

BUDDHIST APPROACH TO RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has been mandated to oversee the mobilization, facilitation, and coordination within the UN system of its expertise, programs, and resources toward supporting global, regional, and national strategies to deal with the building blocks of sustainable development. The outcome document of Rio+20 (Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 2012) - The Future We Want- is a major policy blue-print of ECOSOC that proposes different strategies for the implementation and advancement of sustainable development goals. In this paper, an attempt shall be made to discuss and examine the Buddhist perspective on sustainable development in the light of the Rio+20 document as well as Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. We shall try to show that there are many common grounds between the goals and ideals of ECOSOC and the teachings of the Buddha (Buddhavacana). Hence, it will be proposed that the Buddhavacana has much to offer in terms of sustainable development and can make important contribution toward the efforts of ECOSOC in this regard. Buddhist doctrines relating to respectful attitude toward nature, gender equality, social and economic egalitarianism, non-violence, compassion towards all, simplicity, satisfaction with minimum, non-wastage, tolerance and plurality- are

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all not only fully compatible with the ideals and goals of ECOSOC but are actually contributory toward such an effort. Further, an attempt shall also be made to show that the current globalizing system promotes competition rather than cooperation. Such an attitude has generated conflict and resentment. Thus, we need to seriously examine not only our attitudes and lifestyles but also our policies that govern the use of renewable and non-renewable resources, science and technology, and the scale and direction of industrialization and globalization. An attempt shall be made to show that a society founded upon the Buddhist Dharma recognizes that one should aim at promoting the good of the greater unit to which one belongs, and as a minimum one must not look for one's own satisfaction in ways that may cause harm to others. Thus, in Buddhist approach to social and economic development, the primary criterion governing policy formulation must be the well-being of members of the society as a whole. By pointing out that the vulgar chase of luxury and abundance is the root-cause of suffering, Buddhism encourages restraint, voluntary simplicity, and contentment. The Buddhist ideal, in fact, is co-operation with nature, not domination. Thus, a new relation must be established between people and nature, one of cooperation not of exploitation. Production must serve the real needs of the people, not the demands of the economic system. An effort shall also be made to show that as compared to globalizing consumer system that causes wastage and greed, Buddhism promotes just the opposite.

Sustainable development, as defined in *The Brundtland Report* (1987), is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on the Environment and Development: Chapter 2). This report also talked for the first time of the need for the integration of economic development, natural resources management and protection, social equity and inclusion with the purpose of meeting human needs without undermining the “integrity, stability and beauty” of natural biotic systems. Before *The Brundtland Report* such an apprehension was well expressed in the influential book *Limits to Growth* (1972) which examined five variables (world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion) on the computer modelling of

exponential economic and population growth with finite resource supplies. The findings were that even if new resources are discovered over a period of time and the current reserves therefore change, still resources are finite and will eventually be exhausted. The book predicts that changes in industrial production, food production, and pollution are all in line with the economic and societal collapse that will take place within the twenty-first century itself (see Meadows and Meadows 2004; Hecht 2008). To put it simply, “the laws of thermodynamics are absolute and inviolate. Unless phytomass stores stabilize, human civilization is unsustainable.... There is simply no reserve tank of biomass for planet Earth. The laws of thermodynamics have no mercy. Equilibrium is inhospitable, sterile, and final” (Schramskia, Gattiea and Brown 2015). How do we come to grips with the problem spelt out above and attain sustainable growth? From Buddhist perspective, humankind has chosen a wrong path (*agatigamana*) to development and there is the urgent need for two corrective measures. Firstly, there is the need to put a system in place which not only can design and develop non-pollutive alternative technologies needing minimal specialist skills and which use only renewable resources such as wind and solar power but can also minimize the social misuse of such technologies. Secondly and more importantly, there is the need to sensitize humanity to the practical understanding of the issue whereby human *weltanschauung* can be changed and the revival of spirituality can take place that treats nature with respect.

The present day profit-oriented global economic system in which moral sentiments are viewed as irrelevant is overwhelmingly controlled and run by consumerism and salespersons. In a system such as this, the corporate sector plunders and pollutes on the back of rampant consumerism with the acknowledged goal of *profit maximization* which in turn almost always degenerates into *expropriation of wealth*. Organizations of enormous size monopolize production and distribution of goods. Through the use of clever means these organizations create an insatiable craving among the masses to possess more and more. High-consumption lifestyle is aggressively promoted through advertisements and psychological pressure in various forms is employed to intensify the craving

for maximum consumption. One is lured into buying as much as possible irrespective of the fact whether one needs it or whether one has saved enough to pay for it. Thus, goods are bought not because people need them but because they want them. In fact, a consumer society is characterized by the belief that owning things is the primary means to happiness and thus, consumption is accepted “as a way to self-development, self-realization, and self-fulfillment” (Benton 1997: 51-52). As a matter of fact, consumerism has become so ingrained in modern life that it is viewed by some as a new world religion whose power rests in its extremely effective conversion techniques (Loy 1997: 283). This religion, it has been pointed out, works on the principle that not only growth and enhanced world trade will be beneficial to all, but growth will also not be constrained by the inherent limits of a finite planet. Its basic flaw is that it depletes rather than builds “moral capital” (Loy 1997: 283). Fritjof Capra has pointed out that “the health hazards created by the economic system are caused not only by the production process but by the consumption of many of the goods that are produced and heavily advertised to sustain economic expansion” (Capra 1983: 248). Similarly, Erich Schumacher, the author of *Small is Beautiful*, has warned that materialistic attitude, which lacks ethical inhibitions, carries within itself the seeds of destruction (Schumacher 1973: 17-18, 56, 119). As pointed out by Erich Fromm, the profit-oriented economic system is no longer determined by the question: What is good for Man? But by the question: What is good for the growth of the system? Moreover, consuming has ambiguous qualities: It relieves anxiety, because what one has cannot be taken away; but it also requires one to consume ever more, because previous consumption soon loses its satisfactory character. Actually, this globalizing profit-oriented system works on the principle that egotism, selfishness, and greed are fundamental prerequisites for the functioning of the system and that they will ultimately lead to harmony and peace. However, egotism, selfishness, and greed are neither innate in human nature nor are they fostered by it. They are rather the products of social circumstances. Moreover, greed and peace preclude each other (Fromm 2008: 5-8, 23). From Buddhist perspective, more production of material goods, their increased consumption, and craving (*taṇhā*) for them does not necessarily

lead to increase in happiness. Buddhism teaches that in order to arrive at the highest stage of human development, one must not crave possessions.

One major flaw of the current globalizing consumer system is that it promotes competition rather than cooperation. Competitive and adversarial attitude or the continuous feeling that one has to work against something not only generates conflict and resentment but also invariably results in unhealthy side effects. At the international level, mutual antagonisms among nations have resulted not only in billions of dollars being wasted each year in the production of armaments but also a major chunk of the scientific manpower and technology has been directed at the war industry. For instance, military activities in the world engage approximately 25 per cent of all scientific talent and use 40 per cent of all public and private expenditure for research and development (see Pavitt and Worboys 1977). Sadly, not only that economists look with some apprehension to the time when we stop producing armaments, but also “the idea that the state should produce houses and other useful and needed things instead of weapons, easily provokes accusations of endangering freedom and individual initiative” (Fromm 1955: 5). However, as Bertrand Russell once pointed out, “The only thing that will redeem mankind is co-operation, and the first step towards co-operation lies in the hearts of individuals” (1954: 204). It has been seen that individuals with cooperative skills are more creative and psychologically better adjusted. With its emphasis on cooperation and interdependence, Buddhist practice can inspire the building of partnership societies with need-based and sustainable economies.

Political leaders and business executives often take self-serving decisions. Moreover, “the general public is also so selfishly concerned with their private affairs that they pay little attention to all that transcends the personal realm.... Necessarily, those who are stronger, more clever, or more favored by other circumstances... try to take advantage of those who are less powerful, either by force and violence or by suggestion... (Conflict in the society) cannot disappear as long as greed dominates the human heart” (Fromm 2008: 10-11, 114). A society driven by greed loses the power of

seeing things in their wholesomeness and we do not know when enough is enough. “The hope... that by the single-minded pursuit of wealth, without bothering our heads about spiritual and moral questions, we could establish peace on earth, is an unrealistic, unscientific, and irrational hope... the foundations of peace cannot be laid by... making inordinately large demands on limited world resources and... (putting rich people) on an unavoidable collision course- not primarily with the poor (who are weak and defenceless) but with other rich people” (Schumacher 1973: 18-19). In the present economic system, points out Schumacher, anything that is not *economic* is sought to be obliterated out of existence. “Call a thing immoral or ugly, soul-destroying or a degradation of man, a peril to the peace of the world or to the well-being of future generations; as long as you have not shown it to be “uneconomic” you have not really questioned its right to exist, grow, and prosper” (Schumacher 1973: 27). In this regard, it may be said that Buddhism looks at greed (*lobha*: Morris and Hardy 1995-1900: iv.96) and egotism (*avaññattikāma*: Morris and Hardy 1995-1900: ii.240; iv.1. *asmimāna*: Oldenberg 1879-1883: i.3; Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890-1911: iii.273; Trenckner and Chalmers 1888-1896: i.139, 425; Morris and Hardy 1995-1900: iii.85) as leading to suffering. Real problem lies in the human tendency to have-to possess- which the Buddha called craving (*taṇhā*). It may be pointed out that Buddhism does not mind wealth and prosperity as long as they are acquired and used in accord with the ethical norms. Moreover, from Buddhist perspective, apart from taking into account the profitability of a given activity, its effect upon people and environment, including the resource base, is equally important.

Another flaw of the current globalizing consumer system is that it is widening the division between the rich and the poor. According to the Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report, the richest 1 per cent people in the world now own half of the planet’s wealth and at the other extreme, the poorest 50 per cent of the world’s population owns just 2.7 per cent of global wealth (Kentish 2017). This type of stark poverty and inequality leading to the marginalization and exclusion of the majority of the world population has implications for social and political stability among and within states. It will be unrealistic to expect spiritual, psychological, and social harmony

in the world till it remains materially divided. As a member of a common human family, each individual must have access to a reasonable share of the resources of the world so that s/he is able to fulfil his/her basic needs to realize his/her potential as a productive and respected member of the global family. This means that there is an urgent need for equitable access to resources not only between nations, but also between humans irrespective of gender and nationality. As desperate poverty of the poor has been responsible to some extent for the overuse of the limited resources, economic justice and social equity are important. However, affluent societies are the real problem children of today's world. For instance, it has been estimated that the birth of an American baby represents more than fifty times as great a threat to the environment as the birth of an Indian baby (Jones 1993: 14). Well-documented research has shown that world hunger caused by scarcity of food is a myth because the amount of food produced in the world at present is sufficient to provide about eight billion people with an adequate diet. The main culprit is the agribusiness in a world marred by inequalities (see Capra 1983: 257-258). "Without a revolution in fairness, the world will find itself in chronic conflict over dwindling resources, and this in turn will make it impossible to achieve the level of cooperation necessary to solve problems such as pollution and overpopulation" (Elgin 1993: 42). In this regard, it may be said that Buddhism promotes a wide distribution of basic necessities so that no one has to suffer deprivation as deprivation is the root cause of social conflict. Thus, talking about the cause of social conflict, the Buddha pointed out that, "goods not being bestowed on the destitute poverty grew rife; from poverty growing rife stealing increased, from the spread of stealing violence grew apace, from the growth of violence, the destruction of life became common" (Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890-1911: iii.67). From a Buddhist perspective, an ideal society would follow the motto of happiness and welfare of maximum number of people (*bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya*: Oldenberg 1879-1883: i.21). In such a society one would not look for one's own satisfaction in ways that may become a source of pain/suffering (*aghabhūta*) for others (Feer 1884-1898: iii.189). Hoarding wealth in any form is looked down upon in Buddhism (Morris and Hardy 1995-1900: iii.222) and if a wealthy person

were to enjoy his wealth all by himself only, it would be a source of failure for him (Fausböll 1985: 102). In fact, someone working for the sake of wealth (*dhanahetu*, Fausböll 1985: 122), craving wealth (*dhanatthiko*, Fausböll 1985: 987; *bhogataṇhā*, Sarao 2009: 355), or taking pride in wealth i.e., displaying economic snobbery (*dhanatthaddho*, Fausböll 1985: 104) is considered as a fallen human being and an ignoramus who hurts himself as well as the others. Thus, in Buddhist approach to social and economic development, the primary criterion governing policy formulation must be the well-being of members of the society as a whole i.e., production should be oriented towards serving the real needs of the people instead of serving the demands of the economic system. As emphasized by Fromm, Buddhism supports every human being's right to be fed without qualification in a way as a nourishing mother who feeds her children, who do not have to achieve anything in order to establish their right to be fed and it opposes the mentality of hoarding, greed, and possessiveness. In such a perception, people's "income is not differentiated to a point that creates different experiences of life for different groups" (Fromm 2008: 69).

The present system believes that fulfilment of the material needs of humankind will lead to peace and happiness. But this is a mistaken view. As Erich Fromm points out, an animal is content if its physiological needs- hunger, thirst and sexual needs- are satisfied because being rooted in the inner chemistry of the body, they can become overwhelming if not satisfied. Inasmuch as man is also an animal, these needs must be satisfied. But inasmuch as one is human, the satisfaction of these instinctual needs is not sufficient to make one happy because human happiness depends on the satisfaction of those needs and passions which are specifically human. These essential needs which modern civilization fails to satisfy are "the need for relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, the need for a sense of identity and the need for a frame of orientation and devotion" (Fromm 1955: 25, 28, 65, 67, 134). From the Buddhist perspective, economic and moral issues cannot be separated from each other because the mere satisfaction of economic needs without spiritual development can never lead to contentedness among people. By pointing out that the vulgar chase of luxury and abundance is the root-cause of suffering, Buddhism encourages restraint,

simplicity, and contentment. This way of life embraces frugality of consumption, a strong sense of environmental urgency, a desire to return to human-sized living and working environments, and an intention to realize our higher human potential- both psychological and spiritual (Elgin and Mitchell 1977: 5). This type of enlightened simplicity would integrate “both inner and outer aspects of life into an organic and purposeful whole.... outwardly more simple and inwardly more rich.... and living with balance in order to find a life of greater purpose, fulfillment, and satisfaction” (Elgin 1993: 25). Enlightened simplicity is essential to attain sustainable development and to solve global problems of environmental pollution, resource scarcity, socioeconomic inequities, and existential/spiritual problems of alienation, anxiety, and lack of meaningful lifestyles. Thus, need of the hour for the developed nations is to follow what Arnold Toynbee called *Law of Progressive Simplification* i.e., by progressively simplifying the material side of their lives and enriching the nonmaterial side (Toynbee 1947: 198). Taking a position akin to Buddhism, Elgin (1993: 32-35) has suggested that one choosing to live a life of simplicity would not only lower the overall level but also modify the patterns of one’s consumption by buying products that are long-lasting, easy to repair, serviceable, energy efficient, and non-polluting in their use as well as manufacture. Besides believing in deep ecology, one would show an ardent concern for the poor and the needy. One would prefer a smaller-scaled and human-sized living and working environment that fosters a sense of community and mutual-caring. One would shift one’s diet in favour of one that is more natural, healthy, simple, and suitable for sustaining the inhabitants of the planet Earth. One would not only recycle but also downsize by owning only those possessions that are absolutely required. One would develop personal skills to handle life’s ordinary demands for enhancing self-reliance, minimizing dependence upon others, and developing the full range of one’s potentials. One would also spare time on a regular basis to volunteer to help in improving the quality of life of the community. Enlightened simplicity requires having contentment (*samtuṭṭhi*: Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890-1911: i.71; Trenckner and Chalmers 1888-1896: i.13; Fausböll 1985: 265; Sarao 2009: 204; Morris and Hardy 1995-1900: ii.27, 31, ii.219)

with little, avoiding wastefulness i.e., fewness of desires (*appicchatā*: Oldenberg 1879-1883: iii.21; Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890-1911: iii.115; Trenckner and Chalmers 1888-1896: i.13; Feer 1884-1898: ii.202). Contentment, which is viewed in Buddhism as the best wealth (*saṃtutṭhiparamaṃ dhanaṃ*, Sarao 2009: 204), is the mental condition of a person who is satisfied with what he has or the position in which he finds himself (*saṃtussamāno itarītarena*: Fausböll 1985: 42).

“Private property” as once pointed out by Karl Marx, “has made us so stupid and partial that an object is only ours when we have it, when it exists for us as capital ... Thus all the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by... the sense of having” (Bottomore, 1963: 159). Thus, as pointed out by Erich Fromm, people acquire things, including useless possessions, because they “confer status on the owner” (Fromm 1955: 133). In the *Having Mode of Existence* relationship to the world is one of possessing and owning, to treat everybody and everything as property. The fundamental elements in the relation between individuals in this mode of existence are competition, antagonism, and fear. In such a mode, one’s happiness lies in one’s superiority over others, in one’s power and capacity to conquer, rob, and kill. The peril of the having mode is that even if a state of absolute abundance could be reached; those who have less in physical health and in attractiveness, in gifts, in talents bitterly envy those who have *more* (Fromm 2008: 66-67, 91-92). In the *Being Mode of Existence* one’s happiness lies in aliveness and authentic relatedness to the world, loving, sharing, sacrificing, and giving. The difference between these two modes of existence is that whereas the *having* mode is centered around persons, the *being* mode is centered around things (Fromm 2008: 15, 21, 66).

There is an urgent need to sensitize people to the fact of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings, including humans, and resources. The earth is not only teeming with life but seems to be a living being in its own right. A wide-ranging, objective, well-documented, and value free scientific research shows that each living creature has its place in the biosphere whereby it plays its unique role as part of the collective balance. As pointed out by Capra, all the living matter on earth, together with

the atmosphere, oceans, and soil, forms a complex system that has all the characteristic patterns of self-organization. Thus, “the earth is a living system and it functions not just like an organism but actually seems to be an organism- Gaia, a living planetary being” (Capra 1983: 284-285). From a Buddhist perspective, not only that life is inherently valuable but human and other forms of life are also interdependent and reciprocal. Thus, nature and humanity on the one hand and humans amongst themselves on the other are seen as mutually obligated to each other. A living entity can neither isolate itself from this causal nexus nor have an essence of its own. In other words, as part of the Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), humans are seen as affecting their environment not only through the purely physical aspects of their actions, but also through the moral and immoral qualities of such actions. It is thus said that, if a king and his people act unrighteously, this has a bad effect on the environment and its gods, leading to little rain, poor crops and weak, short-lived people (Morris and Hardy 1995-1900: ii.74-76). This message is also strongly implied by the *Aggañña Suttanta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890-1911: iii.80-98) which shows how in the beginning nature was bountiful but it became less so when humans began to take greedily from it. When they began to harvest more rice than they needed, it was not naturally able to grow quickly enough. This necessitated cultivation which in turn caused division of land into private fields, so that property was invented. Origin of private property became the root cause of different social and economic ills. Thus, one is not surprised that from Buddhist point of view, consumer-oriented modernity “is rejected because it is seen as a form of life that has in a short period of time despoiled the landscape and done irreparable damage to the environment” (Lancaster 2002: 1-2).

Just as poverty is the cause of much crime, wealth too is responsible for various human ills. Buddhism views material wealth as being required only for meeting the bare necessities and must only be earned through are righteous and moral means. Generosity (*dāna*) and liberality (*cāga*) are always linked in Buddhism with virtue (Sarao 2009: 177). Moreover, by giving one gets rid of greediness/selfishness (*macchariya*) and becomes more unacceptable to others because “one who gives makes many friends” (Fausböll 1985: 187;

Morris and Hardy 1995-1900: iii.273. v.40, 209; Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890-1911: iii.234). Above all, it is not necessary to have much to practice generosity because giving even from one's meagre resources (*dajjā appampi*) is considered very valuable (Feer 1884-1898: i.18; Sarao 2009: 224). Generosity is one of the important qualities that make one a gentleman (Morris and Hardy 1995-1900: iv.218). The Buddha is the spiritual friend (*kalyāṇamitta*) (Feer 1884-1898: v.3) par excellence and the saṃgha members who are his spiritual heir (*dhammadāyādo*) are also expected to act as such (Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890-1911: iii.84; Feer 1884-1898: ii.221). The Buddha compares the person who earns wealth righteously and shares it with the needy to a person who has both eyes, whereas the one who only earns wealth but does no merit is like a one-eyed person (Morris and Hardy 1995-1900: i.129-130). In other words, if a healthy society is to be built, liberality and generosity must be fostered as its foundation pillars.

Avoidance of wastage, which is one of the most serious stumbling blocks in the path to sustainable development, is an important aspect of Buddhist enlightened simplicity. The fig-tree glutton (*udumbarakhādika*) method blamed by the Buddha (Feer 1884-1898: iv.283), the method of shaking down an indiscriminate amount of fruit from a fig-tree in order to eat a few, is exactly the same as the one employed in drift-net fishing, where much more aquatic life is destroyed than utilized. Humanity cannot continue to consume the planet's limited resources at the rate to which it has become accustomed. Through unbridled expansion, the economy is not only absorbing into itself more and more of the resource base of the extremely fragile and finite ecosystem but is also burdening the ecosystem with its waste. As human population grows further; the stress on the environment is bound to rise to even more perilous levels. Exploding population levels wipe out what little is accomplished in raising living standards. As pointed out by Paul and Anne Ehrlich, considering present technology and patterns of behavior our planet is grossly overpopulated now and the limits of human capability to produce food by conventional means have also very nearly been reached. Attempts to increase food production further will tend to accelerate the deterioration of

our environment, which in turn will eventually reduce the capacity of the earth to produce food. The Green Revolution “is proving ecologically unsustainable, dependent as it is on an economically and socially vulnerable, high cost, petrochemical agriculture” (Jones, 1993: 13). Its dark side is reflected in crops’ vulnerability to pest problems, loss of genetic diversity through mono-cropping and neglect of local varieties, fertilizer-induced increase of weeds, the threat of fertilizer pollution in fragile soils, toxicity through pesticides leading to cancer and adverse effects on body’s natural immune system, erosion accelerated by multiple cropping, and the mindless squandering of water resources. “Yet these alarming results have barely affected the sale and use of fertilizers and pesticides” (Capra 1983: 257). Through the degradation of the environment, the future is clearly being undermined by the rich in emulation of the developed world and by the poor to stay alive by salvaging the present by savaging the future. In fact, we are faced with “the prospect that before we run out of resources on any absolute basis we may poison ourselves to death with environmental contaminants” (Elgin and Mitchell 1970: 5). Global warming is now irreversible, and nothing can prevent large parts of the planet becoming too hot to inhabit, or sinking underwater, resulting in mass migration, famine, and epidemics. “Signs of potential collapse, environmental and political, seem to be growing.... while politicians and elites fail to recognize the basic situation and focus on expanding their own wealth and power” (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 2009: 68). As suggested by Stephanie Kaza, the environmental impact is accelerated by the rapidly rising population numbers, increasingly efficient technologies, and consumption rates beyond the planet’s capacity. These three have been linked by the equation $I=PAT$, or environmental Impact= Population size multiplied by Affluence (or degree of consumption) multiplied by Technology. Reduce any one of these and the impact drops; increase one or all three, and the impact rises, in some cases dramatically (Kaza 2000: 23).

Since human beings are social creatures who naturally come together for common ends, this means that a social order guided by Buddhist principles would consist primarily of small-scale communities with localized economies in which each member can

make an effective contribution. From the perspective of Buddhist economics, “production from local resources for local needs is the most rational way of economic life” (Schumacher 1973: 42). To attain sustainable development, what we need most of all is streamlining and downsizing. Only small-scale and simple technology would not drain natural resources as in its production would be aimed principally at local consumption, so that there is direct face-to-face contact between producers and consumers. Large-scale technologies are dehumanizing and morally wrong as they become impersonal and unresponsive making individuals functionally futile, dispossessed, voiceless, powerless, excluded, and alienated. “Wisdom demands a new orientation of science and technology towards the organic, the gentle, the nonviolent, the elegant and beautiful” (Schumacher 1973: 20). The Buddhist values mean that environment should not be over exploited and “non-renewable goods must be used only if they are indispensable, and then only with the greatest care and the most meticulous concern for conservation.... The Buddhist economist would insist that a population basing its economic life on non-renewable fuels is living parasitically” (Schumacher 1973: 43-44). Thus, from a Buddhist perspective, a new relation must be established between people and nature, one of cooperation not of exploitation or domination. The driving force of such an economy would be to make a distinction between a state of utmost misery (*daliddatā*) (Feer 1884-1898: v.100, 384, 404), being sufficient (*yāpanīya*) (Oldenberg, 1879-1883: i.59, 212, 253), and glut (*accogāḷha*) (Morris and Hardy 1995-1900: iv.282). There would be a balance between material excess and deprivation i.e., avoidance of both mindless materialism and needless poverty leading to a balanced approach to living that harmonizes both inner and outer development. It would be unbuddhistic to consider goods as more important than people and consumption as more important than creative activity. For building a sustainable future affluent members of the society will need to make dramatic changes in the overall levels and patterns of consumption. We must choose levels and patterns of consumption that are globally sustainable, i.e., use the world’s resources wisely and do not overstress the world’s ecology, i.e., consuming in ways that respect the rest of life on this planet. Such an aim was made explicit in the Green Buddhist Declaration,

prepared by members of the international Buddhist community for discussion at the World Fellowship of Buddhism in Colombo (1980): “We believe that since world resources and the ecosystem cannot support all peoples at the level of the consumption of the advantaged nations, efforts towards global equity must be coupled with efforts towards voluntary simplicity, in one’s individual life-style and through democratically-determined policies. The economic structures which encourage consumerist greed and alienation must be transformed.”

From Buddhist perspective, it is also important that policies must be grounded on moral and ethical values that seek welfare of humankind as a whole. As suggested by Alan Durning (1992), the linked fates of humanity and the natural realm depend on us, the consumers. We can curtail our use of ecologically destructive things and cultivate the deeper, non-material sources of fulfillment that bring happiness: family and social relationships, meaningful work, and leisure. Implementation and realization of the spirit underlying the Buddhist Eight-fold Path (*aṭṭhaṅgikamagga*) encompassing wisdom (*paññā*), morality (*sīla*), and meditation (*samādhi*) in eight parts can truly offer a path leading to sustainable development. Right View (*sammā-ditṭhi*) and Right Thought (*sammā-samkappa*) constitute wisdom; Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*), Right Conduct (*sammā-kammanta*), and Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) constitute morality; and Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*) form the practice of meditation (Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890-1911: ii.311-315). By following this path of wisdom, morality, and meditation one can grow inwardly and follow a life of enlightened simplicity. By following this path humans can aim at harmonious living (*dhammacariya, samacariya*) (Trenckner and Chalmers 1888-1896: i.289; Feer 1884-1898: i.101) and compassion (*karuṇā*) with “the desire to remove what is detrimental to others and their unhappiness” (Fausböll 1985: 73). This would form the basis of the weltanschauung of the well-adjusted and balanced person, who would seek inner peace (*ajjhattsanti*, Fausböll 1985: 837), and inward joy (*ajjhattarata*, Sarao 2009: 362; Rhys Davids and Carpenter 1890-1911: ii.107; Feer 1884-1898:

v.263) by exercising a degree of restraint, limiting his/her needs, and avoiding being greedy (*ussuka*) (Sarao 2009: 199) because one can never become worthy of respect if one is envious, selfish, and fraudulent (*issukī maccharī satho*) (Sarao 2009: 262).

It is time that each of us chooses a way of life that is materially simple, inner directed, and ecology friendly. The fundamental issue is of the Earth's finite capacity to sustain human civilization. "Lifeboat ethic" must be replaced by "spaceship earth ethic." Mindful living opens our perception to the interdependence and fragility of all life, and our indebtedness to countless beings, living and dead from the past and the present. Finally, it may be befitting to conclude in the words of Elgin:

"To live sustainably, we must live efficiently- not misdirecting or squandering the earth's precious resources. To live efficiently, we must live peacefully, for military expenditure represents an enormous diversion of resources from meeting basic human needs. To live peacefully, we must live with a reasonable degree of equity, or fairness, for it is unrealistic to think that, in a communications-rich world, a billion or more persons will accept living in absolute poverty while another billion live in conspicuous excess. Only with greater fairness in the consumption of the world's resources can we live peacefully, and thereby live sustainably, as a human family" (Elgin, 1993: 41-42).

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