Lily de Silva, *The Buddhist Attitude towards Nature*. (Buddhist Publication Society, 1987), 11.

5. Ibid. 9.

6. Lily de Silva, op.cit.11.

man's greed."⁷

The environmental crises resulted from over exploitation of the natural resources. If we take from nature only to the extent that nature can recover from it, then none of our valuable resources shall get depleted. However, dedicated to wasteful luxuries we exploit the order of nature by cultivation of excessive desire. The over exploitation in turn is arising out of over consumption which is stimulated by believing wrongly that man's happiness and well-being lie in the material needs and sensual desires. So it is found out that human choices are an integral part of the ecological balance, and their excessive greed destroys the order of nature. Consequently, it can be said that the root cause of the world's suffering is the man's unquenchable greed. Again this greed is enhanced by ignorance and lastly by hatred.

4. BUDDHIST APPROACH TO THE WORLD'S RECOVERY

Buddhism as we all know is the teachings of Gotama Buddha who lived more than 2500 years ago. As such a kind of crisis has not been heard then the sermons concerning directly with this issue cannot be found in the Pāli scriptures. However, as Buddhism is a full-fledged philosophy of life reflecting all aspects of experience, it is possible to find enough material for managing the disease that our world is suffering from.

Buddhism is not as anthropocentric as the other so-called religious traditions and that its attitude does not therefore allow for the possibility that mankind has the right to take from nature, to see nature as simply a store house of necessities for humanity.⁸ Though Buddhists see the human rebirth as precious, fortunate and one of the five rare occasions (*Manussatabhāvo dullabho*)⁹, it does not place the human being in the first place having right to govern his environment including animate and inanimate things.

7. E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*. (London: Blond & Briggs, 1973), 26.

8. Ibid. 84.

9. The Advisers of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, *The Teachings of the Buddha (Basic Level)*. (Yangon: Ministry of Religious affairs, 1998), 84, 86.

The world is home not only for human beings but for the entire flora and fauna, the totality of nature. Man, indeed, is a part and parcel of nature. Besides people of present days have to understand what is sustainable development, “a kind of development meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”¹⁰ However, this modern definition of responsible consumption and sustainable development are not strange for Buddhists since the Buddha taught it how the human’s greedy nature and laziness impact on the natural processes of the world affected by the morals of man.¹¹ Thus the morality of mankind and the natural environmental condition are closely related. Moreover, deterioration in man’s morality affects the nature well being and it will reciprocate by adverse effect on mankind. So we can safely state that spiritual health and material well being are natural allies but not enemies.

The mutual interaction between mankind and the nature is found in the commentary on the *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta*.¹² When mankind is demoralized through greed, famine (*dubbhikkhantara kappa*) is the natural outcome; when human beings are overwhelmed by ignorance there appear epidemic (*rogantara kappa*) and when hatred is the demoralizing cause, prevalent of violence (*satthantara kappa*) is the result.¹³

All these symptoms of environmental crisis as aforesaid are needed to treat as soon as possible. If not they will fuel one another and become irreversible.

Scientists and ecologists are studying and seeking in search of ways and means to manage the crisis now threatening the world which is suffering from the grave consequences of man’s three unwholesome deeds. On the other hands, different religious traditions are responding with their own ways to combat

10. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brundtland_Commission. Retrieved 28 January 2019.

11. Dīgha Nikāya, Pāthikavagga Pāḷi, *Aggañña Sutta*. (Yangon: Department of Religious Affairs, 2001), 66-81.

12. Buddhaghosa-thera, Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā Vol III, *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta*. (Yangon: Department of Religious Affairs, 1992), 856.

13. Ashin Obhāsābhivamsa, *Research Illustrated Dictionary*. (Yangon: Department of Religious Affairs, 2002), 119, 120.

environmental degradation as they have particular incentive characters with regard to the behaviors and views of the people.

Buddhism suggests that each man has to uplift his moral degradation as we believe that morality of mankind is directly proportionate to the natural process of the world. Moreover, he should lead a simple moderate life by being satisfaction with basic needs.

People of present day have to reduce, reuse, and recycle the consuming things through taking the example of monastic community of those days. We found this event of reuse and recycle by monastic community in the Vinaya Piṭaka as follows.

When King Udena of Kosambhi's saw his concubines offered five hundred costly robes to Venerable Ānanda, he was so disappointed thinking that monks are greedy. And he asked Venerable Ānanda. Venerable Ānanda explained to him that nothing given to members of the Order was wasted. Moreover, Venerable made the king to satisfy by answering his serial questions regarding the usage of robes. The robes offered would be divided among those of the monks whose robes were worn out. The worn out robes would be made to use as counterpanes. The worn out counterpanes would be made to use as bolster cases. The worn out bolster cases would be made to use as carpets. The worn out carpets would be made use as towels for the washing feet. The worn out towels would be made use as dusters. Finally the worn out duster would tear in shreds, beat up with mud, and use them for making flooring of clay. King Udena delighted with the answer of Venerable Ānanda concerning of reducing the amount of waste, reuse and recycling means of the Order and he offered another five hundred costly robes to Venerable Ānanda.¹⁴

Buddhism suggests that each man of nowadays has to uplift his moral degradation as we believe that morality of mankind is directly proportionate to the natural process of the world. Moreover, he should lead a simple moderate life by being satisfied with basic needs. He has to reduce his over consumption to the minimum in order not to become a slave to his insatiable passions since Buddhism offers a modest concept of living, simplicity, frugality, and emphasis on

14. Vin. II. 291.

essential goods, cutting down wastage and a basic ethic.¹⁵

It is said that over consumption generates an unending cycle of desires and satisfactions. According to the vista of Buddhism, unless man controls his insatiable passions and allow them continue to grow there will be no hope for him to escape from his insatiable passions of prison. In fact, Buddhism believes that there is a deep satisfaction without need for superabundance of material goods. And it was evident by the asking and explanation of Buddha to *Niganṭhas* in the *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*¹⁶ whether King *Seniya Binbisāra* of *Magadaha* or the Buddha who abides in greater pleasure.

CONCLUSION

We, humanity of present generation now recognize that the natural resources of the world we are depending upon are not unlimited. It is not difficult to forgive destruction in the past which resulted from ignorance as our ancestors viewed the earth as rich and bountiful, which it is. Many people in the past also saw nature as inexhaustibly sustainable.¹⁷ However, in order not to be embarrassed for giving empty world with no natural resources to our future generation we must aware whether it is necessary or accessory and with great concerning about our consumption. We must start to control the root causes of the world crises, the greed before it is too late.

We mankind of present day as our unique position in relation to other physical and biological elements¹⁸ has to utilize nature in the same way as a bee collects nectar and flies away without damaging the flower or its color or its scent.¹⁹ Just as the bee manufactures honey

15. Padmasiri de Silva, *In Search of a Buddhist Environmental Ethics*. (Buddhist Publication Society, 1987), 25.

16. *Majjhima Nikāya*, *Mūlapaṇṇāsa Pāḷi*, *Cūḷadukkhakkhandha Sutta*. (Yangon: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 1993), 126-132.

17. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *An Ethical Approach to Environmental Protection*. (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society 1987), 8.

18. Klas Sandell, *Buddhist Philosophy as Inspiration to Ecodevelopment*. (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1987), 19.

19. Daw Mya Tin, trans., *The Dhammapada Verses & Stories*. (Yangon: Myanmar Pitaka Association, 1995), 20.

out of nectar, so man should be able to find happiness and fulfillment in life without harming the natural world in which he lives.

So let's passing the inheritance of the world filled with natural resources in variety to our younger generations if we want to be praise worthy ancestors for them by Buddhist approach of simplicity, knowing the measure in taking or consuming things, and balanced lifestyle.

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