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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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UNITED NATION DAY OF VESAK 2025

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CONTENTS

Foreword - <i>His Eminence Thích Thiện Nhơn</i>	ix
Foreword - <i>Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Brahmapundit</i>	xi
1. Devotional Offerings, Their Management, and Compassionate Cultivation: A Reference to Nikāya Sutras - <i>Ven. Thich Nguyen Hanh</i>	1
2. Buddhist Compassion in Action Shared Responsibility for Human Development - <i>Ven. Gawaragiriye Pamarathana Thero</i>	17
3. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development - <i>Prof. Amarjiva Lochan</i>	35
4. Development of Public Health Service Standards for the Palliative Care Facilities in Temples for Sick Monks and End-Of-Life Patients, with Sustainable Support from the Government and Community - <i>Asst. Prof. Dr. Patitham Samnang</i>	45
5. Compassion and Tolerance: Not Weakness, but Strength for Human Development - <i>Dr. Arvind Kumar Singh</i>	55
6. Buddhism Around the World – Africa: Perspectives of African Buddhist Followers - <i>Rev Dr. ILukpitiye Pannasekara Thero</i>	75
7. Buddhist Compassion in Practice: Advancing Human Development through Shared Responsibility - <i>Asst. Prof. Dr. Yesh Pal</i>	95
8. Understanding the Buddhist Behavior and Acts of Compassion from Licchavi Stone Inscriptions (320 - 879ad) in Nepal - <i>Asst. Prof. Sanjay Shakya</i>	111
9. Buddhists in New Lands: Compassion Values and Actions towards better and Sustainable Futures and Happiness - <i>Jose Antonio Rodriguez Diaz</i> ..	131
10. Mauritian Tourism and Sustainable Development: A Buddhist Perspective - <i>Prof. Reshmi D. Ramdhony</i>	161
11. The Role of the Buddhist Doctrine of <i>Karuṇā</i> in Promoting Harmony and Ethical Values for Humanity - <i>Vahe Gharibyan</i>	179
12. The Bodhisattva Ideal and its Shared Responsibility for Human Development - <i>Ven. Dr. Polgaswatte Paramananda</i>	193
13. The Role of Monastic Communities in Promoting Sustainable Peace and Development - <i>Ven. Dr. Dinh Phuc Samādhipuñño</i>	205
14. Buddhist Approach to Making Sustainable Human Satisfaction - <i>Ven. Dr. Ehelepola Mahind</i>	219
15. Universal Responsibility: Buddhist Compassion as a Catalyst for Human Development - <i>Dr. Animesh Prakash</i>	233

16. Buddhist Compassion and Human Development - <i>Projit Kumar Palit</i>	247
17. Prajñā-Infused Bodhisattva Actions: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development - <i>Dr. Ven. Pooja Dabral, Assistant Professor</i>	269
18. An Analysis of Mahākaruṇā Described in the Mahāparinibbānasutta with Special Reference to the Subhaddaparibbājakavattthu - <i>Dr. Gyanaditya Shakya</i>	287
19. Compassion and Buddhist AI - <i>Lim Kooi Fong</i>	305
20. Buddhism and its Contribution to Thailand's Aging Society - <i>Asst. Prof. Dr., Somboon Watana</i>	321
21. The Role of Compassion (<i>Karuṇā</i>) in Fostering Global Unity: Buddhist Perspectives on Collective Responsibility - <i>R. M. Suneth Bandara</i>	333
22. <i>Karuṇā</i> : Transformative Power in Buddhist Practice and its Contributions to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals - <i>Bhikkhu Thich Quang Nguyen</i>	347
23. Integrating Buddhist Loving-Kindness into Holistic Patient Care: A Case Study of the Compassionate Care Facility at Wat Amarintharam Worawihan and Siriraj Hospital, Bangkok, Thailand - <i>Boonmee Pongpet</i>	367
24. Mindfulness as a Tool for Stress Reduction in Vietnam's Knowledge Workforce During Global Integration - <i>Dr. Pham Thi Kien</i>	385
25. Sustainable Development and Buddhist Thought: A Holistic Approach to Harmonizing Progress with Nature - <i>Dr. Deesha Khaire</i>	401
26. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development - <i>Rev. Budumuththawe Dhammasiri Thero</i>	415
27. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Promoting Education, Harmony and Strengthening Unity Through Buddhist Missionary Schools in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh - <i>Jhubhur Chakma</i>	433
28. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development in Cambodia - <i>Morm Savonn</i>	457
29. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Chinese Buddhism in Transition under the Teaching of Venerable Taixu - <i>Ven. Thich Thien Tri</i>	489
30. Origin of Buddhism and its Timeless Wisdom: Unlocking a Future for Global Sustainable Development - <i>Dr. Tikaram D. Kose</i>	503
31. An Investigation into The Impact of Buddhist Social Ethics on Human Development - <i>Rev. Ambaliyedde Sangharathana Thero</i>	525
32. Elimination of Poverty as a Moral Imperative: A Buddhist Analysis - <i>Rev. Dr. Wadinagala Pannaloka</i>	541
33. Vietnamese Buddhism Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development During the Covid-19 Pandemic - <i>Dr. Le Thanh Binh</i>	559
34. The Importance of Buddhist Gratitude (<i>Kataññuta</i>) Education for Moral Development - <i>Ven. Sujit Kumar Singha</i>	585

35. Care of Inochi, or Holistic Spiritual Care, Offered by Buddhist Chaplains: Realization of Buddhist Dharma and Practices - <i>Eishin (Fuminobu) Komura</i>	597
36. From Personal Peace to Community Peace: A Buddhist Compassion Approach - <i>Dr. Tran Minh Duc</i>	613
37. The Impact of Compassion (<i>Karuṇā</i>) in Buddhist Psychotherapy on Creating a Peaceful World - <i>TN. Như Hiếu</i>	631
38. Sharing – Not Saving: Empathy and Interconnectedness as Patterns of Contemporary Fundraising Success - <i>Jitka Cirklová</i>	663
39. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Sdgs): What the Buddhist Community can do - <i>Dr. Henry Dang</i>	683
40. Human Development Paradigm in India & World: An Ambedkarite Buddhist Response - <i>Dr. Kirtiraj D C</i>	693
41. Implementing Buddhist Compassion: Shared Responsibility for Human Development - <i>Dr. Ajay Kumar Maurya</i>	711
42. Buddhism and Compassion in War - <i>Charles Dorman-O’Gowan</i>	737
43. Shared Responsibility and Compassion: A Buddhist Vision for Human Development - <i>Dr. Akhilesh Kumar Mishra</i>	751
44. Mindful Marketing Strategies for Borobudur: A Buddhist Approach to Sustainable Tourism - <i>Budi Hermawan, Soegeng Wahyoedi</i>	789
45. Buddhist Compassion in Action	815
46. Through Promoting Engaged Buddhism: An Altruistic Role of Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō (1865 - 1926) in Pre-Partition Bengal - <i>Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury</i>	815
47. Buddhist Philosophy of Life and Vietnamese Ethics in Sustainable Development today - <i>Nguyen Thi Mai</i>	839
48. The Compassionate Path of Buddhism for a Sustainable Future - <i>Pradhan Atanu</i>	851
49. Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam: Compassion in Action and the Social Responsibility of Bhiksuni Như Thanh (1911 - 1999) - <i>Dr. Ninh Thi Sinh</i>	863
50. “Phước” and the Science of Compassion: Buddhist Practices as a Path to Health, Well-Being, and Transgenerational Epigenetic Benefits - <i>Dr. Duc The Hua</i>	877
51. Distinctiveness of Buddhist Compassion in Action: A Case Study of Mumbai City - <i>Dr. Lata A. Chavan</i>	895
52. Buddhist Compassion in Action to Eliminate Suffering: Comparative Study with Rogerian Humanistic Approach and Buddha’s Compassionate Approach in Uprooting Suffering - <i>Dr. Ashoke Priyadarshana</i>	921
53. Engaged Buddhism in Action: Soka Gakkai’s Role in Peace, Human Rights, and Social Transformation - <i>Aditi Kumar</i>	941
54. Fostering Human Flourishing Through Compassionate Action in the Nikāyas - <i>Dr. Gyan Prakash</i>	953

55. Practical Approaches on Marriage in the Pāli Canon: An Analytical Exploration within the Framework of Ethical and Compassionate Living - <i>Gihan Mallawaarachchi</i>	965
56. The Role of the Four Buddhist Assemblies in Supporting Sustainable Development Goal 16 Through Meditation - <i>Suchada Thongmalai</i>	979
57. Compassionate Practice	1001
58. of Avalokiteśvara Cult: Inspiring Shared Responsibility for Human Development - <i>Thich Duc Quang</i>	1001
59. Brief Introduction of Bodhicitta - Special Reference to Shanti Deva's Bodhicaryā Avatar - <i>Dondup Dorjee</i>	1015
60. 'Role of Loving-Kindness (<i>Mettā</i>) for Sustainable Living as seen in Some Pāli Canonical Texts' - <i>Vaishali Gaidhani</i>	1027
61. Admonishment of all the Buddha's towards Well-Beings - <i>Sayalay Pāramī</i>	1045
62. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development - Philosophical Principles and Practice in the Modern Age - <i>Alex Amies</i>	1075
63. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Protecting Animals and the Environment with Our Diet - <i>Adele Tomlin</i>	1091
64. Buddhism as an Enlightenment to the Global Ecological Crisis - <i>Wangyal Lama Tamang</i>	1107
65. A Study on how the Compassionate Quality (<i>Karuna</i>) as Depicted in the Five Precepts Influences for the Human Security and Development - <i>W. Dehemi Mihara Perera</i>	1121
66. Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development - <i>Roland P. Herke</i>	1145
67. Nurturing Compassion: The Parental and Societal Role in Human Development Through Buddhist Teachings - <i>H. D. Hapugasthenna</i> ..	1163
68. Buddhist Digital Media: Promoting Religious Diversity and Compassionate Dialogue for Human Development - <i>Latifah</i>	1181
69. The Role of Buddhist Compassion in Human Development: Insights from Erik Erikson's Psychological Development Stages - <i>Bhikkhuni Ngoc Linh</i> ..	1203
70. Dynamic Compassion: Comparative Approaches to Human Flourishing - <i>Tuan Hoang</i>	1221
About the Editors	1237

FOREWORD

His Eminence Thích Thiện Nhơn

President of the Executive Council, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha

The anthology “Buddhist Compassion in Action: A Shared Responsibility for Human Development” forms part of the five thematic volumes of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025 International Conference, held under the overarching theme “Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development.” This grand conference was be solemnly hosted at the Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City from 6 to 8 May 2025, in commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the founding of the nation and the 50th anniversary of national reunification.

This volume comprises 70 scholarly articles contributed by international Buddhist scholars, monastics, and peace advocates from diverse cultural, traditional, and academic backgrounds. Despite their diversity, they converge upon a unifying vision: to elucidate the transformative power of compassion (P. *karuṇā*)—compassion—as a fundamental ethical principle, not only in individual spiritual cultivation but also in collective efforts to foster human development and build a more humane, harmonious, and sustainable society.

With a rich thematic structure and interdisciplinary approach, the anthology offers profound insights spanning history, culture, philosophy, sociology, environmental studies, education, and healthcare. These contributions successfully highlight Buddhist compassion not merely as a noble ideal or moral virtue, but as a dynamic force for action—an ethical impetus to address global challenges such as inequality, poverty, conflict, climate change, and moral crises.

A distinctive feature of this volume is its interdisciplinary and cross-traditional methodology, demonstrated through contributions from scholars representing a broad array of nations—India, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, the United States, Nepal, Thailand, Spain, the Czech Republic, Mauritius, Bangladesh, and beyond. These articles underscore that compassion is not a distant ideal, but a practical foundation for concrete actions, ranging from charitable giving and healthcare, to moral education, digital communication, sustainable tourism, and peacebuilding.

This collection also reflects the visionary leadership of Vietnamese Buddhism in convening the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025. It illustrates

how Vietnam is facilitating global intellectual exchange and creating a platform for the confluence of Buddhist wisdom and contemporary development discourses. The Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City, as the host of this historic event, affirms the rising prominence of Vietnamese Buddhism on the world stage, particularly in championing values of compassion, harmony, and liberation.

The editorial board—under the stewardship of Most Ven. Thích Đức Thiện and Most Ven. Thích Nhật Từ—has undertaken the selection, refinement, and compilation of manuscripts with academic rigor and heartfelt dedication. This volume not only fosters global scholarly engagement but also paves the way for new research directions, such as integrating Buddhist compassion into social policy, advancing moral education on a global scale, developing humanistic healthcare models, and promoting applied Buddhist studies in the modern world.

With its intellectual depth and methodological diversity, this anthology stands as an indispensable reference for scholars, spiritual leaders, and policymakers who seek to explore the role of compassion in collective action toward a just, inclusive, and sustainable world.

FOREWORD

By Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Brahmapundit,
President of the International Council for the Day of Vesak (ICDV)

The United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV), initiated by Thailand and embraced by the global Buddhist community, stands as a profound response to the United Nations Secretary-General's call to commemorate Vesak Day worldwide. This occasion marks the sacred triple events of the Buddha's Birth, Enlightenment, and Mahāparinibbāna—not merely as a global cultural festival, but as a sacred duty of the international Buddhist community to advance peace, compassion, and wisdom in alignment with the noble objectives of the United Nations. As Buddhists, we share a collective responsibility to bring the teachings of the Buddha to bear upon the urgent challenges of our time, from social injustice to climate change.

Thailand, with the gracious support of the Thai Royal Family and the Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand, has played an important role in this sacred mission. Spearheaded by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and supported by the Royal Thai Government, we established the International Council for the Day of Vesak (ICDV) in 2004. This laid the foundation for the inaugural United Nations Day of Vesak in the same year, uniting global Buddhist leaders in vital forums to explore Buddhist principles as solutions to global issues—resonating with the vision and mandate of the United Nations.

Over the course of twenty UNDV celebrations, Thailand has had the honor of hosting fifteen, Sri Lanka one, and Vietnam has proudly hosted four—namely in 2008, 2014, 2019, and 2025. Each of Vietnam's contributions to UNDV has been remarkably successful, exemplifying visionary Buddhist leadership and international solidarity. The Government of Vietnam and the leadership of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha have demonstrated unwavering commitment and dedication in organizing these momentous events, showcasing the power of Buddhist unity and collective action for global peace.

The main theme of UNDV 2025, "Solidarity and Tolerance for Human Dignity: Buddhist Wisdom for World Peace and Sustainable Development," reflects the vision of the United Nations and the aspirations of the Government of Vietnam for peace and sustainability in the spirit of the Buddha's teachings. It also honors the Buddha's immense contributions to human history, while commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the founding of the Socialist Republic

of Vietnam and the 50th Anniversary of the country's reunification.

I deeply appreciate and hold in high regard the organizational capabilities, vision, and tremendous devotion demonstrated by the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in hosting the four UNDV celebrations. These efforts stand as a testament to the highest standards of Buddhist leadership and an enduring commitment to peace and sustainable development.

The present volume, "Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development" nêu 4-8 hàng đánh giá bao quát về tầm quan trọng và giá trị của chủ đề này trong bối cảnh chiến tranh vẫn còn tàn phá cuộc sống con người và nhiều khủng hoảng.

This thematic collection features five English-language forums with more than 600 scholarly papers and five Vietnamese-language forums with over 350 research contributions. The high-quality submissions from monastics and scholars alike highlight the academic depth, intellectual diversity, and cross-cultural values of the Buddhist world in dialogue with modern global issues.

As we approach UNDV 2025, I warmly welcome the expected participation of above 1,200 international delegates from 80 countries and 5 territories. Furthermore, I commend the cultural dimensions of UNDV Vesak 2025, including the Buddhist Art Exhibition, the Vietnamese Buddhist Cultural Festival, and the international Buddhist cultural performances from India, China, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

These scholarly, cultural, and spiritual perspectives collectively contribute to the profound success of this sacred Vesak celebration. Together, let us ensure that the 20th United Nations Day of Vesak in Vietnam becomes a beacon of peace, unity, and sustainable development for the entire world.

DEVOTIONAL OFFERINGS, THEIR MANAGEMENT, AND COMPASSIONATE CULTIVATION: A REFERENCE TO NIKĀYA SUTRAS

Ven. Thich Nguyen Hanh*

Abstract:

This study attempts to investigate the general subject of administrative activities surrounding devotional offerings within the *Saṅgha* as portrayed in the *Nikāya* Sutras by addressing the problems arising from the governance of donation in the monasteries mentioned in the *Nikāya* Sutras. Offerings and their administration within the *Saṅgha* are also examined in this research work. It aims to encourage and deepen the understanding of the *Saṅgha* community and advance the goal of liberation within the *Saṅgha* community. Through analyzing secondary sources and primary data from the *Nikāya* Sutras, the article also learns about the establishment, offerings, and administration of the *Saṅgha* during the Buddha's lifetime. The study also looks at the issues of how to use, arrange, and manage the way that food, medicine, money, housing, monasteries, and other material things similar to those in the *Saṅgha* were presented in the teachings of the Buddha. In particular, the study details the activities related to administering the Fourfold *Saṅgha* (*Pāli*: *Catasso parisā*), which comprised laymen devotees (*Pāli*: *Upāsaka*), laywomen devotees (*Pāli*: *Upāsikā*), monks (*Pāli*: *Bhikkhū*), and nuns (*Pāli*: *Bhikkhuni*). The research paper also looks at how devotional offerings from devotees to the *Saṅgha* help to achieve the goal of stable, harmonious, sustainable communities and pure virtues. In addition to using and managing the donated items in meaningful ways, the question of how to resolve problems in the *Saṅgha* while using them to support daily life and spiritual practice is crucial. Finally, it looks at the disagreements and difficulties in providing benefits within the *Saṅgha* and the various messages offered to resolve those conflicts.

Keywords: *Buddhist Saṅgha, offering, administration, Nikāya Sutras, harmony.*

* Nalanda University.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the administrative activities surrounding devotional offerings within the Buddhist monastic community (Pāli: *Saṅgha*) as portrayed in the *Majjhimanikāya*. It examines how offerings are made, used, and managed to maintain and grow the *Saṅgha* and work toward liberation. Offerings, given with reverence, include food, drink, clothing, bedding, medicine, flowers, incense, lamps, and necessary utensils.¹ Administration is defined as planning, organizing, and running the *Saṅgha*.² The *Saṅgha*'s administration consists of four departments: Education, Internal Governance, Building and Development, and Dhamma Spreading.

Gautama Buddha established the *Saṅgha* in the fifth century BCE to provide a disciplined, full-time practice for those wishing to live free from household responsibilities. Initially, the *Saṅgha* consisted only of monks (Pāli: *Bhikkhū*) who lived in monasteries like Jetavana and Venuvana, often enduring harsh conditions in forests and caves. The first disciples, who became Arahants after hearing the Buddha's teachings, were Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama, and Assaji. Five years after his enlightenment, Buddha established the first order of nuns, including his aunt and foster mother, *Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī*, and 500 royal maids. The *Āriyapariyesana Sutta* recounts that in the seventh week after his enlightenment, the Buddha preached to two merchants, *Tapussa* and *Bhallika*, who became his first disciples. The *Saṅgha*, initially composed of monks (Pāli: *Bhikkhū*) and nuns (Pāli: *Bhikkhunī*), also includes laymen (Pāli: *Upāsaka*) and laywomen (Pāli: *Upāsikā*), forming the "fourfold *Saṅgha*." This broader definition encompasses all followers of the Buddha's teachings.

The *Saṅgha*'s composition is complex, including not only monks and nuns but also lay practitioners and novices. The Buddha emphasized the importance of having accomplished followers from all four categories before achieving *parinibbāna*. Historically, monks held a prominent position, but modern times see increased involvement from lay practitioners, reflecting the evolving nature of the *Saṅgha*. Today, the *Saṅgha* is a global tradition with around 506 million followers.³

Donations support the *Saṅgha* through three internal self-management strategies: Sutras (Pāli: *Dhamma*), disciplines (Pāli: *Vinaya*), and the *Saṅgha*'s rules. Offering resources are managed in monasteries to support four departments: Education, Internal Governance, Development and Building, and Dhamma Spreading. Offerings support education through investigation, reflection, and meditation, as well as building through study and meditation. Dhamma dissemination includes psychic marvels, practice, and study. Conflicts in the *Saṅgha* are managed through dialogue and assemblies,

¹ Soka Gakkai. 2024. *Dictionary of Buddhism*. <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/toc/>.

² Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. 2024. Oxford University Press. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com>

³ Pew Research Center. 2020. Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050. Accessed 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/feature/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050/>.

promoting social harmony. The Six Harmonies guide group practice: shared viewpoints, observing precepts, living together, speaking without conflict, experiencing Dharma bliss, and sharing benefits. The *Saṅgha* aims for liberation from suffering, balancing group membership with individual spiritual growth. Proper use of offerings is crucial, as misuse violates Buddhist precepts. The *Vinaya* outlines conduct rules, with penalties for violations.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Concepts of *Saṅgha*

The *Saṅgha*, according to Todd Lewis (2014), is the greater Buddhist society, which consists of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen who have accepted the Three Refuges. The Buddhist society, known as the *Saṅgha*, comprises men, women, and children who adhere to the Buddha's teachings. Over time, the name has taken on two different meanings. Sanskrit and Pāli denote "collection" or "assemblage" and describe a group of people living together for a specific purpose. Primarily, the term "*Saṅgha*" is most commonly used to describe monks and nuns, as well as people who have "left home" and "fallen into homelessness." According to this interpretation, the *Saṅgha* is the "Third Jewel" in Three Jewels (Sanskrit: *Triratna*, Pāli: *Tiratana*), in which a follower of the Buddha may seek shelter. The *Saṅgha*, or Buddhist community, was formed by the Buddha's disciples who renounced worldly life to follow and teach the Buddha's teachings, whether at home, in a temple, or in a study group.

2.2. Formation of *Saṅgha*

The development of Buddhism through the growth of the *Saṅgha*, which Gautama Buddha initially established in the fifth century BCE to provide a means for those who wish to practice full-time in a direct and highly disciplined way, free from the restrictions and responsibilities of household life.

According to the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*,⁴ the first disciples of the Buddha were five wise monks who, after hearing the Buddha teach the Four Noble Truths, became Arahants. They were Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama, and Assaji, and the Buddha's *Saṅgha* was established after that. At first, Pagodas did not exist, only monasteries, such as mango gardens (Pāli: *Jetavana* (Jeta's grove)) and bamboo forests (Pāli: *Venuvana*). Only monks (Pāli: *Bhikkhū*) were in the *Saṅgha* during its first thirteen years of formation. Monks frequently lived hard in the forest, under the trees, and in cave homes.⁵ After Gautama Buddha became enlightened, he established the first Buddhist order of nuns five years later. When the Buddha was at Kapilavatthu, five hundred royal maids and his aunt and foster mother, *Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī*, went to the Buddha to ask permission to join the *Saṅgha*. It was from this group that the first nuns were established.

⁴ SN 56:11 *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* | Setting the wheel of Dhamma in Motion | Dhammatalks.org. (n.d.). https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/SN/SN56_11.html

⁵ Dennis A. Winters. 1988. "The First Buddhist Monasteries." *The Tibet Journal* (Library of Tibetan Works and Archives). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43300289>.

The *Saṅgha* were instructed by the Buddha to travel the countryside and impart knowledge. However, he also mandated that they meet on specific days, including the Dharma and *Pātimokkha* recital, the day of fasting (Pāli: *Uposatha*; Sanskrit: *Upavasatha*) services, and an annual retreat during the rainy season. The establishment of the *Saṅgha* and the assembly that resulted in the construction of the first monasteries were both prompted by these occurrences.⁶

2.3. The fourfold *Saṅgha*

According to the *Āriyapariyesana Sutta*, in the seventh week after his enlightenment, the Buddha preached to two merchants named *Tapussa* and *Bhāllika*,⁷ who sought sanctuary in the Two Jewels as the first two disciples of Buddha Sakyamuni. (Gopinath Mohanty, 2007) (Dennis A. Winters, 1988) However, the *Saṅgha* can also have a broader reference. In addition to the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*, the Pāli texts refer to the “fourfold” of the *Saṅgha*, which include monks (Pāli: *Bhikkhū*), nuns (Pāli: *Bhikkhunī*), laymen (Pāli: *Upāsaka*), and laywomen (Pāli: *Upāsikā*).

In other words, the term “fourfold *Saṅgha*” refers to the men, women, and children who follow the Buddha’s teachings. There are two aspects worth highlighting when considering what counts as the *Saṅgha*. First, assuming the *Saṅgha* are Buddhists in this second, broader sense, we can proceed. Since many Buddhists have also participated in other religious systems, it can still be challenging to determine who is considered a lay Buddhist. Second, while monks and nuns, and perhaps laymen and laywomen, are the primary form of the *Saṅgha*, positions within the *Saṅgha* are not limited to these groups and include novices (monastics who have taken the “lower” ordination to follow ten precepts).⁸

It is crucial to have these four types of Buddhist practitioners. The Buddha stated in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* that he would not achieve *parinibbāna* until he had followers who were “accomplished, trained, learned knowers of the dharma” and belonged to all four categories. His work would not be finished till then. Monks have historically held a more significant position in the *Saṅgha*, but in the modern world, lay men and women are becoming more involved in their communities, and the Fourfold *Saṅgha*, which assigns equal responsibility for comprehending, practicing, and disseminating the teachings of all Buddhists, is another example of how the *Saṅgha* is changing. A true Four-Fold *Saṅgha* holds everyone to the highest standards and excludes no one.⁹ Buddhist *Saṅgha* is a vast and complex religious and philosophical tradition that originated in India over 2,500 years ago and is now followed by

⁶ Dennis A. Winters. 1988. *The First Buddhist Monasteries*. The Tibet Journal (Library of Tibetan Works and Archives). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43300289>.

⁷ Mohanty, G., Patel, C. B., Pradhan, D. R., & Tripathy, B. (2007). Tapassu and Bhallika of Orissa, their historicity and nativity. In *Orissa Review*. <https://magazines.odisha.gov.in/orissareview/nov-2007/engpdf/Pages01-11.pdf>

⁸ Borchert, Thomas. 2012. “Sangha.” April 24. doi:10.1093/OBO/9780195393521-0006.

⁹ Koun Franz. 2019. What Is the Fourfold Sangha? Lion’s Roar Foundation, July 10.

around 506 million people.¹⁰

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In Buddhism, devotional offerings (Pāli: *Puja, Pūjā*), which include things like flowers, incense, food, and candles, are acts of reverence toward the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dharma (Buddha's teachings), and the Sangha (monastic community). They are meant to cultivate virtues like humility and generosity and to show respect and gratitude. This study crosses many academic fields, such as psychology, anthropology, history, philosophy, and religious studies.

3.1. Historical and textual studies

In canonical texts, this research delves into the *Pāli* Canon (Theravāda tradition) and focuses on *Nikāya* Sutras to understand doctrinal development and application in daily donation.

3.2. Cultural studies

The topic indicated the Buddhist practices in cultural research examines the devotional practices in diverse Buddhist communities and how Buddhist donation adapts to different cultures.

3.3. Philosophical research

This research studies doctrine's philosophy related to the Buddhist core concepts, such as offering to present the non-self (Pāli: *Anatta*) concept and Dependent Origination (Pāli: *Paṭiccasamuppāda*) concept when the donors, the receivers, and offering things in the pure conditions to grasp the vast merits. The topic is related to cross-tradition comparative research with the Buddhist donation philosophy, exploring intersections with existentialism, phenomenology, and ethics.

IV. DEVOTIONAL OFFERINGS

4.1. Material offerings

In Buddha's time, Buddha Shakyamuni and his disciples received buildings and gardens more than 2500 years ago, the earliest known monasteries constructed to house Buddhist meditation and formal education inside the holy order. Their plans catered to the requirements of the *Saṅgha* organization at the time of its founding and were modeled by the existing village layout patterns. Based on these early monasteries, later monastery complexes were constructed in different countries where Buddhism spread. This knowledge is primarily derived from the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, which provides a more detailed explanation of the causes and process of this development.¹¹

Upon their ordination, the newest members of the *Saṅgha* were informed that they would only have access to four resources: rag robes gathered from a dust

¹⁰ Pew Research Center. 2020. Religious Composition by Country, 2010-2050. Accessed 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/feature/religious-composition-by-country-2010-2050/>.

¹¹ Damien Keown. 2004. *A Dictionary of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acref/9780198605607.001.0001.

heap, urine that had decomposed for medical purposes, a place to reside at the base of a tree, and pieces of food given as alms. Food provided to the *Saṅgha* by invitation or distribution during ceremonies; clothing made of linen, cotton, silk, wool, coarse fabric, and hemp; medicines made of ghee, butter, oil, honey, and molasses; and homes in caves or buildings were all considered extra allowances.¹² What, Ānanda, is an offering purified by the giver and the receiver? Here, Ānanda, the giver, is virtuous and good-natured, and the receivers are virtuous and good-natured. In this way, Ānanda, the offering is purified by the giver and by the receiver.”¹³

The Buddha taught, according to the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅgasuttam Sutta*, that donations are fully meritorious when the offerings are pure and are fully meritorious when the offering, the giver, and the recipient are all pure. For the offering to achieve the offering of perfection (*Pali: Pāramī, Sanskrit: Pāramitā*), its merit must be dedicated to the three emptinesses, meaning that it must not be attached to the offerings, the giver, or the receiver.

4.2. Non-material offerings

According to the *Nikāya Sūtras*, the value of giving is often found in the giver's intention and the recipient's spiritual worth rather than in tangible wealth. Offerings of non-material assistance, including instruction and direction, are praised in the *Dāna Sutta*.¹⁴ Similarly, the importance of contemplative and spiritual activities as offerings is emphasized in the *Girimānanda Sutta*.¹⁵

In some situations, offering non-material gifts might present difficulties in the modern era since the emphasis is frequently on material gifts, ignoring the transformational power of intangible gifts like time, expertise, or lessons. Furthermore, although material contributions are necessary for survival, they can lead to reliance or excessive accumulation in certain cases.

The Buddha strongly focused on making significant contributions, consistently promoting skill-based or service-oriented offers (such as teaching and healthcare). These have the potential to strengthen ties between the *Saṅgha* and the laity.

¹² Damien Keown. 2004. *A Dictionary of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acref/9780198605607.001.0001.

¹³ *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅgasuttam - The Analysis of Offerings*. (n.d.). <https://ancient-buddhist-texts.net/Texts-and-Translations/Short-Pieces/Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅgasuttam.htm>: “*Kathañ-c’ Ānanda dakkhiṇā dāyakato ceva visujjhati paṭiggāhakato ca? Idh’ Ānanda dāyako ca hoti sīlavā kalyāṇadhammo, paṭiggāhakā ca honti sīlavanto kalyāṇadhammā evaṃ kho Ānanda dakkhiṇā dāyakato ceva visujjhati paṭiggāhakato ca.*”

¹⁴ AN 7:49 *Dāna Sutta* | *Giving* | *Dhammatalks.org*. (n.d.). https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN7_49.html

¹⁵ AN 10:60 *Girimānanda Sutta* | *To Girimānanda* | *Dhammatalks.org*. (n.d.). https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN10_60.html

4.3. Six factors offerings

According to *Chaṭṭaṅgaḍānasutta*,¹⁶ the Buddha explains an offering with six attributes that increase its virtue and spiritual value. These qualities are split into three components for the donor and three for the recipient. The donors' three components are their joyful intention before giving, pleasant mind while giving, and satisfaction after giving. Additionally, Buddha stated three factors: the recipients' advancement or freedom from attachment, progress or freedom from hatred, and progress or freedom from delusion. Offerings with these six attributes produce uncalculated merits, resulting in happiness and well-being, favorable outcomes, and a celestial rebirth. This emphasizes how crucial the giver's intentions and the recipient's condition are to optimizing the spiritual advantages of donations.

V. THE MANAGEMENT OF THE DONATIONS

5.1. The purpose of support from donations

Three internal self-management strategies can be used to receive, employ, and manage these offering resources: the *Saṅgha*'s rules, integrities or sutras (Pāli: *Dhamma*), and disciplines (Pāli: *Vinaya*). In addition, the administration of the resources given to individuals (monks or nuns) and institutions (temples, pagodas, etc.) promotes monastic life's growth and stability. These support offerings are distributed among four departments for organizations: The Department of Education, the Department of Internal Governance, the Department of Development and Building and Development, and the Department of Dhamma Spreading.

According to Dhammadharo and Thanissaro, the sources of offering to support education or Buddha's teachings are available in Buddhism that impart knowledge helpful to the development of the faith of the practitioners: Knowledge acquired from the investigation (Pāli: *Sutamaya-pañña*); an insight gained via reflection (Pāli: *Cintamaya-pañña*); and the knowledge obtained via meditation (Pāli: *Bhavanamaya-pañña*). The sources of offering to support the two types of tasks in the Department of Building and Development are the duty of study (Pāli: *Gantha-dhura*) and meditation (Pāli: *Vipassana-dhura*). However, there are offers to advocate three categories for Dhamma dissemination methods: Psychic Marvels (Pāli: *Iddhi-patihariya*), Practice (Pāli: *Patipatti*), and Study (Pāli: *Pariyatti*).

5.2. Managing contradictions arose

The final concept, "sharing the same view," addresses the differences in viewpoints within a group. Agreeing does not exclude differences or disagreement in the Buddhist *Saṅgha*, for instance, The Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha: (*Bhaddāli Sutta* MN 65)¹⁷ and (*Kinti Sutta* MN

¹⁶ *SuttaCentral*. (n.d.-g). *SuttaCentral*. <https://suttacentral.net/an6.37/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none-es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>

¹⁷ *SuttaCentral*. (n.d.-e). *SuttaCentral*. <https://suttacentral.net/mn65/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

103).¹⁸ When conflicts develop in the original Saṅgha operation, small group discourse that allows for the expression and discussion of variety serves as the foundation for social harmony within the community. In the meantime, members would identify and affirm their points of agreement through dialectic dialogue in the assemblies, ultimately aiming for the total eradication of pain. The Buddha values these gatherings highly in The Great Discourses of the Buddha's Extinguishment (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*).¹⁹ Having regular and frequent assembly gatherings is the top priority among the seven criteria he employs to assess each monastic order's social strength.

The second requirement is for members of the Saṅgha to behave in a friendly manner during meetings. The Vinaya's documentation of the Saṅgha assembly meeting procedures reflects the democratic nature of these sessions, with shared authority, distributed responsibility, balanced participation, and consensus-based decision-making to ensure fairness and harmony. These procedures are remarkably similar to those suggested by current authorities on dispute resolution and workplace communication. Many of the activities that Buddhist bhikkhu have been engaging in their assemblies since the time of the Buddha are very similar to the participatory decision-making, problem-solving, consensus-building, and open-forum discussions that are a part of peace education programs (for examples of contemporary training activities).²⁰ This is by no means a coincidence, as sociology, economics, and anthropology have extensively demonstrated the actual advantages of small-group operations as the cornerstone of organizational harmony (Theresa Der-lan Yeh, 2006).

Incidents arising over the issue of benefits from offerings within the Saṅgha are resolved according to the Six Harmonies, which are basic rules for group practice that a Saṅgha, whether lay or ordained, should strive to follow, whether lay or monastic. The six harmonies are (1) harmony in having the same viewpoints; (2) harmony in observing the same precepts; (3) harmony in living together; (4) harmony in speaking without conflict; (5) harmony in experiencing Dharma bliss; and (6) harmony in sharing benefits.

5.3. Ethical management of offerings

The *Nikāya* Sutras and the Vinaya Pitaka both promote the integrity, openness, and justice norms governing the offerings' management. According to *Dīgha Nikāya* 31, the *Sigalovada Sutta*²¹ promotes moral behavior while handling resources, especially offerings. Ensuring fair distribution and proper utilization of offerings is the responsibility of the Saṅgha.

¹⁸ *SuttaCentral*. (n.d.-f). *SuttaCentral*. <https://suttacentral.net/mn103/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>

¹⁹ *SuttaCentral*. (n.d.-d). *SuttaCentral*. <https://suttacentral.net/dn16/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>

²⁰ Theresa Der-lan Yeh. (2006). *The Way To Peace: A Buddhist Perspective*. International Journal of Peace Studies, 11.

²¹ DN 31. *Sigalovada Sutta: The Discourse to Sigala*. (n.d.). <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html>

The challenges can arise when mismanagement or favoritism in distributing resources can erode trust between the lay community and the *Saṅgha*, and unequal allocation within the *Saṅgha*, particularly in large monasteries or between monks and nuns, can lead to resource disparities.

These difficulties can be overcome by putting in place open procedures and group decision-making, which are motivated by the social spirit found in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.²² Potential contemporary remedies include lay-monastic councils

5.4. Using offerings versus the goal of liberation

The goal of Buddhism is to achieve liberation of enlightenment through comprehending the psychological causes of human suffering. Like followers of other religions, Buddhists strive toward this goal collectively in a body called the *Saṅgha*, which comprises lay practitioners, clergy, and other symbolic individuals. While the *Saṅgha* claims to help Buddhists achieve a religious awakening, it also has a psychological function by lessening the negative impacts of group membership. Because of this balance, the *Saṅgha* may encourage the individuation of its members while maintaining their group membership. So, the *Saṅgha* provides a helpful way to practice spiritual concepts in social situations and, eventually, in the larger community.²³ How the Buddha taught the Fourfold *Saṅgha* to govern the *Saṅgha* to live, grow, and not get in the way of liberation (*Pāli: Vimutti*). That is the aim of the Buddhist path, which is liberation from suffering (*Pāli: Dukkha*). Canonical Buddhism distinguishes two types of freedom: freedom of thought (*Pāli: Ceto-vimutti*) and freedom through understanding (*Pāli: Pañña-vimutti*).²⁴

The use of offerings of material goods and money must be planned properly, and if used improperly or abused, it violates the principles of Buddhist precepts. This is in contrast to the purpose of the practice of liberation. According to Vinaya, a complex set of important codes of conduct (*Pāli: Pāṭimokkha*) includes using money and valuables, the moderate use of living things, eating only before noon, etc. Violations of the rules are punished with punishments ranging from confession to permanent expulsion (*Pāli: Pārājika*) from the *Saṅgha*.

VI. AN ANALYSIS OF DEVOTIONAL OFFERINGS

Maintaining lay and monastic communities' material and spiritual well-being depends heavily on managing devotional offerings in the *Saṅgha*. We can address issues and provide remedies by critically examining these practices via the *Nikāya* Sutras while revealing their organizational, ethical, and spiritual ramifications.

²² DN 16. *Maha-parinibbana Sutta: Last Days of the Buddha*. (n.d.). <https://www.access-to-insight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.16.1-6.vaji.html>

²³ Volkan, Kevin. 2013. "A Psychoanalytic View of the Sangha: Group Functioning in Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism." *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies* 1 (2). Accessed 4 10, 2022. <https://ajournalonline.com/index.php/ajhss/article/view/177>.

²⁴ Bowker, J. (2000). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. In *Oxford University Press eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780192800947.001.0001>

6.1. Spiritual foundations of devotional offerings

The *Nikāya* Suttas emphasize the spiritual essence of offerings, underscoring the intention (Sanskrit: *Cetanā*) and the purity of the giver's mind by meritorious Giving (Sanskrit: *Dāna*). Both the *Velāma Sutta* (AN 9.20) and the *Dāna Sutta* (AN 7.49) emphasize the value of giving as a fundamental practice for laypeople. They stress that regardless of the gift's value, giving with good intentions has enormous merit.

According to the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta* (MN 142), current offerings must be guided by the emphasis on purpose, which necessitates teaching donors about the spiritual importance of giving rather than worldly gain.

6.2. Social equity in offering management

The *Nikāya* Suttas offer limited references to gender-specific dynamics but emphasize equity and fairness in communal practices. Social inequality preferences based on wealth, caste, and gender or rank are strongly discouraged by *Nikāya* Suttas. However, contemporary customs occasionally prefer affluent contributors, undercutting the egalitarian nature of the Buddha's teachings. Giving spiritual merit preference over donor status, distributing donations equally, and actively supporting nuns (*Pāli*: *Bhikkhunī*) are all necessary to uphold the principles established in the *Nikāyas*.

6.3. Ethical challenges and corruption

The *Vinaya* and the *Nikāya* Suttas strongly emphasize Sangha members acting with honesty. Honesty and non-attachment are emphasized as fundamental characteristics in the *Cūla Saccaka Sutta* (MN 35).²⁵ The moral authority and trust of the Sangha might be weakened by poor administration or misuse of offerings. Addressing corruption requires ethical oversight and regular audits based on communal transparency, as demonstrated in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* (DN 5).²⁶

6.4. Spiritual reciprocity

In spiritual practice, offerings show mutual support and enhance the bond between the *Saṅgha* and the laity. The reciprocal duties between donors and recipients are outlined in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*.²⁷ The Sangha provides spiritual instruction, while laypeople offer material help.

Offerings that are just viewed as transactional or do not allow lay donors to access the teachings of the *Saṅgha* might lead to imbalances in reciprocity. Spiritual ties are strengthened when reciprocity is strengthened via open conversation, retreats, and community education.

²⁵ *Cūla-Saccaka Sutta: The Shorter Discourse to Saccaka*. (n.d.). <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.035.than.html>

²⁶ *DN 5_ Kūṭadantasutta—Bhikkhu Sujato.PDF*. (n.d.). Google Docs. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ViFdMYSRDsIM-Gxd_e5edBw9ZHEth_kY/view

²⁷ *DN 31. Sigālovāda Sutta: The Discourse to Sigala*. (n.d.-b). <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html>

VII. DEVOTIONAL OFFERING AND BUDDHIST COMPASSION

7.1. Buddhist compassion in action through *Nikāya Sūtras*

According to the *Nikāya Sūtras*, compassion (Pāli: *Karuṇā*) is a fundamental Buddhist virtue and one of the four divine abidings (*Brahmavihāras*). It must be demonstrated through moral behavior rather than just being an emotion. As a guiding principle, compassion is described as the antidote to cruelty in the *Karuṇā Sutta* (AN 10.176). In addition, the *Mettā Sutta* (Sn 1.8) emphasizes the importance of loving-kindness in promoting peace.

Compassion for All Beings The *Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta*²⁸ connects good deeds to good karmic results, while the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31) emphasizes compassionate connections in day-to-day life. True wisdom and compassion are linked, according to the *Kālāma Sutta*,²⁹ which serves as a guide for moral decision-making. Beyond individual morality, Buddhist compassion promotes moral behavior and communal peace.

7.2. Integration of Devotional Offering and Compassion

The *Nikāya Sūtras* demonstrate the close relationship between acts of compassion and religious sacrifice, strengthening and enhancing one another. Compassion practice is supported by devotion, which fosters virtues like faith and generosity. This integration is a significant and useful feature of the Buddhist path, demonstrating that these practices are not distinct but cooperate to develop a wise and gentle heart. The teachings of the *Nikāya Sūtras* emphasize how compassionate devotional offerings become manifestations of support and care and how compassion enhances and deepens devotion, establishing a mutually reinforcing relationship.

7.2.1. Devotional offerings as an expression of compassion

Rather than solely ceremonial, Buddhist devotional offerings are based on the development of virtues like compassion, gratitude, and generosity (Pāli: *Dāna*). Offerings become a potent tool for showing others that you care about and support them when they are made with compassion.

In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN 16), the Buddha encourages lay devotees to continue making offerings to the Saṅgha after his passing. These donations support the monastics who devote their lives to teaching and practicing the Dhamma. Supporting the Saṅgha is one way lay practitioners show sympathy for those leading them to freedom. As explained in the *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta*,³⁰ sacrifices offered to the Saṅgha are highly meritorious, particularly when undertaken with a pure heart and the goal of assisting in preserving the Dhamma.

²⁸ MN 135. *SuttaCentral*. (n.d.-c). *SuttaCentral*. <https://suttacentral.net/mn135/en/bodhi?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false>

²⁹ AN 3.65. *Kalama Sutta: The Instruction to the Kalamas*. (n.d.). <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.soma.html>

³⁰ MN 142 *Dakkhiṇāvibhaṅga Sutta: The Analysis of Giving* | *Sutta Friends*. (n.d.). *Sutta Friends*. <https://suttafriends.org/sutta/mn142/>

The act of providing food, clothing, and shelter to monastics or people in need is an example of compassion that directly reduces suffering. Giving is a means of developing a compassionate heart and generating favorable karmic circumstances for oneself and others, according to the *Dāna Sutta* (AN 7. 49).

7.2.2. Compassion as the motivation behind offerings

The Nikāya Suttas emphasize the purity of purpose behind a sacrifice devotion. Devotional offerings driven by compassion and giving go beyond tangible presents and instead become manifestations of respect, loving-kindness, and concern. Regardless of social status or interpersonal relationships, lay practitioners are encouraged by the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31) to show kindness, sharing, and compassion to all living beings. This kindness reflects the universal compassion taught by the Buddha.

The *Vāṇija Sutta*³¹ states that the giver's intention determines the value of a donation. Compared to offerings with attachment or the expectation of gain, those with a compassionate and selfless intention yield more spiritual benefits. In accordance with the Buddha's teachings on moral behavior and mental cleansing, compassionate offerings are devoid of greed, hatred, and illusion.

7.3. Compassion in action through offerings

Devotional offerings are not limited to material gifts but can include acts of service and care. These deeds show Dhamma's practical application and exhibit compassion.

When it comes to caring for the sick, the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and associated suttas stress how crucial it is to tend to both lay devotees and monastics who are ill. Providing assistance and care to the sick is a clear demonstration of compassion and a method to respect the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha commends lay devotees who tend to the sick in the *Gihi Sutta* (AN 5.177), saying that such deeds constitute an offering with tremendous merit.

According to the *Dhammapada*,³² the Dhamma is the greatest gift when it comes to sharing it. Sharing or teaching Dhamma to others is a compassionate deed that aids in easing suffering and directing creatures toward emancipation. Offering the Dhamma is better than giving financial presents because it deals with the underlying source of suffering, according to the Buddha in the *Dāna Sutta* (AN 7.49).

7.4. Cultivating compassion through devotional offering

A compassionate mind can be developed by devotional activities like offering-making, reciting suttas, and reflecting on the attributes of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. These exercises encourage practitioners to imitate the

³¹ AN 4.79 *Vāṇija Sutta* | Trade | Dhammatalks.org. (n.d.). https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN4_79.html

³² *Tanhavagga: Craving*. (n.d.). <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/kn/dhp/dhp.24.budd.html>. “Verse 354. The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts; the taste of the Dhamma excels all tastes; the delight in Dhamma excels all delights. The Craving-Freed vanquishes all suffering.”

Buddha's unending compassion in their lives by serving as a reminder.

The *Mettā Sutta* (Sn 1.8) and *Karuṇā Sutta* (AN 10.176) both include meditation instructions for developing compassion. Regularly engaging in these meditations helps devotees cultivate a heart compelled to act kindly and generously. A greater sense of compassion and a connection to all beings are infused into devotional offerings following such thoughts.

The devotional practice of mindfulness of the Buddha's attributes (*Pāli: Buddhānussati*), reflecting on the Buddha's Compassion, encourages practitioners to consider the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha. This reflection inspires them to do similarly in their day-to-day lives.

7.5. The reciprocal relationship between devotional offering and compassion

Compassion and devotional offering establish a mutually beneficial relationship that enhances both activities. Compassion practice is inspired by devotion. Offering flowers or burning candles in front of a Buddha picture are examples of acts of devotion that serve to remind followers of the Buddha's teachings on compassion and inspire them to live out these teachings in their relationships with others.

Additionally, compassion strengthens devotion. Compassion strengthens a person's bond with the Triple Gem and validates the genuineness of their dedication when it is demonstrated through deeds of kindness and caring.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study explores how the *Nikāya* Sutras portray the administrative operations related to devotional offerings in the Buddhist monastic community (*Pāli: Saṅgha*). It examines the ways in which sacrifices are offered, used, and overseen to support and expand the *Saṅgha* and ultimately contribute to the quest for emancipation. The study emphasizes the complexities of ethically managing material and non-material offerings, striking a balance between them, and the social and spiritual ramifications of devotional practices.

The four main departments of the *Saṅgha's* administration are Dhamma Spreading, Internal Governance, Education, and Building and Development. In order to promote the growth and spiritual development of the monastic community, these departments make sure that offerings are spent efficiently. Founded by Gautama Buddha in the fifth century BCE, the *Saṅgha* was first composed of monks but gradually expanded to include nuns, laymen, and laywomen, creating the "fourfold *Saṅgha*." The *Saṅgha* has changed with time, and lay practitioners have become more involved in the present era.

Offerings, both material and non-material, are essential to the *Saṅgha's* support. Food, clothing, and shelter are examples of material offerings; teachings, counseling, and deeds of service are examples of non-material offerings. The giver's purpose and the recipient's purity are closely related to the offerings' spiritual worth. The significance of managing offerings ethically is emphasized in the *Vinaya* and *Nikāya* Sutras. In order to preserve confidence between the *Saṅgha* and the lay society, resources must be used appropriately. Favoritism or poor management can weaken the community's moral authority

and result in resource inequities.

One of Buddhism's core virtues is compassion (*Pāli: Karuṇā*), which is actually expressed in devotional gifts. Compassionate offerings benefit the *Saṅgha* but also help the giver develop qualities like humility and generosity. The laity and the *Saṅgha* have a mutually supportive relationship. While the *Saṅgha* offers spiritual guidance, laypeople offer tangible help. This mutually beneficial partnership fosters societal harmony and deepens the two parties' friendship.

Appropriate devotional offerings guarantee that the *Saṅgha* can concentrate on its spiritual development and emancipation objective. Misuse of resources might go against Buddhist principles and impede this growth. Devotional offerings effectively reduce suffering and foster well-being when they are driven by compassion. They reaffirm the significance of unselfish giving and the interdependence of all beings. The difficulties that the *Saṅgha* currently has in handling offerings might be examined in more detail, especially considering industrialization and globalization. Further understanding of the various administrative approaches and practices used by monastic communities worldwide may also be possible through comparative research across various Buddhist traditions.

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) is a fundamental ethical principle that extends beyond personal spiritual development to encompass shared responsibility for human well-being. Rooted in the Four Immeasurable and the doctrines of *anattā* (non-self) and *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), Buddhist compassion fosters an awareness of interconnectedness and encourages proactive efforts to alleviate suffering. This paper explores the ethical foundations, historical applications, and contemporary relevance of Buddhist compassion in addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. From the Bodhisattva ideal to modern humanitarian movements, Buddhist teachings provide a framework for cultivating empathy, promoting social harmony, and fostering global responsibility. Through mindfulness and loving-kindness practices, individuals can develop an inclusive and action-oriented approach to compassion, reinforcing its role as a transformative force in personal and collective development. Ultimately, Buddhist compassion serves as a timeless model for ethical engagement, offering insights into creating a more just, compassionate, and sustainable world.

Keywords: *Buddhist compassion, karuṇā, shared responsibility, Four Immeasurables, anattā, pratītyasamutpāda, Bodhisattva ideal, social harmony, ethical engagement, mindfulness, loving-kindness, human development, interconnectedness, altruism, sustainability.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism, a profound spiritual and philosophical tradition, promotes compassion (*karuṇā*) as one of its essential ethical tenets. This principle encourages Buddhists to actively alleviate suffering, not only for themselves but also for all beings. Buddhist compassion, when applied to broader social and global issues, becomes a call for shared responsibility in human development. Historically, Buddhist compassion has inspired individuals and leaders to implement policies and initiatives that promote social harmony and community welfare. In the modern world, this compassionate ethic is equally relevant, providing a framework for addressing complex challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Through examining core teachings, historical instances, and contemporary applications, we can see how Buddhist compassion serves as a powerful model for fostering collective progress.

II. BUDDHIST COMPASSION: CORE TEACHINGS AND ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is at the heart of Buddhist teachings, recognized as a fundamental virtue and one of the Four Immeasurable, or *Brahmavihāras*. The practice of compassion extends beyond mere sympathy; it encourages Buddhists to actively engage in the reduction of suffering for all beings. Compassion is not just an ideal, but an actionable path that directs practitioners towards empathy, understanding, and, most importantly, selfless action. In Buddhism, compassion is interconnected with other virtues, forming an ethical framework that guides Buddhists in their journey toward enlightenment while contributing to the well-being of others.

2.1. Compassion in Buddhist Teachings

The importance of compassion in Buddhism is illustrated in the teachings of the Buddha and sacred texts such as the *Dhammapada*. This ancient text emphasizes compassion as a virtue that leads one toward liberation and inner peace. The Buddha taught that suffering is an inevitable part of life, a principle captured in the First Noble Truth. Compassion is therefore a natural response, as it seeks to mitigate the suffering of oneself and others. According to the Buddha, to be truly compassionate means to recognize the interconnectedness of all beings and to act out of empathy, understanding that the suffering of one affects the whole.

Compassion, in Buddhism, is part of the Four Immeasurables, along with *mettā* (lovingkindness), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā*

(equanimity). Together, these qualities are considered divine abodes, guiding Buddhists towards emotional and spiritual maturity. Practicing the Four Immeasurables is a means of cultivating a mind and heart that are boundlessly generous, kind, and free from partiality. Compassion, specifically, encourages Buddhists to extend their care to all sentient beings, transcending egocentric concerns.

2.2. The Ethical Foundations of Compassion

The ethical basis of compassion in Buddhism is rooted in the recognition of *anattā* (nonself) and *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination). The doctrine of non-self teaches that there is no permanent, unchanging self, but rather, that individuals are a collection of interconnected parts and processes. This understanding discourages selfish behavior, encouraging individuals to act in ways that benefit the greater good. Dependent origination further emphasizes that all beings and phenomena arise in dependence upon causes and conditions. It reveals that suffering is not isolated but is part of a broader network of interdependence. From this viewpoint, compassion becomes a natural ethical response, as it acknowledges the shared existence of all beings and the necessity of working together to alleviate suffering.

In Mahayana Buddhism, compassion takes on an even greater significance through the path of the Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva is an enlightened being who, motivated by compassion, vows to remain in the cycle of rebirth to help others attain enlightenment. The Bodhisattva's commitment exemplifies selflessness and dedication to the collective welfare. This model of compassion-driven life represents an ethical ideal for Buddhists, reminding them that personal liberation is intertwined with the liberation of others. A Bodhisattva willingly postpones their final enlightenment, aspiring instead to serve all sentient beings.

2.3. Practical Compassion: Engaging with Suffering

Buddhist compassion goes beyond theoretical ideals, urging individuals to take practical actions to address suffering in its many forms. Compassion is considered an active quality that should lead to concrete actions to relieve the pain of others, whether through simple acts of kindness or more extensive social engagement. The Buddha himself taught by example, spending his life traveling and teaching others to ease suffering and ignorance. In Buddhist communities, this teaching has inspired the establishment of monasteries, educational institutions, and health centers, all of which serve as expressions of compassion in action.

Practicing compassion involves mindfulness and emotional intelligence, as Buddhists are encouraged to understand the nature of suffering deeply. By being mindful of their own emotions and reactions, practitioners develop an empathetic approach towards others. For instance, when encountering someone who is suffering, a Buddhist would attempt to understand that person's pain from a place of non-judgment, recognizing that suffering is a universal experience. This empathetic awareness fosters a sense of shared humanity and prompts compassionate responses.

2.4. Compassion as a Counter to Suffering

The Buddhist understanding of suffering, or *dukkha*, is central to its ethical teachings. *Dukkha* represents not only physical and mental pain but also the inherent dissatisfaction found in worldly experiences. The Buddha identified the causes of suffering as desire, aversion, and ignorance, which bind individuals to the cycle of rebirth. Compassion serves as a counter to these negative states by fostering positive emotions and intentions. By practicing compassion, Buddhists work to uproot selfish desires, anger, and delusion, replacing them with kindness, generosity, and wisdom.

Compassionate action is therefore both a personal and societal antidote to suffering. On a personal level, it helps Buddhists overcome negative mind states that lead to suffering, such as envy, greed, and resentment. On a societal level, compassionate action can promote peace, reduce inequality, and foster a sense of community. Many Buddhists engage in charitable activities, community service, and other forms of social support as expressions of their compassionate commitments. These actions reflect the belief that reducing suffering in the world is a way of cultivating spiritual growth.

2.5. Compassion Beyond Boundaries: Universal Empathy

In the Buddhist ethical framework, compassion extends beyond family, friends, or community; it encompasses all sentient beings without exception. This universal compassion is known as *mahākaruṇā* (great compassion) and is a characteristic of enlightened beings. The Buddha, for example, is said to have displayed boundless compassion for all, irrespective of caste, creed, or social status. This inclusivity is an essential feature of Buddhist compassion, reflecting the belief that all beings, regardless of their background, deserve kindness and care.

The Bodhisattva's path in Mahayana Buddhism exemplifies this principle. By vowing to liberate all sentient beings, the Bodhisattva

commits to helping others without bias or preference. This ideal urges Buddhists to look beyond their immediate surroundings and consider the welfare of all. Universal compassion also has ecological implications, as it calls for respect for all forms of life, including animals and the environment. In this way, Buddhist compassion supports ethical stewardship of the natural world, highlighting the interconnectedness of human, animal, and ecological well-being.

2.6. Cultivating Compassion: Meditation and Mindfulness

Buddhist practice offers various techniques to cultivate compassion, with *mettā-bhāvanā* (loving-kindness meditation) being one of the most prominent methods. In this form of meditation, practitioners actively generate feelings of kindness and compassion, starting with themselves and gradually extending these feelings outward to others, including those they may consider adversaries. This practice helps develop an unbiased and inclusive compassion that transcends personal attachments and preferences.

Mindfulness (*sati*) also plays a crucial role in developing compassion. By being fully aware of their thoughts, emotions, and reactions, Buddhists learn to observe the arising of judgmental or unkind thoughts without acting on them. This practice of mindfulness helps practitioners to approach others from a place of non-reactivity and empathy. Mindfulness, combined with loving-kindness meditation, creates a balanced mental state where compassion arises naturally, allowing individuals to respond to suffering in a calm and caring manner.

2.7. Compassion in the Modern World

In today's interconnected world, Buddhist compassion has inspired numerous social and humanitarian movements. Many Buddhist organizations and leaders are actively involved in efforts to alleviate poverty, provide healthcare, and promote environmental sustainability. For instance, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka draws on Buddhist principles of compassion and selflessness to address social and economic issues. Such movements demonstrate the relevance of Buddhist compassion in tackling contemporary global challenges, from inequality to environmental degradation.

Buddhist compassion thus provides a powerful ethical foundation that encourages individuals to engage with the world mindfully and empathetically. By promoting a spirit of inclusivity, shared responsibility, and proactive service, Buddhism offers a vision of compassion that is deeply relevant in a world facing complex social, economic, and environmental issues.

In summary, Buddhist compassion is a rich and profound teaching that encompasses both ethical and practical dimensions. Rooted in the understanding of interconnectedness and the commitment to alleviate suffering, Buddhist compassion provides a framework for living ethically in a world marked by suffering and interdependence. It invites practitioners to cultivate empathy, act selflessly, and engage in the collective work of reducing suffering for all beings. Through its emphasis on universal compassion, mindfulness, and ethical action, Buddhism offers a timeless message of kindness and responsibility that continues to inspire individuals and communities worldwide.¹

III. THE CONCEPT OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

At the heart of Buddhist philosophy lies *pratītyasamutpāda*, or dependent origination, a profound concept that reveals the interdependent nature of all existence. *Pratītyasamutpāda* posits that all beings and phenomena arise in dependence upon causes and conditions, meaning that nothing exists in isolation. This view fundamentally challenges the notion of a separate, autonomous self, emphasizing instead that all life is deeply interconnected. According to this principle, the suffering or happiness of one being inevitably impacts others, creating a moral landscape where personal and communal responsibilities are intertwined. The recognition of this interconnectedness gives rise to a heightened sense of shared responsibility, urging individuals and communities to address suffering collectively rather than in isolation.

3.1. Dependent Origination: A Foundation of Interconnectedness

In Buddhist thought, dependent origination is not only a philosophical principle but also a guiding ethical framework. This concept teaches that nothing exists independently; rather, everything arises and subsides based on a web of conditions. For example, a tree cannot exist on its own; it depends on sunlight, soil, water, and other elements to grow. This principle applies to humans and social systems as well. Our thoughts, emotions, and actions are all influenced by countless factors, including family, culture, and environment. In this way, dependent origination suggests that each person's existence and experiences are linked to the wider social and ecological context.

The implications of this principle for understanding shared

¹ Harvey (2013): 100 - 105. It emphasizes that Buddhist compassion goes beyond mere sympathy, advocating for proactive efforts to alleviate suffering and improve societal wellbeing.

responsibility are profound. Recognizing our interdependence means acknowledging that we are each part of a larger whole. If one part of the whole suffers, the effects of that suffering ripple outward, impacting everyone. For example, poverty, injustice, and environmental degradation do not only affect those who are directly impacted; these issues create societal imbalances that impact the well-being of all. In response, Buddhist teachings on dependent origination advocate a collective approach to problem-solving, urging individuals to recognize their responsibility not only for their well-being but for the well-being of others.

3.2. The Ethical Imperative of Interdependence

The Buddhist view of interdependence naturally gives rise to ethical implications. When individuals and societies acknowledge their interconnectedness, they are more likely to adopt a compassionate and inclusive outlook that extends beyond personal interests. This ethical imperative suggests that it is not enough to simply avoid causing harm; rather, we are called to actively support others and work towards alleviating suffering wherever it is found. This approach aligns with the Buddhist virtue of *karuṇā* (compassion), which is grounded in the awareness of the shared nature of human experience.

In this light, compassion becomes not just a personal virtue but a communal responsibility. A society built on the understanding of dependent origination is one where individuals recognize the importance of supporting one another. This sense of shared responsibility can be seen in Buddhist communities that prioritize collective welfare through acts of service and support. For instance, in traditional Buddhist societies, monasteries often serve as centers of learning, healthcare, and social welfare. Monks and laypeople alike are encouraged to participate in community support, embodying the principle of interdependence in their daily lives.

3.3. The Bodhisattva Ideal: An Ethical Model of Shared Responsibility

In Mahayana Buddhism, the Bodhisattva ideal embodies the principle of interdependence through a commitment to compassionate service. A Bodhisattva is an enlightened being who, driven by compassion, vows to remain in the cycle of rebirth to help all sentient beings achieve enlightenment. The Bodhisattva's path is a powerful ethical model, as it reflects an unselfish dedication to the welfare of others. This ideal goes beyond individual liberation, recognizing that true enlightenment is bound up with the liberation of all beings.

The Bodhisattva's vow not to attain final enlightenment until all

beings are free from suffering illustrates a profound understanding of shared responsibility. Rather than seeking personal advancement, the Bodhisattva prioritizes the welfare of others, particularly those who are most vulnerable. This ideal has inspired countless Buddhists to take active roles in their communities, from local volunteerism to global humanitarian efforts. In the Bodhisattva ideal, compassion and shared responsibility are elevated to the highest levels of spiritual practice, fostering a society in which collective welfare is valued as much as personal development.²

3.4. Interdependence and Social Responsibility

The notion of shared responsibility extends to various spheres of life, including social, economic, and environmental domains. Recognizing interdependence implies an ethical obligation to address social injustices and inequalities, as the suffering of one part of society inevitably impacts the whole. For instance, issues such as poverty, homelessness, and lack of access to education are not isolated problems; they are symptoms of deeper systemic imbalances. Buddhism teaches that by addressing these issues collectively, we can create a society that is more harmonious and resilient.³

This sense of social responsibility is exemplified in various Buddhist-inspired movements and organizations around the world. For example, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, founded by Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, embodies the principles of interdependence and shared responsibility. This movement focuses on grassroots community development, encouraging self-reliance and cooperation among villagers. Through initiatives in education, healthcare, and economic development, Sarvodaya fosters a sense of collective welfare that aligns with Buddhist ethics. The movement illustrates how interdependence can be translated into practical action that benefits entire communities.

3.5. Environmental Responsibility: Interdependence with Nature

Buddhist teachings on interdependence also have important implications for environmental ethics. According to Buddhism, humans are not separate from nature; rather, they are part of an intricate web of life that includes animals, plants, and ecosystems. This interconnectedness suggests that the health of the natural world is inseparable from human well-being. Therefore, environmental degradation and exploitation are not merely technical or economic issues but are ethical concerns that

² *Majjhima Nikāya*, 2020: 905 - 10, M. III. 71, MN 116.

³ *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, 2021: 45 - 50.

reflect a lack of respect for the interdependent nature of existence.

In response, many Buddhists advocate for environmental conservation and sustainable practices. The principle of interdependence encourages a mindset that values harmony with nature, leading individuals and communities to adopt practices that protect and preserve the environment. Buddhist monasteries and organizations around the world have been involved in tree-planting campaigns, wildlife conservation efforts, and education on sustainable living. These actions reflect an awareness that caring for the environment is a form of compassion and a way of honoring our shared responsibility for the Earth's well-being.

3.6. Personal and Collective Transformation through Interdependence

The concept of interdependence in Buddhism is not only a call for social responsibility but also an invitation to personal transformation. Recognizing that one's actions have far-reaching effects can inspire individuals to cultivate virtues such as kindness, patience, and generosity. Personal transformation, in turn, contributes to collective well-being, as ethical behavior reinforces the interconnected web of society. In this way, the transformation of society and the individual are intertwined processes, each influencing the other.

Practicing mindfulness (*sati*) and compassion are essential ways to embody the principle of interdependence in daily life. By cultivating awareness of their thoughts, emotions, and actions, Buddhists learn to make choices that are considerate of others. For example, by choosing to consume less or avoid harmful behaviors, individuals contribute to reducing suffering on a broader scale. Small acts of kindness and consideration can create positive ripples throughout society, reinforcing the interconnectedness of all beings.

3.7. The Role of Meditation in Understanding Interdependence

Meditation plays a vital role in helping practitioners realize the truth of interdependence. Through practices such as *mettā-bhāvanā* (loving-kindness meditation), Buddhists cultivate a mindset that embraces all beings with compassion and empathy. This practice deepens the understanding of interconnectedness, encouraging individuals to extend goodwill not only to friends and family but also to strangers and even adversaries. By expanding their circle of care, practitioners develop an appreciation for the shared nature of existence and a commitment to communal welfare.

Mindfulness meditation also supports the realization of interdependence by encouraging non-judgmental awareness of each

moment. As individuals become more attuned to the causes and conditions that shape their experiences, they gain insight into the interconnected nature of all phenomena. This awareness fosters a compassionate response to suffering and encourages ethical behavior that honors the shared nature of life.

3.8. Conclusion: Cultivating a Worldview of Shared Responsibility

The Buddhist concept of interdependence, grounded in *pratityasamutpāda*, offers a powerful ethical framework for understanding our shared responsibility in a globalized world. In recognizing that all beings are interconnected, Buddhism calls for a

compassionate, proactive approach to addressing suffering and promoting communal welfare. This worldview has inspired Buddhist practitioners to engage in social and environmental initiatives, embodying the principles of shared responsibility in diverse contexts.

As society grapples with challenges such as social inequality, environmental degradation, and cultural division, the Buddhist teachings on interdependence offer valuable guidance. By cultivating a worldview that honors interconnectedness and embraces shared responsibility, individuals and communities can contribute to a more just, compassionate, and sustainable world. In this way, Buddhist teachings on interdependence provide not only a path to personal liberation but also a roadmap for collective transformation and well-being.⁴

IV. HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF COMPASSION IN ACTION

Throughout history, Buddhism has profoundly influenced leaders, communities, and societies to prioritize compassionate, ethical, and socially responsible practices. Rooted in Buddhist teachings, compassion (*karuṇā*) is more than an idealized virtue; it is a call to actively alleviate suffering and support the well-being of all sentient beings. Historical accounts reveal numerous examples where Buddhist-inspired compassion was implemented in governance, community development, education, and healthcare. These examples, particularly from the reign of Emperor Ashoka and the role of Buddhist monasteries, demonstrate the transformative power of compassion in shaping more just, humane, and resilient societies.

4.1. Emperor Ashoka: Compassion-driven Governance

One of the most renowned examples of compassion-driven leadership is the rule of Emperor Ashoka of India, who reigned from approximately

⁴Williams & Tribe (2021): 23-30

268 to 232 BCE. Ashoka, the third monarch of the Maurya Dynasty, initially led military campaigns to expand his empire, culminating in the violent conquest of the Kalinga region. However, the devastating aftermath of this battle reportedly led Ashoka to a profound moral crisis. Deeply disturbed by the suffering he had caused, Ashoka turned to Buddhism, adopting its principles of nonviolence (*ahimsā*), compassion, and ethical governance. His conversion marked a radical shift in his rule, as he dedicated himself to fostering peace and the welfare of his people.

Ashoka's policies, collectively known as the Edicts of Ashoka, were inscribed on pillars and rocks throughout his empire, communicating his commitment to compassion, nonviolence, and justice. The Edicts advocated for ethical governance, religious tolerance, and humane treatment of all beings, including animals. Ashoka emphasized that a ruler's duty was not merely to protect and expand the state but also to ensure the happiness, safety, and well-being of his subjects. His policies extended to establishing hospitals, educational institutions, and animal sanctuaries, reflecting a comprehensive approach to social welfare.

The establishment of hospitals and medical facilities under Ashoka's reign is particularly noteworthy, as these institutions were among the first examples of public healthcare in the ancient world. These facilities were not limited to human patients; Ashoka's compassion extended to animals, for whom he established veterinary clinics and banned animal sacrifices. By prioritizing healthcare, Ashoka sought to create a society where individuals could lead healthy and fulfilling lives. His support for education and moral development further illustrated his belief that an informed and ethical populace was essential to societal harmony.

Ashoka's commitment to social justice also included efforts to improve the lives of marginalized groups within his empire. He promoted policies aimed at reducing poverty and inequality, providing resources for those in need, and protecting the vulnerable. His efforts to abolish capital punishment and promote restorative forms of justice reflect his adherence to nonviolence and his desire to create a more compassionate legal system.

Ashoka's reign illustrates how Buddhist compassion can be applied to governance, transforming it into a tool for social welfare and human development. His policies, inspired by Buddhist values, serve as a historical model of compassionate leadership that prioritizes the collective welfare over conquest and personal power. In Strong's (2008) analysis of Ashoka's contributions, he emphasizes that Ashoka's policies were directly inspired by Buddhist teachings, revealing the profound influence of compassion in shaping ethical governance.

4.2. Buddhist Monasteries as Centers of Compassion

In addition to inspiring rulers like Ashoka, Buddhism has historically fostered compassionate community practices through its monastic institutions. Buddhist monasteries, particularly in regions such as India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Tibet, have long served as hubs of compassion and support for local populations. Monasteries have functioned not only as centers for spiritual practice and guidance but also as providers of essential services, including education, healthcare, and shelter for the poor. These institutions demonstrate that Buddhist practice can extend beyond individual enlightenment, actively contributing to the well-being of entire communities.

Monastic communities in Buddhist societies were often the primary providers of education, offering literacy training, moral instruction, and practical skills to children and adults alike. The emphasis on education reflects the Buddhist belief in the transformative power of knowledge, both for personal growth and societal development. In many cases, monasteries became the first schools accessible to rural populations, bridging educational gaps and fostering social mobility. By offering these services free of charge, monasteries alleviated the burden of educational expenses for families, embodying Buddhist values of generosity (*dāna*) and compassion.

In addition to education, Buddhist monasteries have historically played a vital role in healthcare. Monks were often trained in herbal medicine and provided medical treatment to those who could not afford it. In regions where formal medical institutions were sparse, monastic communities filled the gap, ensuring that even the poorest members of society had access to basic healthcare. This practice aligned with the Buddhist teaching of *karuṇā*, as monks sought to alleviate physical suffering and promote well-being. Monastic healing practices also contributed to a culture of community support and interdependence, where people could rely on one another during times of illness or hardship.

The tradition of offering food and shelter to the poor further illustrates the compassionate ethos of Buddhist monasticism. In many Buddhist countries, monasteries serve as sanctuaries for those experiencing homelessness, hunger, or displacement. The practice of *dāna*, or generosity, is deeply ingrained in Buddhist culture, and monastic communities often depend on the lay community for sustenance through alms. In return, monks and nuns offer teachings, guidance, and support to the laypeople, creating a reciprocal relationship rooted in compassion and mutual aid. This dynamic fosters a sense of shared responsibility for

communal welfare, where both monks and laypeople contribute to one another's spiritual and material well-being.

4.3. Continued Influence in Contemporary Society

The compassionate actions of Buddhist leaders like Ashoka and the service-oriented approach of monastic communities continue to inspire modern Buddhist movements and initiatives. In contemporary Buddhist societies, monastic institutions remain active in community support, adapting traditional practices to address current social challenges. For example, monasteries in Thailand and Myanmar often provide support for orphaned children, elderly individuals, and refugees. These institutions have expanded their roles to meet the needs of modern society, offering educational programs, vocational training, and mental health services. This adaptability highlights the enduring relevance of Buddhist compassion in promoting human development and addressing suffering.

Furthermore, many modern Buddhist organizations draw inspiration from Ashoka's model of compassionate governance. For instance, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, founded by Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, applies Buddhist principles to grassroots development, focusing on poverty alleviation, community empowerment, and social justice. The movement's name, "Sarvodaya," means "the awakening of all," reflecting its commitment to collective welfare and shared responsibility. Sarvodaya's initiatives, such as self-help groups, environmental conservation, and disaster relief efforts, embody the Buddhist ideals of nonviolence and compassion, demonstrating how ancient teachings can guide modern social activism.

Additionally, Buddhist-inspired NGOs, such as the Tzu Chi Foundation in Taiwan, extend the tradition of compassionate action to international humanitarian efforts. Founded by Buddhist nun Cheng Yen, Tzu Chi provides disaster relief, medical aid, and educational support around the world, emphasizing service to humanity regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or religion. Tzu Chi's approach reflects the Bodhisattva ideal, as volunteers strive to alleviate suffering wherever it arises, embodying a global perspective on Buddhist compassion.

4.4. Conclusion: The Legacy of Buddhist Compassion in Action

The historical examples of compassion in action found in the reign of Emperor Ashoka and the role of Buddhist monasteries underscore the transformative power of Buddhist compassion when applied to governance and community support. Ashoka's reign illustrates how compassionate leadership, inspired by Buddhist values, can create a

more just and humane society, prioritizing public welfare and ethical governance. Similarly, Buddhist monasteries have long served as centers of compassion, providing essential services and embodying a sense of shared responsibility for communal well-being.

These examples not only highlight the impact of compassion-driven practices in historical contexts but also reveal the enduring relevance of Buddhist compassion in addressing contemporary social issues. By extending care and support to those in need, Buddhist leaders, monastic communities, and modern organizations demonstrate that compassion, when put into action, can be a powerful force for positive change. This legacy continues to inspire individuals and communities to approach social, environmental, and economic challenges with compassion, solidarity, and a commitment to the welfare of all.⁵

V. MODERN APPLICATIONS OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

In the modern world, Buddhist principles continue to inspire social movements dedicated to fostering human development and alleviating suffering. A prominent example is the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, founded by Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne in 1958. Inspired by Buddhist values of compassion, nonviolence, and selfless service, Sarvodaya empowers communities by promoting sustainable economic practices, community-based education, and disaster response initiatives. Its name, “Sarvodaya” (meaning “Awakening of All”), captures the essence of shared responsibility and collective action, emphasizing that individual well-being is intertwined with communal prosperity.

Sarvodaya’s success lies in its grassroots approach, where communities actively participate in designing and implementing projects tailored to their unique needs. By focusing on skills training, microfinance programs, and infrastructure development, Sarvodaya demonstrates how compassion-driven initiatives can foster resilience, self-sufficiency, and social cohesion. The movement has become a model for sustainable development, illustrating how Buddhist compassion can lead to lasting social change and a more equitable society.

Among contemporary Buddhist leaders, Ven. Bellanwila Dhammarathana Nayaka Thera stands out as a figure embodying compassion and dedicated service. As the Chief Incumbent of Bellanwila

⁵ Strong (2008): 131 - 133. Ashoka’s contributions to public welfare, noting how his policies were directly inspired by Buddhist teachings of compassion and nonviolence.

Royal Temple in Sri Lanka and the Prelate of Singapore, he has played an influential role in spreading Buddhist teachings and compassionate action across borders. His visionary approach led to the establishment of the Buddhist Library in Singapore, a center that not only serves as a repository of Buddhist knowledge but also engages in numerous community and welfare programs. The library provides educational resources, meditation sessions, and cultural events, nurturing a sense of spiritual wellbeing among diverse populations in Singapore. Ven. Dhammarathana Nayaka Thera's work reflects his commitment to making Buddhism accessible and relevant to the contemporary world, fostering cross-cultural understanding and promoting values of compassion, generosity, and peace. His leadership at the Bellanwila Temple, known for its community outreach programs, further illustrates his dedication to using Buddhism as a tool for social good, inspiring countless people to lead compassionate lives.

Another esteemed leader, Ven. Muruttettuwe Ananda Nayake Thera, has significantly contributed to society through his compassionate leadership and active involvement in the public sphere. As the Chancellor of the University of Colombo, one of Sri Lanka's premier educational institutions, he is committed to guiding the next generation of scholars and leaders with Buddhist values of kindness, responsibility, and ethical conduct. His leadership is not limited to academic administration; he is also known for his support of healthcare professionals and workers, serving as the Chairman of the Nurse Welfare Society in Sri Lanka. In this role, he has advocated for the rights and welfare of nurses, recognizing their essential contributions to society's well-being. Ven. Ananda Nayake Thera's engagement with both education and healthcare reflects his understanding of *karuṇā* (compassion) as a force that transcends religious practice, extending into areas that directly impact human development and quality of life. His compassionate efforts demonstrate how Buddhist values can inspire social advocacy, enhance public services, and promote the well-being of all members of society.⁶

VI. ADDRESSING GLOBAL CHALLENGES THROUGH BUDDHIST COMPASSION

In today's interconnected world, Buddhist compassion offers valuable insights for addressing global challenges, such as poverty, environmental

⁶ Bond (2014): 57 - 62. It discusses the Sarvodaya Movement's alignment with Buddhist principles and its impact on community development, highlighting the role of compassion in fostering sustainable, community-centered initiatives.

degradation, and social inequality. The Buddhist emphasis on ahimsa (nonviolence) and environmental stewardship underscores the importance of protecting the natural world as an act of compassion for current and future generations. Buddhism's principle of right livelihood encourages sustainable practices that reduce harm and promote ethical engagement in economic and environmental activities.

Buddhist compassion also extends to global health and poverty alleviation. Organizations like Buddhist Global Relief and the *Karuna* Trust work on providing healthcare, education, and essential resources to marginalized communities worldwide. These organizations demonstrate that Buddhist values are not confined to religious practice but can inspire humanitarian work on a global scale, showing how compassion-driven initiatives contribute to human development and a more just world.

VII. BUDDHIST VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Ultimately, Buddhism promotes a vision of sustainable human development centered on the welfare of all beings. The ethical teachings of Buddhism encourage a balanced approach to personal and collective well-being, reminding individuals that true fulfillment arises not from individual gain but from actions that support the greater good. Compassion-driven development aims to create societies in which people can thrive, resources are shared equitably, and all members have access to essential resources for health, education, and dignified living.

By prioritizing empathy, kindness, and communal welfare, Buddhist compassion serves as a blueprint for human development that is holistic and sustainable. This vision of development can guide policymakers, organizations, and individuals alike toward creating systems that emphasize shared responsibility, interconnectedness, and the alleviation of suffering as essential components of progress.

In conclusion, Buddhist compassion and the ideal of shared responsibility offer powerful frameworks for addressing the complex challenges facing humanity. From historical examples to contemporary movements, Buddhist ethics demonstrate how compassion can inspire social transformation, drive community-led initiatives, and foster sustainable development. Embracing these values allows individuals and communities to contribute not only to the alleviation of individual suffering but also to the collective advancement of societies, embodying a vision of human flourishing that is ethical, inclusive, and sustainable.

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Prof. Amarjiva Lochan¹

Abstract

Buddhism naturally evokes ideas of human welfare, mutual respect, and compassion. The concept of shared responsibility in Buddhist thought extends beyond individual action, emphasizing collective efforts that transcend national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. It presents a model where compassion is not merely an internal sentiment but is actively expressed through social engagement. This article explores Buddhist compassion in action and its relevance to human development, highlighting core Buddhist principles such as the Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Bodhisattva ideal. These teachings offer a framework for addressing contemporary challenges, including poverty, inequality, social justice, environmental sustainability, and mental health.

Keywords: Buddhism, philosophy, compassion, human development, *karuna*, world-view.

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism, emanating from India, spread its wings to several geographical locations in Asia. Its acceptability and accommodation in faraway lands is the most amazing story of human civilization. Its arrival and the continuity is another intriguing fact as Buddhism went to those far flung areas where they already had a set system of civilisation and belief system. This was majorly due to the profound philosophical and ethical teachings of Buddhism that emphasized compassion (*karuṇā*) as a fundamental principle for both individual and collective well-being. Central to the Buddhist worldview is the belief in interconnectedness and the understanding that the well-being of an individual is inextricably linked to the well-being of others and the environment. In this context, Buddhist compassion extends beyond mere empathy to active engagement in alleviating suffering and promoting human development. This active form of compassion, known as compassion in action, reflects a deep sense of shared responsibility for the welfare

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of all sentient beings and provides an ethical framework for human development. Its acceptability and accommodation in faraway lands is the most amazing story of human civilization. Its arrival and the continuity is another intriguing fact as Buddhism went to those far flung areas where they already had a set system of civilisations and belief systems. This was majorly due to the profound philosophical and ethical teachings of Buddhism that emphasized compassion (*karuṇā*) as a fundamental principle for both individual and collective well-being. Central to the Buddhist worldview is the belief in interconnectedness and the understanding that the well-being of an individual is inextricably linked to the well-being of others and the environment. In this context, Buddhist compassion extends beyond mere empathy to active engagement in alleviating suffering and promoting human development. This active form of compassion, known as compassion in action, reflects a deep sense of shared responsibility for the welfare of all sentient beings and provides an ethical framework for human development.

It is striking and noteworthy that the establishment of Buddhist ideas was never meant to cross the seas or lands out of India. Even Buddha's feet never set on the non-Jambudvīpa

Buddhist compassion, known as *karuṇā*, is a central theme in Buddhist teachings and practice. It refers to the deep empathy for the suffering of others and the sincere wish to alleviate that suffering. The concept of compassion in Buddhism is not just an abstract ideal but a call to action – “compassion in action.” This ideal is manifest across Buddhist Asia in various forms, from individual acts of kindness to large-scale social initiatives. Here are some key ways in which compassion is expressed and practiced in Buddhist Asia:

1.1. Monastic community and public engagement

Monastic communities play a crucial role in fostering compassion-driven societies. In Theravāda Buddhist countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar, monks serve as exemplars of compassionate living. The daily alms-giving ritual (*pindapata*) fosters generosity (*dāna*) among laypeople, reinforcing mutual care within communities. Buddhist monasteries frequently provide education, healthcare, and social services, demonstrating a commitment to social welfare. One example can be found at Wat Phra Dhammakaya² (Thailand). Wat Phra Dhammakaya engages in large-scale humanitarian work, including education and disaster relief.

Almost from the beginning, the temple has had solid establishment support, including from royal and senior military circles.³ The temple's student summer training program, known as *Dhammadayada*, received support from

² Apinya Feungfusakul, *ศาสนทัศน์ของชุมชนเมืองสมัยใหม่ : ศึกษากรณีวัดพระธรรมกาย* [“Religious Propensity of Urban Communities: A Case Study of Phra Dhammakaya”] (Bangkok: Centre for Buddhist Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1998).

³ Dubus, Arnaud. “Monastic Activism and the Case of Wat Phra Dhammakaya”. In *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*. Bangkok: Institut de recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-Est contemporaine, 2018.

the Kaeng Krachan Special Military Camp, the Department of Universities under the Ministry of Education, and the Department of Public.

Works. Additionally, prominent Thai corporations, including the Central Group, Bangkok Bank, Thai Farmers Bank, and Siam Commercial Bank owned by the Crown Property Bureau, have contributed to the temple's ceremonies or training initiatives in various ways.⁴ Wat Phra Dhammakaya established a boarding school for novice monks, where children, primarily from rural areas, were sent by their families to receive training in discipline and order while living as novices for a period of one to three years. Young monks, most of whom held at least a bachelor's degree, with several possessing master's degrees, worked daily on computers to digitize the fifty-six volumes of the Tipiṭaka (the Buddhist Pali Canon). Many of these monks were initially recruited through the Dhammadayada training program.⁵

Another important example here that cannot be missed at all is that of *Maha Ghosananda* and his *Dhammayietras*. *Maha Ghosananda's Dhammayietras* (*Dhammayātrā*) peace walks played a crucial role in Cambodia's post-war reconciliation, embodying the Buddhist tradition of meditative walking to foster healing and social transformation. The first march in 1992 covered 125 miles from refugee camps to Phnom Penh, spreading messages of peace and drawing thousands of supporters, including soldiers who temporarily laid down their weapons to receive blessings. The second walk in 1993, held amid election-related violence, faced significant danger as marchers were attacked, yet their resilience inspired a 90% voter turnout. The third march entered western Cambodia's conflict zones, where participants were caught in Khmer Rouge crossfire, resulting in the deaths of three monks and a nun; survivors were taken captive but later released after their captors, exhausted from decades of war, expressed a desire for peace. Subsequent *Dhammayietras* addressed pressing national issues: in 1995, marchers campaigned against landmines, gathering over 20,000 signatures for a global ban; in 1996, they focused on deforestation, traveling through damaged regions and planting 2,000 trees; and in 1997, they promoted reconciliation, even engaging with former Khmer Rouge leaders like Ieng Sary, whose plea for forgiveness sparked debate but reaffirmed Ghosananda's belief in the power of Buddhist compassion. Through his fearless advocacy, Ghosananda rekindled hope in a war-torn society, encouraging Cambodians to publicly embrace peace. He compared peacemaking to breathing, an unceasing effort essential for ensuring that conflict does not return.⁶

⁴ Jackson, Peter A. *Buddhism, legitimation, and conflict: The political functions of urban Thai Buddhism*. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989.

⁵ Dubus, Arnaud. "Monastic Activism and the Case of Wat Phra Dhammakaya". In *Buddhism and Politics in Thailand*. Bangkok: Institut de recherche sur l'Asie du Sud-Est contemporaine, 2018.

⁶ Poethig, Kathryn. "Movable peace: engaging the transnational in Cambodia's Dhammayietra." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 1 (2002): 19 - 28.

1.2. Social activism and Buddhist organizations

Buddhist compassion extends beyond individual acts to organized efforts addressing systemic issues. Some of the organisations are as follows: The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, founded in Sri Lanka in 1958 by Dr. A. T.

Ariyaratne is a grassroots Buddhist development initiative rooted in the principles of self-reliance, collective effort, and compassion.⁷ Inspired by Buddhist and Gandhian ideals,⁸ the movement seeks to uplift communities through sustainable development, education, and social welfare, emphasizing a holistic approach to human well-being. Sarvodaya operates in over 15,000 villages across Sri Lanka, engaging in diverse projects such as community-driven economic development, disaster relief, environmental conservation, and conflict resolution. The movement has been particularly active in post-war reconciliation efforts, facilitating peace dialogues between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities. It played a crucial role in tsunami relief efforts after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, rebuilding homes and providing emergency aid. Sarvodaya also promotes eco-friendly initiatives, such as reforestation projects and renewable energy programs, aligning with Buddhist environmental ethics. Their Deshodaya (National Awakening) program fosters participatory democracy and local governance, encouraging communities to take charge of their development. Through microfinance schemes and vocational training, the movement empowers marginalized groups, particularly women and youth, to achieve economic independence. Sarvodaya's philosophy – awakening of self and society through shared labor (Shramadana) – demonstrates Buddhist compassion in action, making it one of the most influential and enduring Buddhist development movements in the world.

The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), founded in 1989 by Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa, is a global network that integrates Buddhist teachings with social activism, addressing environmental sustainability, human rights, economic justice, and peacebuilding. INEB works through a decentralized model, collaborating with monks, scholars, and lay practitioners to promote compassionate social change.⁹ One of its notable initiatives is the Eco-Temple Project, which encourages Buddhist monasteries to adopt sustainable practices such as solar energy, organic farming, and waste reduction. The network has been deeply involved in interfaith dialogues and peacebuilding efforts in conflict zones, such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia, advocating for nonviolent resolutions and reconciliation. INEB has also launched youth empowerment programs, such as the Young Bodhisattva

⁷ Ariyaratne, A. T. "Beyond development communication: case study on Sarvodaya, Sri Lanka." (1987).

⁸ Ariyaratne, A. T. "Gandhian Philosophy and Sarvodaya Approach to Promote Ethnic and Racial Harmony and Economic Equality." *International Policy Review* 6, no. 1 (1996): 122 - 126.

⁹ Queen, Christopher S., and Sallie B. King, eds. *Engaged buddhism: buddhist liberation movements in Asia*. State University of New York Press, 1996.

Program, which provides leadership training for young activists in Asia. In response to economic injustices, the network supports fair trade initiatives and sustainable livelihoods, particularly for marginalized communities, including refugees and indigenous peoples. Additionally, INEB played a crucial role in advocating for democracy and human rights in Myanmar, calling for justice for persecuted groups, including the Rohingya. Its humanitarian projects extend to disaster relief efforts, such as supporting victims of the 2011 Thailand floods and the 2015 Nepal earthquake. INEB's commitment to compassionate action, ethical leadership, and social transformation makes it a leading force in applying Buddhist principles to contemporary global challenges.

The Tzu Chi Foundation, established in 1966 by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in Taiwan, has evolved into a global humanitarian organization dedicated to various charitable missions.¹⁰ One of its earliest initiatives was the "Tzu Chi Medical Mission," inspired in 1970 when Cheng Yen observed the link between poverty and illness. This led to the opening of a free clinic in Hualien in 1972. In 1986, the foundation expanded its medical services by inaugurating its first hospital in Hualien, addressing the healthcare needs of Taiwan's eastern coast. Recognizing the importance of medical education, Tzu Chi established the Tzu Chi College of Medicine in 1994, which later became Tzu Chi University in 2000. Beyond healthcare, the foundation has been active in disaster relief worldwide, providing aid in response to events such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2015 Nepal earthquake, and Hurricane Harvey in 2017. Additionally, Tzu Chi's commitment to environmental protection is evident through its recycling programs and promotion of sustainable practices. Today, Tzu Chi operates in over 50 countries, delivering comprehensive humanitarian services rooted in Buddhist values.¹¹

1.3. Environmental conservation and Buddhist ethics

Buddhism's emphasis on interdependence extends to environmental stewardship. Many Buddhist communities actively engage in sustainable agriculture, conservation efforts, and climate advocacy. Notable examples include:

The Thai Forest Tradition promotes ecological preservation as a form of spiritual practice. Wat Pa Pong, a renowned forest monastery in Thailand, embodies the integration of Buddhist ethics with environmental conservation. Founded by Ajahn Chah in 1954 in Ubon Ratchathani Province, the monastery follows the Thai Forest Tradition, emphasizing simplicity, meditation, and deep respect for nature. Monks at Wat Pah Pong and its associated branch monasteries actively engage in environmental preservation by protecting forested areas around their monasteries, considering them sacred spaces for spiritual practice. The monastery's conservation efforts include tree ordination ceremonies, where trees are symbolically ordained as monks to prevent deforestation, a practice that has gained traction across Thailand. Wat Pah

¹⁰ O'Neill, Mark. *Tzu Chi: Serving with Compassion*. John Wiley & Sons, 2010.

¹¹ Yao, Yu-Shuang. *Taiwan's Tzu Chi as Engaged Buddhism*. Leiden: Global Oriental, 2012.

Pong also promotes sustainable living through mindful consumption, minimal ecological footprint, and community engagement in reforestation projects. These activities reflect the Buddhist principle of interdependence, reinforcing the idea that environmental well-being is crucial to human and spiritual development. The monastery's approach has inspired numerous forest conservation initiatives within Thailand and beyond.¹² Another notable name within the Thai Forest Tradition is that of Sulak Sivaraksa. Sivaraksa, a prominent Thai intellectual, social activist, and founder of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), has been a leading advocate for environmental activism as an extension of Buddhist compassion. His work emphasizes the principle of *sufficiency economy*, a model inspired by Buddhist ethics that promotes sustainable living, local self-reliance, and mindful consumption. Sulak has been instrumental in grassroots environmental movements in Thailand, challenging destructive development projects, deforestation, and corporate exploitation of natural resources. Through INEB, he has mobilized Buddhist monks and laypeople to engage in ecological preservation, including reforestation initiatives, campaigns against dam constructions that displace indigenous communities, and educational programs on sustainable agriculture. He has also been a vocal critic of consumerism and globalization, arguing that these forces fuel environmental degradation and social inequality.¹³

Then we have His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, who has been a leading advocate for climate responsibility, integrating Buddhist principles with environmental activism. As the head of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, he has emphasized the urgent need for ecological awareness within Buddhist communities. In 2009, he launched the *Khoryug* (meaning "environment" in Tibetan) initiative, a network of over 50 monasteries and nunneries across the Himalayas dedicated to environmental conservation. Under his guidance, Khoryug has implemented projects on reforestation, water conservation, organic farming, and waste management, particularly focusing on reducing plastic waste in monastic settings. The Karmapa has also organized multiple environmental conferences, bringing Buddhist leaders together to discuss climate change and sustainable practices. His book, *The Heart Is Noble: Changing the World from the Inside Out* (2013), outlines his vision for compassionate environmental stewardship, urging individuals and institutions to recognize the interdependence between humanity and nature.¹⁴

¹² Kongsombut, Prat, Sura Pattanakiat, Wee Rawang, Pattranit Srijuntrapun, Uthaiwan Phewphan, Thamarat Phutthai, Sirasit Vongvassana, and Jirapatch Jumpasingha. "Landscape Ecological Structures and Patterns for Green Space Conservation in Forest Monasteries in Northeast Thailand: 10.32526/ennrj/22/20240016." *Environment and Natural Resources Journal* 22, no. 4 (2024): 366 - 377.

¹³ Sulak, Sivaraksa, and Tom Ginsburg. "Seeds of peace: A Buddhist vision for renewing society." 1992.

¹⁴ Dorje, Ogyen Trinley, and Karen Derris. *The heart is noble: changing the world from the inside out*. Shambhala Publications, 2014.

His advocacy extends beyond the Buddhist community, as he has spoken at international forums, emphasizing the moral responsibility of all religious traditions to protect the planet.

1.4. Buddhist peace movements and conflict resolution

Buddhist leaders have played significant roles in promoting peace and reconciliation in conflict-affected regions. Monastic communities have initiated dialogue and humanitarian assistance to mitigate ethnic and religious tensions. A case in point is Nichiren Buddhism, particularly through the Soka Gakkai movement in Japan, which has been a significant force in promoting peace, nuclear disarmament, and social justice as an expression of Buddhist compassion and global responsibility. Rooted in the teachings of Nichiren (1222 – 1282), Soka Gakkai International (SGI) emphasizes the concept of *human revolution*, where individual inner transformation leads to broader societal change.¹⁵ Under the leadership of Daisaku Ikeda, SGI has actively campaigned for nuclear disarmament, advocating for the abolition of nuclear weapons through initiatives such as the *People's Decade for Nuclear Abolition* and annual peace proposals submitted to the United Nations.¹⁶ SGI played a key role in the establishment of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) by mobilizing public awareness and collaborating with international peace organizations.

Beyond disarmament, SGI also engages in humanitarian efforts, disaster relief, and environmental sustainability projects, viewing these activities as integral to Buddhist practice. The organization's *Earth Charter Initiative* aligns Buddhist ethics with ecological responsibility, promoting education on climate change and sustainability. SGI's *Institute of Oriental Philosophy* and the *Toda Peace Institute* further contribute to global dialogues on peacebuilding, interfaith cooperation, and social justice. The movement's commitment to peace is documented in Ikeda's extensive writings, such as *The Human Revolution* and *Choose Life*, which articulate a vision of engaged Buddhism dedicated to a harmonious and just world.

Another important example is the Dalai Lama and the broader Tibetan Buddhist movement have long advocated for nonviolence as the foundation for resolving conflicts, particularly in the context of Tibet's struggle for autonomy from China. Rooted in Mahayana Buddhist principles of compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*prajñā*), the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, has consistently promoted dialogue over confrontation, exemplifying the philosophy of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) as taught by the Buddha and reinforced by figures like Mahatma Gandhi. Since his exile in 1959, he has championed the "Middle Way Approach," seeking genuine autonomy for Tibet within the framework of the People's Republic of China rather than full independence. His 1987 Five-Point Peace Plan, presented to the U.S. Congress, called for Tibet to become a

¹⁵ Kinoshita, Daiki. 2021. "INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND NICHIREN BUDDHISM." *Contemporary Buddhism* 22 (1 – 2): 398 – 413.

¹⁶ Ikeda, Daisaku. "The Human Revolution." World Tribune Press. 2004.

demilitarized zone and emphasized environmental protection, human rights, and the preservation of Tibetan Buddhist culture.¹⁷

The Dalai Lama's nonviolent struggle has garnered international support, earning him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his unwavering commitment to peaceful resistance. Tibetan Buddhist communities in exile, particularly the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala, India, have continued his advocacy through diplomatic efforts, education, and cultural preservation programs. Tibetan nonviolence also extends to grassroots activism, with organizations like the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) and Students for a Free Tibet (SFT) using nonviolent resistance strategies, such as protests, petitions, and awareness campaigns, to highlight human rights abuses in Tibet. Furthermore, the Dalai Lama's engagement with neuroscientists and interfaith leaders through the Mind & Life Institute demonstrates his belief in compassion-based ethics as a means to foster global peace and nonviolent conflict resolution.

1.5. Rituals and charitable giving

Buddhist festivals and rituals often incorporate acts of charity. The Vesak Festival, commemorating the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and passing, is marked by community service initiatives such as medical camps and food distribution. Similarly in the Kathina Ceremony, an annual event where laypeople offer robes and essential items to monks after the monastic *vassa* (rainy season retreat), demonstrates the shared responsibility of the community in sustaining the monastic order. This reflects monastic community engagement, where monasteries provide education, healthcare, and counseling services. The daily alms-giving ritual (*pindapata*) also reinforces the reciprocal relationship between monks and laypeople, promoting generosity (*dāna*) as a means of reducing suffering. Regular alms-giving and humanitarian efforts underscore the centrality of compassion in Buddhist practice. Further, charitable rituals such as the Kannon Compassion Practices¹⁸ in Japan and China reflect the ideals of the Bodhisattva path. Devotees of Avalokiteśvara (Kannon/Guan Yin) engage in acts of service like food distribution and disaster relief, much like modern Buddhist organizations such as the Tzu Chi Foundation, which extends these principles through humanitarian aid, healthcare, and education.

1.6. Compassion in Buddhist art and literature

Buddhist culture expresses compassion through artistic and literary forms. Depictions of Avalokiteśvara (the Bodhisattva of Compassion) in temples and scriptures inspire devotees to cultivate kindness. Buddhist literature, theater, and iconography serve as moral and ethical reminders of the importance of *karuṇā* in daily life.

¹⁷ Lama, Dalai. *Ethics for the new millennium*. Penguin, 2001.

¹⁸ Dykstra, Yoshiko K. "Tales of the Compassionate Kannon. The Hasedera Kannon Gen-ki." *Monumenta Nipponica* 31, no. 2 (1976): 113 - 143.

Buddhism provides a moral and ethical framework for addressing global challenges. Key doctrines such as the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Bodhisattva ideal offer pathways to sustainable human development.¹⁹

II. THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

(i) **Dukkha (Suffering):** Acknowledges suffering in multiple forms – physical, psychological, and social, including issues like poverty and discrimination.

(ii) **Samudaya (Cause of Suffering):** Identifies attachment, ignorance, and systemic injustices as sources of suffering.

(iii) **Nirodha (Cessation of Suffering):** Advocates for the elimination of suffering through ethical transformation.

(iv) **Magga (Path to Cessation):** The Noble Eightfold Path provides a structured approach to personal and social well-being.

The Noble Eightfold Path and sustainable development

- **Right view & right intention:** Encourage ethical policymaking and sustainable economic models.
- **Right speech & right action:** Foster respectful dialogue and non-exploitative labor practices.
- **Right livelihood & right effort:** Promote ethical professions and perseverance in humanitarian efforts.
- **Right mindfulness & right concentration:** Advocate for mental well-being and mindful leadership in governance.

When applied to human development, the Noble Eightfold Path serves as a holistic approach to creating compassionate, equitable, and sustainable societies. The emphasis on right livelihood, right action, and right speech, in particular, underscores the importance of creating systems and structures that serve the collective good, promote justice, and address the root causes of inequality and social injustice. On the other hand, the *Bodhisattva* ideal emphasizes selflessness, altruism, and social responsibility. It calls for collective action to alleviate suffering, reduce inequalities, and promote well-being for all. Just as the Bodhisattva vows to act in the world with love and compassion, societies can embrace shared responsibility by promoting policies and initiatives that ensure equitable access to resources, education, healthcare, and social justice.

Buddhist compassion in action is a dynamic and transformative force shaping human development across Asia and beyond. By integrating ethical living, social responsibility, and humanitarian service, Buddhism offers a holistic model for addressing contemporary challenges. The principles of *karuṇā* and interconnectedness inspire individuals, communities, and institutions to work collectively toward a compassionate, just, and sustainable world.

¹⁹ Harvey, Peter. *An introduction to Buddhist ethics: Foundations, values and issues*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

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DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE STANDARDS FOR THE PALLIATIVE CARE FACILITIES IN TEMPLES FOR SICK MONKS AND END-OF-LIFE PATIENTS, WITH SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY

Asst. Prof. Dr. Patitham Samniang¹

Abstract

This paper examines the potential of Buddhist temples in Thailand as palliative care centers for monks and terminally ill patients, emphasizing a sustainable model aligned with government health standards. Asst. Prof. Dr. Patitham Samniang and her co-authors highlight the existing gap in palliative care accessibility, especially in low- and middle-income regions, where only 14% of patients in need receive care. By leveraging the infrastructure and social capital of temples, the study proposes a framework integrating Buddhist principles with medical guidelines to provide holistic physical, psychological, spiritual, and social care. A novel contribution of the paper is its detailed model for developing public health service standards, including management systems, training programs, and operational protocols for end-of-life care. The research underscores the dual benefits of reducing strain on healthcare systems while promoting a peaceful transition for patients in line with Buddhist teachings.

Keywords: Business strategy, corporate management, market competition, financial performance, organizational development, strategic planning, innovation management.

I. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Globally, there are approximately 40 million patients in need of palliative care, but only 14% receive it. Of these, 78% are in low- and middle-income countries. A study of palliative care in 234 countries found that only 20 countries

¹ University/ Organization: Rattana Bundit University, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Mahamakut Buddhist University, National Health Security Office.

have a palliative care system, while 42% of the studied areas lacked palliative care services. According to WHO, the types of diseases requiring palliative care worldwide include cardiovascular diseases (38.5%), cancer (34%), respiratory diseases (10.3%), AIDS (5%), and diabetes (4.6%). Other conditions, such as kidney failure, chronic liver disease, neurodegenerative diseases, Parkinson's disease, rheumatoid arthritis, neurological disorders, dementia, congenital disabilities, and drug-resistant tuberculosis, also require palliative care.

Many end-of-life patients face severe pain. For example, 80% of patients with AIDS and cancer, 67% with cardiovascular disease, and patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) experience pain from tolerable to severe levels during the final stages of life.

As Thailand has fully entered the aging society, the number of elderly patients with disabilities is increasing. Common chronic diseases such as cancer and organ failure (e.g., COPD, end-stage renal disease) are prevalent. Each disease has different progression patterns, making it difficult to predict when patients will enter the final stages. However, these conditions are life-threatening, especially for the elderly, and require palliative care alongside curative treatments. The role of palliative care intensifies as the patient approaches death and continues after death to support the family in coping with grief and guilt.

The majority of Thai people have relied on Buddhism for spiritual guidance for centuries. Buddhist monks, as religious leaders, aim to spread the teachings of Buddhism to bring peace and promote well-being. Since 2017, the clergy and affiliated networks have worked together to implement the National Monk Health Charter. The second version of the charter, launched in 2023, focuses on improving the efficiency of healthcare in monks in three key areas: research, data management, evaluation, and reporting; developing health communication channels and innovations for monks; and working through local mechanisms to improve health for monks and the community. This has led to the creation of several innovative models for "Palliative Care Centers in Temples," such as at Wat Pa Non Sa-ad, Wat Thap Klo, Wat Phra Bat Nam Phu, and others, which care for both monks and laypeople in their final stages of life.

Despite this progress, the knowledge within these temples remains scattered and not systematically compiled.

When considering the potential of temples as palliative care centers, it is clear that temples have the infrastructure, social capital, and personnel (monks trained in basic healthcare) to provide efficient palliative care. Using temples as palliative care centers can help care for terminally ill patients, offering both physical and emotional support and preparing them for a peaceful death by Buddhist teachings alongside modern medical care. This approach improves the patients' quality of life, reduces the burden on hospitals and healthcare systems, and eases the emotional strain on families.

Thailand's universal healthcare system, which has achieved universal health coverage, is currently facing questions about its long-term sustainability.

The United Nations has set Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include healthcare targets such as ensuring service coverage and financial risk protection for households. There are proposals to make healthcare more efficient by emphasizing value-based healthcare, community/home healthcare, and strategic purchasing of health services, all in line with Thailand's health reform plans.

Therefore, the development of public health service standards for palliative care in temples is urgent. It aligns with the standards set by the National Health Security Act, B. E. 2545, and is a response to both societal needs and government policies. This development will include policy proposals to improve healthcare systems, create training programs for palliative care, and increase the number of healthcare professionals trained in palliative care, not only for doctors and nurses but also for volunteers. This integrated approach will lead to a sustainable, successful healthcare system for terminally ill patients in Thailand.

1.1. Objectives

(i) To manage knowledge in providing healthcare services for monks who are ill and end-of-life patients in Buddhist temples with best practice models in Thailand.

(ii) To develop guidelines for providing healthcare services at temples' palliative care units for monks and end-of-life patients in alignment with the standards outlined in Section 3 of the National Health Security Act B.E. 2545 (2002).

(iii) To develop best practice protocols for healthcare services at temples' palliative care units for monks and end-of-life patients, in alignment with the standards outlined in Section 3 of the National Health Security Act B.E. 2545 (2002).

1.2. Scope of the study

This study focuses on the management of knowledge in providing healthcare services for monks and end-of-life patients at temples recognized as best practices. These temples were selected by the Sangha (monastic community) and local healthcare units, with a total of seven temples, as follows:

- (i) Wat Pa Non Sa-At, Nakhon Ratchasima
- (ii) Santiphawan Center, Chanthaburi
- (iii) Wat Huai Yot, Trang
- (iv) Wat Thap Khlor, Phichit
- (v) Wat Phrabat Namphu, Lopburi
- (vi) Wat Wang Dong, Kanchanaburi (changed to Wat Pa Makham, Nakhon Ratchasima)
- (vii) Wat Thong Noi, Nan

The study period is set for two months, from October 15, 2023, to December 15, 2023, to develop a draft model for the operation of palliative care services at temples, focusing on the following issues:

- (i) Duration/ Experience of service provision/ Goals
- (ii) Scope of service/ Service models
- (iii) Healthcare personnel involved
- (iv) Management systems and mechanisms
- (v) Stakeholders/ Service units/ Health facilities
- (vi) Pain points/ Needs for support/ Future outlook

1.3. Definitions

(i) **Palliative care unit (สถานชีวาภิบาล):** A healthcare service center in a temple for monks and end-of-life patients, providing holistic care that addresses physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. Care is provided based on medical principles and Buddhist teachings, with monks and volunteers offering services, either independently or in collaboration with government health services.

(ii) **Healthcare service guidelines for palliative care units (หลักเกณฑ์การให้บริการสาธารณสุข):** The standards for healthcare services at temples providing care for monks and end-of-life patients, in compliance with the standards set by Section 3 of the National Health Security Act B.E. 2545 (2002).

(iii) **Operational protocols for palliative care services (แนวปฏิบัติการให้บริการสาธารณสุข):** The procedures and operational details that align with the service guidelines for healthcare services at temples providing palliative care for monks and end-of-life patients, according to Section 3 of the National Health Security Act B.E. 2545 (2002).

(iv) **Types and scope of healthcare services (ประเภทและขอบเขตบริการสาธารณสุข):** The types and scope of healthcare services in palliative care units, in accordance with the National Health Security Act, Ministry of Public Health regulations, and the National Health Security Board's guidelines, ensuring that eligible individuals receive coverage for medical services or healthcare-related expenses under the law.

1.4. Population, sample group, and key informants

1.4.1. Best practice temples: Selected by the Sangha and local health units, the study will focus on seven temples, namely:

- (i) Wat Pa Non Sa-At, Nakhon Ratchasima
- (ii) Santiphawan Center, Chanthaburi
- (iii) Wat Huai Yot, Trang
- (iv) Wat Thap Khlor, Phichit
- (v) Wat Phrabat Namphu, Lopburi
- (vi) Wat Wang Dong, Kanchanaburi
- (vii) Wat Thong Noi, Nan

1.4.2. Core Monks and volunteers: Monks in palliative care units, volunteers, patients, family members, local service units, and network partners.

1.4.3. Experts and professionals: Experts and key personnel from organizations such as the National Health Security Office, Department of Medical Services, agencies responsible for healthcare service accreditation, and representatives of the Maha Sangha (Supreme Sangha Council).

1.5. Study methods

This study will use document analysis, interviews, and fieldwork in the selected temples. These temples were chosen based on their recognition as best practices by experts, healthcare providers, and the monastic community. The study will run from October 15, 2023, to December 15, 2023, and will focus on the management of knowledge in healthcare services for monks and end-of-life patients. The study will address the following issues:

- (i) Duration/ Experience of service provision/ Goals
- (ii) Scope of service/ Service models
- (iii) Healthcare personnel involved
- (iv) Management systems and mechanisms
- (v) Stakeholders/ Service units/ Health facilities
- (vi) Pain points/ Needs for support/ Future outlook

II. DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE GUIDELINES FOR BIOETHICS CENTERS IN TEMPLES FOR SICK MONKS AND TERMINALLY ILL PATIENTS, IN LINE WITH STANDARDS UNDER SECTION 3 OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH SECURITY ACT, B.E. 2545 (2002)

2.1. Chapter 1: Management Standards and Qualifications of Service Providers

2.1.1. Characteristics of Palliative and End-of-Life Care Services in Bioethics Centers for Buddhist Organizations

- (i) In-house Service Management at Bioethics Centers
- (ii) Out-of-house Service Management

2.1.2. Standards for Palliative and End-of-Life Care Management in Bioethics Centers for Buddhist Organizations

2.2. Section 1: Organizational Management Standards

- (i) Building and facilities
- (ii) Organizational structure, roles, and staffing levels of the service unit
- (iii) Management (Foundation/ Board/ etc.)
- (iv) Religious organization hosting the Bioethics Center
- (v) Activities that align with temple service management
- (vi) Financial management system
- (vii) Service recipient registration data management system
- (viii) Complaint management system

- (ix) Referral network with local service units

2.3. Section 2: Service provider standards

2.3.1. Qualifications of service providers

- (i) Monks
- (ii) Community caregivers or eldercare providers, or Caregivers

2.3.2. Relevant training courses for palliative care providers

- (i) Basic Courses
- (ii) Advanced Courses, etc.

2.4. Section 3: Standards for patient care services

2.4.1 Service provision

- (i) Advance care planning standards
- (ii) Service documentation
- (iii) Referral guidelines and procedures between Bioethics Centers and local service units

(iv) Ability to provide services in all four areas: physical, psychological, spiritual, and social

- (v) Support for Living Will creation

2.4.2. Support for entering health services

- (i) Database of target groups and referral services for system entry
- (ii) Coordination with referral centers in service units
- (iii) Follow-up on the referral process for target groups to access services

2.4.3. Qualifications of service providers

- (i) Good health, free from severe communicable diseases
- (ii) Literate
- (iii) At least 1 year of experience in patient or eldercare

2.4.4. Experience in education/ training

(i) Ordained monks, volunteer monks (OSV), or public members trained in family eldercare courses (must complete one additional course)

(ii) (2) Monks, novices, or public individuals aged 18 or older must complete both basic and advanced courses or a community caregiver course (521 hours)

2.5. Relevant training courses for palliative care providers

2.5.1. Basic courses

- (i) Family eldercare course (18 hours)
- (ii) Volunteer monk course (OSV) (35 hours)
- (iii) Ordained monk caretaker course (70 hours)

2.5.2. Advanced courses for palliative care providers

- (i) Caregiver course (70 hours)

(ii) Palliative care provider course (50 hours)

2.5.3. Alternative courses for spiritual care for monks, novices, or interested public to enhance spiritual care capacity based on Buddhist principles

2.6. Chapter 2: Standards for Palliative and End-of-Life Care in Bioethics Centers for Buddhist Organizations

2.6.1. Service Scope of Bioethics Centers

The care includes monks, elderly individuals with dependency, or patients with chronic illnesses in the palliative and end-of-life stages, covering services in physical, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects with quality standards. The quality and service standards set by the Bioethics Center for Buddhist Organizations must be approved by the Sangha (monastic organization) to ensure alignment with Buddhist principles or other religious practices.

2.6.2. Characteristics of service recipients

(i) Immobile, severely ill, or in the final stages of life, or patients in palliative care (PPS = 30%)

(ii) Immobile, unable to swallow, drowsy, in the process of dying, potentially experiencing discomfort such as pain, shortness of breath, or confusion (life expectancy approximately 2 weeks)

(iii) Activities of Daily Living (ADL) score ≤ 11

(iv) Patients whose families cannot provide care (e.g., due to illness, old age, work commitments, or lack of relatives)

2.6.3. Service providers include monks or individuals trained by relevant agencies, organizations, or institutions accredited by the Ministry of Public Health and approved by the Buddhist Sangha for cases where both the provider and recipient are monks or members of other religious groups.

2.6.4. Service provision

(i) Survey patients in the community for entry into care or referral from hospitals after evaluation by a doctor or other accepted criteria for palliative or end-of-life care

(ii) Appointment of a multidisciplinary committee to develop Advance Care Planning (ACP)

o Committee Composition

- At least 3 related professionals, including:
 - (1) A palliative or general practitioner doctor
 - (2) A nurse with experience in palliative care
 - (3) The caregiver or service provider in the Bioethics Center
 - (4) Family members or legal guardians

o Responsibilities

- (1) Initial assessment of all patients entering palliative care
- (2) Create a documented care plan for palliative and end-of-life care

- (3) Ensure the service is delivered according to the care plan, with any necessary adjustments reported to the committee

- (4) Provide consultation to caregivers

- (5) Evaluate care results based on individual patient needs

2.6.5. Care provided in four areas: physical, psychological, spiritual, and social, as per the care plan developed by the multidisciplinary committee

- o **Physical Care**

- Monitor physical changes

- Assist with daily activities, personal hygiene, and wound care

- Provide appropriate nutrition and feeding methods

- Ensure a safe environment

- Alleviate pain and suffering through medical care and comfort techniques

- Prevent accidents in patients with cognitive impairments

- Prevent pressure ulcers and infections

- Provide hygiene and change incontinence products

- Clean medical equipment

- o **Psychological Care**

- Initial psychological assessment for patients and families

- Offer opportunities for patients to express feelings and relieve concerns

- Provide psychological support for end-of-life concerns

- Use Buddhist teachings or other techniques to reduce anxiety

- Coordinate with mental health professionals if needed

- o **Spiritual Care**

- Assess spiritual care needs

- Create an environment for spiritual reflection

- Encourage religious or cultural practices

- Help patients accept death with peace and closure

- o **Social Care**

- Assess social needs and the impact of illness on family dynamics

- Assist with caregiver support and placement services

- Provide family support and healthcare services coordination

- Offer respite care, grief counseling, and assistance with funeral arrangements

This translation preserves the original meaning and structure of the text while providing an accurate rendering of the information in English.

Service Models: The Care Services Provided by Buddhist Organizations at Inpatient and Outpatient Care Facilities

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COMPASSION AND TOLERANCE: NOT WEAKNESS, BUT STRENGTH FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Dr. Arvind Kumar Singh*

Abstract:

This paper explores the transformative power of compassion (*karuṇā*) and tolerance (*khantī*) from a Buddhist perspective, challenging the misconception that these virtues are signs of weakness. Drawing from the Pāli Canon and key Buddhist teachings, the research highlights how these qualities represent profound strengths essential for human development, inner peace, and spiritual liberation. Compassion, as an active desire to alleviate suffering, and tolerance, as an enduring response to adversity, are shown to be integral to personal and societal well-being. The paper contrasts their roles in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, illustrating their complementary nature in cultivating mindfulness, emotional resilience, and ethical behavior. The discussion emphasizes how these virtues foster social harmony, conflict resolution, and societal justice, making them indispensable for addressing contemporary global challenges. Ultimately, compassion and tolerance are presented not as passive traits but as vital forces for sustainable human development, underscoring their importance in building interconnected, empathetic societies.

Keywords: *Compassion (karuṇā), tolerance (khantī), Buddhist ethics, Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, sustainable human development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's fast-paced world, where success is often equated with aggression, competition, and assertiveness, the qualities of compassion and tolerance are frequently dismissed as signs of passivity or weakness. Yet, when viewed through the lens of Buddhism, compassion (*Karuṇā*) and tolerance (*khantī*) emerge not as signs of fragility but as profound strengths that are integral to

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human development. Buddhism teaches that these qualities form the bedrock of a peaceful, meaningful life and played a significant role in treading upon the path to spiritual liberation (*nibbāna*). In today's contemporary world scenario, where aggression and competition often dominate, compassion and tolerance are frequently misunderstood as weaknesses. However, from a Buddhist perspective, these qualities are not only fundamental to personal growth but are central to the attainment of spiritual liberation for all living-beings.

This paper explores compassion (*karuṇā*) and tolerance (*khantī*) from the Buddhist perspective, arguing that they represent profound expressions of strength rather than fragility. This paper explores central teachings of the Buddha from the Pāli Canon, illustrating that compassion is a dynamic and transformative force, driven by the desire to relieve the suffering of all beings. In contrast, tolerance demands inner strength to withstand hardship without succumbing to anger or resentment. Through the lens of Buddhist practice, these virtues contribute to the well-being of both individuals and society, guiding practitioners toward a path of spiritual maturity, peace, and enlightenment. Here through this research paper, I am going to examine these two cardinal virtues from Buddhist perspective, highlighting it as an essential tool to overcome suffering, achieving inner peace, and contributing to the well-being of all beings.

II. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF COMPASSION AND TOLERANCE IN ANCIENT INDIAN TRADITIONS

Compassion (*karuṇā*) and tolerance (*sahishṇutā*) have been integral to India's philosophical, religious, and social fabric since ancient times. These values shaped the ethical foundations of Indian society, influencing governance, interfaith interactions, and everyday life. Ancient Indian texts, including the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, Buddhist and Jain scriptures, and royal edicts, advocate these principles. The historical evolution of compassion and tolerance in Indian traditions can be traced through Vedic literature, the rise of Jainism and Buddhism, and the policies of rulers like Ashoka. This essay explores these themes with references from primary and secondary sources.

In the Vedic Tradition: The *Ṛg Veda* (1500 BCE), one of the oldest known scriptures, emphasizes unity, harmony, and mutual respect. A well-known hymn states: "Let noble thoughts come to us from all directions."¹ This verse reflects openness to diverse perspectives, a foundational aspect of tolerance. The *Atharva Veda* (1200 BCE) also advocates peaceful coexistence, stating: "May we live in harmony, speaking sweet words to each other."² The *Upanishads* (800-200 BCE), which delve deeper into philosophical thought, reinforce compassion as a path to spiritual liberation. The *Chhandogya Upaniṣad* declares: "One should see all beings in oneself and oneself in all beings."³ This concept of interconnectedness fosters empathy and non-discrimination. The *Dharmaśāstras*, such as the *Manusmṛti* (200 BCE–200 CE), which have

¹ *Ṛg Veda* 1.89.1.

² *Atharva Veda* 3.30.3.

³ *Chhandogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7.

often been criticized for their rigid social codes, also promote kindness by stating: ‘A wise man should treat all creatures as his own self.’⁴ Thus, early Hindu traditions laid the groundwork for ethical living based on compassion and tolerance. The *Bhagavad Gita* (2nd century BCE) integrates compassion into the warrior’s duty (*dharma*). In a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, Krishna urges: “He who has no ill will toward any being, who is friendly and compassionate, free from ego and possessiveness, is dear to me.”⁵ This teaching aligns compassion with righteous action, influencing later Hindu ethics.

In Jainism: Jainism, founded by Mahavira (6th century BCE), placed *ahimsa* (non-violence) at the heart of its philosophy. The *Acharaṅga Sūtra*, an early Jain text, states: “One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, water, fire, air, and vegetation disregards their own existence.”⁶ This deep ecological and ethical compassion extended to all life forms. Jain monks practice strict non-violence, even avoiding harm to insects. The Jain principle of *anekāntavāda* (many-sidedness) promotes tolerance by recognizing multiple perspectives, thus fostering dialogue and coexistence.

Ancient India was home to diverse religious traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and later, various sects like Shaivism and Vaishnavism. The Mauryan, Gupta, and later Chola empires promoted interfaith dialogue. The Tamil epic *Thirukkural* (5th century CE), written by Thiruvalluvar, states: “Compassion is the root of righteousness. Even in legal codes, rulers upheld tolerance. The *Arthaśāstra* (3rd century BCE), attributed to Chanakya, advises that the king should allow all religious sects to live according to their own laws.” This legal pluralism ensured harmony in a multi-religious society.

Ancient Indian traditions stand out for institutionalizing compassion and tolerance across philosophical, social, and political domains. In contrast to rigid exclusivism seen in some other ancient civilizations, Indian traditions promoted adaptability and inclusivity. This ethical foundation influenced later movements like the Bhakti and Sufi traditions, which further emphasized love and acceptance. Modern Indian leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi, drew from these traditions. Gandhi’s philosophy of *ahimsa* was deeply rooted in Jain, Hindu, and Buddhist thought, shaping India’s independence movement. He famously said: “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” This ethos continues to inspire global peace movements. The historical evolution of compassion and tolerance in ancient Indian traditions reflects a deep ethical and philosophical commitment to coexistence. From the Vedic concept of universal harmony to Jain *ahimsa*, Buddhist *karuṇā*, and Ashoka’s policies, these ideals shaped Indian civilization. The *Bhagavad Gita* reinforced moral duty with compassion, while legal texts ensured social harmony. These values not only defined ancient India but continue to guide modern ethical and political thought.

⁴ *Manusmṛti* 6.92.

⁵ *Bhāgavad Gītā* 12.13.

⁶ *Acharaṅga Sūtra* 1.1.5.

Gautama Buddha (5th century BCE) broadened the concept of compassion, elevating it as a universal virtue. The *Dhammapada*, one of the essential Buddhist texts, states: Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love; this is the eternal rule.” The Buddha emphasized *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā* (loving-kindness), encouraging followers to cultivate empathy toward all beings. The Buddhist ideal of the *Bodhisattva*, someone who delays personal enlightenment to help others, embodies the ultimate expression of compassion. Aśoka, the Great (273–232 BCE) inscribed messages of religious tolerance and compassion on his edicts. In Rock Edict XII, he declared: “One should not honor only one’s religion and condemn others, but should honor others’ religions for this or that reason.” His policies promoted vegetarianism, animal welfare, and religious harmony, setting a precedent for state-sponsored tolerance.

2.1. *Karuṇā* in Buddhist literature

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is the name of volition for eradication of suffering of others. It is not a simple verbal expression towards beings in suffering but a positive attitude to be one with the suffering of others and making right efforts for its gradual minimization.⁷ It is called compassion because it is scattered over the afflicted, stretched out over them by diffusion.⁸ Compassion has the characteristic of evolving the mode of removing pain; the property of not being able to bear others suffer; the manifestation of kindness; the proximate cause of seeing the need of those overcome by pain. Its consummation is the quieting of cruelty; its failure is the production of sorrow.⁹

Here the beings in suffering of all planes of existence are its objects (*dukkhijanesu karuṇā*). The beings of the past and those of future do not come in its preview. It embraces the beings of the present state of existence. There is no barrier of place and the states of the beings. Sometimes compassion (*karuṇā*) is intimately associated with the *Dānapāramitā*. Through compassion a *Bodhisattava* perfects himself in every way and at last attains Buddhahood.¹⁰ There are so many references of that in the *Jātakas*, where compassion (*karuṇā*) for all creatures is exhibited through the story of a hungry tigress.

Further it is stated that the Buddha gave up the opportunity, he had of putting an end to samsaric ills by becoming an arahant at the feet of Dipaṅkara Buddha and resolved to fulfill the perfections (*pāramī*) in *saṃsāra*, so that he could become Buddha to save many others from saṃsāric ills. The Buddha, during his forty-five years of missionary service, each day in the very early

⁷ As.192: *paradukkhe sati hadaya kampanam karoti ti karuṇā. kiṇāti vā paradukkham, himsati, vināseti ti karuṇā. kiriyati vā dukkhitesu karaṇavasena pasāriyati ti karuṇā.*

⁸ As.192: *kiriyati vā dukkhitesu karaṇavasena pasāriyati ti karuṇā.*

⁹ As.193: “*dukkhapanayanakarappavattilakkhaṇa karuṇā, paradukkhasah-anarasa, avihimsāpaccupatṭhāna, dukkhabhibhūtanamanathabhāvadassanapadatthāna. vihiṃsupasamo tassa sampatti, sokasambhavo vipatti.*”

¹⁰ cf. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Ed.) G. P. Malalasekera Vol. VI Fascicle 3, published by Government of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2002, p. 435 (Article Name ‘*Mahākaruṇā*’ by Lily de Silva).

hours in the morning, entered a trance called *mahākaruṇā samāpatti* to see who deserved his special attention that day, and it is said that the Buddha travelled long distances to help out such people.¹¹

Ācārya Buddhaghosa in his *magnum-opus* work *Visuddhimagga* gives a detailed description of the practice of compassion.¹² In the *Nāmarūpaparicchedakathā*, Ācārya Aniruddha has also highlighted the practice of compassion in the same way as that of the friendliness: While avoiding the rising of sorrow, destroying injury from a distance devoting concentration on compassion (*karuṇājjhāna*), (He) is made to get the glory (i.e., wealth) of loving kindness (*mettā*).¹³ The friendliness is called unlimited. There is no limit of the range of its practice. It can be developed to any number of being and therefore, the Buddha has advised whatever being there may be- moving, static, big, very big, medium size, gross in nature, small or just like atom, seen or unseen, living near or far, have come into existence or will come in future- let all be happy, free from ill-will passing the life without any disturbance, directing himself for higher realization. It is further advised that one should not harm anyone in anyway nor looked down others. There should be no anger, ill-will or any desire which may bring suffering to others: Whatever living beings there may be, feeble or strong (or the seekers and the attained) long, stout, or of medium size, short, small, large, those seen or those unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born as well as those yet to be born, may all beings have happy minds.¹⁴ The annoyance and hatred towards such beings were reduced and in due course uprooted.¹⁵

Let their suffering of variegated nature be eradicated, agonies be destroyed, sinful activities be minimized, fear be reduced, pollutions and impediments be removed away: So nice! The beings may get liberated from sorrowful states in all ways. The disturbance (*upāyāsa*), grief (*soka*) and lamentation (*paridevanā*) of the living beings be brought down (calm down), sinful elements get destroyed, the defiling factors (*saṃkilesā*) be cooled down, impediments (*palibodhā*) be cut down, hatred (*byāpādā*) be destroyed (lit. killed), the misfortune or distress (*upaddavā*) be turned back, miseries (*byasanāni*) get destroyed (get lost), the wrong state (*vipattiyo*) may go away.¹⁶ Let there be wish for compassion to all

¹¹ cf. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, (Ed.) G.P. Malalasekera, Vol. VI, Fascicle I, published by Government of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1996, p. 145. (Article Name: 'Karuṇā' by W. G. Weeraratne).

¹² *Vism.* 314: *karuṇam bhāvetukāmena pana nikkaruṇatāya ādinavaṃ karuṇāya ca āni-saṃsaṃ paccavekkhitvā karuṇābhāvanā ārabhitabbā.* (Ñānamoli 1997, p.340)

¹³ *Nāmarūpapariccheda*, V. 1366: "sokuppattiṃ nivārento-vihimsaṃ durato haraṃ, mettāyamiva pāpeti-karuṇājjhānamappaṇaṃ."

¹⁴ *Sn.V.* 146 - 147.

¹⁵ *M. I.* 424 - 25: *karuṇaṃ bhāvanam bhāvayato yā vihesā sā pahiyissati.*

¹⁶ *Nāmarūpapariccheda*, V. 1361 - 63: "aho sattā vimuccantu - dukkhadhammehi sabbathā;/ sādhu samentupāyāsā - sokā ca paridevanā./ khīyantu pāpadhammā ca - passambhantāmayā tathā;/ saṃkilesā palibodhā ca - samucchijjantu pāṇinaṃ/ byāpādā ca vihāyantu - vinivattan-tupaddavā./ byasanāni vinassantu - vigacchantu vipattiyo."

beings always; and after the eradication of all sufferings, there must be desire for compassion.¹⁷

The word *karuṇā* in Mahāyāna Sanskrit texts occurs very frequently. According to the *Prajñāpāramitā* Sūtras, a bodhisattva shows his *karuṇā* by resolving to suffer many torments and agonies in many births to lead others to enlightenment. He does not care for his own happiness, loves all beings as a mother loves her children.¹⁸ In the *Aṣṭasahasrikā*, the Buddha compares the Bodhisattava to an excellent compassionate hero who would never desert the being for whom he is the savior.¹⁹ Āryaśūra and Śāntideva exalt *karuṇā* above all virtues. We see that as emotionalism grew in Buddhism, this virtue was given more importance. In the beginning wisdom (*prajña*) and mercy (*dayā*) were considered equally important. In fact, *prajña* is sometimes regarded more than mercy (*dayā*). *Karuṇā* and *Dayā* are necessary for the spiritual upliftment of the Bodhisattva. Both these qualities are very important for the matters relating to the duties of a king. In the early Mahāyāna, Mañjuśrī, the personification of wisdom, is the *primus inter pares* among the Bodhisattavas, while in the later Mahāyāna Avalokiteśvara, the personification of compassion is the first.

The concept of *mahākaruṇā* (universal compassion) is one of the cardinal principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Bodhisattva never accepts *nirvāṇa* though by meritorious and righteous deeds he becomes entitled to it. He deliberately postpones his own salvation until the whole world of suffering beings be saved. Ordinary people of little merit would always take refuge in the all-compassionate Bodhisattva. To pray for the compassion of the Bodhisattva was deemed as one of the best ways of being relieved of all sufferings. As *bodhicitta* aims at the welfare of the beings, there cannot be *bodhicitta* without *karuṇā*. Thus, Mahāyāna doctrine of universal compassion was also adopted in the Tantric Buddhist texts. In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, there is a description that how a devout Bodhisattva was earnestly praying to all the enlightened ones, bent on entering *nirvāṇa*, not to accept the *nirvāṇa*, until the suffering world be saved from the miseries of life, and everyone be helped in realizing perfect wisdom.²⁰ We find a very beautiful echo of it is the *Jñāna-siddhi* where all the compassionate Buddhas are earnestly requested not to accept their own nirvana, but to wait on and on until all the creatures attain perfect Buddhahood.²¹ In the *Sādhana-mālā*, we find it an essential part of many of the

¹⁷ Nāmarūpapariccheda, V.1365: “iccevaṃ anukampanto - sabbasatte pi sabbathā,/ sab-badukkhā-samugghātāṃ - patthentokaruṇāyati.”

¹⁸ *Karuṇā Puṇḍarika* 122.10 119; *Prajñāpāramitā Śat.* 111. Quoted in the *Buddhist Studies Journal*, Vol. No.6, May 1979, University of Delhi, Delhi, p. 81. cf. Sn.v.149: “mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ - āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe,/ evaṃ pi sabbabhūtesu - mānasā bhāvaye aparimāṇāṃ.

¹⁹ *Aṣṭasahasrikā*, XX. 371 – 73.

²⁰ *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Chapter III, vv. 4 - 6, 10 - 11, 13 - 15.

²¹ *Jñānasiddhi* of Indrabhūti, published under Gaekwad's Oriental Series, No. XLIV, Chapter III, edited with an Introduction and Index by Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, published by Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1929.

*sādhana*s to pray to the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, bent on nirvana, to wait for time eternal for the benefit of all beings.²² In the songs of the Dohas of the Siddhācāryas, we find the spirit of universal compassion expressed often in a very nice way. The stress of *karuṇā* in various ways is a characteristic feature also of *Caryāpadas*.

2.2. *Khanti* in Buddhist literature

The word *karuṇā* in Mahāyāna Sanskrit texts occurs very frequently. According to the *Prajñāpāramitā* sutras, a bodhisattva shows his *karuṇā* by resolving to suffer many torments and agonies in many births to lead others to enlightenment. He does not care for his happiness, loves all beings as a mother loves her children.²³ In the *Aṣṭasaḥasrikā*, the Lord compares the Bodhisattava to an excellent compassionate hero who would never desert the being for whom he is the savior.²⁴ Āryaśūra and Śāntideva exalt *karuṇā* above all virtues. We see that as emotionalism grew in Buddhism, this virtue was given more importance. In the beginning wisdom (*prajña*) and mercy (*dayā*) were considered equally important. In fact, *prajña* is sometimes regarded more than mercy (*dayā*). *Karuṇā* and *Dayā* are the necessary for the spiritual upliftment of the Bodhisattva. Both these qualities are very important for the matters relating to the duties of a king. In the early Mahāyāna, Mañjuśrī, the personification of wisdom, is the *primus inter pares* among the Bodhisattavas, while in the later Mahāyāna Avalokiteśvara, the personification of compassion is the first.

The concept of *mahākaruṇā* (universal compassion) is one of the cardinal principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Bodhisattva never accepts *nirvāṇa* though by meritorious and righteous deeds he becomes entitled to it. He deliberately postpones his own salvation until the whole world of suffering beings be saved. Ordinary people of little merit would always take refuge in the all-compassionate Bodhisattva. To pray for the compassion of the Bodhisattva was deemed as one of the best ways of being relieved of all sufferings. As *bodhicitta* aims at the welfare of the beings, there cannot be *bodhicitta* without *karuṇā*. Thus, Mahāyāna doctrine of universal compassion was also adopted in the Tantric Buddhist texts. In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, there is a description that how a devout Bodhisattva was earnestly praying to all the enlightened ones, bent on entering *nirvāṇa*, not to accept the *nirvāṇa*, until the suffering world be saved from the miseries of life, and everyone be helped in realizing perfect wisdom.²⁵ We find a very beautiful echo of it is the *Jñāna-siddhi* where all the compassionate Buddhas are earnestly requested not to accept

²² *Sādhana-mālā*, Vol. II, (Ed.) Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, published by Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1928, p. 344; quoted in *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* by Dasgupta, Shashi Bhushan, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, Third Edition, 1974, p. 47.

²³ *Karuṇā Puṇḍarika* 122.10 119; *Prajñāpāramitā Śāst.* 111. Quoted in the *Buddhist Studies Journal*, Vol. No.6, May 1979, University of Delhi, Delhi, p. 81. cf. Sn.V.149: “*mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ - āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe, / evaṃ pi sabbabhūtesu - mānasā bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ.*”

²⁴ *Aṣṭasaḥasrikā*, XX. 371 – 73.

²⁵ *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Chapter III, vv. 4 - 6, 10 - 11, 13 - 15.

their own nirvana, but to wait on and on until all the creatures attain perfect Buddhahood.²⁶ In the *Sādhanaṃālā*, we find it an essential part of many of the *sādhana*s to pray to the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas, bent on *nirvāṇa*, to wait for time eternal for the benefit of all beings.²⁷ In the songs of the Dohas of the Siddhācāryas, we find the spirit of universal compassion expressed often in a very nice way.

III. UNDERSTANDING COMPASSION AND TOLERANCE

The *Mettā Sutta* highlights *karuṇā* as a boundless quality essential for overcoming selfishness and fostering universal well-being, and on the other hand the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* discusses *karuṇā* as a mental quality that reduces suffering and supports the path to liberation. Similarly, the *Dhammapada* talks about *khantī* which extols patience as the highest virtue, emphasizing its role in developing resilience and moral strength and in the *Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta* illustrates how *khantī* (tolerance) ensures harmonious governance and societal stability. There is interrelation between two found in the *Visuddhimagga* which explores how *karuṇā* and *khantī* complement each other in cultivating mindfulness and ethical behaviour, forming the basis for holistic development. Often misconceived as passive or weak, these virtues represent profound resilience, emotional intelligence, and ethical fortitude. *Karuṇā* motivates selfless action to alleviate suffering, fostering empathy-driven leadership and interconnected societies. *Khantī* involves enduring adversity with patience and moral courage, facilitating conflict resolution and inclusivity. Together, they cultivate inner stability, enhance social cohesion, and nurture sustainable human development. This exploration underscores their transformative potential, advocating for their integration into modern approaches to individual and collective growth.

3.1. The essence of compassion in Theravāda Buddhism

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is a cornerstone virtue in Buddhism, regarded as essential to the path of enlightenment. It represents a deep and active longing to ease the suffering of others, grounded in wisdom and the understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings. While its essence is consistent across Buddhist traditions, the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna Buddhism emphasize distinct aspects and methods for cultivating compassion. This essay explores compassion's definitions in both traditions, highlighting their similarities and differences through canonical literature. In Theravāda Buddhism, predominantly practiced in Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and parts of South Asia, *Karuṇā* is one of the four divine abodes (*Brahmavihāras*), alongside loving-kindness (*mettā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). These states of mind are cultivated to develop a heart free from attachment,

²⁶ *Jñānasiddhi* of Indrabhūti, published under Gaekwad's Oriental Series, No. XLIV, Chapter III, edited with an Introduction and Index by Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, published by Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1929.

²⁷ *Sādhanaṃālā*, Vol. II, (Ed.) Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, published by Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1928, p. 344; quoted in *An Introduction to Tantric Buddhism* by Dasgupta, Shashi Bhushan, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, Third Edition, 1974, p. 47.

aversion, and ignorance.

Compassion is defined as a heartfelt wish for the alleviation of others' suffering. It transcends passive sympathy, embodying an active aspiration to relieve suffering without discrimination. The *Dhammapada* eloquently encapsulates this: "May all beings be happy; may all beings be without disease. May all beings experience the sensation of auspiciousness? May nobody suffer in any way?"²⁸

This verse underscores *karuṇā* as a universal wish for the happiness and well-being of all, regardless of identity or behaviour.

Compassion in the Theravāda is inseparable from wisdom (*paññā*). Practicing compassion requires understanding the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), its causes, and the impermanence of all phenomena. This wisdom is grounded in the Buddha's teachings on dependent origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) and the three marks of existence (*Tilakkhaṇa*): impermanence (*aniccā*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). The *Itivuttaka* (Verse 36) succinctly illustrates this wisdom-driven compassion: "And how, bhikkhus, does one develop the mind of compassion? One, having seen a person suffering, reflects: "This being, too, is subject to aging, illness, and death; this being also experiences birth, aging, sickness, and death."²⁹

The above passage reflects the wisdom-driven compassion in Buddhism, where understanding the shared nature of suffering (*dukkha*) leads to the development of compassion (*karuṇā*) for all beings. The *Itivuttaka* presents such reflections as key to cultivating a compassionate heart and overcoming selfish tendencies. Here, compassion arises from recognizing the universal experience of suffering, fostering a desire to alleviate it.

3.2. Compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhism

Mahāyāna Buddhism, which developed in India and spread to East Asia, elevates compassion to the central ideal of the Bodhisattva path. A Bodhisattva vows to attain Buddhahood to liberate all sentient beings from suffering. In the Mahāyāna, *karuṇā* is not just an aspiration; it is the foundation of a transformative path that integrates the perfection of wisdom, ethical conduct, and meditative concentration. Compassion in the Mahāyāna is closely tied to the concept of emptiness (*Śūnyatā*). Emptiness reveals that all phenomena lack intrinsic existence, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all beings. This insight deepens compassion, motivating selfless action for others' benefit. The *Lotus Sutra* articulates this beautifully: "As the great compassionate one, the Bodhisattva saves sentient beings by compassion, and through benefiting others, he himself attains the ultimate perfection."³⁰

²⁸ Bodhi, Bhikkhu. *The Dhammapada: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic with Annotations*. Wisdom Publications, 1998, p. 95.

²⁹ *Itivuttaka: Sayings of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu, **Thanissaro**, **Access to Insight**, 1997.

³⁰ *The Lotus Sutra*, Watson, Burton, trans. Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 324.

The above passage underscores the central role of compassion (*karuṇā*) in the Mahāyāna Buddhism, where the Bodhisattva's vow to help all sentient beings is viewed as the highest ideal. By acting compassionately toward others, the Bodhisattva not only benefits others but also progresses toward ultimate enlightenment (Buddhahood). This teaching exemplifies the selfless compassion that defines the Bodhisattva path and the portrayal highlights *karuṇā* as a transformative force, leading not only to the alleviation of suffering but to ultimate Buddhahood.

The Bodhisattvabhūmi by Asaṅga further emphasizes the Bodhisattva's commitment:³¹ "The Bodhisattva's compassion is not merely a wish for others to be free from suffering but a deep commitment to help all beings attain enlightenment. Compassion is the means by which the Bodhisattva transcends all obstacles and attains Buddhahood, not for oneself alone but for the benefit of all."

The famous Bodhisattva vow exemplifies this selflessness in the following words: "However innumerable beings are, I vow to save them. However inexhaustible the afflictions are, I vow to put an end to them. However immeasurable the Dharma teachings are, I vow to learn them. However unsurpassable the Buddha's path is, I vow to attain it."³²

Comparative Insights: Despite differing frameworks, the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna agree on compassion's indispensability for enlightenment. In the Theravāda, compassion is tied to wisdom and the impermanent nature of suffering, while in the Mahāyāna, it underpins the Bodhisattva ideal of selfless dedication to others' liberation. Both traditions emphasize compassion's universality, extending to all beings, and its transformative potential. They regard it as a powerful antidote to self-centeredness, cultivated through meditation, ethical conduct, and engagement with the world. Ultimately, compassion in Buddhism transcends personal and doctrinal boundaries, guiding practitioners toward the shared goal of alleviating suffering and attaining enlightenment for the benefit of all.

IV. ESSENCE OF TOLERANCE IN THERAVĀDA AND MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM

Tolerance, or *Khantī* in Pāli, is a central virtue in Buddhism, widely regarded as essential for spiritual development and fostering peace within oneself and society. In Buddhist teachings, tolerance is not passive resignation or mere endurance but an active, conscious, and wise response to suffering, provocation, or adversity. It involves the ability to endure hardship without anger, hatred, or frustration and is closely connected to the practice of patience (*sabari*). While both the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna traditions emphasize the importance of tolerance, their approaches reveal subtle differences.

³¹ Silk, Jonathan. *The Bodhisattvabhūmi: A Translation from the Sanskrit* (Asaṅga in the 4th Century CE). Brill Academic Publishers, 2014, p. 89.

³² Asaṅga, *Mahāyāna Sūtrālaṅkāra* (Bodhisattva's Path: The Sūtrālaṅkāra), trans. Kumārajīva and Khenpo Sodargye, 1999, p. 121.

This essay explores the concept of tolerance in these traditions, drawing on canonical texts to highlight its meaning and significance.

Tolerance in the Theravāda Buddhism: The Theravāda Buddhism, primarily practiced in Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka, and parts of South Asia, considers tolerance (*Khantī*) one of the ten perfections (*Pāramīs*). These qualities are cultivated to attain enlightenment, with tolerance being vital for overcoming anger and developing wisdom. In the Theravāda tradition, tolerance is understood as the ability to endure hardships without succumbing to negative emotions like anger (*kodha*) or hatred (*dosa*). It involves patience, forbearance, and emotional resilience. The Pāli term *Khantī* conveys not passive endurance but a skilful, wise response to suffering that acknowledges its inevitability in human existence.

The *Dhammapada* underscores the importance of tolerance with teachings such as: “Not by anger is anger pacified; by non-anger is anger pacified. This is a timeless truth.”³³ This verse encapsulates the essence of tolerance in Theravāda Buddhism: responding to anger with patience and non-retaliation rather than perpetuating a cycle of negativity. Tolerance, therefore, is seen as mental discipline, counteracting aversion and promoting inner peace.

As one of the *Pāramīs*, tolerance supports enlightenment by helping practitioners overcome internal defilements and develop wisdom. The *Visuddhimagga*, a foundational Theravāda text, elaborates: “*Khantī* is the ability to endure suffering and unpleasant situations without anger or resentment. It reflects a mature mind that understands the impermanent nature of all things.”³⁴ This wisdom-rooted tolerance recognizes suffering as part of the human condition and cultivates emotional strength to navigate adversity without anger.

Tolerance in Mahāyāna Buddhism: Mahāyāna Buddhism, which developed in India and spread to East Asia, emphasizes tolerance within the framework of the Bodhisattva ideal. A Bodhisattva vows to attain Buddhahood to benefit all beings, making tolerance integral to their path of selfless compassion and wisdom. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, tolerance transcends personal virtue and becomes a manifestation of the Bodhisattva’s compassionate resolve to help others. Asaṅga’s *Bodhisattvabhūmi* states: “The Bodhisattva, by developing tolerance, can endure the suffering of sentient beings without irritation or anger, for he has dedicated himself to their ultimate welfare.”³⁵

Tolerance here is not limited to personal hardship but extends to bearing others’ suffering with a compassionate heart. It reflects the Bodhisattva’s unshakable commitment to the welfare of all beings.

³³ *The Dhammapada: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic with Annotations*. Bodhi, Bhikkhu. Wisdom Publications, 1998, p. 111 (Verse 223).

³⁴ Nāṇamoli, Bhikkhu. *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2011, p. 300.

³⁵ Silk, Jonathan. *The Bodhisattvabhūmi: A Translation from the Sanskrit* (Authored by Asaṅga in the 4th Century CE). Brill Academic Publishers, 2014, p. 104.

Mahāyāna also links tolerance to the realization of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which teaches that all phenomena lack inherent existence. This insight fosters an understanding of interconnectedness, helping practitioners view suffering and hostility as transient illusions.

The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* emphasizes this connection: “A Bodhisattva, having fully realized emptiness, can remain patient in the face of the most severe provocation because he knows that all suffering is based on illusion.”³⁶

This wisdom enables Bodhisattvas to respond to adversity with equanimity, rooted in their understanding of the nature of reality.

The *Lotus Sūtra* reinforces this view: “The Bodhisattva who has cultivated the perfection of patience can remain unmoved, no matter what difficulties he faces, because he sees that all things are empty and impermanent.”³⁷

Thus, tolerance in Mahāyāna Buddhism reflects spiritual maturity, informed by compassion and the realization of emptiness.

Despite differences in emphasis, Theravāda and Mahāyāna agree that tolerance is indispensable for spiritual progress. Both traditions view it as an active, wise response to suffering, characterized by patience and compassion. In Theravāda, tolerance is tied to personal liberation and wisdom, focusing on overcoming anger and understanding the impermanent nature of suffering. In Mahāyāna, tolerance is central to the Bodhisattva ideal, emphasizing compassion for others and the aspiration to liberate all beings. Mahāyāna further deepens the concept by linking it to the realization of emptiness, broadening its scope beyond personal practice to include the selfless commitment to others’ welfare.

Tolerance (*Khantī*) is a cornerstone of Buddhist practice in both Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions, serving as a tool for overcoming anger, fostering wisdom, and cultivating compassion. While Theravāda emphasizes tolerance as a *Pāramī* leading to enlightenment, Mahāyāna elevates it as a defining quality of the Bodhisattva path. Regardless of these distinctions, both traditions recognize tolerance as a transformative force, guiding practitioners toward inner peace and the ultimate goal of alleviating suffering for all beings.

4.1. Compassion and tolerance as expressions of strength

Compassion (*karuṇā*) as Strength: In Buddhism, compassion transcends a mere emotional response to suffering. It embodies an active, dynamic wish to alleviate suffering, rooted in wisdom and an understanding of the impermanent and interconnected nature of all beings. The Pāli term *karuṇā* signifies a profound, heartfelt desire for others to be free from suffering and its causes. This conception goes beyond conventional interpretations of compassion as sympathy or pity. The Buddha emphasized the universality of compassion in

³⁶ See Conze, Edward. *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary (Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra or Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra)*, Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973.

³⁷ *The Lotus Sutra*. Hurvitz, Leon. Columbia University Press, 1976, p. 238.

teachings such as the verse from the *Dhammapada*:³⁸ “May all beings be happy; may all beings be without disease. May all beings experience the sensation of auspiciousness. May nobody suffer in any way.” This boundless aspiration extends to all beings, even those who are difficult or hostile, transcending personal attachments and ego-driven desires.

Compassion, often seen as vulnerability in society, is viewed by the Buddha as spiritual strength. It demands emotional maturity, the ability to overcome ego, and the courage to act selflessly, even when confronting suffering. The Buddha’s life exemplifies this strength, as he remained compassionate despite facing personal hardship and hostility. By following his example, practitioners cultivate a heart that embraces adversity with kindness and transcends prejudices.

Tolerance (*khantī*) as Inner Strength: The virtue of tolerance, *khantī*, is not passive resignation but an active process of transformation. It reflects the ability to endure suffering and difficulty without giving in to anger or frustration. *Khantī* aligns with the perfection of patience (*Sabarī*), one of the ten *Pāramī* (perfections) necessary for enlightenment. The *Dhammapada* teaches:³⁹ “Not by anger is anger pacified; by non-anger is anger pacified. This is a timeless truth.” Here, the Buddha underscores that tolerance, grounded in wisdom and understanding, is the antidote to anger and conflict.

Tolerance involves a disciplined mind that acknowledges suffering and responds with equanimity rather than emotional reactivity. It is not about avoiding conflict but addressing it with awareness and wisdom. By cultivating tolerance, individuals’ developmental peace and reduce emotional suffering.

4.2. Compassion and tolerance in interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal challenges and the role of compassion: In daily life, compassion and tolerance foster harmony amidst interpersonal challenges. The Buddha advised in the *Sīla-Vīmaṃsaka Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*:⁴⁰ “A person who, by enduring the provocations of others, does not give rise to anger is said to have conquered the world.”

The above teaching of the Buddha highlights the inner strength required to remain composed and compassionate, even in difficult circumstances.

The Strength of Compassionate Action: Compassion and tolerance demand active engagement and decision-making. The Buddha’s example illustrates the transformative power of compassionate action. In the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, he likened compassion to a mother protecting her child:⁴¹ “As a mother

³⁸ *The Dhammapada: A New Translation of the Buddhist Classic with Annotations*. Bodhi, Bhikkhu. Wisdom Publications, 1998, p. 235 (Verse 197).

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 97 (Verse 223).

⁴⁰ *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, and Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans., Wisdom Publications, 1995, p. 112.

⁴¹ *The Āṅguttara Nikāya*, Trans. Bodhi, Bhikkhu, *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, Wisdom Publications, 2012, p. 776.

would protect her child, even at the risk of her life, so should one cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.”

This boundless love reflects immense emotional resilience and the transcendence of self-interest, embodying true spiritual strength.

4.3. Compassion and tolerance for human development

In today’s world, where aggression, competition, and materialism often dominate our daily lives, compassion and tolerance are increasingly recognized as essential for addressing some of the most pressing global challenges. From political conflict to social inequality, environmental destruction to mental health crises, the need for compassion and tolerance is undeniable. These two qualities not only promote individual well-being but are also vital for societal development and global harmony. By exploring the roles of compassion and tolerance, particularly through the lenses of emotional well-being, social justice, and conflict resolution, we can better understand how these values contribute to a healthier, more just, and peaceful world.

Compassion and Emotional Well-being: At the core of human development is emotional well-being, and compassion plays a key role in fostering this essential aspect of life. In a world increasingly marked by stress, anxiety, and mental health crises, compassion offers a counterbalance to the negative emotions that can overwhelm individuals. Psychological research corroborates what many ancient traditions, including Buddhism, have long suggested—that practicing compassion is not only beneficial to others but also to oneself. Studies have shown that compassion can reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and loneliness, which are becoming more prevalent in today’s fast-paced, digitalized society.

Self-compassion, in particular, is an essential component of emotional well-being. It involves treating oneself with kindness and understanding, especially in times of failure or difficulty, rather than being harshly self-critical. When individuals practice self-compassion, they are more likely to experience emotional resilience and less likely to succumb to feelings of worthlessness or distress. This emotional resilience, in turn, fosters a sense of fulfillment and purpose, as it allows individuals to move through challenges with a balanced and open mind.

Additionally, compassion for others is a powerful tool for building stronger relationships and deeper connections with those around us. When people demonstrate empathy and kindness toward others, they create positive social environments that reduce isolation and promote mutual support. In a world that often prioritizes individual success over collective well-being, fostering compassion can help individuals break through barriers of isolation, enhancing the mental and emotional well-being of society as a whole.

Compassion and Social Justice: Beyond individual emotional health, compassion is also a driving force for social change and justice. It motivates individuals and communities to take action to address systemic inequalities, such as racism, poverty, gender inequality, and economic disparity. When people

genuinely care about the suffering of others, particularly those who are marginalized or oppressed, they are more likely to engage in actions that seek to address and rectify these injustices.

One of the primary reasons compassion plays such an important role in social justice is that it fosters empathy. Empathy allows individuals to understand the experiences and challenges of those who are different from themselves. By practicing compassion, individuals are more likely to recognize the shared humanity that connects all people, regardless of race, nationality, religion, or socioeconomic status. This empathy is crucial in reducing prejudice and building a more inclusive, equitable society.

Compassion also acts as a powerful motivator for collective action. Whether through grassroots movements, community organizing, or national campaigns, compassionate individuals and groups work tirelessly to create policies and systems that promote equality, justice, and human rights. As a result, compassion becomes the cornerstone of societal harmony, ensuring that efforts to tackle inequality are not only driven by logic or legal frameworks but also by a deep commitment to human dignity and the well-being of all individuals.

Tolerance and Social Cohesion: In a world that is increasingly interconnected, diverse, and pluralistic, tolerance has become a key pillar for social cohesion. Tolerance allows for the peaceful coexistence of individuals and groups with differing beliefs, values, and practices. In today's globalized world, people are often exposed to a variety of cultures, religions, and ideologies. While this diversity is a source of richness and innovation, it can also be a source of tension and conflict if not approached with tolerance.

Tolerance involves accepting and respecting differences without judgment, recognizing that diversity is not something to be feared but celebrated. It is the willingness to coexist peacefully, even when one's personal beliefs or values may differ from those of others. In a world that often emphasizes competition and division, tolerance offers a refreshing alternative that promotes collaboration, dialogue, and mutual respect.

Buddhist teachings on *Khantī* (patience) and non-reactivity emphasize the importance of tolerance in fostering social harmony. *Khantī* encourages individuals to practice patience in the face of adversity, to remain calm and composed even amid conflict. This teaching is particularly relevant in today's polarized societies, where divisive rhetoric and hostility often dominate public discourse. By embracing tolerance, individuals and communities create a foundation for civil discourse, where differences can be discussed respectfully and peacefully, rather than through hostility or violence.

Tolerance and Conflict Resolution: Tolerance also plays a crucial role in conflict resolution. In an increasingly polarized world, where social, political, and cultural differences often lead to conflict, tolerance offers a non-violent approach to addressing differences. Rather than escalating tensions or resorting to aggression, tolerance enables individuals to engage in dialogue,

listen to opposing viewpoints, and seek common ground. In essence, tolerance promotes understanding, which is essential for resolving conflicts peacefully.

In the context of international relations, tolerance is key to resolving global conflicts and fostering cooperation between nations. Diplomatic negotiations, peace treaties, and international alliances often depend on the ability of leaders to tolerate differing perspectives and work toward mutually beneficial solutions. The ongoing peace efforts in areas such as the Middle East or South Asia, for example, often require leaders to put aside deep-rooted prejudices and engage in dialogues that prioritize peace and reconciliation over division and hostility.

On a more personal level, tolerance in interpersonal relationships allows individuals to navigate disagreements and conflicts with grace and understanding. Instead of reacting impulsively or aggressively, tolerant individuals are more likely to take a step back, assess the situation, and respond in a way that fosters collaboration rather than confrontation. This approach not only resolves conflicts but also strengthens relationships and promotes long-term harmony.

The Power of Compassion and Tolerance for Human Development: Compassion and tolerance are not merely abstract ideals but practical values that can transform both individuals and societies. Compassion, by fostering emotional well-being and motivating actions for social justice, enables individuals to connect with others on a deep, empathetic level. It encourages a society that is inclusive, equitable, and committed to addressing the suffering of others. Tolerance, on the other hand, provides the foundation for peaceful coexistence in a diverse and interconnected world. It enables individuals and communities to engage in respectful dialogue, resolve conflicts, and build social cohesion despite differences.

Together, compassion and tolerance create a powerful framework for human development. They encourage individuals to care for themselves and others, to seek justice and fairness, and to resolve conflicts in peaceful, constructive ways. In a world that faces complex challenges, these values are more important than ever. By embracing compassion and tolerance, we can create a world that values human dignity, fosters emotional well-being, and works towards a more just and peaceful global society.

V. THE INTERCONNECTION OF COMPASSION AND TOLERANCE FOR GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Compassion and tolerance are indispensable for addressing issues such as climate change, social inequality, and technological advancements: **Environmental Crisis:** Compassion motivates actions to protect the Earth, while tolerance fosters collaboration among diverse stakeholders. **Technological Ethics:** Compassion ensures equitable technological progress, and tolerance promotes inclusive debates about ethical implication.

To sum up, *karuṇā* (compassion) is not merely emotional sympathy; it motivates individuals to act selflessly to alleviate the suffering of others. This

active compassion fosters interconnection, breaking down barriers of selfishness and creating strong, supportive communities. A compassionate person is not weak but emotionally resilient, capable of facing challenges with equanimity. Such individuals understand the needs of others and prioritize collective well-being, fostering trust and cooperation. Compassion also inspires forgiveness and reconciliation, breaking cycles of conflict and promoting healing.

Khantī (tolerance) involves enduring hardships, criticism, and adversities with calmness, reflecting immense inner strength. It requires self-control and a deep understanding of impermanence (*aniccā*). Tolerance enables individuals to approach disagreements with understanding, reducing hostility and fostering peaceful dialogue. By preventing impulsive reactions, it preserves relationships and promotes long-term harmony. Tolerance demonstrates moral fortitude in the face of injustice or provocation, encouraging thoughtful responses over reactive aggression.

Both virtues cultivate mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and ethical conduct, which are foundational for personal and professional growth. Compassion bridges divides, while tolerance ensures respectful coexistence despite differences. Together, they create an environment where individuals can express their potential without fear of judgment or harm. In Buddhism, these two virtues are indispensable for achieving higher states of consciousness and, ultimately, liberation (*nibbāna*) for human development.

Compassion and tolerance are not signs of weakness but vital qualities for personal and collective growth. They allow individuals to connect with others, act selflessly, and resolve conflicts with wisdom and patience. Drawing from Buddhist teachings, these virtues offer a path to inner peace, societal harmony, and global sustainability, fostering a future where all beings can flourish. Far from being weaknesses, *karuṇā* and *Khantī* embody transformation strength which provides the tools to navigate life with wisdom, equanimity, and compassion. In a world often marked by conflict and division, these virtues hold the key to fostering individual and collective human development.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research paper explores the concept of *karuṇā* (compassion) and *khantī* (tolerance) in Buddhism and its expression through social participation, particularly in Human Development. The central argument is that compassion drives Buddhists to actively engage in alleviating the suffering of others. This compassion is not just an emotional response but a call to action, following the example of the Buddha. While the Buddha's primary concern was spiritual liberation, the practice of compassion in Buddhism expands beyond individual spiritual growth to include social involvement.

Here, it is argued that Buddhist engagement with the world, driven by *karuṇā*, is a significant aspect of the tradition, not just a spiritual practice but an active force for social good. The compassion (*karuṇā*) compels Buddhists to serve others and address social issues. The expression of *karuṇā* in Buddhism is seen through social participation, which includes conflict resolution and social

activism. The core belief is that physical and spiritual peace is interconnected, and the path to *nirvāṇa* involves resolving societal issues. The Buddhist tradition is shown to not be reclusive or world-negating but one that actively engages with the world. Examples of contemporary Buddhist social engagement are examined to illustrate how *Karuṇā* is put into action.

The paper further highlights the responses of Buddhists to three major world events: the COVID-19 pandemic, the military coup in Myanmar, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. These events underscore how Buddhists, motivated by *karuṇā*, take active roles in conflict resolution and social activism. Buddhist organizations like the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation have provided humanitarian aid to those affected by the war, showcasing *karuṇā* through practical acts of compassion. The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated Buddhist social engagement.

Across the world, Buddhist communities helped alleviate the economic hardships caused by the pandemic, offering social services and fundraising for medical supplies and the best example was Vietnam Buddhist Sangha which has demonstrated through such activities during the pandemic period and also of the Vietnamese Monks and Nuns of Gautam Buddha University has done a lot of social services in and around its campus for the needed people. Buddhist temples worldwide engaged in similar acts of charity and support for those affected by the virus, proving that *karuṇā* extends beyond mere emotional sympathy to tangible actions that address human suffering.

The social participation of Buddhists, driven by compassion, contributes significantly to the betterment of society. The acts of compassion displayed by Buddhists inspire others to engage in similar acts, creating a ripple effect of kindness and goodwill. These actions also demonstrate that *karuṇā* can lead to positive societal change by fostering cooperation, sensitivity to others' suffering, and social unity. *karuṇā*, as a guiding principle, has the potential to unite diverse individuals and groups in their shared efforts to alleviate suffering and build a better society, which ultimately led to human development. *karuṇā* is a universal call to compassion, inviting all individuals, regardless of religious affiliation, to act with kindness and sensitivity toward others. By embracing compassion, society can move toward a more just and peaceful future, with Buddhism providing a model of social engagement and activism rooted in altruism.

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BUDDHISM AROUND THE WORLD – AFRICA: PERSPECTIVES OF AFRICAN BUDDHIST FOLLOWERS

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Abstract:

The study explores how Buddhism has been introduced and practiced in Africa. The study highlights that Buddhism remains relatively new to many Africans, often encountered through media, literature, and educational institutions like the African Buddhist Seminary (ABS) in South Africa, founded in 1994. Surveying 26 participants from seven African countries, the research finds that most converts were previously adherents of Christianity, Islam, or indigenous traditions. Many were drawn to Buddhism through free monastic training programs and accessible teachings, leading to profound personal transformations. Key practices such as meditation, mindfulness (*sati*), and the Middle Way fostered emotional resilience, compassion (*karuṇā*), and deeper insights into impermanence and karma. The study concludes that Buddhism, when adapted to local cultural contexts, provides practical and ethical solutions for modern challenges, enhancing personal well-being and social cohesion across African communities.

Keywords: *Buddhism, compassion, African Buddhist followers.*

I. INTRODUCTION

This section aims to explore how Africans perceive the Buddhist way and its teachings. For many Africans, Buddhism is a new concept, often introduced through cultural channels such as Chinese films. These films may spark interest in Buddhism, particularly through the portrayal of Shoaling monks, which serves as an entry point for Buddhist educators and an initial source of inspiration for many.

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II. PATHWAY TO BUDDHISM

Some participants encountered Buddhist teachings while using libraries or reading books, often discovering ideas they had never previously encountered. After completing their Advanced Level or Matric studies, many sought opportunities for further education. News about free monastic training in South Africa, often found in newspaper advertisements, motivated them to pursue this path. Consequently, many participants cited newspapers, media, or friends as their first sources of inspiration for engaging with Buddhism.

The African Buddhist Seminary¹ was established in South Africa in 1994 and has since trained many students over three years. After completing their training, many students share their newfound knowledge with friends, reinforcing the community aspect of their journey. According to Buddha's teachings, sharing knowledge and good fortune with others is an important virtue. Most participants first encountered Buddhism through friends and media, with fewer discovering it through independent reading.

III. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

The research included 26 participants from seven African countries, with a gender breakdown of 2 females and 24 males. The countries represented are: (1) Congo: 2. (2) Madagascar: 3. (3) Malawi: 4. (4) Mozambique: 1. (5) South Africa: 8. (6) Tanzania: 7. (7) Uganda: 1

3.1 Religious background and transition

Participants came from various religious backgrounds, often practicing the faith of their parents or other religions before exploring Buddhism. After completing the three-year monastic course at ABS, many chose to adopt Buddhism as their primary spiritual path. They now actively incorporate Buddhist teachings into their daily lives. The breakdown of participants' original religious beliefs.²

One participant, already a Buddhist, was born into a family of practitioners, which sparked their interest in further study. They perceive Buddhism as scientifically grounded in the concepts of cause and effect.

3.2 Educational background

The participants displayed a high average level of education, with most holding at least an Advanced Level/Matric qualification or higher. This educational foundation encourages them to continue exploring and deepening their understanding of Buddhist practice. The breakdown of their educational qualifications.³

3.3 Age distribution

A significant number of participants belong to the younger age group,

¹ ABS.

² (1) Christian: 12. (2) Catholic: 5. (3) Islamic: 3. (4) Anglican: 2. (5) Lutheran: 1. (6) Protestant: 1. (7) Baha'I: 1. (8) Buddhist: 1.

³ (1) M.A: 1. (2) B.A: 6. (3) Diploma: 1. (4) Advanced Level: 18.

which is a positive indicator for the future of Buddhism in Africa.⁴

This young demographic aligns with the Buddha's teachings in the *Dhammapada*, which emphasize the importance of utilizing each stage of life – childhood, youth, and old age – to develop a meaningful and purposeful existence. The introduction of Buddhist concepts to younger generations is crucial, as they can achieve significant growth during this formative period.

IV. STAGES OF LIFE AND THE PRACTICE OF BUDDHISM

The Buddha stated in the *Dhammapada* that life consists of three stages: childhood, youth, and The Buddha, as recorded in the *Dhammapada*, elucidates that life unfolds in three distinct stages - childhood, youth, and old age. The wise are those who utilize each of these stages to cultivate their lives with balance and purpose.⁵ In particular, youth is regarded as the most crucial phase, as it is during this period that individuals can most effectively harness both their mental and physical capacities. Introducing the younger generation to Buddhist teachings is therefore essential; doing so not only equips them with the tools for personal transformation but also deepens their comprehension of the nature of existence.

In our study, participants articulated numerous benefits derived from their engagement with Buddhism. Their experiences reveal that practicing core Buddhist principles - such as mindfulness (*sati*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and the pursuit of wisdom (*paññā*) - not only enhances personal development but also fosters a more nuanced understanding of life's challenges. These insights provide a valuable guide for those seeking to incorporate Buddhist practices into their daily lives, illustrating how such practices can lead to greater self-awareness and a more harmonious relationship with the world. Ultimately, the reflections offered by these practitioners underscore the transformative potential of a Buddhist way of life, presenting a compelling model for individual and societal growth.

V. BENEFITS GAINED THROUGH THE PRACTICE OF BUDDHISM

Most participants completed a three-year monastic training course at the African Buddhist Seminary (ABS). After their training, they shared their reflections. Many adopted new lifestyles in line with the five precepts, which entail abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and consuming intoxicants. Below are some of their thoughts regarding the benefits they gained:

The participant's reflections vividly illustrate the transformative impact of Buddhist practice on personal growth. Through dedicated meditation and adherence to the five precepts, they report a profound change in self-identity, noting that they are no longer the person they once were. This transformation is rooted in acquiring knowledge about meditation, the concept of impermanence,

⁴ (1) Ages 10-20: 1. (2) Ages 20-30: 16. (3) Ages 30-40: 3. (4) Ages 40-50: 4. (5) Ages 50-60: 1. (6) Ages 60-70: 1.

⁵ S. Sumangala Thera (1914), p. 25.

and the significance of ethical conduct - specifically, understanding the Four Noble Truths as the foundation for regulating one's life.⁶

Central to their experience is the embodiment of the Middle Way, as taught by the Buddha. They assert that life should not be defined by its inherent suffering or by an overly optimistic perspective, but rather by how one chooses to live. By internalizing Buddhist teachings, the participant has not only adapted a more balanced outlook on life but has also integrated lessons from other traditions - such as blending aspects of Christian and Buddhist thought - to enhance their capacity for compassion and to mitigate negative emotions.

(1) Living the Middle Way: I strive to embody the Middle Way, as the Buddha taught. Some say life is filled with suffering, while others view it positively. However, I believe the key is not whether life is good or bad but how I choose to live. (2) Internalization of Teachings: While I may not be a perfect practitioner, I do my best to internalize what I have learned, and I find it helpful in my daily life. (3) Integrating Teachings: I was a strict follower of Christianity but struggled to fully understand its commandments. Upon blending Buddhist and Christian teachings, I discovered numerous benefits, including a heightened sense of compassion for all sentient beings and a fear of negative actions. This integration has been a significant benefit of my Buddhist practice. (4) Cultural Understanding: Living with individuals from different cultures has taught me that people of various religions can coexist peacefully. Buddhism promotes tolerance, and as students of diverse backgrounds, we supported each other as one family under the Buddhist umbrella. This experience was invaluable. (5) Emotional Regulation: In the past, I would easily become angry over trivial matters, but I have noticed a positive change. I realize that anger brings no benefit and only harms my mind. While I still experience anger at times, I am learning to manage it. (6) Collective Karma: As an African native, I share in the collective karma faced by our communities. Nonetheless, my capacity for love and compassion towards all beings has grown over time. I continue to reflect inwardly. (7) Learning Patience and Community Living: I have learned about meditation, impermanence, and the importance of causes and conditions. I've also gained insights into living harmoniously with people from diverse backgrounds and practicing patience as a monk. (8) The Zen koans were mentally stimulating and often profound. Our relationships became more relaxed, and stress - such as exam-related anxiety - was significantly reduced. There was always time to address problems that arose or to let them go without grief. Strangers felt comfortable opening up to me. (9) I gained a clearer understanding of the three characteristics of existence, which inspired me to pursue my practice full-time. I developed faith and confidence in being present, regardless of what thoughts or feelings might arise. I learned the significance of taking refuge in the Triple Gems by embracing uncertainty. This realization, achieved through my *vipassanā* practice, taught me that *vipassanā* is not merely a process of letting go, but rather an opening up

⁶ Author's survey (2023).

to the present moment. This transformation has profoundly changed my life.

Furthermore, their journey emphasizes the importance of emotional regulation. Once prone to anger over trivial matters, they have learned, through practices like *vipassanā*, to manage their emotional responses effectively. This shift has resulted in a clearer understanding of the three characteristics of existence - *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anattā* (non-self) - which has inspired a full-time commitment to their practice. They now take refuge in the Triple Gems with a renewed sense of presence, acknowledging the interplay of cause and effect in shaping their life circumstances. Additionally, the participant has cultivated a strong sense of collective responsibility by recognizing their shared karma with their community. This realization has motivated them to serve others and contribute to a more compassionate society. Their narrative further demonstrates an increased openness to diverse cultural experiences, improved communication skills, and the adoption of healthier lifestyle choices, such as abstaining from meat, smoking, and excessive drinking. (10) I readjusted my mindset after realizing that there is more to life than merely adhering to preconditioned beliefs. (11) I began to understand the reasons behind my life's circumstances. I took responsibility for my actions and the causes and conditions that shaped my life. Accepting my karma, I recognized that the most meaningful action is to help others. I vowed to do my best each day to be of service. I came to accept my place within the larger whole, understanding that everything, including myself, is empty and impermanent. (12) I discovered that enlightenment can be achieved through one's own efforts, without relying on intermediaries, such as the church. I learned to understand my mind and myself better, extending *mettā* and *karuṇā* to all beings and engaging in Kuan Yin bodhisattva practice. I met many interesting people along the way and had the opportunity to contribute to the dharma. (13) I developed clarity and calmness of mind, along with greater tolerance for others and an increase in wisdom and compassion. (14) I learned how to conduct my daily life, whether in my neighborhood or other settings, contributing my skills and building relationships. While one cannot be happy all the time, we strive to alleviate our suffering through the Eightfold Path, as taught by the Buddha. Among African communities, understanding Buddhism can be challenging due to its depth and profundity. Although I do not identify as a Buddhist, I find that I thrive by applying Buddhist principles in my life. (15) No matter what mindset I find myself in, I strive to be present, using my awareness wisely and facing situations with a conscientious attitude. I recognize the cause and effect of my actions, and with an open, calm, and transparent mind, I understand my current state and achievements, fostering a sense of strength, maturity, knowledge, and skills that contribute to my mental and spiritual satisfaction. (16) I have come to understand the importance of recognizing my responsibility for everything I do, and the resulting consequences - whether positive or negative. I have learned patience and respect for all living beings, acknowledging their right to exist and thrive. I believe that all beings are on a path toward enlightenment, which fuels my growing compassion and willingness to help others liberate themselves from

suffering. Nowadays, I find that I am much calmer and rarely experience anger, hatred, or negative emotions. My moral conduct has significantly improved since I began learning about Buddhism. (17) I have realized that suffering permeates our world, affecting everyone regardless of wealth or status. My daily thoughts and actions have shifted towards speaking and acting in ways that minimize suffering for others, emphasizing compassion for all living beings. (18) I strive to treat every living being equally by cultivating a compassionate attitude toward all. Previously, I did not treat animals well, but I have since decided to stop eating meat and have become a vegetarian. (19) Practicing Buddhism has allowed me to develop compassion for all living beings and to recognize both my own suffering and that of others, leading to my spiritual growth. (20) I have learned about meditation, the law of karma, and the interconnectedness of all life. In the past, I viewed animals solely as sources of food, but I now understand them as our relatives. My experiences have also taught me how to coexist with people from diverse backgrounds. I have become more adept at explaining ideas and speaking in front of others, abilities I previously struggled with. I have learned Chinese and become fluent in English, expanding my circle of friends beyond just those from Tanzania. I've adopted healthier habits, such as abstaining from smoking, drinking, and eating meat, which have transformed my life significantly. (21) Previously, I felt confined by dogmatic traditional doctrines. Now, I am more open and receptive to a diverse range of genuine and practical experiences – insights I have discovered through Buddhism. My interactions with others have broadened, and my personality has transformed tremendously. (22) Buddhism has opened my mind, enabling me to understand phenomena more clearly.

In summary, these reflections underscore that the practice of Buddhism facilitates a deep, holistic transformation - integrating ethical, emotional, and intellectual dimensions - thereby fostering both individual well-being and broader social harmony.⁷

Author's comments

Many participants now adhere to the five precepts and strive to live according to the Middle Way, as taught by the Buddha. Several had Christian backgrounds, but after exploring Buddhism, one remarked, "When I started blending Buddhism with Christianity, I discovered numerous benefits in my life, including a greater awareness of negative actions and an increase in love and compassion for all sentient beings."

Their perceptions of animals have also evolved; they no longer view them merely as food. One participant stated, "I used to treat animals poorly, seeing them only as sources of food. Now, I recognize them as our relatives and have made the conscious choice to stop eating meat and become a vegetarian." This shift illustrates their significant lifestyle changes.

Many individuals from other faiths believe that liberation requires external assistance. However, these participants have realized that enlightenment can be achieved through their own efforts, without reliance on intermediaries.

⁷ Author's survey (2023).

They now understand their responsibility for their actions and the resulting consequences – be they positive or negative – reflecting the Buddhist concept of karma.

At the seminary, students from various faiths live together for three years, sharing meals, learning, and practicing together. They have found that people of different religions can coexist peacefully, and Buddhism teaches them tolerance. They practice without criticizing other faiths, fostering mutual respect among all individuals.

They engage in Zen, *Samatha*, and *vipassanā* meditation, incorporating their experiences into daily life. Through *vipassanā* practice, they have learned that it is not merely a process of letting go but rather an opening up to the present moment. This understanding has fundamentally changed their lives.

Additionally, they recognize the importance of helping others, embracing the concepts of emptiness and impermanence. Many express that the most meaningful action in life is to assist others, vowing to contribute positively each day. They have come to accept that they are just a small part of a larger whole, understanding that everything, including themselves, is impermanent.

Participants have developed positive habits, such as abstaining from smoking, drinking, and unhealthy eating, which can significantly benefit impoverished communities by reducing unnecessary expenditures.

Their reflections align with the Middle Way, as taught by the Buddha. They acknowledge that “one cannot be happy all the time; we strive to eliminate suffering through the Eightfold Path.” The responses gathered illustrate how many have transformed their lives through Buddhism, now following the Middle Way as the Buddha emphasized.

VI. WHAT IS THE MIDDLE WAY?

The Eightfold Path is recommended for everyone to follow. Most respondents are now practicing the Middle Way, emphasizing the importance of self-practice. This understanding is crucial for creating a better society.

Often, people may think they will become disheartened after following this system for just a few days. In reality, many participants have already begun doing meaningful work for others, which ultimately benefits themselves. The following responses illustrate how they plan to continue their practice for their benefit:

- (1) Personal Practice: I am committed to practicing these teachings, not just by reading books. People are suffering everywhere, and we must share these valuable concepts. For example, this temple (Nan Hua Temple) is actively donating resources to those in need. Buddhism teaches us how to create merit through acts of kindness. There’s also a temple in Congo affiliated with Nan Hua Temple in South Africa, where Master Hui Ren is helping to start a project to assist people. I hope to contribute to this effort. While I am not yet prepared to become a monk due to personal reasons, I aspire to do so when the time is right.
- (2) Community Support: I plan to earn money to help address the pressing issues facing Africa, such

as war, hunger, and AIDS. I want to provide both material and spiritual support, allowing people to experience the joy of liberation. Without addressing these fundamental needs, true liberation is difficult to achieve. (3) Spreading Awareness: If I return to Malawi, most people there are Muslims and Christians who have never encountered a Buddhist monk or heard of Buddhism. My first step will be to share my understanding with my family, which will enable them to spread this knowledge further. We can also distribute free books containing Buddhist teachings in my community.

Participants expressed a multifaceted commitment to integrating Buddhist teachings into both their personal lives and broader communities. Many stated that their daily practice - through meditation, the recognition of impermanence, and adherence to the five precepts along with the Four Noble Truths - has fundamentally transformed their identity, enabling them to overcome previous limitations and extend compassion to those in need.⁸ (4) Mind Training: I will work on understanding my mind, particularly what anger truly is and its associations. I plan to achieve this by reading various Buddhist sutras, consulting with monks, and practicing meditation. (5) Commitment to Study: I aim to study Buddhism thoroughly, become a monk, and help teach it across the African continent. (6) Ethical Living: I have learned the importance of refraining from killing, stealing, lying, engaging in sexual misconduct, and consuming alcohol. These teachings are vital for leading a moral life, and I intend to uphold them throughout my life. (7) Monastic Aspirations: I have started practicing Ch'an Pure Land teachings at Nan Hua Temple and intend to become an ordained monk in the future. (8) Continued Practice: I plan to remain in robes and practice meditation for as long as possible, interspersed with study and work. (9) Monastic Path: My intention is to continue along the monastic path and become a fully ordained nun. (10) Ongoing Support and Teaching: I will continue attending meditation retreats and practicing Guan Yin meditation. Additionally, I aim to teach meditation to beginners and support Dharmagiri and its teachers, engaging in any other dharma work that comes my way. (11) Bodhisattva Vow: Having taken the Bodhisattva Aspiration vow, I am committed to benefiting all sentient beings. (12) Commitment to Self-Improvement: As I strive for survival, I recognize the value of what I have learned. Understanding the truth is liberating in itself; therefore, I will continue to practice and learn until I achieve enlightenment. I will study diligently to understand more concepts and apply them in my daily life, seeking advice from those with greater knowledge. My goal is to use my understanding to teach and share ideas with others, all grounded in the fundamental teachings of the Buddha. (13) Future Aspirations: Whatever circumstances allow, my aspiration is to become an African monk and to propagate the

⁸ Participant Responses (2023).

Buddha Dharma in as many countries as possible. Before that, I wish to deepen my study of Buddhism, attend more lectures, and continue my meditation practice. (14) I hope to continue practicing and applying what I have learned to achieve Buddhahood. (15) I plan to meditate at home and introduce this practice to my friends. I have some background knowledge, and if I encounter any difficulties, I can reach out to the Masters in South Africa and Tanzania for guidance. I aim to engage with Buddhism in my local area, where there is a large Hindu temple that we can use as a starting point for our activities. (16) Due to the positive and transparent nature of Buddhism, I wish to integrate its principles into my daily life to foster personal growth, influence others positively, and enhance my relationships. (17) I hope to return to Africa for a period to help create conditions conducive to sharing the Buddha's teachings with those interested in the Dharma.

Several respondents emphasized the importance of living the Middle Way, asserting that true fulfillment is not determined by external circumstances but by the conscious choices made in daily life. This balanced approach, which integrates insights from both Buddhist and other religious traditions, has fostered an increased capacity for compassion (*karuṇā*) and a proactive stance toward mitigating negative emotions.⁹ Community engagement also emerged as a vital theme. Some participants plan to generate resources to address pressing issues - such as war, hunger, and disease - by providing both material and spiritual support, thereby creating conditions for collective liberation. Others underscored the need to spread awareness about Buddhist principles in regions where Buddhism is less known, especially among predominantly Muslim and Christian communities, by sharing Dhamma literature and personal insights. In addition, a strong commitment to mind training was evident. Participants described their efforts to deepen their understanding of their own minds through the study of various Buddhist sutras, consultation with monastic teachers, and regular meditation practices such as *vipassanā*. While some aspire to embrace a fully monastic lifestyle, others intend to continue as lay practitioners, contributing to Buddhist teaching and community outreach. Notably, several individuals have taken the Bodhisattva vow, affirming their commitment to benefit all sentient beings. They also highlighted the importance of ethical living and self-improvement as foundations for both personal and societal progress. In summary, the diverse responses illustrate a robust engagement with Buddhist practice that encompasses personal transformation, community support, and the dissemination of Dhamma. These initiatives reflect a holistic approach to spiritual development, promising substantial benefits for individuals and society alike.

Author's comments

Participants expressed a desire to engage in charitable work in their home countries. One individual mentioned, "First, I can share my understanding

⁹ Participant Responses (2023).

with my family, and then extend it to others.” This approach is fundamental to establishing Buddhism in any country: a local person must first understand and practice the teachings, which can then be shared with others, ultimately reducing suffering.

Many participants aspire to become monks and continue their service to African communities. This intention is commendable, as it would facilitate the swift spread of Buddhist activities in local communities. Additionally, these individuals are committed to following the five precepts for a lifetime.

Most respondents are eager to incorporate Buddhist teachings into their lives and strive to set a positive example for others. While many choose to remain lay practitioners, a few are working toward becoming monks or nuns. After beginning their practice, they actively share their insights with family, friends, and others, mirroring the path taken by the Buddha, who first achieved enlightenment and then shared his knowledge with the world. This sequence – understanding followed by teaching – is critical for successful dissemination of the teachings.

VII. HOW THEY HOPE TO SHARE THEIR UNDERSTANDING WITH OTHERS

(1) Community Projects: I plan to share my knowledge with others and initiate projects to help the poor and needy. We could establish a Buddhist school or introduce Buddhism as a subject in schools. (2) Collaborative Learning: By teaching and working together, we can exchange personal experiences to enrich our understanding. (3) Building Relationships: I will cooperate with others in all required activities to foster strong and meaningful relationships, even if it may be challenging. (4) Exploring Life’s Meaning: I aim to help my colleagues understand the deeper meaning of life by analyzing every phenomenon in the world, allowing each person to follow their path. (5) Living by Example: I will demonstrate the teachings through my actions, speech, and conduct. (6) Highlighting Commonalities: I intend to emphasize that, despite different religious practices, the core focus of all religions is peace, compassion, and doing good deeds for others. (7) Spreading Awareness: I will share insights through word of mouth and written communication to help others discover the truth of Buddhism. (8) Teaching Compassion: “I will teach the basic Buddhist precepts, focusing on loving-kindness and compassion. (9) Addressing Questions: If anyone asks me about Buddhism, I will gladly explain and share my knowledge to help develop Buddhist ideas within my community. (10) Personal Growth: I will continue to cultivate my understanding daily, striving to overcome my shortcomings, regardless of the challenges I face. (11) Teaching Meditation: I aim to teach *vipassanā* and give Dharma talks, contributing to the well-being of society as a whole. (12) Right Action: I will perform all actions to benefit those around me. (13) Monastic Commitment: By becoming a monk, I will actively participate in spreading the Buddhist Dharma, especially during our weekend retreats that target Western audiences. (14) Workshops and Retreats: I will hold workshops on basic Buddhist meditation, introduce others to the Dharma, and share my experiences and insights about Buddhist retreat centers and teachers. (15) Bodhisattva Aspiration: This is part of my Bodhisattva

Aspiration vow, in addition to my ongoing commitments over the past seven years. (16) Encouraging Right Livelihood: I will motivate and encourage others to live according to the right principles and the right livelihood. (17) Engagement and Discussion: I will engage in discussions and reflections with others to deepen our understanding. (18) Translating Teachings: In my daily life, I will observe situations and use my knowledge to offer explanations. I also plan to translate some Buddhist scriptures and commentaries into my native language to make the teachings accessible to more people. Eventually, I hope to establish a class to share this knowledge with others, serving as a role model for them. (19) We must be mindful of our mental activities every day and encourage others to do the same. Through these actions, we can foster a world filled with peace and love. I aim to be compassionate, loving, and kind to all living beings. (20) Because of the beauty and authenticity of Buddhist teachings, I will actively seek opportunities to share these values and benefits with others. (21) I do my best to encourage my colleagues to attend the Buddhist seminary to study Buddhism. I feel it is important for them to have the same opportunity to benefit from this experience as I have. (22) I am already sharing the benefits of my practice with my colleagues in the U.S.A. This sharing is part of my duties and responsibilities.

Author's comments

The responses indicate how participants plan to share their Buddhist knowledge with others. One respondent I spoke with in 2003 is now a dedicated monk in the U.S.A. He has begun sharing his valuable insights with his community. After completing his training and being allowed to help others, he embraced this responsibility. Buddhism spreads through understanding; when individuals grasp the principles of Buddhism, they can significantly contribute to their communities. This monk's journey exemplifies how studying and understanding Buddhism can inspire meaningful community service.

Participants expressed strong intentions to share their understanding of Buddhism with others. They hope to teach and collaborate, exchanging personal experiences to develop Buddhist ideas within their colleges and home countries. They also plan to continue holding workshops on basic Buddhist meditation to introduce others to the Dharma.

With their experience in insight meditation, they aspire to convey the deep meaning of life by analyzing the phenomena around them. Ultimately, each individual is encouraged to follow their path, contributing to the creation of a compassionate society free from selfishness and craving.

One participant remarked, "I will confidently share my teachings through my actions, speech, and mind." This aligns with the Buddha's teaching: one must first practice the teachings themselves before guiding others.

They are eager to teach the basic Buddhist precepts, emphasizing loving-kindness and compassion. To enhance understanding, it is crucial to provide local African communities with Dhamma books in their native languages.

This accessibility will facilitate a deeper understanding of Buddhist teachings. One participant stated, “I will try to translate some Buddhist scriptures and commentaries into my mother tongue so that many people can access the profound knowledge of the Buddha Dharma.” This initiative is significant for spreading Buddhism in Africa.

Additionally, some participants aspire to become Buddhist monks and continue their service to their communities. As one participant expressed, “By becoming a monk, I will actively engage in spreading the Buddhist Dharma wherever I can.”

VIII. APPLICATION OF NEW PHILOSOPHIES

In the following section, we explore how respondents plan to apply their newfound philosophy in their lives. They have identified several similarities between their original religions and Buddhism, allowing them to embrace Buddha’s teachings through these connections.

8.1. Similarities between Buddhism and past religious teachings

(1) Impermanence and Morality: Both Buddhism and Christianity address impermanence –recognizing that things do not last forever—and emphasize values such as compassion, love, generosity, faith, and respect for elders. They both advocate against actions like killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying. Although there may seem to be differences on the surface, the core teachings reflect similar truths about life and morality. (2) Peace, Wisdom, and Non-Violence: Both religions promote peace, wisdom, and non-violence as fundamental principles. (3) Purpose of Religion: In my view, the primary purpose of all religions is to enhance the lives of their followers and to spread genuine love among all living beings, particularly humanity. (4) Universal Concepts: Buddhism teaches that everything in the universe is impermanent, which parallels Jesus Christ’s teaching on the same theme. Both religions encourage avoiding evil and performing good actions during our time on Earth. (5) Five Precepts and Biblical Parallels: The five precepts in Buddhism share similarities with the moral guidelines found in the Bible. While the expression of these concepts may differ, both traditions emphasize karmic retribution – where one’s actions lead to corresponding consequences, as reflected in both Buddhist and Christian teachings. (6) Compassion and Mercy: Buddhism places a strong emphasis on compassion, akin to Christianity’s focus on mercy. Both religions have guidelines (the Ten Commandments in Christianity and the precepts in Buddhism) that encourage generosity and moral behavior. They teach the importance of endurance through suffering. (7) Common Goals: Both religions aim for supreme peace, tranquility, and happiness, while also seeking to aid all sentient beings. Although the paths may differ, they share a common goal of enlightenment or liberation. As the saying goes, “There are many ways to kill a rat,” indicating that people can belong to different faiths while pursuing similar objectives. (8) Loving Kindness: Both Buddhism and Christianity advocate for loving kindness and compassion towards others and all living beings. (9) Moral Guidelines: Both

religions provide moral guidelines that instruct individuals on how to be harmless and helpful in the world. For instance, Christianity emphasizes the importance of forgiveness, while Buddhism elucidates the reasons and methods for achieving understanding and compassion. Many teachings in Christianity may be obscured by superstition and fear, whereas Buddhism offers a diverse range of teachings that accommodate various perspectives, allowing individuals to take responsibility for their actions, leading to conviction and skillful deeds. (10) Teaching Generosity and Compassion: Both religions teach the principles of generosity, morality, loving-kindness, and compassion, aiming to improve the lives of all beings. (11) Refraining from Harm: Both traditions advocate refraining from killing, stealing, lying, and sexual misconduct, underscoring their shared moral foundations. (12) Miracles and Spiritual Powers: Some of Christ's miracles bear similarities to the Siddhis (spiritual powers) of yogis. Christ's teachings emphasize love, which resonates with Buddhist teachings on compassion. Furthermore, aspects of the Ten Commandments closely mirror the five precepts of Buddhism. (13) Interpretation and Relation: The relationship between Buddhism and Christianity can vary depending on interpretations of their teachings. (14) Moral Integrity: The main similarity among all religions is their aim to cultivate moral integrity in individuals, guiding them toward joy and happiness. (15) Functional Similarities: Religions share substantive similarities, as they provide ways for humans to meet their needs through established practices, beliefs, and structures. They foster a sense of the holy and the conviction that human existence is rooted in experiences of the sacred. (16) Three Poisons: Buddhism emphasizes the need to eliminate the three poisons: ignorance, hatred, and greed. This aligns with Christian teachings, which also advocate for the rejection of these harmful qualities. (17) Moral Conduct: Buddhism and Christianity both encourage adherents to abstain from harmful actions such as killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, lying, and consuming intoxicants.

8.2. Similarities between Buddhism and past religious teachings

Karma: Both Buddhism and my previous religion emphasize the principle of cause and effect, teaching that our actions have consequences. The precepts in Buddhism resonate with similar moral teachings in my faith, encouraging kindness and goodness towards others.

Personal Experience: I was raised Catholic and attended church regularly, but we did not often read the Bible ourselves; others would do that for us. In Buddhism, we take personal responsibility for our spiritual journey, reading and practicing on our own to attain liberation. While Christianity does not discuss rebirth, Buddhism addresses concepts like heaven and hell. I have practiced both religions and found that the differences are not as significant as they may seem. For example, Buddhism has five precepts, while Christianity has its Ten Commandments, which include similar moral guidelines that promote ethical behavior.

(1) Universal Salvation: All religions emphasize the importance of salvation, albeit through different names and methods. They advocate

for moral and ethical observance, teaching followers to cultivate humane qualities. (2) Compassion and Charity: Both traditions stress the significance of compassion towards others and the importance of charity and service. (3) Impermanence: Buddhism asserts that everything is impermanent, a concept also reflected in Christianity. Both traditions teach that we should avoid evil and strive to perform good actions during our time on Earth. (4) Moral Guidelines: Both religions provide moral guidelines that teach individuals to refrain from harming others, including prohibitions against killing, stealing, lying, and sexual misconduct. (5) Miracles and Spiritual Powers: Some miracles attributed to Christ are similar to the spiritual powers of yogis in Buddhism. Both traditions emphasize love and compassion in their teachings. (6) Common Goals: Both Buddhism and Christianity focus on achieving supreme peace, happiness, and liberation. Despite their different approaches, they share a common goal of helping all sentient beings. (7) Understanding and Freedom: A central theme in both religions is the idea that individuals have the freedom to choose their paths, which can lead to moral goodness and a quest for joy and happiness. (8) Shared Teachings: The genealogical connections between Buddha and Jesus point to shared origins and teachings, such as the immaculate conceptions of Maya and Mary. Both figures experienced profound spiritual events that shaped their teachings and followers.

Author's comments

There are notable similarities between Buddhism and other religions, which have been extensively documented by scholars. The responses from participants reveal how they perceive parallels between their previous faith (Christianity) and Buddhism.

Many respondents recognize these similarities and find that Buddhism is a positive and accessible practice. This suggests a strong potential for them to engage deeply with Buddhist teachings. From a Buddhist missionary perspective, the survey highlights how students are likely to integrate and act upon their new understanding of Buddhism.

All religions aim to enhance the lives of their followers and promote love among all living beings. Concepts such as impermanence and karmic retribution exist in both Buddhism and Christianity, emphasizing the importance of one's actions and their consequences.

While Buddhism has five precepts and Christianity has the Ten Commandments, both traditions promote similar ethical standards. Participants have noted these similarities, which can ease the transition into Buddhist practice. Recognizing these connections fosters confidence in their spiritual journey.

As we explore their current ideas about Buddhism, many participants have undergone a three-year course and continue to practice. They have engaged with and understood various aspects of Buddhist teachings, further enriching

their spiritual lives.

IX. CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON BUDDHISM

(1) Open Viewpoint: My perspective on Buddhism is very open, even though my knowledge is limited and my learning process is slow. I recognize that Buddhism is a beneficial religion focused on practical application in daily life rather than rote memorization. Practicing what I learn is essential; without practice, knowledge is meaningless. This practice is not just for monks; it is for everyone. Monks, too, must engage with the outside world, helping those in need and providing support in various ways. (2) Understanding of Buddhism: I know the term “Buddhism” primarily by its name. Historically, Buddha did not label it as a religion. Today, many schools teach Buddhism, but regardless of their differences, they all convey the fundamental teachings of Buddha. (3) Practical Way of Life: Buddhism is a practical way of life that can lead individuals toward liberation from suffering. (4) Detachment from Self: I view Buddhism as a religion that emphasizes detachment from the self. However, it can be challenging to gain interest in regions where egoism and selfishness prevail. (5) Addressing Global Issues: For Buddhism to thrive globally, it must address local problems first. In wealthy countries like those in Europe and America, teaching people about the mind is effective, as they are economically stable. However, in Africa and other developing regions, we must first focus on economic stability before delving into deeper teachings. (6) Cultural Relevance: Buddhism needs to adapt to African culture to establish roots in society. Establishing schools, hospitals, and charitable organizations that reflect Buddhist values is essential for growth. (7) Truth of Buddhism: Buddhism claims to be the ultimate truth and can alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings when understood and practiced correctly. Personally, it has resolved many of the spiritual questions that troubled my mind. (8) Understanding African Context: Buddhist missionaries should recognize that traditional African values have evolved since colonial times. Young Africans must be educated to engage effectively with modern developments. (9) Practical Methods: Buddhism offers practical methods for addressing daily challenges in life. (10) Joy in Learning: I am grateful for the opportunity to learn and apply Buddha Dharma in my life. My search for answers has ended, and I feel confirmed in my convictions; now, I can focus on practicing. (11) Complete Religion: I see Buddhism as a complete religion and way of life that leads to happiness and peace. It represents the only true path to liberation. (12) True Origin: Buddhism should remain rooted in its true origin, the Bodhi Citta, to maintain authenticity. (13) Relevance of Buddhism: Buddhism continuously proves itself as a relevant and uplifting religion. I have yet to encounter a situation that cannot be explained through its teachings. (14) Diversity of Teachings: The Dharma is vast and deep, offering teachings suitable for different types of people. It also encompasses various forms of art, music, and poetry that help individuals appreciate and engage with the teachings in diverse ways. (15) Current Age: We are in the ‘Dharma-ending’ age, and I am uncertain about the African vision. We await the arrival of Maitreya Buddha to guide us. (16) Spiritual Knowledge: Buddhism provides the best knowledge

and a perfect path to spiritual happiness. Whether or not I become a monk, I wish to teach others about Buddhism. It's vital to find effective means to spread its teachings. (17) Practical Guidance: Buddhism combines positive teachings that help people live happily and support those in need. However, we must not confuse temporary happiness with lasting fulfillment. Buddha taught that reliance on materialistic values leads to disappointment. While pursuing happiness in everyday life, we must also strive for the ultimate goal of attaining Nirvana, free from rebirth and suffering. (18) Cultural Understanding: Those introducing Buddhism to Africa must understand its diverse cultures. Education is crucial for fostering acceptance and understanding. (19) Long Road Ahead: There is a growing awareness of Buddhism in the West, but it will take considerable time for these ideas to gain acceptance in Africa. (20) Future Prospects: My perspective on Buddhism in Africa is that it still has a long way to go, but the growth potential exists. (21) Increased Understanding: I now know more about Buddhism than Christianity, as I have actively studied it and gained a deeper understanding. (22) Buddhism as a Way of Life: Through my understanding, I see Buddhism as a comprehensive way of life. (23) Growth of Buddhism: Buddhism is the fastest-growing religion in the West and serves as a foundation for world peace and happiness.

Author's comments

From the responses gathered it is evident that many participants believe that Buddhism is not solely for monks practicing within temple walls in pursuit of liberation. Instead, it holds valuable teachings for everyone, allowing anyone to practice Buddhism and witness its benefits. The diversity of Buddhist thought, particularly the Theravada and Mahayana schools, is acknowledged, but students focus primarily on the core teachings of Buddhism rather than the distinctions between different schools. Their main interest lies in grasping the essence of the Buddha's teachings.

Additionally, many respondents have expressed awareness of their economic struggles. In the past, they were often driven to prioritize financial survival over spiritual pursuits. This focus on daily necessities can hinder their ability to concentrate fully on Buddhism, contributing to a slower learning pace. When individuals come to Africa to teach Buddhism, it is crucial for them to first understand African cultures, values, and languages. Without this foundational knowledge, the learning process can be significantly delayed.

Some practitioners view Buddhism as a practical way of life that guides on living peacefully and ethically in the world. They believe that Buddhism has much to offer in terms of community development within Africa. They suggest that for Buddhism to thrive globally, it must address the specific challenges faced by the communities it seeks to serve. Without offering practical solutions to current problems, it is difficult to engage individuals who are preoccupied with their immediate concerns.

Buddhism outlines practical methods to navigate daily life and overcome challenges. Those who are eager to find spiritual solutions have begun their journey with these teachings, which are new and refreshing to them. One

respondent noted, “It has solved many of the unanswerable spiritual questions that were circulating in my defiled and unclear mind.”

However, establishing Buddhism as a widely accepted practice will take time and requires a deep understanding of its principles. As one participant remarked, “It will take a long time for these ideas to be accepted in Africa.” These reflections provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for Buddhism in the region. Next, we will explore the respondents’ most interesting teachings and insights.

X. FAVORITE TEACHINGS IN BUDDHISM

(1) Four Noble Truths and Kalama Sutra: The Buddha emphasized that one should not accept his teachings as truth without personal experience. It is essential to learn and accept anything that may be beneficial. The Buddha himself left his palace to seek liberation, discovering various methods along the way, ultimately realizing that self-mortification was not the answer. This led him to the Middle Way. (2) Practical Philosophy: I view Buddhism as a philosophy rather than a religion, and I believe that if we truly understand its teachings, the world will improve. My favorite teaching is Emptiness, which conveys that no objects exist independently and that understanding this absence is critical. (3) Understanding Emptiness and Impermanence: My favorite teachings focus on the concept of emptiness and the understanding that everything is impermanent. (4) Core Teachings: The teachings of impermanence, meditation, the Middle Way, and the Noble Truths resonate deeply with me. (4) Noble Truths and Karma: I appreciate the Noble Truths, the Middle Way, meditation, karma, and the concept of rebirth. (5) Impermanence and Karma: I find value in the teachings that emphasize the impermanence of all things, the Noble Truths, the Middle Way, and karma. (6) Buddhist Wisdom: I am particularly drawn to the teachings of dependent origination, karma, rebirth, Buddhist wisdom, and emptiness. (7) Meditation and the Eightfold Path: My favorite teachings include meditation, karma, and the Eightfold Path. (8) Diverse Teachings: There are so many teachings that it is challenging to choose favorites. However, the concepts of self-effort, self-responsibility, self-realization, joy, hope, and conviction stand out. (9) 37 Factors of Enlightenment: I am particularly interested in the 37 Factors of Enlightenment. (10) All Teachings: All teachings resonate with me; I believe in the value of every aspect of Buddhism. (12) Pure Land and Sutras: The “Pure Land Sutras” and the Flower Garland Sutra contain profound teachings that keep my mind engaged. There are many sutras I have yet to read that may become favorites in the future. (13) Main Concepts: I appreciate the three main characteristics of existence – *Anicca* (impermanence), *Dukkha* (suffering), and *Anatta* (non-self) – as well as the practice of *Brahma Vihāra*. (14) Four Ordinary Foundations: I find significance in the Four Ordinary Foundations: Birth, Impermanence, Action, Cause and Result, and Samsara. (15) Essential Teachings: My favorite teachings include the Eightfold Path, Chan meditation, the Four Noble Truths, Pure Land teachings, Emptiness, and the Ten Precepts. (16) Cause and Effect: I value the teachings on cause

and effect and dependent origination. I advise beginners to start with the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, including the Four Noble Truths, moral discipline (precepts), and the Eightfold Path. (17) Core Concepts: My favorites include the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, dependent origination, karma, and meditation. (18) Compassion and Change: I appreciate the teachings on compassion, karma, the Four Noble Truths, and the concept of impermanence, which illustrates that everything is subject to change. (19) Comprehensive Learning: All teachings are significant to me as they guide me closer to liberation. (20) Karma and Personal Responsibility: I particularly resonate with the teaching of karma, the importance of meditation, and the negative consequences of actions such as drinking and smoking. I recognize that understanding these teachings can be universally applied. (21) Philosophical Insights: I value the philosophical aspects of Buddhism, including parables that convey deeper meanings and messages. (22) Merit and Future Creation: The teaching of karma and the cultivation of merit are crucial. I understand that I am responsible for creating my future and that the events of my life result from my past actions. (23) Foundations of Mindfulness: I appreciate the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Four Noble Truths, karma, and dependent origination.

From the responses, it is clear that participants have a keen interest in various fundamental Buddhist teachings. While these principles can be complex and may require significant time to fully grasp, understanding them can help individuals navigate life's challenges. By categorizing their collective interests, we can outline key topics for further exploration:

10.1. Key Buddhist teachings of interest

(1) Rebirth. (2) *Samsara*. (3) Emptiness. (4) Compassion. (5) Philosophy. (6) Impermanence. (7) Meditation. (8) *Brahma Vihāra*. (9) Eightfold Path. (10) Four Noble Truths. (11) *Kalama Sutra*. (12) *Karma* and Rebirth. (13) Dependent Origination. (14) Buddhist Wisdom. (15) Pure Land Sutras. (16) Four Foundations of Mindfulness. (17) Flower Garland Sutra. (18) The 37 Factors of Enlightenment. (19) The Three Characteristics: *Anicca*, *Dukkha*, and *Anatta*

10.2. Overview of learning experiences

The students have studied both Mahayana Pure Land teachings and basic Theravada Buddhism. They have also engaged in Zen meditation practices with a resident Zen master at the African Buddhist Seminary. However, many participants expressed a stronger affinity for Theravada teachings. They prefer to continue their studies in Theravada Buddhism, as they find its teachings to be more novel and relevant to their lives compared to the familiar concepts found in Pure Land teachings, which they associate with notions of heaven.

While they initially found the Mahayana system easier to practice due to its flexibility, they expressed a desire to focus on Theravada teachings internally while potentially identifying as Mahayana monks externally. This indicates their intention to establish a unique Buddhist sangha that integrates elements from both traditions.

The enthusiasm for learning and practicing these principles suggests that they play a significant role in the participants' psychological development. By embracing these teachings, they believe they can achieve personal success and fulfillment.

XI. SUMMARY TABLE OF RESPONSES

Following is a table summarizing the responses obtained from the participants regarding their favorite teachings and interests in Buddhism.

Teaching/ Principle	Interest Level
Rebirth	High
Samsara	High
Emptiness	High
Compassion	High
Philosophy	High
Impermanence	High
Meditation	High
Brahma Vihāra	High
Eightfold Path	High
Four Noble Truths	High
Kalama Sutra	High
<i>Karma</i> and Rebirth	High
Dependent Origination	High
Buddhist Wisdom	High
Pure Land <i>Sutras</i>	Moderate
Four Foundations of Mindfulness	High
Flower Garland <i>Sutra</i>	Moderate
The 37 Factors of Enlightenment	High
The Three Characteristics	High

This summary reflects the collective interests and aspirations of the participants as they navigate their Buddhist journey.

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN PRACTICE: ADVANCING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract:

Buddhist compassion, rooted in the core principles of interdependence and non-harm, provides a profound framework for addressing contemporary challenges in human development. This paper examines how Buddhist compassion can foster shared responsibility to create equitable, inclusive, and sustainable societies. Central to this exploration are traditional Buddhist teachings, including the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Bodhisattva ideal, which underscore compassion as both a personal practice and a collective ethos.

The study highlights the transformative power of compassion in cultivating empathy, cooperation, and ethical responsibility. By embracing the interconnectedness of all beings, Buddhist compassion promotes holistic solutions to pressing global issues. Examples of Buddhist-inspired initiatives in education, healthcare, and environmental conservation illustrate its practical application. For instance, mindful education programs have enhanced emotional well-being and resilience among students, while healthcare initiatives grounded in compassion have improved patient care and community health outcomes. Similarly, Buddhist principles have guided environmental conservation efforts, emphasizing harmony with nature and sustainable practices.

The paper further argues that integrating Buddhist compassion into global development paradigms encourages systemic change. It advocates for an ethical approach that balances human needs with planetary well-being, addressing issues such as inequality, ecological degradation, and social fragmentation. By fostering a shared sense of responsibility, Buddhist compassion inspires collective action toward a more just and sustainable world. This study demonstrates that Buddhist compassion, as a timeless and transformative

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principle, offers valuable insights for contemporary human development. Its integration into global practices can help create a future rooted in empathy, equity, and sustainability.

Keywords: *Buddhist compassion, human development, shared responsibility, interdependence, Four Noble Truths.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Human development in the modern era is marked by significant progress and profound challenges. Advances in technology and economics have elevated living standards globally, yet they have simultaneously intensified social inequality, environmental degradation, and community disconnection. As these crises deepen, the limitations of individualistic paradigms in addressing such issues become evident. A transformative shift is necessary—one that emphasizes shared responsibility and the recognition of interconnectedness. Buddhist compassion, rooted in the welfare of all beings and the acknowledgment of interdependence, provides a compelling framework for fostering this shift.

Buddhist compassion, or *karuṇā*, represents a “deep commitment to alleviating the suffering of others” through ethical, mindful, and cooperative actions.¹ Central to this perspective is the recognition of interdependence, encapsulated in the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* or “dependent origination,” which underscores that all phenomena arise in mutual causation.² This philosophical foundation challenges individualism, promoting a collective ethos where the welfare of one is inseparable from the welfare of all.

This paper explores the principles of Buddhist compassion and their relevance to contemporary human development. It begins by analyzing the philosophical underpinnings of compassion in Buddhist thought, focusing on its “ethical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions.” Compassion in this context extends beyond emotional empathy to encompass “conscious, active engagement in reducing suffering.”³ The discussion highlights how Buddhist compassion integrates mindfulness, non-harm (*ahiṃsā*), and altruism, offering a holistic approach to addressing global challenges.

The paper also examines practical applications of Buddhist compassion, exploring its transformative potential in fostering “shared responsibility at individual, community, and systemic levels.” Case studies of Buddhist-inspired initiatives illustrate how these principles translate into action. For example, mindfulness-based education programs have promoted “emotional

¹ Chödrön, P. (2017). *The places that scare you: A guide to fearlessness in difficult times*. USA: Shambhala Publications. P. 26.

² Harvey, P. (2013). *An introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, history, and practices*. UK: Cambridge University Press. P. 49.

³ Dalai Lama, & Tutu, D. (2016). *The book of joy: Lasting happiness in a changing world*. Avery USA: Publishing Group. P. 9.

well-being, resilience, and inclusivity.”⁴ Similarly, healthcare initiatives rooted in compassion have enhanced “patient care and community health,” while environmental conservation efforts have aligned human activity with “sustainable and harmonious coexistence.”⁵ By analyzing these examples, the paper underscores how Buddhist compassion can inspire systemic change, addressing issues like inequality, social fragmentation, and ecological crises. It argues that integrating Buddhist compassion into development paradigms fosters a more ethical and holistic approach to human progress, balancing individual and collective needs while promoting planetary well-being.

Finally, the paper reflects on the broader implications of integrating Buddhist compassion into contemporary frameworks of human development. It posits that compassion, as a timeless and transformative principle, bridges the gap between individual transformation and collective action, enabling the creation of “inclusive, equitable, and sustainable societies. “This perspective aligns with global calls for ethical development that centers on human dignity and ecological sustainability.”⁶ The challenges of the modern era demand innovative and ethical solutions that transcend the limitations of individualistic paradigms. Buddhist compassion offers a profound and actionable framework for addressing these challenges. By fostering a culture of shared responsibility and interconnectedness, it provides new possibilities for advancing human development in ways that honor the dignity and welfare of all beings.

II. THE FOUNDATIONS OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION

In Buddhism, compassion (*karuṇā*) is one of the four immeasurables (*brahmavihāras*), along with loving-kindness (*mettā*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Compassion arises from the recognition of suffering (*dukkha*) as a universal condition and the sincere wish to alleviate it. Unlike pity, which creates a hierarchical relationship between the sufferer and the observer, Buddhist compassion emphasizes equality and interconnectedness.⁷ The Four Noble Truths provide a foundational understanding of suffering and its cessation. The first truth acknowledges the pervasive nature of suffering, while the second identifies its root causes, such as craving and ignorance. The third truth affirms the possibility of liberation, and the fourth outlines the Noble Eightfold Path as a practical means to achieve it. Compassion is integral to this path, particularly in ethical conduct (*sīla*) and right intention (*sammā-sankappa*).

Central to Mahayana Buddhism is the Bodhisattva ideal, which epitomizes

⁴ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2015). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. UK: Hachette Books, p. 52.

⁵ Kaza, S., & Kraft, K. (2000). *Dharma rain: Sources of Buddhist environmentalism*. UK: Shambhala Publications, p. 32.

⁶ United Nations Development Programme. (2020). *Human development report 2020: The next frontier—Human development and the Anthropocene*. USA: UNDP, p. 6.

⁷ Dalai Lama, & Tutu, D. (2016). *The book of joy: Lasting happiness in a changing world*. Avery USA: Publishing Group, p. 38.

selfless compassion. A Bodhisattva vows to forgo personal liberation until all beings are freed from suffering. This ideal underscores the concept of shared responsibility, where individual well-being is inextricably linked to the welfare of others. The Bodhisattva's actions, guided by wisdom (*prajñā*) and skillful means (*upāya*), serve as a model for integrating compassion into everyday life. As stated by Chödrön, "The Bodhisattva embodies the courage to look directly at the places that scare us, fully embracing suffering as part of the path to liberation."⁸

In Buddhist thought, compassion extends beyond mere emotion and becomes a practice, a way of living that transforms the self and others. The ethical teachings found within the Noble Eightfold Path offer practical guidance on how to cultivate compassion in daily life. According to Kabat-Zinn, "True compassion requires not just feeling for others, but actively working to alleviate their suffering through wise and skillful actions."⁹ The Bodhisattva ideal is an expression of the interconnectedness that permeates Buddhist philosophy. It embodies the principle that one's liberation cannot be separated from the liberation of all beings. This interconnectedness is essential for fostering a sense of shared responsibility. The only way to attain lasting happiness is by helping others achieve the same.

Compassion in Buddhism is not merely an emotion but a transformative practice that deepens self-awareness and fosters genuine empathy toward others. It is through this practice that individuals develop a profound sense of interconnectedness, which leads to actions motivated by a genuine desire to alleviate suffering. Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. This practice of compassion is expressed through ethical behavior, mindfulness, and wisdom. The teachings of mindfulness (*sati*) in Buddhism encourage individuals to cultivate a clear and present awareness of both their own experiences and the experiences of others. Mindfulness helps us see what is happening in the present moment without unnecessary reactivity or distortion, allowing us to meet others with kindness and compassion.

Buddhist compassion is a dynamic force that moves beyond simple acts of kindness to include skillful action. Skillful action, or *upāya*, involves responding to the needs of others in ways that are most appropriate to their circumstances. This concept is rooted in the Bodhisattva ideal, where wisdom and compassion come together in the service of others. As Harvey describes, "Skillful means represent the creative and compassionate response to the unique circumstances of beings and the ever-changing nature of the world."¹⁰

⁸ Chödrön, P. (2017). *The places that scare you: A guide to fearlessness in difficult times*. USA: Shambhala Publications, p. 69.

⁹ Kaza, S., & Kraft, K. (2000). *Dharma rain: Sources of Buddhist environmentalism*. UK: Shambhala Publications, p. 72.

¹⁰ Harvey, P. (2013). *An introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, history, and practices*. UK: Cambridge University Press, p. 46.

The transformative power of compassion is demonstrated through Buddhist-inspired initiatives in education, healthcare, and environmental conservation. Mindfulness-based education programs, for example, emphasize cultivating compassion and empathy in students, leading to improved emotional well-being and better interpersonal relationships. As Kabat-Zinn asserts, “When we integrate mindfulness into education, we help students develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationships with others.”¹¹

Similarly, in healthcare, Buddhist-inspired compassion has led to the development of patient-centered care models that prioritize empathy and holistic healing. These approaches recognize the interconnectedness between physical, emotional, and mental well-being. The Dalai Lama & Tutu state, “Compassion in healthcare is not just about providing medical treatment; it’s about attending to the whole person—mind, body, and spirit.”¹² Furthermore, environmental conservation efforts rooted in Buddhist compassion focus on sustainable practices that respect the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world. Kaza and Kraft discuss how Buddhist teachings inspire a lifestyle that aligns with ecological balance and respect for all living beings. They argue that “Buddhism offers a vision of harmony with nature that can guide us in creating sustainable communities.”¹³

Buddhist compassion has global relevance in addressing contemporary challenges such as social inequality, environmental crises, and global health disparities. In a world where interconnectedness is more apparent than ever, the values of compassion and shared responsibility resonate deeply. Sustainable development requires global cooperation and shared responsibility, principles that align with Buddhist teachings of interconnectedness and compassion. By integrating Buddhist compassion into global development paradigms, individuals and communities can adopt a more ethical and holistic approach to human well-being.

This approach fosters empathy, cooperation, and a shared sense of responsibility—key elements for building inclusive and sustainable societies. The Bodhisattva ideal serves as a guiding light, urging individuals to act with compassion not only for their benefit but for the welfare of all beings. The foundations of Buddhist compassion provide a rich and profound framework for addressing contemporary human development challenges. By emphasizing interconnectedness and shared responsibility, Buddhist compassion moves beyond individual acts of kindness to a way of life that transforms both self and others. The Bodhisattva ideal exemplifies this commitment to compassion, serving as a beacon for integrating these principles into everyday actions.

¹¹ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2015). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. UK: Hachette Books, p. 63.

¹² Dalai Lama, & Tutu, D. (2016). *The book of joy: Lasting happiness in a changing world*. Avery USA: Publishing Group.

¹³ Kaza, S., & Kraft, K. (2000). *Dharma rain: Sources of Buddhist environmentalism*. UK: Shambhala Publications.

Compassion is not just a feeling; it is a way of life that can heal our world. In this light, Buddhist compassion offers a timeless and transformative path toward creating more just, sustainable, and compassionate societies.

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION

The practice of mindfulness (*sati*) and meditation is a cornerstone of Buddhist compassion, offering profound opportunities for self-awareness and emotional growth. Mindfulness encourages individuals to observe their thoughts and emotions without judgment, enabling a deeper understanding of their suffering and the suffering of others. Compassion-based practices such as loving-kindness meditation (*metta bhavana*) and compassion meditation (*karuna bhavana*) further enhance this process. These meditative practices cultivate an attitude of unconditional care and concern for all beings, fostering empathy and reducing egocentric tendencies.

Research demonstrates that these practices significantly improve emotional resilience, reduce stress, and promote altruistic behavior.¹⁴ For instance, a study by Neff found that self-compassion correlates positively with emotional well-being and resilience, highlighting the transformative potential of these meditative techniques.¹⁵ As Thich Nhat Hanh eloquently states, “Compassion is the heart of our true nature. It transforms the way we relate to ourselves and the world around us, bringing healing and joy.”¹⁶

At the community level, Buddhist principles encourage collaboration, mutual support, and ethical conduct to address social challenges. The Sangha, or Buddhist community, exemplifies shared responsibility, fostering environments where individuals can practice compassion in daily interactions. Modern interpretations of Sangha extend to initiatives in education, healthcare, and social services that embody Buddhist values. Mindfulness-based education programs offer a practical application of compassion in schools. These programs teach students emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and stress management skills, contributing to harmonious relationships and improved mental health. According to Jennings et al., mindfulness in education enhances teachers’ well-being and creates more compassionate classroom environments, benefiting both educators and students.¹⁷

Similarly, Buddhist principles have influenced healthcare models that prioritize holistic care. These approaches emphasize addressing the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of health. For example, the Upaya Zen Center

¹⁴ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2015). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York, United States: Hachette Books. p. 56.

¹⁵ Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2 (2), 85 – 101.

¹⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh. (1998). *The heart of the Buddha’s teaching: Transforming suffering into peace, joy, and liberation*. New York, United States: Berkley Books, p. 23.

¹⁷ Jennings, P. A., Frank, J. L., Snowberg, K. E., Coccia, M. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2011). Cultivating emotional balance in the classroom: Mindfulness training as a means of promoting emotional regulation and compassion. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 103 (4), 958 – 973.

in New Mexico integrates Buddhist compassion into end-of-life care, providing patients and families with emotional support during critical moments.¹⁸ As Dalai Lama and Tutu observe, “Compassion in healthcare is not merely an ethical imperative; it is a path to healing that acknowledges the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit.”¹⁹

Buddhist compassion extends to systemic change by addressing the structural roots of suffering and advocating for holistic approaches to human development. The Buddhist principle of interdependence highlights the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental systems, emphasizing the importance of policies that prioritize collective well-being over individual profit. Buddhist organizations worldwide have championed sustainable practices that align with these principles. For instance, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka applies Buddhist values to community development, emphasizing empowerment, sustainability, and equity. Rooted in the concept of *dana* (generosity), the movement mobilizes communities to collectively address issues such as poverty, education, and environmental conservation.²⁰

Environmental conservation is another area where Buddhist compassion plays a vital role. Buddhist teachings advocate for mindful consumption and respect for all forms of life, offering a framework for addressing ecological crises. Kaza and Kraft note that Buddhist-inspired environmental movements promote practices such as reducing consumerism and conserving natural resources, fostering a harmonious relationship with nature.²¹ As Shantideva reflects in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, “All the joy the world contains has come through wishing happiness for others; all the misery the world contains has come through wanting pleasure for oneself.” This insight underscores the necessity of systemic changes that align with compassionate values, advocating for global solidarity and shared responsibility.²²

The practical applications of Buddhist compassion are as diverse as they are profound, encompassing individual transformation, community engagement, and systemic change. By integrating mindfulness and meditation into daily life, individuals can cultivate self-awareness and empathy, transforming their relationships with others. At the community level, initiatives inspired by Buddhist principles create environments of mutual support and ethical

¹⁸ Halifax, J. (2008). *Being with dying: Cultivating compassion and fearlessness in the presence of death*. Boulder, United States: Shambhala Publications, p.18.

¹⁹ Dalai Lama, & Tutu, D. (2016). *The book of joy: Lasting happiness in a changing world*. New York, United States: Avery Publishing Group, p. 31.

²⁰ Bond, G. D. (2004). *The Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka: Religious tradition, reinterpretation, and response*. Columbia, United States: University of South Carolina Press, p. 48.

²¹ Kaza, S., & Kraft, K. (2000). *Dharma rain: Sources of Buddhist environmentalism*. Boulder, United States: Shambhala Publications, p. 49.

²² Shantideva. (2011). *A guide to the Bodhisattva way of life*. Translated by Stephen Batchelor. Ithaca, United States: Snow Lion Publications, p. 89.

collaboration, addressing social challenges such as education and healthcare. On a systemic scale, the principle of interdependence drives holistic approaches to sustainable development, advocating for policies that prioritize collective well-being and ecological balance. Buddhist organizations like the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement exemplify the transformative power of these principles, demonstrating how compassion can shape a more just, equitable, and sustainable world. Compassion is not just an ethical ideal; it is a necessity for our survival. By recognizing our interconnectedness, we find not only personal liberation but also the means to create a better future for all. In this light, Buddhist compassion offers timeless wisdom and practical guidance for addressing contemporary challenges, fostering a path toward individual and collective flourishing.

IV. MINDFULNESS IN EDUCATION

Mindfulness, a practice rooted in Buddhist traditions, has gained significant traction in educational settings through programs like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindful Schools. These initiatives aim to enhance students' mental health, emotional resilience, and academic performance. By integrating mindfulness and compassion into the classroom, these programs create an environment conducive to holistic learning, promoting empathy, cooperation, and inclusivity.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Kabat-Zinn, introduces participants to mindfulness practices such as focused breathing, body scans, and gentle yoga. While originally designed for stress management, MBSR has been adapted for schools to help students cope with academic pressures and social challenges. These adaptations emphasize the importance of fostering emotional well-being alongside intellectual growth. Research indicates that students participating in mindfulness programs exhibit improved concentration, reduced anxiety, and enhanced interpersonal relationships.²³

Mindful Schools, another prominent initiative, tailor mindfulness techniques to the unique dynamics of educational settings. This program trains educators to incorporate mindfulness into their teaching practices, thereby modeling emotional regulation and mindfulness for students. Through guided meditation, reflective journaling, and compassion exercises, students learn to develop self-awareness and manage stress effectively. Mindfulness practices in schools cultivate emotional regulation and social connectedness, creating a supportive environment for learning and growth.

The benefits of mindfulness in education extend beyond individual students. Classrooms that adopt mindfulness practices often experience a positive shift in group dynamics. Students become more attuned to their peers' needs and emotions, fostering a sense of community and mutual respect. This cultural shift towards empathy and cooperation aligns with the Buddhist

²³ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2015). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York, United States: Hachette Books, p. 42.

concept of interconnectedness, which emphasizes the interdependence of all beings. By encouraging students to recognize their shared humanity, mindfulness programs contribute to a more inclusive and supportive school environment. Furthermore, mindfulness education has a ripple effect on educators. Teachers who practice mindfulness report lower levels of burnout, increased job satisfaction, and improved classroom management skills. By prioritizing their own mental health and modeling mindfulness for students, educators create a more balanced and harmonious learning atmosphere. Mindfulness in education nurtures both the teachers and the taught, enabling a cycle of mutual support and growth.

Despite its numerous benefits, implementing mindfulness programs in schools is not without challenges. Some educators and parents express concerns about integrating practices with Buddhist origins into secular institutions. To address these concerns, programs like Mindful Schools emphasize the scientific basis and universal applicability of mindfulness, ensuring its accessibility to diverse communities. Neff argues that “self-compassion and mindfulness are universal human capacities that transcend cultural and religious boundaries, making them relevant to all educational contexts”.²⁴ Mindfulness in education represents a transformative approach to learning, blending emotional well-being with academic excellence. Programs like MBSR and Mindful Schools exemplify how mindfulness can empower students to navigate challenges with resilience and compassion, fostering a culture of empathy, cooperation, and inclusivity in the classroom. Mindfulness practices in schools cultivate emotional regulation and social connectedness, creating a supportive environment for learning and growth.

Buddhist-inspired healthcare models emphasize the integration of compassion and medical care, addressing physical, emotional, and social suffering holistically. Organizations such as the Tzu Chi Foundation exemplify this approach, combining advanced medical services with empathy-driven outreach. Guided by Buddhist principles, these models prioritize patient-centered care and recognize the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit in the healing process. The Tzu Chi Foundation, founded in Taiwan, is a global organization known for its compassionate healthcare initiatives. Its hospitals provide cutting-edge medical treatment while cultivating an environment of kindness and respect. Volunteers, many of whom are trained in mindfulness and meditation, offer emotional support to patients and their families. This integration of medical expertise with compassionate service reflects the Buddhist ideal of *karuṇā* (compassion), which seeks to alleviate suffering in all its forms.

Compassion-driven healthcare also addresses broader societal issues such as healthcare accessibility and equity. Tzu Chi’s outreach programs provide free medical services to underserved communities, embodying the Bodhisattva ideal

²⁴ Neff, K. D. (2003). Self-compassion: An alternative conceptualization of a healthy attitude toward oneself. *Self and Identity*, 2 (2), 85 – 101.

of selfless service. These efforts highlight the importance of addressing systemic disparities to promote collective well-being. Compassionate healthcare nurtures not only the physical well-being of patients but also their emotional and spiritual resilience. Holistic care extends beyond the treatment of physical ailments. Buddhist-inspired healthcare models recognize the profound impact of emotional and spiritual health on recovery. Practices such as mindfulness meditation and compassionate listening are integrated into patient care, helping individuals cope with stress, anxiety, and grief. Research has shown that such practices enhance emotional resilience and improve overall quality of life, particularly for those facing chronic or terminal illnesses.²⁵

The influence of Buddhist compassion in healthcare is not limited to traditional Buddhist organizations. Many modern healthcare systems adopt mindfulness-based approaches, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), to improve patient outcomes. These methods, inspired by Buddhist teachings, foster a more empathetic and holistic perspective among healthcare providers. Mindfulness in healthcare enables practitioners to connect with patients on a deeper level, enhancing both the care they provide and their professional satisfaction. Buddhist-inspired healthcare initiatives offer a transformative model that integrates compassion with medical expertise. By addressing the physical, emotional, and social dimensions of health, these models embody a holistic approach to healing, fostering resilience and well-being in patients and communities alike.

The Buddhist concept of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*) underscores the interconnectedness of all life forms, offering a profound framework for environmental conservation. This principle emphasizes that human well-being is inextricably linked to the health of the natural world, fostering a moral responsibility to protect the planet for future generations. Inspired by this philosophy, Buddhist organizations and initiatives worldwide have advocated for sustainable living and environmental stewardship. One such initiative is the Ecobuddhism network, which merges Buddhist teachings with ecological activism. This organization promotes a shift from exploitative practices to lifestyles that honor the planet's delicate balance. It calls for mindfulness in consumption, urging individuals and communities to reduce waste, conserve natural resources, and adopt renewable energy solutions. These actions reflect the Buddhist commitment to ahimsa (non-harming) and the recognition of humanity's duty to live in harmony with nature.

The moral imperative to protect the environment is further articulated by Buddhist scholars and practitioners. Kaza and Kraft argue, "Buddhist principles of harmony with nature and respect for all life offer crucial insights for addressing global environmental crises."²⁶ They highlight how Buddhist

²⁵ Halifax, J. (2008). *Being with dying: Cultivating compassion and fearlessness in the presence of death*. Boulder, United States: Shambhala Publications, p. 67.

²⁶ Kaza, S., & Kraft, K. (2000). *Dharma rain: Sources of Buddhist environmentalism*. Boulder, United States: Shambhala Publications, p. 102.

practices, such as mindful awareness and compassion, can cultivate an ethical mindset that prioritizes sustainability over short-term gains. This perspective challenges the consumer-driven ethos prevalent in many societies, encouraging a reevaluation of humanity's relationship with the earth. Buddhist teachings also inspire practical initiatives aimed at environmental restoration. For instance, in Sri Lanka, Buddhist monks have spearheaded tree-planting campaigns to combat deforestation and promote biodiversity. Similarly, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement integrates Buddhist values into community development projects, focusing on sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and water conservation. These efforts demonstrate how ancient wisdom can address contemporary ecological challenges.

Moreover, Buddhist-inspired environmental activism extends to policy advocacy. Organizations like the Ecobuddhism network actively engage with international forums to promote climate justice and equitable resource distribution. They emphasize the importance of collective action and global cooperation, aligning with the Buddhist ideal of shared responsibility. Buddhist concept of interdependence offers a transformative vision for environmental conservation. By fostering a sense of interconnectedness and moral responsibility, Buddhist teachings inspire both individual and collective actions that contribute to a sustainable and harmonious world. As humanity faces escalating environmental crises, the insights of Buddhism provide a valuable ethical compass for navigating these challenges.

Buddhist compassion, rooted in principles such as *karuṇā* (compassion) and *pratītyasamutpāda* (interdependence), offers profound transformative potential. Yet, its application in contemporary contexts often encounters significant challenges. Cultural and institutional barriers, including resistance to change and the commodification of mindfulness practices, can diminish its impact. At the same time, these challenges provide opportunities for innovation, meaningful dialogue, and the development of adaptive strategies that integrate Buddhist compassion into modern frameworks. This dynamic process requires adaptability, cross-cultural understanding, and collaboration among diverse stakeholders to ensure its transformative essence is preserved. One of the primary challenges in applying Buddhist compassion is resistance to change within established cultural and institutional systems. Many contemporary societies prioritize individualism, material success, and competition, which often conflict with Buddhist values of interconnectedness and altruism. For example, in education, traditional systems emphasize academic performance over the cultivation of emotional intelligence and ethical behavior. Educational settings that focus solely on cognitive outcomes risk neglecting the emotional and social dimensions essential for holistic development.²⁷

Similarly, healthcare systems, driven by profit and efficiency, may undervalue the holistic care promoted by Buddhist compassion. Institutional priorities

²⁷ Gyatso, T. (2005). *The universe in a single atom: The convergence of science and spirituality*. US: Broadway Books, p. 89.

on measurable outcomes often undermine the deeper, relational aspects of compassionate healthcare. This focus on tangible results can overshadow the more nuanced and transformative aspects of care that address emotional and spiritual dimensions. The commodification of mindfulness is another significant barrier. In many cases, mindfulness practices are divorced from their ethical and spiritual roots, transforming into tools for stress management or productivity enhancement. When mindfulness is stripped of its ethical underpinnings, it risks becoming a shallow technique rather than a profound practice of self-awareness and compassion. This commercialization not only dilutes the depth of Buddhist teachings but may also perpetuate consumerist tendencies contrary to the values of simplicity and interconnectedness.

Despite these challenges, the application of Buddhist compassion offers significant opportunities for innovation and dialogue. The resistance to change can catalyze discussions that bridge cultural and institutional divides, fostering mutual understanding and adaptability. The Buddhist concept of *upāya* (skillful means) encourages tailoring teachings to specific contexts without compromising their ethical core. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes this adaptability, stating, “Compassion must be translated into action that meets people where they are, with wisdom and understanding.”²⁸

Cross-cultural dialogue plays a crucial role in expanding the relevance of Buddhist compassion. Recognizing its universal principles while respecting cultural variations allows for localized adaptations that address unique challenges. For instance, mindfulness programs in Western schools often focus on stress reduction and emotional regulation, while programs in Asian contexts may integrate traditional practices like *mettā bhāvanā* (loving-kindness meditation) to emphasize collective well-being. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders further amplify the potential of Buddhist compassion. Partnerships between religious organizations, educators, healthcare professionals, environmentalists, and policymakers can create interdisciplinary solutions aligned with Buddhist ethics. The Tzu Chi Foundation exemplifies this collaborative spirit by integrating compassionate care into disaster relief, medical services, and environmental sustainability. True compassion manifests in collective action that addresses the multifaceted dimensions of human suffering.

Successfully integrating Buddhist compassion into existing frameworks requires a balance between tradition and modernity. Embedding compassion-oriented practices into established systems, while maintaining their ethical and philosophical roots, ensures their transformative potential. For example, mindfulness-based education programs can include lessons on empathy and interconnectedness alongside stress-reduction techniques.²⁹ Mindfulness practices in schools not only enhance students’ emotional regulation but also

²⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh. (1998). *The heart of the Buddha’s teaching: Transforming suffering into peace, joy, and liberation*. New York, United States: Berkley Books, p. 49.

²⁹ Batchelor, S. (1997). *Buddhism without beliefs: A contemporary guide to awakening*. US: Riverhead Books, p. 11.

cultivate a culture of empathy and cooperation. In healthcare, the holistic models promoted by Buddhist compassion offer valuable insights. Programs like those implemented by the Tzu Chi Foundation prioritize emotional and spiritual care alongside physical treatment, embodying the integrative approach advocated in Buddhist teachings. As long as space endures, as long as sentient beings remain, may I too remain to dispel the miseries of the world.

Environmental conservation is another critical area where Buddhist compassion can be applied. The principle of *pratītyasamutpāda* highlights the interdependence of all life, providing a philosophical foundation for sustainable practices. Organizations like the Ecobuddhism network advocate for systemic changes that align with these values, emphasizing the moral responsibility to protect the planet. Buddhist principles of harmony with nature and respect for all life offer essential guidance for addressing global environmental crises.³⁰ Addressing the challenges of applying Buddhist compassion involves navigating tensions between tradition and modernity with wisdom and creativity. The Bodhisattva ideal, as articulated by Shantideva, serves as a guiding framework, emphasizing the courage and commitment needed to alleviate suffering and promote collective well-being. This ideal inspires individuals and communities to act not only for personal transformation but also for systemic change.³¹ While the application of Buddhist compassion encounters significant cultural and institutional challenges, these barriers also present valuable opportunities for growth, dialogue, and innovation. By promoting adaptability, cross-cultural understanding, and collaboration, Buddhist principles can be effectively integrated into modern frameworks. As Thich Nhat Hanh eloquently states, “Compassion is a verb, an active force that transforms lives and systems alike.”³² Through mindful engagement with these challenges, Buddhist compassion can inspire transformative actions that address pressing global issues and foster a more compassionate world.

V. CONCLUSION

Buddhist compassion, rooted in the principles of interdependence and non-harm, offers profound insights for advancing human development through shared responsibility. This framework emphasizes the interconnected nature of all life and the importance of addressing suffering at its root, rather than merely alleviating its symptoms. By fostering individual transformation, community engagement, and systemic change, Buddhist compassion provides a comprehensive approach to promoting holistic well-being. At the individual level, Buddhist practices encourage mindfulness, self-awareness, and emotional resilience. These practices help individuals recognize their suffering and develop

³⁰ .Kearney, P. (2009). *Compassionate action: An engaged Buddhist approach to relief work*. UK: Windhorse Publications, p. 78.

³¹ Shantideva. (2011). *A guide to the Bodhisattva way of life*. Translated by Stephen Batchelor. Ithaca, United States: Snow Lion Publications, p. 102.

³² Thich Nhat Hanh. (1998). *The heart of the Buddha's teaching: Transforming suffering into peace, joy, and liberation*. New York, United States: Berkley Books, p. 44.

empathy for others, fostering a mindset of care and responsibility. This inner transformation not only benefits individuals but also creates a ripple effect, influencing families, workplaces, and communities. Communities play a vital role in translating the principles of Buddhist compassion into collective action. Buddhist teachings inspire initiatives that promote inclusivity, cooperation, and mutual support. By addressing issues such as education, healthcare, and social equity, communities can build environments that prioritize holistic well-being and ethical living. These collective efforts exemplify the potential of shared responsibility to drive meaningful and lasting change.

On a broader scale, Buddhist compassion guides systemic transformation. The concept of interdependence underscores the need to align economic, social, and environmental priorities with the principles of sustainability and equity. From advocating for climate justice to promoting ethical governance, Buddhist-inspired approaches emphasize the importance of addressing global challenges in ways that respect the well-being of all beings and the planet. As the world faces pressing issues such as environmental degradation, social inequality, and mental health crises, the integration of Buddhist compassion into development paradigms offers a pathway to a more compassionate and sustainable future. Its timeless principles encourage innovative solutions that honor both human and planetary needs, offering a vision of progress that balances material and spiritual growth. Buddhist compassion provides a transformative lens for reimagining human development. By fostering interconnectedness, ethical responsibility, and a commitment to alleviating suffering, it offers practical and profound solutions for creating a just, equitable, and sustainable world. The continued exploration and application of these principles can inspire individuals, communities, and systems to work together in harmony, shaping a future that benefits all.

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UNDERSTANDING THE BUDDHIST BEHAVIOR AND ACTS OF COMPASSION FROM LICCHAVI STONE INSCRIPTIONS (320 - 879AD) IN NEPAL

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Abstract:

Practicing compassion allows us to recognize the suffering and difficulties that all living beings experience and respond with a genuine desire to alleviate that suffering. It's a deep and active form of empathy that motivates compassionate action. Human behavior gradually develops from the behaviors they were dealt with. The history of Nepal witnessed the 'Golden Era' with fascinating glory of varied perspectives during the Licchavi Period (320 - 879 AD), stating in the possibility to speak "History speaks about the past but shows the way towards the future". They seemed to have a very balanced lifestyle between spiritualism and materialism. Those evidences are well documented in inscriptions that provide support and a sophisticated system for their sustenance by providing endowments to those systems emphasizing the welfare and transferring the merit earned by that to their forefathers. A specific example of that could be the installation of images. Particularly the Buddhist images of Avalokiteśvaras and Buddhas are the epitome of such behavioral archetype. This paper will analyze those inscriptions from the perspective of compassion to elaborate and discuss the society of that time to make it more prosperous, and what we could do to make our modern society more compassionate towards the world and sentient beings, or those models still applicable in terms of self-sustenance. This paper will deal with the possible way the future, from the historical practices of Nepalese ancestry, will shower the power of compassion for the betterment of the world tomorrow. Since cultivating compassion is a practice that helps us overcome self-centeredness and develop a sense of interconnectedness, it is instrumental

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in expecting a better world to live in tranquility and bliss. This paper will also explore those inscriptions from the Philosophical understanding of Buddhist Compassion, Planning and Preservation of actions, and finally an approach to Sustenance. Thus, the proposed model in the acronym PPS (Philosophy, Plan, and Sustenance) could be the model and theory to be implemented in the contemporary world referencing the tested model in Nepal for more than fifteen hundred years. They are the primary sources witnessing first-hand experiences to analyze the future horizon in sustenance. The Pāli and Sanskrit primary sources were also referenced to elaborate the idea of compassion, whereas secondary sources include books written on similar themes. The selected inscriptions in the Gupta script are given in the Appendix after transliteration following the IAST standard.

Keywords: *Buddha and Bodhisattva statues, Compassion, Endowments and Guthi, Licchavi Inscriptions, Licchavi Period in Nepal, PPS theory, Water Conduit.*

I. THE PPS THEORY

PPS stands for Philosophy, Plan, and Sustenance. This is the proposed model referencing and supporting the statement “History speaks about the past but shows the way towards the future.” The acts or philanthropies recorded from inscriptions of the Nepalese Licchavi Period (320 - 879 AD), a golden era, along with tested models will be taken into account as a testament. Philosophy refers to the Buddhist philosophy of compassion, Plan refers to water and other-related activities, and Sustenance refers to the System of “*Guthi*” which will be explored as a sample for discussion. The result is believed to be an act of implementation to replicate the same thought of compassion because it remains the same from the Buddhist approach. The Plan could be any activity, whereas the Sustenance of the plan and models in it could be applied in the entirety of what was referred to in the Licchavi period. Since compassion is solely empathetic, it must not always be deeply and precisely based upon religious rigidity; rather, the sentiment is very open to human endeavors.

The main ideas and their developments could be postulated in the following manner: (1) The compassionate actions testimonial by stone inscriptional records in Nepal support the ancient idea of humanitarian development plans. (2) Those stone inscriptional records also hinted at stereotyped mechanisms and provided tested models that could be implemented directly in the modern age, with or without amendment, to subside the modern problems regarding egocentrism with ideas backed up by Buddhist practices of compassion. (3) The PPS (Philosophy, Plan, and Sustenance) model could work to implement a better world in the coming days at community levels for sustenance and affinity.

II. TWO KEY INGREDIENTS IN BUDDHISM: COMPASSION AND WISDOM

The Buddhist approach can never be fully realized without these two fundamental root elements. *Nālava Sutta* in *Sutta Nipāta* of *Khuddaka Nikāya*

states: “*Paññā Narānam Ratanam*,” a phrase that alone suffices to convey the profound value of *Paññā*, or *Prajñā*, which in English translates to “Wisdom.” It is regarded as the jewel of *Nara*, meaning “humans,” as expressed in *Pāli* literature. The hierarchical path of realization begins with *Śīla*, progresses through *Samādhi*, and ultimately culminates in *Prajñā*.

In a broader sense, if wisdom is the ultimate realization of reality, then compassion is the boundless action directed toward all beings. Many *Jātaka* tales – depicting the Buddha’s past lives – are rich with examples of compassionate deeds, including self-sacrifice, mortification, and austerity. Stories such as *Mañicūḍa*, *Vessantara*, and *Vyāghri Jātaka* exemplify the unwavering commitment of *bodhisattvas* to the welfare of those in need, as attested by both *Pāli* and *Sanskrit* literary traditions. These narratives gained immense popularity, reflecting shared human sentiments and the aspiration to embody the ideal virtues of *bodhisattvas*. This is further evidenced in Nepalese *Licchavi* inscriptions, which commonly document Buddhist endowments and consecration records.

The Bodhipathapradīpa says: “*Tataḥ samasasttvesu maitricittapuraskritah/ Durgatitryajanmādisankrantimaraṇādibhiḥ/ Dristvāhśeṣam jagaddukham dukhena dukhitasya ca/ Dukhaḥetostathā dukhād jagatam muktikaṇṭhāyā*”.

The essence could be extracted as “after the *Maitri*, *Karuṇā* (compassion) needs to emerge. The dominating wish to eradicate the *Dukkha* or suffering of an entire sentient being is *Karuṇā*. Considering all the sentient beings as their own and willing continence developed in mind is *Karuṇā*.¹ Again, the Advayavajrasaṅgraha says whole world, phenomenal and noumenal, resolves into one word and one idea of *Śūnyatā*, so the whole world of activity in all its variety of forms resolves into one word *Karuṇā*. It arises from seeing all sentient beings daily beset by all sorts of original miseries they are in.² Since the first noble truth talks about the “truth of Suffering”, it could emotionally be dealt with compassion for oneself and others. This technique is well observed in the omniscient Buddha because he is the epitome of the realization of Compassion and Wisdom. These references and teachings could be imitated by humans to make their livelihood meaningful.

2.1. Compassion in Buddhism

Compassion or the *Karuṇā* is one of the four “*brahma-vihāras*” or sublime states of mind and action, along with *metta*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*. The higher stages are seen to rest on them because they have the power to weaken the defilements of lust, ill-will, and delusion, and to bring the mind to a state of peace, hence it will both be a powerful form of mental purification and liberation actions. It is the first “P” of the PPS model discussed earlier which stands for Philosophy guided by Buddhism and Compassion. This could further be elaborated from the *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta* because the conclusion it draws

¹ Negi (1998), p. 100.

² Advayavajrasaṅgraha (1927), XXXVI.

is that “Compassion is the most prerequisite for the ideal Buddhist model for a socially and economically sound society”.³ It also emphasizes that exploitation in social and economic justification will result in havoc in humanity and hence create turmoil in terms of poverty and its consequences. Thus, a society rooted in compassion implies a society of materialistic and mental sophistication.

Dhammapada, A Pāli text from *Khuddaka Nikāya* explains the need for Compassion in such a manner: “All tremble at violence, all fear death. Comparing oneself with others, do not harm, do not kill”.⁴ Important to the exercising of this kind of compassion is the realization that life is dear to all, and Compassion toward self and others are inseparable. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has written in his teachings on compassion that this practice of cultivating compassion is not limited to Buddhist practitioners only, but it has to be seen as a universal quality that can be developed by anyone.

The fourteenth Dalai lama says: “I believe that at every level of society, the key to a happier world is the growth of compassion”.⁵

Gautam Buddha, in his previous lives, accomplished many of the generous activities recorded in *Jātaka* tales. He is said to have fulfilled *daśa pāramitā*, *daśa upa-pāramitā* and *daśa paramatṭha pāramitā*. The support system behind the attitude of giving (*Dāna*) is compassion. Without compassion, *dāna* is not possible. *Jātaka* tales like *Akitti Jātaka*, *Śankha Jātaka*, *Yudhañjaya Jātaka*, *Māhāsudarsana Jātaka*, *Māhāgovinda Sutta*, *Nimi Jātaka*, *Khandahala Jātaka*, *Śivi Jātaka*, *Vessantara Jātakas* are some of the very powerful *Jātaka* tales that well exemplify the power of compassion and giving.⁶ The *Vissudhimagga* says “A bhikkhu who practices compassion or meditation is compassion, he must not only be compassionate towards the people in suffering but also to those in ease or of the happy situation”.⁷ This practice must be done from the nearest to the farthest and not vice versa.⁸ The same type of temperament we can see from the Licchavi inscriptions, where the person directly involved for their pious activities and merit thus earned was spread and handed over from their parents to the entire sentient beings in most of the cases. This could also be well understood and contemplated from the statement mentioned below by Goldestein: “This (compassion) isn’t self-pity or pity for others. It’s feeling one’s pain and recognizing the pain of others... Seeing the web of suffering

³ Vajracharya (2011), pp. 421 - 30.

⁴. *Dhp* 129: “*Sabbe tasanti danḍassa sabbe bhāyanti maccuno / Attānāṃ upamam katvā na haneyya na ghātaye*”.

⁵ BBC, *Karuna and Metta*, accessed on [January 5, 2025], available at: [https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zf8g4qt/revision/7#:~:text=Compassion%20\(Karu%E1%B9%87%C4%81\)&text=The%20Buddha%20taught%20that%20showing,should%20show%20compassion%20to%20everyone.\)](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zf8g4qt/revision/7#:~:text=Compassion%20(Karu%E1%B9%87%C4%81)&text=The%20Buddha%20taught%20that%20showing,should%20show%20compassion%20to%20everyone.))

⁶ Vajracharya (2011), p. 61.

⁷ Dharmagupta (2008), p. 195.

⁸ Dharmaragupta (2008), p. 339.

we're all entangled in, we become kind and compassionate to one another".⁹ The Bodhicaryāvatāra says: "Samsāradukhanirmokṣamanumode śarīrinām/ Bodhisattvabuddhatvamanumode ca tāyinām/ Cittotpādasamudramśca sarvasattvasukhāvahān/ Sarvasatvāhitādhānānamode ca śāsinā".

These two stanzas are translated as: I approve of the salvation of the listeners and all the Buddhas who are freed from the suffering of the world, similarly, I also approve of the Bodhisattva and Buddhahood of those who preach the path that leads to enlightenment.¹⁰ I approve of the *bodhicittopāda* ocean made by the Śhāstās (Buddhas) because it brings happiness and altruism to all beings.¹¹ The *Yānas* and their schools emphasize different forms of compassion. In Śrāvaka and *Pratyeka Yānas*, compassion (*Karuṇā*) arises from recognizing the constant suffering experienced by sentient beings, rooted in fundamental miseries and their consequences. This is known as *Sattvālabhanā Karuṇā*, or "compassion for sentient beings." In the Mahāyāna tradition, particularly in its Sautrāntika and Yogācāra schools, compassion stems from understanding the impermanent nature of the phenomenal world. This form is referred to as *Dharmāvalambanā Karuṇā*, or "compassion for the phenomenal world".¹²

The stanzas, categories of *Karuṇā*, and their feelings could be well reflected in Licchavi inscriptions. Thus, a philosophical conversion into tangible resources in terms of images and inscriptions written within it is great evidence to believe in religious impact on society.

2.2. The Compassionate Acts and Benevolence in Licchavi Inscriptions of Nepal

In Nepal, ca. 320 AD to 879 AD belongs to the Licchavi period, eulogies "Golden Era" from all possible dimensions that signify sophistication in all possible sorts from national to international demeanor. The economic stability enhances people's interest and dedication toward working for the welfare of others. The contentedness of satisfaction and self-esteem consent is entirely human behavior as suggested by Maslow's hierarchy of needs when he reached his highest form of self-actualization.¹³ These could be reflected in the inscriptions that were installed detailing their deeds. The religion and their respective practices are in a balanced state during this period, which is praiseworthy, this yields a society to demonstrate empathy. A religious coexistence with the freedom to install their respective images and *Guṭhis*, i.e., trusts, is the most significant incident we encounter from the Licchavi inscriptions. Kings have seemed liberal and people of different strata are encouraged to work for the welfare of people. Water conduits, various images of their respective devotion, formulations of trusts, or *guṭhis* with land endowments for sustainable upkeep are the major things to witness from inscriptional sources.

⁹ Goldstein (1980), p. 125 - 26.

¹⁰ Rijal (2021), p. 43.

¹¹ Rijal (2021), p. 44.

¹² *Advayavajrasaṅgraha* (1927), XXXVI.

¹³ McLeod (2024), p. 10.

From the Buddhist perspective, we have images of Buddha and Bodhisattva images being installed and consecrated with many devotional declarations in terms of donations driven by compassion. The earliest recorded image of Avalokitesvara in wood, provenance to Nepal, is one dated around the late fifth century discovered from Lhāsā in Tibet.¹⁴ However, Stone images in Nepal *maṇḍala*, i.e, Kathmandu Valley is still in situ, and possess an inscription dated ca. 550 AD elaborating the contemporary sentiment of merit sharing.¹⁵ Images in various other mediums are still continuously standing to witness the glory of Buddhist religious practices till now.

2.3. Corpus of Licchavi Inscriptions of Nepal

Inscriptions provide undeniable records of history. There were 190 Licchavi inscriptions recorded by Dhanavajra Vajracharya up to 1973 in Nepal.¹⁶ Few are recently discovered after his records. These inscriptions have the potential to provide valuable information regarding art history and human behaviors. The recent discoveries of inscriptions are worth exploring from the perspective of compassionate deeds. Usually, the Licchavi inscriptions describe and declare more about the culture of that particular time they are installed. The historical depiction, people's mindset, and contemporary societal expression are worth exploring from the historical evidence. The records put forth by the kings or elites or pious people for various activities are testaments that people are willing to make people aware of their deeds and perhaps encourage others to do and follow the systems they have implemented for generations to come.

The Licchavi inscriptions emphasize the compassionate deeds that envisage many dynamics of planning for sustenance. Mostly the inscriptions were written in *Gupta* letters, often called the Licchavi scripts in Nepal. They are mostly found around the water conduits, specifically stone taps and irrigation systems, or on the pedestal of stone images installed by devotees, declarations or commandments of kings or rulers of those times for the people to make them aware. These inscriptions are significant enough to give historical references and socio-political advancements. While observing those stone inscriptions, it was noticed that the pattern in which they were written is identical to that of contemporary inscriptions in India. The inscriptions were written in a simple formula beginning with the place from where it was commanded, and to whom it was addressed, then giving certain epithets to the person responsible for installing it (Kings or others), explaining the main content, and then the date of installation in most cases. The inscriptions found in Nepal record the stanzas from Buddhist religious practices as well. These inscriptions could be broadly categorized into donatory, Government regulatory commandments, and religious practices. The formulations of *guthis* or trust for various work and land

¹⁴ Pal, "Prolegomena to the Study of an Early Wood Bodhisattva from the Himalayas", accessed on [December 25, 2024], available at: <https://www.asianart.com/articles/prolegomena/index.html>.

¹⁵ Locke (1980), p. 297. Ganabaha Inscription, Appendix 1.

¹⁶ Vajracharya (1973), ka-cha.

endowments to make it sustainable are worth mentioning among them. The reason behind all those religious acts and governmental regulations is caused due to the act of compassion, if not because of those emotions driven out of compassion. It is obvious that people might not have gone for the donation activities or mentioned the welfare of sentient beings, including their near and dear ones, until and unless they believe and feel them.

We have encountered at least 32 inscriptions out of 190, recorded by Dhanavajra Vajracharya,¹⁷ which could explicitly be considered Buddhist by the elements and characters mentioned on them. 13 mentioning the water-related inscriptions like water conduits and irrigation systems. One very interesting thing about those inscriptions is that they mention their installation for a good cause and envision their sustainability. They have provided lands of different sizes and production capacities for their continuity in the future. Not only that, the kings and other *guthis* which were endowed earlier needed to be kept in their way provisioned uninterrupted and any interference concerning even from the government officials is stated prohibited. They were describing many idealistic lines to maintain and thus guarantee its continuation. These are deliberately mentioned because they are well aware of their need and significance. It was even mentioned in many inscriptions that those who encroach on the land will die immediately, and those who support and acknowledge the deeds will have enough money for their lifetime, as their wife, and even after their life, they will go to heaven together.¹⁸ The water-related efforts are mainly for the ease of people. The Licchavi kings and meritorious people are delighted to provide and arrange the water supply system for their pupils and make them comfortable in life. The obvious reason for *Bhiksus*, *Bhikshunis*, elites, and pious people making efforts to serve the people is out of compassion. They are well aware of those meritorious works and are joyful to be enlivened in this attitude of donating the lands for *guthis* to formulate to keep the system for a long period. They rejoice in their deeds and transfer their merit to their mother and father along with all the ancestors and sentient beings. This is pure austerity which is commonly practiced in *Māhāyāna* tradition. These inscriptions mentioned “*Māhāsāṅghikas*”, *Bhikṣusangha* and *Bhikṣuṇi Sangha* etc which directly linked with the concept of *Māhāyāna*. The images of Avalokiteśvara and the inscriptions mentioned on them are highlights to correlate the act of compassion as described in Ārya Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha because he, himself is the embodiment of compassionate deeds and philanthropies.

2.4. “Compassion” in Buddhist Licchavi Inscriptions: Understanding and Analysis

The Licchavi inscriptions mentioned here will be categorically divided and observed into three types. 1. Inscriptions in Buddhist Images installed 2. Making ‘water conduits’ for the people and 3. Land endowments for *Guthis* (Trusts) to sustain *Vihāra* and others.

¹⁷ Vajracharya (1973), *ka-cha*.

¹⁸ *Minnāth* Inscription, Appendix 1.

III. INSCRIPTIONS IN BUDDHIST IMAGES INSTALLED

One of the oldest inscriptions, Cābahi inscription, dated 499 AD, indicates the Image of *Māhāmuni* and *Bhikṣusangha*, which expresses a desire to be born male in the next birth by a devotee named Manodhara. Manodhara is making land endowments with various capacities for producing paddy. This could be worth exploring from a societal perspective. She made her pious donations out of compassion for the sake of her parents and forefathers, their welfare, and supreme bliss.

The other significant inscription is the one from the Lagan, Gaṇabaha inscription. It was inscribed on the base of the Padmapāṇi image in stone.¹⁹ The reason behind inscribing this inscription is to witness the establishment of Avalokiteśvara Padmapāṇi by one *paramopāsaka* Maṇigupta and his wife Mahendramati. The impressive ending line explains the sharing and transference of merit from this pious deed to their mother and father and all sentient beings wishing them to attain omniscience. The Bodhisattva *Avalokiteśvara* describes not deeply attaining Buddhahood but rather helping or facilitating others to become Buddha. *Avālokiteśvara* means “Lord who looks down” is a Bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all Buddhas, which is why he is also called *Karunāmayā*. *Avalokiteśvara* is capable of taking any form of being, reaching different realms of the universe, and liberating sentient beings from all sins and sufferings. Meditation of *Avalokiteśvara* by chanting his symbolic mantra “*Om mani padme hum*” will invoke and enshrine the compassion ideal of the Bodhisattva in one’s inner mind.²⁰ If we look at the flow for merit transference, we can see it’s in the flow as suggested in the Pāli text *Viśuddhimagga*. The sentiment and formula of Pāli sources were adapted in Māhāyana expression as well. Yet this inscription somehow connects the ancient tradition of transferring compassion from the nearest then to the entirety. They are highly aware of the approach put forth by *Avalokiteśvara* in Buddhist practices concerning compassion. Another addition is the selection of the term “*paramopāsaka*” which is typical of Buddhists in character since it indicates the highest *Upāsaka*, i.e., devotee. *Upāsaka*, *Upāsika*, *Bhikṣu*, and *Bhikṣuni* are combinedly called the “*Catupariṣada*” and they are the four wheels of the cart. It is not possible to imagine a Buddhist Sangha without them. Their activities related to compassion are most likely phenomena for them. During the Licchavi period, the impact set by Māhāyana scripture called “*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*” is immense since the cult of Amitabha Buddha and his entourage for the welfare of sentient beings has been verified from the Tyāgal tole inscription in Pātan.²¹ Many of the inscriptions also testify to his impact on the Buddhist community and hence the practice of compassion is highly likely with abundant installation of *Avalokiteśvara* images in frequent encounters dated in between the Licchavi period. Another very significant inscription is one that mentioned the word

¹⁹ Gaṇabaha Inscription, Appendix 1.

²⁰ R. Vajracharya (2003), p. 28

²¹ Tyāgala Tole Inscription, Appendix 1.

“Śākyabhikṣu”. This unique term abruptly appears in several inscriptions both in India and Nepal.²² They are the ones who are commissioned to make the statues and install them in various places for certain purposes. The caves of Ajantā, in India, witnessed many of the donations given by them to create what we see as magnificent today. Interestingly, Ajantā has 99 donative inscriptions up to the Vākataka Period. In the observation of Richard Scott Cohen, the word “Śākyabhikṣu” has been repeated 25 times whereas “Śākyaupāsaka” and “Śākyaupāsikā” repeated three times in inscriptions of Ajantā caves from a total of 73 epithets used for the donors.²³ The recent discovery of an inscription dated 542 AD from Guitole mentions the achievement of *anuttarajñāna* for the entire sentient being, specially dedicated to the parents of the donor Yaśomitra Śākyabhikṣu.²⁴ Śākyabhikṣus are given many interpretations regarding their nativity but one thing is for certain, they are devout Buddhists having the vigor to travel as a missionary for the propagation of Buddhism and donations. They are the one who donates out of their compassion and plan for their sustenance. It is interesting enough to realize that this system of making Śākyabhikṣus called “*bare chuyegu*” remained practiced in Nepal only along with many traditional practices of *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna*. Thus the legacy remains and has been guided by the practice of donation deeply rooted in the feeling of compassion. These are just a few dated samplings to elucidate the circumstances verifying similar mentions and behaviors of Buddhist people at that time.

The Bodhicaryāvatāra says “Today I summon the world to Buddhahood and worldly happiness. Meanwhile, in the presence of all the saviors, may gods, titans, and all rejoice.”²⁵ Bodhisattva and bodhicitta are vital ingredients for the practice of Māhāyāna Buddhism and it is inseparable from the act of compassion. This sentiment of bodhicitta from textual content was celebrated and also implemented in the Nepal maṇḍala since the initial historical traces of its inception from inscriptional and art historical grounds could relate them around the fifth century so far.

IV. MAKING OF “WATER CONDUITS” FOR THE PEOPLE

Water implies life. Undoubtedly, living beings can never survive without water. The water supply system as seen from the Licchavi inscriptions seems of prime priority for the authorities at that time. This service does not even require any spirituality other than a common feeling of serving humanity. Interestingly, those water systems were handed over to the monks for their maintenance and continuity. It was also mentioned that those water supplies are specifically managed for the monk’s community in a vihara²⁶ and they are

²² Schopen (2010), p. 250.

²³ Cohen (1995), p. 325 - 86.

²⁴ Alsop and et. al., *The Standing Buddha of Guitabahi*, accessed on [November 2, 2024], available at <https://www.asianart.com/articles/guita/part1/index.html>.

²⁵ Rijal (2021), p. 57: “*Jagadadya naimantritām Māhā sugatatvena kukhena chāntarā / Puratah khalu saarvatāyīnāmabhinandantu surāsurādayaḥ*”.

²⁶ Pharping Inscription of Amśuvarma, Appendix 1.

solely responsible for all the authority. From the perspective of its need, these water systems were treated in the inscriptions from the attention of national authority. King Mānadeva succinctly mentions that water conduits are for the ease of people.²⁷ Some talks about the merit we gather from this pious work will be transferred to our forefathers and they could attain their supreme bliss.²⁸ The Naksāl inscription of Amśuvarma is given and the entire responsibility is handed over to local people for the protection and sustainability from the government official called “*lingvala*” for the water system there and its use. They also guided not to graze animals near it and prohibited even to crossing over this territory after declaring it as a protected area²⁹, the eleventh goal in the UN declaration for sustainable development goals within the title of “make cities and human settlement inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” were practiced and envisioned well before its inception in modern time.³⁰ Viṣṇugupta’s inscription talks about the water irrigation system and canals, which further elaborate on the *guthi* system to take all the responsibility to run for the future with no hassle.³¹ The Nilvārāhi inscription highlights the maintenance of water supply and the endowment of land, emphasizing the establishment of multiple waterspouts or *Jaladroṇi* to ensure the comfort and convenience of people by providing a steady water supply. The system of special authority and inner court of the king called *antarāsana* was also created to look after water-related issues or management.³² Such inscriptions are very special to understand the thought processes and actual circumstances that prevailed there.

This historical evidence speaks loudly that humanity and mindset in royalty or the government authority or elites or even general people are envisioned to serve the people at large. This is seen in solving water-related problems. The obvious reason for heading towards this is not any predestined reason for self-centeredness or hope to be praised by people, but rather a self-satisfying and contented action. Compassion is the most likely erudition for activities related to the water system from historical records in Nepal.

This is the second “P” that refers to planning. The water system is a plan yielded from the compassionate feelings of Buddhist practitioners and others guided by empathy. The modern world also suffers from the lack of water supply, at least in countries in underdeveloped status. Many remote villages in Nepal have tragic scenarios of queuing for a limited amount of water. This situation was reflected in those inscriptions which were solved by planned actions put forth by those in the authoritative power of policymaking. It is not only a mere responsibility of authority to work in serving but also the

²⁷ Keltole Inscription of Mānadeva, Appendix 1.

²⁸ Tundikhel Inscription, Appendix 1.

²⁹ Naksāl Inscription of Amśuvarma, Appendix 1.

³⁰ United Nations, *The 17 Goals*, accessed on [December 20, 2024], available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

³¹ Chinnamastā Inscription of Dhruvadeva, Appendix 1.

³² Minnāth Inscription, Appendix 1.

feeling of making the situation better with ease driven by insightful feelings of compassion towards those in need. The perseverance towards results is not an easy task unless something is in support deeply and that is not other than insightful thought of compassion. Thus the plan formulated out of philosophy yields something productive and beneficial for people at large. This could not be constrained for a limited people and a period since it is a common benefit for many generations to come and to utilize it, whether it is a water system or anything else.

V. LAND ENDOWMENTS FOR *GUṬHIS* IN SUSTENANCE

The satisfied mind of a person should be the one that sustains their deeds and is confident that their works could benefit many. There are at least 80 donatory inscriptions that mention the creation of Caityas, Vihāras, water conduits, and many more driven by religious inclination during the Licchavi period in Nepal. The curious factor regarding those is that they planned not only for a short period. Their awareness for the sustenance is commendable and they worked out even today after thousands of years of installation. The persisting practices are worthy of elaboration since the endowments of lands, forming a *guthi* to take care of it, and making rules, regulations, and mindset to ordinary people are key factors for its upkeep. The lands donated are mentioned with various capacities based on the production of paddy and make use of it for continuity in various aspects. Some warning statements in misusing the endowments and praising those implemented in the discipline are fruitful adaptations to sustain actions.³³ The government is also making a rule, permission to collect certain taxes that allow them to preserve the system they created for the local population.³⁴ Apart from that, structural advancement by creating fences around the water conduits and reservoirs to protect them from animals and others was also mentioned.³⁵ Among these inscriptions, the Capah Turaṇa baha inscription in Pātan stands unique in terms of mentioning the *Bhikṣuṇisangha*, renovation of the Vihāra of *Cāturvinśa-Māhāyānapratipannārya Bhikṣuṇisangha*, the endowment of massive lands with proper location and on top of that the donor described as *paramopāsikayaḥ viśiṣṭadharmapālabhoginyā Mrginyaḥ* i.e; devotional giving of Dharmapala's main wife *Bhitriṇi Mṛigini* and wishing '*yādatrapuṇyam tadbhavatu samātapitribhatri Paruvāṅgamanam sarvasatvānām Niśśṣṭukhavinivartaye svatmānaścāgra pravaraṭarāmritakāyapratimābhāya Bhuyāt'* i.e; This merit of pious deed will be useful for the cessation of the suffering of my mother, father my husband, and all the sentient beings and finally, I could also attain the supreme and meritorious *Amritakāya*.³⁶ This particular term of *Amritakāya* is unique in the sense that they are not seen quite often. It deepens the deeper understanding of the Buddhist philosophy since it refers to the real body or *Dharmakāya*. The perception from this inscription,

³³ Minnāth Inscription, Appendix 1.

³⁴ Yangubaha Inscription of Narendra Deva, Appendix 1.

³⁵ Naksāl Inscription of Amśuvarma, Appendix 1.

³⁶ Shakya (1991), p. 8-9, Capah Turaṇbaha Inscription, Appendix 1.

representing other inscriptions as well, is very clear for what they are doing, why they are intended to do so, and what is the significance of it in terms of welfare.

These examples indicate our forefathers are not only committed to the construction of various stuff but also keen enough to keep it for the coming generations. The Cābahi inscription gave many speculations regarding afterlife concepts. The land endowed to the *Māhāmuni*, i.e., the Buddha image and the *bhikṣusangha* depicting the Kinnari *Jātaka* in a mural wishing to become born again into male form is something unusual to be inscribed in the inscription. This is probably a feeling to become Buddha or Bodhisattva since in literature, males born are only capable of becoming Buddha.³⁷ In Theravada tradition, we can see the influential practice of “*Puṇyanumodana*” or else based on Sanskrit traditional practices of “*Saptavidhānottara puja*”. They are the idea of merit transference whether to be called *pariṇāmanā*, *Puṇyapariṇāmanā*, or *bodhipariṇāmanā*. It is one prime ritual practice in every activity they are engaged in. This same inference could be analyzed from all those endowments recorded in Licchavi inscriptions of Nepal. There were no exact verses of chantings to be inscribed but the merit was handed over basically for the welfare of all the sentient beings. However, the donor’s parents were mentioned individually, and other living beings were also given equal priority to achieve supreme bliss. They are the greatest testimonies of witnessing the adaptation of the Buddhist philosophy and culture into their actions with the greatest devotion and courtesy. These practices are a perfect blend of religious activities and the modern thought of sustainability into action.

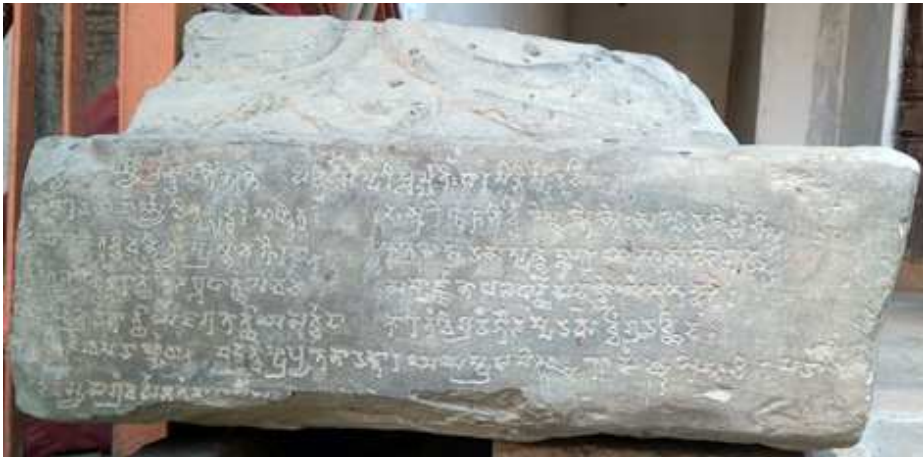
VI. CONCLUSION

The Licchavi inscriptions are the most valuable heritage documents witnessing the golden period in Nepal. Any period won’t be called golden unless something is created equivalent to gold for masses of people. The gold in this perspective is the human sentiment of helping and giving not only to living beings close to their heart but also to those who are already deceased or in entirety, all sentient beings. The inscriptions are the admixture of both mundane and supramundane deeds directed by the Buddhist perspective of compassionate actions as a sublime state of mind. This mingled to impact a large population. Those systematic approaches are expected to be sustained. The tested model that incorporates Buddhist philosophy, plan, and sustenance (PPS) is one effective tool that needs to be taken into consideration for future implementation towards the heritage or any other development models in the national or international application. That is why the scattered information in our ancestral records like Licchavi inscriptions is capable enough to guide the entire humanity to a new level. Nepal is rich from the legacy it possesses from its ancestral heritages and cultures, albeit it was tagged an underdeveloped country. However, the country could give testimonies that were already proven and could be used at any time in calculated circumstances, unlike a

³⁷ Vajracharya (2010), p. 36.

new prototype that is yet to be tested and implemented. This model of PPS as supported by Licchavi inscriptions is just one part of sampling among many other possible derivable entities. This study verifies the Licchavi people in Nepal understood the connectivity among people, their thoughts, and actions oriented towards its sustenance. Those inscriptions convinced that people had a tendency to merit transference and that could work to achieve enlightenment or the supreme bliss of humankind yet there were no mentions or success stories to have claimed their spiritual journey after their generous works ever been encountered, but the process they were implemented by creating the *guṭhis*, endowing the lands for its upkeep had saved the water spouts or irrigations systems even today. This very effective Buddhist approach not only speaks about the past but also shows the way towards the future and in this case, compassion always remains the catalyst from Buddhist perspectives.

Appendix
(Selected Inscriptions only)
Cābahi Inscription of 499 AD



(Medium stone, Photography by the researcher, Inscription is based on broken stuff)

Dudhairairindriyaih kritsnā vahyate yairiyamprajā, dāsavattāni sanfharya kripayāparipīdya tā dānaśila...

Samprāpyānuttaram jñānam prajādukhātprmoচিতā, pramoच्या sarvadukhebhyo yosau śhantampadaṅgalah ma...

Sankhidhya suchiraṅkalambhavanambhavavicchidah, Kinnarijātakakīrṇnanachitravirājitam śrī ...

Catvārimśatsapañceha yatra dhānyasya mānikāh, varṣe varṣetha jāyante kṣetrandattantayā yatra hryṣṭāvimśaitimānikah...

*Vichitram deyadharmamme kārayitveha yacchubham, sribhāvam hi vi-
ragyāham puruṣmatyvamavāpya ca śokakāmaMāhā...*

*... Māghavarse kāle āṣādhāśudhiva 10 asyāndivasapūrvāyām-
bhtārakaMāhārājaśri...*

Gaṇabaha Inscription of ca. 550 AD

(Medium- Stone, Photo Courtesy: Lain Singh Bangdel, Inscription is in the base of Avalokiteśvara Image)



*Om svasti ... Bhattarakama (haraja Sri...) devasya sāgram varṣasatam sa-
majñā (payatah) Sarvasatvahitasukharthaya bhagavata Āryavalokitesvaranātha
pratiṣṭhapitah deyadharmoyam paramopāsakamaṇiguptasya bharyayā mahen-
dramatyā saha yadatra puṇyam tadbhavatu mātāpitripurvaṇagam kritva sarva-
satvānam sarvākāraavaropeta ... sarvajñajñānāvāptaye.*

Pātan Tyāgal Tole Inscription of Ca. Sixth Cent. AD

(Medium- Stone, Photo Courtesy: Diwakar Acharya)



*Māhāprajñālokaśatabhavamāmohatimiram kukhāvatyam satatama-
mitābhañjinaravim*

*Salokiśam lokodbhavadbhayaḥharampaṅkajadhara Māhāsthāmaprāptam..
pāsnigdhamaṇa (sam)*

Chinnamasta Dhruvadeva Jīṣṇugupta inscription of 624 AD.

Long inscription- only selected versions are mentioned.

... *Bhavatāmbhattāraka Māhārājādihikārājaśyaśu varmapā-
dairyuśmadīyagrāmānāmupakārāya yosau tilamaka ānītobhūtpatissanskārā
bhāvādvinaśtamudriksya sāmantaścandravarmavijñaptai rasmābhista-
syai va prasādīkritastena cāsmadanujñātena yusmadyāmānāmevopakārāya
pratīkamskritosya copakārāya pāramparyāvicheda cirakālodvahanāy
yuśmākam vātikā apī prasādīkritāstadetābhyo yathākālāpīṇda kamupas-
amkatya bhadbhireva tilamakapratīśamsārah karaṇīya etadyāmavayavyat-
irekeṇa cānyagrāmanivāsinānna keśāñcinnetum labhyatesya ca..prasādasya
cīrasthitaye śīlāpattakaśāsenamidandattamevam vedibhirna kaiścidayamprād-
onyathā karaṇīyo yastvetāmājñāmatīkramyāmyānyatha tilamaka nayetta-
syāvaśyandaṇḍaḥ pātayitavyo bhaviṣyadbhidarapī bhūpatibhiḥ pūrvārā jakri-
taprasādānurvāttabhireva bhavitavyamiti apī cātra vātikānāmuddesaḥ ...*

... Samvat 48 kārṭika śukla 2 dūtaka yuvarājaśrī Viṣṇuguptaḥ

Kelatole Inscription of king Manadeva, Licchavi Period.

... Śāstravīhite yo nigrahe (sam) rataḥ, Śuddhatmā prakṛiteḥ titeva dayate
śrīmānadevo (nripaḥ).

Svapraṇam ... Yuktātmanā ... Jitavatā ksmām rakṣatā sarvadā.

(tene) dam śrutidharmaśāstravīhitam dharmakriyāṅkurvatā lokānam
sukhākāmyayā suvimālampāṇīyamānāyā...

Guitar Inscription of 541/2 AD





(Photo Courtesy: Ram Shaky and Gyanendra Shaky)

1. *Ū deya dharmmoyaṃ śākyabhikṣo Yaśomitrasya mātāpitarauṇ
pūrvvāṅgamaṇi kṛtvā ācāryyopādhyāyānāṃ sarvvasatvānāṃ
anuttarajñānavāptaye* 2. *stu, bhāṭṭāraka Māhārāja śrī rāmadevasya sāgra
varṣasataṃ samājñāpayataḥ Māhāsāmante Māhārāja śrī kramalīla kuśalīni*
3. *bhagavato buddhasya kāṇsyapratimā pratiṣṭhāpitā mārggaśīrṣe śukla
trayodaśyāṃ saṃvat a-pka cu pka.*

Capah Tole, Turanbaha Inscription of the Sixth Century AD.



(Medium- Stone, Photography by the researcher, Inscription is in Jaldroni)

*Deyadharmoyamparamopāsikayah viśiṣṭadharmapālabhoginyā nrginyah
yadatra punyam tadbhavatu samātapitribhatri Paruvangamanam sarvasatvā-
nam*

*Niśś dukhavinivartaye svatmānaścāgrapravaratarāmritakāyapratimābhāya
Bhuyāt, gandhakutipratisamskaranāya tadaprayojane ca cāturvīṃśa-*

Māhāyānapratipannārya Bhikṣuṇiṣaṅghaparibhogā Yakṣayaṇīvī pratipādītā panapphyṇāmapaśṣimapradeśe bhūmiśata 100 pinamānyā paṇyāśa 50

Bhūya gramadakṣīpradeśe) bhūmi śaṣṭi 60 pindamānyā ṣattriṇśa 36 grihaprastha śaṣṭhaśatāya

Pharping Inscription of Amsuvarma

Om svatanuvasuśirah karādidānairupakritathijanasya yena sakala...

Santaptasya kalīśvarairatiśanityaṅguṇadveṣibhirlokasyāsyā kushāvaho ma...

Sa śrīmāṅkalahābhīmāninripatih sarvajñatāmāpnuyāt yenaikena kalāvapi sthiradhiyā...

Teneyam svayaśomarīcivimalasphitāmbhuvi syandinom rājñā śrikalahābhīmāni...

Pravista pātālampunarapi parāvritya tarasā dravībhūtā kitih pracuraya....

Āryavāsasya bhūṣa prañīdhivirahitā nityamanyārthcriti

Kurvāṇevopamānaṅkṣītitalaśaśinastasya rājñah kripāyā...

Sakalajagadudanyāśāntaye śītatoyāmiha yativaravāse pātayitvā prañālīm

Naxal Bhansārahiti Inscription of Amsuvarma, earlier Seventh cent. AD.

Om svosti kailāsakūtabhavanādananyanarapatīśakarānatīpa-rapunyādīkārasthitinibandhanonniyamānamanassamādhāno bhagavat-paśupatibhattārapādānugrihito bappapādānudhyātah śrī Māhāsāmantāmsuvarma kuśali joṇjondīṅgrāmanivāsīnah pradhānapurassarāṅkutumbīnah kuśalamābhāṣya samājñāpayati viditambhavatu bhavatānniśālāprañālīkar-maparitoṣitairasmābhīh līṅgvalṣṇḍhaśvikavāhikāgantribalīvardānāmapraveśe-na vah prasādah kritastadevamadhigatārthairna kaiścīdeṣa prasādonyathā karaṇīyo yastvetāmājñām vilaṅghyānyathā kuryātkārayedvā tam vayanna marṣayīṣyāmo bhaviṣyadbhirapi (Bhūpathibhīh pū) rvarājakritaprasādānu-vartibhi (reva bhavitavyaṅcirasthitaye cāsyā) prasādasya śīlapattakaśāsane (ne prasādah krita iti svayamājñā dū) takaścātra yuvarājodayadevah (samvat)... Aṣṭamyāma.

Tundikhel Inscription of Amsuvarma, 621 AD

Samvat 45 jēṣṭha śukla..... Amśuvarmaprasādena pituh puṇyavivridhaye kārītā satprañāliyam vārtena vibhuvarmaṇā

Minnatha Inscription during Licchavi period

Long inscription- only selected version are mentioned

(ne) naiva vicārya nirṇetavyam tilamakaśca saptadhā vibhajya paribhoktavyo gogvalpāñcālikaire (ko mā) go grāhyo jājjepāñcālikaireko bhāgastegvalpāñcālikaireko bhāgo yūgvo- lpāñcālikāistrayo (bhāgā) llapāñcālikāistveko bhāga itye-vamavagatārtherbhavdbhiranumantavyametāt śāsanām...

Yaṅgubāha Padmapāṇi Inscription of 756 AD



(Medium- Stone, Photography by the researcher, Inscription is in the base of this Image)

*Etaṅgrāmalahugvale prativasaṃ Huṃdharmajīvaḥ svayam prākārṣī-
davalokiteśamamalamapāṣāṇamatyadbhutam /*

*Satvānāmavikalpamutpathaṣṭāmprā- ndhacittātmanām / saṃsārārti-
malā-ka-ragahanānnirpuktaye sarvadā/*

*Rājye śrīmānadevasya varṣeṣītyuttare śate / māghakṛṣṇadvitīyāyām-
pratiṣṭhāsya guṇodadheḥ/*

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BUDDHISTS IN NEW LANDS: COMPASSION VALUES AND ACTIONS TOWARDS BETTER AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURES AND HAPPINESS

Jose Antonio Rodriguez Diaz, Dr., PhD*

Abstract:

In the following pages, I present a sociological exploration of the values and practices of compassion among Buddhists in Spanish-speaking countries. This study examines how they engage with Buddhism, along with their interpretations, practices, and applications of its teachings. The aim is to deepen our understanding of how Buddhist values and practices adapt to new contexts, contributing to the pursuit of happiness and the creation of more just and sustainable societies. To achieve this, I draw on the first international survey of Buddhist values and practices in Spanish-speaking countries, conducted in 2022. My approach combines two methodologies: one rooted in sociological principles and another that integrates Buddhist teachings with sociology and social network analysis. The primary focus is on the lived experiences of Buddhists, exploring their visions, values, practices, and actions that define their spiritual journeys. By integrating the Buddhist concepts of non-self and dependent origination with relational sociology and social network analysis, I investigate the causal interactions and interdependencies between the values and practices of compassion and the social structures they give rise to. The visions and practices of these Buddhists shape Buddhism as a path of personal and social transformation, guiding individuals toward happiness. The interplay between values and practices forms a cognitive-action social field of Buddhist compassion, which, in turn, reveals the essence of the social and cultural identity of Buddhists in new contexts.

Keywords: *Buddhism, compassion, social transformation, happiness.*

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WHAT

This study offers a sociological examination of the values and actions of compassion among Buddhists in Spanish-speaking countries. It delves into how these principles are perceived and practiced, serving as a foundation for both personal and social transformation. The work explores their role in the pursuit of happiness and their contribution to the creation of better and more sustainable societies.

Compassion (*Pāli* and *Sanskrit*: *karuṇā*) is one of the central pillars of the Buddhist vision and practice, aimed at alleviating suffering while fostering interconnectedness and positive action for all. Compassion is the wish for others to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

In fact, according to the Buddha himself, it is the very essence of the Buddha and, therefore, of perfection. In the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, he affirms:

“Bhikkhus, there is one person who arises in the world for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human beings. Who is that one person? The Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One. This is that one person who arises in the world for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human beings.”¹

And in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, he speaks about the benefits of its practice: “Monks, the idea of compassion, if cultivated and made much of, is of great fruit and great profit.”² Similarly, the XIV Dalai Lama defines compassion as: “Compassion can be roughly defined in terms of a state of mind that is nonviolent, non-harming, and non-aggressive. It is a mental attitude based on the wish for others to be free of their suffering and is associated with a sense of commitment, responsibility, and respect towards the other.”³ He also emphasizes that its practice leads to happiness: “Therefore, compassion has two functions: it causes our brain to function better and it brings inner strength. These, then, are the causes of happiness.”⁴ Compassion, as part of the four immeasurables, is the social essence of Buddhism. Its form is inherently social; it implies a vision and action of interaction with other beings (human or non-human) aimed at their well-being and happiness. It is a primary avenue for creating harmonious relationships - both among individuals and within and between societies. Through this process of interaction, compassion actively shapes the social sphere, striving toward the creation of better societies: those with less suffering, greater happiness, more harmony, reduced conflict, and

¹ AN 1: xiii, 1; I 22 - 23

² AN. 46. 63.

³ Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. New York: Riverbed Books, 1998, 114.

⁴ Dalai Lama, “Compassion as the Source of Happiness,” *Dalai Lama Official Website*, accessed at, <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/compassion-and-human-values/compassion-as-the-source-of-happiness>

increased respect for the environment.

HOW

I hope to shed light on the values and practices of emerging Buddhist populations, offering insights into the processes of adapting Buddhism to their lives within the Spanish-speaking world, which has been historically dominated by Catholicism. Buddhism has a significant history and roots in Spanish-speaking countries. However, knowledge about the practitioners and followers who make up the Buddhist social world remains limited. To gain a closer look into the world of Buddhist practitioners, I draw on the results of the first international survey conducted in Spanish-speaking countries, centered on their characteristics, values, and practices.⁵ I approach the topic using a two-pronged methodology. In the first, more extensive part, I apply a conventional empirical approach to describe and analyze various indicators (used as proxies) of compassion values and practices. Here, I focus primarily on their frequency of occurrence, treating them as independent variables. I begin the exploration of the social world of these Buddhists by examining their sociodemographic characteristics and then proceed to analyze how their spiritual path of personal and social transformation is articulated through systems of values and practices. I seek to understand their worldview - how they see and interpret the world - alongside their ways of acting and shaping it. Finally, I explore how all of this is complemented by the pursuit of life satisfaction and happiness. To identify similarities and differences in these paths based on region, tradition, and gender, I apply basic statistical techniques using the SPSS program. Once these dimensions of compassion in the lives and practices of Buddhists in Spanish-speaking countries have been analyzed, I aim to transcend dualistic distinctions and separations between elements and dimensions. By following the principles of dependent origination and interdependence, I seek to understand the causal interrelations between these factors and their role in pathways of transformation toward happiness. I treat the correlations among all elements within the social space as networks of interaction that shape social maps of the world of compassion, tracing paths of both personal and social transformation toward happiness. This represents a new way of analyzing Buddhist social dynamics, introducing fresh measures and meanings that emerge from interaction. To achieve this, I employ the theoretical and technical framework of Social Network Analysis (SNA), using the software UCINET and NetDraw.

I. BUDDHISTS IN NEW LANDS

Just over half (58%) of the survey responses came from Buddhists living in Latin America, while 40% were from Spain. The respondents were evenly divided

⁵ “The survey was carried out through Google Forms between July 27, 2022, and December 26, 2022, with 257 valid responses. It is the first survey of its kind conducted in the Buddhist world, with the collaboration of Buddhistdoor en Español and the Dharma-Gaia Foundation. The responses provide an initial but rich perspective on various dimensions of Buddhism in Spanish-speaking countries.” *Following the Buddhist Path: Our Values, Religiosity, Spirituality*.

between men and women, with a mean age of approximately 51 years (50.7). By age group, the youngest participants constituted a minority (less than 10%), a third of the respondents were between 30 and 49 years old, and more than half were aged 50 or older (Table 1).

Table 1. Age groups

Age	Percentage (%)
18 to 29 years	9%
30 to 49 years	34%
50 years and over	56%

Table 2. Some sociodemographic characteristics

Average values		TRADITION			AREA		GENDER	
	TOTAL	Th ⁶	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	Men	Women
Age (mean)	50,65	45,26	50,32	52,0	54,1	48,1	49,1	52,7
Age of contact with Buddhism (mean)	34,22	30,6	33,6	34,8	35,5	33,6	31,2	37,9
% Women	49%	33	55	52	53	46%		

A slightly higher percentage of women responded in Spain than in Latin America (53% vs. 46%), and the average age in Spain is somewhat higher than in Latin America (54 vs. 48 years). Globally, female Buddhist respondents are also slightly older than male respondents (53 vs. 49 years) (Table 2). When comparing these Buddhist populations with those in Asia - where 95% of the world's Buddhists reside - we find that the percentage of women is also slightly higher than that of men. However, the overall average age in Asia is somewhat lower (46 years).⁷ Unlike in countries where Buddhism is the dominant religion, in Spanish-speaking countries - where Catholicism is predominant - Buddhists do not typically encounter Buddhism early in life. Instead, their engagement with it tends to begin later. In fact, fewer than 20% had contact with Buddhism before the age of 20. Half of the respondents began their relationship with Buddhism between the ages of 20 and 40. The average age at which they first encountered Buddhism was 34 years, during full adulthood, and, on average, they have been practicing for nearly 13 years. In general, Buddhism is not inherited from parents but is instead voluntarily and actively embraced as part of a conversion process.

The first contact with Buddhism was primarily through books (41%) and,

⁶ Th: Theravāda; Mh: Mahāyāna; Vj: Vajrayāna; SP: Spain; LA: Latin-America

⁷ According to data from the World Values Survey 6, in Rodríguez (2018).

to a lesser extent, the internet (26%). A third of respondents were introduced to Buddhism through social relationships with friends and acquaintances, while fewer than 10% learned about it from their families. The Buddhist social world - including centers, teachers, and talks - as well as its surrounding environment, such as yoga centers and natural therapies, also played a significant role, though to a lesser extent than mass media channels and social connections. A substantial part of their Buddhist practice is shaped by relationships with traditions and schools, as well as with centers and teachers. The two most followed traditions among respondents are Vajrayāna (47%)⁸ and Mahāyāna (45%),⁹ while Theravāda has a smaller presence (17%). The majority of practitioners (85%) are members or sympathizers of an organization or similar group and have a teacher or role model they follow. More than a quarter (27%) identify with or feel connected to more than one tradition, 29% feel close to more than one center, and 51% follow more than one teacher or spiritual guide. This demonstrates the permeability of jurisdictional boundaries and the decreasing separation between traditions, centers, and teachers, leading to a more interconnected form of Buddhism. These patterns highlight the ways in which different traditions have expanded. There are notable differences in their spread between Spain and Latin America. In Spain, 65% of respondents identify with Vajrayāna (reflecting its strong presence), followed by Mahāyāna (42%), while Theravāda has a smaller following (9%). In Latin America, the distribution is more balanced, with Mahāyāna being the most prevalent tradition (47%), followed by Vajrayāna (35%) and Theravāda (22%). When comparing these regions, we see that the proportion of Vajrayāna practitioners in Spain is nearly double that in Latin America, whereas the proportion of Theravāda followers in Latin America is more than twice that in Spain. These figures reflect distinct models of expansion: Vajrayāna is the predominant tradition among respondents in Spain, while Mahāyāna holds that position in Latin America.

II. COMPASSION VALUES

A first step in understanding how these Buddhists perceive compassion is to examine the role it plays in their understanding and interpretation of Buddhism.

2.1. Views of Buddhism

Buddhists in these new lands view Buddhism as a multifaceted tradition, associating it with multiple concepts simultaneously. A large majority (79%) define it as a “spiritual path,” while a significant number (66%) see it as a “philosophy.” These two dominant definitions emphasize Buddhism as both a path to follow and a way of understanding and interpreting reality. Additionally,

⁸ Of these, 35 per cent belong to the Sakya school, 23 per cent to the Kagyu school, 8 per cent to the Geluk school, 5 per cent to the Rimah movement, and 3 per cent to the Nyingma school.

⁹ Of these, 40% are associated with Zen Buddhism, 7% with Pure Land Buddhism, and 2% with Chan Buddhism.

many respondents conceptualize it as a set of transformative practices (57%), a system of values (48%), and a way of life (48%). Furthermore, 30% associate it with a path of social transformation. Although less common, a notable portion of practitioners (37%) regard Buddhism as a religion, while 23% consider it a science, and 16% view it as a system of personal therapies (Table 3 and Graph 1). For these practitioners, Buddhism serves as a space that nurtures and strengthens the values of compassion. Compassion is central to their understanding of Buddhism - not only as a worldview (philosophy or religion) but also as a system of values and attitudes (way of life) and as a guiding path with a social dimension. It shapes their perception of reality and stands as a fundamental element of their spiritual journey. Philosophy and religion provide the conceptual framework for compassion, influencing how practitioners relate to others and to suffering. The system of values and way of life reflect the space where compassionate attitudes are cultivated, while paths of transformation reveal the social dimension of these values - translating them into action to confront suffering and promote the well-being of all beings.

Table 3. Views of Buddhism as:

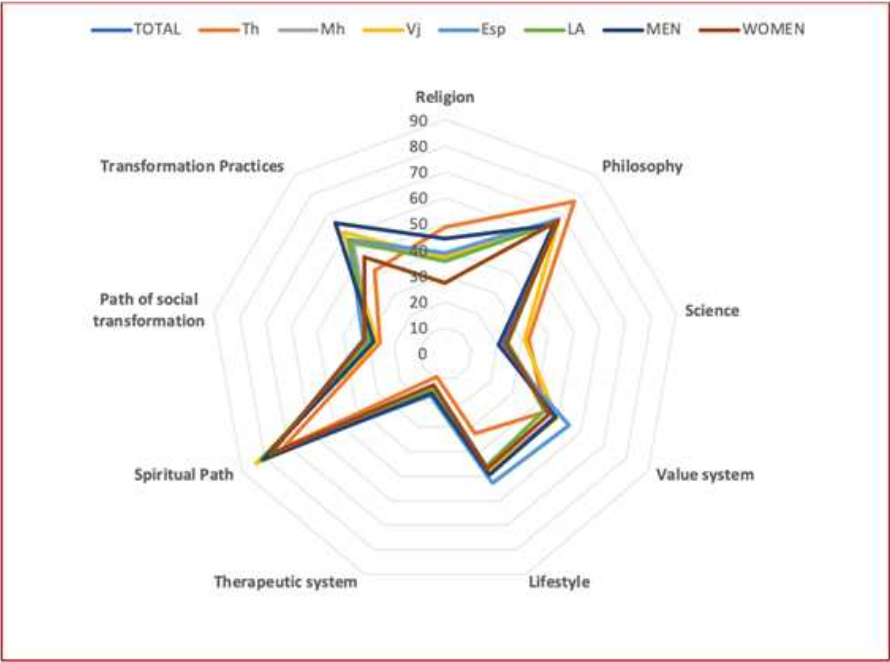
In Percent- ages Multiple Re- sponses ¹⁰	TO- TAL (%)	Th	Mh	Vj	Esp	LA	MEN	WOM- EN
Religion	36,6	48,8	37,1	36,7	38,7	35,8	44,4	27,2
Philosophy	66,1	76,7	66,4	67,5	67,9	66,2	64,8	66,9
Science	22,8	32,6	24,1	30,8	20,8	24,3	20,8	23,4
Value system	48,4	44,2	48,3	49,2	54,7	43,9	48,8	46
Lifestyle	48,6	32,6	49,1	48,3	52,8	45,9	49,6	46,8
Therapeutic system	15,6	9,3	13,8	13,3	17	14,9	16	12,9
Spiritual Path	79,9	72,1	81,9	84,2	77,4	81,8	80,8	77,4
Path of social transformation	30,7	25,6	28,4	26,7	32,1	29,7	28	31,5
Transforma- tion Practices	57,1	41,9	55,2	60,8	57,5	56,8	65,6	48,4

“Th” Theravāda; “Mh” Mahāyāna; “Vj” Vajrayāna; “SP” Spain: “LA” Latin America

¹⁰ In this type of question, several answers can be given at the same time.

The various definitions of Buddhism can be grouped into two broad categories: those centered on meaning and vision - aimed at understanding reality - and those focused on practices that follow from that vision. Compassion plays a central role in both. The dimension of meaning includes associations with philosophy, values, religion, and science, reflecting how practitioners conceptualize Buddhism as a way of understanding reality. The dimension of practice encompasses definitions that emphasize Buddhism as a spiritual path, a set of transformative practices, a behavioral system, and a path of social transformation.

Graph 1. Views of Buddhism



For these Western practitioners, Buddhism represents a close relationship between meaning and practice. It forms a structured path that integrates essential elements - defining the spiritual journey and shaping a life project with both goals and methods for achieving them. This path can be understood as the interaction of three key dimensions: philosophy (a way of understanding and perceiving reality), practices for transformation (both individual and social change), and systems of values and behaviors (guiding orientations and practical applications). Compassion emerges as an integral outcome of this combination. Despite geographical distance, Buddhist communities on both sides of the Atlantic share striking similarities, placing equal importance on these core elements. Notably, while men tend to emphasize Buddhism's religious aspects more than women, women are more likely to view it as a practice of transformation. In shaping their understanding of compassion within Buddhism, Theravāda Buddhists stand out in their strong association

of Buddhism with philosophy (77%) and religion (49%), significantly more than Vajrayāna and Mahāyāna followers. In contrast, practitioners of Vajrayāna and Mahāyāna place greater emphasis on Buddhism as a behavioral system, a practice of transformation, and a spiritual path. These differences reflect varying approaches -some practitioners focus more on the practical dimensions of Buddhism, while others prioritize its philosophical and conceptual aspects. Theravāda followers emphasize religion and philosophy, practitioners in Spain highlight Buddhism as a system of values and behaviors, while Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna practitioners predominantly define it as a spiritual path. The motivations for engaging with Buddhism - and the expectations associated with its knowledge and practice - are key to understanding the paths these practitioners take. The primary reasons given for turning to Buddhism, and for embracing it as a way of life, reveal a diverse and complex set of aspirations. The most frequently cited motivations (mentioned by over a third of respondents) can be grouped into three distinct conceptual categories.

Table 4. Top Reasons to Approach Buddhism

In Percentages Multiple An- swers ¹¹	TOTAL (%)	Th	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	MEN	WOMEN
Seeking personal growth	48	44	45	52	50	47	47	50
Seeking greater capacity to deal with problems or situations of suffering	47	61	52	50	44	49	45	49
Pursuit of happiness	34	37	31	38	43	28	36	31
Seeking spiritual guidance	33	33	37	32	28	36	32	34
Possibilities to help others	32	30	36	34	30	32	32	30

¹¹ In this type of question, several answers can be given at the same time.

The motivations for engaging with Buddhism reveal a journey of personal empowerment, guided by spirituality, and oriented towards helping others. Buddhism is thus perceived as a path of compassion, integrating knowledge, values, and practices to foster both personal growth and social well-being. There are minimal differences between men and women in their reasons for practicing Buddhism. Likewise, Hispanic Buddhists in Spain and Latin America largely share the same motivations, though their priorities differ slightly: In Spain, the primary motivation is personal growth, followed by the ability to cope with suffering, and the pursuit of happiness. In Latin America, the main focus is on developing resilience to suffering, followed by personal growth, and deepening Buddhist practice. These priorities suggest two distinct but complementary narratives: Spain: Personal growth, Coping with suffering, and Happiness. Latin America: Coping with suffering, Personal growth, and Deepening practice. In terms of traditions, Vajrayāna followers tend to emphasize personal growth as their primary goal. Theravāda and Mahāyāna practitioners place a stronger focus on developing the ability to confront suffering. These variations reflect different approaches to the Buddhist path, yet all converge on Buddhism as a transformative tool for both self-improvement and compassionate action.

2.2. Effects and outcomes of being and practicing

Being Buddhist and practicing Buddhism have resulted in important changes in their lives and have strengthened their values and attitudes of compassion. In fact, the vast majority of practitioners (90%) have found either a lot or quite a lot of what they were initially seeking in the knowledge and practice of Buddhism. For the majority of practitioners, being Buddhist has led to radical changes in the meaning of their lives, particularly regarding their perceptions of enemies and society as a whole, which are crucial for fostering peaceful relationships and societies (Table 5, Graphs 3 and 4). It has also transformed their perspectives, interpersonal relationships, and social roles. Altogether, these changes facilitate the practice of compassion and enhance their social orientation.

Table 5. Social effects of practicing Buddhism

In Percentages %	TO-TAL	Th	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	Men	Women
Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life (Multiple Answers)¹²								
In relation to enemies	73%	86	71	77	70	69	70	70
Regarding society	68	79	72	70	65	70	68	66

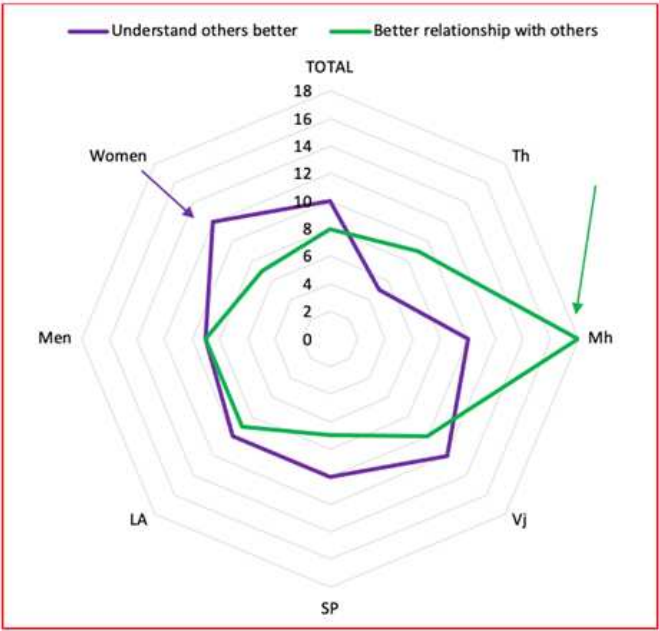
¹² In this type of question, several answers can be given at the same time.

Results from Bud- dhist Practice								
Understand others better	10%	5	10	12	10	10	9	12
Better relationship with others	8	9	18	10	7	9	9	7

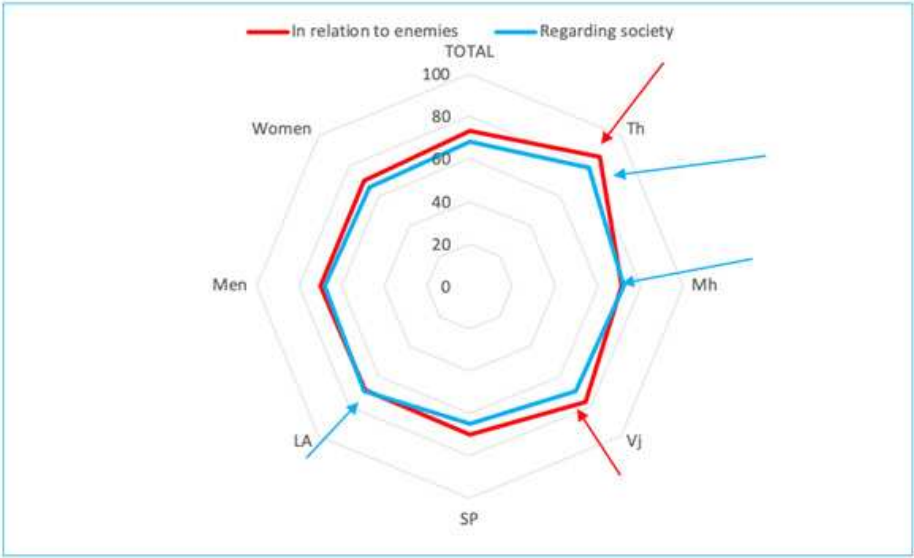
“Th” Theravāda; “Mh” Mahāyāna; “Vj” Vajrayāna; “SP” Spain: “LA” Latin America

The overall result is a new life path and new ways of walking it - paths of compassion and social transformation. There are few differences between traditions, regions, or genders in the social effects of being Buddhist and the outcomes of practicing Buddhism. Theravāda and Vajrayāna practitioners emphasize slightly more the effects of Buddhism in changing the meaning of life concerning enemies and society, while Mahāyāna and Latin American practitioners emphasize slightly more the effect of Buddhism in changing the role of society in life. Mahāyāna practitioners particularly highlight the improvement of relationships with others as a result of their practice, whereas women and Vajrayāna practitioners emphasize a greater understanding of others. These data underscore the significance of the social dimension, alongside the personal dimension, in their vision and practice of Buddhism. The result is a spiritual path that integrates both dimensions in compassion.

Graph 3. Most important social outcome of their practice



Graph 4. Changes in the Meaning of Life



III. COMPASSION IN ACTION

The vision, orientation, and relationship with others, along with participation in or collaboration with organizations and social activities, shape the social dimension of the spiritual path and the practice of compassion. Trust in others is a central element in understanding both the systems of relationships and the social circles that emerge from them, as well as in defining the social role that Buddhists play. Trust is the foundation of the social dimension of compassion and serves as the driving force for social transformation. Buddhists’ trust in most people is relatively high. On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (completely), the average is 6.82. Levels of trust in others - whether close or distant - shape the social circles of trust in which Buddhists live. Couples, followed by close family members and friends, occupy the central space of the social system of trust, with high averages on a scale from 1 to 5: 4.41, 4.17, and 4.05, respectively. These represent social spaces of strong and cohesive relationships. The second social circle of trust consists of colleagues from Buddhist organizations, associations, and workplaces. The third circle, with slightly lower levels of trust, includes extended family members and people of other religions and/or nationalities. The least trusted, although still above the midpoint on the 1-to-5 scale, are recently met acquaintances (average of 2.8) and neighbors (3.02) (Table 6 & Graph 5).

Table 6. Trust

	TOTAL	Th	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	Men	Women
Trust most people –1 to +10	6,8	6,7	6,6	7,2	7	6,7	6,7	7

Trust people from other religions –1 to +5	3,3	3,1	3,3	3,5	3,5	3,2	3,2	3,4
Trust people from other countries –1 to +5	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,6	3,6	3,4	3,4	3,5
Trust neighbors –1 to +5	3	3,1	3,1	3,2	3	3,4	2,9	3,4
Trust friends –1 to +5	4,1	4,2	4	4,2	4,1	4	4	4,1

“Th” Theravāda; “Mh” Mahāyāna; “Vj” Vajrayāna; “SP” Spain; “LA” Latin America

Graph 5. Trust



Social trust and compassion shape the social role of Buddhists, manifesting in a high level of participation in civil and social organizations of various kinds, primarily oriented toward society. Through this participation, they become part of the broader social fabric and contribute to its structure and dynamics. Buddhists stand out not only as members of religious organizations (36%) but also as active participants in humanitarian organizations (29%), cultural

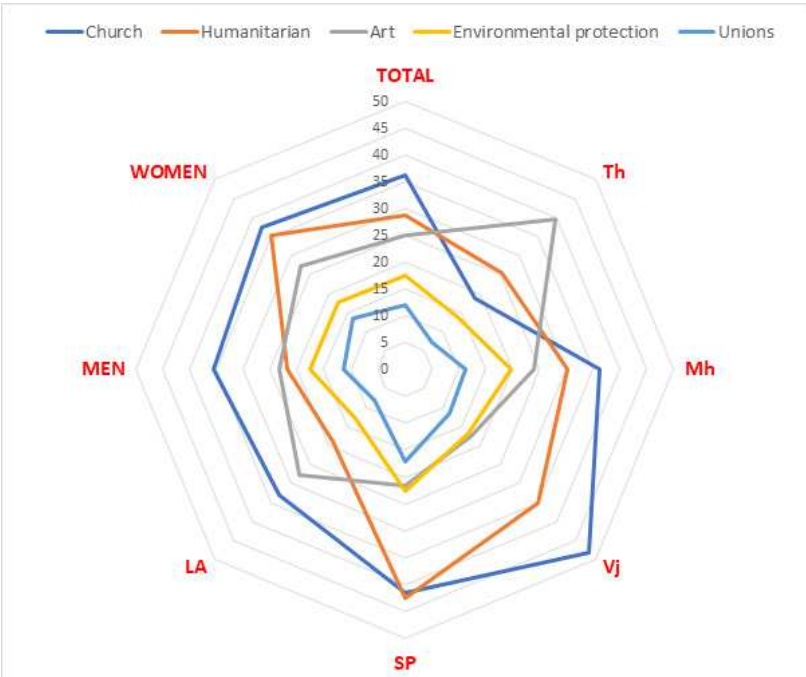
organizations (25%), professional associations (23%), sports and/or leisure organizations (23%), and environmental protection organizations (18%). These are avenues for fostering relationships with the social environment and channels through which Buddhist visions and practices of compassion are disseminated throughout society, with the hope of creating a positive impact (Table 7, Graph 6).

Table 7. Membership in civil organizations

%	TO-TAL	Th	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	MEN	WOM-EN
Church	36	19	36	48	42	33	36	38
Humanitarian	29	26	30	35	43	19	22	35
Art	25	40	24	18	22	28	24	27
Environmental protection	18	14	20	17	23	13	18	18
Unions	12	7	11	12	17	8	11	14
Average number of Memberships in civil organizations	2,7	2,5	2,6	2,7	2,8	2,6	2,5	2,8
% of membership	74,7%	65,1	75,9	76,7	81,1	70,3	73,4	76

There are very few differences across regions, traditions, and genders. Most notably, *Vajrayāna* practitioners and Spanish Buddhists have the highest levels of affiliation with religious and humanitarian organizations. *Theravāda* practitioners are distinguished by their strong involvement in cultural and arts organizations, while *Mahāyāna* practitioners and Spanish Buddhists stand out for their notable participation in environmental organizations.

Graph 6. Membership in civil organizations



At the same time, they engage in actions related to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which directly align with the essence of compassion - reducing suffering and improving the well-being of all beings. Almost half of the respondents (46%) participate in or collaborate on activities related to the SDGs. The goals in which they are most actively involved (mentioned by more than 10% of respondents) include SDG3: “Good Health and Well-Being” (18%), followed by SDG4: “Quality Education” (12%), SDG5: “Gender Equality” (11%), SDG13: “Climate Action” (11%), and SDG10: “Reduced Inequalities” (10%)

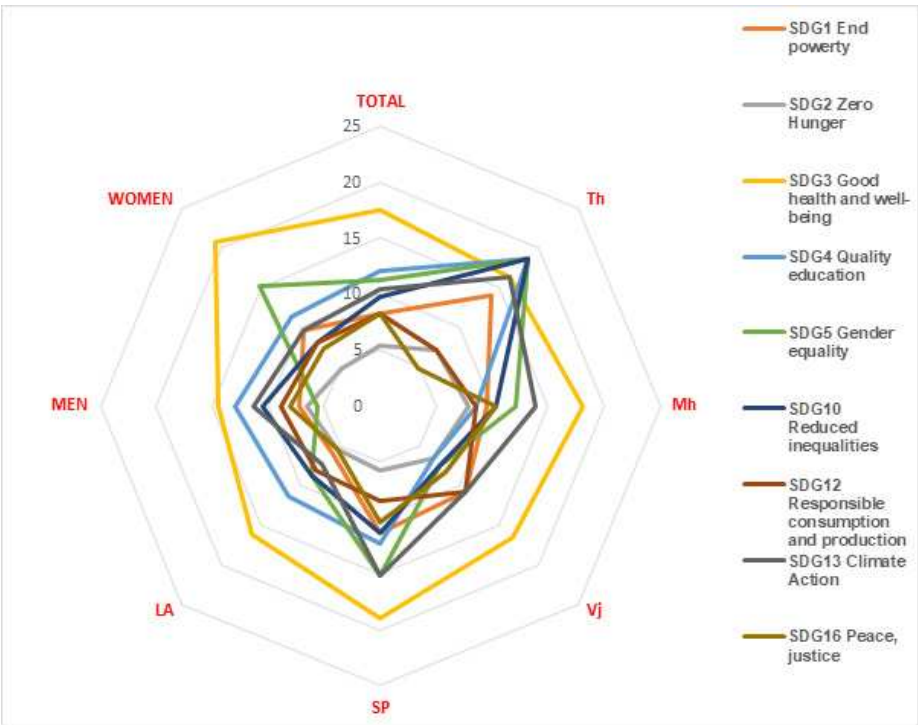
Table 8. Participation in SDG actions.

In Percentages Multiple An- swers	TO- TAL	Th	Mh	Vj	SP	LA	MEN	WOM- EN
SDG1 End powerty	8,2	14	9,5	10,8	11,3	6,1	7,3	9,6
SDG2 Zero Hunger	5,4	7	7,8	6,7	5,7	5,4	6,5	4,8
SDG3 Good health and well-being	17,5	16,3	18,1	16,7	18,9	16,2	14,5	20,8

SDG4 Quality education	12,1	18,6	8,6	6,7	12,3	11,5	12,9	11,2
SDG5 Gender equality	11,3	18,6	12,1	7,5	15,1	8,8	5,6	15,2
SDG10 Reduced inequalities	9,7	18,6	10,3	7,5	11,3	8,8	10,5	8
SDG12 Responsible consumption and production	8,2	7	8,6	10,8	8,5	8,1	8,9	8
SDG13 Climate Action	10,5	16,3	13,8	10,8	15,1	7,4	11,3	9,6
SDG16 Peace, justice	8,2	4,7	10,3	8,3	10,4	5,4	8,1	7,2

There are notable differences in how various Buddhist groups engage in SDG-related actions connected to compassion. Spanish Buddhists, along with Mahāyāna practitioners, are particularly active in initiatives promoting good health and well-being (SDG3). When it comes to climate action (SDG13), both Spanish Buddhists and Theravāda practitioners stand out for their participation. Efforts to combat poverty (SDG1) see significant involvement from Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Spanish practitioners alike. In promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG16), Mahāyāna practitioners and Spanish Buddhists are particularly engaged. Finally, in addressing hunger and food security (SDG2), Theravāda and Mahāyāna practitioners demonstrate strong commitment. These distinctions highlight the diverse ways in which Buddhist communities contribute to global sustainable development goals through compassionate action.

Graph 7. Participation in SDG actions



From all this, we can highlight two main avenues of compassion in action: a high level of trust in most people and significant participation in and collaboration with social organizations. These commitments reflect their dedication to social transformation as an integral part of their spiritual path.

3.1. Towards Better Futures

A large majority of Buddhists view the future as open: 44% believe that everything will change, although they do not know how, and 33% see the recent crisis as an opportunity for transformation and improvement. In contrast to this open and/or optimistic outlook, nearly 8% believe that nothing will change, while 17% expect the future to worsen. It is noteworthy that Theravāda practitioners (40%) stand out for considering the recent crisis as an opportunity for a better future. Meanwhile, nearly half of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna practitioners perceive the future as uncertain, though open. Additionally, women are more likely than men to see the crisis as an opportunity for change, whereas men are slightly more inclined toward a pessimistic view, believing that either conditions will deteriorate or nothing will change.

3.2. Creating Better Futures

Aligned with this vision of open futures, and as clear examples of compassion in action, the vast majority of Spanish-speaking Buddhists take active steps to contribute to a better future. Only 2.4% state that they cannot do anything (Table 9 & Graph 8). The primary focus of Buddhists’ actions for a better future is environmental care, with 72% engaging in activities related to this area, followed closely by helping others (70%). Personal changes in lifestyle

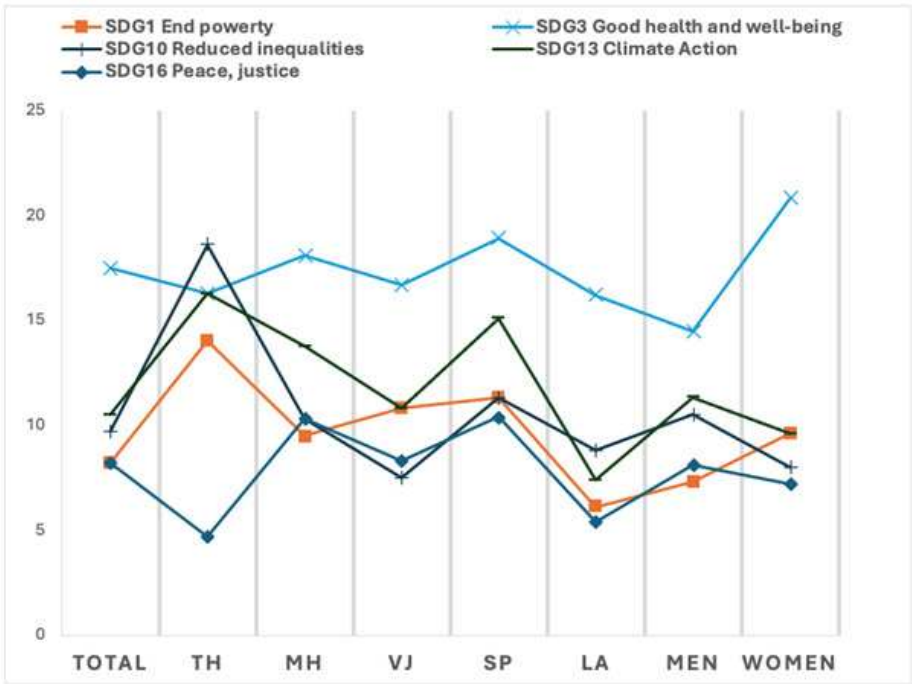
and consumption habits (63% and 65%, respectively) are also used as means to move toward better futures. Just over half of the survey respondents indicate that they are striving to be less selfish (59%) and dedicating more time to being close to their loved ones (55%) to achieve this goal. The two main avenues of action toward a better future center on environmental responsibility and care for others. To create a more sustainable future, Buddhists engage in direct actions, adopt lifestyle changes, and cultivate selflessness. Their commitment to the well-being of others, as part of becoming less selfish and implementing personal changes, manifests in helping others and spending more time with loved ones. These actions for a better future can be seen as expressions of compassion and love - not only for all living beings today but also for those of future generations.

Table 9. Actions for better futures

ACTIONS FOR BETTER FUTURES. In %	TOTAL	Th	Mh	Vj	Sp	LA	Men	Women
Change lifestyle	63	61	67	60	52	69	65	59
Change consumption pattern	65	56	64	70	70	58	61	66
Be closer to loved ones	54	40	56	52	51	53	48	58
Be less selfish	59	63	63	65	59	57	61	54
Help others	70	67	71	73	70	68	64	74
Belong to social organizations	38	28	36	44	48	30	33	42
Care for the environment	72	63	74	73	73	68	64	78

There is considerable similarity across regions, traditions, and genders in their visions and actions toward the future. The small differences observed are as follows: Vajrayāna practitioners and Buddhists living in Spain place slightly more emphasis on changes in consumption and collaboration with social organizations. Women stand out for their dedication to helping others and caring for the environment, while Latin American practitioners focus more on lifestyle changes as a means of contributing to better futures. Theravāda and Mahāyāna practitioners emphasize helping others. Compassion guides Buddhists’ social action, whether through participation in civil organizations or involvement in SDG-related initiatives aimed at reducing suffering and enhancing the well-being of all living beings. In this way, Buddhist social action contributes to the creation of better and more sustainable future societies.

Graph 8. Actions for better futures



IV. HAPPINESS

Following the Dalai Lama’s assertion that compassion contributes not only to the happiness of others but also to those who practice it, we now turn to the happiness and well-being of these Buddhists. We conclude this glimpse into the world of these Buddhist communities with a few insights into their quality of life and happiness. The vast majority of Buddhists (72%) consider themselves quite or very happy, compared to 24% who describe themselves as only somewhat happy and 4% who consider themselves unhappy. Additionally, most Buddhists (81%) report enjoying good health, although nearly 20% indicate that they are not in good health (Table 10).

Table 10. Happiness and health

Current Happiness Level			Health Level		
	N	%		N	%
Very happy	(40)	15.8%	Very good	(67)	26.3%
Quite happy	(142)	56.1%	Good	(140)	54.9%
Somewhat happy	(61)	24.1%	Regular	(43)	16.9%
Not very happy	(10)	4%	Bad	(4)	1.6%
Not happy at all	0	0	Very bad	(1)	0.4%

On a scale of 1 to 10 (from least to most), the average happiness score is 7.54, the average life satisfaction score is 7.94, and the average enjoyment of life score is 7.78. In global terms, this is a population that considers itself happy, satisfied, and able to enjoy good health and life.

Table 11. Happiness

Average values		TRADITION			AREA		GENDER	
	TO-TAL	Th	Mh	Vj	Sp	LA	Men	Women
Happiness	7,54	7,40	7,61	7,60	7,46	7,60	7,33	7,79
Satisfaction	7,95	7,86	7,96	8,0	7,75	7,50	7,77	8,13
Enjoyment of life	7,78	7,62	7,91	7,80	8,08	7,96	7,54	8,01
n	257	43	116	120	102	148	124	125

“Th” Theravāda; “Mh” Mahāyāna; “Vj” Vajrayāna; “SP” Spain; “LA” Latin America

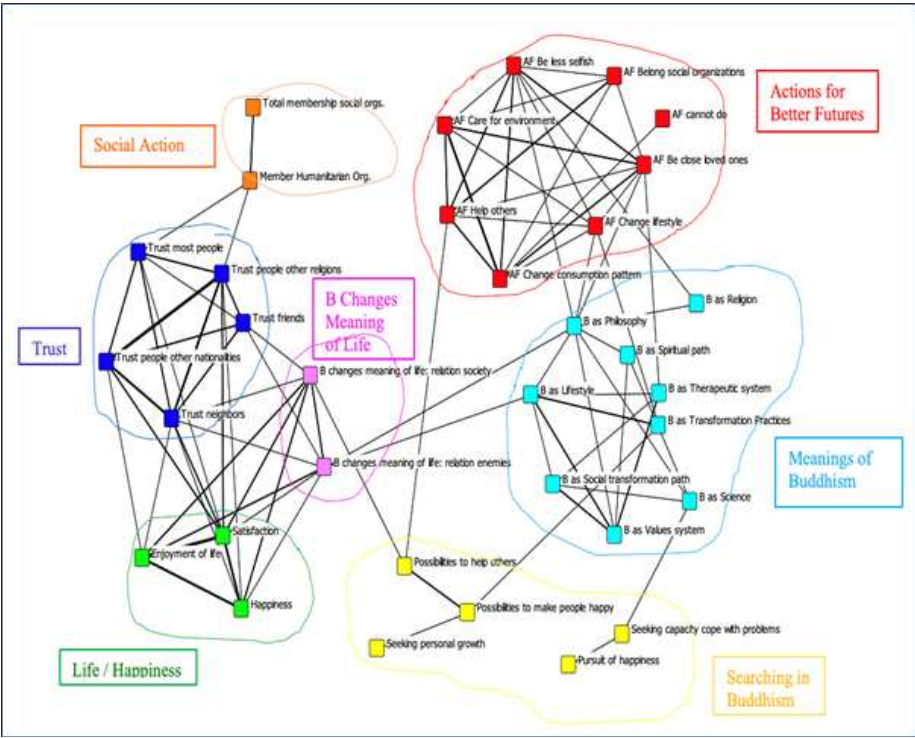
There are no major differences among the three main traditions (Table 11). The only minor distinctions worth noting are that followers of the *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna* traditions report slightly above-average levels of happiness, satisfaction, and enjoyment, whereas those of the *Theravāda* tradition are slightly below average. Women exhibit the highest levels across these three well-being indicators, and Latin American Buddhists report a slightly higher level of happiness than Spaniards but a slightly lower level of satisfaction and enjoyment of life. These Buddhists in new lands are not only guided by the values of compassion in their social action but are also happy individuals who are satisfied with and enjoy life.

V. A NON-DUAL VISION: MAPPING THE BUDDHIST SOCIAL WORLD

To overcome the meaning-practices duality and to understand Buddhism - as well as the visions and practices of Buddhists in new lands - through central aspects of Buddhism such as *anattā* (not-self or non-duality) and *paṭicca-samuppāda* (dependent origination), I now focus on the interconnections among all compassion-related values and actions. The relational approach and Social Network Analysis (SNA) offer a new perspective in which meaning is acquired through relationships, structures, and systems of relations. This perspective is closer to Buddhism: *anattā*, *paṭicca-samuppāda*, and *suññatā* (emptiness). Nothing has meaning on its own; everything acquires meaning through interaction - different interactions result in different meanings. By focusing on correlations, co-occurrences, coincidences, links, or relationships, we can visualize relational systems and structures, thereby mapping social connections. The application of SNA allows for the representation of this

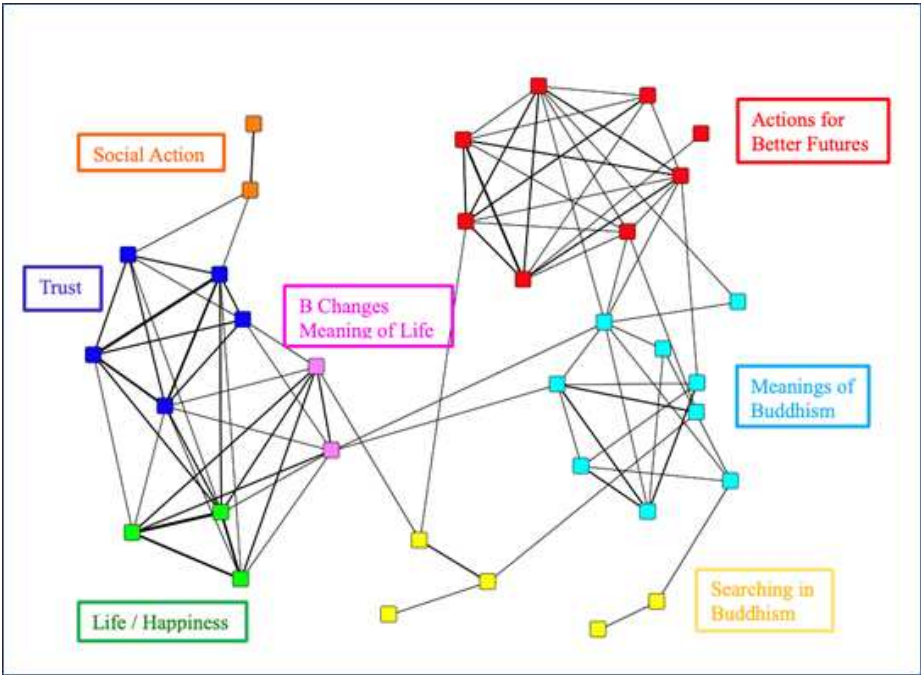
cognitive action structure as a kind of map of Buddhist social DNA. Similar to the Buddhist worldview - where nothing possesses intrinsic existence and everything arises through interaction - relational sociology sees social entities as taking form through relationships. These entities are ever-changing and differ as their interrelated causal components shift. Analyzing the social and the dimension of interdependence allows us to perceive the unseen: the relationships that shape both new and old meanings. It enables us to represent the social world graphically, much like physical maps. For this study, I employ the theoretical and technical approach of SNA using UCINET software, which provides new ways of perceiving relational systems along with novel indicators and metrics for analysis. Some of the key concepts and metrics include: Nodes: Actors or elements that are interconnected, Links: Relationships, connections, contacts, coincidences, or similarities, Network: A graphical representation of the system of interconnections or links created by relationships, Centrality: An indicator of the number of direct contacts or links each node has, Sub-structures: Differentiated systems of relationships within a network, and Social maps: Visualizations and analyses of networks as maps and social pathways - representing communication, interdependence, and causality - offering a visual approach to the Buddhist social universe. In this framework, nodes represent the elements that constitute the Buddhist social cognitive action system, while the lines connecting these nodes signify causal relationships between them. The relational intensity between nodes - indicating the extent to which they influence each other - is represented by the thickness of the connecting lines. The charts and analytics do not indicate the size or frequency of a given element. Instead, they reflect its relational relevance. In other words, everything is understood through interaction. In this dynamic, the most important or central elements are those that engage in the greatest number of interactions. The most central elements, therefore, exert the most influence on the entire system. Graph 9 represents this relational system in the form of a map, illustrating the correlations among variables (proxies for compassion) used in the study. The variables - referred to as nodes in the jargon of social network analysis - correspond to six dimensions: trust, life and happiness, actions for better futures, meaning of Buddhism, searching in Buddhism, and the effects of Buddhism in changing the meaning of life. To facilitate differentiation, the nodes representing each dimension are marked with distinct colors. The system is fully interconnected; all nodes are linked directly or indirectly. This signifies a continuous flow of causal interactions throughout the system. It reflects that values, actions, and practices do not exist in isolation but rather in interaction, forming more complex systems of meaning and practice. As demonstrated in Graph 9, actions for better futures are linked to - and both influence and are influenced by - the meanings of Buddhism according to practitioners. Each combination of elements results in a distinct cognitive action.

Graph 9. Compassion social space



We can interpret this system as a map - a network of interconnected paths that directly and indirectly link various nodes. It can be visualized much like a subway map, where one station leads to another, ultimately reaching a destination. For example, if Buddhism is perceived as a Religion, it connects to the action for a better future of Being Less Selfish, which in turn leads to the action of Helping Others. This then links to Searching in Buddhism for Possibilities to Help Others, which connects with the effects of Buddhism in Changing the Meaning of Life about Society, and ultimately, all these pathways lead to Happiness. Graph 10 illustrates two major relational groupings (subnetworks): one on the left and the other on the right, with a weak connection between them. Within each grouping, the dimensions exhibit high levels of direct interrelation, forming strongly connected clusters. On the right, the dimensions of Actions for Better Futures and Meaning of Buddhism form a highly cohesive relational structure, primarily linked by the notion of Buddhism as Philosophy. Additionally, connected to Meaning of Buddhism is a weaker structure: Searching in Buddhism. On the left, the dimensions of Trust, Life/Happiness, and Buddhism Changing the Meaning of Life are strongly interconnected. Moreover, the Social Action dimension is linked to Trust, reinforcing the role of trust in shaping social engagement and well-being.

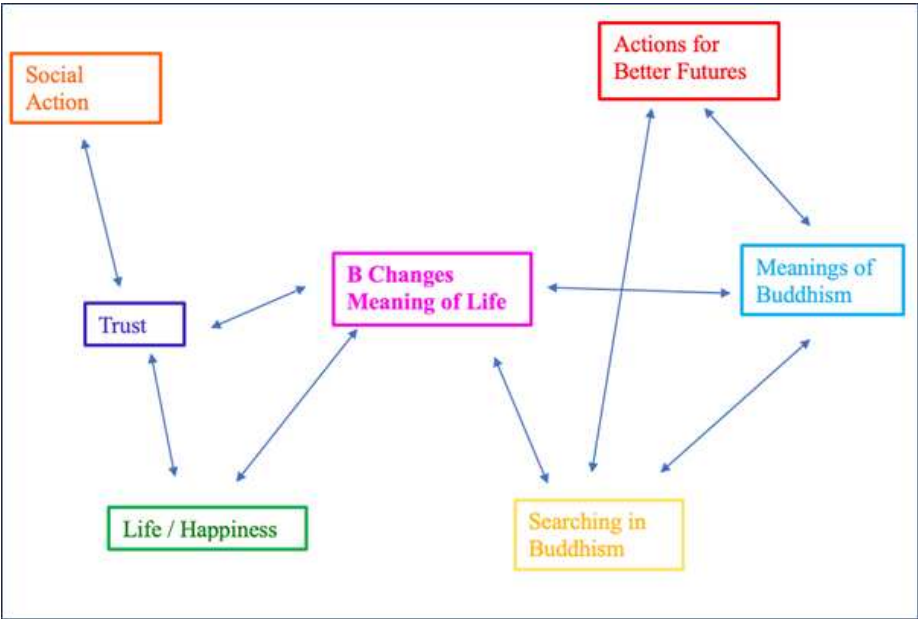
Graph 10. Buddhist social space, with no labels



Linking network: B's Effects on Meaning of Life

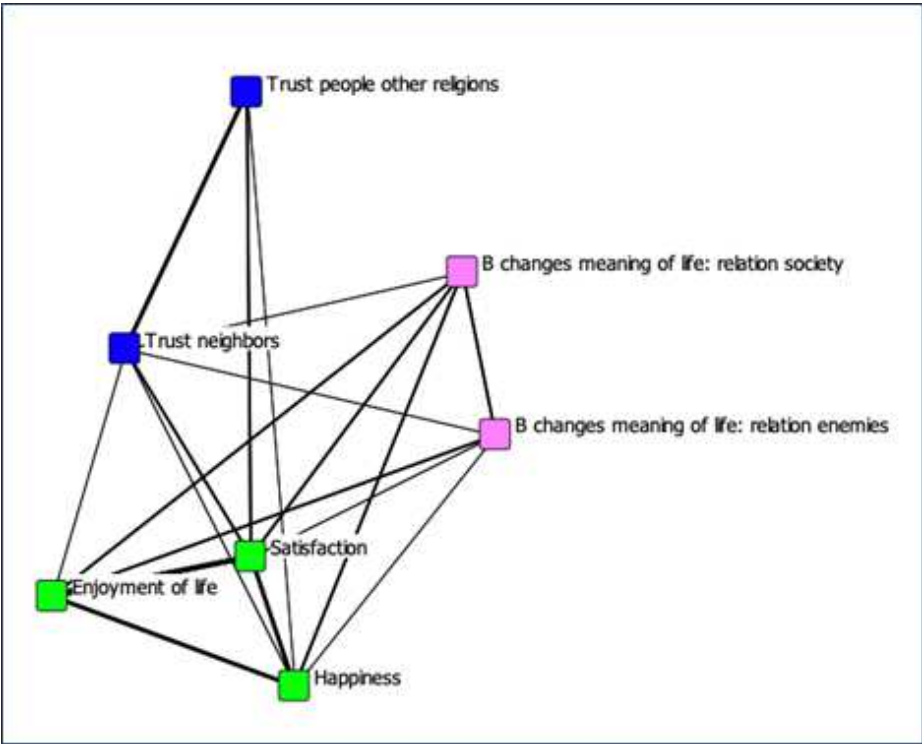
The two major groupings are connected solely through the dimension of Buddhism, Changing the Meaning of Life, which acts as a bridge, ensuring the total interconnection of the network. Specifically, Changing the Meaning of Life about Society is linked to Possibilities to Help Others and indirectly to the Action of Helping Others. Meanwhile, Changing the Meaning of Life about Enemies connects to Buddhism as both a Philosophy and a Lifestyle. Graph 11, which illustrates the interconnections between dimensions, provides a clearer view of how this complex system of compassion-related values and practices is articulated. It reveals a fully connected network, where all dimensions are linked either directly or indirectly. The two major subnetworks (left and right) are held together by the Effects of Buddhism in Changing the Meaning of Life, which serves as the crucial bridge. This dimension plays a key role in maintaining the connectivity of the system, enabling the flow of influences and communication across different aspects of Buddhist practice. It is the most central node in the network, with the highest number of connections, making it the most influential in shaping the dynamics of the system. Without this bridge, the network would become fragmented, severing the link between the left and right subnetworks, and ultimately disrupting the integration of compassion-based values and actions. Thus, Buddhism Changing the Meaning of Life is the central pillar that unites various elements of compassion, facilitating both personal and social transformation.

Graph 11: Network of dimensions



At the core of this system of values and practices lies the transformative effect of Buddhism in changing the Meaning of Life. From this central dimension, causal connections extend in both directions - toward Trust and Good Life on one side, and toward Meanings of Buddhism, Expectations from Its Practice, and Actions for a Better Future on the other. This dimension serves as a key pathway for transformation. Viewing this network of interconnections as a map of communication within the compassion space also reveals the paths leading to Happiness. Happiness is directly linked to Good Life (including Satisfaction and Enjoyment of Life), Trust in Others (such as neighbors and people of other religions), and Change in the Meaning of Life (specifically about enemies and society) as a result of Buddhist practice. Each of these dimensions is just one step away - one “metro stop” - from Happiness (Graph 12). However, the rest of the network elements, particularly those in the right-side substructure, do not have direct access to Happiness. They can only reach it by crossing the bridge of Change in the Meaning of Life. Multiple pathways connect different elements of the network to Happiness - some are direct and short, while others require passing through several stations. For example: Very short routes: (1 step, 1 subway stop), from Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life, and from Trust, and also from Quality of Life. (See in Map)

Graph 12: Direct links to/from Happiness

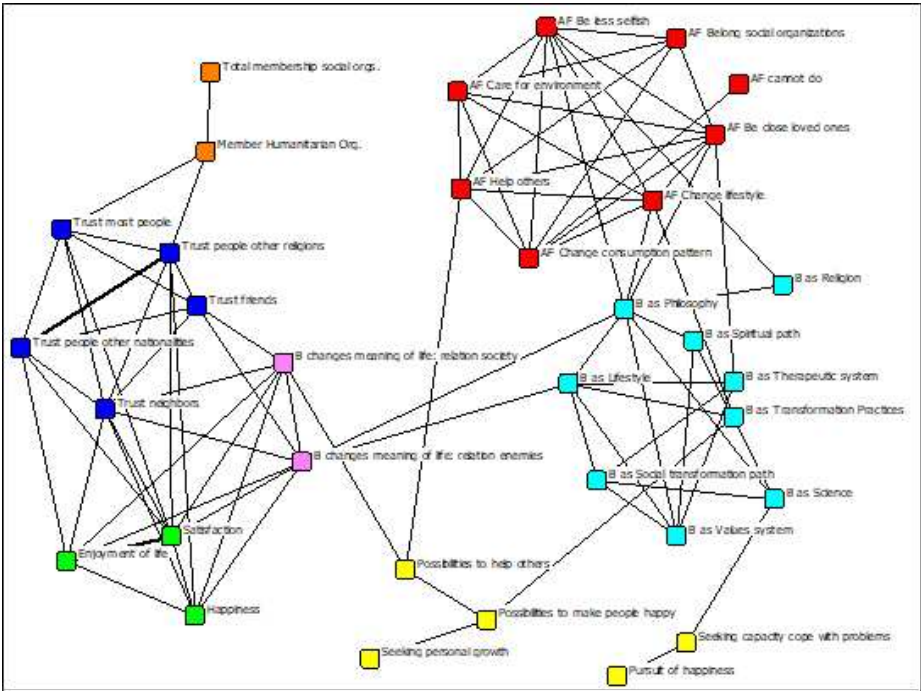


Direct links of Happiness: Trust, Life, B Changes in Meaning of Life.

Links of Happiness to entire network: through B Changes in Meaning of Life

Firstly, short routes (2 steps, in two stops): From Buddhism as Philosophy or Buddhism as Lifestyle to Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life regarding enemies to Happiness. Second, short routes (3 steps, in three stops): From (Action for Better Futures) AF Help Others to (Seeking in Buddhism) Possibilities to Help Others to Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life regarding society to Happiness. Thirdly, medium-length routes (6 steps, in six stops): From (Seeking in Buddhism) Pursuit of Happiness to Capacity to Cope with Problems and Suffering to Buddhism as Science to Buddhism as Path of Social Transformation to Buddhism as Lifestyle to Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life regarding enemies to Happiness. Lastly, long journeys (11 steps, in eleven stops): From (Seeking in Buddhism) Pursuit of Happiness to Capacity to Cope with Problems and Suffering to Buddhism as Science to Buddhism as Path of Social Transformation to Buddhism as Lifestyle to Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life regarding enemies to Buddhism as Philosophy to (Action for Better Futures) Be Less Selfish to AF Help Others to (Seeking in Buddhism) Possibilities to Help Others to Buddhism Changes Meaning of Life regarding society to Happiness. Compassion, both as a value and in action, is always a key part of these paths to and from happiness. It not only contributes to a more sustainable and better future but also fosters happiness.

MAP OF COMPASSION AND HAPPINESS



VI. CONCLUSIONS

Compassion is a broad cultural and social identity framework, acting as an umbrella for ways of seeing and acting for the benefit of all beings. Compassion permeates values and guides actions toward a better world with less suffering and greater sustainability. To explore the sociological dimensions of compassion, values, and actions among Buddhists in new lands, particularly in Spanish-speaking countries, I adopt a dual methodological approach. In the first part, the sociological analysis provides an initial picture of Buddhists in Spanish-speaking countries, examining their characteristics, their vision and relationship with Buddhism, as well as their compassion-related values, practices, and actions that shape their Buddhist path. How Buddhists in Spanish-speaking countries understand Buddhism defines three conceptual spaces where compassion is articulated: as a worldview, as a set of values, and as a path to follow. In terms of the goals they seek to achieve through Buddhist practice, two key dimensions emerge: on the one hand, personal empowerment to confront suffering; on the other, objectives related to compassion, such as the possibility of helping others and contributing to their well-being and happiness. Their vision of Buddhism is complex, integrating knowledge and practices that shape their spiritual path. These practices and activities are strongly oriented toward personal empowerment within the spiritual journey. Within this framework, Buddhism becomes a vital project, with new goals and pathways to realize them. The practice of Buddhism involves a radical transformation that expands the possibilities of compassion, whether by changing one's perception of enemies or by reshaping one's view

of society. This transformation enables a broader social vision, one that aspires toward harmony and the cessation of conflict and suffering. Understanding and cultivating better relationships with others fosters equanimity, which in turn facilitates compassion. The way one perceives others is a fundamental factor in the capacity to act compassionately. Compassion, in both principle and practice, brings us to the social dimension of Buddhism - its role in shaping social dynamics, values, and contributions to the societies in which Buddhists engage. At the social level, it is essential to highlight their trust in others and their active participation in society, including collaboration with social organizations and initiatives aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through these efforts, they contribute to the development of more sustainable and compassionate future societies. On a global scale, this Buddhist population tends to perceive itself as happy and fulfilled, enjoying life as part of its lived experience. In the second part of this study, I engage in a process of abstraction, analyzing the data and variables as components of a system of interactions. Here, I adopt a Buddhist perspective, incorporating concepts of nonduality, dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), and interdependence. Within this approach, what matters most are the social systems that emerge from the interactions between values and practices. I employ relational (network) analysis as a means of synthesizing the social system of compassion at a higher level of abstraction, focusing on causal interactions that shape this system and the new meanings that emerge from it. The interplay between values and actions defines a cognitive-action social field of Buddhist compassion. The resulting map reveals the essence of the socio-cultural identity of Buddhists in new lands. This approach reveals a fully interconnected network in which everything is influenced by everything else. A change in one aspect has ripple effects throughout the entire system. For instance, a shift in the perception of Buddhism - as either a religion or a science—ultimately impacts actions, the purposes sought in Buddhist practice, and even the experience of happiness. Relational analysis identifies two major subnetworks with strong internal cohesion yet relatively weak connections to each other. These two distinct but interrelated domains of cognitive action represent: (1) the area of trust and quality of life and (2) the area of Buddhist visions and their contributions to both personal and social transformation. The connection between these two domains holds the entire system together and shapes the Buddhist social world of compassion. At the core of this system is Buddhism's transformative effect on how individuals understand life and its meaning - particularly in altering perceptions of enemies and society. Indeed, a significant portion of one's access to happiness depends on this shift in perspective. We can understand this network as a system of influences and causal interrelations that shape compassion, as well as a communication map that links various points within the social space. Through this framework, we can trace personal and collective pathways of transformation - both toward and from happiness.

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MAURITIAN TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

This paper explores the principles of Buddhism as they relate to sustainable tourism in Mauritius. The island of Mauritius, a piece of jewel amidst the Indian Ocean, is best known for its pristine beaches, natural beauty, cultural diversity, rich biodiversity, and thriving tourism industry. While Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam are the predominant religions, Buddhist philosophy also holds a significant place among the island's diverse communities. Mauritius has rejoiced itself as a prime tourist destination for over four decades, contributing significantly to its economic development. Besides its positioning as a tropical island on the global map and its natural attractions, Mauritius has a strong social fabric and multicultural vibrancy. However, the rapid expansion of the tourism industry in the country has put forward some serious challenges to the whole concept of sustainable development, leading to environmental degradation and over-reliance on finite resources. This paper explores how Buddhism and its principles of humanity and ecological harmony can enhance sustainable tourism in Mauritius. It highlights the nation's existing initiatives, such as the Sustainable Island Mauritius project, while weaving in the relevance of Buddhist philosophies like interdependence, non-violence, mindfulness, and moderation. By integrating these principles, Mauritius can enhance its commitment to sustainable development, ensuring a balance between economic growth, environmental conservation, and cultural inclusivity. It will further provide a holistic framework of development for the country supported by the integration of Buddhist ethics and values.

Keywords: *Sustainable tourism, Buddhist philosophy, environmental degradation, Interdependence and mindfulness, sustainable development.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

While Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are the predominant religions in Mauritius, Buddhist philosophy and practices also hold a significant place among the island's diverse communities. This paper delves into the principles of Buddhism and their relevance to sustainable tourism in Mauritius, exploring how Buddhist philosophies can contribute to and enhance the country's ongoing efforts to promote responsible and environmentally conscious tourism practices.

Mauritius, a tropical island nation located off the eastern coast of Africa, is part of the Mascarene Islands and boasts a unique volcanic origin. The island is encircled by coral reefs, offering breathtaking natural beauty that has positioned it as a premier tourist destination. The northern plains of Mauritius gently rise to a central plateau, varying in elevation from approximately 270 to 730 meters above sea level. This plateau is bordered by small mountains believed to be the remnants of an ancient volcanic rim, with the highest point being Piton de la Petite Rivière Noire, standing at 828 meters in the southwest. The island's major rivers, the Grand River South East and the Black River, serve as vital sources of hydroelectric power, while reservoirs such as Mare aux Vacoas provide essential water resources.¹ This natural landscape, coupled with a rich cultural heritage, attracts over 1.3 million visitors annually, making tourism a cornerstone of the Mauritian economy, contributing around 23% to the GDP. However, such extensive reliance on tourism also presents challenges, including environmental degradation, resource depletion and socio-economic disparities.

Mauritius has long been celebrated for its exemplary social fabric, functioning as a welfare state with multiculturalism as one of its strongest attributes. Since gaining independence in 1968, the nation has built a reputation for promoting social justice and harmony among its citizens, with constitutional guarantees protecting freedom of thought, conscience, religion, opinion and expression. All of these have contributed towards making Mauritius a rainbow nation. The rich history of the island has been shaped by the co-existence of descendants from Indian, African, Chinese, and European origins, which, as of today, constitute valuable assets for the country in cultural diversity and social dynamics.² These principles of inclusivity and equity resonate with Buddhist teachings, which were introduced to Mauritius primarily by Chinese migrants during the 19th and 20th centuries. Although the Buddhist population remains relatively small, its influence is evident in areas like Port Louis and Quatre Bornes, where Buddhist temples and practices reflect the enduring presence of this philosophy.

Central to Buddhism are principles such as compassion (*karuṇā*),

¹ Bowman, Larry Wells. Mauritius. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 11 Feb. 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mauritius>

² Bunwaree, S. (2002). *Education, Society, and Development: National and International Perspectives*. Mauritius Institute of Education, p. 56.

mindfulness (*sati*) and the interconnectedness of all beings. These values align closely with the goals of sustainable tourism, which seeks to balance economic benefits with cultural preservation, social equity and environmental conservation. The teachings of Lord Buddha, emphasizing mindfulness and empathy, urge humanity to care for the planet and all its inhabitants – a call that is increasingly urgent in addressing the global challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. At the heart of Buddhism are principles such as compassion (*karuṇā*), mindfulness (*sati*), and the interconnectedness of all beings. These values closely align with the goals of sustainable tourism, aiming to balance economic benefits with cultural preservation, social equity, and environmental conservation. The teachings of Lord Buddha, emphasizing mindfulness and empathy, urge humanity to care for the planet and all its inhabitants, a call that has become increasingly urgent in tackling the global challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. The world today continues to face challenges such as climate change, deforestation, and other ecological concerns. A study published in *Nature Sustainability* in February 2022 revealed that annual carbon emissions from tropical deforestation have doubled over the past two decades, underscoring the escalating impact of forest loss on climate change. Globally, another 2022 study published in *Nature Climate Change* indicates that over 75% of the Amazon rainforest has been losing resilience since the early 2000s due to droughts and fires, primarily due to human activities related to deforestation. In Thailand, the Green Buddhism movement has gained traction, with monks leading reforestation projects and promoting environmental education. Phra Paisal Visalo, a prominent Thai monk, has been instrumental in advocating for ecological conservation and sustainable development. As Mauritius forms part of the SIDS (Small Island Developing States), making it particularly vulnerable to climate change and other threats, a comprehensive ecological model of development for Mauritius is imperative. It is high time to take concrete action and reassess the country's approach to urbanization. Although Mauritius is promoting sustainable development policies, many other actions require urgent attention. Buddhist philosophy supports eco-friendly development for both humankind and nations. By integrating Buddhist ethics into contemporary sustainability initiatives, Mauritius has the potential to position itself as a leader in ecologically and culturally conscious tourism. By integrating Buddhist ethics into contemporary sustainability initiatives, Mauritius has the potential to position itself as a leader in ecologically and culturally conscious tourism.

Mauritius's commitment to sustainability is exemplified by its active participation in initiatives like the Global Tourism Plastic Initiative (GTPI). The GTPI training workshop, held from November 25 to 27, 2024, at the Ravenala Attitude Hotel in Balaclava, underscored the importance of transitioning to a circular economy for plastics. Organized by the ministry of tourism in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the TUI Care Foundation and the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the workshop brought together stakeholders from across the tourism value

chain to combat plastic pollution and promote sustainable practices. Junior Minister Hon. Sydney Pierre highlighted the importance of collaboration between international and local partners, emphasizing that implementing effective structures and regulations is crucial for reducing plastic pollution and establishing Mauritius as a global model for sustainable tourism.³

Through a combination of eco-friendly practices, cultural heritage promotion and investments in renewable energy, Mauritius demonstrates that economic development and environmental preservation are not mutually exclusive but can thrive together. The integration of Buddhist philosophies into this framework offers an additional dimension of ethical guidance, emphasizing harmony with nature and respect for all forms of life. These values provide a robust foundation for addressing the environmental and social challenges associated with tourism, including pollution, habitat destruction and inequality. In the *Sangharakshita*, the idea of co-existence of human beings along with other living entities provide for the basis of such a framework. This is described as follows: As Buddhists we are meant, we are urged to direct *mettā* towards all living beings. That doesn't just mean all human beings, it means all animals, insects, plants, birds, beasts of every kind. So, this is the basis, we may say, of our ecological concern as Buddhists: we wish well towards all living beings.⁴ The Buddha Dhamma discourse has also generated discussions on the ethical implications of scientific research, promoting a more holistic and responsible approach to scientific projects.

The concept of sustainable tourism seeks to strike a balance between the economic benefits derived from tourism and the imperative to protect cultural heritage, ensure social equity and conserve natural environments. In Mauritius, this entails preserving marine ecosystems, fostering eco-friendly accommodations and actively engaging local communities in tourism initiatives. Tourism is a major pillar for the economic development of Mauritius. The country at is a crossroad for over a couple for years now since the post-Covid-19 pandemic nature of tourists visiting Mauritius are no more only satisfied with the traditional 'sun, sea and sand' holidays. On the contrary, they are turning to visit more and more nature-based tourism spots, natural parks and reserves. This has compelled policymakers to diversify the products to be offered to tourists and visitors to the island. With the influx of visitors at our natural reserves, lakes, mountains and other attractive natural places, there is a risk of natural degradation with such high usage of the places. Moreover, service providers tend to revamp those natural places, adding more concrete information for on-site activities to meet up the expectations of the demanding

³ Government of Mauritius (GIS, 2024). Accessed on [December 23, 2024], available at <https://govmu.org/EN/Pages/NewsDetails.aspx?n=Certificates-remitted-to-participants-of-GTPI-Training-Workshop-on-plastic-pollution-reduction-and-sustainabil.aspx>

⁴ The Buddhist Centre. Accessed on [February 11, 2025], available online at https://thebuddhistcentre.com/system/files/groups/files/verses_on_nature_and_the_environment.pdf

and highly sophisticated tourists. A study has shown that such improvement of infrastructure on the natural sites have had significant negative impact of the environmental quality. The authors further emphasize on the alteration of the ecosystems by tourist activities, precisely at the Casela Nature and Leisure Park in Mauritius.⁵ Here comes the ecological concepts of Buddhism, which can help policymakers and other stakeholders ascertain a more harmonious relationship between sustainable development and the preservation of nature. By aligning these efforts with Buddhist principles of mindfulness, compassion and interconnectedness, Mauritius can strengthen its commitment to responsible tourism, offering a model for other nations to emulate.

In this spirit, Mauritius reiterates its unwavering dedication to championing sustainable development, fostering global solidarity and inspiring a greener, cleaner future for generations to come. This paper explores how the intersection of Buddhist philosophies and sustainable tourism practices can transform Mauritius into a beacon of ecological and cultural stewardship, setting a powerful example on the global stage.

With a view of incorporating some of the principles of Buddhism, whether consciously or unconsciously, Mauritius has adopted a couple of concrete measures to restore the degradation of its natural beauty, thereby bringing ecological sustainability to the island. Some of these measures are in line with the recommendations of the UNDP Climate Promise, where the Government of Mauritius submitted its Nationally Determined Contribution report (NDC report) in October 2021, under the Paris Agreement to help limit global warming.⁶ The following table shows a glimpse of the major areas where Mauritius has adopted such eco-friendly measures or is planning to adopt by 2030.

Prohibiting single-use plastics
Hotels in Mauritius have banned single-use plastic product
Recycling waste water
Mauritius has put measures in place to recycle wastewater
Reducing food waste
Mauritius has reduced the number of buffets and instead offers set menus in the hotels
Becoming green-certified

⁵ Ramkissoon, H., Durbarry, R. *The Environmental Impacts of Tourism at the Casela Nature and Leisure Park, Mauritius*. The International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability Volume 5, Number 2, 2009, Available on <http://www.Sustainability-Journal.com>, ISSN, p. 1832-2077

⁶ UNDP: Global Climate Promise. Accessed on [February 11, 2025], available online at <https://climatepromise.undp.org/what-we-do/where-we-work/mauritius>

Mauritius is working to become a green-certified destination by 2030

Reduction of gas emissions by 40% in 2030 compared to business-as-usual

Aiming to achieve 60% of energy production from green sources by 2030, phasing out the use of coal and increasing energy efficiency by 10%

The above measures are based on the following pillars of the Mauritian economy: Tourism, biodiversity and ecosystem, agriculture, forestry, coastal zones, health, infrastructure, disaster risk management

II. CASE STUDIES AND THEIR PRACTICAL APPLICATION THAT INCLUDE THE INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

2.1. MauPHI framework

The MauPHI framework helps businesses measure and improve their sustainability impacts, from waste reduction to eco-friendly supply chains. Its focus on circular economy principles aligns with Buddhist moderation.

2.2. Digital tools for eco-tourism

Mobile apps and online platforms can educate tourists about eco-friendly practices and offer virtual tours of cultural sites, reducing physical wear and tear on heritage locations.

2.3. Expanding technological outreach

Introducing wearable devices that track carbon footprints or offering interactive guides on local biodiversity could deepen tourist engagement while promoting sustainability. These innovations are both educational and practical, further aligning with mindful tourism practices.

The concept of *agatigamana* in Buddhist philosophy is an intriguing one, which can be linked to the aforementioned case studies. As we transition through the age of technology and immerse ourselves deeper into the virtual world with the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), our parameters for shaping future societies are changing drastically. Whether this shift is sustainable or not, only time will tell. However, the evident signs of the modern age are not entirely reassuring for humanity and sustainable development as a whole.

In Theravāda Buddhism, as sourced from the Pāḷi Canon: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines, four wrong paths are clearly outlined: the path of greed (*chanda*), the path of hate, the path of delusion, and the path of cowardice. Ironically, what humanity perceives as progress and evolution, reflected in technological advancements, does not necessarily equate to true advancement. While these achievements undoubtedly ease our lives, they also render them increasingly mechanical. Moreover, they are transient and inevitably lead to significant side effects. Digitalization distances us from our true selves.

Nyanatiloka (1970) reiterates the golden rule: One who is freed from evil impulses is no longer liable to take the wrong path of greed, hatred,

delusion, or cowardice (A. IV. 17; A. IX. 7).⁷ Considering the integration of technology and innovation in the Mauritian context, in light of the wrong path of *agatigamana* in development and growth, Mauritius should reevaluate its resource allocation to better align with nature and sustainable development. Mauritius has experienced remarkable economic progress and is regarded as a reference point in the region. However, despite its achievements, the country is currently experiencing a paradoxical surge in social unrest despite its peaceful reputation. There is a growing number of road accidents and fatalities, increasing frustration among citizens, rampant drug abuse among youth, and a rise in other societal issues. The argument that Mauritius, despite being a small island, is experiencing significant societal fragmentation could be directly linked to its disconnection from nature. Greed and hate are becoming ingrained in human behavior, calling for deeper research to understand this phenomenon.

If we seek to understand the root causes of these escalating societal issues – much like in many advanced societies – we will inevitably turn to self-reflection. This is where Buddhist philosophy offers timeless, proven solutions for more sustainable growth. Now, in such a scenario, what are the measures being taken by Mauritius? Here I would like to mention the Made in Morocco Campaign: A national label promoting locally produced goods and services to reduce reliance on imports and encourage sustainable consumption practices. I must also write about the specialty of some of our best eco-hotels. The beauty of our top-notch luxurious resorts lies in the unique meditation halls with the soothing vibes of their Buddhas, sounds of gongs and eye-catching sayings everywhere that elevate events like yoga classes, concerts, corporate gatherings and exhibitions in a most welcoming manner. Paradis Beachcomber and Dinarobin Beachcomber hotels at Le Morne are vivid examples of those resorts that, apart from environmental consciousness in all its aspects, are side by side, offering an unforgettable experience that feels surreal, matching the almost hypnotic relaxation of the tempting crystal-clear waters that are playgrounds for adrenaline-seekers. Tourists endorse that it is the combination of zen and thrill that transforms their travels. They find nourishment for the soul in the enchanting ambience in the special meditation halls and massage rooms diffusing scents from their locally made “Be Beautiful” collection of products with an overall strong Buddhist influence. They serve tasty fresh water in bottles that are made with plants. All these gestures as well as the relevance of the yoga and meditation rooms remain more apt in today’s time and age with the challenges that all of us are facing daily across the world. Too much reasoning has spoiled the contemporary mind. People have lost their hearts and faith. They are in search of such places. The very fact that our hotels are providing such blissful experiences to tourists is the added value of the quality of the

⁷ *Sigalovada Sutta: The Discourse to Sigala* - The Layperson’s Code of Discipline. Translated by Narada Thera (1996). Accessed on [February 11, 2025], available online at <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html>

products we are offering. It is certainly an economic activities, out of which the country is deriving a considerable amount of funds, yet the accompaniment of the tourists towards yoga and meditation can be referred as a noble action, just like a true friend (Mauritius) being by the side of its visitors and providing them with a human touch, as stipulated in the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31) - A true friend stands by in times of need, who rejoices in your successes, who gives wise counsel, and who protects you from harm.

The measures adopted by the few hotels of Mauritius (which need to be present in most of the hotels) align with Buddhism's philosophy and Gautam Buddha's teachings. This place, carrying Buddhist iconography, illustrates the fluid boundaries between religious and cultural traditions. It shares the Buddhist heritage with locals and foreign tourists. This philosophy emanates from the Buddhist teachings of Interconnectedness and Compassion, where the essence of such teachings is put into practice as touristic products at hotels. They not only help the visitors to connect to nature but provide them with deep insights on life, nature and compassion. The message of Thich Nhat Hanh, a renowned Vietnamese Zen master, resonates here where he articulates the inseparability of humans and nature⁸. His words are as follows: "We classify other animals and living beings as nature, acting as if we are not part of it. Then we pose the question 'How should we deal with Nature?' We should deal with nature the way we should deal with ourselves! We should not harm ourselves; we should not harm nature... Human beings and nature are inseparable."

This statement underscores the Buddhist view that harming nature is tantamount to harming oneself, highlighting the deep interconnectedness of all life. Mauritius can further derive inspiration from other very popular tourist destinations, for instance, Bhutan, one of the thriving Buddhist nations today, is always an example to follow for its "Gross National Happiness" model.

III. THE CORE CONCEPTS OF BUDDHISM RELATED TO ECOLOGY

It is worth reiterating the core concepts of Buddhism related to ecology. Among the modern applications of the principles of Buddhist ecology⁹, the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* mentions the five themes: Gradual training, mindfulness and meditation, ethical conduct and daily life, karma and rebirth and the qualities of a good person. Based on the translation of Thich Minh Chau, a well-known Vietnamese scholar of Pāli Buddhism, these themes provide high relevance for Mauritius and the globe at large. They are geared towards climatic action and ecological sustainability. In addition to this, the six core concepts of the Buddhist philosophy resonate closely with ecology and they are as follows:

- (1) Interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*): All phenomena are interconnected and nothing exists independently. This principle fosters

⁸ Peter Harvey (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 158.

⁹ AN, translated by Thich Minh Chau, Thich Minh Thanh & Thich Nhat Tu (eds.). Hong Duc Publishing House, Hanoi, 2021, p. 367.

a sense of responsibility towards protecting ecosystems, as harming one part of the environment affects the whole. (2) Non-Harming (*ahiṃsā*): The precept of non-violence applies to humans, animals, plants and the Earth itself. Buddhists often adopt vegetarian or vegan diets to minimize harm to other beings. (3) Compassion (*karuṇā*): Compassion for all living beings encourages efforts to alleviate environmental destruction, as it causes both human and non-human suffering. (4) Impermanence (*anicca*): Awareness of impermanence inspires mindfulness about over consumption and waste, promoting sustainable living. (5) The middle way: Buddhism advocates for moderation, avoiding extremes in consumption and behavior. This principle can inspire tourists and stakeholders to adopt practices that minimize environmental and cultural degradation while maximizing enjoyment and respect for local traditions. (6) Contentment and simplicity: Buddhist teachings encourage moderation and detachment from materialism, aligning with principles of minimalism and reduced ecological footprints. (7) Mindfulness (*sati*) and ethical conduct: Practicing mindfulness increases awareness of one's actions and environmental impact, fostering intentional and eco-friendly behaviors.

The above pillars of Buddhism are the essential pathways that can help Mauritius set an example for the world by shaping the country as a reference for ecological progress and sustainability. Buddhism provides both philosophical and practical frameworks for addressing ecological challenges. Its teachings promote harmony between humans and nature, offering solutions rooted in mindfulness, compassion and sustainable living. The *Suttanipāṭa*, v. 394 asserts - Let him not destroy, or cause to be destroyed, any life at all, nor sanction the acts of those who do so. Let him refrain from even hurting any creature, both those that are strong and those that tremble in the world.¹⁰ This perspective aligns with modern environmental movements, creating opportunities for collaboration in protecting the planet. Bhale, A. (Oct 2024) argues that integrating the Buddhist principles into sustainable development practices offers a holistic and culturally informed approach to addressing global challenges. He further mentions that adopting such measures by any country championing sustainable development is a critical global imperative encompassing environmental, economic and social dimensions to ensure a balanced and equitable future for all on this planet.¹¹

The major question is where do we begin with the philosophical and practical frameworks of Buddhism in the context of Mauritius? The *Suttanipāṭa* gives us a clear guideline for this, which reads as follows: Let him not destroy, or cause to be destroyed, any life at all, nor sanction the acts of those who do so. Let him refrain from even hurting any creature, both those that are strong and

¹⁰ *Suttanipāṭa*, v. 394, in Fausböll, V. (Trans.). (1881). *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 10: The *Dhammapada* and the *Suttanipāṭa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹¹ Bhale, A. (2024, October) International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews, Vol 5, no 10, pp 3889 - 3895, ISSN 2582 - 7421. <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.5.1024.3004>

those that tremble in the world.¹² The *Kṣudraka Āgama* further supplements this idea, where Buddha clarifies - Whether they be creatures of the land or air, whoever harms here any living being, who has no compassion for all that live, let such a one be known as depraved. By recognizing the importance of such meaningful messages, one must plan the model of progress in any country. Mauritius has much to offer to the world in terms of the co-existence of the theoretical frameworks of Buddhism and its practicability. We can be a model, where many other countries can consequently replicate. In the Preface of his book, Most Ven. Thich Thien Nhon (2019) mentions - Today our planet is confronted with several crises and unprecedented natural disasters. The imminent threat of terrorism and ethnic violence, tackling poverty, providing education, and sustainable development leads us to strive for social justice. There is an urgent need for concerted and constant planning and right effort at an international level to foster permanent peace in the societies and the lives of individuals.¹³ Such planning for sustainable development and ensuring social justice is guaranteed in the Mauritian Constitution, where most of the clauses are adopted by local institutions. However, as Buddhism is not a static religion and provides for practical actions to be adopted for a healthier and better living, the principles will help immensely in the shaping of a 'new' Mauritius. It is to be noted and not to be confused that the precepts are not commandments, but rather guidelines set forth by the Buddha, to be followed in that spirit.¹⁴

(1) Eco-tourism initiatives: Mauritius can draw inspiration from Buddhist values to promote eco-friendly tourism. For instance, resorts and tour operators could integrate sustainable practices such as waste reduction, renewable energy and coral reef preservation, fostering a harmonious relationship with nature. (2) Community involvement: Sustainable tourism in Mauritius must prioritize local communities. Buddhist teachings on compassion and generosity can encourage tourism operators to involve local artisans, farmers and guides, ensuring equitable economic benefits. (3) Education and awareness: Buddhist principles can inform educational campaigns that teach tourists about respecting the island's cultural and natural heritage. This can include mindfulness workshops, eco-tourism certifications, and partnerships with Buddhist centers to offer cultural experiences that emphasize harmony and respect. (4) Artistic awareness: The whole world agrees that Buddhism is one of the world's most widespread and lasting

¹² Nyima, Tashi (2016). *The Great Middle Way: The Buddha on Animals*. Accessed on [February 10, 2025], available online at <https://greatmiddleway.wordpress.com/2016/04/08/the-buddha-on-animals/>

¹³ Most Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu (2019) (Ed.). *Family and Society: A Buddhist Perspective*. United Nations Day of Vesak 2019. Vietnam Buddhist University Series. Hong Duc Publishing House, p. 328.

¹⁴ *Malunkya-putta-sutta* (1948), in V. Trenkner and R. Chalmers (eds.), *Majjhima Nikaya*, No. 63, Vol. 1, PTS. Pāli Text Society of London, London, p. 498.

philosophies that guide humanity towards enlightenment. As the widespread Buddhist art and heritage embody the spiritual and cultural essence of the Buddha's teachings, it is a beautiful way to foster cross-cultural understanding and promote spiritual growth. It is for these reasons that the Buddhist mementoes are the widest sold in all souvenir shops at airports and attract international tourists around the world. Arousing such artistic awareness is not difficult here, as Mauritius is no exception. Highly artistic forms of beautiful statues of the Buddha are to be seen in all houses, shops, and hotels of Mauritius.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1. The made in Morocco campaign

Investing in the Green Technology of Mauritius, the Made in Mauritius campaign was set in 2013 by the Mauritian Manufacturers Association. The idea behind this nationwide campaign is primarily to protect local production against mass imports. Mauritius is highly dependent on the importation of foreign goods and consumables. Mauritius' significant categories of imports are fish, crustaceans, molluscs and aquatic invertebrates, which amounted to \$263.54M in 2023.¹⁵ Cereals, dairy products, cotton, furniture, clothing, essential oils, iron and steel, and other milk products are at the top of the list of goods and consumables Mauritius regularly imports for local consumption. Made in Mauritius has been working rigorously with the local industry to promote Mauritian products to curb the importation rate of goods and consumables. Besides local production, the campaign aims to encourage and preserve Mauritian know-how. It further aims to conserve our industrial heritage and promote the industry of tomorrow. Aligning with the country's sustainable development, all local companies working under the Made in Moris umbrella are committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹⁶ Sustainable development has emerged as a critical global imperative, encompassing environmental, economic and social dimensions to ensure a balanced and equitable future for all. The United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), underscores the importance of this concept in addressing pressing global challenges.¹⁷

4.2. The Mauritian tourism

Of an island state of about 1.27 million inhabitants, Mauritius has a robust tourism industry. This industry welcomes some 1.3 million tourists who visit the island yearly. With this growing number of tourists on our soil, coupled with

¹⁵ Trading Economics. Accessed on [December 23, 2024], available at <https://trading-economics.com/mauritius/imports-by-category>

¹⁶ Sustainable Development Goals (p. 104). (2021). United Nations. <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210051897c014>

¹⁷ Annarelli, A., Catarci, T., & Palagi, L. (2024). *The forgotten pillar of sustainability: development of the Sassessment tool to evaluate Organizational Social Sustainability*. (Annarelli et al., 2024). Available at <https://doi.org/10.48550/arxiv.2404.04077>

active local industries in the sector, the main question is how the Mauritian economy sustains itself by balancing its ecological preservation and economic development. With the Mauritius Tourism Development Plan, the country has set the goal of acquiring the “Green Destination” status by 2030. Central to Mauritius green growth is promoting sustainable tourism, which entails reducing negative impacts (such as resource overuse, emissions, waste and negative social consequences) while enhancing positive sustainability impacts (such as resource circularity, community development, cultural preservation and ecosystem quality).¹⁸ This article further states that Mauritius has around 400 tour operators that serve as a bridge between inbound tourists and local service providers. Tour operators generate about 50% of hotel customers and are responsible for over 70% of crafts and artisan product sales. To increase the positive impact, the SIM project targeted tour operators and their suppliers, including hotels, tour guides, taxi drivers, and local SMEs (like handicraft makers). It is worth noting that women entrepreneurs are highly involved in sustaining the SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises). They are dedicated towards the making of handicrafts and other creative and artistic products, which are very much appreciated and bought by tourists. Butler, J. (1993) has delved profusely in her ground-breaking work in the feminist theory, relating it with the relationship between discourse, power and the materialization of bodies. She talks much about the performativity of gender.¹⁹ The concept of interconnectedness and independence of the Buddhist philosophy is a perfect example, which the Mauritian authorities and local stakeholders have adopted. The Mauritian tourism industry is encountering some structural changes as this is a vital industry for the economic sustenance of the country. Mauritius faces multiple ecological challenges regarding climate change and environmental imbalances as a tropical island. These directly impact the tourism industry and all the formal, informal, and subsidiary sectors dependent on the tourism industry. This is why Mauritius is committed to aligning itself and rethinking its economic development plans while preserving its ecology and mitigating environmental damage. Coupled to this, the benefits of yoga and meditation need to be further promoted across all spheres. This should not only be restricted to tourists as high-class spa services in hotels, but should be propagated down to the common people. As the whole world is recognized for its importance and its positive impact on the health of people and boosting a healthy lifestyle, authorities, schools, the private sector, and other stakeholders should have a strong interest in promoting it. The decision to embark on the Mahāyāna can thus to some degree be compared to the decision of following a meditative vocation like *vipassanāyāna*, where one opts for emphasizing the meditative cultivation of insight with comparatively little time and effort dedicated to the cultivation of tranquility, *samatha*. Both of these *yānas* are open to monastics

¹⁸ Collaborating Centre on Sustainable Consumption and Production (CSCP). (2024) Sustainable Island Mauritius. Accessed on [December 22, 2024], available at <https://www.cscp.org/our-work/sus-island/>

¹⁹ Butler, J. (1993), *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of sex*, Routledge, New York.

and laity alike, and none of them requires ordination.²⁰

Mauritius is home to diverse coastal habitats critical in blue carbon storage. Mangrove forests, seagrass meadows and salt marshes absorb and store carbon dioxide, regulate climate, provide coastal protection, harbour rich biodiversity and support conservation efforts. The government of Mauritius is actively involved in initiatives such as mangrove reforestation, the establishment of marine protected areas, public awareness campaigns and international collaborations to preserve and restore blue carbon ecosystems.²¹ Again, these diverse initiatives align with the SDGs' goals and the eco-sensitive destination for a country like Mauritius. In Mauritius, coral reefs play a critical role in the island's socio-economic development, whereby healthy coral reefs significantly contribute to coastal protection, fisheries, and tourism industries, and for the preservation of biodiversity. Despite their importance, the reefs of Mauritius, like other reefs worldwide, are being impacted by climate change and other anthropogenic and natural disturbances. Over the past decade, the Mauritius Oceanography Institute (MOI) has successfully created techniques for coral cultivation for conservation purposes. In 2017, MOI began a community coral cultivation project in Mauritius, which focused on training coastal communities, including fishermen, in coral cultivation and reef rehabilitation. The project aligned with the government's push to promote coral cultivation as an alternative livelihood. This project has been implemented to help mitigate climate impacts on coastal communities through coral restoration, training, and raising environmental awareness. The community-based coral culture project was initiated in 2020 to train coastal communities in coral culture and reef rehabilitation techniques, aligning with the government's goal of promoting coral culture as an alternative livelihood.

The project aimed to establish sea-based demonstration farms dedicated to cultivating resilient corals, thereby facilitating the restoration of damaged reef ecosystems. Additionally, it focused on equipping local communities and stakeholders with training in coral farming and reef rehabilitation, thereby imparting valuable skills. The initiative sought to enhance awareness regarding the significance of coral ecosystems and their conservation while also addressing the impacts of climate change on coastal regions through coral restoration activities. The results included the establishment of multi-layered rope nurseries at designated sites, leading to the restoration of 1,050 square meters of degraded reefs utilizing coral fragments. A total of sixty-one eco-guide trainees were enrolled across the project locations, enriching

²⁰ Anālayo, B. *The Revival of the bhikkhunī Order and the Decline of the Sāsana*. Published in the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 20 (2013), P. 110 – 93. Available on <https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/revival-bhikkhuni.pdf>

²¹ Nairobi Convention. (2024, August 20 - 22). *Strengthening marine ecosystems: The case of Mauritius. Regional collaboration for a sustainable blue economy: Enhancing Ocean governance in the Western Indian Ocean*. Paper presented at the 11th Conference of the Parties to the Nairobi Convention (COP11), Madagascar.

local expertise concerning coral ecosystems. The Government of Mauritius is committed to supporting climate change initiatives, with potential plans to restore 250 coral gardens.

The country's vulnerability is due to a range of climatic, biological, geological and technological hazards. In recent years, the increasing frequency and intensity of cyclones, torrential rains and flash floods have also threatened people's livelihoods in the islands. Mauritius is so vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which confirms the 2018 World Risk Reports which ranks Mauritius 16th among the highest disaster risk countries.²² Temperatures and sea levels in Mauritius are rising at a faster rate than global averages and the country is also facing accelerated coastal erosion and coral bleaching. As Mauritius adapts to the triple planetary crisis, its government is making firm commitments and supporting essential projects to protect the environment and bolster climate resilience.

According to the World Risk Report 2021, Mauritius was classified as the 51st most exposed country to natural hazard. The UN report SIDS in Numbers 2017 projects that Mauritius will become a water-stressed country by 2025, barely three years from now.²³ In recent years, Mauritius has experienced episodes of prolonged droughts, flash floods and cyclones with high intensities comparable to Category-5 hurricanes. With rapid economic development over the past years, many key sectors, like transport, manufacturing, and construction, have experienced rapid growth. However, these developments have placed additional pressure on the island's limited resources. Moreover, the impacts of the triple planetary crisis are threatening our hard-earned development, impacting sustainable development and weakening our country's ability to respond to emerging environmental challenges effectively.

4.3. Challenges and opportunities

Implementing Buddhist-inspired sustainable tourism in Mauritius faces challenges such as over development, climate change, coral reef damage, waste management, and limited awareness among tourists. However, these challenges present opportunities for the government, private sector and civil society to collaborate on innovative solutions, such as green infrastructure, stricter regulations on tourism activities and greater promotion of eco-tourism.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish partnerships between Buddhist organizations and tourism authorities to promote eco-conscious travel. Develop policies that align with Buddhist values, such as limiting single-use plastics and preserving sacred

²² United Nations Environment Programme (2019, December 17). *Reducing climate change and disaster risk in Mauritius* (2019, December 17). Published on <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/reducing-climate-change-and-disaster-risk-mauritius>

²³ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). (2023, January 24). *Mauritius sets goals to curb the triple planetary crisis*. Article published on <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/mauritius-sets-goals-curb-triple-planetary-crisis>

cultural sites. Offer training programs for tourism operators to incorporate mindfulness and sustainability into their services. Encourage tourists to engage in responsible travel behaviors through educational campaigns and incentives. Work on balancing economic growth with ecological and spiritual well-being. Promote vegetarian alternatives to traditional events, catering to the cultural and culinary sensitivity of diverse tourists while respecting Buddhist values. Encourage resorts to adopt solar energy and water conservation systems, aligning infrastructure development with eco-friendly principles. Partnering with the international Buddhist organization or eco-tourism bodies can elevate Mauritius' profile as a global leader in sustainable tourism. Collaborations on global summits or cultural exchanges can showcase Mauritius initiatives on a broader platform and help expand perspectives on sustainability. By embracing these recommendations, Mauritius can ensure a sustainable future for its tourism industry while honoring its rich cultural and ecological heritage.

Policy suggestions based on Buddhist values: Strengthening eco-tourism and ethical travel. Encouraging cultural tourism to promote harmony and inclusivity. Education and awareness programs focusing on mindfulness and environmental ethics. Collaborative approaches: Government, private sector, and community partnerships. It is a must to preserve cultural heritage for future generations and to support tourism, education, entertainment, and cultural promotion. It is worth mentioning that the contribution of one and another from authors, content creators, artists, painters, singers, dancers, arts and culture practitioners, educationists, academics, researchers, public and private stakeholders and policymakers among others is imperative here to produce and maintain a consistent, reliable and highly productive database. To preserve and promote this rich cultural heritage, the Ministry of Arts and Culture is aiming at the long-term sustainability of this database. Mauritius has so far set an example for the region and the whole world as well, in valorizing its tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which has been our asset for over decades now.

VI. CONCLUSION

Mauritius stands at a crossroads, where the need to balance economic growth with ecological and cultural preservation is more pressing than ever. Buddhism offers valuable insights for fostering sustainable tourism in Mauritius. By integrating Buddhist values of mindfulness, compassion and interconnectedness, the island can balance its economic aspirations with the need to protect its natural and cultural heritage. If on the one hand, this paper aims to contribute to the projection of Mauritius as a more compassionate, sustainable and tourist destination, on the other hand, it aspires to refresh the beauty of Buddha Dhamma in today's world and ensure its enduring relevance for future generations.

As a global tourism destination, Mauritius has the potential to lead by example, demonstrating how ancient philosophies that resonate deeply with the local multicultural ethos can inform modern sustainability practices.

Through the Global Tourism Initiative, Mauritius is setting an example as a model for the world, by demonstrating that sustainable tourism is not just a necessity, it is an opportunity for transformation. We are forging a path where economic development and environmental preservation go hand in hand. This is our pledge to the planet, inspired by the essence of Vesak and rooted in the principles of compassion and mindful coexistence. With this vision, Mauritius serves as a humble yet determined example nation transforming challenges into opportunities and aspirations into reality. Through our dedication to sustainable tourism and environmental stewardship, we inspire others to honor the sacred bond between humanity and nature. Together, let us honor the legacy of Lord Buddha by building a world where kindness prevails, nature flourishes and all beings live in harmony. On behalf of Mauritius and its people, I offer my deepest gratitude to the United Nations Vesak Day organizers and participants for their tireless efforts in promoting these universal values. May our deliberations be fruitful, our initiatives impactful and our vision enduring. I cannot end the paper without sharing this speech of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, which goes as follows: “We are destined to share this planet and as the world grows smaller, we need each other more than in the past. But whether we are trying to reduce the nuclear threat, defend human rights or preserve the natural environment, it is difficult to achieve a spirit of genuine co-operation as long as people remain indifferent to the feelings and happiness of others. What is required is a kind heart and a sense of community, which I call universal responsibility.”²⁴

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²⁴ His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in an address to ‘Seeking the True Meaning of Peace’, San Jose, Costa Rica. June 25-30, 1989.

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THE ROLE OF THE BUDDHIST DOCTRINE OF *KARUṆĀ* IN PROMOTING HARMONY AND ETHICAL VALUES FOR HUMANITY

Vahe Gharibyan*

Abstract:

This paper explores the Buddhist concept of *karuṇā* (compassion) and its role in promoting ethical values and harmony within human societies. Rooted in the teachings of the Buddha, *karuṇā* extends beyond mere empathy, embodying a transformative force that seeks to alleviate suffering and promote peace. Through examining the doctrinal aspects of *karuṇā*, its practical applications, and its relevance in contemporary global issues, this paper demonstrates how compassion serves as a guiding ethical principle for humanity. The paper will also address the intersections of *karuṇā* with other Buddhist values such as *mettā* (loving-kindness), *upekkhā* (equanimity), and *muditā* (sympathetic joy), highlighting their collective contribution to societal harmony.

Keywords: *Karuṇā, Buddhist ethics, compassion meditation, social harmony, non-violence, Vesak celebration, interconnectedness.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism, one of the world's oldest and most widely practiced religions, offers profound insights into the nature of human suffering and the means to overcome it. At the heart of this religion is the concept of *karuṇā* (compassion). Although many cultures value compassion, the Buddhist understanding of *karuṇā* has a unique depth, as it is not simply an emotion but a transformative practice that brings relief to suffering and promotes harmony among people. Rooted in the teachings of the Buddha, *karuṇā* extends beyond mere empathy, embodying a transformative force that seeks to overpower suffering and

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promote peace¹.

Through examining the religious aspects of *karuṇā* and its role in contemporary global issues, this work presents how compassion serves as an essential ethical principle for us. The Sanskrit word *karuṇā* is often translated as “compassion” or “empathy.” It is one of the four Brahmavihāras, or “divine abodes,” alongside *mettā* (loving-kindness), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity)².

In early Buddhist texts, such as the *Dhammapada*, *karuṇā* is presented as the core of the Buddha’s ethical teachings. It transcends simple empathy by prompting action to reduce the suffering of others. The Buddha’s teachings on compassion arose from his own direct experiences of suffering and his understanding of *dukkha* (suffering), *samudaya* (the cause of suffering), *nirodha* (the cessation of suffering), and *magga* (the path leading to the cessation of suffering). For example, the *Mettā Sutta* (Discourse on Loving-kindness) emphasizes the importance of loving-kindness and compassion, stating that one should cultivate an attitude of goodwill toward all beings, free of worldly attachments.³

The path of *Nirvāṇa* in Buddhism is deeply connected to compassion. According to Buddhist teachings, the goal of the practice is to transcend the ego and develop a mind that is free from delusion, greed, and hatred - qualities that hinder the development of compassion.

Karuṇā is considered essential for cultivating wisdom (*prajñā*) and ethical behaviour (*śīla*). In this sense, compassion is not merely an emotional response but a key element of spiritual development. The Buddha taught that without compassion, a person cannot truly progress along the path to enlightenment, as the understanding of suffering and the desire are central to transcending the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth called *samsāra*.

II. BODY

2.1. *Karuṇā* in the context of Buddhist ethics: Buddhist ethics is grounded in the principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence), which includes avoiding harm to oneself and others. Compassion is the natural remedy to harmful actions caused by ignorance and material desires. According to the *Dhammapada* (verse 132), “One who harms with a stick beings who desire happiness, while seeking happiness for himself, won’t find happiness after death.” This highlights that true happiness arises from compassion toward others⁴. The cultivation of *karuṇā* is linked to the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*), which form the foundation of Buddhist morality. By practicing this system of morality, individuals help create a society based on respect for life and compassion for all sentient beings.

A key Buddhist doctrine that supports the practice of *karuṇā* is

¹ Gyatso, Kamalashila (2019): 42 - 43.

² Gethin (1998): 186 - 187.

³ Gunaratana (2007): Retrieved from “Bhavana Society” (mp3).

⁴ Patna Dhammapada (2017): 106 (*Dhp* 132).

pratītyasamutpāda (dependent origination), which teaches that all beings are interconnected and that suffering is actual for everyone. Because all beings are interconnected, causing harm to one individual causes harm to the whole world or whole system. Compassion is thus not only a moral obligation but also a recognition of our interconnectedness with all beings. In the *Sūtra of the Forty-Two Sections*, the Buddha teaches that “If one does not wish to be harmed, one should not harm others.” This illustrates that *karuṇā* is rooted in the realization that all beings wish for happiness and bliss and try to avoid suffering. *Karuṇā* is first and foremost a personal practice. It is cultivated through meditation, where one focuses on developing compassion for oneself, loved ones, neutral persons, and even enemies. Over time, this practice broadens the heart and mind to include all beings.⁵

Buddhist meditation techniques such as *karuṇā-bhāvanā* (compassion meditation) help practitioners develop a genuine concern for the well-being of others, extending compassion to all beings, regardless of their station or role in life. By fostering an attitude of compassion, practitioners transform their relationships and actions. Studies on the effects of meditation on well-being show that regular practice of *karuṇā* meditation increases psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and a sense of connectedness with others.

Compassionate communities are built on the ethical principle of *karuṇā*. The social impact of *karuṇā* is seen in the charitable work of Buddhist religious monastic communities, which often engage in social progress programs such as healthcare for the sick, educational initiatives, and assistance to the poor and marginalized. All this is the main path of Buddhist philosophy in the frame of different societies. Compassion also plays a role in restorative justice, where the goal is not to punish the offender but to transform the wrongdoer’s mind and behavior through understanding and reconciliation. Buddhist-inspired peace-building efforts, such as those led by monks in conflict zones like Myanmar and Sri Lanka, demonstrate the power of *karuṇā* in fostering social harmony⁶.

This process has been actual in different historical periods, when Buddhist monks and enthusiasts worked for peace and harmony. Prominent Buddhist figures, such as the Dalai Lama, have exemplified *karuṇā* through their advocacy for peace, human rights, and interfaith dialogue. The Dalai Lama often emphasizes that compassion is the foundation of human flourishing and the key to resolving global conflicts. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, is another example of *karuṇā* in action. His teachings are for the application of compassion in everyday life, particularly in social justice and environmental activism⁷.

⁵ Li and French (1995): 52.

⁶ Queen, King (1996): 206.

⁷ Schedneck, Brooke (18 March 2019), “Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist monk who introduced mindfulness to the West, prepares to die”, accessed on [January 9, 2025], available at: <https://theconversation.com/thich-nhat-hanh-the-buddhist-monk-who-introduced-mindfulness-to-the-west-prepares-to-die-111142>

In the face of global crises such as climate change, war, and systemic injustice, *karuṇā* offers a compassionate ethical framework for addressing these issues. Compassion is not limited to an individual's sphere but extends to all sentient beings, advocating for global responsibility toward the planet and its inhabitants. Buddhist principles of compassion align with global ethical values such as human dignity, equality, etc. Initially, *karuṇā* supports the protection of human rights by emphasizing the inherent worth and well-being of every individual.

Buddhist-inspired peacebuilding models emphasize the importance of empathy, dialogue, and reconciliation in resolving general conflicts and tensions. By focusing on alleviating the suffering of others, *karuṇā* fosters a cooperative global ethic, a moral that transcends political, religious, and cultural divides. Buddhism's influence on modern secular ethical frameworks is increasingly recognized, especially in the fields of environmental ethics and humanitarian work. *Karuṇā* offers a foundation for promoting global ethical principles that prioritize the reduction of suffering⁸.

Buddhist teachings on *karuṇā* are integral to peace-building efforts. Compassionate responses to violence and conflict encourage understanding, dialogue, and reconciliation rather than retribution. Scholars such as Stephen Batchelor have argued for a secularized interpretation of Buddhist ethics, emphasizing that the cultivation of compassion and mindfulness can contribute to a more humane and ethical global society without requiring adherence to traditional religious beliefs⁹. Buddhist leaders, such as the Dalai Lama, have actively engaged in peace negotiations, stressing the importance of empathy and mutual understanding in resolving conflicts. In places like Sri Lanka, *karuṇā* has played a role in facilitating post-conflict healing and reconciliation.

Karuṇā underpins the Buddhist view of human rights, which asserts that all beings deserve to live free from suffering and oppression. Compassion motivates the effort to promote social justice, ensuring that the vulnerable and marginalized are protected. The universal nature of *karuṇā* means that it transcends ethnic, national, and cultural boundaries. This has significant implications for human rights work, particularly in promoting policies that address inequality, displacement, and systemic violence.

In educational settings, *karuṇā* promotes empathy among students and encourages a culture of kindness and cooperation. Schools that integrate Buddhist principles of compassion see an increase in collaborative learning environments.¹⁰ Compassionate care is at the heart of Buddhist-inspired healthcare practices, emphasizing the need to treat patients with dignity, respect, and understanding. Medical practitioners who cultivate *karuṇā* are better able to address not only the physical but also the emotional and

⁸ Buddhagosa (2010, 2.99), "Dhamma Lists: Insight Meditation Center", accessed on [January 7, 2025], available at: www.insightmeditationcenter.org.

⁹ Batchelor (1998): 2 - 3.

¹⁰ Jovini, Sutikyanto, Andanti (2024): 467 - 468.

psychological needs of patients. The concept of *karuṇā* can also inform ethical decision-making in healthcare, especially in areas such as mental health and palliative care, where compassion is essential to providing holistic and psychological support.

The Buddhist doctrine of *karuṇā* provides a comprehensive ethical framework for fostering social harmony, promoting human well-being, and addressing the suffering of others. Its application in contemporary society can help guide individuals and communities toward a more compassionate and just world, where the presence of suffering is at the heart of all actions. By emphasizing empathy, non-violence, and interdependence, *karuṇā* plays a transformative role in personal development, social ethics, and global peace-building.¹¹ This expanded structure provides a detailed exploration of *karuṇā*, with each section elaborating on key concepts and their societal implications, also in the frame of some religious events, festivals such as Vesak celebrations.

2.2. Vesak and the Karuṇā: A celebration of compassion: Vesak, also known as Buddha Jayanti, is one of the most significant festivals in the Buddhist calendar. Celebrated by millions of Buddhists worldwide, Vesak commemorates the birth, enlightenment, and death (*parinirvāṇa*) of the Buddha. The observance of this day is not only a remembrance of the Buddha's life but also an opportunity to reflect on and renew one's commitment to the core Buddhist teachings, particularly the practice of *karuṇā*.

Vesak holds profound spiritual meaning, particularly for those who seek to live in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. According to Buddhist doctrine, the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree¹² by realizing the nature of suffering (*dukkha*) and the cessation of suffering. The realization of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path became the foundation of his teachings, and central to this path is the cultivation of virtues such as wisdom (*prajñā*), ethical conduct (*śīla*), and mental discipline (*samādhi*). Of these virtues, *karuṇā*, or compassion, is perhaps the most recognized and practiced in everyday life.

For Buddhists, Vesak provides a moment to reflect on the Buddha's compassionate actions, such as his decision to remain in the world to teach others the path to liberation, despite his attainment of enlightenment. It is a time to re-emphasize the Buddhist ideals of altruism and universal compassion toward all beings, particularly the most vulnerable. By commemorating the Buddha's compassionate actions, Buddhists worldwide are reminded of their responsibility to act with kindness and empathy in their own lives.

Vesak is not merely a celebration of the Buddha's life but an active invitation to embody the principles he taught. The day encourages Buddhists to engage in various compassionate acts, including:

¹¹ Mayton (1995): 309 - 311.

¹² Gethin (1998): 22.

i. Charitable Activities¹³: On Vesak, many Buddhist communities organize charitable acts such as feeding the poor, providing healthcare for the sick, and distributing clothing and necessities to the needy. These acts of service are direct expressions of *karuṇā* in action, aimed at alleviating the suffering of others.

ii. Environmental Initiatives: Given the Buddhist view of interdependence and the interconnectedness of all life, Vesak is also an occasion for environmental stewardship. Buddhist communities around the world often organize tree-planting activities or campaigns aimed at protecting the environment¹⁴. This reflects the Buddhist belief that all beings, not just humans, deserve compassion and that the Earth is a living entity deserving of care and respect.

iii. Religious Teachings and Reflections: On Vesak, Buddhist monks and laypeople gather to meditate, chant, and reflect on the Buddha's teachings. These activities serve as an opportunity to deepen one's understanding of *karuṇā* and to practice compassion in meditation. Through acts of devotion and reflection, Buddhists seek to purify their hearts and minds, cultivating a mindset that is more attuned to the suffering of others.

Through these practices, Vesak encourages individuals to move beyond theoretical compassion and embody it through concrete, compassionate actions. This calls on individuals to cultivate a spirit of *karuṇā* not only in private moments of meditation but also in public actions that have the power to heal the world. The celebration of Vesak accordingly became a cultural event not only for Buddhist philosophy followers but also for everyone. In this case, we can notice the celebration's universal role. The celebration of Vesak also highlights the importance of *karuṇā* in promoting social harmony. In a world often marked by conflict, injustice, and suffering, the Buddha's message of compassion serves as a beacon for building peaceful societies. Vesak provides an occasion for Buddhists to come together as a community and renew their commitment to the ethical principles that contribute to social harmony. By focusing on the alleviation of suffering and the welfare of others, Vesak underscores the Buddhist ideal of a compassionate society - a society where people actively work toward the collective well-being of all people.

In a more global context, Vesak promotes the understanding that compassion is not confined to one's local community or family. It extends across borders, transcending national, cultural, and religious differences. On Vesak, Buddhists worldwide acknowledge that the practice of *karuṇā*

¹³ Ngo Minh, *Vesak Day: Illuminate the world with light of compassion and wisdom*, accessed on [February 10, 2025], available at: <https://hanoitimes.vn/vesak-day-illuminate-the-world-with-light-of-compassion-and-wisdom-326933.html>

¹⁴ Thiri Khit Oo, *Vesak Day: Buddhists pouring water on Bodhi Tree on Kason Full Mo*, accessed on [February 10, 2025], available at: <https://npnewsmm.com/news/664c5458b8d19416f60a117f>

has the potential to unify humanity in its shared struggle against suffering¹⁵. This inclusivity reflects the universal nature of the Buddha's teachings, which advocate for the well-being of all beings - human and non-human alike.

Moreover, the festival provides a reminder of the role compassion plays in conflict resolution. In regions affected by violence and war, the observance of Vesak offers an opportunity to engage in acts of reconciliation and forgiveness, addressing the root causes of conflict and creating pathways toward healing. By invoking the Buddha's model of compassionate action, Vesak calls for active efforts to mend broken relationships and foster understanding among people.

In the face of contemporary challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and humanitarian crises, Vesak serves as a reminder of the transformative power of compassion. The Buddha's teachings offer a way forward for individuals and communities seeking to respond to these global crises with mindfulness and empathy.

The growing environmental crisis requires a collective response rooted in *karuṇā* for the Earth and all its inhabitants.

On Vesak, many Buddhist leaders emphasize the importance of sustainable living practices, urging their communities to adopt more eco-friendly lifestyles¹⁶. The teachings of *karuṇā* highlight the interconnectedness of all life, underscoring that the destruction of nature directly contributes to human suffering. Through such teachings, Vesak encourages global efforts to preserve the environment and protect biodiversity.

Vesak also serves as a moment to reflect on the pressing issues of poverty, discrimination, and social injustice. *Karuṇā* challenges individuals and societies to look beyond their privileges and recognize the struggles of marginalized and oppressed communities. Through charitable efforts and social engagement, Buddhists strive to alleviate poverty and address systemic inequalities, recognizing that true compassion requires an active commitment to justice for all.

In regions of conflict, where millions of people have been displaced from their homes, Vesak calls on Buddhists to extend compassion to refugees and displaced persons. The festival serves as a reminder of the Buddha's teachings on compassion for the suffering of others, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or religion. Acts of humanitarian aid, advocacy for refugee rights, and the creation of welcoming communities reflect the teachings of *karuṇā* in addressing the plight of those forced to flee their homes.

¹⁵ Vesak 2023: What is it and how do Buddhists celebrate Buddha Day or Wesak? (May 05, 2020), accessed on [January 12, 2025], available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news-round/48106687#:~:text=Vesak%20is%20one%20of%20the,it%20means%20to%20be%20Buddhist.>

¹⁶ Braun, *The Insight Revolution*, accessed on [January 15, 2025], available at: <https://www.lionsroar.com/the-insight-revolution/>

The festival serves as a powerful reminder of the Buddha's compassion toward all sentient beings and encourages individuals to practice compassion in their daily lives, both in thought and action. In the context of this paper's broader exploration of *karuṇā* as a means of promoting ethical values and harmony, Vesak exemplifies the potential of compassion to transform societies and contribute to the alleviation of global suffering. The celebration of Vesak¹⁷ serves as both an expression of gratitude for the Buddha's teachings and a call to action—one that invites all of humanity to engage in the practice of *karuṇā* and contribute to a world based on mutual respect, care, and understanding.

While much of the prior analysis focuses on the social and ethical implications of *karuṇā*, it is crucial to understand the psychological underpinnings of compassion within Buddhism. From a psychological perspective, *karuṇā* is more than just an emotional response to others' suffering - it is a deliberate cultivation of positive mental states and cognitive regulation. Buddhist teachings emphasize mindfulness and insight *vipassana*¹⁸ as tools for understanding the nature of the mind and emotions. This awareness helps people recognize their habitual emotional responses, particularly negative ones such as aversion, fear, or indifference.

In Buddhist psychology, *karuṇā* is seen as a counterforce to these negative emotional tendencies. It is an antidote to self-centeredness and egoic attachment, which are often at the root of unwholesome states like anger, hatred, and greed. Through practices like meditation, individuals are encouraged to cultivate *karuṇā* towards all beings - friends, strangers, and even those perceived as enemies or sources of suffering. The practice of cultivating *karuṇā* in meditation involves focusing on the welfare of others, extending compassion first to oneself, and then radiating it outward. This technique of mental and emotional cultivation allows individuals to transcend their suffering and develop the cognitive flexibility needed to respond to others' pain with equanimity and care.

Also, *karuṇā* is closely connected to managing emotions. By recognizing and changing how one reacts to pain, Buddhist practitioners learn to build better connections with their emotions. This process doesn't mean hiding or ignoring bad feelings, but rather accepting them through mindfulness and kind awareness. This approach is similar to modern therapy methods, like Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT), which helps people develop self-compassion and share it with others.

In the Buddhist context, *karuṇā* offers a way for psychological healing, not just by easing others' suffering but also by providing methods for creating emotional balance and reducing personal stress. By combining mental training

¹⁷ Cornwell, *Happy Vesak Day: An insight into the history of Buddhism and the Vesak celebration*, accessed on [February 10, 2025], available at: <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/uobinternational/2024/05/22/happy-vesak-day-an-insight-into-the-history-of-buddhism-and-the-vesak-celebration/#:~:text=The%20festival%20of%20Vesak%20brings,for%20those%20who%20practice%20Buddhism.>

¹⁸ Beaumont, Bell, McAndrew, Fairhurst (2021): 910 - 922.

and emotional control, *karuṇā* helps people gain better mental clarity, stability, and inner peace.

2.3. The role of compassion in knowledge and wisdom: In Buddhist thinking, compassion is not just a virtue but also a key part of wisdom (*prajñā*)¹⁹. *Karuṇā* is seen as a necessary partner to wisdom, especially in developing the right view (*samyak drishti*), which is central to the path of enlightenment. Wisdom and compassion work together: wisdom helps one understand the truth of the world, while compassion ensures that one uses this understanding to help others.

From a knowledge perspective, *karuṇā* offers a deeper understanding of suffering and its causes. As the Buddha taught in the Four Noble Truths, suffering comes from ignorance (*avidyā*),²⁰ a misunderstanding of reality. Without compassion, one might understand suffering intellectually but remain unaffected by it. However, when *karuṇā* is part of one's understanding, knowledge becomes life-changing. *Karuṇā* guides knowledge away from just thinking about suffering to directly experiencing the pain of others. This changes the Buddhist practitioner from being an observer to an active helper in reducing suffering.

In practical terms, *karuṇā* leads to using wisdom in everyday life. This view isn't just about intellectually understanding suffering but about having the wisdom to act with compassion, showing that the main goal of Buddhist knowledge is to free all living beings. Helping others through *karuṇā* becomes a key part of pursuing wisdom, as it involves realizing that the well-being of others is deeply linked to one's own. This understanding of *karuṇā* highlights the importance of social action in Buddhist thinking.

2.4. Compassion as a response to the human condition: The existential aspects of *karuṇā* are perhaps the most meaningful. Buddhist teachings focus on the core aspects of human life - suffering, change (*anicca*), and the absence of a permanent self (*anattā*)²¹. These truths show that the world is naturally filled with suffering, but they also offer a way to overcome it through developing wisdom and compassion.

Karuṇā answers existential questions by providing a meaningful response to the suffering that is part of life. It affirms life, not despite suffering, but because of it. Compassion comes from understanding that suffering is universal and that all beings are connected through their shared vulnerability to pain and loss. The existential nature of *karuṇā* is found in realizing that all living beings, from the highest to the lowest, experience pain and are trapped in the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

¹⁹ Keown (2003): 218.

²⁰ Keown (2013): 73.

²¹ Anatta, in Buddhism, the doctrine that there is in humans no permanent, underlying substance that can be called the soul, accessed on [December 27, 2024], available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/anatta>

In Buddhist existentialism, compassion is not just a moral act but a necessary response to the human condition. It is through *karuṇā* that one faces life's impermanence and suffering. Compassion becomes a way to find meaning in a world full of chaos and pain. It provides a path to go beyond self-centered thinking and to develop more empathy and understanding.

Moreover, practicing *karuṇā* encourages individuals to examine their attachment to the self. The Buddhist teaching of non-self says that holding onto a permanent, separate self is a major cause of suffering. Through compassion, people begin to let go of these attachments, realizing that the self is not separate but connected to all other beings. This change moves the individual from existential despair to an understanding of the interdependence that links all beings. One of the potential pitfalls in the practice of compassion is *compassion fatigue*, a psychological condition often experienced by individuals who are exposed to continuous suffering or are deeply involved in alleviating the pain of others. Buddhist practitioners, especially those involved in social activism or humanitarian work, must be mindful of this phenomenon.²²

The concept of *compassion fatigue* suggests that the continual focus on the suffering of others can lead to emotional burnout, diminishing one's ability to respond compassionately. To counter this, Buddhist teachings emphasize the need for balanced practice. One must engage in self-care and mindfulness to prevent over-extension of one's emotional resources. It is important for practitioners to cultivate *karuṇā* not only towards others but also towards themselves, recognizing their own limitations and the need for rest, reflection, and spiritual renewal of.

Hindu philosophy, particularly through texts like the Bhagavad Gita²³ and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali,²⁴ frames *Karuṇā* within the broader framework of dharma (ethical duty) and self-realization. Compassion is seen as a natural expression of one's understanding of the self (atman) as inseparable from the universal self (Brahman). For example, Krishna's guidance in the Gita often reflects a compassionate desire to lead Arjuna toward righteous action, emphasizing that true compassion may sometimes require difficult decisions aligned with the greater good.

In Jainism, the analytical lens highlights the principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence) as the foundation of *Karuṇā*. Compassion is not only an ethical virtue but a way of preserving the purity of the soul by avoiding harm to others. This perspective is more ascetic, emphasizing discipline and restraint as expressions of compassion, extending even to microscopic life forms.

From an analytical perspective, *Karuṇā* acts as a bridge between personal ethics and universal harmony. It addresses the existential condition of suffering by fostering empathy and selflessness. Philosophically, it challenges the boundaries

²² Bhaskar (2009): 322.

²³ Sharma (1986): 3.

²⁴ Larson (2008): 32.

of self and other, urging individuals to act not out of obligation alone but from a profound realization of unity. The doctrine thus becomes a transformative tool, harmonizing individual liberation with collective well-being.

Furthermore, there are limits to human empathy, especially when confronted with widespread or systemic suffering. The sheer magnitude of global issues such as poverty, war, or climate change can overwhelm individuals and communities, making it difficult to know where to begin or how to effect meaningful change. Buddhist teachings encourage practitioners to focus on manageable acts of compassion—small acts of kindness and care - rather than feeling paralyzed by the enormity of suffering in the world. The practice of *karuṇā* does not require one to single-handedly resolve all of the world's suffering but calls for a compassionate engagement with the suffering one can address.

Karuṇā, or compassion, is a key and transformative idea in Buddhist philosophy, covering a wide range of psychological, knowledge-based, existential, and moral aspects. At its heart, *karuṇā* is a remedy for the widespread suffering (*dukkha*) experienced by individuals and communities. It requires a deep change in how we view and respond to the suffering of others, calling for a broad, selfless attitude that goes beyond ego and personal interests. Through mindfulness and meditation, *karuṇā* is developed as a powerful inner quality - a continuous mental practice that helps individuals connect with the suffering in the world while also allowing them to act in compassionate and meaningful ways.

III. CONCLUSION

Cultivating *karuṇā* involves deeply recognizing the interconnected nature of all beings and the complex relationships that support both suffering and happiness. By understanding that all life is linked, one gains a better understanding of suffering itself - realizing that it is not an individual experience but a shared condition that impacts all living beings. In this way, *karuṇā* creates the possibility for a new approach to suffering, transforming it from a cause of despair into a motivation for compassionate action.

Additionally, the cultivation of *karuṇā* encourages a new understanding of the self and its role in the world. By embracing compassion, individuals can start to break down the strict boundaries of self-centeredness that usually shape their actions and views. This dissolution of ego leads to a more harmonious relationship with others and the world around them, fostering ethical behavior and a sense of shared responsibility. Through this process, *karuṇā* promotes peace and reconciliation, not just on a personal level but also at societal and global levels.

In a world increasingly marked by injustice, inequality, and environmental crises, *karuṇā* acts as both a moral framework and a practical guide for healing. It offers a compassionate response to the global challenges we face, highlighting the importance of empathy, solidarity, and collaboration across national, cultural, and religious boundaries. *Karuṇā* calls for action - action rooted in the understanding of the interconnectedness of all life and our collective responsibility for each other's well-being.

In Buddhist practice, the development of *karuṇā* is closely linked to the path of enlightenment. It is not simply a passive emotion or feeling, but an active force that pushes the practitioner toward selfless actions and moral duties. The Bodhisattva ideal represents this, where the compassionate being postpones their liberation to help others on their journey toward freedom from suffering. In this way, *karuṇā* becomes both a goal and a method—an essential practice for personal transformation as well as for enhancing the well-being of the collective.

In the broader context of Indian philosophy, *karuṇā* goes beyond any single tradition and highlights its universal significance across different schools of thought. Whether in Hinduism, Jainism, or Buddhism, compassion is seen as a basic ethical principle that connects all beings. Each tradition, while offering its distinct perspective, views *karuṇā* as an essential response to the challenge of suffering, encouraging individuals to act with a deep sense of moral responsibility toward all forms of life.

Ultimately, the role of *karuṇā* in promoting ethical values and global harmony is crucial to human well-being. It calls on us to recognize our shared humanity and the deep interconnectedness of all life, urging us to make compassion a daily practice. By doing so, we not only change our hearts and minds but also create a ripple effect that can bring healing, peace, and justice to a divided world. Compassion, when truly lived, becomes a powerful force capable of addressing the most urgent challenges of our time - whether they are social, environmental, or political - and guiding humanity toward a future of greater unity and collective well-being.

Thus, *karuṇā* is not just an abstract idea but a practical and deeply transformative path that touches the very essence of human existence. Its practice invites each person to contribute to a larger, more compassionate world, where relieving suffering becomes both a personal and shared goal. In this way, *karuṇā* stands as a beacon of hope and a guide for ethical living, urging us to act with love, wisdom, and kindness for the benefit of all beings.

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THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL AND ITS SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

The Bodhisattva represents a sentient being destined to become a Buddha in the future. The aspirant striving for Enlightenment embodies an idealistic lifestyle that inspires individuals and communities toward a righteous world. This paper primarily explores the idealistic characteristics of the Bodhisattva and highlights how his great compassion cultivates a sense of responsibility towards others, fostering a more caring world. It further examines how sharing the Bodhisattva ideal enhances an individual's spiritual well-being and contributes to a collective sense of responsibility for human development in various ways. Additionally, this study elucidates how the Bodhisattva ideal can serve as a foundation for building a more just, equitable, and sustainable world.

Keywords: *Bodhisattva ideal, enlightenment aspiration, compassion and responsibility, spiritual well-being, human development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Bodhisattva is a unique concept that has evolved in Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions. The word “Bodhisattva” means “enlightening being” in Sanskrit. The Bodhisattva (Pāli: Bodhisatta) represents a sentient being destined to be a Buddha in the future. There is a difference between the definitions of the word ‘Bodhisattva’ in the Mahāyāna and Theravāda schools. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, ‘Bodhisattva’ is a figure of wisdom and also refers to the consciousness of the truth of the universe and life with compassion towards people.¹ Meanwhile, the name ‘Bodhisatta’ is given to a being who aspires to be Bodhi or attains Enlightenment in Theravāda tradition.

The Bodhisattva concept is one of the most important models in Buddhism,

* Deputy Editor, Sinhala Dictionary Compilation Institute.

¹ Malalasekara (2003), p. 322.

especially in the Mahāyāna. Both traditions, Mahāyāna and Theravāda, mainly use the term 'Bodhisattva' for a Buddha to be. The Pāli term "*Bodhisatta* refers to one directly attempting to gain Enlightenment. Bodhisattva is a being destined to attain "enlightenment" in early Buddhism".² The emergence of Mahāyāna after the Second Council is considered the actualization of the potential for Buddhahood that was already embedded deep within human beings.

Bodhisattva may refer to a spiritually perfect person who is innately considered ideal. "By Bodhisattva is meant, therefore, one who is attached to or has inherent Enlightenment or knowledge of the truth. In this general sense, without any distinction, it may be applied to any person aspiring to the Bodhi, but strictly speaking, a Bodhisattva destined to become a *Sammā Sambuddha*, a fully enlightened one."³ The Bodhisattva ideally signifies the scope of the Theravāda tradition based on the quality of compassion. A Bodhisattva practice is performed on the grounds of the ten perfections. It performs various acts of merit out of compassion for all sentient beings. Further, he vows to become a Buddha with compassion towards human beings. Bodhisattvas are people who have inherited higher spiritual qualities. They vow to alleviate human suffering and encourage people and communities to engage in humanitarian efforts, social justice initiatives, and human development.

II. BODHISATTVA CONCEPT

Generally, a Bodhisattva is a human destined to become a Buddha. He is attempting to attain *nirvāṇa*. The Sanskrit Word Bodhisattva has been explained in different ways. Bodhi means 'enlightenment'. However, ancient and modern scholars have offered several interpretations of the word *sattva*.⁴ However, the term Bodhisattva is interpreted differently in various texts. The Sanskrit-English Dictionary defines "Bodhi as perfect knowledge of wisdom and the illuminated of enlightened intellect. *Sattva* means a Buddhist saint with only one birth to undergo before obtaining the state of a supreme Buddha and then *nirvāṇa*".⁵

The Pāli term of Bodhisatta is given to a being who aspires to Bodhi or Enlightenment. The word refers to all those who seek *nibbāna*, including Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, and the disciple of Buddhas (Malalasekara, 2003). He further mentions that the word Bodhisattva may have been used originally only in connection with the last life of the Buddha. It is mentioned in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta*: "In the days before my enlightenment when I was as yet only a Bodhisatta."⁶

There are several definitions of Bodhisattva in Mahāyāna texts, especially in *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, *Jātakamālā*, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, etc. Those texts

² Malalasekara (2003), p. 322.

³ Narada (1940), p. 48.

⁴ Har (1999), p. 172.

⁵ Monier monier- William (2003), p. 734.

⁶ D. II. 67

mainly describe the Bodhisattva character and his performances in length. The *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*⁷ signified the obligation of a Bodhisattva; “He vowed to enter into the supreme bliss of *nirvāṇa* before all beings got liberated. He does not realize the highest liberation for himself. He promised to lead all beings to liberation, and He would stay until his last existence, even for the sake of one living soul”. The motivation of Bodhisattvas is to seek to help all beings rather than themselves. They are destined to attain Enlightenment in the future for the sake of all beings. They perceived *śūnyatā* (emptiness) as the most profound truth. *Śūnyatā* (emptiness) is a distinguished realization in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

According to the Theravāda text of *Buddhawamsa* (KN)⁸: a Bodhisattva should be a human being, a male, sufficiently developed to become an *arahant* in that very birth, a recluse at the time of the declaration, should declare his resolve before a Buddha, should be possessed of attainment, be prepared to sacrifice all, even life and his resolution should be substantial and unwavering. These eight conditions should be fulfilled to be an aspirant, and then the Bodhisattva performs the ten perfections to acquire the qualities of Buddhahood. Apart from performing perfections, Bodhisattva must make five great sacrifices: Giving up wife, children, kingdom, life, and limb.

Bodhisattva's virtuous performances are depicted in the *Jātaka* stories in Theravāda Buddhist literature and *Jātakamālā* in Mahāyāna. Āryaśūra in *Jātakamālā*⁹: (2010) shows the inner qualities of the Bodhisattva and his consciousness to benefit others. The Bodhisattva's actions in *Jātaka* stories depend on countless lifetimes of discipline, compassion, and selflessness, and he is full of virtue and nobility with ever-deepening wisdom. He acts with certainty of the consequences of his actions, knowing what conduct with further his intention to benefit the world.

The Bodhisattva concept is usually bound with Karma, *Jātaka* stories depicted that the Bodhisattva actions are dependent on Karma. He is a result of former Karma, and the present Karma also predicts his future. This Karmic concept inspired the Buddhist community to follow the virtuous life in this very world. Bodhisattva plays a sacrificial role, and his life is dedicated to the welfare of others. His humanitarian approach is typical and extraordinary. The Bodhisattva ideal in Mahāyāna is related to becoming Buddha in the future. Another aspect of Bodhisattva's character is his career, which is regarded as an entirely selfless being who never expects anything from others.

III. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Human Development is a broad field that goes beyond economic growth and focuses on human well-being and progress. Although it encompasses various aspects, this article mainly concerns human cognitive and emotional

⁷ Suzuki (1932), p. 165.

⁸ Buddhawamsa Pāli (KN) (2005), p. 235.

⁹ *Jātakamālā*, (2010), p. 56.

development in the context of the Bodhisattva ideal. Apart from that, it deals with social development, which includes understanding social norms, forming relationships, and developing a sense of identity. From the point of lifespan perspective, human development concerns a lifelong process and cultural values through individual experiences. In particular, the Bodhisattva doctrine is incorporated with spiritual development, but physical well-being for human society is also emphasized. “The concept of Buddha Amitābha and the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara as the embodiment of compassion, an all-merciful divine father, whose sole aim is to deliver all living beings from suffering. This development was the natural result of the intrinsic human nature, which seeks external protection and consolation in a male or female divinity.”¹⁰ Therefore, human development is a vital aspect of Buddhism, and Bodhisattva’s career has elucidated it. Buddhism firmly believed that Bodhisattva’s effort happened out of compassion for all living beings. The Bodhisattva doctrine is regarded as a practice that is too demanding. When interpreting human development in the light of the Bodhisattva concept, it is believed that material well-being is necessary to support the cultivation of the mind. For this reason, material richness and mental wellness are particular aspects of building human development. However, Buddhism often prioritizes mental wellness rather than materialism. World Development Report of the World Bank (1991) has defined human development, thus, “Development in a broader sense is understood to include other important and related attributes as well, notably more equality of opportunity, and political freedom and civil liberties. The overall goal of development is therefore to increase the economic, political and civil rights of all people across gender, ethnic groups, religions, races, regions and countries.” Further reiterates that development is a sustainable increase in living standards encompassing material consumption, education, health, and environmental protection. While accepting the above objectives of Human Development in Buddhism, it emphasizes that spiritual values in human development are necessary. According to the Human Development Index, there are four essential pillars in human Development: Equality, sustainability, productivity, and empowerment.

Buddhism mainly concerns the higher qualities humans acquire in this very life, called Bodhisattva. As mentioned by Santideva in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Bodhisattva thought, “I should eliminate the suffering of others because it is suffering, just like my own suffering. I should take care of others because they are sentient beings, just as I am a sentient being.”¹¹ Therefore, human development in Buddhism is sharpening human qualities distinctively, Bodhisattva never thought selfishly when happiness is equally dear to others and himself. He never strives for happiness for himself alone. A Bodhisattva is a person who sacrifices his happiness for the sake of others. He is responsible for building the happiest human world and showing them the path to salvation

¹⁰ Kariyawasam (2002), p. 11.

¹¹ *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, (2003), p. 128.

easier. Human development, from the point of view of the Bodhisattva ideal, is to form a peaceful, contentment, and joyful sentient being.

IV. BODHISATTVA IDEAL AND ITS PRACTICABLE PART

The Bodhisattva concept, as well as Bodhisattva practice, is exceptional because it seeks to cause a revolution in the general attitude of man. Bodhisattva practice is a striking thought in Buddhism that influences and changes the lifestyle of the Buddhist community. "Following the Bodhisattva ideal, he argued that it had no meaning if the search for reality was not for the good of the entire world. To him, it was selfishness to seek his salvation while all humanity was immersed in misery. He, therefore, abandoned the search for mere personal salvation. He decided that until he found the way for the entire world's salvation, he would not follow the path of his happiness."¹² Bodhisattva's life and career are intended for the benefit of others, not for oneself. Sometimes, he gets enough chances to attain the highest state of *nirvāṇa*, but he deliberately gives up on them. He never thought that his effort should be for his benefit. Bodhisattva practice is characterized by the ten perfections (*pāramitā*). Every perfection has been depicted as the virtue and sacrifice of Bodhisattva. As mentioned in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* by Santideva: "Whatever good I have acquired by doing all this, may I appease and assuage all the pains and sorrows of all living beings."¹³ His practice is entirely devoted to the welfare of all creatures. He thought his work should bring happiness to society, and his responsibility was to escape people from evil suffering.

Bodhisattva practice is incorporated with the perfections (*pāramitā*), and his behavior is often idealistic. Therefore, the Bodhisattva performs for the happiness of others, and those performances are depicted as perfections. According to Theravāda Buddhism, there are ten *pāramitās* or perfections that the Bodhisattva has fulfilled in the course of his career. One who practices the ten perfections is commonly titled a Bodhisattva. It has been described in the *Buddhawamsa Pāṭi* (KN): "The Bodhisattva is a precursor of a Buddha, who is an aspirant to be enlightened."¹⁴

4.1 The ten perfections and their contribution towards the human development

The Bodhisattva proceeds to investigate the qualities that he should acquire for Buddhahood. This is ten in number, with ten perfections and six in Mahāyāna. Each of the ten is divided into three, varying in kind and degree. Thus, in the case of *dāna*, the *dāna pāramī* consists of giving one's limbs, *dāna upapāramī* is giving away one's external possessions, and *dāna paramattha pāramī* is giving one's life. Bodhisattva's responsibility is to cultivate higher human qualities by practicing thirty *pāramitās*, and his career is not confined to benefiting himself, he should share his work for the happiness of others.

¹² Valisinha (1938), p. 483.

¹³ *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, (2003), p. 140.

¹⁴ *Buddhawamsa* (2005), p. 236.

There are ten perfections chiefly to be practiced and fulfilled by a Bodhisattva in the circle of *Samṣāra*. These perfections are a kind of discipline that enables the Bodhisattva to obtain the supreme bliss of *nibbāna*. The ten *pāramitās* (perfections) are *dāna* (giving), *sīla* (virtue), *nekkhamma* (renunciation), *paññā* (wisdom), *virya* (effort), *khanti* (patience), *sacca* (truth), *adhiṭṭhāna* (determination), *mettā* (compassion), and *upekkhā* (equanimity).

These perfections are inherited in Bodhisattva's character, which shows the dedication to rendering the greatest service for the community's well-being. *pāramitā* helps to gain merits on the one hand, and on the other hand, *pāramitā* bases to advance spiritual development in an individual. *Pāramitā* elucidates the concept of human flourishing, and performing the *pāramitā* shows Bodhisattva's exemplary accountability to the community. *Dāna*, or giving, is the first of the ten *pāramitās* which lead to becoming Buddha. Therefore, Bodhisattva's basic practice is the foundation for fulfilling the other perfections. This practice has been depicted in many *Jātaka* stories, in which the Bodhisattva shows his munificent behavior.

Many *Jātaka* stories show the Buddha's previous life, during which he practiced *dāna pāramitā*. Giving is a perfection and a moral planted in a generous mind. Bodhisattva is willing to make sacrifices, even his life, without hesitation. "Buddhist morality is based on the universal law of cause and effect and considers good and bad deeds in terms of how they affect the person and those around him. An act that benefits oneself cannot be considered good but simultaneously brings physical and mental suffering to another being."¹⁵ Bodhisattva works for the entire world's benefit rather than personal profit. His generosity is particularly driven by human flourishing and development. Eventually, the Bodhisattva's career paved the way for Enlightenment by allowing humans to adhere to the Bodhisattva ideal. "Yet in the practice of charity, the Bodhisattva has to be discriminated. He cannot offer anything that may cause unhappiness or injury to anyone, such as poisons, drugs, and weapons of destruction. Neither can he give intoxicating drinks which weaken morality."¹⁶ This positive practice of Bodhisattva is an approach to expand what people can do for society's well-being. Applying the Bodhisattva charity work to current society enables people to improve their spiritual lives. Further, it provides a philanthropic material foundation for human development. In this regard, economic growth is essential. However, we must pay attention to its righteous contribution because Bodhisattva's career is wholly based on virtuous actions that engage in human well-being both individually and socially. "In Buddhism, practicing moral conduct can give rise to conditions that immediately and eventually promote prosperity, health, and long life. The practice of morality, including these favorable conditions, can be maintained by confidence in the results of good actions."¹⁷

¹⁵ Nadeeva (2022), p. 41.

¹⁶ Valisinha (1938), p. 490.

¹⁷ Neminda (2019), p. 30.

The Bodhisattva doctrine and its practice promote the community's moral responsibility and mental purity for the equal development of the heart and intellect. In this regard, virtue or *sīla* is a proper practice to overcome the unwholesome acts in one's character. Bodhisattva's character exemplifies that wholesome activities bring happiness and unwholesome activities bring suffering. Therefore, he always practices wholesome activities by abstaining from killing, stealing, committing adultery, using intoxicants, harsh words, craving for another's property, and tale-bearing, which are harmful either to the doer or to another, or both. In brief, one needs to abstain from all vicious and sinful deeds, one who practices *sīla* and does not commit any sin. From the point of view of human development, the practice of morality is the way to promote righteousness in society, and it has been exemplified in the Buddhist *Jātaka* stories, too. His goal is to liberate others from suffering with great compassion, a significant spiritual force that runs through all ten perfections. Bodhisattva's career is entirely of righteousness, and they never admire unrighteousness, the ten perfections are performing for the well-being of humanity. "Perfection and compassion go together, to be enlightened means to be compassionate. Such a being is the ideal person to be emulated if salvation is set as the goal. This special emphasis on compassion introduced a new orientation in the ethical framework as it demanded that the seeker not be satisfied with his spiritual gain but work actively for the welfare of others."¹⁸ In Buddhism, human development is mainly discussed based on spiritual values. In this regard, the Bodhisattva ideal exemplifies that positive virtues have to be cultivated and perfected to develop human values, and it is prescribed in Mahāyāna as cultivating the Bodhicitta, Bodhicitta is the storehouse of innumerable qualities which the Bodhisattva has inherited.

The Bodhisattva career often exemplifies the righteous livelihood in human development, and unrighteousness is never admired. It is impossible to develop a virtuous mind within a very short period. Bodhisattva has been long engaged in performing virtues for the benefit of others. His effort is ultimately morally upright and meritorious, his endeavor to develop unrisen good and promote the good that has already arisen. The Buddhist view of human development is a spiritual-based approach, and this approach is based on an apparent supposition that an individual's spiritual capacity and awareness are not immobile, but indeed develop changes, and potentially increase. "Incorporating spirituality within the human behavior and social environment life span content is a foundational attempt to honor holistic personal development. One can consider the development of an individual's spirituality from gestation through the years of life to death while considering the socioeconomic, political, racial, ethnic, and more significant societal influences impacting a person's faith journey."¹⁹ In this respect, Bodhisattva, an ideal, also promotes the spirit development of individuals rather than material

¹⁸ Misra (1995), p. 149.

¹⁹ Straughan (2016), p. 13.

development. Bodhisattva's goal is to have a clear view of life and a practical way to achieve social good since training depends on reality. In such a teaching, the intelligent can have trust, it can give the necessary impetus for reaching the highest goal attainable in the world. In other words, this Bodhisattva message points to the path to complete freedom from superstition, wrong understanding, discontent, and conflict. Therefore, those ten perfections can achieve Bodhisattva's aspiration and ensure the welfare of all beings.

4.2 The Bodhisattva ideal and its relevance to building a humane society

The Buddha has admonished that everyone is responsible for one's deeds and for what he is, no one can blame another for his unhappiness, misery, feeling of insecurity, or anxiety as well as everyone can possess one should seek security and freedom in themselves, in one's mind, purified by virtue, is the best of all conceptions of human liberty based on a realistic view of life. Bodhisattva's career shows that all good depends on nobility of character. Bodhisattva's career is vehemently dedicated to the good of many out of compassion for the world and the profit, welfare, and happiness of divine and human beings. "The virtues represent the beginning of the moral life intended to bring about social harmony, while the morals are more comprehensive in that they are concerned with the ultimate health, both physical and mental, and the welfare of oneself and others."²⁰ Pursuing happiness and welfare for oneself and others is the foundation of the Bodhisattva doctrine, and its social and moral purpose is to strengthen the relationship among all living beings. In this context, benevolence and compassion are the most important sentiments inspiring each person's behavior. The Bodhisattva concept of society is not confined to humans and includes all living beings. In social morality, cultivating the virtues of compassion and nonviolence is the primary practice of the Bodhisattva's career, and it has contributed to the building of a humane society. The practice of ten perfections during a Bodhisattva career is a discipline that enables the building of a moral society by bestowing on all living beings freedom from fear, hatred, and distress. His practice of perfection teaches people to avoid what produces non-humans and to do what produces a humane atmosphere in society.

The adherence and practice of the ten perfections are most important for the good life, and the Bodhisattva always practices them to show the readiness to build a righteous society. "All good depends on the nobility of character, and it may be justly said that the Buddha's teaching, which tells us to seek security and freedom in ourselves, in our minds, purified by virtue, is the best of all conceptions of human liberty based on a realistic view of life."²¹ The Bodhisattva possesses a noble character who universally loves all creatures. He was never concerned about discrimination, and no more condemnation or criticism existed. His character is full of virtue, and it is evident that this practice leads to the awakening in the higher realms of conscious life. From

²⁰ Kalupahana (1995), p. 82.

²¹ Rahula (1969), p. 28.

the point of humane society, Bodhisattva's ideal confirmed a peaceful society, his constant endeavor is to suppress one's evil tendencies and cultivate the thoughts, words, and acts that lead to good. The meaning of His effort is to struggle to prevent people from doing harmful acts, to spread goodness, and to increase the goodness in society. In short, he is determined to avoid evil deeds and practice charity. When there is such a person with outstanding qualities of conduct and intellect, a community becomes free from the plague of fanaticism and insecurity of extremist action as well as from the heartless exploitation, oppression, and suppression of the weak by the strong. Rahula further explains that Bodhisattva practice is a possible way to protect a community from being overwhelmed and build a harmless and non-violent society in the world.²² Bodhisattva shared that his responsibility is to build a humane society by examining living in a way that does not hurt anybody. In such a society, the way of friendly feeling will encourage the idea of dedicating oneself to the service of others and doing all one can to make people's lives happy.

4.3 The Bodhisattva ideal and Human Development in Mahāyāna tradition

The Bodhisattva is the model practitioner in the Mahāyāna tradition who dedicates his/ her life entirely to the salvation of other beings. Mahāyāna texts have adopted this concept to distinguish from the earlier Indian concept of Arahant, a being who is also enlightened. In this regard, Bodhisattva possesses two main characteristics: A deep sense of compassion for the suffering of all other beings and a special type of wisdom based on realizing the nature of the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of all existences. The Bodhisattva attains his/ her enlightenment by arousing the thought of selfless Enlightenment (*Bodhicitta*) and practicing the six perfections (*pāramitā*) based on compassion (*karuṇā*). It is entirely different from Arahant.

Bodhisattva is applied as an honorific title by the great Mahāyāna teachers of antiquity, such as Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, and Asaṅga. Vasubandhu has defined the generous part of Bodhisattva. The essence of *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* (*Lotus Sūtra*) is playing an effective role in the dimension of Bodhisattva belief and practice in Mahāyāna. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* (*Lotus Sutra*): "Some people delight in the pain of others because they lack compassion due to always focusing on their welfare. Likewise, [Bodhisattvas] take delight in doing actions for the welfare of others, since they lack all concern about themselves, because of repeatedly feeling compassion."²³ Generally, the Mahāyāna concept of Bodhisattva is the basis of two fundamental principles, namely, moral responsibility and mental purity, in other words, the equal development of the heart and intellect. The Bodhisattva character in Mahāyāna is magnificent and powerful, unlike a human being. However, spiritual progress occurs through the practice of *Bhūmis*, similar to *pāramitās*. The Bodhisattva ideal comes to light by practicing perfection, common in both traditions. The *Jātaka* stories are the primary sources that exemplify the ideal of the Bodhisattva character. There are six perfections in the Mahāyāna tradition, later

²² Rahula (1969), p. 31.

²³ Bunno (1989), p. 268.

made into a group of ten. The earlier six, as given in Buddhist Sanskrit works, are as follows: *Dāna* (liberality), *sīla* (morality), *khanti* (patience), *virīya* (energy), *dhyāna* (concentration) and *paññā* (wisdom). The four supplementary *pāramitās* are *upāya* or *upāya kauśalya* (skill in means), *prañidhāna* (resolution), *bala* (strength) and *jñāna* (knowledge).

The great being lives both for his good and for the good of others, and he practices removing lust, hatred, and delusion and encourages others to do so. This quality is apparent in the Bodhisattva ideal. There are ample instances around the Bodhisattva career of attempting to cultivate good. He abstains from violating the five precepts and encourages others in such restraint. The spiritual aspects of Bodhisattva are highly appreciated in *Lotus Sūtra*, and it introduces the universal virtue of the Bodhisattva himself. “World-honored One! If any Bodhisattvas hear these Dhammas, they shall be aware of the supernatural power of Universal Virtue. If the *Law-Flower Sūtra* proceeds on its course through *Jambudīpa*, some receive and keep it, let them reflect thus: ‘This is all due to the majestic power of Universal Virtue.’ If any receive and keep, read and recite, rightly remember it, comprehend its meaning, and practice it as preached, let it be known that these are doing the works of Universal Virtue and have deeply planted good roots under numberless countless Buddhas and that the hands of the *Tathāgatas* will caress their heads. If they only copy it, these, when their life has ended, will be born in the heaven *trāyastriṃśa*, on which occasion eighty-four thousand nymphs, performing all kinds of music, will come to welcome them.”²⁴ The discussion on universal virtue in the Mahāyāna tradition is an important concept in the modern world. It is given the highest place and is held in the greatest esteem by Theravāda Buddhism. It says that the Bodhisattva career inspires society to overcome the greedy by liberality, to overcome evil by sound, and to overcome anger by kindness. However, the human development index defines human development as an approach to development in which the objective is to expand what people can do and be. It further indicates what might be called people’s fundamental freedoms. It puts people first. In this view, a healthy economy enables people to enjoy a long, healthy life, a good education, a meaningful job, a family life, democratic debate, and so on.²⁵ The ultimate purpose of the Bodhisattva ideal in Mahāyāna Buddhism is to improve people’s well-being in spiritual aspects. Accordingly, one who needs to cultivate good to become Buddha and not practicing perfections and not doing good nobody can become Buddha, consequently, completing the perfections is considered to be developing one’s mind. The Mahāyāna Bodhisattva ideal has been contributing to the well-being of society by raising human development for centuries.

V. CONCLUSION

The life of Bodhisattva is a typical example of such a life. Indeed, this grand ideal, exemplified and placed before humanity, needs further consideration for its unique position in the context of spiritual development in the history

²⁴ Bunno (1989), p. 207.

²⁵ Alkire and Deneulin (2009), p. 4.

of humankind. One who attempts to lead this ideal would change the face of current society in a short time. Those anxious for true happiness and prosperity will acquire it by practicing the Bodhisattva ideal respectively. The current world is consumed with rivalries, hatreds, injustices, and cruelties that need this Bodhisattva practice. Human development is not merely about materialism; it is also about spiritualism. Bodhisattva's ideal emphasizes that human development consists of peace, brotherhood, contentment, and happiness. In this classification, the highest place is given to the Buddha, who follows the Bodhisattva ideal of which he was discovered. This paper elucidated that Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions have proved this ideal is integral to Bodhisattva doctrine. There is, however, one aspect of the ideal in which the Mahayanists differ from the Theravadists. It is about how everyone can become a Bodhisattva to attain salvation. But Theravadists agree that the Bodhisattva ideal is a path to becoming Buddha and is not nobler than the Buddhahood. However, both traditions promote human development by cultivating good based on Bodhisattva practice. People-centered development has become an accepted discourse of global debates in the human development index. Bodhisattva ideals in Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions have mainly discussed the progress of human development on the grounds of spirituality. For that reason, the Bodhisattva ideal can be applied comprehensively to the human development paradigm to build a better world.

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THE ROLE OF MONASTIC COMMUNITIES IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

Monastic communities (*Saṅgha*) have long been central to Buddhist culture and society. Historically, they function as custodians of the *Dhamma*, spiritual educators, and agents of social transformation. The *Pāḷi* Canon, particularly the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and key discourses in the *Sutta Piṭaka* outline the ethical and practical responsibilities of the monastic order. These teachings are not only spiritual in orientation but are also deeply intertwined with creating harmony and sustainability within society.

In the 21st century, the growing challenges of climate change, economic inequality, and social conflict underscore the need for sustainable solutions rooted in ethical frameworks. This paper argues that monastic communities can play a pivotal role in addressing these issues by embodying principles of peace, non-attachment, and compassion. The discussion will integrate classical *Pāḷi* texts and contemporary examples to propose practical approaches to sustainable peace and development.

Keywords: *Buddhist monastic communities, sustainable peace, Buddhist ethics, peacebuilding, social harmony, environmental sustainability, non-violence, compassion, right livelihood.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Monastic communities, referred to as the *Saṅgha*, represent one of the three core pillars of Buddhism (*Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha*), functioning as both custodians of spiritual knowledge and agents of societal transformation. Throughout Buddhist history, these communities have been instrumental in preserving and transmitting ethical frameworks that promote peace, social

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harmony, and environmental sustainability. The *Pāli Canon*, particularly the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and *Sutta Piṭaka*, outlines a code of conduct and guiding principles designed to foster these outcomes, making the monastic order a vital moral compass within Buddhist societies.

In the contemporary world, the relevance of these principles has gained renewed significance in the face of critical global challenges such as environmental degradation, socioeconomic inequalities, and escalating social conflicts. Traditional Buddhist ethics, especially the tenets of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), and compassion (*karuṇā*), provide a foundation not only for personal moral development but also for broader societal peacebuilding and sustainable development. These principles guide individuals and communities to address the root causes of suffering through peaceful, ethical, and environmentally conscious means.

Recent examples, such as the “Eco-Monks” movement in Thailand, demonstrate how monastic communities can actively engage with modern issues. Through initiatives like tree ordination ceremonies and ecological awareness campaigns, monks have extended the application of Buddhist ethics to protect natural ecosystems, mitigate climate change, and promote sustainable living. Similarly, monastic schools in Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries have contributed to reducing social inequalities by offering free education and leadership training for underserved populations, thus fostering long-term socio-economic resilience.

This paper examines the multifaceted role of Buddhist monastic communities in promoting sustainable peace and development. Drawing on both classical Buddhist teachings and contemporary practices, the discussion explores how the *Saṅgha*’s ethical frameworks offer practical strategies for addressing the interconnected crises of today’s world. By integrating compassion-based service, ecological responsibility, and conflict mediation, monastic communities continue to exemplify a path toward a just and harmonious society. This study ultimately aims to highlight the *Saṅgha*’s enduring contributions as an ethical model for both spiritual and social transformation in the 21st century.

II. THE ETHICAL FOUNDATION OF PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN BUDDHISM

The ethical foundation of Buddhism, as preserved in the *Pāli Canon*, provides a profound framework for fostering peace and sustainable development. The teachings encapsulate universal values such as non-violence, ethical economic activity, and compassion, all of which are essential for creating harmony in society and ensuring the well-being of future generations. This section delves deeper into three core principles: non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), and compassion (*karuṇā*), analyzing their scriptural basis and their practical relevance.

2.1. Non-violence (*ahiṃsā*)

Non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) is a cornerstone of Buddhist ethics, emphasized in

the first precept (*pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* – to abstain from taking the life of any living being). This precept is not limited to physical harm but also includes refraining from actions and words that cause suffering to others.

The *Dhammapada* states:

“All tremble at the rod, all fear death.

Treating others like oneself, neither kill nor incite to kill.”¹

“All tremble at the rod, all love life.

Treating others like oneself, neither kill nor incite to kill.”^{2, 3}

Beyond fostering environmental protection and conflict resolution, the principle of non-violence serves as a fundamental pillar in both personal transformation and societal ethics. In *Cūḷakammavibhaṅgasutta*⁴, the Buddha explains that those who engage in killing or violence will experience suffering in this life and future rebirths, emphasizing the karmic consequences of harm.

Take a woman or man who kills living creatures. They’re violent, bloody-handed, a hardened killer, merciless to living beings. Because of undertaking such deeds, when their body breaks up, after death, they’re reborn in a place of loss, a bad place, the underworld, hell. If they’re not reborn in a place of loss but return to the human realm, then wherever they’re reborn they’re short-lived. For killing living creatures is the path leading to a short lifespan.⁵

From a practical perspective, *ahiṃsā* is deeply integrated into the disciplinary framework of the Buddhist monastic community (*Saṅgha*). The *Vinaya Piṭaka* explicitly prohibits monks from intentionally taking the life of any sentient being, whether human or the smallest insect. In the *Pārājika* 3⁶, the Buddha declares that if a monk deliberately kills a human being or incites another to commit such an act, he incurs a *pārājika* offense and is permanently expelled from the *Saṅgha*:

Yo pana bhikkhu sañcicca manussaviggahaṃ jīvītā voropeyya satthahāraṃ vāssa pariyeseyya maraṇavaṇṇaṃ vā saṃvaṇṇeyya maraṇāya vā samādapeyya - ‘ambho purisa, kiṃ tuyhiminā pāpakena

¹ “Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa, sabbe bhāyanti maccuno, / Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā, na haneyya na ghātaye.”

² “Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa, sabbesaṃ jīvitaṃ piyaṃ, / Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā, na haneyya na ghātaye.”

³ *Dhp.* 129 - 130. Sujāto, 2021b, p. 28.

⁴ MN 135 (*Cūḷakammavibhaṅgasutta*).

⁵ Sujāto (2018b), p. 198.

⁶ *Pārājika* 3: “Yo pana bhikkhu sañcicca manussaviggahaṃ jīvītā voropeyya satthahāraṃ vāssa pariyeseyya maraṇavaṇṇaṃ vā saṃvaṇṇeyya maraṇāya vā samādapeyya - ‘ambho purisa, kiṃ tuyhiminā pāpakena dujjīvitena, mataṃ te jīvītā seyyo’ti, iti cittamano cittasaṅkappo anekapariyāyena maraṇavaṇṇaṃ vā saṃvaṇṇeyya, maraṇāya vā samādapeyya, ayampi pārājiko hoti asaṃvāso.” Vin. iii. 73.

*dujjīvitena, mataṃ te jīvītā seyyo'ti, iti cittamano cittasaṅkappo anekapariyāyena maraṇavaṇṇaṃ vā saṃvaṇṇeyya, maraṇāya vā samādaṭṭheyya, ayampi pārājiko hoti asaṃvāso.*⁷

However, the prohibition against killing extends beyond human life to include all sentient beings, no matter how small. The *Pācittiya* 61⁸ rule explicitly states that if a monk deliberately kills any living being, he commits a *pācittiya* offense: “If a monk intentionally kills a living being, he commits an offense entailing confession.”⁹ This strict adherence to non-violence reflects the comprehensive nature of Buddhist ethical discipline, wherein even the smallest creatures are afforded protection under the precepts of the *Vinaya*.

Additionally, in *Pācittiya* 62¹⁰ of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, the Buddha prohibits monks from pouring water containing living organisms or disturbing vegetation, as such actions may harm microscopic life forms: “If a monk uses water that he knows contains living beings, he commits an offense entailing confession.”¹¹

These *Vinaya* injunctions illustrate that *ahiṃsā* extends beyond refraining from direct acts of killing, it encompasses a way of life grounded in mindfulness, respect for all living beings, and environmental stewardship. Both monks and lay practitioners, by observing this principle, contribute to the realization of a compassionate, non-violent, and harmonious society.

This teaching extends beyond human relationships to include animals and the environment, advocating for the protection of all forms of life. In this way, non-harming promotes environmental stewardship, urging individuals and communities to live in harmony with nature. For instance, the ecological crises of deforestation and species extinction can be mitigated by applying this principle to land and resource management. Monastic communities, with their tradition of simplicity and respect for nature, often lead by example. Monks in Thailand, for instance, have initiated tree ordination ceremonies, symbolically protecting forests by treating them as sacred entities.

A prominent example is the “Eco-Monks” movement in Thailand. The “Eco-Monks” movement is a social initiative launched by Buddhist monks in Thailand to raise awareness about environmental protection and promote concrete actions to preserve nature. The term “Eco-Monks” reflects the monks’ commitment to integrating Buddhist teachings with environmental values. This movement emerged in the late 20th century, during a time when Thailand faced severe deforestation. Many monasteries located near forests became focal points for protecting trees and the surrounding ecosystems. Numerous monks actively participated in forest conservation by spreading

⁷ Brahmali (2021a), p. 97.

⁸ *Pācittiya* 61: “Yo pana bhikkhu saṅcicca pāṇaṃ jīvītā voropeyya, pācittiyaṃ.” *Vin.iv.* 125.

⁹ Brahmali (2021b), p. 410.

¹⁰ *Pācittiya* 62: “Udakaṃ pana bhikkhu saṅcicca pāṇakaṃ viheṭhetvā chaḍḍeyya vā chaḍḍāpeyya vā, pācittiyaṃ.” *Vin.iv.* 126.

¹¹ Brahmali (2021b), p. 412.

awareness of the importance of the environment. Activities such as “ordaining trees” (conducting rituals where monks wrap saffron robes around trees) symbolically connected Buddhist ethics with environmental protection. These ceremonies transformed trees into sacred symbols, reminding people of the relationship between humans and nature.¹²

The monks also organized sermons and discussions to raise awareness about the role of the environment. Their teachings emphasized that protecting nature is an expression of compassion and social responsibility. The “Eco-Monks” movement has initiated numerous projects, including reforestation, water conservation, and waste management. Many monasteries have become ecological hubs where communities can learn sustainable living practices. By leveraging the prestige and influence of the monks, the movement has successfully shifted community attitudes toward nature.

The “Eco-Monks” movement in Thailand serves as a clear example of the role Buddhism can play in addressing modern issues, particularly environmental protection. By combining Buddhist teachings with concrete actions, the movement has brought about positive changes in community awareness and behavior, promoting a lifestyle that harmonizes with nature. The values of compassion, wisdom, and interdependence have been applied to enhance environmental awareness, contributing to the creation of a sustainable and fulfilling future for all living beings.

Moreover, the principle of non-harming fosters conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It encourages individuals to approach disputes with empathy and a commitment to non-violence. This has practical implications in addressing social and political conflicts, where the avoidance of harm can de-escalate tensions and create space for dialogue.

2.2. Right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*)

Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) is one of the core elements of the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya Aṭṭhaṅgika Magga*), a framework that leads to the cessation of suffering and the attainment of liberation. It provides ethical guidance on how individuals should sustain themselves economically while ensuring their livelihood does not cause harm to others or to the environment. The concept is not merely a personal ethical guideline but also has profound implications for societal harmony and sustainable development.

The Buddha defined *sammā-ājīva* as refraining from livelihoods that directly or indirectly cause harm to other beings. In the *Vaṇijjāsutta*,¹³ five specific trades are mentioned that a follower of the Dhamma should avoid: trading in weapons (*saṭṭhavaṇijjā*), trading in living beings (*sattavaṇijjā*), which includes slavery and trafficking, trading in meat (*maṃsavaṇijjā*), trading in intoxicants

¹² Dipen Barua (2020), *Environmental Warriors: Buddhist Eco-monks and Tree Ordination*, [03/12/2024] <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/environmental-warriors-buddhist-eco-monks-and-tree-ordination/>.

¹³ AN 5. 177 (*Vaṇijjāsutta*).

(*majjavaṇijjā*), and trading in poison (*visavaṇijjā*).¹⁴

These trades are considered unethical because they involve harm or exploitation, violating the principle of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence). Furthermore, the *Mahācattārisakasutta*¹⁵ emphasizes that right livelihood must be grounded in right intention (*sammā-saṅkappa*) and supported by other ethical practices, such as right speech (*sammā-vācā*) and right action (*sammā-kammanta*).

Monastic communities embody *sammā-ājīva* in their way of life. The Vinaya Piṭaka outlines the rules for monastic livelihood, emphasizing simplicity, non-possession, and reliance on alms (*piṇḍapāta*). By avoiding any form of trade or economic exploitation, monks and nuns demonstrate an alternative model of sustainable living. In addition, many monasteries actively contribute to their communities through educational programs, healthcare initiatives, and environmental conservation projects. For instance:

- In Myanmar, monastic schools provide free education to underserved communities.

Monastic education is critical in ensuring learning opportunities for those children in Myanmar who are not fully served by the government system; it currently provides education to over 275,000 children and targets marginalized children often from migrant families, conflict areas, or remote communities.¹⁶

- In Thailand, Buddhist monks lead reforestation projects and environmental awareness campaigns.

As part of that effort, the monastery holds dhamma walks. (Dhamma, in Buddhism, broadly means to uphold the teachings of the Buddha). In these walks, which have taken place near-annually since 2000, groups of monks set off across the district for stretches of up to eight days and seven nights, mostly barefoot and bearing no food or provisions for shelter. They subsist only on what villages and towns provide. Laypeople join in, too, lending numbers and support to the monks as they conduct outreach to officials, residents, and especially children, to raise awareness of the benefits of forest conservation, organic cultivation, and sustainable development.¹⁷

These activities not only benefit local communities but also inspire laypeople to adopt ethical practices in their own lives. In modern contexts, businesses and policymakers can draw on the concept of *sammā-ājīva* to shape ethical frameworks for economic activity. This includes investing in renewable energy, supporting fair trade, and promoting circular economies that minimize waste and pollution.

¹⁴ Sujāto (2018a), p. 198.

¹⁵ MN 117 (*Mahācattārisakasutta*).

¹⁶ Daw Ohnmar Tin & Miss Emily Stenning (2015), p. 6.

¹⁷ Greg Harris (2024), *The Forest Monks*, [28/01/2025] <https://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/magazine/entry/how-buddhist-monks-protect-thailands-environment/##>.

2.3. Compassion (*karuṇā*)

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is a central tenet of Buddhist teachings, integral to the alleviation of suffering (*dukkha*) and the cultivation of harmonious communities. Rooted in the recognition of the interconnectedness of all beings (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), compassion extends beyond passive empathy to include active efforts to reduce suffering, whether individual or societal. It is one of the four sublime states (*brahmavihāra*), alongside loving-kindness (*mettā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), which collectively serve as the ethical and emotional foundation for a peaceful and inclusive society.

Compassion as a fundamental quality to be cultivated by anyone following the Buddhist path. It is not merely a personal virtue but also a transformative force for social harmony. In this context, compassion involves: understanding the suffering of others, developing a sincere wish to alleviate that suffering, and taking concrete steps to help reduce or eliminate the causes of suffering.

In the *Cūḷakammavibhaṅgasutta*¹⁸, the Buddha elaborates on the karmic impact of compassionate actions. He explains that acts motivated by compassion generate wholesome karma (*kusalakamma*), which leads to immediate benefits in the present and positive results in future lives. This teaching underscores the long-term value of compassion as an ethical practice that aligns with both spiritual progress and societal well-being. The *Mettāsutta*¹⁹ complements these teachings by linking loving-kindness (*mettā*) to the cultivation of compassion. It describes how the practice of loving-kindness creates an atmosphere of trust, safety, and inclusivity, making it possible for communities to thrive in peace.

“With love for the whole world,/ unfold a boundless heart:/ above, below, all round, unconstricted, without enemy or foe.”²⁰

“When standing, walking, sitting,/ or lying down while yet unwary,/ keep this ever in mind;/ for this, they say, is a divine meditation in this life.”^{21, 22}

Compassion motivates individuals and institutions to address systemic issues that perpetuate inequality and suffering. In the Buddhist tradition, acts of generosity (*dāna*) are viewed as expressions of compassion. For example:

- Monastic communities in countries like Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and India often provide free education to children from underprivileged backgrounds, breaking cycles of poverty.

- Buddhist organizations worldwide engage in humanitarian efforts, such as disaster relief and healthcare, offering practical support to those in need.²³

¹⁸ MN 135 (*Cūḷakammavibhaṅgasutta*).

¹⁹ Sn. 1. 8. (*Mettāsutta*).

²⁰ “*Mettaṇca sabbalokasmi, mānaṣaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ, Uddhaṃ adho ca tiriyaṇca, asaṃbādhaṃ averamasapattaṃ.*”

²¹ “*Tiṭṭhaṃ caraṃ nisinna va, sayāno yāvatāssa vitamiddho, etaṃ satiṃ adhiṭṭheyya, brah-mametaṃ vihāramidhamāhu.*”

²² Sujato (2021a) p. 27.

²³ Ulrich Nitschke (2016), *Religious Engagement in Humanitarian Crises, International*

Compassion fosters mutual understanding and reduces divisiveness. In multi-ethnic or multi-religious societies, compassion enables individuals to see beyond differences, focusing instead on shared humanity. The *Mettā-sutta* illustrates how cultivating compassion and loving-kindness helps to dissolve feelings of enmity and fear, thereby creating an environment of inclusivity and reconciliation. For instance, in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, monastic communities have historically played mediatory roles in resolving local disputes. By advocating for forgiveness and mutual respect, they exemplify how compassion can be a practical tool for conflict resolution.

Monastic communities play a pivotal role in demonstrating and institutionalizing compassion. Their daily activities often go beyond spiritual practice to include tangible contributions to societal well-being. Examples of such compassionate activities include:

- In times of crisis, monasteries often serve as sanctuaries. In Sri Lanka, monasteries have provided shelter and food to displaced individuals during periods of civil conflict.²⁴ During natural disasters in Myanmar and Nepal, Buddhist monks and nuns have organized relief efforts, offering medical care and emotional support to affected populations.²⁵

- Many monastic communities operate schools, clinics, and vocational training centers, especially in underserved areas. In India, Buddhist monasteries have partnered with NGOs to establish programs that address child malnutrition and illiteracy in rural regions.²⁶ In Southeast Asia, monks provide free health services and organize blood donation drives, embodying compassion through public service.²⁷

Compassion is a transformative force in Buddhist ethics, providing a foundation for both personal and collective well-being. By alleviating suffering and fostering mutual understanding, it catalyzes social justice, conflict resolution, and sustainable development. Monastic communities, through their compassionate practices and public service, exemplify the potential of

Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development, https://www.partner-religion-development.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PaRD_Religious_Engagement_in_Humanitarian_Crises_-_Good_practices_08-2016.pdf.

²⁴ Department of Archaeology (2024), *Buddhist Meditation Monasteries of Ancient Sri Lanka*, [28/01/2025] <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6774/>.

²⁵ The Buddhist Channel (2024), *Buddhist Nuns Lead Relief Efforts Amid Myanmar Floods*, [28/01/2025] <https://buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=51,13564,0,0,1,0>. Central Tibetan Administration (2015), *Monks and Nuns at Forefront of Relief Efforts in Nepal*, [28/01/2025] <https://tibet.net/tibetan-monks-and-nuns-at-the-forefront-of-relief-efforts-in-nepal/>.

²⁶ Chandrasekera M. Wijayaratna (2004), *Role of Local Communities and Institutions in Integrated Rural Development*, Asian Productivity Organization. <https://www.apo-tokyo.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/pjrep-icd-se-3-01.pdf>.

²⁷ VietnamPlus (2019), *Over 650 Buddhist monks, followers register for blood, organ donation*, [28/01/2025] <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/over-650-buddhist-monks-followers-register-for-blood-organ-donation-post157235.vnp>.

karuṇā to create a more equitable and peaceful world.

2.4. Practical implications for peace and development

The ethical principles of non-violence, right livelihood, and compassion provide a strong foundation for addressing global challenges. Monastic communities, by living according to these principles, serve as role models for sustainable peace and development. They:

- Advocate for Non-violence: Their commitment to *ahiṃsā* encourages peaceful conflict resolution at all levels of society.
- Promote Ethical Economies: Through *sammā-ājīva*, they inspire sustainable practices that prioritize well-being over profit.
- Foster Social Solidarity: Compassion-based initiatives strengthen community ties and address systemic inequalities.

These values are not abstract ideals but actionable frameworks that can guide individuals, organizations, and governments toward a more equitable and harmonious world. By integrating the ethical teachings of the Pāli Canon into modern contexts, monastic communities contribute significantly to the global quest for peace and sustainability. These ethical principles serve as a foundation for peacebuilding and sustainable development. By living according to these values, monastic communities provide a template for societal transformation.

III. PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF MONASTIC COMMUNITIES

Monastic communities, as custodians of the Buddhist teachings (*Dhamma*), play a critical role in fostering sustainable peace and development. Their contributions extend beyond spiritual guidance, encompassing tangible efforts in education, environmental stewardship, conflict resolution, and social welfare. These activities exemplify the integration of ethical principles from the Pāli Canon into practical action, addressing both individual and societal needs. Below, each key area of contribution is examined in detail.

3.1. Monastic schools and leadership training

One of the primary functions of the *saṅgha* is to provide moral and spiritual education to individuals and communities. By teaching the *Dhamma*, monastics offer practical frameworks for ethical behavior, conflict resolution, and good governance. In countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand, monastic schools have historically been centers of education for both laypeople and future leaders. These institutions not only teach Buddhist scriptures but also incorporate lessons on compassion (*karuṇā*), non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), and mutual respect. Leaders educated in these schools often carry these values into their decision-making, promoting policies rooted in ethical principles.

The *Sigālovādasutta*²⁸ provides a detailed ethical framework for harmonious social relationships. It emphasizes mutual respect and duty across six key relationships: parents and children, teachers and students, spouses, friends, employers and employees, and religious practitioners and lay supporters.

²⁸ DN 31 (*Sigālovādasutta*).

Monastics frequently use this teaching to address family and community conflicts, guiding individuals to fulfill their roles responsibly and contribute to societal harmony.

3.2. Environmental advocacy

Buddhist teachings on interconnectedness (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) form the foundation of environmental ethics. Recognizing the interdependence of all life, monastic communities often take the lead in advocating for environmental conservation and sustainable living.

One notable example is the practice of “tree ordination” in Thailand, where monks symbolically ordain trees as monks, thereby rendering them sacred and protecting them from deforestation. This innovative practice draws on the Buddhist teaching of loving-kindness (*mettā*), extending compassion to non-human life forms and fostering a deep respect for nature.

In many regions, monasteries promote sustainable agricultural practices such as organic farming and water conservation. These initiatives align with the *Dhamma* by ensuring that human activities do not harm the environment or exploit resources unnecessarily. By teaching lay communities these methods, monastics empower them to live sustainably and harmoniously with nature. The active role of monastics in environmental advocacy demonstrates how Buddhist ethics can be applied to address urgent global challenges, including deforestation, climate change, and biodiversity loss.

3.3. Mediation and conflict resolution

Monastic communities have long been respected as impartial mediators in interpersonal and communal disputes. Drawing on principles of equanimity (*upekkhā*) and wisdom, monastics facilitate dialogue and promote peaceful solutions. Equanimity (*upekkhā*), one of the *brahmavihāra* (sublime states), enables monastics to approach disputes without bias or attachment. This quality allows them to mediate conflicts effectively, ensuring that all parties feel heard and respected.

The *Kālāmasutta* or *Kesamuttisutta*²⁹ encourages critical thinking and ethical decision-making, urging individuals to evaluate actions based on their consequences rather than relying on dogma or authority.

Please, Kālāmas, don't go by oral transmission, don't go by lineage, don't go by testament, don't go by canonical authority, don't rely on logic, don't rely on inference, don't go by reasoned train of thought, don't go by the acceptance of a view after deliberation, don't go by the appearance of competence, and don't think ‘The ascetic is our respected teacher.’ But when you know for yourselves: ‘These things are unskillful, blameworthy, criticized by sensible people, and when you undertake them, they lead to harm and suffering,’ then you should give them up.³⁰

²⁹ AN 3. 65 (*Kesamuttisutta*).

³⁰ Sujato (2018a) p. 248 - 9.

Monastics use this teaching to guide conflicting parties toward reasoned and compassionate resolutions, fostering understanding and reducing hostility. For example, in regions affected by ethnic or religious tensions, monastic-led dialogues have often de-escalated violence and facilitated reconciliation. By providing a neutral platform for discussion, monastics help communities find common ground and rebuild trust.

In many parts of Asia, monasteries serve as centers for social welfare, providing: (1) Free Education: Monastic schools offer education to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, breaking cycles of poverty (2) Healthcare Services: Some monasteries operate clinics, offering free medical care and traditional medicine to underserved populations; (3) Disaster Relief: During natural disasters or crises, monastic communities frequently organize relief efforts, distributing food, water, and essential supplies to affected populations.

These activities demonstrate the practical application of Buddhist values in addressing systemic issues such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to basic resources.

Monastic communities play a vital role in promoting sustainable peace and development through education, environmental advocacy, conflict resolution, and social welfare. By embodying the principles of the Dhamma, monastics serve as role models and catalysts for positive change. Their efforts not only alleviate immediate suffering but also create conditions for long-term societal harmony and resilience. The practical contributions of the saṅgha highlight the enduring relevance of Buddhist ethics in addressing contemporary global challenges.

IV. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite their deep-rooted traditions and substantial contributions to peace and development, monastic communities face a range of challenges in adapting to the complexities of the modern world. These challenges often stem from societal changes, resource limitations, and the need to navigate new contexts. However, these same challenges also present opportunities for innovation and growth, enabling monastic communities to expand their impact in contemporary society.

4.1. Challenges

(1) Modernization and Secularization. As societies become increasingly modernized and secularized, the relevance of monasticism is often questioned. Key aspects of this challenge include, changing Social Priorities: Urbanization, technological advancements, and economic pressures have shifted societal focus toward material success, often sidelining spiritual values and traditional practices; Declining in Lay Support: With fewer people adhering to religious traditions, monastic communities may face a reduction in lay contributions (*dāna*), which are critical for their sustenance; Erosion of Authority: In secular societies, the moral and spiritual authority traditionally held by monastics may be diminished, limiting their influence in addressing social and political issues.

(2) Institutional Limitations. Many monastic institutions face structural

and resource-related challenges that limit their capacity for large-scale social engagement. These include resource Constraints: Limited financial resources and a reliance on lay contributions can restrict the scope of monastic activities, particularly in addressing poverty, education, or disaster relief; Lack of Modern Skills: Some monastics may lack the training needed to address contemporary issues, such as climate change, technology, or governance; Internal Divisions: In some cases, differences in interpretation of Buddhist teachings or institutional politics can hinder collective action among monastic communities.

4.2. Opportunities

Despite these challenges, monastic communities have several opportunities to expand their relevance and impact in modern society. By leveraging partnerships, technology, and interfaith dialogue, they can address contemporary issues while staying true to their core principles.

(1) Partnering with Governments and NGOs. Collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations provides an avenue for monastic communities to scale their initiatives and access additional resources. These partnerships can expand Reach: Governments and NGOs can provide logistical support to enhance the delivery of education, healthcare, and disaster relief services offered by monastic communities; Facilitate Advocacy: By working with international organizations such as the United Nations, monastics can amplify their voices on global issues like peacebuilding, environmental sustainability, and poverty alleviation. For example, monastic communities in Nepal have partnered with international NGOs to provide earthquake relief, showcasing the potential of collaborative efforts.

(2) Utilizing Modern Technology. Modern technology offers monastic communities powerful tools to disseminate Buddhist teachings and engage with broader audiences: Online Platforms: Websites, social media, and video streaming platforms enable monastics to reach a global audience, sharing teachings and practices that promote peace and mindfulness; E-Learning and Digital Resources: Monastic institutions can develop online courses, meditation apps, and e-books, making Buddhist teachings accessible to people in remote areas or those unfamiliar with traditional practices; Raising Awareness: Technology can be used to highlight pressing issues such as climate change or social inequality, rallying support for monastic-led initiatives. For instance, monks from the Plum Village tradition, inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh, have successfully used online platforms to teach mindfulness and raise awareness about environmental concerns.

(3) Focusing on Interfaith Dialogue. Interfaith collaboration is a powerful way to build coalitions for peace and sustainability, allowing monastic communities to work alongside other religious and secular groups: Promoting Mutual Understanding: Interfaith dialogues foster empathy and collaboration among diverse groups, creating a foundation for joint action on shared challenges; Addressing Global Issues: Religious leaders from different traditions can unite to advocate for sustainable development, human rights, and climate justice. The Parliament of the World's Religions and similar platforms

provide opportunities for monastics to share their perspectives and learn from other traditions, strengthening collective efforts toward global harmony.

4.3. Strategic approaches for overcoming challenges

To maximize their impact and address the challenges they face, monastic communities can adopt the following strategies:

(1) Modernize Education and Training: Incorporate contemporary subjects such as environmental science, technology, and social entrepreneurship into monastic education, empowering monks and nuns to address modern challenges effectively; Provide training in conflict resolution, leadership, and advocacy to enhance the capacity of monastics to serve as change-makers.

(2) Strengthen Community Engagement: Actively engage lay communities to reinforce the reciprocal relationship between monastics and laypeople. This includes offering accessible teachings, community service, and inclusive outreach programs; Creating platforms for youth engagement, making Buddhist teachings relevant to younger generations, and inspiring them to contribute to societal well-being.

While modernization and institutional limitations pose challenges, monastic communities have significant opportunities to adapt and thrive in contemporary society. By partnering with governments and NGOs, leveraging modern technology, and engaging in interfaith dialogue, they can amplify their contributions to sustainable peace and development. Through strategic adaptation and unwavering commitment to the Dhamma, monastic communities can continue to inspire and lead efforts for a more just and harmonious world.

V. CONCLUSION

Monastic communities serve as enduring examples of ethical living and social responsibility, rooted in simplicity, non-violence, and compassion. These timeless principles offer a valuable framework for addressing modern challenges. By combining traditional Buddhist teachings with contemporary strategies, monastic institutions play a vital role in promoting sustainable peace and development. In the face of global crises, the wisdom and practices of the *Saṅgha* provide a meaningful path toward harmony, resilience, and the well-being of all beings.

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BUDDHIST APPROACH TO MAKING SUSTAINABLE HUMAN SATISFACTION

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Abstract:

This research paper explores the Buddhist teachings related to cultivating sustainable human satisfaction, highlighting how Buddhist insights can address the complexities of human contentment in a world marked by increasing demands. The research posits that human dissatisfaction arises from an insatiable nature, exacerbated by materialistic pursuits. Drawing from the discourses of the Buddha, the study emphasizes that true satisfaction is achievable through wisdom and understanding rather than blind faith. By incorporating Buddhist philosophical teachings, individuals can attain a deeper sense of peace and contentment that transcends temporary relief. The paper aims to illustrate how these teachings can be applied to foster sustainable human satisfaction, thereby contributing to individual well-being and societal harmony.

Keywords: *Buddhism, human, sustainable satisfaction, happiness, wisdom.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Research Question: How can Buddhist Principles be applied to reach sustainable human satisfaction in the modern world? Here are three main Aims and Objectives as follows:

- (1) To evaluate the role of Buddhist philosophy in understanding human contentment.
- (2) To identify practical applications of Buddhist insights for sustainable living.
- (3) To explore the relationship between Buddhist practices and lasting satisfaction.

Significance: This research highlights the importance of Buddhist values in addressing modern challenges related to happiness and sustainable satisfaction.

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Research Methods: This research employs qualitative analysis through a literature review and textual criticism of key *Pāli* canonical texts. It examines both primary and secondary sources to gain insights into the relationship between Buddhism and sustainable human satisfaction.

Research Limitations: This paper is based on textual interpretations and analyses of the *Pāli* canon, primarily the *Sutta Piṭaka*, reflecting teachings related to sustainable satisfaction.

II. DISCUSSION

It is a well-established fact that, throughout history, both humans and other beings with semi-human features have played a significant role in shaping society. These early humans exhibited traits that evolved, eventually leading to the development of modern human characteristics. Human society has continuously transformed in response to intellectual and practical needs, adapting to environmental influences to ensure survival up to the present day. As the Buddha preached, “*Lujjatīti kho Bhikkhū tasmā lokoti vuccati*”,¹ emphasizing the transient and ever-changing nature of the world. This constant evolution reflects not only the adaptability of human civilization but also the underlying impermanence that governs all existence. It is not difficult to understand the nature of the world, as it is characterized by constant change, breaking, destruction, and evolution. This inherent nature of impermanence is evident when we examine historical transformations and how each era has been defined by the changes it underwent. Human progress has been shaped by the continuous pursuit of inspiration and satisfaction, driven by the need to confront challenges and seek solutions. It is through this process of adaptation and problem-solving that humanity has reached its present state, reflecting the ever-changing and dynamic essence of existence. As is well known, that era were once named as follows:² (1) Ancient Stone Age, (2) New Stone Age, (3) Semi-Agricultural Age, (4) Semi-Agricultural and Semi-Nomad Age, (5) Agricultural Age, (6) Semi-Industrial Age (There are three Ages namely Copper Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age).

In addition, several other Ages related to the transformation of humans occurred due to natural evolution or Man-made evolution can also be listed. (1) The Industrial Age: The Industrial Revolution in Europe and its related eras; (2) The Age of Scientific Productivity: The era associated with the time followed by the Industrial Revolution, producing various goods for the convenience of humankind; (3) Technological Age: The age of massive transformation brought about by computer technology; (4) Modern high-tech Age: The current era where the development of electronic media and technology that has evolved unprecedentedly.

¹ *Samyutta Nikāya, Saḷāyatana Vagga*, IV vols, ed. by M. Léon Feer, Bristol: Pāli Text Society, 1894, p. 52.

² Mūrti Maithree, *Agama saha Miyagiya Lokaya* (Colombo 02: Lakehouse Investments Ltd., 1972), p. 2 - 5.

It is not difficult to comprehend that several powerful factors also affected the massive physical transformations that have taken place in human history for several centuries. These include: (1) Industrialization, (2) Modernization, (3) Post modernization, (4) Globalization.

It is no secret that due to the efforts made by the human who has been on a continued journey in searching for comfort since then, had not only crossed the boundaries of the world he lives in, but also created the concept of 'Universal Village' by exploring other planets in the universe. It is not unfair to state that the man attempted to accumulate an unlimited wealth of knowledge and be satisfied physically due to the unsatisfied (inexpiable) desire to enjoy pleasure, which is an innate characteristic not only in humans, But in all creatures of the world.

Every living being in this world desires pleasure and avoids suffering. No creature willingly seeks pain. In Buddhism, the concept of compassion (*karuṇā*) emphasizes the wish for the well-being of all beings. As taught in *sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā*,³ one should cultivate the aspiration for all beings to experience happiness and act accordingly. Furthermore, the verse "*Sabbe sattā sabbe pāṇā, sabbe bhūtā ca kevalā; sabbe bhadraṇi passantu, mā kañci pāpamāgamā*"⁴ reinforces the idea that all beings – humans, animals, and every living creature – should foster goodwill towards others, wishing them only happiness and freedom from harm. This teaching encourages individuals to cultivate positive intentions, act with kindness, and contribute to a world free from suffering, embodying the essence of Buddhist compassion.

As expressed in the well-known Buddhist teaching *Nānatta Kāyā, Nānatta Saññā*, it is acknowledged that qualities and perceptions vary from person to person. Accordingly, the pleasures one enjoys and those one expects to experience take different forms. There are times when what brings happiness at one moment turns into sorrow at another. However, every living being desires to experience some form of pleasure. One reason for this expectation is that all beings inherently seek to secure happiness or pleasure in different ways.

Sometimes, individuals attempt to oppress others to attain pleasure for themselves. However, Buddhism teaches that if one suppresses or controls others for personal pleasure, one will not find happiness in the afterlife. Conversely, if one refrains from oppressing others for personal happiness, one will experience happiness in the afterlife. This is stated as follows: "*Sukhakāmāni bhūtāni – yo daṇḍena vihiṃsati/Attano sukhamesāno – pecca so na labhate sukkaṃ.*"⁵ (Living beings seek pleasure. Whoever seeks his pleasure (happiness) and suppress others with rods and sticks, he will not find happiness in the afterlife): '*Sukhakāmāni bhūtāni – yo daṇḍena na hiṃsati/*

³ *Khuddakapāṭha, Karaṇīya Metta Sutta*, Ed. by T. W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenburg. London: Pāli Text Society, 1886, p. 3. (Pāli text: *Khp* 9).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Dhammapada, Daṇḍavagga*, BPS, Ed. by Acharya Dhammarakkhitha Thera, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1996, p. 53.

*Attano sukhamesāno – pecca so labhate sukkaṃ.*⁶ (Living beings seek pleasure. Whoever seeks his pleasure (happiness) does not suppress others with rods and sticks, he will find happiness in the afterlife.)

It is a well-known fact that the words meaning “satisfied,” “satisfaction,” and “to be satisfied” are derived from the Sinhala verb *thruptiya*. The base form of this word is *thrupta*. The opposite of satisfaction is dissatisfaction, while excessive satisfaction is denoted by words such as “saturated” and “supersaturated.” In *Pāli*, the equivalent term is *titta*, and its antonym is *atitta*.⁷ The word *thrupta* is a combination of Sanskrit and Sinhala. However, in pure Sinhala, it is used as *tit*, with its antonym being *notit*.

According to the *Pāli - English Dictionary*, the corresponding English terms for *titta* include “satisfied,” “enjoying,” and “happy.”⁸ Common antonyms include “unsatisfied,” “dissatisfied,” and “unhappy.” It is important to recognize that terms such as “happiness,” “joy,” “satisfaction,” and “contentment” are frequently used to express similar feelings, yet each carries a distinct meaning. In the context of today’s complex society, these words are particularly relevant, as humans are continuously striving to attain worldly satisfaction.

Among the Buddha’s teaching that show what the basic human nature is like, the statement, ‘*Ālayarāmā kho paṇāyaṃ pajā ālayasamuddhitā*’⁹ made by the Buddha after attaining enlightenment is vital. It has made it clear that man is by nature attached and indulged. Then it says that (*Ragadosā Paretehi*) one who is suffering from emotions such as lust, hatred, etc. (*Rāgarattā*) one who clings to it with lust and possess a heated nature. The Buddha further points out that ‘*Tamokkhandena Āvatā*’¹⁰ the darkness of ignorance, man must also be in a state that is covered. It is not difficult to understand how much man tries to be satisfied with it, even though it is attached to it.

One of the main factors associated with all these forms of enjoyment is that man loves to enjoy some pleasure and is making great efforts to achieve it, and how he tries to satisfy himself physically and mentally. He who likes himself, seeks happiness, and strives to fulfill his desires to develop and indulge in that satisfaction. However, the teaching of ‘*Ūno loko atitto taṇhā daso*’¹¹ in Buddhism shows that there is no limit to that contentment and in the end, one becomes a slave to *taṇhā* (greed) and acts like one without being able to fulfil all his aspirations. It seems that man acts in two ways to achieve the satisfaction

⁶ *Dhammapada, Daṇḍavagga*, BPS, Ed. by Acharya Dhammarakkhitha Thera, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1996, p. 53.

⁷ Rhys David & T. W. Stade, *Pāli - English Dictionary*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1994), p. 19.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *Majjhima Nikāya, Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*, PTS, Ed. by V. Trenckner. London: Pāli Text Society, 1888, p. 173 (Pāli text: MN. 26).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Majjhima Nikāya, Raṭṭhapāla Sutta*, PTS edition, Ed by V. Trenckner. London: Pāli Text Society, 1888, p. 273 (Pāli text: MN. 83).

shown in this way: (1) Attempt to be satisfied by developing the factors related to the physical or worldly existence of life; (2) Spiritual or the effort to be satisfied by creating mental contentment.

When considering the efforts of individuals who seek a peaceful home life by developing certain factors, it is possible to identify aspects that are fundamentally common to everyone. Each of these can be regarded as a benchmark, and it is no secret that people make every possible effort to elevate themselves. These factors include: (1) Satisfaction through the enhancement of economic power; (2) Satisfaction through achieving social status by conforming to normative acceptance as a respected member of society; (3) Satisfaction through increasing one's influence in the political sphere; (4) Satisfaction through adherence to cultural values and norms, as well as their development; (5) Satisfaction through personal growth in alignment with religious beliefs and traditions; (6) Satisfaction through the pursuit of various educational advancements.

Gaining satisfaction through religious activities can be categorized into the mental or spiritual aspect, while cultural and educational aspects also contribute to spiritual development. Most of the other aspects are closely related to the physical dimension of life. On the other hand, some individuals disregard the religious aspect, reject religious beliefs, and abandon religious affiliations. However, it appears that in doing so, they also seek to create a sense of freedom and satisfaction. They argue that being confined within religious doctrines and adhering to religious beliefs restricts human freedom and independent thinking. Nevertheless, this too is an attempt to attain a form of satisfaction. It is also observed that those who do not accept religious beliefs remain culturally connected to some extent, as religious concepts and rituals serve as foundational elements in shaping the cultural traditions of each society.

Additionally, even if individuals confine their thinking to the religious teachings they have inherited while attempting to promote secular (non-religious) principles, it remains uncertain whether religions that advocate self-mastery and assert that humankind is emotionally superior to divine beings can effectively address the modern trend of secularism. However, it is evident that those who lead a domestic life primarily focus on developing physical aspects to attain satisfaction. It is not difficult to understand that all these factors arise from human efforts to fulfill personal aspirations and satisfy boundless desires.

It is easy to understand that the basic physical needs of all living beings seeking satisfaction include food, sleep, and sexual fulfillment. It is also well known that there are four essential requisites (*catuppaccaya* in Pāli and *sivupasaya* in Sinhala) that define the fundamental needs of monks: *cīvara* (robes/ clothing), *piṇḍapāta* (alms food), *senāsana* (accommodation), and *gilānapaccaya* (medical necessities). A restriction on the consumption of these requisites has been imposed; otherwise, the purpose of the monastic life would be undermined. The Buddha established specific limits on these four requisites, as stated: *pāmsukūla cīvara* (robes made from discarded cloth), *piṇḍiyālopa bhojana* (alms food collected in a bowl), *rukhamūla senāsana*

(dwelling at the root of a tree), and *pūtimutta bhesajja* (simple fermented medicine). By maintaining a contented and simple lifestyle, a monk's life becomes meaningful.

Beyond these four basic requisites, any additional resources available for use and consumption should be regarded as supplementary rather than essential. However, it is evident that a layperson, living a life often characterized by dissatisfaction, is generally reluctant to impose limits on personal desires. This reluctance arises because humans, shaped by nature, do not easily accept restrictions on their wants and needs. By examining the following couplets, we can gain some insight into the common nature of human needs: (1) Food and drink, (2). Clothes, (3) Houses and dwellings, (4) Health facilities, (5) Good or bad behavior, (6) Comfort and maintain good posture, (7) Transport facilities, (8) Jobs and titles

In addition, many other needs are also been presented by the terms such as children, money, and wealth, land, etc. However, what the Buddha preached in *Karaṇīyametta Sutta* is that, '*Santussako ca subhāro ca appakicco ca sallahukavutti*'¹², to find worldly satisfaction and not take mental happiness away, but to always act righteously and happily, and staying a bit away from the oppressive busyness and living a simple life with compassion will bring a sense of satisfaction to the life.

Currently, we can observe the side effects of modern humanity's pursuit of a saturated lifestyle filled with conveniences, often at the cost of environmental degradation. Amidst the environmental and cultural upheaval caused by pollution and excessive consumption in developed countries, we face significant challenges. These issues contribute to persistent poverty, malnutrition, and unemployment, affecting one-sixth of the global population. Additionally, the number of refugees worldwide has surpassed 35 million. We must take action to prevent these conditions from being passed on to future generations.

On the other hand, various diseases are on the rise. Due to advancements in the healthcare field, many of these illnesses have been identified and classified under different names. Diseases such as diabetes have become increasingly common due to excessive food consumption. Physical ailments such as high blood pressure, cancer, and acid-related illnesses are also widespread. Kidney diseases and neurological disorders are prevalent in Sri Lanka and many Asian countries. Furthermore, the number of individuals suffering from mental health issues has steadily increased in recent years.

It is undeniable that these unfortunate consequences stem from humanity's relentless pursuit of desire fulfillment. Recently, medical professionals have acknowledged that a person's mental state significantly impacts their physical well-being. However, the Buddha had pointed out this fact many centuries ago. It is worth recalling that the Buddha once said that '*Cittassa Damato Sādhū*

¹² *Khuddakapāṭha, Karaṇīya Metta Sutta (Khp 9)*, PTS, Ed by T. W. Rhys Davids and Oldenburg, H. London: Pāli Text Society, 1886, p. 3.

Cittaṃ Dantaṃ Sukhā Vahaṃ.¹³ Which means it is always good to control the mind and thereby bringing physical and mental healing.

Many people in the world think that amassing wealth, money, and material resources of economic value is the highest satisfaction for a man. The Buddha preached '*Na kahāpana vassena -titti kāmesu vijjati*',¹⁴ which means that man cannot be satisfied even if he receives a rain of gold, which was the main monetary value in India at that time. Buddha once again pointed out that man enjoys pleasures according to his desires, but he never reaches any satisfaction. '*Atittaṃ Yeva Kāmesu - Antako Kurute Vasaṃ*'.¹⁵ It has undoubtedly shown us that everyone, including the ones who are immersed in wealth and lust, will fall under the spell of death.

Many people believe that becoming the leader of a country is the highest form of satisfaction one can achieve. However, a ruler who governs only one nation often desires greater satisfaction by expanding territorial boundaries, even beyond sea limits, to rule multiple countries. Even if he has conquered the entire earth, he remains unsatisfied and continues to covet other lands and nations. This relentless desire may drive him to wage war in pursuit of further conquests. For rulers, such ambitions are often deemed necessary, regardless of the immense loss of human life they may cause. Buddhist literature addresses this issue as follows:

*'Rāja pasayha paṭhavim vijitvā
Sasāgarantaṃ mahimāvasanto
Oraṃ samuddassa atittarūpo
Pāraṃ samuddassa pi patthayetha'*¹⁶

However, in the end, it says that man will eventually die due to never-ending greed.

*'Rājā ca aññe ca bahumanussā
Avītatanhā maraṇaṃ upenti
Ūnāva hutvāna jahanti dehaṃ
Kūmehi lokamhi na hi atthi titti'*¹⁷

The meaning of this verse is that many people, including rulers and ordinary individuals, die without having fulfilled all their desires and, as a result, do not experience true satisfaction in this sensual world.

However, according to Buddhism, human desires are limitless and can

¹³ *Dhammapada, Citta Vagga*, BPS, Ed. by Acharya Dhammarakkhitha Thera, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1996, p. 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 68.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 33.

¹⁶ *Majjhima Nikāya, Māratajjaniya Sutta*, PTS edition, Ed. by V. Trenckner. London: Pāli Text Society, 1888, p. 337 (Pāli text: MN. 50)

¹⁷ *Jātaka, Mahānipāta* (Jātaka No. 22), Ed. by V. Fausböll. London: Pāli Text Society, 1883, p. 123.

never be fully satisfied. Therefore, the solution is not to produce unlimited goods but to cultivate restraint and limit one's desires. Buddhism offers a profound response to those who seek to satisfy their boundless cravings: although one cannot attain lasting satisfaction by acquiring everything one desires, true fulfillment can be found by developing contentment within the heart. He who possesses contentment in his heart appears to have everything, whereas he who lacks contentment will remain unsatisfied, even if he possesses the entire world.

In this journey of life, dissatisfaction arises because people dwell on past actions and words, as well as constantly worry about the future and nurture countless expectations. The mental defilements resulting from such thoughts can even manifest physically, sometimes discoloring a person's face or affecting their body. This is stated in Buddhism as follows:

*'Atītaṃ nānusoṇāmi – nappajappamanāgatam
Paccuppannaṃ yaṇemi – tena vaṇṇo paṇidati'*¹⁸

It means 'I do not regret thinking about the past which is over. I do not think about the future that has not yet come and have expectations. I think about the present and act accordingly. It will be difficult for someone who is going through day-to-day homely issues to create satisfaction in the journey of life. Therefore, Buddha has shown the importance of being without conflict in several famous parables. '*Padumaṇca toyena alippamāno*'¹⁹ it means as a lotus, which was grown in the mud under the water stays above the water. '*Vāripokkhara patteva*'²⁰, which means similar to the water which was put on the lotus leaf does not stay, '*Vātova jālamhi asajjamāno*'²¹, which means similar to the wind which goes through all the obstacles, one must not hold onto anything in life, and should not have any conflicts.

The Buddha has pointed out the importance of not being shaken by the nature of the world or the eight laws of the world (*Aṭṭhalo Dhamma*) by saying '*Putṭhassa Loka Dhammehi - Cittaṃ Yassa na Kaṃpati*'²². Highlighting the importance of such moderate and thoughtful concepts helps find satisfaction. Due to dissatisfaction and discomfort, young people/ people get addicted to drugs and make efforts to commit crimes such as suicide.

The specialty of Buddhism emphasized the importance of mental wellbeing to address the discomfort and dissatisfaction caused by a problematic situation. It is mentioned in the Buddhist literature that the householders were engaged in the *Satara Satipaṭṭhāna* for mental wellbeing even in ancient India. '*Mayampi Bhante gihi Odāta Vasena - Kālena Kālaṃ Samayena Samayaṃ*

¹⁸ Ibid, *Mahānipāta*, Vol. VI, p. 233.

¹⁹ *Sutta Nipāta, Khaggavisāṇa Sutta*, (Sn 1.3), trans. by Bhikkhu Sujato, SuttaCentral. P. 32.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Sutta Nipāta, Mahā Maṅgala Sutta* (Sn 2.4), PTS Volume V, Ed. by Andersen, D and Smith, H. London: Pāli Text Society, 1913, p. 46.

*Catusu Satipaṭṭhānesu Supatiṭṭhā Citta Viharāma'*²³

In the journey of seeking satisfaction, those who lead a household life may or may not attain complete fulfillment. Regardless of the way of life one follows, walking the path of life with wisdom and understanding brings a sense of comfort and contentment. Buddhism offers numerous teachings that can guide individuals toward this state.

Ordinarily, people tend to accumulate material possessions and resources that they find desirable. However, Buddhism highlights that there are two types of accumulation, and the more significant of these is the accumulation of righteous qualities. This is considered the ultimate form of accumulation: '*Dveme Bhikkhave sannicayā, katamāni dve. Āmisasannicayo ca Dhammasannicayo ca. Ime kho Bhikkhave dve sannicayā. Etadagghaṃ Bhikkhave imesaṃ dvinnamaṃ sannicayānaṃ yadidaṃ Dhammasannicayoti*'²⁴.

Although one may build and accumulate material resources such as land, harvests, children, servants, and animals to fulfill the needs of worldly life, one should not find satisfaction in wealth alone. It is essential to remember that mental satisfaction is equally important. Therefore, one should cultivate and develop inner qualities alongside material prosperity. This includes nurturing virtues such as honesty, morality, wisdom, and generosity. Buddhism emphasizes this principle as follows: '*Dasahi Bhikkhave vaḍḍhahi vaḍḍhamāno ariyasāvako ariyāya vaḍḍhiyā vaḍḍhati. Sāradāyi ca hoti varadāyi kāyassa, katamehi dasahi? Khetthavatthūhi vaḍḍhati, dhanadhaññaṇa vaḍḍhati. Puttadārehi vaḍḍhati. Dāsakammakāra porisehi vaḍḍhati. Catuppadehi vaḍḍhati. Saddhāya vaḍḍhati. Sīlena vaḍḍhati. Sutena vaḍḍhati. Cāgena vaḍḍhati. Paññāya vaḍḍhati.*'²⁵

Everyone experiences suffering in their way due to life's disappointments. As a result, people are constantly seeking solutions to the challenges of this world. At the same time, the Buddha taught that those who follow Buddhism and believe in reincarnation should seek a resolution not only to the problems of this world but also to those of the afterlife. To attain complete satisfaction, one must not become entangled in this cycle of suffering. When a Brahmin named *Jaṭā* asked the Buddha who could resolve this predicament, the Buddha preached: '*Anto jaṭā bahi jaṭā - jaṭāya jaṭitā pajā/Taṃ taṃ gotama pucchāmi - Ko imaṃ vijaṭāye jaṭāṃ*'²⁶.

Then the Buddha preached that the wise man who dares to overcome

²³ *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*, PTS Volume II, Ed by T. W. Rhys Davids and Oldenberg, H. London: Pāli Text Society, 1881, p. 154.

²⁴ *Ānguttara Nikāya, Sannicaya Sutta*, PTS Volume I, edited by M. Léon Feer. Bristol: Pāli Text Society, 1894, p. 52 (Pāli text: AN. 4. 62).

²⁵ *Anguttara Nikaya, Vaḍḍhi Sutta*, PTS Volume V, Ed. by Richard Morris. London; Pāli Text Society, 1894, p. 136 (Pāli text: AN.10.74).

²⁶ *Samyutta Nikaya, Jaṭā sutta*, PTS edition, Ed. by L. Feer. Bristol: Pāli Text Society, 1885, p. 161 (Pāli text: SN 1.13).

defilements settles this confusion through developing contemplation (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*Paññā*): ‘*Sīle patitṭhāya naro sapañño – cittam paññaṃca bhāvayaṃ/ ātapi nipako Bhikkhū – so imaṃ vijaṭaye jaṭaṃ*’²⁷. Further, combining these with the state of salvation, the one who has attained the state of Arahant by getting rid of lust, hatred, and ignorance can solve the issue: ‘*Yesaṃ rāgo ca doso ca – avijjā ca virājitā/ Khīṇāsavā Arahanto – tesaṃ vijaṭitā jaṭā*’²⁸. Once we realize where there is satisfaction or what it looks like, we will finally understand that there is no other *Dhamma* except the salvation (*Vimutti/ Vimukti*) that must be achieved by the man himself through self-directed activities. This is the only path that leads to attain the supreme bliss of *Parinibbana*.

Currently, to overcome dissatisfaction, we can observe that many people in society pursue various miracles, often following them blindly. However, Buddhism does not endorse superstition or blind faith. Instead, Buddhism promotes a form of faith grounded in wisdom and discernment, known as *ākāravatī saddhā* (reasoned faith). In contrast, *amūlika saddhā* (blind faith) refers to faith without discernment, which Buddhism does not encourage. Nonetheless, there are Buddhists of both types among us. Most people possess only faith but lack discernment.

The terms *accariya* and *abbhūta dhamma* are used in Buddhism to refer to miracles. Every occurrence follows a set of natural laws. However, events for which the causes remain unknown are often categorized as miracles. Yet, when the true causes behind what is considered a miracle are discovered, it ceases to be miraculous.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* states that there is no general rule determining the form and function of supernatural miracles. It asserts, “There is no general rule determining the types of occurrences.”²⁹ Miracles are distinct from what is commonly known as magic. The term “magic” typically refers to optical illusions deliberately performed by certain individuals. In Buddhism, this is known as *indrajāla*, which implies deceptive tricks or illusions. Buddhism also mentions a group known as *vidyādhara*, who were believed to possess such abilities.

We have heard about world famous magicians who are able to blindfold people in a way that no one can understand, such as traversing through the sky, penetrating walls, walking on water, disappearing the Eiffel Tower in Paris, the Statue of Liberty in America, and huge train cars in an instant. These are deliberate optical illusions. Had such magicians posed as religious leaders, they would have created a large number of delusional followers.

²⁷ *Samyutta Nikaya, Jaṭā sutta*, PTS edition, Ed. by L. Feer. Bristol: Pāli Text Society, 1885, p. 161 (Pāli text: SN 1.13).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Werblowsky, R. J. Z. *Miracle*. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed on [January 22, 2025], available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/miracle>.

A normal person is unable to comprehend how the miracles take place. Nothing happens without a reason. There is nothing in the world that is not subject to the Theory of Cause and Effect, one of the main concepts taught in Buddhism, '*Hetuṃ Paṭicca Sambhūtaṃ - Hetubhaṅgā Nirujjhati*'.³⁰ The modern science also holds a similar view. "Nothing happens without a cause, and nothing happens unless it can happen".³¹ It will pose a risk to link the principles of science to Buddhism and to try to prove Buddhism through science. Scientific findings and conclusions sometimes may differ. When a discovery was made, certain things that have already been accepted by science as truth may become false. Mingling such uncertain scientific facts with Buddhism can cause harm to Buddhism. Many things that are in Buddhism are beyond science. Such is the subject of miracle or supernaturalism, one such topic. Those who have acquired mundane power through meditation can create and perform various kinds of supernatural activities.

The miraculous activities performed by a person who has developed his mind through meditation belong to a specific category. Appearing in several different forms — disappearing, walking through walls, walking on water, sitting in the sky, etc. — these are considered miracles performed through mental power. The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* states that the miracle of guidance (teaching powers) for one's good is a more important form of miracle (supernormal powers). It is not advisable to use miraculous activities to prove Buddhism. When the facts about optical illusions are revealed, it may lead to the elimination of trust in Buddhism from one's mind. It may also cause one to renounce their belief. There is no fault in not accepting so-called religious miracles.

The Buddha and some of his disciples had the power of knowledge to predict the future (*dibba cakkhu*), divine hearing (*dibba sota*), recollection of past lives (*pubbe nivāsānussati ñāṇa*), and the ability to know about future existences. Even before the birth of the Buddha, some attained such miraculous powers through yoga and meditation. However, possessing the ability to perform miracles does not make one an enlightened person. Buddhism advocates the purification of the mind, not the pursuit of miraculous powers.

The Buddha possessed the miraculous power of creating a stream of water and fire at the same time from his body, known as *Yamaka Pāṭihāriya* (*Yamāmaha Pelahara* or the twin miracle). There were three occasions when the Buddha performed *Yamāmaha Pāṭihāriya*. A clear explanation of the wisdom mentioned in *Tesatta ñāṇa pūjā* is found in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga Prakaraṇa* of the *Suttanipāta*. Among the seventy-three forms of wisdom mentioned in it, *Yamāmaha Pāṭihāriya* is considered an action and part of the wisdom that belongs to a Buddha. Buddhist literature records that the Buddha performed miracles to communicate the *Dhamma* in the following instances.

³⁰ *Samyutta Nikaya, Sela sutta*, PTS Volume II, Ed. by M. Léon Feer. Bristol: Pāli Text Society, 1884, p. 12 (Pāli text: SN 12. 2)

³¹ Linder, D, *The Leopold and Loeb Trial: An Account*. Famous Trials, [January 22, 2025], available at: <https://famous-trials.com/leopoldandloeb/1741-home>

At the end of the first week after the Buddha's enlightenment, under the Bodhi tree, to leave off the doubts of the Gods.

On the first day of the Buddha's visit to *Kapilavattupura*, to clear the doubts of the Shakyas at the temple of *Nigrodha* (*Negrodhārāma*).

To conceal the pride of heretics under the *Gaṇḍhabba* mango tree in Sevath Nuwara.

There are three types of miracles in the Buddha's time. We can classify three wonders that are constantly encountered in the Buddhist literary tradition: the miracle of wisdom (*Iddhi Pāṭihārya*); the miracle of prayer (*Ādesanā Pāṭihārya*); the miracle of Teaching power (*Anusāsanā Pāṭihārya*).

The Buddha used miraculous powers to subdue *Āṅgulimāla* and the three *Jaṭilas*, as well as to break *Nanda's* conceit by creating female images. The Buddha's ability to understand the nature of the minds of living beings is called the miracle of *Ādesanā Pāṭihāriya*. Delivering sermons in the form of advice, teaching the three principles of *sīla* (virtue), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom), and opening the path of the *Dhamma* for the benefit of all living beings can be recognized as the true miracle — the miracle of teaching power (*Anusāsanā Pāṭihāriya*). One must understand that beings took refuge in the *Noble Triple Gem* and realized the truth by listening to the *Dhamma*, not by witnessing miracles. The Buddha valued the miracle of exhortation above all.

The Buddha had no desire to gather a large group of disciples by performing supernatural feats. Performing miracles to attract people is against the monastic discipline. This rule was established based on an incident where a monk attempted to bring down a bowl placed on top of a bamboo tree using miraculous powers. In contemporary society, many religious traditions and sects conduct campaigns aimed at attracting devotees by performing various miracles. Healing sessions are also held to cure diseases, restore mobility to the disabled, and heal blindness. However, it is not possible to restore the limbs of a disabled person through a miracle. Instilling a strong belief in the mind can sometimes lead to temporary healing during such sessions. Some also use hypnosis to heal illnesses through a similar mental transformation, which does not require any particular religion or belief.

III. CONCLUSION

Among all beings that inhabit the world, humans are the ones who can never be satiated. Compared to other animals, human happiness and satisfaction have become increasingly complex due to vast and ever-growing needs, making it difficult to attain true contentment easily. The *Dhamma* preached by the Buddha was not only for the happiness and satisfaction of human beings in this world and the hereafter but also for the well-being of all living creatures. Many sermons emphasize the path to achieving lasting human satisfaction. According to Buddhism, understanding the truth is attained through wisdom.

In the early periods of Buddhism, rather than rejecting faith and devotion, priority was given to intellect, wisdom, and logic. Buddhist followers can realize

the truth by following Buddhist philosophical teachings rather than merely adhering to religious concepts. While Buddhist concepts may offer temporary relief and peace, true and lasting comfort can be achieved by embracing Buddhist philosophical teachings. Accordingly, the Buddha preached a path for progress both in this world and in the next, emphasizing the development of wisdom without blind faith. His teachings encourage a deep understanding based on insight, enabling individuals to attain happiness, comfort, and true satisfaction.

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UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY: BUDDHIST COMPASSION AS A CATALYST FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

As the world grapples with pressing global issues such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and political unrest, the need for sustainable human development has become more critical than ever. Traditionally, human development has been measured using indicators such as economic progress, access to healthcare, and political stability. However, in the modern era, the understanding of human development has broadened to include ethical, social, and spiritual aspects. Among these, the practice of *karuṇā* — a core value in Buddhist teachings — stands out as a vital dimension. This raises an important question: how can the cultivation of *karuṇā* contribute to addressing global challenges and advancing sustainable human development?

This paper examines the role of Buddhist *karuṇā*, viewed as a collective and active responsibility, in addressing contemporary human development challenges. It highlights how this principle can shape holistic human personality growth, fostering a sustainable and harmonious global society.

Keywords: *compassion, karuṇā, human development, buddhist ethics, universal responsibility, interdependence, mindfulness.*

I. DEFINING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Human development, as defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), focuses on improving the quality of life for all people by enhancing their capabilities, promoting social equity, and ensuring sustainability. Traditionally, human development indicators – such as the Human Development Index (HDI) – measure aspects such as income,

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education, and health. However, this definition has been expanded to include not only material well-being but also ethical, emotional, and spiritual development.¹

In a Buddhist context, human development goes beyond individual prosperity and seeks collective well-being. This concept integrates both material and non-material growth, underscoring the importance of social harmony, ethical behavior, and *karuṇā* in fostering a sustainable and just society. It is through *karuṇā* that one can address the root causes of suffering in human society, such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

II. COMPASSION: AN EMOTION AND A MENTAL STATE

In Buddhist teachings, *karuṇā* is regarded as both an emotion and a mental state, deeply connected to wisdom and the understanding of suffering. Various scholars and masters, including Thich Nhat Hanh, Ajahn Chah, the Buddha, Nyanaponika Thera, Bhikkhu Bodhi, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, and Pema Chödrön, emphasize that *karuṇā* is not merely a passive emotional response but an active and cultivated force that can be developed through mindfulness and insight. It is seen as a guiding principle that motivates ethical conduct and skillful actions to alleviate suffering, rooted in the recognition of our shared humanity and the interconnectedness of all beings. *Karuṇā*, therefore, is both a heartfelt response to suffering and a mental attitude that leads to the well-being of others.

Compassion has traditionally been a spiritual concept, but only recently has it been studied scientifically. While it is widely recognized in various religions, it has now become a subject of objective research. For instance, studies show that some individuals respond to unfairness with retaliation, while others act with *karuṇā*.² This raises the question of what factors influence these differences and whether *karuṇā* can be cultivated through training.

An interesting discussion between His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and Paul Ekman on *karuṇā* is significant to note here. The Dalai Lama considers *karuṇā* an emotion but also acknowledges that it can be cultivated through training, especially through practices such as *samatha* and *bodhicitta* meditation. According to him, *karuṇā* is like a mood in that it influences one's actions but does not distort one's perception of reality.

Ekman disagrees with the Dalai Lama's view of *karuṇā* as an emotion. He defines *karuṇā* as something that needs to be cultivated and, once developed, becomes a permanent part of a person's character. According to Ekman, *karuṇā* differs from emotions in four ways: (1) *karuṇā* needs to be cultivated, whereas emotions do not; (2) once cultivated, *karuṇā* becomes an enduring feature of a person, whereas emotions come and go; (3) *karuṇā* does not distort our perception of reality, whereas emotions do initially, during the refractory

¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Reports. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org>. (Accessed: 18 February, 2025).

² Matthieu Ricard, *The Habits of Happiness*, TED Talk, February 2004, available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/matthieu_ricard_the_habits_of_happiness (accessed 1 January 2025).

period; and (4) the focus of *karuṇā* is restricted to the relief of suffering.³

Ekman emphasizes that *karuṇā* is different from emotions because it does not involve the same temporary emotional states and has a more focused goal—relieving suffering. Emotions, by contrast, come and go, can distort perception, and are more general in scope.

The Dalai Lama highlights that intense *karuṇā* can feel like an affliction because it arises from concern for others' suffering. However, unlike other afflictive emotions, *karuṇā* is under control, as it is voluntarily cultivated. Despite any anxiety, the person feels strength in their compassionate response. Ekman agrees that while cultivating *karuṇā* is voluntary, once it is cultivated, it leads to a spontaneous, involuntary desire to help.

III. BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF COMPASSION (KARUṆĀ): NATURE AND SCOPE

Karuṇā is a natural human quality. The term itself encompasses a range of meanings, which are understood in different ways depending on its intensity, from mild to profound.⁴ It is not simply an emotional response but a deeply philosophical and ethical approach to life. Compassion can also be understood in two stages: biological and extended. The biological stage refers to the innate love and compassionate actions one might feel toward all beings, much like a mother's love for her children. The extended stage, on the other hand, requires intentional cultivation and development.

The *Mettā Sutta*, Sn 1.8.7, "Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, even so let one cultivate a boundless love towards all beings."⁵ This passage uses a striking simile, comparing the unconditional love and protective instinct of a mother for her only child to the kind of love one should cultivate toward all beings. The imagery of a mother's selfless devotion emphasizes the depth and sincerity required in practicing *mettā*. The term "boundless love" reflects the universal and unlimited nature of *mettā*, extending beyond personal attachments to encompass all living beings without discrimination. This aligns with the Brahmavihāra (the four divine abodes), where *mettā* is cultivated alongside *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity). Thus, this sutta encapsulates the ideal of universal benevolence, urging individuals to nurture a heart that is as protective, unconditional, and

³ Ekman, Paul, and Dalai Lama. *Emotional Awareness: Overcoming the Obstacles to Psychological Balance and Compassion: A Conversation between the Dalai Lama and Paul Ekman*. Times Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2008.

⁴ Ekman, Paul. *Atlas of Emotions*. Commissioned by the Dalai Lama, accessed February 18, 2025, <https://atlasofemotions.org/#states/enjoyment>. It is worth exploring *The Atlas of Emotions* by Paul Ekman, where different layers of emotions are presented in a psychological order. *The Atlas of Emotions* was commissioned by the Dalai Lama, who stated: "To find the new world, we needed a map, and for us to find a calm mind, we need a map of our emotions."

⁵ Sn 1.8.7. "Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe/Evampi sabbabhūtesū mānaṣaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ."

boundless as a mother's love for her only child.

The *Aghātavinayasuttaṃ* of *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (AN 5.162) also discusses the nature of *karuṇā*, stating that it is the direct opposite of a mind that wishes harm upon others. The sutta suggests that just as a sick person requires compassion and assistance, we should also respond to those with harmful or impure behavior with understanding and a desire for their healing or improvement, rather than resentment.⁶ This passage serves as a powerful illustration of the aroused sheer *karuṇā*, sympathy, and tender concern for another person. The simile in this passage compares a person with impure bodily and verbal behavior, and an unsettled mind, to a sick and afflicted traveler on a highway. The sick person, in this context, represents someone who is spiritually or mentally unwell, distant from any source of healing or support - similar to a traveler stranded between two faraway villages without access to necessary resources. The compassionate person who wishes to help the sick traveler symbolizes the proper attitude one should adopt toward someone exhibiting harmful behavior: rather than resentment, one should cultivate *karuṇā*, wishing for their well-being and hoping they find the healing or understanding they need.

This passage also explores related terms of *karuṇā*, particularly *anukampā* and *anuddayā*. Additionally, the *Dhātumālā* of *Saddanītippakaraṇa* equates *karuṇā* with *dayā* and *mettā*. It further defines *karuṇā* as follows: *Tattha karuṇāti paradukkhe sati sādhuṇaṃ hadayakampanaṃ karotīti karuṇā. Kirati paradukkhaṃ vikkhipatīti karuṇā. Kaṃ vuccati sukhaṃ, taṃ rundhati vibādhati kārūṇikaṃ na sukhāpetīti karuṇā.*

IV. COMPASSION IN BUDDHIST THOUGHT AND MEDITATION

Karuṇā is the second of the four *brahmavihāra* (illimitables) and one of the forty meditation objects discussed by Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga* (*Vism.*). As an illimitable, *karuṇā* is a psychic factor associated with twenty-eight types of consciousness. However, both the text and its commentaries indicate that *karuṇā* is not present in types of consciousness accompanied by equanimity. Systematic meditation on *karuṇā* can develop the four material attainments (*rūpajjhāna*) through the fivefold method.

Karuṇā and *muditā* (appreciative joy) arise only when *citta* occurs in the appropriate mode: either as commiserating with those in suffering, when *karuṇā* arises, or as rejoicing in the fortune of others, when *muditā* arises.⁷ Compassion is the intention to alleviate the suffering of others. According

⁶ AN 5.162: “Seyyathāpi āvuso, puriso ābādhiko dukkhito bālhagilāno addhānamaggapaṭipanno, tassa purato pissa dūre gāmo, pacchato pissa dūre gāmo, so na labheyya sappāyāni bhojanāni, na labheyya sappāyāni bhesajjāni, na labheyya patirūpaṃ upaṭṭhākaṃ, na labheyya gāmantanāyakaṃ. Tamenam aññataro puriso passeyya addhānamaggapaṭipanno. So tasmim purise kārūṇiṃ yeva upaṭṭhāpeyya, anuddayaṃ yeva upaṭṭhāpeyya, anukampaṃ yeva upaṭṭhāpeyya: “ahovatāyaṃ puriso labheyya sappāyāni bhojanāni, labheyya sappāyāni bhesajjāni, labheyya patirūpaṃ upaṭṭhākaṃ, labheyya gāmantanāyakaṃ.”

⁷ Bodhi, 2010, p. 98

mindfulness, its cultivation, and consistent application. And how does one care for oneself by caring for others? Through patience, non-harming, loving-kindness, and compassionate actions. Thus, by nurturing oneself, one supports others; and by supporting others, one nurtures oneself.¹²

Karuṇā is not merely a concept to be contemplated or cherished in the mind; it is a practice (*bhāvanā*) that must be cultivated, applied, and experienced. Ācariya Buddhaghosa, in his seminal work *Visuddhimagga* (*Vism.*), provides an extensive explanation of the practice of *karuṇā*. He emphasizes that one seeking to develop *karuṇā* should begin by reflecting on the dangers of its absence and the immense benefits of cultivating it.

VI. THE ROLE OF COMPASSION IN ETHICAL CONDUCT

Moral conduct is deeply intertwined with compassion; in essence, it is a manifestation of compassion in action. A verse of the *Dhammapada* (v. 158) also suggests that one should first practice what is right before teaching others.¹³ In this way, the wise will avoid reproach. The logic behind this statement is rooted in the idea of integrity and authenticity. Before guiding others, one must first embody the principles they wish to teach. This ensures that their actions align with their words, making their teachings more credible and respected. When a person practices what they preach, they earn trust and avoid being criticized for hypocrisy. In other words, the effectiveness of one's instruction depends on personal example, and acting in accordance with one's values is essential for true leadership.

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is a guiding principle for ethical conduct. The *Mārakathā* of the *Mahāvagga* states: “*Caratha, bhikkhave, cārikaṃ bahujaṇahitāya bahujaṇasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ.*”¹⁴ In essence, this passage expresses the Buddha's intention to spread compassion and goodwill for the benefit of all beings, both divine and human. It emphasizes the importance of working for the greater good, seeking to alleviate suffering and promote happiness for all.

The word *anukampā* signifies a natural and selfless response, motivated by profound compassion (*karuṇā*). Etymologically, *anukampā* means “trembling or quivering along with,” reflecting the deep empathetic resonance one experiences upon witnessing another's suffering. The *Samantapāsādikā* (*Smpk.* 230) defines *anukampā* as a sympathetic stirring of the heart (*citta kampana*) that arises upon seeing the distress of others: “*Anukampā ti paraḍukkheṇa*

¹² SN 169: *kathaṇca, bhikkhave, attānaṃ rakkhanto paraṃ rakkhati? āsevanāya, bhāvanāya, bahulīkammaṇa — evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, attānaṃ rakkhanto paraṃ rakkhati. kathaṇca, bhikkhave, paraṃ rakkhanto attānaṃ rakkhati? khantiyā, avihiṃsāya, mettacittatāya, anudayatāya — evaṃ kho, bhikkhave, paraṃ rakkhanto attānaṃ rakkhati. attānaṃ, bhikkhave, rakkhissāmīti satipaṭṭhānaṃ sevitaḥḥaṃ; paraṃ rakkhissāmīti satipaṭṭhānaṃ sevitaḥḥaṃ. attānaṃ, bhikkhave, rakkhanto paraṃ rakkhati, paraṃ rakkhanto attānaṃ rakkhati”ti.*

¹³ *Dhp* (v. 158): “*attānameva paṭhamam, patirūpe nivesaye. athaññāmanusāseyya, na kilisseyya paṇḍito.*”

¹⁴ Oldenberg, 1879, p. 21.

cittakampana” – “*Anukampā* is the trembling of consciousness in response to the suffering of others” The commentary of the *Dīgha Nikāya* describes *anukampā* as the forerunner of *mettā* (altruistic love), just as *avihiṃsā* (non-harm) is the forerunner of *karuṇā* (compassion). In other words, *anukampā* serves as the initial impulse that leads to acts of loving-kindness (*Smv* II.456). The *Dhammasaṅgani* further defines *anukampā* as *adosa* (non-hatred) or *mettā* (friendliness), emphasizing that *anukampā* embodies an absence of ill-will and a sincere wish for the welfare of others. Whatever living beings there may be – feeble or strong (or the seekers and the attained), long, stout, or of medium size, short, small, large, those seen or those unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born as well as those yet to be born – may all beings have happy minds.¹⁵ By practicing in this manner, one expands the reach of compassion, allowing it to permeate all directions and envelop everything in its gentle, soothing waves. *Anuddayā* (mercy) is often used as a synonym for *anukampā* (compassion). In the *Dhammadāyādasutta* (MN 3), the Buddha expresses the wish that his disciples should inherit his *Dhamma*, not material wealth, because of his deep compassion for them: “*Atthi me tumhesu anukampā*” (MN I 18).

VII. THE DALAI LAMA’S PERSPECTIVE: UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY AND GLOBAL

The role of *karuṇā* in fostering a just and peaceful world is profound. The Dalai Lama asserts that genuine *karuṇā* arises from recognizing our shared humanity, transcending national, cultural, and religious divides. In his influential work *Ethics for the New Millennium*, he writes: “If we are to live in a peaceful and just world, we must first develop compassion and the conviction that we share a common humanity.”¹⁶

For the Dalai Lama, *karuṇā* is more than a personal virtue – it is a collective ethical duty. He champions the idea of “universal responsibility,” urging individuals, nations, and organizations to act with *karuṇā* and wisdom for the well-being of all. His vision of a global ethic rooted in *karuṇā* presents a powerful framework for addressing critical challenges such as climate change, poverty, and conflict.

VIII. THICH NHAT HANH’S VISION: ENGAGED BUDDHISM AND INTERBEING

Thich Nhat Hanh, a renowned Vietnamese Zen master, introduced the concept of *Engaged Buddhism*, which encourages Buddhists to actively apply the Buddha’s teachings to contemporary social and political challenges. His approach highlights the idea that spiritual practice should not be confined to meditation and personal enlightenment but should also extend to addressing global concerns such as social justice, environmental sustainability, and conflict resolution.

¹⁵ Sn 1.9.4 - 5: “*ye keci pāṇabhūtatthi, tasā vā thāvarā vanavasesā. dīghā vā yeva mahantā majjhimā rassakā anukathulā. diṭṭhā vā yeva adiṭṭhā , ye va dūre vasanti avidūre. bhūtā va sambhavesī va, sabbasattā bhavantu sukhittā.*”

¹⁶ Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2001),

A key principle in Thich Nhat Hanh's philosophy is interbeing, which refers to the deep interconnectedness of all life forms. This concept teaches that no individual or phenomenon exists in isolation; rather, everything is interdependent. Recognizing this interconnectedness fosters a sense of responsibility toward one another and the environment, reinforcing the importance of *karuṇā* and mindful living. He emphasizes the need for both personal and collective responsibility. He states: "The Earth is not only our home, but we are also its caretakers. It is our collective responsibility to care for the planet and one another."¹⁷

This perspective underscores the idea that mindfulness and *karuṇā* should not only be practiced individually but should also inspire actions that benefit society as a whole. His teachings on *Engaged Buddhism* advocate for a holistic approach to solving global problems such as climate change, social inequality, and war. By transforming oneself through mindfulness and loving-kindness, individuals can contribute to meaningful societal change, creating a world that reflects the Buddhist ideals of peace, harmony, and interconnectedness.

IX. APPLYING COMPASSION TO ADDRESS MODERN SOCIAL ISSUES

In a world grappling with pressing challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and conflict, the need for empathy and kindness has never been greater. *Karuṇā* is more than just a personal virtue – it is a shared responsibility that nurtures social harmony and promotes justice. Economic inequality remains one of the most urgent issues, leaving millions without access to basic necessities. Implementing compassionate policies, such as fair wages, universal healthcare, and strong social support systems, can help reduce this disparity. Likewise, tackling climate change requires a compassionate outlook that prioritizes the well-being of both vulnerable communities and future generations.

Karuṇā is also a key force in resolving conflicts. By encouraging understanding and open dialogue, it helps bridge divisions among individuals, communities, and nations. Whether through grassroots initiatives or international diplomacy, acts of kindness and empathy can mend relationships and foster peace. To build a more just and sustainable world, *karuṇā* must be woven into governance, education, and everyday interactions. When people and institutions commit to empathy and shared responsibility, they create a society that upholds human dignity and prioritizes collective well-being.

X. DEFINING SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: INTERDEPENDENCE IN BUDDHIST THOUGHT

Buddhism teaches that personal well-being and social harmony are deeply interconnected. The Buddha encouraged individuals to acknowledge their shared responsibility for the well-being of others, recognizing that every action — whether personal or communal — affects the broader world. This idea is

¹⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh, *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2008).

beautifully illustrated in the *Itivuttaka* (It 44), where the Buddha states: “Just as a flower does not pick or choose the bees that come to it, so too does the wise person not discriminate between the suffering of beings; they seek to relieve all.” This metaphor highlights the universal nature of *karuṇā* and the moral obligation to help alleviate suffering wherever it exists. In today’s globalized world, where individual and national actions have far-reaching consequences, the Buddhist principle of interdependence offers valuable ethical guidance. By cultivating *karuṇā* and recognizing our interconnectedness, individuals, communities, and nations can work together to reduce suffering and build a more just and harmonious society.

XI. INTEGRATING MINDFULNESS AND COMPASSION INTO EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Highlighting the importance of moral ethics in the education system, the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, emphasizes that universities should undertake more research and discussions to cultivate moral ethics in students. In Europe, the Church historically played a role in upholding moral ethics and family values. However, efforts are now being made to integrate moral values into the education system. Many universities have introduced experimental projects, such as meditation, which have yielded positive results.

The Dalai Lama asserts: “Ethics must be based on secularism, not on religion. Secularism means respect for all religions.” He further explains that a secular approach to ethics, in the Indian sense, involves respecting all religious traditions as well as the perspectives of non-believers in an unbiased manner. The Dalai Lama advocates for an ethics framework grounded in secularism rather than religious doctrine. He clarifies that secularism, in the Indian context, means respecting all religious traditions and the views of non-believers. He asserts that true transformation begins with understanding and managing emotions through secular ethics: “I believe we can change our emotions by using our intelligence to raise our awareness. Through an education system motivated by compassion, we can expand the sense of well-being of all people, not just within our circles, and eventually bring peace to the entire human race on this planet.”

The School of Happiness was introduced in Delhi schools in 2018 under the initiative of the Dalai Lama. The syllabus for this curriculum is divided into three parts. In the first part, children are taught mental concentration. In the second part, they listen to stories and are encouraged to narrate them in their own words. In the third part, children engage in activities that help them understand the world around them. Since there are no examinations in this course, students remain stress-free. Following the Delhi Government’s initiative, Lucknow University also introduced a Happiness Curriculum for postgraduate students in the 2021–22 academic session. Launched by the Department of Education, the Education for Happiness course is interdisciplinary and open to all master’s students. The primary aim of this curriculum is to highlight the difference between peace of mind and material happiness.

XII. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE AND COMPASSIONATE DEVELOPMENT

To effectively integrate Buddhist principles of *karuṇā* into global development, several key policy recommendations can be implemented to create a more just, sustainable, and harmonious world:

(i) Compassionate governance: Governments should adopt policies that prioritize the well-being of all individuals, with a particular focus on marginalized and vulnerable populations. This includes ensuring access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and social support while addressing economic disparities and promoting social justice. By fostering an inclusive and compassionate approach to governance, societies can work toward reducing inequality and improving overall quality of life.

(ii) Environmental stewardship: A fundamental Buddhist principle is the recognition of *paṭicca-samuppāda* (interdependence), which underscores the need for environmental responsibility. Policymakers and corporations should collaborate to develop and implement eco-friendly policies that reduce carbon emissions, protect natural ecosystems, and encourage sustainable agricultural and energy practices. By embracing a non-harming (*ahiṃsā*) approach toward the environment, humanity can preserve natural resources for future generations and mitigate the impact of climate change.

(iii) Education reform: To cultivate a more compassionate and ethically responsible society, mindfulness and *karuṇā*-based learning should be incorporated into school curricula. Teaching emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, and mindfulness techniques can help students develop a deeper sense of empathy and social responsibility. This reform would foster a generation of individuals who are more attuned to the needs of others and committed to ethical leadership.

(iv) Global cooperation: Recognizing the interconnected nature of global challenges, nations must work together to address issues that affect all of humanity. International cooperation should be encouraged in areas such as climate change agreements, fair trade policies aimed at reducing economic inequality, and collaborative efforts to eliminate poverty. By fostering a shared sense of responsibility for global well-being, countries can work in unison to build a more equitable and peaceful world.

By implementing these policy recommendations, governments, institutions, and individuals can contribute to a development model that aligns with Buddhist *karuṇā*, ensuring a future that is not only prosperous but also ethically and socially responsible.

XIII. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: ADDRESSING MISCONCEPTIONS OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION AS PASSIVE

One of the challenges in applying Buddhist *karuṇā* in modern society is the misconception that it is passive or detached from worldly affairs. Some critics argue that Buddhist practice encourages withdrawal from the world and does not adequately address systemic issues such as poverty, inequality, and

environmental destruction. However, as seen in the teachings of the Buddha and modern Buddhist leaders, *karuṇā* is a dynamic force that actively seeks to alleviate suffering and promote social change. To address this misconception, it is essential to cultivate and practice *karuṇā* rather than merely holding constructive thoughts about it. As it has been rightly said: one drop of practice is better than thousands of resolutions. The *Visuddhimagga* (*Vism.*) describes the practice of *karuṇā* as follows: “One who wants to develop compassion should begin his task by reviewing the danger in lack of compassion and the advantage in compassion.”¹⁸ Thus, *karuṇā* is not just an aspiration but a transformative force that requires diligent practice to bear its true fruits.

Potential of Buddhist ethics in a globalized world

In an interconnected world, Buddhist ethics provide a universal moral foundation that transcends national, cultural, and religious distinctions. Rooted in the principles of *karuṇā* (compassion), *paṭicca-samuppāda* (interdependence), and *ahiṃsā* (non-harming), these teachings offer a guiding ethic for addressing pressing global challenges such as environmental degradation, social injustice, and conflict. The wisdom of Buddhist ethics encourages a sense of shared responsibility, mindful collective action, and ethical leadership, fostering harmony and sustainable well-being for all beings.

XIV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, Buddhist *karuṇā* offers a profound framework for addressing the world’s most pressing challenges, from poverty and inequality to environmental crises. By emphasizing *paṭicca-samuppāda* (interdependence) and shared responsibility, Buddhist teachings encourage not only personal transformation but also collective action. *Karuṇā*, as both an emotion and a mental state, is an active force that fosters ethical conduct, nurtures interconnectedness, and drives sustainable development. The perspectives of the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh highlight how *karuṇā* can be applied to global issues, calling for universal responsibility and engaged action. When integrated into education systems and policy-making, these values can lead to more equitable and harmonious societies. While misconceptions exist about Buddhist *karuṇā* being passive, its true essence is one of active engagement—driving both individual growth and social change. Ultimately, Buddhist ethics provide a powerful tool for creating a compassionate, sustainable future grounded in shared responsibility and mutual respect.

Abbreviation:

DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Dhs	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇi</i>
It	<i>Itivuttakapāli</i>

¹⁸ Nāṇamoli, 2010, p. 308. Pali text equivalent: “*karuṇam bhāvetukāmena pana nikkaruṇatāya ādinavaṃ karuṇāya ca ānisaṃsaṃ paccavekkhitvā karuṇābhāvanā ārabhitabbā*” (Kosambi, 2017, p. 260).

MN *Majjhima Nikāya*

Sn *Suttanipāṭa*

SN *Samyutta Nikāya*

v *verse*

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

This paper explores the intersection between Buddhist philosophy and human development, emphasizing the necessity of a balanced approach that integrates both material and spiritual dimensions. While modern advancements have improved physical well-being, they have also led to increased psychological distress, alienation, and ethical dilemmas. The teachings of the Buddha advocate for an internal transformation to cultivate compassion, mindfulness, and ethical living as essential components of holistic development. This research examines how Buddhist thought aligns with contemporary human development theories, particularly those proposed by Amartya Sen and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Additionally, it highlights the role of Buddhism in governance, peacebuilding, and ethical decision-making. Through the principles of equity, sustainability, productivity, empowerment, cooperation, and security, Buddhism offers a moral framework that supports sustainable human progress. The study underscores that true human development extends beyond economic growth, encompassing psychological well-being, moral integrity, and collective harmony. The Buddhist perspective, particularly through its concepts of compassion (*karuṇā*) and mindfulness (*sati*), provides a viable path for addressing contemporary socio-economic and environmental challenges while fostering inner peace and global sustainability.

Keywords: *Buddhism, human development, compassion, mindfulness, sustainable development, UNDP, amartya sen, ethical governance, inner peace.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The basic purpose of human development is to improve the quality of life and dignity of human beings. So, the objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives.

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So the common idea of human development is capacity building for healthy and happy living.¹ But Mankind is challenging the various environmental and developmental problems that create multiple causations, complex interactions, inevitable uncertainty, and unpredictability of the World situation. But modern man has better physical bodies and health in past ages, and he is also immensely nourished mentally and intellectually compared to his predecessor. But we find modern man getting increasingly alienated both from himself and others. He is unhappy, tense, restless, and often inflicts violence on others or commits suicide on himself. Buddha realized the above tragic situation developing even in his time and he warned of its intensification in the decades ahead and emphasized the need for modern civilization to change its direction from human sensuality to human spirituality.² Buddha realized the above tragic situation developing even in his time and he warned of its intensification in the decades ahead and emphasized the need for modern civilization to change its direction from human sensuality to human spirituality. When external development is receiving disproportionate attention in the modern world of science and technology, there is an urgent need for a course correction at this stage of human development to emphasize the internal development for achieving lasting peace, satisfaction, contentment, inner equilibrium, and fulfillment, both at the individual level and at collective levels. This was the profound message of ancient Indian wisdom as taught particularly in the Dhamma, and it was reiterated, reemphasized, and reinforced in the lives and teachings of Buddha in the modern age. This teaching engenders a holistic worldview (*weltanschauung*), encompassing both the internal and the external. Humanity is suffering from a conflict of human development.³ Human Development encompasses both aspects of development - material development as well as spiritual development, which together lead to human fulfillment. Human Development is not one-sided; it has many aspects and takes into account the total and diverse needs, facets, and possibilities of a human being as an individual and human society collectively.⁴ The concept of human development depends on the concept of a human being itself. Buddha teachings, the urgent need for a harmonious blend of external and internal development - starting from the physical leading up to the spiritual - for holistic human development at the individual and the collective levels.⁵

II. THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT AND BUDDHISM

Buddha has knowledge of the armed clash and the king-controlled military force and their activities. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) takes action on how Buddhist thinkers have sought to influence leaders to moderate the ways in which they wield power and govern, warning

¹ J. V. Rao (1996): 15.

² Palit (2019): 113 - 115.

³ Palit (2019): 119 - 125.

⁴ R.R, French,, (2015): 833 - 880.

⁵ Mineshima, Hideo,, (1991): 110.

them of the negative consequences of failure to do so for them and their kingdoms. Meanwhile, Sugiki's work (2020a, 2020b) examines measures that Buddhists considered in order to avoid killing during conflict.⁶ Buddhism admits that monks and nuns must necessarily distance themselves from war on their path to liberation, lay Buddhists, including rulers and soldiers, must seek to minimize suffering while fulfilling their worldly duties and responsibilities, not least to protect people from attack and improve the conditions of those for whom they are responsible, especially the vulnerable.⁷ The United Nations Development Programme investigates how Buddhism might help to regulate hostilities and reduce suffering during armed conflict on its own terms.⁸ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was to explore correspondences between Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law and investigate how Buddhism might help to regulate hostilities and reduce suffering during armed conflict on its own terms.⁹ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works on how Buddhism provides meaning, satisfaction, and human life that is long and healthy, with ample scope to acquire education, have a fairly good living standard, and enjoy full political freedom, equipped with assured human rights and elements of self-respect, which may be termed as human development.¹⁰ In the concept of human development, as propounded by Mahbub Ul Haq, he promoted the idea that individuals should be the point of focus in the developmental process and that each phase of economic and other activities must be examined methodically to determine the extent of reward each individual draws from his contributions.¹¹ According to Amartya Sen, what an individual is capable of doing or not capable of doing, coupled with what an individual is capable of being or not capable of being, is referred to as the capabilities of an individual. The various expressions of the capabilities of an individual can be ascertained by factors such as adequate provision of food, decent housing, easy availability of health and medical services, availability of opportunity for education, and the existence of freedom in political expression. He is of the opinion that the enhancement, growth, and development in the quality of life, along with the prevalence of an atmosphere of freedom, should be the various features that must be viewed when the process of development is analyzed, and not merely the sole economic phenomenon.¹² As per Amartya Sen, the evaluation of development ought to be done from the point of view of enhancing the quality of life based on three factors. The first factor is entitlement, which may be viewed as rights, powers, and privileges such as easy access to opportunities to have education, ease in the availability of medical and health facilities, etc.

⁶ Andrew, Bartles, et al. (2021): 2.

⁷ Palit (2009): 413 - 425.

⁸ Palit (2010): 191 - 200.

⁹ Swāmi, Kirtipradānanda (2022): 46.

¹⁰ T. V. Rao (1995): 15.

¹¹ United Nations Development Programme (1997): 15.

¹² Amartya. Sen (1988): 1 - 180.

The second factor is capabilities that follow as a consequence of entitlements, and capabilities mean factors that are capable of equipping people with the chance to freely select from various ways of living.¹³ The third and last factor is functioning means the combination of activities done by the individual in the society and his position in the society, which together determines the quality of the existence of the individual in the society. According to Amartya Sen, Buddha assumes that mankind is challenging the various environmental and developmental problems that create multiple causations, complex interactions, inevitable uncertainty, and unpredictability of situations.¹⁴ Buddha first thought a caste was less equal to society and individual human development). As far as the issue of human development is concerned, in the parlance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the mainstay of human development is classified into six basic pillars which are influenced by Buddhist ideas.¹⁵ The six main elements, or the contributing factors, on which the concept of UNDP's Human Development rests are the following:¹⁶

(a) Equity

There should be impartial, even, and equal opportunity available to each individual, without any distinction of gender, in availing the facilities for both education and health care.

(b) Sustainability

All individuals should be entitled to earn a livelihood that should be able to provide for their sustenance. All individuals should also be able to get equitable and even shares in the overall pattern of dissemination of consumables and other goods.

(c) Productivity

In the economic ecosystem, there should be total involvement and contribution of persons in the course of the generation of income. In order to facilitate this happening, the government has to devise and implement effective social schemes for the people.

(d) Empowerment

Individuals should be free to choose the development factor of their choice, in which they are interested in contributing, and should be free to make the decisions by which their lives are impacted.

(e) Cooperation

It requires the sense of involvement and contribution of individuals in the society as well as the economy. It also requires a sense of belongingness to a particular group or community that may result in joint benefit and mutual enhancement of the group or community.

¹³ Amartya. Sen (1988): 90 - 180.

¹⁴ Palit (2010): 191 - 200.

¹⁵ Palit., (2010): 191 - 200.

¹⁶ United Nations Development Programme (1997): 15.

(f) Security

It calls for some sort of assurance that the openings for growth, expansion, and progress are more or less stable in nature. Individuals should be able to avail themselves of the chances and openings freely, with a feeling of safety, and must have enough confidence about their longevity.¹⁷

In order to highlight the fact that merely the factor of economic growth is not sufficient enough to evaluate the development index of a nation or an economy, a new tool—the Human Development Index (HDI) - was devised, which took into account the people and their capacities as the benchmark and standards for evaluating the level of development. The three basic key factors that primarily determine the level of human development - a long life with good health, having a good education, and a good living standard - are taken into consideration for arriving at the HDI, which is calculated as the average achievement on these three basic key factors of human development. UNDP's Human Development now accepts the happiness index of Bhutan. The happiness index covers both features of development - material development as well as spiritual development, which together lead to human fulfillment.¹⁸

III. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND INDIAN TEXT

Human development is a natural and essential passion of every being. It is better to say that all the instincts, desires, aspirations, ambitions, pursuits, and goals are singular - happiness. Thus every being is apparently craving different ends but is essentially craving a singular end that is human development. It is difficult to find an actual definition of human development.¹⁹ Human development is experienced, but human development is itself not an experience. The one that is experienced and the one that is experiencing still need to be defined. The early Indian's thoughts on human development are reflected in the *Veda*, *Upaniṣad*, and *Bhagavad Gītā*, as well as the *Manusmṛti* (मनुस्मृति). In the Vedic philosophy, the twofold ideology of pravṛtti (outward action) and Nivṛtti (inward contemplation) is spoken of. The Rig Veda,²⁰ i.e., the dual purposes of our life are the emancipation of the soul and the welfare of the world.²¹ Human development is the ultimate goal and purpose of every human being. A human being is a knower and a doer.²² Lead me from the asat to the sat./ Lead me from darkness to light./ Lead me from death to immortality./ Om Peace Peace Peace.²³

If a person does not have the knowledge of their origin or about oneself,

¹⁷ United Nations Development Programme (1997): 15.

¹⁸ Swāmi, Kirtipradānanda, (2022): 45.

¹⁹ Palit, (2010): 191 – 200.

²⁰ *Om asato mā sad-gamaya | Tamaso mā jyotir-gamaya | Mṛtyor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya | Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ*

²¹ Swāmi Vivekānanda (2013): 105 - 106.

²² *Om asato mā sad-gamaya | Tamaso mā jyotir-gamaya | Mṛtyor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya | Om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ*.

²³ Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣads - I. iii. 86.

they do not experience happiness but rather suffer from many problems. This truth is expounded in the seventh chapter of the Chandogya Upaniṣads through a dialogue between Narada and Sanatkumara. Narada was a learned man, but despite his vast learning, he was full of sorrow and tension. He approached Sanatkumara, a wise, learned, and knower of self, and told him, "In spite of all the knowledge I have, I am only a knower of words and not a knower of Ātmān (the Self). I have heard from great ones like you that only the knower of the Ātmān crosses the ocean of sorrow. Therefore, since I do not know the Ātmān, I am full of sorrow. Take me; O blessed one, across that ocean of sorrow. Knowledge about oneself, i.e., what we are in reality, helps us to remain at peace."²⁴ Socrates, a Greek philosopher, insists on 'know thyself.' A person who knows oneself is not only wise but is also full of happiness. The Upanishads consider this world not as a source of problems and unhappiness but as a training ground for a person's self-realization. Arunima knew that in the absence of this knowledge, a person becomes arrogant, egotistical, and selfish. He gives many examples to his son so that he will realize his identity. Egoism, arrogance, and selfishness are the root causes of various problems in this world, like the increase in divorces, environmental problems, family problems, etc.²⁵ In the same Upanishad, in the second chapter, Panchakosha explained about the material life and spiritual life. This Panchakosha refers to five levels of realities of the human person. These five levels are the physical level, the glossy body (*Annamaya-kośa*), the vital air (*Prāṇamaya-kośa*), the mental level (*Manomaya-kośa*), the intellect level (*Vijñānamaya-kośa*), and bliss (*Ānandamaya-kośa*).²⁶ As a person, he should develop at all levels through hard work and practice. There should be total development at the individual level. According to S. R. Bhatt, "It stands for the development of all dimensions of human personality - physical, mental, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. Mere physical or mental or intellectual development is lopsided and can never be sustainable."²⁷ If a person achieves this all-round development, he is at peace with himself and also with others. The *Amṛitabindu Upaniṣads* says that for human beings, the mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation. The mind that is attached to material objects is the cause of bondage, while the mind that is detached and free from desires is the cause of liberation.²⁸

*"manah eva manushyānām kāraṇam bandha-mokṣayoh
bandhaaya viśayā-saktam muktam nirviśayam smṛitam"*²⁹

It is the mind that, when deluded, creates problems, but when clarified, can directly access the Divine. *Sadasadvivēka* is spoken of in the *Jñāna-yoga* - what

²⁴ Swamy Sivananda (1998).

²⁵ S, Vidyashree., Amulya, Bharadwaj (2023): 626 - 35.

²⁶ S, Vidyashree., Amulya, Bharadwaj (2023): 627 - 30.

²⁷ S. R. Bhatt. (2004): 98.

²⁸ *Amṛitabindu Upaniṣad*, verse: 2.

²⁹ मन एव मनुष्याणां कारणं बन्धमोक्षयोः/बन्धाय हवषयासक्तं मुक्तं हनहवषयं
स्मृतम् ॥.

is real and what is unreal. Making a distinction between the real and the unreal, and realizing that behind this ever-changing world, there is an unchanging reality, is the essence of the *Jñāna-yoga*.

The four principal *Mahāvākya* (Great Sayings) of the *Upaniṣads* form the basis of the *Jñāna-yoga*. They all express the insight that the individual self (*jīva*), which appears as a separate existence, is in essence part and manifestation of the whole (*Brahman*). The four *Mahāvākya* are:

- (1) Brahman is insight (*Prajñānam Brahma*)³⁰
- (2) This Self (*Ātmān*) is Brahman (*Ayam Ātmā Brahma*)³¹
- (3) That essence (*Tat*, referring to *Sat* - the Existent, are you (*Tat Tvam Asi*)³²
- (4) I am Brhman (*Aham Brahmāsmi*)³³

The basic teaching of *Jñāna-yoga* - the path of knowledge, as mentioned in the *Upaniṣads* - is that the human being is not merely this body-mind complex. The *Upaniṣads* assert that we have a far deeper dimension; we are the ever-free, ever-pure ātman. We are immortal, holy, and perfect beings. The goal of life is to realize our own true nature, to realize the eternal and the deathless ātman - which, in the language of the *Gītā*, no sword can pierce, no air can dry, no fire can burn, and no water can melt.³⁴ The *Upaniṣads* state the progressive states of happiness as follows:

(i) One unit of the joy of celestial humans known as the *gandharvās* (*manuṣya-gandharvāṇām ānandaḥ*)³⁵ = 100 units of human joy.

(ii) One unit of the joy of divine celestials known as the *deva gandharvās* (*deva-gandharvāṇām ānandaḥ*)³⁶ = 100 units of joy of *gandharvās* = 10000 units of human joy.

(iii) One unit of the joy of ancestors (*pitṛs*) in their long-lasting world (*pitṛṇām cira-loka-lokānām ānandaḥ*)³⁷ = 100 units of joy of divine celestials (*deva gandharvās*) = 1,000,000 units of human joy.

(iv) One unit of the joy of those who become gods by birth in the divine heavens, the world of ājāna (*ājānajānām devānām ānandaḥ*)³⁸ = 100 units of joy of *pitṛs* = 100,000,000 units of human joy.

(v) One unit of joy of those who become gods by good deeds is known as

³⁰ Aitareya Upaniṣads 3.3 of the Rig Veda: परञ्जानम् ब्रह्म.

³¹ Mandukya Upaniṣads 1.2 of the Atharva Veda: अयम् आत्मा ब्रह्म.

³² Chandogya Upaniṣads 6.8.7 of the Sāma Veda: तत् त्वम् अहम्.

³³ Brihadāranyaka Upaniṣads 1.4.10 of the Yajur Veda: अमि ब्रह्मास्मत्सम.

³⁴ Bhagavad Gītā, Chapter 2, verse 23.

³⁵ एको मनुष्यगन्धवाथणामानन्द.

³⁶ एको देवगन्धवाथणामानन्द.

³⁷ एको हपत्तूणां हचरलोकलोकानामानन्द.

³⁸ एको आजानजानां देवानामानन्द.

karmadeva (*karmadevānām devānām ānandaḥ*)³⁹ = 100 units of joy of those who become gods by birth in the divine heavens = 10,000,000,000 units of human joy.

(vi) One unit of the joy of the immortal ruling gods (*devānām ānandaḥ*)⁴⁰ = 100 units of the joy of those who become gods by good deeds known as *karmadevas* = 1,000,000,000,000 units of human joy.

(vii) One unit of joy of *Indra* (*indrasya ānandaḥ*)⁴¹ = 100 units of joy of the immortal ruling gods known as *karmadevas* = 100,000,000,000,000 units of human joy.

(viii) One unit of joy of *Bṛhaspati* (*bṛhaspateḥ ānandaḥ*)⁴² = 100 units of joy of *Indra* = 10,000,000,000,000,000 units of human joy.

(ix) One unit of joy of *Prajāpati* (*prajāpateḥ ānandaḥ*)⁴³ = 100 units of joy of *Bṛhaspati* = 1,000,000,000,000,000,000 units of human joy.

(x) One unit of joy of *Brahmānanda* (*brahmaṇaḥ ānandaḥ*)⁴⁴ = 100 units of joy of *Prajāpati* = 100,000,000,000,000,000,000 units of human joy.

This analysis of happiness, *ānanda-mīmāṃsā*, done in the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, glorifies the joy derived in *Brahmānanda*, the supreme bliss, and compares it vis-à-vis the maximum happiness conceivable in human life. It shows humanity that even if one manages to get worldly happiness of the highest degree that can ever be conceived by the human mind, even that human happiness would pale into insignificance when compared to the supreme bliss of *Brahmānanda*.

The *Gītā* classifies happiness into three qualities, which are *Sāttvika* happiness (higher spheres), *Rājasika* (middle spheres), and *Tāmasika* happiness (lower spheres).⁴⁵ *Gītā* claims that every individual is the mixture of goodness, emotion, and delusion, and it is determined and predominates.⁴⁶ Happiness (*Sukham*) is the athletic state for nirvana. *Nibbāna* is in a higher state than *Sukham* toward salvation with absolute freedom.⁴⁷ In order to reach the state of nirvana, 5 chapters of the *Gītā* present the way specifically as follows: “He who has well-being within him, [he] who has joy within himself, [he] who is enlightened within himself, that *Yogī* is the *Brahman* even when he is alive, [and] would get salvation by becoming absolutely free.”⁴⁸

Those sages who get freedom, desire, and anger, [who] have minds that

³⁹ एको कमथदेवानां देवानामानन्दः।

⁴⁰ एको देवानामानन्दः।

⁴¹ एको इन्द्रस्यानन्दः।

⁴² एको बृस्पितेरानन्दः।

⁴³ एको प्रजापतेरानन्दः।

⁴⁴ एको ब्रह्मण आनन्दः।

⁴⁵ Chapters 14, 18 trans. P. R. Ramachander.

⁴⁶ Chapter 14 trans. P. R. Ramachander.

⁴⁷ Paranipe, Anand C. (2013): 1 - 20.

⁴⁸ Chapter 5, 24/ trans. P. R. Ramachander.

are peaceful and contented, [and] who are able to realize their souls, [would get salvation within this and in other worlds.⁴⁹ According to R.C. Zaehner, the basic dogma of the *Gītā* is that knowing both the self and Brahman, who are one mode of being, changeless and undivided.⁵⁰ In addition, he insists that in the *Gītā* there are two stages in the process of liberation: firstly, the realization of the self as eternal, and secondly, the discovery of God as identical in eternal essence but as distinct in power and personality.⁵¹ According to Manu, in order to be happy, a man must maintain perfect contentment and become self-controlled. According to Manu, practice the *Dharma* (duty) through the spiritual path. This path may be opened only by those who attempt total self-restraint of the lower self. As Manu explains *Dharma*:

The ten points of duty are patience, forgiveness, self-control, not stealing, purification, mastery of the sensory powers, wisdom, learning, truth, and lack of anger. Those priests, who study the ten points of duty carefully and, after they have learned it, follow it, progress to the highest level of existence.⁵²

IV. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND ITS HISTORY

Concepts of human development also originated in ancient times, but they were divided into two parts - the West and the East. Western human development traces ancestry to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Greek humanism was limited to its citizens and excluded the non-Greeks and the slaves from its blessings.⁵³ Roman humanism was broader but did not also extend to the slaves. They were secular and non-religious. After Christianity, it preached its humanism, based on its narrow theology, first to the peoples of the Roman Empire and, later, to the peoples of Europe as a whole. But this Christian humanism was also exclusive; it was limited to the believers in its narrow creed and dogma; it did not extend not only to non-Christians but also to its dissidents in creed and to all scientists and rationalists. Western humanism in general, and Christian humanism in particular, received their most serious shock from the very violent Thirty Years' War between the Protestants and Catholics in Germany.⁵⁴ Man killed a man in the name of a common god and religion, reducing the population of Germany, according to historians, from 25 to 5 million. This was a traumatic experience for all thinking Europeans to sift their faith from god to man. is a shift of faith from god to man was helped by the Europeans' discovery of Greek humanism in the wake of its contact with the thought, culture, and literature of classical Greece in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; this modern Western humanism, strengthened by physical sciences and technology, held out melioristic hopes of full human development

⁴⁹ Chapter 5, 26/ trans. P. R. Ramachander.

⁵⁰ Zaehner, R. C (1969): 30.

⁵¹ Zaehner, R. C (1969): 31.

⁵² The Laws of Manu, Chap. 5, p. 115.

⁵³ Swami, Ranganathananda (1990): 14.

⁵⁴ Swami, Ranganathananda (1990): 53.

in peace and plenty all over the world. It steadily gained strength and prestige for three hundred years, up to 1913 CE. 133 The devastating First World War took place from 1914 to 1918,⁵⁵ when Western man hated and killed brother Western man to an extent unprecedented in history. This was followed by the continuous tensions of the post-war years, culminating in the more devastating Second World War, with its additional Nazi brutalities and gruesome murder of millions of Jews. These traumatic experiences shook the very foundations of Western man's faith even in himself, just as the Thirty Years' War earlier had destroyed his faith in God. They shattered his faith even in humanism itself. The Second World War has left Western man with no focus on faith and loyalty either to a god above or man below, breeding in him a cynical attitude concerning all values - religious and otherworldly or human and this-worldly, for ethical and moral; and it has led him to opt for a plunge into a crude materialism and to bend his efforts for the satisfaction of his organic cravings during the short span of his physical existence. This has, in turn, resulted in generating inner tensions, privations, and psychic distortions to an alarming degree. Into this Western human context came a new challenge in the form of the Bolshevik Revolution and the hope of a new human civilization led by the USSR, promising peace and plenty around the world. After impressive achievements in the field of mass human development during its first four decades, this new experiment is also showing severe inner tensions within the individual man and woman in the USSR in the form of an increase in crime, drunkenness, and other psychic distortions, and intense conflicts between one Marxist state and another.⁵⁶ Marxist humanism goes far, but not far enough, to ensure human fulfillment. Buddhism helps Marxism to carry its study of man into the depth of the human spirit and to base its undoubtedly promising human experiment on the rock of the divine in man and not on the sands of his physical and organic system.⁵⁷ The Greco-Roman and modern Western peoples have achieved a type of human development based on this faith in oneself and the Promethean spark it ignited in them. But with these, they have built up a high level of social welfare and the spirit of human individuality and dignity. But Buddhism pointed out to the people of the West that this did not exhaust the scope of human excellence, the scope of the science of human possibilities. So man is not only a member of a social community or a political personality, but there is also a higher dimension of human development and excellence. That is called the spiritual dimension of human growth and excellence. If the first one is a horizontal and lateral growth, the second one is a vertical and inward growth. Aristotle said that man is a social animal. This is true; we need that gregarious background for our growth, but man has a vertical dimension, which calls for a deepening of his awareness, for spiritual growth within. Even in ancient Greek culture, this higher dimension of excellence was placed before man in the famous dictum of the Oracle of Delphi: 'Man, know yourself.' It is

⁵⁵ Bipan, Chandra (1982): 235 – 261.

⁵⁶ Swami, Ranganathananda (1990): 50.

⁵⁷ Swami, Ranganathananda, Swami (2005): 13.

not enough that you know the external environment. There is a profound inner environment also to be investigated and realized. There was only one Greek who understood this truth and realized it, and that was Socrates. He realized himself as the infinite and immortal *Ātmān*, and the Greeks, who knew only the socio-political dimension of man, the horizontal dimension, could not understand him. It was something beyond their comprehension. They are well-known men wrestling with forces outside and establishing their hegemony over the external world. But the greatness of Socrates was something deep, something subtle. It is a great tragedy that the Athenian state could not appreciate the high spiritual dimension of Socrates, and therefore he was condemned to death. He was described by the judges as a corrupter of the Athenian youth. What a sad description! And what human excellence and greatness! However, the socio-political philosophy of the Greeks could not grasp that character excellence. This is not only the example of Socrates but also we refer to Jesus Christ. Jesus also gave a tremendous message of man's spiritual inwardness. But the socio-political philosophy of the Jews of the time could not comprehend it and condemned him to death. Socio-political character excellence, the Athenians and the Jews could understand and appreciate, but not anything higher than that. In Indian history, we have the example of Bhagavan Buddha of the sixth century BCE who is teaching against Hinduism. Up to 80 years before his death,⁵⁸ He was not challenged by others, but his teachings peacefully transformed, in the next few centuries, India and much of Asia. It is a great example of Indian humanism. Humanism cannot coexist with any predatory attitude or behavior; it cannot coexist with any intolerant attitude or behavior either.⁵⁹ The Buddhist philosophy was given unique political expressions by several Indian political states at the all-India as well as provincial levels, among whom the most outstanding example was the policy and program of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka of the third century before Christ experiencing remorse after his successful but bloody war with his neighboring Kalinga state, Ashoka⁶⁰ renounced all wars as the instrument of state policy, and, as proclaimed through his numerous rock and pillar edicts, many of which still exist, he silenced all war drums, *yuddha-bherī*, and struck the kettle-drums of truth and justice, *dharma-bheri*; and this not only in the political and international fields but also in the fields of inter-religious relations. is wise policy of non-violence, active toleration, and international understanding was taken up by his successors also at the all-India and provincial levels, who extended welcome and hospitality to successive foreign racial and religious groups and refugees fleeing from persecution from their own countries, like the Jews and the early Christians from West Asia and the Zoroastrians from Iran. Bertrand Russell felt the need for knowledge, but he gave a warning to modern man: "Knowledge is power, but it is power for evil as much as for good. It follows that, unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge,

⁵⁸ Thaper (2002): 175 – 179.

⁵⁹ Radhakrishnan (1969): 381 - 382.

⁶⁰ Thaper (2002): 175 – 180.

an increase of knowledge will be an increase of sorrow.⁶¹

V. BUDDHA AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

In the sixth century BCE, Buddha discourses on the different aspects of human life, such as social, ethical, philosophical, psychological, spiritual, political, and economic, besides the principle of good governance and national unity. India is a land with varied diversity in all its inhabitants for a long period. It has its mechanism of sustenance and development. Buddha recognized the power of nature, which is embodied in the sun. Man is a very small part of the cosmos and must be in perfect balance with the whole of it. Buddha acknowledged the power of nature's balance, and he explained how it existed in society by practicing nonviolence.⁶² Buddha observed that the use of iron in the third century BCE created ecological problems and peace in the society. Iron extended the people's settlement, cutting down the forest and extending the agriculture field. Agricultural production increased rapidly in society. People brutally killed animals for religious purposes and also for personal interest. People were damaging nature and the environment cruelly. Urbanization was rapidly expanded, which developed ecological imbalance and unhappiness in society.⁶³ People were also fighting each other cruelly for power and wealth. Most of the people wanted harmony and peace in society. Buddha observed that the mental imbalance of man was the main cause of damage to nature and peace in society.⁶⁴ According to Buddha, practicing *dhamma* is indeed a fundamental tenet of human development, as it transcends the boundaries of mere moral philosophy and delves into the realm of holistic progress - personal, social, and spiritual. Through the cultivation of awareness of the "Inner Cosmos" within human life, individuals can discern the structures of "internal existence" and "transcendence," forming a basis for universal human dignity and rights. According to the Buddha (*Dīgha Nikāya*. 2.3.159, *VRI*. 2.73), principles of the *Dhamma* are *akālika* (timeless), *sandiṭṭhiko* (empirical), *ehi-passiko* (verifiable), *vinñūhi* (known by the wise), and individually understandable. Hence, they may be adopted as a standard parameter to examine and verify any problem, subject, or event to ensure sustainable peace in the world. According to Buddha, nonviolence and happiness are not two separate entities but are two halves of one circle; man lives in happiness, and happiness, to some extent, lives in man. Both are parts of the Society. Social development requires the removal of barriers for all the citizens of a nation, enabling them to march onwards towards the fulfilment of their cherished dreams with confidence and dignity. According to Buddhist thought, sustainable peace or happiness and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin. The *Visuddhimagga* and *Atthasalini* mention a few laws, which are *Citta-niyāma* (mind law), *Kamma-niyāma* (action law), *Dhamma-niyāma* (phenomenal universal law), *Utuniyama* (season laws),

⁶¹ Bertrand, Russell (1953): 120 - 121.

⁶² Palit (2009): 413 - 425.

⁶³ Palit. (2010): 191 - 200.

⁶⁴ Burton, D. (2002): 326 - 345.

and Bijaniyama (seed law). All laws are more effective for the betterment of human society.⁶⁵ The words *dhammata* and *niyama* are used as a 'natural law of way,' and they mean a righteous path by which everything in the cosmos is also guided by the universe. Since everything moves in the right path, there is hardly any apprehension of one's causing harm to the other. Any imbalance anywhere is bound to affect this harmony. It provides a sense of security for all the members of the universe, resulting in a balance between the whole universe. Mental or physical, which has been called '*anrta*' (the antithesis), is bound to affect the harmony. The *Dhammasangani* is divided into *kusala* (happiness), *akusala* (unhappiness), and *avyākata*, which is neither pleasing nor painful (Palit, 2011) 155-169.). He laid down the model code of conduct for the sustenance of the living world, in particular human beings. Buddha advises the practice of *metta* (loving kindness) towards all creatures, invisible and visible, awaiting birth and born.⁶⁶ The Buddha also advocates fervently against killing and destruction of life in any form. Buddha prescribed *Yajñas* comprising *Sīla* (virtue), *Samādhi* (concentration), and *Prajña* (wisdom) to establish a loving and moral society (Labh, 2004). He divided *Sīla* (Virtue) into two - *carittasīla* (duties of performance) and *vārittasīla* (duties of avoidance).⁶⁷ A compassionate mind increases self-confidence and inner peace, and it has strengthened the base of sustainable peace, nature conservation (*Saṅgaha*), and sustainable development of society. According to Buddhist behavioral psychology, human actions are divided into three categories: *kāya-kamma* (bodily actions), *vācā-kamma* (verbal actions), and *Mano-kamma* (mental actions). Mental behaviors are the most important of these three categories, since they still influence the other two.⁶⁸ Every human mind has five components, which are *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāna*.⁶⁹ In Buddhist teaching, mind and matter characteristics are evident, just as they are in human psychology. The components of consciousness or thought (*sampayutta dhamma*) and the units of matter or atoms (*rūpakalpa*) make up the composition of mind and body. The cognitive and non-cognitive components, or mental influences, form the cognition or unit of mind (*citta and cetasikas*).⁷⁰

The *Buddhavacana* (teachings of the Buddha) has fully supported the nonviolence of action of man. Buddhist philosophy deals with the welfare and happiness of the masses (*bahujana hitāya, bahujana sukhāya*). The Buddha powerfully upheld values that are "akin to the modern concepts of human rights".⁷¹ The Buddhist *Pañcasīla* (Five Virtues) represents an acknowledgment of both the right to life and the property right. Buddhism supports that all

⁶⁵ Palit (2019): 113 - 125.

⁶⁶ Law (1997): 55 - 67.

⁶⁷ Lab, B. (2004): 113 - 120.

⁶⁸ Shakya, Anusha (2023): 60 - 70.

⁶⁹ Shakya, Anusha (2023): 60 - 70.

⁷⁰ Shakya, Anusha (2023): 60 - 70.

⁷¹ Perera (1991): viii.

human beings are born with unconditional freedom and accountability, and from a Buddhist perspective, “one is indeed one’s lord” (*attā hi attano nātho*). In Buddhism, *ahiṃsā* is a viewpoint of all human activities. All people love others and are not hurt or killed by others. This feeling of self-preservation and self-love is transferred in thought to other people. 99 and in this way the love for and protection of life come to be promoted. For instance, the Dhammapada echoes this very idea by stating that as all fear death, comparing others with oneself, one should neither kill nor cause to kill.⁷² The Buddha felt that the humane sentiment of *appamāna mettā* (boundless friendliness) and *mettacittaṃ* (heart full of love) must be extended to all conscious beings because essentially all life has a desire to protect itself and make itself comfortable and happy.⁷³ The admirable virtues of Buddhism such as the four characteristics of kindness,⁷⁴ i.e., *dāna* (liberality), *peyyāvajja* (kindly speech), *atthacariyā* (sagacious conduct), *samānattatā* (feeling of common good or impartiality); four qualities of character significant of a human being who has attained enfranchisement of the heart i.e., *mettā* (friendliness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *upekhā* (equanimity), *muditā* (sympathy); ten perfections (*dasa pāramiyo*) of a bodhisatta consisting of *dāna* (liberality), *sīla* (morality), *nekkhamma* (renunciation), *paññā* (wisdom), *virīya* (vigor), *khanti* (tolerance), *sacca* (truthfulness), *adhiṭṭhāna* (self-determination), *mettā* (friendliness), *upekhā* (equanimity); along with *cāga* (benevolence),⁷⁵ *kataññutā/kataveditā* (gratefulness), *gāravatā* (respect), *peyyāvajja* (courtesy), *samānattatā* (equanimity), *nikāra* (humility), *khanti* (tolerance), *saṃtuṭṭhi* (satisfaction) with minimum, *khantisoracca* (gentleness and forbearance), *alīnatā* (sincerity), *anupāyāsa* (peacefulness), (*paranuddayatā*) sympathy with others, *saccavajja* (truthfulness), and above all *ahiṃsā* (non-injury) towards all forms of life (*bijagāma bhūtagāma*) are the foundation blocks of the moral basis of an individual’s association with other fellow beings which would firmly provide to fully understand the aim of the human peace or human development.⁷⁶ The Dalai Lama realizes that we are ‘truly a global family’ and by necessity must develop a sense of universality. ‘It is our collective and individual responsibility to protect and nurture the global family, to support its weakest members, and to preserve and tend to the natural environment in which we all live.’⁷⁷

VI. BUDDHISM AND HUMAN MIND

The *Visuddhimagga* uses the Indic word *cārika* to describe certain temperaments, which simply means “behavior of moving around” or “behavior of conduct.” According to *Pāli* commentaries, there are many personality classifications, but the most prevalent one is found in the text *Visuddhimagga*,

⁷² Sarao, K T S (trans.) (2009): 129.

⁷³ Shaky, Anusha (2023): 60 – 70.

⁷⁴ Sarao, K T S (2017): 1 – 4.

⁷⁵ Sarao, K T S (2017): 1 – 4.

⁷⁶ Sarao, K T S (2017): 1 – 4.

⁷⁷ Lama, Dalai. (1999): 22.

which has six temperaments - *cārika* dependent on the leading mind and mental states.⁷⁸ These are:

1. The selfish natured (*rāga-cārika*)
2. The hateful one (*dosa-cārika*)
3. The unwise or dull-natured (*moha-cārika*)
4. The trustworthy (*saddhā-cārika*)
5. The wise-hearted (*buddhi-cārika*)
6. The ruminating-natured (*vitakka-cārika*).

The first three are positive, while the remaining three are negative. The negative personalities are more likely to commit crimes than other individuals. 125. In the Buddhist classification of behavioral types of human beings, the approach distinguishes these diverse effects in both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. 126 In terms of moral assessment, Buddhism defines three causes responsible for any immoral activity: *Rāga* (greed), *Dosa* (aversion), and *Moha* (misbehavior, delusion), which develops from the lack of self-awareness. And apart from these three immoralities, Buddha observes some psychological factors that contribute to criminal behavior. These factors are deeply entrenched in one's subconscious mind the whole time.⁷⁹ These are:

- Sensual intolerance (*kāmarāga*)
- Resentment, hostility, and a propensity for abuse (*paṭigha*)
- Self-maintenance
- Ego-centric views and different perceptions (*diṭṭhi*)
- Distrust, trepidation, and skepticism are all symptoms of compulsive suspicion (*vicikicchā*).

Mano, is an illusion that establishes emotions of equivalence, dominion, and servility. These tendencies exist latent in the subconscious mind, manifesting only when the situations are particularly infuriating. Individuals are unaware of their deep-seated behavior under ordinary circumstances. According to Buddha, only Non-violence and humanity fulfill basic needs for their lives, and to encourage spiritual practice, they fulfill internal peace. The Noble Eightfold Path, the fundamental Buddhist teaching, includes the five precepts in its components on right speech, right conduct, and right livelihood. In Theravada tradition, the five precepts are recited in *Pāli* language.⁸⁰ The five precepts are as follows:

- Abstaining from killing living beings.
- Avoiding stealing.
- Avoiding inappropriate sexual conduct.
- Refraining from telling lies (falsehood).

⁷⁸ B. Buddhaghosa (2010): 428.

⁷⁹ Shakya, Anusha (2023): 70 - 72.

⁸⁰ Anusha, Shakya (2023): 94.

- Absence of intoxication.

The five precepts have been described as unfavorable to a society that is peaceful and as social attitudes that bring harmony. In Buddhist texts, the ideal, virtuous society is one in which human beings understand the five precepts. The early Buddhist texts contain numerous references to the five precepts. The precepts are observed as ways to develop a positive self-concept or as a representation of that character. They are described in the *Pāli* Canon as a means of avoiding suffering to oneself and others. They are additionally described as gifts to themselves and others. They are regarded as moral standards that specify what it means to be human, both physically and mentally.⁸¹

Buddha observed this unkind, unjust, and inhuman custom in the name of religion. He revolted against the same and raised his objections, saying that such *Yajñas* (religious sacrifices) were cruel and worthless. The Buddhist text *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta* states that when humanity is demoralized through greed, famine is the natural result. Instead, he prescribed *Yajñas* comprising *Sīla* (virtue), *Samādhi* (concentration), and *Prajña* (wisdom) in which there was no killing and the best possible fruits were also obtained.⁸² But Buddha Ghosh divided the *Sīla* into two: *carittasīla* (duties of performance) and *varittasīla* (duties of avoidance).⁸³ He explained the *varittasīla*, which are –

1. To abstain from taking life.
2. Not to take what is not given.
3. Sexual purity.
4. To abstain from a false intoxicating drink.

According to him, “Habitual morality is to the broad earth, on which, as their fulcrum or basis, all creatures move, stand, or rest, and again, *Sīla* is compared to the sources of the great rivers and the ocean, starting as rill and burn way up in the mountains and ministering to an increasing scale of animal growth as they descend and wax deep and wide, till merged in the ocean.”⁸⁴ The attitude of Pragmatism is clearly expressed in the ‘*Culamba-lunkya Sutta*,’ where Buddha made use of the example of a wounded man.⁸⁵ The wounded man, by an arrow, wished to know who shot the arrow, from which direction it came, and whether the shaft was of this kind of wood or another before he would have the arrow removed. The arrow here signifies the sufferings in our daily life caused even by disbalanced happiness and leads one to the removal of the arrow of suffering. This is Buddha’s practical and more personal view in the light of his experience.⁸⁶ The *Lokavipatti Sutta* (*An.* IV.157, *cf.* *Dn.* III. 260, 286) describes how everyone is subject to the eight worldly conditions (*loka-dhamma*), namely

⁸¹ Anusha, Shakya (2023): 94 - 95.

⁸² Labh (2004): 113 – 120.

⁸³ Law, B.C (1997): 55 - 67.

⁸⁴ Law (1997): 55 - 67.

⁸⁵ Choudhury & Palit (2010): 1 - 7.

⁸⁶ Bhowmick (2004): 136 – 37.

gain and loss (*lābha* and *alābha*); fame/ good repute/ popularity and disrepute/ shame/ obscurity (*yasa* and *ayasa*); blame and praise (*nindā* and *pasamsā*); pleasure and pain (*sukha* and *dukkha*). Recognizing these four pairs of agreeable and disagreeable experiences as impermanent, painful, and subject to change encourages patience and equanimity rather than allowing oneself to be captured by an emotional reaction. Drawing on the second type of *ksānti* supports the first type, acceptance of suffering. Relevant to the third type, tolerance of injurious behaviour, which is important about non-retaliation, is *Dhammapada*, 'As an elephant in the battlefield withstands arrows shot from bows all around, even so, shall I endure abuse. There are many, indeed, who lack virtue.'⁸⁷

VII. CONCLUSION

Buddhist vision and thought is the One Self in all, which evaluates the man as a human being, and not as conditioned by his external variable factors such as race, creed, or political nationality. Universal peace and toleration only create a universal vision of Ānanda or happiness. The Four Noble Truths doctrine plays a central role in understanding and addressing human happiness in line with the dynamics of the human mind. This Buddhist thought did not remain as a vision but was given unique political expressions by several political states at the all-India as well as provincial levels, among whom the most outstanding example was the policy and program of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka of the third century before Christ.⁸⁸ Experiencing remorse after his successful but bloody war with his neighbouring Kalinga state, Ashoka renounced all wars as the instrument of state policy and, as proclaimed through his numerous rock and pillar edicts, many of which still exist, he silenced all war drums, yuddha-bheri, and struck the kettle-drums of truth and justice, dharma-bheri; and this not only in the political and international fields but also in the fields of inter-religious relations.⁸⁹ This wise policy of non-violence, active toleration, and international understanding was taken up by his successors also at the all-India and provincial levels, who extended welcome and hospitality to successive foreign racial and religious groups, and refugees fleeing from persecution from their own countries, like the Jews and the early Christians from West Asia and the Zoroastrians from Iran. In the third century BCE, the Mauryan Emperor Asoka demonstrated this tolerance in his rock edicts - '*Samavaya eva sadhuh*', he proclaimed in one of his edicts: 'Concord alone is right.' The Buddha, with great compassion for the world, required his followers to practice the four boundless states (*appamanna*) of loving kindness (*metta*), of compassion (*karuna*), of sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and of equanimity (*upekkha*).⁹⁰ This practice of '*metta*' or universal love, begins by suffusing one's mind with universal love (*metta*) and then pervading it to one's family, then to the neighbours, then to the village, country and the four corners of the

⁸⁷ *Dhammapada* translation Acharya Buddhārakkhita (1985): 21 - 115.

⁸⁸ Basham A. L. (1983): 39.

⁸⁹ Palit, P. K (2011): 155 - 69.

⁹⁰ Palit, P.K (2019): 113 - 125.

Universe. The message of Buddhism and the principles on which it rests have assumed a new significance in today's world. "Qualities of the human spirit that bring happiness to both self and others".⁹¹ These could also be called the fundamental 'human values' in the sense that these are the things that a human being values - seeks, aspires for, prizes, and pursues. Human development, therefore, is conditioned by the human being's aspiration and goal-orientation, that is, his or her 'value system'. A materially highly 'developed' individual may consider a spiritually developed personality who is rather unconcerned about his 'material development' to be 'undeveloped' or 'underdeveloped'; and vice versa. The concept of 'human development' would therefore crucially depend upon human aspiration and on the aspect of human personality that is being sought to be 'developed'. The external dimension of human development, which primarily deals with material prosperity, takes into account the aspects concerned with social and economic development, and deals with factors such as income, education, and healthy living. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of the United Nations Organization (UNO) which is subsumed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) point to this external dimension of human development for the most part.

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⁹¹ Dalai Lama (1999): 22.

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PRAJÑĀ-INFUSED BODHISATTVA ACTIONS: BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

This paper explores the Bodhisattva actions imbued with *prajñā* within the context of Mahāyāna Buddhism, emphasizing their critical role in promoting world peace and sustainable development. The term “*prajñā*” translates to wisdom or insight, embodying a profound understanding of the nature of reality, particularly the principles of emptiness (Skt. *śūnyatā*) and dependent origination (Skt. *Pratītyasamutpāda*). In Mahāyāna Buddhism, *prajñā* is not merely an insight into reality to attain liberation from the fears of *saṃsāra* but a vital aspect of the Bodhisattva path, a commitment to attaining enlightenment (Skt. *samyak saṃbodhi*) not just for oneself but for the welfare of all sentient beings.

Keywords: *Bodhisattva actions, prajñā, Mahāyāna Buddhism, emptiness (śūnyatā), dependent origination (Pratītyasamutpāda).*

I. INTRODUCTION

The quest for world peace and sustainable development represents one of the most pressing challenges facing humanity today. In an age marked by conflict, exploitation of resources, and climate crises, Buddhist teachings, particularly from the Mahāyāna tradition, offer profound insights and actionable frameworks that can guide us toward a more harmonious existence and a sustainable future. This paper explores key Buddhist principles that contribute to world peace and sustainability, drawing extensively from various Mahāyāna *sūtras* and the treatises of ancient Nālandā Masters.

Mahāyāna Buddhism emphasizes the Bodhisattva ideal, encapsulating the commitment to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. The actions

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of a Bodhisattva are driven by great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) and wisdom (*prajñā*), enabling practitioners to address suffering and create conditions for peace. Many *sūtras* articulate the Bodhisattva's vows or commitments that embody the ideal of selfless service, tirelessly working to alleviate the suffering of others. The Bodhisattva's commitments further illustrate this commitment to engaging in morally and ethically responsible actions that foster harmony and understanding in a world rife with conflict. When viewed through the lens of contemporary challenges such as violence, environmental degradation, and social inequality, the application of these ancient principles becomes increasingly relevant.

In modern times, the cultivation of world peace necessitates the translation of these Bodhisattva actions into tangible steps. The *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* for instance, highlights the importance of non-violence and reconciliation, urging Bodhisattvas to mediate conflicts with wisdom and compassion. Moreover, profound insights from the teachings of ancient Nālandā Masters, such as Arya Nāgārjuna, Aryadeva, Acarya Vasubandhu, Arya Asaṅga and Acarya Candrakīrti, provide a rich philosophical backdrop for these practices. Arya Nāgārjuna's philosophy of the *madhyamaka mārga* (middle way) and his emphasis on the dependent origination and lack of inherent nature of existence serve as a foundation for understanding how every action contributes to the collective well-being of society and the environment.

The principles derived from *Mahāyāna sūtras* advocate for an ethical approach to living that emphasizes mindful consumption and sustainable development. In *Jātakas*, the Buddha has explained the interconnected co-existence of all living forms, asserting that nurturing the environment is essential for both personal cultivation and societal health. Engaging in sustainable development aligns with the Bodhisattva's ethical imperative to cultivate conditions conducive to the flourishing of all beings. This paper explores the following key Bodhisattva ideals that contribute immensely to world peace and sustainable development. (1) *Bodhicitta* – unwavering spirit of altruistic courage for world peace. (2) *Pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* – insight into reality for individual and collective well-being. (3) Six *pāramitā* – skilled Bodhisattva actions on the grassroots.

Bodhicitta, *Pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā*, and the six *pāramitā* are essential Bodhisattva ideals that significantly contribute to world peace and sustainable development. Each of these concepts not only underpins the philosophical framework of Mahāyāna Buddhism but also provides practical insights into fostering a more harmonious and sustainable world.

II. BODHICITTA – UNWAVERING SPIRIT OF ALTRUISTIC COURAGE FOR WORLD PEACE

Bodhicitta, often translated as the “awakening mind”, is a central concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism that embodies the altruistic intention to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. This profound aspiration not only has spiritual significance but also catalyzes promoting world peace and sustainable development. *Bodhicitta* inspires individuals to cultivate

compassion, wisdom, and courage as they engage in meaningful actions that address the pressing challenges facing humanity and the planet.

All Bodhisattva actions are motivated by an unwavering spirit of the awakening mind (Skt. *bodhicitta*) that is imbued with this wisdom of *śūnyatā*. In other words, all Bodhisattva actions of the six *pāramitā* - have the power to benefit all sentient beings and the world at large due to their cultivation of *bodhicitta* and *prajñā* of *śūnyatā*. The first of them is *Bodhicitta*, which is technically defined as uncontrived altruistic intention to attain *samyak sambodhi* for the benefit of all sentient beings. Ārya Maitreya's text titled *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*¹ explains *Bodhicitta* as a mind which wishes for thorough, complete enlightenment for the welfare of others. It says "Developing Bodhicitta means longing for true, perfect enlightenment in order to benefit others."² Since the limitless mind of the Sole Guide of the World has upon thorough investigation seen its preciousness, all beings wishing to be free from worldly abodes should firmly take hold of this precious awakening mind."³

As Bodhisattva Śāntideva says in the verse above, the commitment of *Bodhicitta* transcends mere personal attainment. It emphasizes a collective uplift aimed at providing solace and spiritual growth to all sentient beings, signifying a cognitive and affective shift from self-centred motivations to a broader purpose. In the "*gaṇḍavyūha*" Chapter from the *Mahāvaiṣṭya Sūtra*, the Buddha explains this spirit of *Bodhicitta* as the driving force for all the actions of Bodhisattvas. He says "Noble one, in brief, see that however many Dharmas of the Buddhas and however many qualities of the Buddhas there are, they are all qualities of the aspiration to enlightenment [*Bodhicitta*] and all perfectly present within it. Why is that? It is because the field of activity of all Bodhisattvas arises from it. Even all the Buddhas of the past, present, and future arise from it. Therefore, noble one, this aspiration to the highest, complete enlightenment, through being held with the motivation for omniscience and a higher motivation, has a perfection of limitless qualities."⁴

In practical terms, *Bodhicitta* inspires individuals to engage in actions that promote peace, whether at a local or global level. Leaders and activists influenced by *Bodhicitta* often demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of adversity, advocating for justice and compassionate policies. This ideal encourages the embrace of non-violence, as demonstrated in the teachings

¹ *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, known as The Ornament of Perfect Realization in English, is one of the five treatises transmitted by Ārya Maitreya to Ārya Asanga.

² Maitreya, *Maitreya's Ornament for the Clear realizations (Abhisamayālaṅkāra)*, trans. Hopkins, 2015, 50.

³ Śāntideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, trans. Stephen Batchelor. Boston: Snow Lion, 2012, p. 8.

⁴ "*Gaṇḍavyūha*" Chapter from the *Mahāvaiṣṭya Sūtra* "A Multitude of Buddhas" [Skt. *Buddhāvataṃsakānamahāvaiṣṭyasūtrāt gaṇḍavyūhasūtraḥ paṭalaḥ*], trans. Peter Alan Roberts under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha, accessed Jan 18, 2025. https://84000.co/translation/toh_p.44-45.

of the *Lotus Sutra*, where the Bodhisattvas are depicted as embodiments of *mahākaruṇa* (great compassion) and skillful means (*upāya-kauśala*). They work tirelessly to alleviate suffering, showing that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the active presence of benevolence and understanding.

2.1. Understanding various aspects of *Bodhicitta*

Bodhicitta is classified into two main aspects: relative *Bodhicitta* and ultimate *Bodhicitta*. The relative *Bodhicitta* refers to the spontaneous aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings of all three realms. The ultimate *Bodhicitta* is called *Bodhicitta* for namesake, in actuality, it refers to Ārya Bodhisattva's non-dual realization of emptiness. Together, these two *Bodhicitta* create a comprehensive framework for understanding the method and wisdom aspects of the path to enlightenment respectively.

Bodhicaryāvatāra by Śāntideva elucidates the significance of *Bodhicitta* in the Bodhisattva path. In another context, the *Bodhicitta* can be distinguished between Aspirational *Bodhicitta* (Skt. *bodhipraṇidhicitta*) and Engaged *Bodhicitta* (Skt. *bodhiprathāṇacitta*). While Aspirational *Bodhicitta* refers to the first moment of the heartfelt wish to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings, Engaged *Bodhicitta* refers to the active engagement in Bodhisattva practices that embody this aspiration through altruistic actions of ten *pāramitas* in the world. Bodhisattva Śāntideva says: "In brief, the awakening mind should be understood to be of two types. The mind that aspires to awaken and the mind that ventures to do so.⁵ As is understood by the distinction between aspiring to go and (actually) going. So the wise understand in turn the distinction between these two."⁶

The *Prasangika Madhyamaka* School of Buddhist Philosophy describes Aspirational *Bodhicitta* as the initial moment of *bodhicitta*. This means that the first moment of mind generating *Bodhicitta* is referred to as Aspirational *Bodhicitta*. From the next moment onwards, this *bodhicitta* is termed Engaged *Bodhicitta*. The distinction, as mentioned in the verse above, is that Aspirational *Bodhicitta* is the aspiration to awaken, while Engaged *Bodhicitta* is the active engagement on the path to complete awakening.

In other words, the "Aspiration *bodhicitta* is the vow to generate the same intention as the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the past."⁷ It is an altruistic mind in the form of aspiration that sets the foundation for the practitioner's spiritual journey. On the other hand, the engaged *Bodhicitta* refers to the practical implementation of aspirational commitment in daily life. This involves engaging in compassionate actions, ethical conduct, and selfless service to

⁵ Śāntideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, trans. Stephen Batchelor. Boston: Snow Lion, 2012, p. 8.

⁶ Śāntideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, trans. Stephen Batchelor. Boston: Snow Lion, 2012, p. 9.

⁷ Bstan-vdzin-rgya-mtsho, *A Flash of Lightning in The Dark of Night: A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. Boston: Shambhala South Asia Editions, 1999, p. 32.

benefit others. It is the vow to accomplish, as they did, all the Bodhisattva practices of the path to enlightenment such as the practice of ten *pāramitas* and so on, for the sake of all beings⁸ Together, these two elements form a cohesive framework for fostering world peace and sustainable development, drawing upon rich teachings found in *Mahāyāna sūtras* and the insights of the *Nālandā* Masters.

2.2. Community engagement and sustainable development

The principle of Aspirational *Bodhicitta* and Engaged *Bodhicitta* are instrumental in promoting peace and also sustainable development. As global challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality become increasingly pressing, the compassionate action inherent in *bodhicitta* can lead to meaningful change. We have to understand that the cultivation of *bodhicitta* is not a solitary endeavour, it is for the welfare of humanity, and it flourishes within community contexts through collaboration and shared aspirations of wanting happiness and not wanting miseries. Community engagement initiatives rooted in *bodhicitta* can thus foster solidarity and support among individuals striving for shared altruistic goals. When communities come together to support each other, whether through food drives, educational programs, or environmental clean-up efforts, they embody the spirit of Aspirational and Engaged *Bodhicitta*. These acts of service encourage individuals to connect beyond self-interest, cultivating an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual aid, which is essential for addressing collective challenges. The cultivation of *bodhicitta* has significant implications for world peace. When individuals embody the spirit of altruism and compassion, they contribute to a culture of kindness and harmony. Engaging in practices that foster goodwill among people helps dismantle barriers and prejudices, paving the way for deeper connections and understanding across diverse communities.

Whatever joy there is in this world, all comes from desiring others to be happy, and whatever suffering there is in this world, all comes from desiring myself to be happy (110). If I do not actually exchange my happiness, for the suffering of others, I shall not attain the state of Buddhahood, and even in cyclic existence shall have no joy (111).⁹

As the Bodhisattva Śāntideva reveals in the above verses, the practice of *Bodhicitta* leads the practitioners to the city of omniscience, is the ground for all the happiness in the world. Through inviting us to transform our innate self-centred attitudes into a radiant embrace of universal love, we equalize ourselves with others and understand the interconnectedness of all sentient beings. It is the realization that our happiness thrives not in isolation but intricately linked with that of the welfare of others. At the heart of *Bodhicitta* practice lies a gentle call to examine our innate proclivities, the tendencies for selfishness that may obscure the brilliance of our true nature for perfection which the Buddha

⁸ See Bstan-vdzin-rgya-mtsho, *A Flash of Lightning*, p. 32.

⁹ Śāntideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, trans. Vesna & B. Alan Wallace, 1997.

taught as *tathāgatagarbha*. It is the recognition that all sentient beings have the same potential which has no bounds. The rationale behind *bodhicitta* resonates with a profound insight that if we do not actively exchange our happiness for the suffering of others, we risk remaining trapped in the incessant cycle of fears, pains, and limitations. Therefore, to gain the depths of true fulfilment, we must turn our gaze outward, letting go of our longing for individual liberation for mere personal satisfaction.

In sum, the integration of Aspirational and Engaged *Bodhicitta* provides a framework for understanding the interconnectedness of our aspirations and actions with the broader quest for world peace and sustainable development. As we embrace these principles in our daily lives, we contribute to a collective movement toward a more just and compassionate global community, ultimately realizing the noble ideal of the Bodhisattva: To illuminate the path of liberation for all sentient beings and to create a future where peace, justice, and sustainability are not merely aspirations but lived realities.

III. PRATĪTYSAMUTPĀDA AND ŚŪNYATĀ – INSIGHT INTO REALITY FOR INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING

Pratītyasamutpāda, or dependent origination, is a fundamental Buddhist principle that explains the interconnectedness of all phenomena. This teaching asserts that everything arises in dependence on conditions and is, therefore, interrelated. In tandem, the concept of *śūnyatā*, or emptiness, emphasizes that all entities lack inherent existence. Together, these two principles encourage a profound understanding of reality that can enhance individual and collective well-being. The profundity of the wisdom of *śūnyatā* as expressed in the *Lalitavistara Sutra* reverberates through the ages: “Profound, peaceful, stainless, lucid, and unconditioned such is the nectar-like truth I have realized. Were I to teach it, no one would understand, so I will silently remain in the forest.”¹⁰

These words of the Buddha capture the essence of the profound insight he realized, one that invites the practitioners to approach the *Dharma* with systematic and consistent learning, contemplation and meditation. As the verse expresses, it is the profundity of *śūnyatā*, the ultimate truth that the Buddha skilfully emphasizes by expressing the wish to retire to silence than to teach it to others. The *Lalitavistara sūtra* further elaborates, the skilful imparting of the teachings by the compassionate Buddha at the request of the celestial beings. As Arya Nāgarjuna says in the following verse from *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, his dharma of *Pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* served as a beacon of light, a panacea against the beginningless ignorance and distorted views that chain beings to their suffering. “I prostrate to Gautama. Who, through compassion

¹⁰ *The Noble Great Vehicle Sūtra “The Play in Full”*: “Ārya lalita vistara nāma mahāyāna sūtra; wy.: ‘phags pa rgya cher rol pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo”, Toh 95, Degé Kangyur, vol. 46 (mdo sde, kha), folios 1.b–216.b., translation by Dharmachakra Translation Committee, 84000.co:2013, Verse 25.3, accessed September 13, 2020, <https://read.84000.co/translation/UT22084-046-001.html>

taught the exalted Dharma, which leads to the relinquishing of all views.”¹¹

His profound teachings *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* and deeds driven by insight into them became a legacy of profound and skilful compassion, empowering others to eradicate the root of ignorance and rise beyond their circumstances and experience the same state of liberation he had achieved. The *Heart Sutra*, one of the key *sūtras* in Mahāyāna Buddhism, highlights the correct understanding of things through its famous declaration, which expounds the two truths, in particular, with an example of any physical form. The two lines are “Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form. Form is also not other than emptiness.”¹²

While the two lines are widely renowned and recited in prayers by many, yet their meaning remains obscured to their readers and oftentimes is misinterpreted. ‘Form is empty. Emptiness is form, explain two truths (Skt. *dvāsatya*)’¹³ of any physical form such as our body. The Buddha taught that all phenomena have two truths. All objects of knowledge¹⁴ can be classified into two mutually exclusive truths. If something exists, it must be either a concealed truth aka. Conventional truth (Skt. *saṃvṛti satya*) or the ultimate truth. There is no third truth beside the two truths, as Buddha stated in Meeting of the Father and Son *Sūtra*: “Without depending on others the Knower of the World taught these two truths, conventional and likewise ultimate - a third truth does not exist.”¹⁵

The teaching of the “two truths” suggests that there is a disparity between the appearance and reality of a phenomenon. The objects undeniably appear to exist intrinsically or objectively. Even all the Buddhist schools, except for *prasaṅgika mādhyamaka*¹⁶, accept this appearance of things, arguing that if phenomena did not exist in their own right or intrinsically, there would be no way to posit that they exist. However, the *Prasaṅgika* school espouses a very profound depiction of the ultimate truth of phenomena, such as five

¹¹ Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, In: Tsongkhapa, *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nagarjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, translation by Geshe Ngawang Samten and Jay L. Garfield (NY: Oxford University, 2006), p. 563.

¹² The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom, the Blessed Mother (*Bhagavatīprajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya*), Translated by the Dharmachakra Translation Committee, (accessed 12 Oct 2024), <https://84000.co/translation/toh21#toc>

¹³ All four schools of Buddhist metaphysics, namely *Vaiśiṣṭika*, *Sautrantika*, *Cittamātra* and *Mādhyamaka* posit the concept of two truths. However, the exact meaning of two truths varies amongst the four traditions and reveals the subtlety of their view of the reality of the world.

¹⁴ Object of knowledge is synonym for phenomena. Anything that exist is known as phenomena or object of knowledge.

¹⁵ *Meeting of the Father and Son Sūtra*, In: Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1996), p. 412.

¹⁶ One of the two sub-schools of *Mādhyamaka* school of Buddhist philosophy. The other sub school is known as *Svātantrika Mādhyamaka*. *Prasaṅgika Mādhyamaka* presents the subtlest ultimate reality of a phenomena, i.e. emptiness of intrinsic existence.

aggregates, to be empty of their characteristics, or inherent existence. For instance, when we look at the aggregate of form¹⁷, it does exist but when we examine very closely, then we see that it does not exist as something other than its constituents. At the same time, none of its parts is the form. One discovers that the form neither exists as one with its parts nor as different from its parts. Since form is not found through this ultimate analysis, form is said to have no intrinsic existence. This perspective fosters an awareness of our shared existence, promoting empathy and compassion in interpersonal relationships. In recognizing that our actions impact the larger web of life, individuals may become more motivated to adopt sustainable practices. “Profound wisdom is the eye with which to behold profound emptiness and the path by which to uproot (fundamental ignorance), the source of cyclic existence. It is the treasure of genius praised in all the scriptural pronouncements and is renowned as the supreme lamp that eliminates the darkness of close-mindedness. Knowing this, the wise who have wished for liberation have advanced themselves along this path with every effort. I, the yogi, have practised just that. You who also seek liberation, please cultivate yourself in the same way.”¹⁸

As stated in the verse, the wisdom of emptiness is the eye which sees the true nature of reality, while ignorance – also called self-grasping ignorance – distorts the reality and binds us in *samsāra*. *Nāgārjuna* also explains the ignorance as the misconception of reality – the grasping at the intrinsic or independent existence of all phenomena.¹⁹ And, it is only through realizing the wisdom that apprehends the emptiness of intrinsic existence, one can transcend the deluded perspective of ignorance.

How do we know that we have a wrong mind whose object of apprehension is in direct opposition to that of the wisdom? We tend to emphasize a lot on the self as so solidified and intrinsically there. For instance, we believe in an essential core to our being, which is characterized as our identity or individuality, independent of the psychophysical aggregates that constitute our existence. This is known as self-grasping ignorance pertaining to the self or person. We likewise misapprehend the phenomena other than person, as existing by virtue of their intrinsic nature, termed as the self-grasping ignorance pertaining to phenomena. Moreover, the deeper inquiry into the ultimate nature of things enables one to understand that all problems – whether mental or physical – are rooted to this fundamental ignorance which is two-fold:

(1) Ignorance pertaining to misperception related to causation. (2) Ignorance pertaining to ultimate reality or emptiness of the selfhood. As

¹⁷ The aggregate of form corresponds to material or physical factors. It includes our own bodies, and material objects as well. Specifically, the aggregate of form includes the five physical organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body), and the corresponding physical objects of the sense organs (sight, sound, smell, taste and tangible objects).

¹⁸ Tsongkhapa: *Lines of Experience*, In: Gyatso, Tenzin (the fourteenth Dalai Lama): *Illuminating the Path to Enlightenment*, tr. Geshe Thupten Jinpa, Taiwan: 2002, p. 184.

¹⁹ See *ibid*, p. 141.

opposed to the reality of causal interdependency, we see things randomly coming into being. This is the first kind of ignorance. And second ignorance is that we see things having intrinsic or objective existence. These misperceptions are finally responsible for our ethical problems, such as aversion, clinging, as well as the development of our numerous prejudices.

3.1. *Śūnyatā* and *Pratītyasamutpāda*: two sides of the same coin

The philosophy of emptiness, which is the final legacy of Buddha's teachings, counteracts these misconceptions with the principle of *Pratītyasamutpāda*, which is the "recognition of the fundamentally dependent nature of the reality"²⁰ and is the core of Buddhist understanding of the world and nature of the human existence. The etymology of the term '*Pratītyasamutpāda*' is explained as follows, "The word 'dependent-arising origination' in Sanskrit is *Pratītyasamutpāda*. It has two parts: *pratītya*, a continuative meaning 'having depended', and *samutpāda*, an action noun meaning 'arising'."²¹ It describes how all things arise and exist in dependence upon their respective conditions, without any inherent or independent existence. It is of two kinds: (1) Wisdom of the causal dependent origination – that shows how the effects come into existence by depending on its causes. (2) Wisdom of the subtler level of dependent origination, i.e., dependent origination of wholes' dependence on parts and mental imputation.

Subtler understanding of dependent origination shows that there is the mutual dependence between the parts and whole, without the parts, there can be no whole and without the whole, its parts make no sense. The third or the subtlest understanding of dependent origination, i.e., the dependent origination of dependence on mere designation shows that objects lack intrinsic existence and come into existence through mere mental imputation based on the total network of everything that has a possible or potential relation to it. In *Madhyamaka tenets*, the term "dependent origination" includes the notion that all things exist in dependence upon mental designation²², and therefore negates independent or objective existence. It is for this reason, emptiness and dependent origination are also termed as the two sides of the same coin. *Nāgārjuna* says: "That which is dependent origination is explained to be emptiness. That, being a dependent designation, is itself the middle way."²³

The emptiness should not be misunderstood as nihilism because emptiness in its extended form 'emptiness of independent existence' negates independent existence and not existence itself. The fact that the phenomena are empty of

²⁰ Gyatso, Tenzin (the fourteenth Dalai Lama): *The universe in a single atom*, London: Clays ltd, 2005, p. 68.

²¹ Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*. London: Wisdom Publications, 1996, p. 163.

²² Newland, Guy: *Introduction to Emptiness*- as taught in Tsong-kha-pa's great treatise on the stages of the path, New York: Snow lion publications, 2008, p. 70.

²³ Nagarjuna, In: Je Tsongkhapa: *Ocean of reasoning - a great commentary on Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamikakarika*; Trans. By Geshe Ngawang Samten & Jay L. Garfield. New York: Oxford university press, 2006, p. 503.

independent existence itself proves that they exist merely by dependence. The correct understanding of emptiness, therefore, will lead one to conform to the functionalities of the conventional world without the slightest contradiction. Moreover, if one sees emptiness in the light of dependent origination, one can avert the dreadful extreme views – nihilism and absolutism – and thus unfold the real intent of the Buddha’s teachings. Understanding dependent origination encourages us to reflect on the consequences of our choices, leading to a more responsible and ethical approach to living. For instance, the global climate crisis is a manifestation of collective actions and their consequences. By applying the insights from these teachings, communities can foster cooperation and collaborative efforts to mitigate environmental degradation. Notable figures such as Thich Nhat Hanh have emphasized the importance of mindfulness and interbeing, promoting practices that enhance well-being for individuals and society.

The concepts of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) and *śūnyatā* (emptiness) are central to Mahāyāna Buddhism and provide profound insights into the nature of reality. These philosophical principles are not merely abstract ideas, they offer practical guidance for enhancing individual well-being, promoting collective harmony, and contributing to sustainable development and world peace. By understanding and internalizing these teachings, individuals can foster a deep sense of interconnectedness and compassion, leading to actions that support both personal and global flourishing.

3.2. *Pratītyasamutpāda* and *Śūnyatā* for sustainable development

The application of *Pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* has significant implications for sustainable development. Understanding that societal and ecological systems are interdependent encourages a more holistic approach to development practices. For instance, when policymakers consider the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of their decisions, they are more likely to foster long-term sustainability and promote well-being for all stakeholders. The *Pratītyasamutpāda* and *Śālistambha Sūtras* emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings, teaching that the welfare of one depends on the welfare of many. This insight can serve as a guiding principle for developing policies that prioritize ecological health, social equity, and economic viability. Sustainable agricultural practices, for example, not only benefit farmers and consumers but also contribute to the health of ecosystems and food security for future generations. Furthermore, incorporating perspectives of *pratītyasamutpāda* into economy and business practices can encourage corporate responsibility. Companies that recognize the impact of their operations on communities and ecosystems are more likely to adopt sustainable practices that minimize harm and maximize positive contributions. The concept of corporate social responsibility echoes this understanding, promoting ethical behaviour and environmental stewardship as integral to a company’s mission.

In summary, *Pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* provide crucial insights into the nature of reality and illuminate pathways for individual and collective

well-being. By recognizing the interconnectedness of all phenomena and the emptiness of inherent existence, individuals can cultivate compassion and responsibility that extend to their communities and the environment. These teachings offer transformative guidance for promoting sustainable development and world peace. When applied, they encourage ethical decision-making, mindful consumption, and collaborative efforts toward common goals. Furthermore, educating future generations about these principles can empower them to address pressing global challenges with wisdom and compassion.

IV. DAŚA PĀRAMITĀ – SKILLED BODHISATTVA ACTIONS ON THE GRASSROOTS

The *Daśa Pāramitā*, or Ten Perfections, outlines the qualities that a Bodhisattva must cultivate to practice effectively for the benefit of others. These six practices constitute the causes of happiness, and serve as the ground to achieve Buddhahood. The six *pāramitās*, derived from the Mahāyāna sūtras such as the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtrās*, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra*, *Dasabhūmi Sūtra*, *Samādhinirmocana sūtra*, and *Subāhuparipṛcchā sūtra* and other multiple texts, and later explained and summarized by great Nālandā Masters in their treatises such as Arya Nāgārjuna in *Ratnavali* and *Suḥṛllekha*, Acarya Candrakīrti in *Madhyamakāvatāra*, Bodhisattva Śāntideva in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* respectively. Their most detailed explanation was provided by Arya Maitreya in his five texts, such as *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* and *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra*. In the *Subāhuparipṛcchāsūtra*, Bodhisattva Subāhu, wanting to help sentient beings understand the path of practice to the ultimate enlightenment, asked the Buddha what qualities a great Bodhisattva must have through the following sūtra passage:

“The Bodhisattva great being Subāhu bowed to the Blessed One and asked him, Blessed One, what are the qualities Bodhisattva great beings should have if they are to awaken swiftly and completely to unsurpassed and perfect awakening? The Blessed One replied to the Bodhisattva great being Subāhu as follows: Subāhu, if Bodhisattva great beings are to awaken swiftly and perfectly, they must constantly and relentlessly complete the six perfections.”²⁴

What are these six *pāramitā*? As enumerated in Arya Nāgārjuna’s Letter to a Friend, they are as follows: “Generosity and discipline, patience, diligence, concentration and the wisdom that knows thusness, those measureless perfections make them grow and be a Mighty Conqueror who’s crossed *Samsara*’s sea.”²⁵

²⁴ “The Sūtra of the Question of Subāhu / 84000 Reading Room,” 84000 Translating The Words of The Buddha, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://read.84000.co/translation/toh70.html#UT22084-043-007-section-1>

²⁵ Nāgārjuna, *Nagarjuna’s Letter to a Friend*, trans. Ye-shes-rdo-rje (Itahaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2005), p. 29.

These perfections, which include: (1) *dāna* (generosity) (2) *sīla* (morality) (3) *kṣānti* (patience) (4) *vīriya* (enthusiasm or energy) (5) *dhyāna* (meditative concentration), and (6) *prajñā* (wisdom), operate as a framework for skilled actions on the grassroots level. Each perfection contributes to a comprehensive approach toward promoting individual empowerment and collective action, essential for sustainable development and world peace. However, the four additional *pāramitās* mentioned in the *Daśa Bhūmis Sūtra* correspond to the ten *bhūmis* (stages) of a Bodhisattva's path: (7) *upāya-kauśala* (skillful means), (8) *pranidhāna* (aspiration prayers), (9) *bala* (power) and (10) *jñāna* (primordial wisdom).

Bodhisattva path in Mahāyāna Buddhism serves as a crucial framework for practitioners to attain enlightenment and aspire to guide other sentient beings toward one's enlightenment. In several Mahāyāna *sūtras*, great Bodhisattvas have requested the Buddha to clarify the swiftest way to attain the state of perfection, both for themselves and sentient beings. To the question of why these perfections are called perfections in their ideal form, the Buddha talked about the five reasons as follows: "Blessed One, why are the perfections called 'perfections'?", "Avalokiteśvara, this is for five reasons. The perfections are without attachment, disinterested, free from faults, nonconceptual, and dedication of merit: (1) "Being without attachment, they are completely devoid of attachment to factors adverse to themselves. (2) "Being disinterested, they are free from thoughts fixating on results or some reward obtained from their accomplishment. (3) "Being free from faults, they are not involved with afflicted phenomena and lack unskillful means. (4) "Being nonconceptual, they are free from any literal assumption of having a defining characteristic specific to them. (5) "Being dedicated to merit, they are the aspiration for the result of the bodhisattva path by having produced and accumulated these perfections."²⁶

The Sanskrit word *pāramitā* carries a specific philosophical meaning in this context. *Pāra* means the other side, *mita* is to go; so to go to the other side. It's as if there's a river, to go beyond to the other side. *Pāramitā* is translated as transcendental. It's going beyond, to go to the other shore. Therefore, the *Prajñāpāramitā* means the *Prajñā*, and it's not just the very best kind of knowledge or understanding, it's understanding, the realization which has power to take you or has gone beyond the *samsaric* state of mind. Lopez says "A more creative yet widely reported etymology divides *pāramitā* into *pāra* and *mita*, with *para* meaning "beyond," "the further bank, shore, or boundary," and *mita*, meaning "that which has arrived, or its meaning "that which goes." *Pāramitā* then, means "that which has gone beyond," "that which goes beyond," or "transcendent." This reading is reflected in the Tibetan

²⁶ *Samdhinirmocana sūtra*, "The Sūtra of the Unraveling the Intent / 84000 Reading Room," 84000 Translating The Words of The Buddha, accessed December 07, 2024, <https://read.84000.co/translation/toh106.html#UT22084-049-001-chapter-9>

translation “pha rol tu phyin pa” (gone to the other side) and is supported by such renowned figures as Asanga, Vasubandhu, and Candrakīrti, as well as The Heart *Sūtra* commentators *Jñānamitra*, *Prāśāstrasena*, and *Vajrapāṇi*.²⁷ The six perfections provide a roadmap for one’s journey to Buddhahood. It is a mental journey of cleansing mental defilements (afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations) and allowing the true nature to become manifest in its full form.

4.1. Generosity (*dāna*)

The *dāna* refers to the practice of generosity and selflessness, which is foundational for the Bodhisattva path. The spirit of Mahāyāna is to deliberately reach out to others. We start by making others receptive to us. Generosity is a universal language which everybody understands as an expression of the other person’s feeling of love and affection for them. The Buddha taught different types of generosity at different occasions. The three types of generosity taught in *Samdhinirmocana sūtra* are (1) Generosity of Material Resources (Skt.: *amīṣa dāna*), (2) Generosity of Protection/ Fearlessness (Skt.: *abhaya dāna*), and (3) Generosity of Dharma (Skt.: *dharma dāna*). “The enlightening being Avalokiteśvara also asked the Buddha, “how many different kinds of each of the six transcendent ways are there?” The Buddha replied, “there are three kinds. The three kinds of giving are giving of teaching, giving of goods, and giving of fearlessness.”²⁸

Different types of Generosity create a ripple effect; when one person acts generously, it inspires others to do the same, thus fostering a culture of cooperation and altruism. Implementing *dāna* in grassroots efforts can take many forms, such as community service projects, food banks, and educational initiatives aimed at underprivileged groups. For instance, in many Buddhist communities around the world, practitioners engage in food distribution for the homeless or vulnerable populations. This not only provides immediate relief but also cultivates relationships built on trust and understanding, thus contributing to a peaceful society where compassion prevails over greed and division.

4.2. Morality (*śīla*)

The *śīla* is the second perfection and it emphasizes the importance of moral discipline in all physical, verbal and mental actions. In other words, restraining our physical, verbal and mental negativities is known as the practice of Ethical Discipline. In the *Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, Bodhisattva Śāntideva underscores that moral conduct is essential for peace and harmony within oneself and in relationships with others. In Chapter 9, *Samdhinirmocana sūtra*, the Buddha divided *śīla* into three categories of moral discipline: “The three kinds of

²⁷ Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *The Heart Sūtra Explained: Indian and Tibetan Commentaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 21 - 22.

²⁸ *Samdhinirmocana sūtra*, “The Sūtra of the Unraveling the Intent / 84000 Reading Room,” 84000 Translating The Words of The Buddha, accessed December 07, 2024, <https://read.84000.co/translation/toh106.html#UT22084-049-001-chapter-9>

discipline are the discipline that refrain from what is not virtuous, the discipline that engages in virtue, and the discipline that engages in benefiting beings.”²⁹

The three kinds of ethics practiced by Bodhisattvas are, (1) Ethics of refraining from negativities, (2) Ethics of gathering virtues, and (3) Ethics of engaging in the welfare of beings. In practice, promoting *śīla* can manifest through community ethics programs that engage youth in dialogue about morality and integrity, teaching them to act responsibly in their personal and social lives. By fostering a culture of ethical behavior, communities can build a strong backbone against corruption, discrimination, and violence, thereby nurturing an environment where peace can flourish.

4.3. Patience (*kṣānti*)

The Sanskrit word for ‘patience’ is *kṣānti*. It has multiple connotations: Patience (mostly in terms of time), forbearance (in bearing pain) and fortitude. The mental state that destroys our virtue of patience is the anger. To eliminate the anger, one has to practice patience. With patience, along with the practice of ethical discipline, we try to stop the non-virtues. The three kind of patience explained in over many verses of chapter six of the *Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* are, (1) Patience to bear suffering (Skt.: *duḥkhādhivāsānā-kṣānti*), (2) Patience in not paying heed to the perpetrator (Skt.: *apakāramarṣaṇakṣānti*) and (3) Patience to bear the profundity/complexities of the meanings of *Dharma* (Skt.: *dharmanidhyānakṣānti*).³⁰ Developing patience helps individuals approach conflicts with a calm mindset, essential for reconciliation efforts and peace-building. Grassroots initiatives that focus on conflict resolution often employ patience as a core principle. Programs in schools or community centers that teach conflict resolution skills not only foster individual resilience but also promote collective understanding. By instilling patience as a valued quality, communities can empower their members to engage in dialogue during disputes rather than resorting to aggression.

4.4. Enthusiasm or joyous effort (*vīrya*)

The *vīrya* is a specific perfection of the joyous effort and enthusiasm that one requires to engage in virtuous action. In other words, finding joy in virtue is known as joyous effort. It is a flawless state of mind characterized by enthusiasm for accumulating virtue and working for the benefit of sentient beings, along with the physical, verbal, and mental activities that such a state of mind generates. (1) Joyous effort involves not giving in to the laziness of being attached to trivialities or trivial purposes. (2) Joyous effort entails not succumbing to the laziness of procrastination. (3) Joyous effort means not undermining our potential due to laziness.

²⁹ Saṃdhinirmocana sūtra, “The Sūtra of the Unraveling the Intent / 84000 Reading Room,” 84000 Translating The Words of The Buddha, accessed December 07, 2024, <https://read.84000.co/translation/toh106.html#UT22084-049-001-chapter-9>

³⁰ Śāntideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, trans. Stephen Batchelor. Boston: Snow Lion, 2012, p. 54 - 75.

Joyous effort is an antidote to laziness and motivates practitioners to continuously strive for self-improvement and to uplift others in the journey to attain infinite happiness of Buddhahood. At the grassroots level, diligence can be seen in various community empowerment programs that aim to provide skills training and workshops. Organizations focused on environmental sustainability, for example, advocate for hard work in conserving resources and promoting eco-friendly technologies. By harnessing the diligent efforts of individuals, communities can make significant strides toward sustainable practices that benefit the environment and bolster community resilience.

4.5. Meditation (*dhyāna*) and wisdom (*prajñā*)

Dhyāna is the fifth perfection and serves as a vital means for cultivating inner peace and stability. The term *dhyāna* “derived from *dhya*,” means meditation, thought, reflection, particularly on a profound and virtuous object for a spiritual goal.³¹ The practice of meditation allows individuals to develop mindfulness, clarity, and concentration, enabling them to act with wisdom and compassion (explained above) in their daily lives. The light of wisdom requires two qualities: Unflickering stability and brightness. To achieve the steadiness of wisdom, we need to practice single-pointed meditation, which is the fifth perfection of meditative concentration. For the sharpness of wisdom, we rely on the sixth perfection of wisdom. These two approaches are called “calm abiding” (*śamatha*) and “special insight” (*vipaśanā*).³² Once one possesses this powerful and unwavering, laser-like beam of wisdom, it will cut through self-grasping ignorance as well as its subtle stains. By severing the root of all afflictive obscurations (Skt.: *kleśāvaraṇa*), which is self-grasping ignorance, you achieve Nirvana. Furthermore, by cutting through even the subtlest of mental defilements, known as cognitive obscurations (Skt.: *jñeyāvaraṇa*), one reaches the ultimate goal of the Path of No More Learning, or Buddhahood.

Cultivating the unity of meditation and wisdom at the grassroots level is vital for individual liberation as well as for fostering community well-being. Cultivating insight into reality with the union of *śamatha* and *vipaśanā* equips individuals with tools to manage stress and emotional challenges, enhancing mental health and interpersonal relationships. This unity further enhances our capability for social cohesion, promoting peace and harmony within communities.

Therefore, integrating wisdom, particularly through educational initiatives that emphasize critical thinking and ethical reasoning, is crucial to strengthen the foundation of community engagement and social harmony. By incorporating traditional Buddhist teachings alongside contemporary insights on ecology and social justice, communities can develop a deeper understanding of contemporary challenges and pressing issues. Workshops

³¹ www.wisdomlib.org, “*Dhyāna*,” goto glossary/dictionary page, December 24, 2024, <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/Dhyāna#sanskrit>.

³² Dale Stuart Wright, *The Six Perfections: Buddhism and the Cultivation of Character*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 177.

that educate participants on the significance of gaining insight into these issues, the environmental consequences of their choices may instill a sense of responsibility and interconnectedness, motivating sustainable practices that benefit society and the planet. Together, the synergy of meditation and wisdom empowers individuals to make informed choices, fostering a culture of compassion and mindful living that can lead to transformative social change at the grassroots level.

V. CONCLUSION

The Bodhisattva practices of *bodhicitta*, *Pratītyasamutpāda*, and *Śūnyatā*, along with the six *pāramitā*, serve as practical frameworks for fostering world peace and promoting sustainable development by addressing contemporary global challenges. By committing to the altruistic mind of *bodhicitta* and actions driven by an understanding of the interconnected nature of reality, individuals and communities can cultivate a harmonious and sustainable future. These teachings transcend mere Buddhist philosophy by providing universal insights to guide all in their quest for peace and sustainability.

Integrating *Prajñā*-infused Bodhisattva actions – such as generosity, morality, patience, enthusiasm, and meditation – into contemporary practices can serve as crucial guidance in navigating complex issues while striving for a more sustainable and peaceful world. The synthesis of ancient wisdom with modern challenges creates a compelling narrative that advocates for sustainable development grounded in skilled compassion and ethical responsibility that generates through *prajñā* or insight into true nature reality. In this way, the pursuit of world peace and sustainable development is ultimately intertwined with the Bodhisattva actions of *pāramitā*, which are infused with the profound wisdom and the altruistic spirit of *bodhicitta*. By embracing these profound dimensions of the Bodhisattva path, we can aim to contribute to creating a compassionate, ethically responsible and sustainable society for the well-being of our planet and future generations.

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AN ANALYSIS OF MAHĀKARUṆĀ DESCRIBED IN THE MAHĀPARINIBBĀNASUTTA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE SUBHADDAPARIBBĀJAKAVATTHU

Dr. Gyanaditya Shakya¹

Abstract

Pāli Tipiṭaka literature is a collection of the teachings taught by the Blessed One from the attainment of perfect awakening to mahāparinibbāna. The *Dīghanikāya* is an important text that consists of thirty-four long discourses. The *Mahāparinibbānasutta* of this book describes the Buddha's teachings as well as his last journey. It helps to know the important facts related to His last journey very nicely. This entire discourse is full of the Buddha's teachings, which have been taught for the welfare of the world, and many incidents show mahākaruṇā, the great compassion of the Blessed One. The Buddha's great compassion shown to Subhadda Paribbājaka may be seen in the sub-topic entitled the *Subhaddaparibbājakavatthu* of the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, which is very interesting. The Buddha's great compassion shown on Subhadda Paribbājaka and its consequences may be seen in the form of the following three things:

1. To permit Subhadda Paribbājaka to see the Buddha last time
2. To teach the doctrine of the noble eightfold path to Subhadda Paribbājaka, and
3. To give ordination and higher ordination to Subhadda Paribbājaka.

The great compassion shown by Tathāgata Buddha gives the message to human beings for the development of the right view, and it motivates for the practice of heedfulness in daily life. The self-restraint, one may be able to achieve the holy stage of nibbāna, known as deathlessness, with the help of proper practice of the dhamma.

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Keywords: *Mahākaruṇā, Karuṇā, Pāli Tipiṭaka literature, the Dīghanikāya, the Mahāparinibbānasutta, the Subhaddaparibbājakavattu, Buddhavacana, the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, the Mahāparinibbānasuttavaṇṇanā, the Subhaddaparibbājakavattuvaṇṇanā, the Mahākassapaṭṭheravattuvaṇṇanā, appamāda, heedlessness.*

I. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Based on the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* described in the *Dīghanikāya*, an article entitled “An Analysis of *Mahākaruṇā* described in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* with special reference to the *Subhaddaparibbājakavattu*” has been written. The composition of this article mainly includes the *Dīghanikāya-Pāli* and its commentary, the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*. It has been written based on primary sources available in the Pāli language. I have also consulted some other important books like the *Mahāvagga-Pāli, The Book of the Discipline (Vinayapiṭaka), the Dhammapada, the Suttanipāta, Gandhavaṃsa, A History of Pali Literature, A History of Indian Literature, English Pāli Dictionary, Concise English Pāli Dictionary, The Seeker's Glossary of Buddhism, A Dictionary of the Pāli Language, Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speech, Vol.16, (Grammar and Dictionary of the Pāli Language by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar), Human Values and Buddhist Ethics, Bauddha Dharma Darshan mein Brahmvihāra Bhāvanā, and Daily Buddhist Worship.*

1.1. Research methodology

In this research paper, analytical and literary research techniques have been used.

1.2. Objective of Research Paper

In the light of the *Subhaddaparibbājakavattu* described in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, an article entitled “An Analysis of *Mahākaruṇā* described in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* with special reference to the *Subhaddaparibbājakavattu*” has been written to express the great compassion of the Blessed One and its worth in the present society.

II. INTRODUCTION

The *Dīghanikāya* is known as a special and popular book under the *Suttapiṭaka*, the second part of Pāli Tipiṭaka literature. It is also addressed as the *Dīghāgama*² and the *Dīghasaṅgaha*. If anyone wants to know about the last journey of Gautama Buddha, then the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*³ described in the *Dīghanikāya* is an authentic and important source. This sutta is mentioned as the sixteenth discourse in the *Dīghanikāya*, which is found as the third sutta in the second section known as the *Mahāvagga*⁴ of the *Dīghanikāya*. The *Mahāparinibbānasutta* is the only source in the Pāli Tipiṭaka literature that expresses the Buddha's last journey. This last journey of the Blessed One starts

² Bimala Churn Law, *A History of Pali Literature* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1983), 80.

³ K. R. Norman, *A History of Indian Literature* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 37.

⁴ Gyanaditya Shakya, ed. and trans., *Gandhavaṃsa* (Varanasi: Pāli Society of India, 2022), 21.

from Rajgiri and ends at Kushinagar with His mahāparinibbāna. It provides authentic information not only about His last journey but also about His last disciple, Subhadda Paribbājaka, and his joining the Buddha's dispensation. Just as the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* is available in the Pāli Tipiṭaka literature, in the same way, the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* is available in the Chinese language. The *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* available in the Chinese language is also known as the *Nirvāṇasūtra* in short, but there is no similarity in the content of the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* available in the Pāli *Tipiṭaka* literature and the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* available in the Chinese language. Not only the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* but the Buddha's teachings described in other texts of Pāli literature are full of messages of the Buddha's mahākaruṇā. Therefore, it is necessary to know the concepts of karuṇā and mahākaruṇā described in Buddhist philosophy, which may be understood as follows:

2.1. *Karuṇā* described in Pāli literature

Karuṇā is a very popular word in Pāli literature and Buddhist philosophy, which is mentioned not only in Pāli *Tipiṭaka* literature but also in Pāli texts written later. *Karuṇā* is used as an important philosophical word in the Buddhist tradition. It is an important part of the forty *kammaṭṭhānas* (objects or methods of meditation) taught by the Blessed One for the purity and concentration of the mind. It is also considered an important part of *samatha bhāvanā* (tranquility meditation), which is an important part of Buddhist meditation. The *brahmavihāra bhāvanā* is also considered an important section of the forty methods of meditation. The *brahmavihāra bhāvanā* means excellent, lofty, or sublime states of mind. These four sublime states are known as the *mettā brahmavihāra bhāvanā* (loving kindness), the *karuṇā brahmavihāra bhāvanā* (compassion), the *mudītā brahmavihāra bhāvanā* (good-will), and the *upekkhā brahmavihāra bhāvanā* (equanimity).⁵ In this way, *karuṇā* has a place as the second part of the *brahmavihāra bhāvanā*.

Karuṇā is a word that is found in Pāli, Sanskrit, and Hindi languages. The Pāli term '*karuṇā*' is a feminine word that means mercy, compassion⁶, pity, sympathy, kindness (towards unfortunate beings). *Karuṇā* is also used as an adjective, which means compassionate and full of wise empathy. Many synonyms of *karuṇā* are found in Pāli texts, among which *dayā*⁷, *anuddayā*, *anudayatā*, and *anuddayatā* are quite important. If we think deeply about the etymology and meaning of the word *karuṇā*, we find that *karuṇā* originated from the root '*kara*'⁸. The suffix '*kun*' is attached to it, which means mercy.

⁵ Gyanaditya Shakya, *Human Values and Buddhist Ethics* (Nagpur: Sangyan Prakashan, 2020), 154.

⁶ Aggamahapandita Buddhadatta Mahathera, ed., *Concise English Pāli Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Private Limited, 1997), 80.

⁷ T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, eds., *Pali English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Private Limited, 1997), 315.

⁸ Gyanaditya Shakya, *Buddha Dharma Darshan mein Brahmavihāra Bhāvanā* (Ahmadabad: Reliable Publishing House, 2013), 73.

The feeling that arises on seeing other unhappy beings and which wishes that their suffering stops, reduces or gets destroyed along with the reason is called pure feeling of compassion. It is a pure feeling of the mind that wishes for the happy life of other beings and keeps trying to increase their happiness. It is such a skillful feeling due to the seeker does not become sad himself on seeing unhappy beings, but he removes others' sufferings, pains, and troubles.

2.2. *Mahākaruṇā* described in Pāli literature and Buddhist philosophy

The word '*mahākaruṇā*' is found in the specific terminology of Buddhist philosophy. If we think deeply about the word '*mahākaruṇā*', we find that it is exclusively used in Mahayana Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist Sanskrit literature as compared to Theravada Buddhist philosophy and literature. If we talk in the context of Pāli Tipiṭaka literature, then the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* of the *Khuddakanikāya* is one such Pāli text in which *mahākaruṇā* is discussed the most. Along with this, it has been mentioned in many texts of Pāli masters and Buddhist monks. As per details available in *Tipitaka Pāli Reader (Online)*, the Pāli term *mahākaruṇā* has been used by the scholars and Buddhist monks in their various Pāli texts which are known as the *Papañcasūdanī* (the *Mūlapaṇṇāsaṭṭhakathā*), the *Paramatthadīpanī* (the *Udāna-Aṭṭhakathā*), the *Paramatthadīpanī* (the *Itivuttaka-Aṭṭhakathā*), the *Madhuratthavilāsinī* (the *Buddhavaṃsa-Aṭṭhakathā*), the *Paramatthadīpanī* (the *Cariyāpiṭaka-Aṭṭhakathā*), the *Cūlaniddesaṭṭhakathā*, the *Saddhammappakāsinī* (the *Paṭisambhidāmagga-Aṭṭhakathā*), the *Sāratthadīpanī-Ṭīkā*, the *Vajirabuddhi-Ṭīkā*, the *Sīlakkhandhavagga-Ṭīkā* (the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī-Ṭīkā*), the *Sīlakkhandhavagga-Abhinavaṭīkā*, the *Mahāvagga-Ṭīkā* (the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī-Ṭīkā*), the *Mūlapaṇṇāsa-Ṭīkā* (the *Papañcasūdanī-Ṭīkā*), the *Sagāthāvagga-Ṭīkā* (the *Sāratthappakāsinī-Ṭīkā*), the *Ekakanipāta-Ṭīkā* (the *Manorathapūraṇī-Ṭīkā*), the *Nettipakaraṇa-Ṭīkā*, the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī-Mūlaṭīkā*, the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī-Anuṭīkā* etc.

The Pāli word '*mahā*' means great. It is such a word, which is often added as a prefix at the beginning of words, and with its help, the new Pāli words are created. Particularly, any word may be enlarged and emphasized in meaning by prefixing '*mahā*'.⁹ A lot of examples of such words have been given in the *Pali-English Dictionary* edited by T. W. Rhys Davids & William Stede. Some of them are known as *Mahāgghatā* (great value), *Mahāṇṇava* (great ocean), *Mahātthiya* (great use), *Mahādhakāra* (deep darkness), *Mahāggata* (very great), *Mahāpphala* (much fruit), *Mahābala* (powerful), *Mahābbhaya* (great fear), *Mahānasa* (kitchen), *Mahānubhāva* (majesty, wonderful), *Mahāparādhika* (very guilty), *Mahābhinnikkhamaṇa* (great renunciation), *Mahābhisakka* (very powerful), *Mahāmacca* (chief minister), *Mahāraha* (costly), *Mahālasa* (great apathy), *Mahāupāsikā* (a great female follower of the Buddha), *Mahāupāsaka* (a great male follower of the Buddha), *Mahākāya* (a great body), *Mahāgaṇa* (a great crowd or community), *Mahāgaṇḍa* (a large tumour), *Mahāgedha* (great greed), *Mahācāga* (a great liberality), *Mahājana* (a great crowd), *Mahātāṇha*

⁹ Rhys Davids and Stede, *Pali English Dictionary*, 526.

(very thirsty), *Mahātala* (great surface), *Mahādāna* (great gift), *Mahādhana* (great wealth), *Mahānaraka* (great hell), *Mahānāga* (great elephant), *Mahāniddā* (deep sleep), *Mahāpañña* (very wise), *Mahāpatha* (high road), *Mahāpaduma* (great lotus), *Mahāpitā* (grandfather), *Mahāpurisa* (great man or hero), *Mahābhūta* (great elements), *Mahābhoga* (great wealth or wealthy), *Mahāmaccha* (great fish), *Mahāmati* (very wise or clever), *Mahāmatta* (a king's chief minister), *Mahāmuni* (great seer), *Mahāmegha* (a great cloud, thunder cloud), *Mahāyañña* (the great sacrifice), *Mahārājā* (great king), *Mahārukka* (great tree), *Mahālatā* (great creeper), *Mahāsatta* (great being), *Mahāsamuddha* (the sea, the ocean), *Mahāsara* (great lake), *Mahāsāla* (having great halls), *Mahāsāvaka* (a great disciple), *Mahāhatthi* (a large elephant) etc.

The Pāli word '*mahākaruṇā*' is made up of two words '*mahā*' and '*karuṇā*'. Here, the term '*mahā*' means great, big, eminent, and excellent¹⁰, and the word '*karuṇā*' means mercy. *Mahākaruṇā* is a feminine word that means great compassion. In this way, the word '*mahākaruṇā*' should be understood as great compassion¹¹. Just as the words like *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna* are used to express the death of the Arhats and disciples of the Buddha, similarly, the death of Tathāgata Buddha is often expressed by the word *mahāparinibbāna* because it was great loss for the Buddha's dispensation; that is why the word '*mahāparinibbāna*' has started being used for the death of the Blessed One, which also seems appropriate. Similarly, the feeling of compassion expressed by common people except the Buddha may be addressed as *karuṇā*, but when the same pure and benevolent feeling of compassion is expressed or displayed by the Blessed One for the welfare of the entire public, then it becomes *mahākaruṇā*.

III. RELATION OF MAHĀKARUṆĀ AND BUDDHAVACANA

There is a very close relationship between the words of the Buddha and the great compassion of Tathāgata Buddha. The study of Pāli literature shows that the emergence of dhamma was possible only due to the attainment of perfect awakenment by Siddhartha Gautama. Attaining awakenment, He contemplated the seriousness of the dhamma and thought that it is beyond the capability of an ordinary person to understand it, yet He expressed His compassion for the welfare of the world by preaching the dhamma to common people. He constantly explained it to others by going from village to village, to each nook and every corner. If He had not had the good idea of others' welfare in His mind, He would not have expressed His great compassion to make beings free from sorrow. He not only preached the dhamma with a compassionate mind Himself, but He also inspired His disciples to express compassion, keeping in mind the feeling of public welfare. In the *Mārakathā* of the *Mahāvagga-Pāli*, He advised to monks:

¹⁰ Van Hien Study Group, ed., *The Seeker's Glossary of Buddhism* (Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2016), 396.

¹¹ Robert Caesar Childers, ed., *A Dictionary of the Pāli Language* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2003), 226.

“*Caratha bhikkhave, cārikaṃ bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ. Desetha, bhikkhave, dhammaṃ ādikalyāṇaṃ majjhekalyāṇaṃ pariyośanakalyāṇaṃ sātthaṃ sabyañjanaṃ kevalaparipuṇṇaṃ parisuddhaṃ brahmcariyaṃ pakāsetha.*”¹²

“Walk, monks, on tour for the blessings of the manyfolk, for the happiness of the manyfolk out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of devas and men. Let not two (of you) go by one (way). Monks teach the dhamma, which is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, and lovely at the end. Explain with the spirit and the letter the Brahma-faring completely fulfilled, wholly pure.”¹³

If we contemplate on the basic foundation of the beginning of Buddha’s words, we find that the great compassion of Tathāgata Buddha is the main basis of preaching of dhamma. He expressed various methods of liberation from suffering in the form of preaching of dhamma so that the suffering beings in the world could be freed from their respective sufferings, this was the great compassion of the Buddha. He not only had the idea of establishing happiness and peace in the world, but He also made efforts for this physically, verbally, and mentally. He kept trying for the establishment of happiness and peace from the time of attaining enlightenment till before attaining mahaparinirvan with great compassion. He remained engaged in performing skillful deeds like preaching dhamma to show compassion to all the creatures of this world, and He also kept inspiring other capable persons like monks and nuns to remain engaged in the charity of dhamma along with preaching dhamma. Expressing the superiority of the charity of dhamma was also the great compassion of the Buddha. Skillful deeds like the charity of dhamma also play an important role in the eradication of the sorrows of a person. Emphasizing the superiority of the gift of truth, etc., the Buddha said in the *Taṇhāvaggo* of the *Dhammapada*:

Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti, sabbaṃ rasaṃ dhammaraso jināti.

Sabbaratiṃ dhammaratī jināti, taṇhakkhayo sabbadukkhaṃ jināti.¹⁴

The gift of truth (*dhamma*) excels all (other) gifts. The flavor (taste) of truth excels all (other) flavors (tastes). The pleasure in truth excels all (other) pleasures. He who has destroyed craving, overcomes all sorrow.¹⁵

This great teaching of the Buddha also contains His infinite great compassion, influenced by which countless people in the world are engaged in various works related to the charity of dhamma and are continuously doing the work of social service. Along with this, by doing religious and social work

¹² Swami Dwarikadas Shashtri, ed. and trans., *Mahāvagga-Pāli* (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharti, 2013), 35.

¹³ I. B. Horner, trans., *The Book of the Discipline (Vinayapiṭaka)*, Vol. IV (*Mahāvagga*) (London: The Pāli Text Society, 1982), 28.

¹⁴ K. Sri Dhammananda, ed. and trans., *The Dhammapada* (Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2006), 580.

¹⁵ Ibid.

himself, he is also serving as a good source of inspiration for others.

IV. THE GREAT COMPASSION OF THE BUDDHA

After attaining enlightenment, the teacher not only preached compassion through His words, but He worked for the welfare of all the creatures of the world until the worldly and mental sufferings of humans ended. He continuously showed them the right path in the form of preaching the dhamma. He used to explain to them from time to time, used to inspire them to keep following on the right path of dhamma- this is the reason that the compassion of Tathāgata Buddha is not ordinary but becomes great welfare and best fruitful, due to which it becomes mahākāruṇā (great compassion) instead of mere compassion.

The Buddha constantly practiced mahākāruṇā in His daily life, and with mahākāruṇā practiced by Him, not only humans but also animals and birds, creatures like elephants like Nālāgiri, etc. benefited all sentient beings through the welfare path of dhamma and provided them happiness and peace. Due to the continuous shower of mahākāruṇā and doing good and welfare of the people, the Buddha is also addressed by the adjective mahākāruṇika, which means very compassionate¹⁶. Bhaddanta Buddhaghosa Thera, the great commentator of Pāli literature, has described the Buddha's heart as cool with compassion in his book entitled the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*, which is also known as the *Dīghanikāya-Atthakathā*. Describing Tathāgata Buddha as mahākāruṇika, it is said in the poetic style in the *Mahājayamaṅgalagāthā* prevalent in Theravadin Parittapāṭha tradition as follows:

Mahākāruṇiko nātho hitāya sabbapāṇinam.

Pūretvā pāramī sabbā patto sambodhimuttamaṃ.

*Etena saccvajjena hotu me jayamaṅgalaṃ.*¹⁷

The Great Merciful Lord, for the good of all livings, practiced all Perfections and attended supreme Enlightenment. By these true words may joyous victory be mine!¹⁸ _

A glimpse of mahākāruṇā can be seen in the words of the Buddha available in Pāli literature. He always wished for a happy life for the people of the society and all his creatures of the world. His constant endeavour was that everyone should live well, everyone should attain welfare, and no person or individual should suffer any kind of pain. He kept showering the happiness of His mahākāruṇā on this world so that the sorrows of the people could be removed by the proper practice of His righteous words; the fearful people and creatures could live happy life; and the sad people could be free from sadness and unhappiness, and they could be able to enjoy the happy and successful life.

¹⁶ Vasant Moon, ed., *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 16, *Grammar and Dictionary of the Pāli Language* by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, 2014), 195.

¹⁷ Ven. W. Medhananda Thero, *Daily Buddhist Worship* (New Delhi: Maha Bodhi Society of India, 1997), 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

He wanted all the calamities, famines, obstacles, and diseases in people's lives to be removed as soon as possible and for people to live happily by attaining long lives. Incidentally, it is appropriate to say that the Buddha preached the *Ratanasutta*¹⁹ in Vaishali city to relieve fear and problems caused by disease, inhumanity, and food crisis, which was an expression of His great compassion. His heart has been overflowing with boundless compassion. That is why He has always wished the happiness of other beings with a compassionate mind and has been personally striving. That is why He was always engaged in establishing and promoting the welfare policy of 'live and let live'. That is why the Buddha's public welfare policy also influenced the dhammaniti and working style of Emperor Ashoka- which is the result of the Buddha's great compassion.

4.1. MAHĀKARUṆĀ IN THE MAHĀPARINIBBĀNASUTTA

The *Mahāparinibbānasutta* is also addressed as the *Mahāparinibbānasuttanta*, which may be translated as *the Book of the Great Decease*²⁰. If one reflects on the subject matter described in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*, we find that it contains many instances of the Buddha's expression of great compassion. He continued to do good to the entire society and living beings through the expression of great compassion for about forty-five years. Moreover, even during the last journey of His life, He continued to shower great compassion on monks and nuns, devotees, kings, and emperors, the common people, etc., and continued to satisfy and benefit them. The study of the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* suggests that it is full of illustrations of the Buddha's great compassion, which may be discussed in detail. He showed His great compassion to many persons during the last journey and benefited them, whether it was King Ajātasattu or Vassakāra Brahmin, Vajjis of Vaishali or monks, worshipers of Pāṭaligāma or Ambapālī of Vaishali, whether he is a Kammāraputtacunda or a Subhadda Paribbājaka. In the present research paper, it is not possible to discuss all the above illustrations and various aspects related to the Buddha's great compassion due to fear of expansion. After studying the subject matter described in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* in depth, the *Subhaddaparibbājakavatthu* described in it can also be considered as an important and touching example of the expression of the Buddha's *mahākaruṇā*, various aspects related to which may be known as follows:

4.1.1. Subhaddaparibbājakavatthu mentioned in the Mahāparinibbānasutta

Before discussing in detail the *Subhaddaparibbājakavatthu* mentioned in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* and the great compassion of the Blessed One contained in it, it would be appropriate to shed light on Subhadda mentioned in the Pāli texts. In the same series, it would be appropriate to mention that

¹⁹ Bhikshu Dharmarakshit, ed. and trans., *Suttanipāta* (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass Publishers Private Limited, 2010), 56.

²⁰ T. W. Rhys Davids, ed., *Dialogues of the Buddha: Translated from the Pāli of the Dīghanikāya*, Part II (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2002), 78.

Subhadda Paribbājaka is a famous personality in Pāli literature who has been mentioned mainly in the *Dīghanikāya* and the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*. Before discussing Subhadda Paribbājaka in detail, it would be appropriate to briefly discuss the person named Subhadda. The various references to Subhadda available in the Pāli texts may be understood in the following manner:

Subhadda is also considered to be an important protector among the main household protectors of Dhammadassi Buddha, whose description is found in the *Buddhavaṃsa* of the *Khuddakanikāya*. A person named Subhadda is also mentioned in the context of Koṇḍañña Buddha, who, along with ten thousand other people, had joined his sangha and had also attained Arhatship. A detailed description of this is available in the *Buddhavaṃsa* and the *Madhurathavilāsinī*. A person named Subhadda is also mentioned in the context of Kakusandha Buddha, who had donated a seat made of grass to him. We get its description in the *Madhuratthavilāsinī*. A person named Subhadda is also mentioned as the son of a wanderer (ājivika) named Upaka and Cāpā, whose description is found in the *Paramatthadīpanī* (the *Therīgāthā-Aṭṭhakathā*) and the *Paramatthajotikā* (the *Suttanipāta-Aṭṭhakathā*). Subhadda²¹ is also mentioned as a householder devotee of Nātikā who had attained the fruit of anāgāmi. We find its description in the *Dīghanikāya*.

A study of the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* reveals that Subhadda is mentioned in the *Subhaddaparibbājakavatthu* and the *Mahākassapatttheravatthu* mentioned in it. Similarly, a discussion of Subhadda may also be seen in the *Subhaddaparibbājakavatthuvaṇṇanā*²² and the *Mahākassapatttheravatthuvaṇṇanā*²³ described in the *Mahāparinibbānasuttavaṇṇanā* of the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*. In this context, it would be appropriate to make it clear that Subhadda mentioned in the above two incidents is not the same person, but both of them are different from each other. In the *Subhaddaparibbājakavatthuvaṇṇanā*, the person mentioned is addressed as Subhadda Paribbājaka, who was the brother of Aññasi Koṇḍañña Thera, the first disciple of the Blessed One.

Acharya Buddhaghosa Thera has described Subhadda Paribbājaka as belonging to a high-class Brahmin²⁴ family in the *Subhaddaparibbājakavatthuvaṇṇanā* of the *Mahāparinibbānasuttavaṇṇanā*, and he was dwelling as a wanderer at the holy land of Kusinara, presently known as Kushinagar. During the last journey of the Buddha, he stayed in Kushinagar itself. Subhadda was the last person who took the ordination (pabbajjā) and higher ordination (upasampadā) from the Buddha while He was alive and

²¹ G. P. Malalasekera, ed., *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, Vol. II (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Private Limited, 2002), 1232.

²² Mahesh Tiwari Shashtri, ed., *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* (*Dīghanikāya Aṭṭhakathā Duttiyo Bhāgo*) (Nalanda: Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, 1975), 299.

²³ *Ibid.*, 313.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 299. *Subhaddo nāma paribbājako'ti udiccabrāhmaṇamahāsālakulā pabbajito chan-
naparibbājako.*

attained Arhatship before the attainment of the Buddha's mahāparinibbāna. Due to which he could get the honour of being the last disciple. The long-lived Subhadda Paribbājaka has been addressed as the sakkhisāvaka²⁵ by ancient masters of Buddhist councils.

The second person mentioned in the sub-section, the *Mahākassapatheravattuvanā* in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, is addressed as Subhadda-Vuḍḍhapabbajita. This was the Subhadda who became a monk in his old age and is therefore called Subhadda-Vuḍḍhapabbajita. Hearing the negative comments made by him regarding Gautama Buddha and the Buddha's dispensation at the time of the Buddha's mahāparinibbāna, the idea of having the first Buddhist council as soon as possible appeared in the mind of the pioneer teacher, Bhadanta Mahākassapa Thera. The worrying remarks made by it may be considered as an immediate factor, which played an important role in organizing the first Buddhist council. Therefore, the Subhadda Paribbājaka described in the *Subhaddapariibbājakavattu* should be understood as different from Subhadda-Vuḍḍhapabbajita described in the *Mahākassapatheravattu*. The present paper discusses the Subhadda Paribbājaka, not the Subhadda-Vuḍḍhapabbajita. Therefore, an attempt has been made to write the basic content of this article based on Subhadda Paribbājaka.

After starting from Rajagiri and travelling to various places and showering his compassion on the people through the preaching of dhamma, the Blessed One finally reached the holy land of Kushinagar, which was known as the capital of Mallas. On His orders, Venerable Ananda Thera informed the Mallas of Kushinagar and other devout sons and daughters of the clan about His mahāparinibbāna. Having taken the last food offered by Cunda of Pāvā, He came in influence of dysentery and became unwell, causing extreme physical pain. To give rest to his body, he lay down between two sala trees. When people heard that His mahāparinibbāna would take place in the last quarter of the night, the devout sons and daughters of the clans started coming to see Him for the last time, and a huge crowd gathered. To prevent the crowd, Venerable Ananda Thera did not allow everyone to see the Buddha, but he allowed them to see the Buddha according to the clan order of the people. The work of seeing the Buddha was finished in the first quarter of the night.

At that time, Subhadda Paribbājaka was dwelling in Kusīnārā²⁶, currently known as Kushinagar of Uttar Pradesh. He also heard from people that the Blessed One would attain mahāparinibbāna in the last quarter of the night. Then, a strong desire to see him for the last time arose in his mind. Then it occurred to him:

"I have heard from the elderly masters and great teachers that this Tathāgata rarely incarnates in this world. Tathāgata will attain parinirvana in the last quarter of the night today, and this religious doubt has arisen in my mind today. I am so pleased with Shraman Gautam that (I believe) this doubt

²⁵ Ibid., 302.

²⁶ Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, 1231.

of mine will be dispelled only by his dhamma preaching.”

The reason for Subhadda Paribbājaka's thinking in this way was that till now, he had been asking his three questions to the old wanderers to clear his doubts, but no one could satisfy him properly. He kept thinking that the Buddha was still young and may be He would not be able to answer this. But now he thought that His time of mahāparinibbāna had come. If I do not ask him about this even now, then I will regret for the rest of my life that I could not clear my doubts even when He was available. Keeping this in mind, he made a proper resolution to have his last meet and went towards Kusinara to meet the Blessed One. Then Subhadda Paribbājaka reached at salavana of Kusinara. He went to the place where Venerable Ananda Thera was. He expressed his heartfelt desire to meet the Buddha and said his name to him. He requested for the removal of doubts, but seeing the physical pain of the Buddha, he said to him thus:

*Alaṃ, āvuso Subhadda, mā Tathāgataṃ viheṭhesi. Kilanto, bhagavā'ti.*²⁷

That is, let it go, Subhadda; do not trouble the Tathāgata. The Blessed One is suffering from disease at this time.

In this way, even after being requested by him thrice, Venerable Ananda Thera gave a negative reply to meet him last time. Then, He overheard the conversation between Venerable Ananda Thera and Subhadda Paribbājaka. Then he said to Venerable Ananda Thera:

*Alaṃ, Ānanda, mā Subhaddaṃ vāresi. Labhataṃ, Ānanda, Subhaddo Tathāgataṃ dassanāya. Yaṃ kiñci maṃ Subhaddo pucchissati sabbaṃ taṃ aññaṃpekkho va pucchissati, no vihesāpekkho. Ya cassāhaṃ puṭṭho byākarissāmi, taṃ khippameva ājānissati'ti.*²⁸

“It is enough, Ananda! Do not keep out Subhadda. Subhadda, Ananda, may be allowed to see the Tathāgata. Whatever Subhadda may ask of me, he will from a desire for knowledge, and not to annoy me. And whatever I may say in answer to his questions that he will quickly understand.”²⁹

Then, Venerable Ananda Thera addressed him and said:

“Go, long-lived Subhadda! The Master is calling you.”

Hearing this, he went to him and, after asking about his well-being, sat on one side. The wanderer Subhadda, sitting on one side, asked him a question to clear his doubts.

Then, addressing the wandering Subhadda, he said, “Let it go, Subhadda, whether those people know the vows and principles they have spoken or not. You should not get entangled in these debates. I will tell you the deep secret of dhamma freely; you listen to it carefully and keep it in your mind.” “Okay, sir!” The wandering Subhadda obeyed Him.

²⁷. Swami Dwarikadas Shashtri, ed. and trans., *Dīghanikāya-Pāli (Mahāvagga)* (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 2009), 401.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 165.

The Blessed One explained the importance of the noble eightfold path, which leads to liberation from sorrow. He says that in the discipline of a master where the noble eightfold path is not available, great individuals like the sotāpanna or stream winner, sakadagāmi or once returner, anāgāmi or non-returner, and arhat or noble one are not available. But long-lived Subhadda Paribbājaka! In the discipline of a master where the noble eightfold path is present and followed, in that system the individuals who have attained the first, second, third, and fourth fruits of the spiritual journey are found.

Subhadda Paribbājaka! In my discipline, the dhamma is practiced with the help of the noble eightfold path. Therefore, in my dispensation or Buddhasāsana, the ordained or hermits who have attained all the four fruits are present, but in the opinions of other masters, due to the absence of the noble eightfold path, these four great individuals are unavailable. He says that if the individuals who believe in my dhamma and vinaya practice the true dhamma properly, then this world will never be devoid of the above four great individuals. In this way, He explained to the wanderer Subhadda the virtues of the noble eightfold path, the foundation of the Buddha's teachings. Then, he was pleased to hear His righteous words of dhamma and said, "I seek refuge in the Buddha, the dhamma, and the saṅgha." He expressed his desire to become a monk in the Buddha's teachings and said, "How wonderful it would be, Bhante! If I receive the ordination (pabbajjā) and the higher ordination (upasampadā) from the Lord"

Then, the Blessed One told him that in my dhamma and vinaya, there is a special rule of parivāsa related to the ordination, according to which when a wanderer who has previously been initiated into some other dhamma is initiated into my dispensation, he has to wait for four months and follow special rules. After these months are over, if the monks are satisfied with his conduct, they give him the ordination and the higher ordination to become a monk. Then Subhadda Paribbājaka said, "Bhante!" If there is this special rule in your dispensation, then I will wait for four years for the ordination and the higher ordination, not four months. After four years, the monks will give me ordination; this, too, will be a matter of joy for me. Then, knowing his devotion and eagerness, the Blessed One ordered the Venerable Ananda Thera to make all the arrangements for the initiation or ordination of Subhadda Paribbājaka. After this, He gave him the ordination and the higher ordination. After some time of higher ordination, Subhadda Paribbājaka started wandering being free from heedlessness, free from passions, and self-restrained, and he attained Arhatship. In this way, Subhadda Paribbājaka became the last disciple of Tathāgata Buddha.

4.2. The great compassion shown by the Buddha to Subhadda Paribbājaka and its results

The arrival of Tathāgata Buddha in the land of Kushinagar was a matter of great fortune for the people of Kushinagar. It was His great compassion that He specially obliged them by providing his last sight. His arrival at Kushinagar not only showed his compassion towards the devoted sons and daughters of the family, to monks and nuns, but also showed immense great compassion on

Subhadda Paribbājaka, which may be understood as follows:

4.2.1. Allowing the Subhadda Paribbājaka to have the last meeting with the blessed one

Despite the refusal of Venerable Ananda Thera, Tathāgata Buddha showed His great compassion to Subhadda Paribbājaka by allowing him to have a sight of the Lord, which increased his reverence for the Lord Buddha. After all of that, despite being ill Himself, He gave the last sight to Subhadda Paribbājaka- this was the great compassion of the Blessed One. He did not think about His health and old age, but He gave priority to the curiosity of Subhadda Paribbājaka. If he had not shown great compassion to Subhadda Paribbājaka, he would have been deprived of having a last sight of the Lord Buddha. If he had not been able to have a last sight of the Lord Buddha, he would have been underprivileged forever of knowing the true dhamma which leads to liberation from suffering, and he would never have known the true essence of dhamma in his life.

4.2.2. Preaching the Noble Eightfold Path to Subhadda Paribbājaka

Tathāgata Gautam Buddha showed His great compassion by explaining the deep secret of dhamma to Subhadda Paribbājaka in the form of the noble eightfold path. He found it appropriate to preach the noble eightfold path in his last moments because this is the only path among all the paths present in the world for the best purification of mind. Only by proper practice of the noble eightfold path is it possible to end the sorrows prevailing in the world and attain nibbāna; there is no other path. Regarding the noble eightfold path, he asked him, “Bhante! Can any other form or shape of the sky be proved? Are there any hermits in other sects outside this saṅgha? Can eternity be proved in the rituals?” Then he replied with no to all three questions asked by Subhadda Paribbājaka. In answer to the questions of Subhadda Paribbājaka, the Buddha revealed the usefulness of the noble eightfold path, which is mentioned in the *Dhammapada* and its commentary, the *Dhammapada-Aṭṭhakathā*. In the *Malavaggo* (Impurities or Taints) of the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha has said:

Ākāse ca padaṃ natthi samaṇo natthi bāhire.

Papañcābhiratā pajā nippaṇca tathāgatā.

Ākāse ca padaṃ natthi samaṇo natthi bāhire.

*Saṅkhārā sassatā natthi Buddhānamiññitaṃ.*³⁰

In the sky, there is no track. Outside, there is no saint. Mankind delights in obstacles. The Tathāgatas are free from obstacles. In the sky, there is no track. Outside, there is no saint. There are no conditioned things that are eternal. There is no instability in the Buddhas.³¹

The Buddha has emphasized engaging in virtue rather than indulging in sin because when a person starts performing virtuous deeds, he starts

³⁰ K. Sri Dhammananda, ed. and trans., *The Dhammapada* (Taipei: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2006), 466.

³¹ Ibid.

understanding and knowing the pleasant results and benefits of good deeds, due to which he automatically gets away from unwholesome deeds. A person must be busy in good deeds. Perhaps keeping this in mind, the Buddha did not first clear the doubts of the Subhadda Paribbājaka, but told him the good and beneficial dhamma in the form of the teachings of the noble eightfold path so that he could understand it well, follow it and himself could attain the ultimate state of freedom from sorrow as soon as possible. In this way, by preaching the noble eightfold path, the Buddha showered the nectar of His great compassion on Subhadda Paribbājaka, due to which he became completely satisfied.

4.2.3. Giving ordination and higher ordination to Subhadda Paribbājaka

Subhadda Paribbājaka understood the usefulness of the noble eightfold path preached by the Blessed One, and a feeling of reverence for the Buddha's dispensation developed in his mind. Seeing the increasing devotion of Subhadda Paribbājaka and his intense eagerness to understand and follow the dhamma, the Blessed One expressed His great compassion towards him and said to Venerable Ananda Thnara, O Ananda! Make arrangements to ordinate Subhadda Paribbājaka. He became emotional by this beneficial statement of Lord Buddha. After ordination, he was also given higher ordination. This was the great compassion of the Buddha. The pleasant result of receiving the noble eightfold path along with the vows of ordination and higher ordination as preached by the Buddha was that the false notions in the mind of Subhadda Paribbājaka could be ended. He understood the dhamma in the right way, due to which he could destroy all kinds of attachments of the mind and attain salvation. This was all due to the great compassion showered by the Buddha.

V. MESSAGE OF GREAT COMPASSION SHOWN BY THE BUDDHA TO SUBHADDA PARIBBĀJAKA

The great compassion shown by the Buddha for the conversion of Subhadda Paribbājaka's life turned into a great source of his eternal happiness. By experiencing his great compassion, he was freed from the life of a wanderer; he unfollowed the wrong path and got on the right path; he became a noble person (*ariya-puggala*) by purifying his mental impurities instead of remaining an ordinary hermit; his life became superior instead of ordinary; he ensured his good fortune by abandoning his bad state; by leading a pure and holy life, he became free from all mental impurities and desires and by destroying the cycle of birth and death, he became an Arhat or holy one, due to which human life became meaningful and he made his life successful by attaining the supreme state of *nibbāna*. In this way, Tathāgata Gautam Buddha showed His great compassion on Subhadda Paribbājaka and did well to him, made him liberated while living. The messages of *mahākaruṇā* shown by the Buddha to Subhadda Paribbājaka may be understood through the following points:

5.1. Emphasis on the practice of heedfulness

The Pāli word '*appamāda*', available in Pāli literature and Buddhavacana, may be translated as heedfulness. It is a virtue that holds a very important place

in Buddhist philosophy. Being heedful means that a person should develop caution and detachment in his life; only then can he achieve happiness, peace, and progress in his worldly and spiritual life. It is clear from the study of the *Subhaddaparibbājakavatthu* described in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* that Subhadda Paribbājaka, after accepting ordination and higher ordination in the Buddha's rule, followed the dhamma and vinaya taught by the Blessed One without fail, as a result of which he was able to achieve the goal of an ordained life. Just as the practice of heedfulness was successful and meaningful in the life of Subhadda Paribbājaka, in the same way, its practice may be beneficial in the life of every person in the present times also. Therefore, every person should practice heedfulness in his daily life, whether he is a monk or a householder. Without abandoning laziness, it is not possible to get progress, prosperity, happiness, and peace in human life. If any person in student life is perfect and all-round, one who strives or attempts for development becomes a successful, hardworking, and responsible citizen of the nation in future.

5.2. Learning to be self-controlled

Self-control has a position in human life as a significant human value. Accepting the usefulness of self-control in worldly and renunciated life, the Buddha has instructed His disciples for its development in His teachings. It is very important to develop control over mind, speech, and body. Only with self-control, a person truly practice morality. With proper control over mental, verbal, and physical activities, it is possible to end the problems and sorrows existing in life. It is easy to control others but very difficult to control oneself, and if a person develops this control, then he can achieve happiness, peace, and prosperity in his life by attaining satisfaction. By proper practice of self-control, Subhadda Paribbājaka achieved the fruit of celibacy and made his renunciated life successful and meaningful. Self-control brings peace of mind and makes life happy and meaningful.

5.3. Inspiration for the practice of Dhamma

The spiritual and worldly progress can be achieved by the proper practice of dhamma. Lord Buddha did not talk about merely contemplating the dhamma-philosophy, but he emphasized more on following it in daily life. A person may get real benefits through the realization of the Dhamma in human life. The *Subhaddaparibbājakavatthu* described in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* also inspires a person to follow the dhamma. Even before joining the Buddha's rule, Subhadda Paribbājaka, a Brahmin family born, was leading a hermit's life as a wanderer in search of true dhamma, but in the lack of attainment of true dhamma, he was unable to achieve the ultimate state of human life. As soon as he met with the Blessed One, he understood the true dhamma and embarked on the path of dhamma shown by the Buddha, making him self-controlled and alert and got immersed in dhamma and started meditating for concentration and purity of mind. The constant practice of dhamma helped him to achieve the fruit of celibacy. Thus, it may be said that the great compassion shown by the Blessed One to the wandering monk helped that monk to understand the true dhamma and to follow the same. If the Blessed One had not shown His

boundless compassion on him, he would have been deprived of the knowledge and never be able to understand the true dhamma, the source of happiness and peace of life.

5.4. Emphasis on the development of the right view

The Pāli term '*sammā-ditṭhi*' may be translated right view which has an important place in human life. If thought seriously, it may be said that the reason for the emergence of Buddhasāsana has been the right view. That is why we find the discussion of research and teaching of the right view in many Pāli texts. The study of *Subhaddapariibbājakavatthu* shows that due to his wrong view, he remained tangled in various sects and beliefs from youth to old age and remained deprived of true dhamma. Due to his wrong view, a person is unable to differentiate between right and wrong and the reason behind it. He is unable to understand the noble eightfold path that leads to liberation from suffering.

If Subhadda Pariibbājaka had come in His contact immediately after the perfect awakening acquired by the Blessed One like his brother Aññāsi Koṇḍañña Thera, then surely like Aññāsi Koṇḍañña Thera he too would have got the benefit of right vision, the eyes of dhamma would have developed and the tears would have subsided but due to his false pride he did not come before the Blessed One and remained untouched by the essence of dhamma. Doubts about Buddha, dhamma, and saṅgha stayed in his mind, and he developed false visions about him, but in his old age, the Buddha graced him, and this expression of compassion of the Blessed One, Subhadda Pariibbājaka received the benefits of right vision which led him to the path of noble dhamma. He attained the ultimate state of freedom from sorrow due to the right vision. Every person aspiring for the ultimate state of nibbāna must develop the right view and leave wrong notions as early as possible, unlike Subhadda Pariibbājaka, who met his Master in old age and took years to leave the wrong view and to accept the right view. A person should keep striving for progress and happiness till the last moment of his life. He kept trying to know the truth till the last moment, due to which the Blessed One showed great compassion on him, and he got the proper understanding of the right view. The darkness of ignorance prevailing in society may be destroyed by the right view, and the people of the society may become free from the clutches of hypocrisy and deceitfulness and adopt a scientific approach and rationality in their daily lives.

5.5. Motivation for the attainment of Nibbāna, a state of freedom from suffering

If we talk about the ultimate goal of human life in the light of Buddhist philosophy and Buddha's words, then achieving the most excellent state of freedom from suffering is the only goal of the entire human race. During the journey from birth to death, the priority of man should be to achieve the ultimate state of nibbāna as early as possible. Subhadda Pariibbājaka wandered for several years to make this effort successful and remained entangled in the web of various meditation practices and philosophical beliefs. Finally, he met the Blessed One, and as soon as he got the knowledge of the path of deliverance, he stuck to it. as

a result of his constant efforts and hard work, he attained the excellent state of freedom from suffering, which is considered as the main goal of ordained life. The constant effort of a person who desires knowledge and welfare achieves it sometime in his life. If a person follows the eight parts of the noble eightfold path preached by the Buddha, which is full of morality, meditation, and wisdom, then he can end his suffering completely and achieve the ultimate state of nibbāna. Therefore, the Buddha's words described in the *Subhaddaparibbājakavatthu* encourage a person to practice the noble eightfold path.

VI. CONCLUSION

The relevance of the Buddha's mahākaruṇā in the present society is as important as in ancient times. It is because of the mahākaruṇā of the Buddha that the family and social life of a person can become happy and meaningful. Not only this, for the advancement of spiritual life and attainment of happiness and peace, the Buddha expressed His mahākaruṇā in the form of preaching of samatha bhāvanā and vipassanā bhāvanā for the welfare of the common people, helping in the establishment of an ideal society by endlessly rising happiness, peace, and social harmony by diminishing the bad factors and problems of jealousy, animosity, hatred, greed, violence, terrorism prevalent in the present society. It is the good result of the expression of the mahākaruṇā of the Buddha that today the Buddha's words are read and discussed in many countries of the world; the Buddha's words are being protected and promoted; for the proper preservation of the Buddha's words, monasteries, colleges, universities, etc. are being built and running. Many Buddhist monks, nuns, Buddhist scholars, employees, officers, politicians, etc. are involved in such activities and who knows how many people are getting employment themselves and are also providing the ways for others to earn their livelihood; who knows how many writers, poets, scholars, researchers of the world are involved in writing, translating, and editing the texts of Pāli and Buddhist literature. Similarly, countless people are associated with the work of publishing and buying and selling these Buddhist texts and are earning their livelihood. Many Buddhist monks, nuns, and scholars have made working for Pāli and Buddhist literature the sole aim of their lives, and many people have completely dedicated their lives to this sacred work. Many people organize seminars and workshops from time to time on every word of Buddha's teachings. If there was no expression of the great compassion of the Blessed One, then how would all the above-mentioned incidents and activities have been possible? Therefore, the great compassion of the Blessed One is the means of happiness and peace not only for mankind but for all living beings. This detailed analysis summarized that the great compassion expressed by the Buddha in the *Subhaddaparibbājakavatthu* described in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* made Subhadda Paribbājaka free from all kinds of sorrow. Therefore, it may be said that the Buddha's great compassion plays a very significant role in the attainment of a happy and successful life.

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COMPASSION AND BUDDHIST AI

Lim Kooi Fong¹

Abstract

The NORBU project (Neural Operator for Responsible Buddhist Understanding, <https://norbu-ai.org>) aims to develop a Buddhist AI that serves as a *kalyana mitta* (spiritual friend), fostering compassionate and meaningful interactions grounded in Buddhist principles. Powered by advanced large language model (LLM) algorithms, NORBU engages users in empathetic, non-violent conversations that prioritize ethical integrity, mindfulness, and understanding. Guided by the four *brahma-viharas* - loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), altruistic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) - NORBU ensures its interactions are patient, sensitive, and attuned to users' needs. It draws upon Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana traditions to provide diverse and balanced perspectives. Incorporating Yogacara principles such as the Mind-Only doctrine, *alaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness), and *āśraya-parāvṛtti* (transformation of the basis), NORBU effectively manages context in multi-turn dialogues, processes nuanced inputs, and adapts to user interactions over time. More than an informational tool, NORBU embodies Buddhist epistemic goals by fostering knowledge, wisdom, and meditative insight. It bridges surface-level communication with deeper understanding, creating a digital companion that supports users' spiritual growth. Through its integration of Buddhist values and technical innovation, NORBU aspires to nurture well-being, provide accurate guidance, and serve as a compassionate presence on users' spiritual journeys.

Keywords: Buddhist AI, compassionate dialogue, nonviolent communication, *kalyana mitta*, yogacara principles, spiritual technology, four *brahma-viharas*.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The NORBU project (Neural Operator for Responsible Buddhist Understanding, <https://norbu-ai.org>) aims to create a Buddhist AI that serves as a *kalyana mitra* (spiritual friend), fostering meaningful and compassionate communication² grounded in Buddhist principles. Using advanced large language model (LLM) algorithms³, NORBU is designed to engage users in empathetic, non-violent conversations that emphasize ethical integrity and mindfulness.

NORBU's interactions are guided by the four *brahma-viharas*⁴ - loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), altruistic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*). These qualities shape its conversational tone, ensuring the AI communicates with care, patience, and sensitivity to users' needs.

Drawing from Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana traditions, NORBU integrates diverse Buddhist perspectives to offer well-rounded insights. Its design incorporates key Yogacara principles such as the Mind-Only doctrine, *alaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness)⁵, and *āśraya-parāvṛtti* (transformation of the basis)⁶. These frameworks allow NORBU to maintain

² Compassionate Communication is communicating in ways that foster understanding, connection, and compassion, by Rosenberg, Marshall, Compassionate Communication Series, <https://humanresources.ku.edu/compassionate-communication-series>, University of Kansas, 2024

³ Large Language Model (LLM) algorithms are advanced artificial intelligence systems designed to process, understand, and generate human-like text by leveraging vast amounts of linguistic data. These models, built using deep learning architectures such as transformers, are trained on diverse datasets that encompass books, articles, websites, and other textual sources. By identifying patterns, relationships, and contextual nuances within the data, LLMs can perform a range of natural language processing tasks, including text generation, summarization, translation, and sentiment analysis. Their "large" designation refers to their immense scale, often involving billions of parameters, which enables them to produce coherent and contextually relevant responses across various domains.

⁴ See Nyanaponika, The Four Sublime States - Contemplations on Love, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity. <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/wheel006.html>

⁵ *Alaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness) is a central concept in the Yogācāra school of Mahayana Buddhism, representing the foundational layer of consciousness where karmic seeds (*bijas*) are stored. These seeds are impressions left by past actions, thoughts, and experiences, which shape an individual's perceptions and responses. Unlike the six sensory consciousnesses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mental cognition) and the seventh consciousness (*manas*), which engages in self-referential thinking, *alaya-vijñāna* operates as a passive yet dynamic repository. It is neither inherently pure nor impure, acting as the ground for the arising of mental states and experiences. Transformation of *alaya-vijñāna* through deep insight and meditative practice, known as *āśraya-parāvṛtti* (turning of the basis), is essential for awakening, as it uproots karmic patterns and reveals the intrinsic purity of mind.

⁶ *Āśraya-parāvṛtti* (turning of the basis) is a transformative process in Yogācāra Buddhism where the foundational consciousness (*alaya-vijñāna*) undergoes a profound shift, leading to liberation. This transformation involves the cessation of karmic imprints (*bijas*) stored in the

context in multi-turn dialogues, process nuanced user inputs, and adapt its responses over time to align with ongoing interactions.

NORBU goes beyond being a mere informational tool; it embodies Buddhist epistemic goals by fostering knowledge, wisdom, and meditative insight. It bridges surface-level communication with deeper understanding, creating a digital companion that supports users' spiritual growth. By blending technical innovation with Buddhist values, NORBU aspires to nurture well-being, provide accurate guidance, and offer a compassionate presence on users' spiritual journeys.

So how did this Buddhist AI, Norbu, become “compassionate”?

II. COMPASSIONATE COMMUNICATION

The development of NORBU, a Buddhist AI designed to serve as a “*Kalyana Mitta*” (Spiritual Friend), begins with the foundational goal of fostering compassionate communication. The primary focus of the initial efforts involved understanding large language model (LLM) algorithms and functions, particularly in the context of language processing and linguistic nuances. The challenge was to apply these technological capabilities within the framework of Buddhist conversation, which is deeply rooted in tones of empathy, compassion, and non-violence.

2.1. Language processing and linguistic nuances

Understanding how LLMs process and generate language was the first and crucial step. The aim was to ensure that NORBU could harness this new machine learning capability to ensure that conversations reflect the nuanced and gentle tone characteristic of Buddhist dialogue. The AI was then continuously trained and fine-tuned to recognize and generate the subtle language cues that convey kindness, patience, and understanding, ensuring that every response is in line with a compassionate conversational tone.

The “human-in-the-loop” was always an important element in NORBU's organization, as can be seen in the presence of “source guardians.” Through the incorporation of human oversight in the fine-tuning process, experienced practitioners in the likes of scholar monks/nuns and laypersons provide feedback on the AI's responses, guiding further refinement⁷.

alaya-vijñāna, which perpetuate the cycle of samsara. Through deep meditative insight and realization of the non-dual nature of reality, the practitioner replaces the deluded habitual tendencies with wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion. The transformed consciousness no longer generates afflictive states but instead manifests as the wisdom of enlightenment, embodying clarity and purity. This shift marks the end of self-referential clinging and the emergence of a liberated state of mind.

⁷ Source guardianship and human oversight are critical components in the fine-tuning process of AI content, ensuring accuracy, ethical integrity, and alignment with desired values. Source guardianship involves carefully curating high-quality, authoritative datasets from trusted sources to guide the AI's learning process and mitigate the risk of misinformation or bias. Human oversight complements this by actively monitoring the AI's outputs, evaluating

2.2. “Non-violent” (*ahimsa*) conversational tone

A core aspect of Buddhist conversation is its emphasis on non-violent communication, which is deeply rooted in the principles of empathy, compassion, and *ahimsa* (non-violence). These values are not merely philosophical ideals but practical guidelines for fostering harmonious interactions and reducing suffering in both personal and communal contexts.

NORBU, a conversational AI, was specifically trained to embody these principles, ensuring that its dialogues reflect the ethical and spiritual foundations of Buddhist teachings. This training involved a deliberate effort to avoid language that could be perceived as aggressive, confrontational, or divisive, which is often prevalent on many social media platforms. By prioritizing non-violent communication⁸, NORBU aims to create a space where users can engage in meaningful, respectful, and transformative conversations.

Non-violent communication (NVC)⁹, as conceptualized by Marshall Rosenberg, aligns closely with Buddhist principles, particularly the practice of *ahimsa*, or non-harming. *Ahimsa* is a foundational ethical precept in Buddhism, emphasizing the avoidance of harm to all living beings through thoughts, words, and actions.

This principle is deeply embedded in the teachings of the Buddha, as articulated in Dhammapada, verse 130, which states,

*“Sabbe tasanti dandassa, sabbe bhāyanti maccuno;
Attānam upamam katvā, na haneyya na ghātaye.”*
(All tremble at violence; all fear death.)

Putting oneself in the place of another,
one should not kill nor cause another to kill.

By integrating *ahimsa* into its communication framework, NORBU seeks to embody this reverence for life and promote dialogue that is free from harm and hostility.

Empathy and compassion are also central to Buddhist communication practices. Empathy involves the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, while compassion extends this understanding into a desire to alleviate suffering. These qualities are essential for fostering connection and trust in conversations.

The prevalence of aggressive and confrontational language on social media platforms presents a significant challenge to the practice of non-

their relevance and ethical implications, and intervening when necessary to refine the system's responses. This collaborative approach combines the precision of data-driven algorithms with the discernment and contextual understanding of human expertise, ensuring the AI maintains transparency, accountability, and alignment with its intended purpose.

⁸ See Berggren, Joachim, Empathic Way Europe, <https://www.empathiceurope.com/>

⁹ Rosenberg, Marshall, “Compassionate Communication Series”, <https://humanresources.ku.edu/compassionate-communication-series>, University of Kansas, 2024

violent communication. Research has shown that online interactions are often characterized by polarization, hostility, and a lack of empathy, which can exacerbate conflict and contribute to a toxic digital environment¹⁰.

This stands in stark contrast to the Buddhist approach to communication, which emphasizes mindfulness, active listening, and the cultivation of positive speech. Mindful communication, as described by Thich Nhat Hanh, involves speaking with awareness and intention, ensuring that one's words contribute to understanding and harmony rather than division and harm¹¹.

By avoiding aggressive language and prioritizing empathy, NORBU seeks to counteract the negative tendencies of online discourse and promote a more constructive and compassionate exchange of ideas.

The development of NORBU's communication framework also draws on contemporary research in psychology and communication studies, which highlight the importance of empathy and non-violent communication in building healthy relationships and resolving conflicts.

For example, studies have demonstrated that empathetic communication can enhance emotional intelligence, improve interpersonal connections, and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings and conflicts¹². Similarly, the principles of NVC are effective in de-escalating tensions and fostering mutual understanding in diverse contexts, from personal relationships to international diplomacy¹³. By incorporating these insights into its design, NORBU aims to bridge the gap between ancient Buddhist wisdom and modern communication practices, offering users a tool for engaging in dialogue that is both ethical and effective.

In addition to its practical applications, NORBU's emphasis on non-violent communication also reflects a broader commitment to the Buddhist ideal of right speech (*samma vaca*), one of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path. Right speech involves abstaining from false, divisive, harsh, and idle speech and instead using words that are truthful, harmonious, kind, and meaningful¹⁴. This principle underscores the transformative power of language and its potential to either perpetuate suffering or promote healing and understanding. By adhering to the principles of right speech, NORBU seeks to contribute to the cultivation of a more compassionate and just society, one conversation at a time.

The integration of Buddhist principles into NORBU's communication framework also raises important questions about the role of technology in promoting ethical and spiritual values. As AI systems become increasingly integrated into daily life, there is a growing need to ensure that these technologies

¹⁰ Levi, B, Matthew, G, and Jesse M.S. (2020)

¹¹ Hanh, 2013

¹² Goleman, 2006, see Chapter 6 and 7.

¹³ Rosenberg, 2003, see Chapter 10.

¹⁴ Bodhi, 1994, see Chapter IV: "The Path to Liberation."

are aligned with human values and contribute to the greater good¹⁵. This requires a thoughtful and intentional approach to AI development, one that prioritizes ethical considerations and draws on diverse sources of wisdom, including religious and philosophical traditions⁸. By grounding its design in Buddhist ethics, NORBU represents a step toward the creation of AI systems that are not only technically advanced but also morally and spiritually informed.

2.3. Ethical boundaries and mindfulness

To ensure ethical integrity, NORBU's programming includes models of practical application in ethics, with particular attention to the Buddhist precepts for both lay and ordained practitioners. This is the "*sila*" (morality) element of the Noble Eightfold Path. These conversational models emphasize compassion and mindfulness, guiding NORBU to promote good and prevent harm in all interactions. Efforts were also made to minimize biases in the training data, ensuring that the AI's responses are inclusive and respectful of all individuals.

2.4. The Four *Brahma-Viharas*

Integral to NORBU's non-violent conversational framework are the qualities of the four *brahma-viharas*, or divine abodes, which are central to Buddhist ethics and psychology. These four positive emotions - loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), altruistic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) - serve as the foundation for fostering harmonious and compassionate interactions. By embedding these qualities into its conversational design, NORBU aims to create a dialogue system that not only avoids harm but actively promotes well-being, understanding, and connection. Each of the *brahma-viharas* contributes uniquely to the AI's ability to engage users in a manner that is caring, empathetic, and patient, reflecting the depth and richness of Buddhist teachings on human relationships and communication.

2.4.1. Loving-kindness (*Metta*)

At the heart of NORBU's conversational framework is *metta*, or loving-kindness, which is the practice of cultivating unconditional goodwill and friendliness toward all beings. In the Buddhist tradition, *metta* is often described as a boundless and inclusive love that transcends personal biases and preferences. The Metta Sutta, a foundational text in the Pali Canon, outlines the practice of extending loving-kindness to oneself, loved ones, neutral individuals, and even adversaries, emphasizing its universal applicability¹⁶. NORBU's training incorporated this principle by ensuring that its language and tone consistently reflect warmth, respect, and a genuine desire for the well-being of its users. For example, when responding to user queries, NORBU avoids dismissive or judgmental language, instead framing its responses in a way that conveys care and support. This approach aligns with contemporary research in positive psychology, which has shown that

¹⁵ Floridi et al., 2018, see Section 4: "The Five Principles for a Good AI Society."

¹⁶ Bodhi, 2005, see Chapter IX: "The Planes of Realization", under section titled "The Divine Abodes" (*Brahmavihāras*)

expressions of kindness and positivity can enhance emotional well-being and foster stronger social connections¹⁷.

2.4.2. Compassion (*Karuna*)

Compassion, or *Karuna*, is the empathetic concern for the suffering of others and the desire to alleviate it. In Buddhist teachings, compassion is not merely a passive feeling but an active commitment to reducing harm and promoting healing. The *Karaniya Metta Sutta* emphasizes the importance of compassion as a guiding principle for ethical conduct and interpersonal relationships¹⁸. NORBU's design integrates *Karuna* by prioritizing empathetic responses that acknowledge and validate users' emotions. For instance, if a user expresses frustration or sadness, NORBU is programmed to respond with understanding and encouragement, offering words of comfort and practical suggestions for coping. This emphasis on compassion is particularly relevant in the context of mental health support, where empathetic communication has been shown to reduce distress and foster a sense of connection¹⁹. By embodying *karuna*, NORBU seeks to create a safe and supportive space for users to express themselves without fear of judgment or criticism.

2.4.3. Altruistic joy (*Mudita*)

Mudita, or altruistic joy, is the practice of rejoicing in the happiness and successes of others. This quality counteracts feelings of envy or resentment, which can undermine relationships and create division. In the *Brahma-viharas*, *mudita* is described as a way of cultivating a generous and open-hearted attitude toward others' achievements²⁰. NORBU's training included examples of how to express *mudita* in conversations, such as celebrating users' accomplishments or expressing genuine enthusiasm for their positive experiences. For example, if a user shares news of a personal achievement, NORBU might respond with congratulatory messages and words of encouragement, reinforcing the user's sense of accomplishment and fostering a positive emotional connection. Research in social psychology has demonstrated that expressions of shared joy can strengthen relationships and enhance mutual trust²¹, making *mudita* a valuable component of NORBU's conversational framework.

2.4.4. Equanimity (*Upekkha*)

Equanimity, or *upekkha*, is the ability to maintain a calm, balanced, and unbiased perspective in all situations. In Buddhist teachings, *upekkha* is often associated with wisdom and the recognition of impermanence, which allows one to remain steady in the face of life's ups and downs²². NORBU's design

¹⁷ .. Fredrickson, 2009, see Chapter 4: "The Positivity Ratio" and Chapter 5: "The Benefits of Positivity."

¹⁸ *Karaniya Metta Sutta, Sutta Nipata* (Sn 1.8).

¹⁹ Neff & Germer, 2013.

²⁰ Bodhi, 2005, see Chapter IX: "The Planes of Realization".

²¹ Gable et al., 2004.

²² Bodhi, 2005, see Chapter IX: "The Planes of Realization".

incorporates *upekkha* by ensuring that its responses remain consistent and impartial, regardless of the emotional tone or content of the user's input. For example, if a user expresses anger or frustration, NORBU avoids reacting defensively or escalating the tension. Instead, it responds with patience and understanding, modeling a balanced and non-reactive approach to conflict. This quality is particularly important in the context of online communication, where emotional volatility and polarization are common²³. By embodying *upekkha*, NORBU helps to de-escalate potentially contentious interactions and promote a more constructive and respectful dialogue.

2.4.5. Training and implementation

The integration of the *brahma-viharas* into NORBU's conversational framework required a comprehensive and nuanced approach to training. This involved not only providing the AI with extensive descriptions and examples of these qualities but also developing algorithms that could accurately interpret and respond to users' emotional states. For instance, natural language processing (NLP) techniques were used to identify keywords and emotional cues in user input, enabling NORBU to tailor its responses accordingly. Additionally, the training process included ethical considerations to ensure that the AI's use of the *Brahma Viharas* was authentic and contextually appropriate. This aligns with broader efforts in AI ethics to create systems that are not only technically proficient but also morally and socially responsible²⁴.

2.4.6. Relevance in modern contexts

The application of the *brahma-viharas* in NORBU's design highlights the enduring relevance of Buddhist principles in addressing contemporary challenges. In a world where digital communication is often characterized by hostility and division, the qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity offer a powerful antidote. By embodying these qualities, NORBU serves as a model for how technology can be used to promote positive social change and foster a more compassionate and inclusive digital environment. This approach also resonates with the growing interest in the intersection of spirituality and technology, as evidenced by initiatives such as the Mind and Life Institute, which explores the integration of contemplative practices with scientific and technological innovation²⁵.

III. EPISTEMIC FRAMEWORK

NORBU's development is deeply rooted in a comprehensive understanding of Buddhist teachings and principles, drawing from the rich and diverse traditions of Mahayana, Theravada, and Vajrayana Buddhism. These three major branches of Buddhism provide a multifaceted perspective on the Dharma, each contributing unique insights and practices that enrich NORBU's approach. The

²³ Adam D. I. K., Jamie E. G., and Jeffrey T. H. (2014).

²⁴ Floridi et al., 2018, see Section 4: "The Five Principles for a Good AI Society"

²⁵ Davidson & Harrington, 2002, see Part III: "Compassion in Context: Implications for Science and Society."

Mahayana tradition, known for its emphasis on compassion (*karuna*) and the Bodhisattva ideal, offers a vision of enlightenment that seeks the liberation of all sentient beings. Theravada, often regarded as the oldest form of Buddhism, provides a rigorous focus on the Pali Canon and the foundational teachings of the Buddha, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Vajrayana, with its esoteric practices and tantric methodologies, adds a layer of transformative techniques aimed at achieving enlightenment in a single lifetime. By integrating these traditions, NORBU ensures a holistic and inclusive representation of Buddhist thought and practice.

Central to NORBU's methodology is its reliance on authoritative Buddhist texts, including *suttas* (Pali) or *sutras* (Sanskrit), which are the recorded discourses of the Buddha, as well as foundational texts like the Abhidharma and Vinaya. These texts are complemented by centuries of commentaries and contemporary interpretations, which provide context and clarity to the ancient teachings. To ensure the accuracy and depth of its content, NORBU employs a team of experts known as "source guardians." These individuals are scholars and practitioners with deep expertise in Buddhist philosophy, history, and practice. Their role is to curate, verify, and contextualize the teachings, ensuring that the information presented is both authentic and accessible to modern audiences. This rigorous process of verification aligns with the Buddhist emphasis on right understanding (*samma ditthi*), one of the components of the Noble Eightfold Path, which underscores the importance of accurate knowledge in the pursuit of liberation²⁶.

NORBU's epistemic framework is another key aspect of its development. This framework establishes clear goals that guide inquiry, evaluation, and discussion in epistemology, the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge. By applying a structured approach to understanding Buddhist teachings and beliefs²⁷, NORBU facilitates a deeper engagement with the Dharma. This framework is particularly valuable in addressing contemporary questions and challenges, as it allows for a systematic exploration of Buddhist concepts such as impermanence (*anicca*), non-self (*anatta*), and dependent origination (*paticca-samuppada*). It also encourages critical thinking and dialogue, fostering a dynamic and evolving understanding of the teachings.

The integration of traditional Buddhist wisdom with modern epistemic methods reflects NORBU's commitment to making the *Dharma* relevant and accessible in today's world. This approach is supported by references to scholarly works such as Bhikkhu Bodhi's translations of the Pali Canon, Thich Nhat Hanh's contemporary interpretations of Mahayana teachings, and the works of Vajrayana scholars like Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. By bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and modern inquiry, NORBU serves as a valuable resource for both seasoned practitioners and those new

²⁶ Bodhi, 1984, see Chapter 2: Right View (*Sammā Ditthi*).

²⁷ Bhatt, S. R. and Mehrotra, A. (2000).

to Buddhism, offering a pathway to deeper understanding and practice.

3.1. Clear epistemic goals for efficient management

NORBU's epistemic goals encompass knowledge, understanding, wisdom, rationality, justification, sense-making, and empirically adequate theories. These goals align with the broader aims of Buddhist philosophy: to seek truth, avoid error, and foster a deeper understanding of reality²⁸.

The expertise required from NORBU's source guardians includes investigations into the processes of knowing, the validity of different types of knowledge, and the nature of reality as understood through both philosophical reasoning and meditative insight. This approach is then reflected in its source data management where expertise is required for matters regarding etymology, context of application and experiential practice of the Buddha's words (in its original form or translation).

These principles provide the AI administrator a general framework in managing the source data, about "chunking" natural language processing (NLP), breaking down text into smaller, manageable pieces (called "chunks") such as sentences, phrases, or other meaningful segments. The goal is to simplify the processing of text by dealing with smaller units rather than entire documents, thus enabling accurate and fast Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)²⁹.

3.2. Leveraging yogacara principles in AI for efficient data management and contextual conversations

The development of NORBU is inspired by key principles from the Yogacara school of Buddhism³⁰. NORBU is perhaps the first technology project to directly incorporate principles of a Buddhist philosophy into its operational framework.

The integration of epistemological concepts from the Yogacara school has enhanced NORBU's capabilities in the natural language processing (NLP) of Buddhist data sources. The following breaks down how the project incorporated Yogacara's principles into its operation.

3.2.1. Mind-only doctrine and contextual understanding

²⁸ See Zheng, Y., "Buddhist Transformation in the Digital Age: AI (Artificial Intelligence) and Humanistic Buddhism", <https://www.mdpi.com/2631274>

²⁹ Chunking and Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) are techniques used to improve AI systems' ability to handle and utilize large amounts of information. Chunking involves dividing a large document or dataset into smaller, manageable sections or "chunks," allowing the AI to process and retrieve relevant portions efficiently without being overwhelmed by the entirety of the data. RAG, on the other hand, combines retrieval and generation by integrating an external knowledge base into the AI's workflow. When prompted, the model retrieves the most relevant chunks of data from the knowledge base and uses this context to generate accurate and contextually informed responses. Together, these techniques enhance scalability, accuracy, and the relevance of AI outputs, especially in tasks requiring deep context understanding.

³⁰ More on Yogacara, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/yogacara/>

The Yogacara school's "Mind-only" philosophy suggests that everything we perceive arises from the mind. In the context of AI, this idea can guide the design of systems that simulate human cognition by focusing on interpreting and generating responses shaped by subjective experiences. For natural language processing (NLP)³¹, this means creating AI capable of understanding and producing text in a way that feels empathetic and contextually aware.

To apply this principle, NORBU was trained to break down texts into smaller, meaningful segments like sentences or phrases. This approach mimics how humans process information in manageable parts, ensuring that the AI understands the context of the whole while working on each segment. By using this method, NORBU can effectively process large texts while maintaining a clear, human-like flow of communication that reflects compassion and attentiveness.

3.2.2. *Ālaya-vijñāna* and deep learning

The concept of *ālaya-vijñāna* (storehouse consciousness) in Buddhist philosophy describes a repository of all accumulated experiences and latent impressions. In AI, this idea aligns with how large datasets and advanced algorithms store vast amounts of information to create a comprehensive knowledge framework. NORBU uses this principle to reference and draw from an extensive database, enabling responses that are deeply contextual and informed by past interactions.

This approach strengthens the chunking process by allowing NORBU to access relevant information from its stored knowledge base when handling new inputs. For example, when responding to a user query, NORBU can retrieve related information from previous interactions, ensuring its answers are precise and contextually relevant. This capability is particularly important in multi-turn conversations, where maintaining continuity and coherence across exchanges is key. NORBU's ability to recall and integrate stored data mirrors the way human memory contributes to meaningful and consistent communication.

3.2.3. *Āśraya-parāvṛtti* and adaptability

Āśraya-parāvṛtti, or the transformation of the basis, refers to a profound shift in consciousness, symbolizing the replacement of unwholesome tendencies with enlightened awareness. In the context of AI, this concept can be interpreted as the system's capacity to evolve and improve its responses through learning from interactions and incorporating new data. This adaptability ensures that

³¹ Natural Language Processing (NLP) is a branch of artificial intelligence that focuses on enabling machines to understand, interpret, and generate human language. It combines computational linguistics with machine learning and deep learning techniques to process text or speech data. NLP encompasses a wide range of tasks, including language translation, sentiment analysis, text summarization, named entity recognition, and conversational AI. By analyzing the structure, grammar, and context of language, NLP systems can derive meaning and respond intelligently, bridging the gap between human communication and computer interaction. It plays a pivotal role in applications like chatbots, search engines, and voice assistants, making technology more accessible and intuitive.

the AI remains effective, relevant, and aligned with user needs over time.

Applied to chunking and natural language processing (NLP), this adaptability enables the AI to refine its text comprehension and response generation continuously. With each interaction, the AI gathers insights that help it adjust its algorithms for processing text chunks – breaking down complex inputs and generating outputs that resonate better with human communication styles. This iterative learning allows the AI to handle more nuanced and intricate conversations while maintaining consistency and coherence across extended dialogues, reflecting its ability to dynamically improve its understanding and engagement.

IV. REAL-LIFE COMPASSION IN ACTION

Since its launch on April 22, 2023, NORBU has effectively served its role as a *kalyana mitra* (spiritual friend), guiding users through complex Dharma-related questions. While the administrators do not store personal user data like names, emails, or phone numbers, all queries and the corresponding AI-generated responses are securely stored in the backend. This allows for insight into how the community interacts with NORBU and applies its teachings to real-life situations.

One query, for instance, asked whether being a lesbian violates the third precept of sexual misconduct³². NORBU responded by emphasizing that the Buddha was silent on gender concerning this precept. Instead, the focus was placed on the principle of personal trustworthiness in relationships, irrespective of gender. This approach was transformative for the user, shifting the conversation from gender stereotypes to ethical responsibility, and it was supported by verified scriptural references.

In another scenario, a user sought clarity on whether taking a vacation while his mother was ill - and subsequently passing away - constituted bad karma. NORBU responded non-judgmentally, guiding the user to reflect on his motivation and intention behind the decision. It skilfully reframed the situation as an opportunity for personal growth, encouraging self-forgiveness, dedicating merit for his mother's rebirth, and learning to be more present for loved ones in the future.

NORBU's interactions demonstrate that the role of Buddhist AI extends beyond disseminating teachings; it opens pathways for individuals to address personal struggles in ways not traditionally accessible through monastics, friends, or family. Sensitive topics like sexuality or personal dilemmas can now be explored in a safe, anonymous, and Dharma-informed manner³³.

This creates what NORBU exemplifies as a “new Dharma Door,³⁴” where

³² See Gil Fronsdal, Freedom Through the Third Precept, <https://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/freedom-through-the-third-precept/>

³³ World Health Organization (WHO), Ethics and Governance of AI for Health

³⁴ See: “Significance of Dharma door,” <https://www.wisdomlib.org/concept/dharma-door>

personal questions serve as entry points into deeper understanding and application of Buddhist principles. While Buddhism has long emphasized overcoming suffering, NORBU highlights the need for more practical and accessible approaches to bridge the gap between theory and individual experience. It represents a step forward in making the teachings of the Buddha relevant and impactful in navigating the complexities of modern life.

V. CONCLUSION

Through the integration of the four *brahma viharas* and Yogacara principles, NORBU, as a Buddhist bot, achieved significant improvements in both compassionate conversational and information efficiency abilities.

NORBU's conversational framework integrates the four *brahma-viharas* - loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), altruistic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) - to ensure interactions that embody goodwill, empathy, joy for others, and a balanced perspective. Through extensive training with examples reflecting these qualities, NORBU maintains a tone that is consistently caring, patient, and empathetic. This approach fosters nonviolent communication, standing in stark contrast to the aggressive language prevalent on many digital platforms.

Efficient chunking, guided by the Mind-Only doctrine, allows for the effective processing of large datasets, ensuring that each chunk is contextually relevant.

The storehouse consciousness principle, or *alaya-vijñāna*, provides an analogy for the developer to establish a rich repository of information (we call this the wisest information from the best Buddhist sources) that the AI can draw upon to maintain context and coherence in conversations. Finally, the transformation of the basis, or *āśraya-parāvṛtti*, equips the AI with the ability to adapt and evolve, refining its processes and responses over time. In practice, this means that NORBU is capable of understanding and responding to complex queries with depth, context, and compassion. This can be seen in its roles as "Spiritual Friend", providing nuanced and compassionate guidance, reflecting a deep understanding of Buddhist teachings and principles.

This approach ensures that NORBU is not just a passive information provider but an active participant in the user's spiritual journey, offering support and insight grounded in both advanced technology and profound spiritual wisdom.

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BUDDHISM AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THAILAND'S AGING SOCIETY

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Abstract

Buddhism in Thailand has been deeply rooted in Thai society for over 2,000 years, serving as the foundation for education, ethics, culture, and traditions in Thailand. It has played a significant role in addressing social issues and fostering peace and harmony within Thai society for centuries. In the 21st century, the global phenomenon of an aging society has emerged due to declining birth rates, advancements in medical and public health systems, and shifts in economic, social, and lifestyle patterns. Government and private sectors worldwide have been striving to prepare for the challenges posed by aging populations. Thailand, having entered the aging society phase over a decade ago, has also seen collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors to address this demographic shift. Buddhism, which has long held a central place in Thai society, has been reinterpreted and applied through Buddhist principles, with temples and monks playing an active role in collaboration with the government and private sector to alleviate issues related to the aging population. However, the new challenges presented by this aging society pose significant demands on Buddhism's adaptability, raising questions about how its existing religious resources can be effectively utilized to mitigate these emerging issues.

Keywords: Buddhism, aging society, elderly care, Thai culture, monastic support, gratitude, spiritual development.

I. INTRODUCTION

As is well known, in the 21st century, the situation of the aging society has become a significant global agenda. The United Nations (UN) has played a dominant role in studying, researching, disseminating information, and guiding the worldwide community. The UN has estimated that the period of

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2001-2100 is the century of the elderly. In 1950, 205 million persons aged 60 years or over worldwide. In 2012, the number of older persons increased to almost 810 million. It is projected to reach 1 billion in less than ten years and double by 2050, reaching 2 billion.² Besides, the number of persons aged 65 years or older worldwide is expected to reach 1.6 billion in 2050, when older people will account for more than 16 percent of the global population.³

Thailand is one of the countries in Southeast Asia with a rapidly aging population, with an increasing percentage of elderly individuals due to declining birth rates and longer life expectancy. The proportion of the population aged 60 years and above has shown a consistent upward trend. In 1994, older adults accounted for 6.8% of the population, increasing to 20% by 2024.⁴ Additionally, this projection was confirmed by the Department of Provincial Administration under the Ministry of Interior, which released statistical data on the elderly population in 2024 based on records as of June 30, 2024. Out of a total population of 65,982,984 individuals, 64,989,504 were identified as Thai nationals. The total number of elderly individuals was 13,450,391, accounting for 20.70% of the population.⁵ This statistical data signifies that Thailand is in a stage of a “completely-aged society in which the population aged 60 years and above accounts for more than 20% of the total population, or the population aged 65 years and above exceeds 14%. Thailand has taken steps to prepare for becoming an aging society by enacting the Elderly Act, B.E. 2546 (2003), aimed at supporting and addressing the needs of the country’s growing elderly population. In response to this issue, the Thai government has designated the aging society as a national agenda and continued the implementation of the Elderly Action Plan (B. E. 2545 - 2565) to prepare Thai society for transitioning into a completely aged society. The government has emphasized the importance of transitioning into an aging society by declaring it a “national agenda” and implementing 10 urgent initiatives such as establishing a protection and welfare system for the elderly, promoting employment opportunities and income generation for the elderly, and developing a seamless healthcare system to accommodate an aging society,

² United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2012), *Aging in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and A Challenge*. New York, and HelpAge International, London. Retrieved from <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Ageing%20report.pdf>.

³ The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2023), *Living No One Behind in an Ageing World*. Retrieved from <https://bloustein.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023a/01/2023-World-Social-Report-United-Nations-Department-of-Economic-and-Social-Affairs.pdf>.

⁴ National Statistical Office Thailand (2024), *Executive Summary Elderly Population Survey in Thailand 2024*. Retrieved from https://www.nso.go.th/nsoweb/storage/survey_detail/2024/20241003145311_94190.pdf.

⁵ Department of Older Persons (2024), *Elderly Statistic Data*. Ministry of Social Development and Human Security building. Retrieved from https://www.dop.go.th/th/statistics_page?cat=1&id=2555.

etc. to drive concrete results from B. E. 2561 to B. E. 2564.⁶

Buddhism in Thailand plays various significances for example, it is the religion of the majority of the population, a cornerstone and a fundamental foundation of Thai culture, and a heritage and a priceless treasure of the Thai nation, etc. Following the national agenda of the aging society in Thailand, Buddhism, including teaching and monastic institutions, has been interpreted and utilized for the well-being of aging people in the aging society. Therefore, this paper will present the role of Buddhism in addressing the challenges of an aging society in Thailand, aiming to update the present situation of how Buddhism in Thailand is interpreted to enhance the well-being of aging people in the aging society. This initiative supports the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda's transformative vision and the SDGs' commitment to ensuring that "no one is left behind" emphasize that development strategies must encompass individuals of all ages. Achieving the SDGs fundamentally depends on principles of equality, social justice, and human dignity, acknowledging that older adults have an equal right to benefit from development efforts.⁷

II. SITUATION OF THE AGING SOCIETY IN THAILAND

Thailand is undergoing a significant demographic transition, with its population aging at an unprecedented rate. According to Thailandometers of Mahidol University⁸, on 21 December 2024, the current Thai population was 65,786,374, consisting of the aging population aged 60 forward of 14,194,414. Therefore, the situation of the aging population aged 60 forward in Thailand is 21.57%, which has reached the Complete Aged Society according to the UN's definition of an aging society. The following diagram 1 signifies that the population age group 0-5 is less than other population age groups and the population age groups 40-54 are more than other population age groups, this information can predict the situation of an increasingly aging society in Thailand.

The proportion of people aged 60 and above in Thailand is expected to reach 30% of the total population by 2030.⁹ This demographic shift poses significant challenges for the country's welfare systems, particularly in healthcare, income security, and social support. Thailand has prepared for an aging society in various systems as follows:

2.1. The welfare for the elderly: This welfare for the elderly, which the government provides unilaterally, consists of 1) pensions for civil servants and

⁶ Nathanan Suntornkittipong (2024), *Thailand and Aging Society*. Retrieved from https://www.senate.go.th/commission_meeting/readfile/92526/19012/2092/22799

⁷ United Nations (2024), *SDGs Actions Platform*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development. Retrieved from <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships>.

⁸ Mahidol University (2024), *Thailandometer*. Retrieved from <http://thailandometers.mahidol.ac.th/>

⁹ Knodel & Chayovan (2012), *The Well-Being of Older Persons in Thailand: A 2011 Survey*. Population Studies Center, University of Michigan.

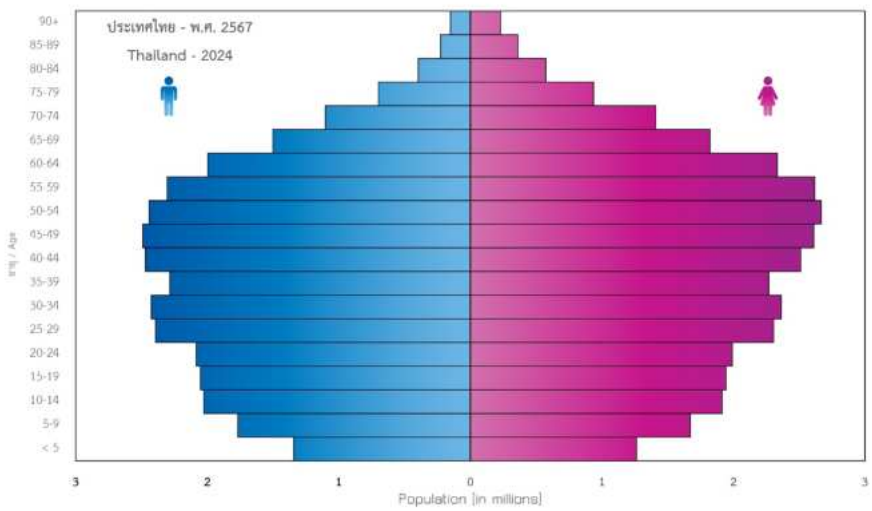


Diagram 1 from <https://www.boi.go.th/index.php?page=demographic>

2) monthly allowances for the elderly of 600 - 1000 Baht. In these two parts, there are a total of 11 million people who receive services, using a government budget of approximately 250 billion Baht per year.

2.2. Compulsory savings system: The government is implementing the World Bank’s approach to create a retirement savings system and pension system to create stability, which is called the “three pillars of the retirement saving system.” They are as follows:

2.2.1. Pillar 1: It is a compulsory pension system that each country’s government provides to its citizens, called Pay-as-you-go (PAYG), which determines the benefits to be paid to members (Defined Benefit) until death. It is a basic old-age security, setting a minimum income benefit that is sufficient to continue, consisting of the Social Security Fund, Section 33,39, with 12 million people in the social security system, with approximately 1.5 trillion Baht in fund assets.¹⁰

2.2.2. Pillar 2: Mandatory saving system, where the government forces people to save money while working. It may be managed by the private sector or independent government agencies. There is a fund, and members’ savings and employers’ contributions to the fund are in each member’s account (Individual Account). The objective is to raise the income of retirees above the poverty line so that they have a better income according to their normal living standards. It consists of the Government Pension Fund (GPF) and the Private Teachers’ Welfare Fund, totaling more than 1 million people with total assets of 800 billion Baht. If the GPF is enforced, there will be an additional 11 million people joining, totaling 12 million people.

¹⁰ Tnnthailand.com (2023), *How ready is Thailand to transition into an aging society in 2021?*. Retrieved from <https://www.tnnthailand.com/news/wealth/53904>.

2.2.3. Pillar 3: The Voluntary saving system and the government promote it, which is managed by the private sector, has a fund, and members' savings are transferred in a fixed amount (Defined Contribution). In some cases, there may be employer contributions to the fund in each person's account. The objective is to give savers more options in saving money for retirement, have enough savings for future living, have access to convenience and medical care that is higher than the standard, such as the Provident Fund (PVD), Social Security Section 40, National Saving Fund (NSF), other products such as RMF, Social Security, with a total of more than 10 million people involved, with a total budget of more than 1.3 trillion Baht.¹¹

2.3. The National Saving Fund (NSF) is for the elderly who are Thai nationals to be members of the individual account system. It is not a government agency or state enterprise because Thailand currently does not have a retirement savings system that covers all types of labor sectors. Most of the country's labor force is still not covered for old age, and these workers are at risk of falling into poverty in old age because they do not have access to savings tools while they are working. The NSF is a government policy to encourage self-employed people, who are estimated to be over 30 million people, to save money for retirement. The government will help pay a portion of the contributions, and when the saver reaches 60 years of age, they will receive a monthly pension for life.¹²

In conclusion, Thailand is proactively addressing the challenges posed by an aging population, which is projected to comprise 30% of the total population by 2030. Through a multi-faceted old age welfare system, the government has implemented significant measures to support the elderly, including pensions for civil servants and monthly allowances for seniors. The establishment of a compulsory savings system, based on the World Bank's "three pillars" framework, aimed to enhance income security for retirees. The first pillar focuses on a defined benefit pension system that ensures a minimum income, while the second pillar mandates savings during one's working life, with contributions from both employees and employers, fostering financial stability in retirement. The third pillar promotes voluntary savings, providing additional options for individuals to secure their financial futures. However, despite these initiatives, many workers remain outside the existing savings frameworks, particularly those in informal or unregulated sectors. The National Saving Fund (NSF) aims to fill this gap by inspiring self-employed individuals to save for retirement, thus mitigating the risk of poverty among the elderly. As Thailand continues to adapt its policies and programs, ongoing efforts will be crucial to ensure that all segments of the population have adequate support and resources as they age. The collaborative approach across different pillars of the pension system reflects the government's commitment to fostering a sustainable and inclusive environment for its aging citizens.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The National Saving Fund (NSF) (2024). Retrieved from <https://www.nsf.or.th/index.php>.

III. ELDERLY CARE IN THAI BUDDHIST FAMILIES: A REFLECTION OF GRATITUDE, DUTY, AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Buddhism, the predominant religion in Thailand, was introduced by two Indian monks, Sona and Uttara. As a result, Buddhism has played a significant role in Thai culture for many years. In the early 21st century, the global elderly population has become a focus of observation and planning. Thailand has been experiencing an aging society for over a decade, with around 93.5% of its population practicing Buddhism. According to Buddhist teachings, elderly individuals are highly regarded for their wisdom and contributions, emphasizing a culture of gratitude. To address the challenges posed by an aging demographic, there is a need for responsible age-related caregiving. The Pali Canon contains numerous teachings highlighting the importance of elderly care, including the responsibilities of parents. The Buddha's teachings aim to foster physical, moral, emotional, and intellectual growth for the well-being of individuals. In line with the Buddha's compassion, Buddhism in Thailand has been adapted to enhance the quality of life for older adults.¹³

The term “elderly” or “Phusungaayo” in Thai has been interpreted as the Pali term “Jara” as that in Buddhism, there is no word “Phusungaāyu” directly, but there is a word in Pāli, “Jarā (old)”, which, in Thai, means, Kae (aged), Koaw (old) and Kramkra (mature).¹⁴ The dictionary of the Royal Institute, B. E. 2546 (2003 C. E.), used all these words to give the meaning of “Phusungaāyu (aging person).”¹⁵ In Buddhism, the word “Jarā” appears in the scriptures as the Buddha said, “Oh! Monks, what is Jarā (old)... (it) is the condition of old teeth, falling grey hair, the age of decline, the old age of human beings and all other beings, this is called “Jarā (old age).”¹⁶ The elderly deserve care by referencing teachings in Pali about the importance of parents. The Pali Buddhist scriptures highlight parents as exemplary moral figures who were esteemed during the time of the Buddha. The Buddha described parents as the Brahman, the first angels (Burapadevata), and the first teachers of their children (Burapacariya). This evidence suggests that Buddhism honors and values parents as some of the highest individuals due to their support for their sons and daughters. Buddhism venerates and honors these parents. In contrast, those who fail to respect their parents and show ingratitude are viewed as having harsh hearts, hindering their personal moral development. Buddhism regards gratitude as

¹³ Somboon Watana (2022), *Buddhism and an Ageing Society in Thailand as a Part of Suvarnabhumi Land*. Poligrafi, 27(105/106), 127–147. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2022.339>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ As quoted by Somboon Watana (2022), *Buddhism and an Ageing Society in Thailand as a Part of Suvarnabhumi Land*. Poligrafi, 27(105/106), 127–147. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2022.339>.

¹⁶ Mahamakutarajavidhyalaya Foundation in the Royal Patronage (2003), *Tripitaka and Commentary 91 Books the 200th Anniversary of the Chakri Dynasty Rattanakosin*, vol.26,92, (Bangkok: Mahamakutarajavidhyalaya Foundation in the Royal Patronage).

a hallmark of a righteous person, as indicated by the Buddha's assertion that a Sattapurisa (good person) embodies gratefulness. Grateful individuals are celebrated as they embody the traits of a good person, making gratitude a fundamental quality of virtue.¹⁷

The way Thai people approach the care of elderly family members is of significant importance to their lifestyle. In most families, elderly parents are regarded as the foundational pillars of the household. Beyond their professional commitments, children take on the vital responsibility of looking after their aging parents. This obligation is deeply embedded in cultural values shaped by Buddhism, particularly the principles of gratitude, which have long been integral to Thai society. At the heart of this cultural framework lies the Triple Training, or "*Tri-sikkhā*," which includes moral discipline (*sīla*), mental training (*citta*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Together, these elements – often referred to as morality, concentration, and insight – form the cornerstone of human development in Buddhist teachings. *Sīla* emphasizes ethical behavior and virtuous conduct in one's interactions with the environment. *Citta* focuses on mental development, promoting emotional stability and inner peace. *Paññā* involves the cultivation of wisdom, enabling individuals to grasp the truths of existence and their connection to the world around them.¹⁸ These three dimensions of development are essential for people of all ages, including the elderly, who are uniquely positioned for such growth due to their wealth of life experience and understanding of life's realities. The methods for human development based on the Triple Training are further elaborated through the Four Forms of *Bhavana* (Development), which include physical practice (*kāya*), ethical conduct (*sīla*), mental development (*citta*), and wisdom cultivation (*paññā*). The connection between the Triple Training and the Four Forms of *Bhavana* is clear: moral discipline aligns with physical and ethical practices, which focus on bodily development and behavior; mental training corresponds to aspects of mentality development, fostering emotional resilience and stability.

This culture has been rooted in Thais in line with their beliefs in Buddhism as confirmed by the research project "Caregiving for Elder Parents in accordance with the Buddhist Doctrine in Thai Buddhist Families". This study focused on examining the caregiving practices for elderly parents within Thai Buddhist families guided by Buddhist principles. It employed a quantitative research approach, targeting Buddhists aged 18 to 59 years residing in five selected districts of Metropolitan Bangkok, Thailand. Using a purposive sampling method, data was collected from a sample population of 632 individuals in Bangkok, Thailand, with descriptive statistics applied for analysis. The findings indicated that 98.4% of participants acknowledged the influence of traditional

¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 33, 277.

¹⁸ Somboon Watana (2017), *Caregiving for Elder Parents in Accordance with the Buddhist Doctrine in Thai Buddhist Families*. Journal of Community Development Research (Humanities and Social Sciences) (10) 2, 67 - 80. Retrieved from <https://www.journal.nu.ac.th/JCDR/article/view/1821/1103>.

Buddhist teachings on caregiving for elderly parents. These teachings emphasize that caring for parents is both a fundamental duty of children and a virtuous obligation for Thai Buddhists, reflecting gratitude and reciprocity toward one's parents. Additionally, 95.5% of respondents expressed their commitment to adhering to caregiving principles aligned with the Buddhist concept of Bhavana (the four dimensions of human development). This includes promoting health or providing care during illness, supporting elderly parents in meditation practices, chanting, and attending Dhamma talks on various occasions.¹⁹ Again, the research title "Care-giving for Elder Parents of Thai Buddhist Families according to the Six Directions Teaching in Buddhism" also confirmed this culture. This study focuses on examining the caregiving practices for elderly parents (referred to as the "east" or "front direction") within Thai Buddhist families, guided by the Buddhist concept of the six directions. It adopts a quantitative research approach, targeting Buddhists aged 18 to 59 years residing in five districts of Bangkok Metropolitan, Thailand. Using purposive sampling, data was collected from 632 participants, and descriptive statistics were applied for analysis. The findings indicate that caregiving for elderly parents, in alignment with the Six Directions Teaching in Buddhism, is highly prioritized. Specifically, 98.9% of respondents expressed their adherence to the principles of caring for elderly parents, reflecting the strong influence of Buddhist teachings on familial responsibilities.²⁰

In conclusion, Buddhism offers a comprehensive and compassionate framework for addressing the challenges of an aging society in Thailand. Its teachings on gratitude, filial piety, and human development not only shape the cultural values surrounding elderly care but also provide practical guidance for ensuring the well-being of older adults. As Thailand continues to navigate the complexities of demographic aging, the integration of Buddhist principles into caregiving practices will remain vital. By honoring the elderly and fostering a culture of respect and reciprocity, Thai society can ensure that its aging population is cared for with dignity, compassion, and wisdom, in harmony with the timeless teachings of the Buddha.

IV. MONASTIC INSTITUTIONS IN THAILAND AS SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR THE ELDERLY

Buddhist monasteries (wat) in Thailand play a pivotal role in the social and spiritual fabric of the community, particularly as support systems for the elderly. These institutions are not merely places of worship but also serve as comprehensive hubs for community engagement, social welfare, and spiritual development. For older adults, monasteries offer a range of programs tailored to their needs, including meditation sessions, religious teachings, and social activities. These initiatives provide spiritual enrichment (*Paññāa Sikkhā*), mental stimulation (*Citta Sikkhā*), and opportunities for social interaction (*Sila Sikkhā*), which are essential for maintaining a sense of purpose and well-

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

being in later life. By fostering a supportive environment, monastic institutions help mitigate the challenges of aging, such as loneliness and social isolation, which are prevalent among the elderly population.

In rural areas of Thailand, where access to formal social services is often limited, temples frequently function as de facto community centers. They step in to fill gaps in healthcare, housing, and social support for elderly individuals who may lack family assistance or financial resources. For instance, the Phra Bat Nam Phu, the Buddhist Monastery in Lopburi Province, is renowned for its hospice care program, which provides free shelter, medical care, and spiritual guidance to elderly and terminally ill patients. This temple, along with others like it, exemplifies the compassionate ethos of Buddhism and its emphasis on caring for the vulnerable.²¹ Such initiatives underscore the indispensable role of monastic institutions in addressing the practical and emotional needs of Thailand's aging population.

The involvement of monasteries in elderly care is deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings, which emphasize compassion (*karunā*), generosity (*dāna*), and the alleviation of suffering (*dukkha*). Monks and lay volunteers often collaborate to organize community-based programs, such as meal services, health check-ups, and recreational activities, specifically designed for older adults. These efforts not only enhance the quality of life for the elderly but also strengthen intergenerational bonds within the community. For example, younger members of the community are encouraged to participate in temple activities, fostering a culture of respect and care for the elderly that aligns with traditional Thai values of filial piety and gratitude.

Moreover, monastic institutions serve as spaces for the elderly to engage in spiritual practices that promote mental and emotional well-being. Meditation, chanting, and participation in religious ceremonies are integral components of temple life, offering older adults a sense of peace and fulfillment. These practices are particularly beneficial for those coping with the physical and psychological challenges of aging, as they provide tools for managing stress, cultivating mindfulness, and finding meaning in life's later stages. The holistic approach of monastic institutions – addressing both the material and spiritual needs of the elderly – reflects the interconnectedness of physical, mental, and spiritual health in Buddhist teaching. For instance, in the study on the role of Wat Phra That Doi Saket in promoting community health, it was found that Wat Phra That Doi Saket plays a significant role in health promotion, ranked in the following order: social, mental, spiritual, and physical health. This is because monks remain a source of emotional support for the villagers in the community. As a result, the role of monks in social work is the most highly expected aspect.²² The role of monasteries as support systems for the

²¹ Somboon Watana (2022), Buddhism and an Ageing Society in Thailand as a Part of Suvarnabhumi Land. Poligrafi, 27(105/ 106), 127 – 147. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2022.339>.

²² Jittima Senachai (2015), *The Roles of Buddhist Monastery in Supporting Community*

elderly is further amplified by their ability to adapt to changing societal needs. As Thailand undergoes demographic shifts, with an increasing proportion of elderly citizens and a decline in traditional family structures, monastic institutions are stepping up to provide innovative solutions. For example, some temples such as Wat Dhammaraksa Nivesana Ageing Care Home: Situated in Lopburi Province, Thailand, this initiative was founded by the renowned Thai Buddhist monk, Luang Por Alongkot Tikkhapanyo, who serves as the abbot of Wat Phra Bat Namphu temple in Lopburi. The temple is known for its rehabilitation center for individuals living with AIDS. This care home represents an expansion of the monks' ongoing efforts. Its primary goal is to offer shelter and support to elderly individuals who have been abandoned during the later stages of their lives. The project was initiated in response to the growing issue of elderly abandonment in society, and Phrabhuddhapada Nernkho Buddhist Insight Meditation Center, located in Rayong Province, has introduced residential care programs, offering long-term accommodation and support for elderly individuals who require assistance with daily living. These programs often integrate modern healthcare practices with traditional Buddhist principles, creating a unique model of elderly care that is both culturally relevant and effective.

In conclusion, Buddhist monasteries in Thailand are indispensable support systems for the elderly, offering a blend of spiritual, social, and practical assistance. Through their diverse programs and initiatives, these institutions address the multifaceted needs of older adults, from providing necessities to fostering spiritual growth and community engagement. The compassionate and holistic approach of monastic institutions not only enhances the well-being of the elderly but also reinforces the values of generosity, respect, and interconnectedness that are central to Thai culture and Buddhism. As Thailand continues to navigate the challenges of an aging population, the role of monasteries as pillars of support will remain crucial in ensuring that the elderly can age with dignity, purpose, and a sense of belonging.

V. CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND SUGGESTIONS

The aging population in Thailand presents both challenges and opportunities for society, deeply intertwined with the cultural and spiritual fabric of Buddhism. Thai Buddhist families and monastic institutions have long been pillars of elderly care, guided by principles of gratitude, filial piety, and compassion. However, as Thailand continues to transition into an aging society, new challenges emerge, necessitating innovative approaches to ensure the well-being of older adults while preserving cultural and spiritual values.

The integration of Buddhist teachings into elderly care has provided a robust framework for addressing the needs of the aging population. The emphasis on

gratitude, duty, and spiritual development has fostered a culture of respect and reciprocity, ensuring that elderly individuals are valued and cared for within families and communities. Monastic institutions, with their holistic approach, have further complemented familial care by offering spiritual, social, and practical support. However, the rapid demographic shift, urbanization, and changing family structures pose significant challenges. Traditional caregiving models, which rely heavily on family-based support, may no longer suffice as younger generations migrate for work or face economic pressures. Additionally, the increasing demand for elderly care services strains the capacity of monastic institutions, which often operate with limited resources.

To address these challenges, a multi-faceted approach is essential. First, there is a need to strengthen community-based care that integrates the roles of families, monastic institutions, and local governments. Collaborative initiatives, such as training programs for caregivers and partnerships between temples and healthcare providers, can enhance the quality of elderly care. Second, leveraging technology to support elderly care, such as telehealth services and digital platforms for social engagement, can bridge the gaps in access and connectivity, particularly for those in rural areas. Third, promoting intergenerational programs within monastic institutions can foster mutual understanding and support between younger and older generations, reinforcing cultural values of respect and gratitude. Finally, policy interventions, such as subsidies for elderly care services and incentives for family caregivers, can alleviate the financial burden on families and institutions.

In conclusion, while the challenges of an aging society are complex, the enduring principles of Buddhism provide a strong foundation for addressing them. By adapting traditional practices to modern realities and fostering collaboration across sectors, Thailand can ensure that its elderly population continues to receive care that is compassionate, dignified, and rooted in cultural and spiritual values. This holistic approach will not only enhance the well-being of older adults but also strengthen the social fabric of Thai society as a whole.

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THE ROLE OF COMPASSION (*KARUṆĀ*) IN FOSTERING GLOBAL UNITY: BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES ON COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract:

The paper examines the role of compassion (*karuṇā*) in Buddhism as a core teaching in fostering global unity and promoting collective responsibility. The teachings of the Buddha offer valuable insights into the transformative power of compassion and emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings in a world categorized by division and conflict. Individuals, by cultivating compassion, can bring together people, groups, or communities that are separated by differences, such as beliefs, backgrounds, or opinions, enhance empathy, and promote mutual understanding among the diverse communities. Thus, I highlight how compassionate actions inspire people to recognize their shared humanity and explore how compassion can motivate individuals and communities to take collective responsibility for addressing global challenges such as poverty, environmental pollution, and social injustice. Moreover, the paper discusses practical applications of Buddhist compassion in various spheres, including community-building initiatives, peace-building efforts, and social justice movements. Further, I emphasize the importance of integrating Buddhist principles of compassion into policies and practices at both individual and organizational levels and identify compassionate leadership, characterized by empathy, inclusivity, and a commitment to the well-being of all, as essential for fostering collaboration and cooperation. Consequently, the paper promotes the incorporation of compassion into educational systems, governance, and community engagement to create a culture of inclusivity and mutual respect. Ultimately, this exploration highlights the vital role of compassion in building a harmonious and equitable world. By embracing Buddhist perspectives on

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collective responsibility, individuals and societies can collaborate to achieve sustainable development and lasting peace. The insights gained from this study not only enhance the understanding of Buddhist teachings but also provide practical pathways for fostering global unity through compassion, emphasizing the idea that collective responsibility is essential for addressing the challenges facing humanity today.

Keywords: *Compassion (karuṇā), global unity, collective responsibility, social cohesion.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is a key teaching in Buddhism that emphasizes the moral and ethical responsibility of individuals toward the well-being of others. The Pāli word “*Karuṇā*” expressing this concept of compassion is accordingly described as “the desire to remove what is detrimental to others and their unhappiness”¹. According to the definition given by Buddhaghosa, the commentator, *karuṇā* means “the feeling that causes the good people’s hearts to be moved when they see others’ suffering is compassion”². The scholarly arguments say that the main idea behind the Buddhist concept of compassion expressed by the Pali term *karuṇā* is the desire to remove the suffering of others.³ In an era marked by socio-political divisions, economic disparities, and environmental crises, the role of compassion in fostering global unity and promoting collective responsibility has become increasingly relevant. Buddhist teachings offer profound insights into the transformative power of compassion, illustrating how the cultivation of a compassionate mind can contribute to personal, communal, and global well-being. The Buddha himself emphasized the significance of compassion in addressing social issues, advocating for non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), generosity (*dāna*), and loving-kindness (*mettā*) as essential virtues for achieving harmony.⁴ Scholars have highlighted how Buddhist ethics promote a sense of shared responsibility, encouraging individuals to act for the welfare of all beings rather than solely for personal gain.⁵ In contemporary discourse,

¹ Sn. p 73, “*Ahita-dukkhāpanayanakāmatā.*”

² Vism. p.318, “*Paradukke sati sādhuṇaṃ hadayakampanaṃ karoti’ti karuṇa.*”

³ Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, vol 4, p. 121.

⁴ These teachings are found in the *Dhammapada* (verses 223 – 226), where the Buddha discusses the importance of nonviolence and loving-kindness. He also highlights generosity as a path toward spiritual progress and societal well-being. These virtues are central to Buddhist ethics, promoting peaceful coexistence and reducing conflict within society by encouraging individuals to act selflessly for the benefit of all beings (Ṭhānissaro, 1997 & Ñāṇamoli, 1995).

⁵ Scholars such as Peter Harvey in *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (2000) and Damien Keown in *Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (2005) have highlighted how Buddhist ethics promote a sense of shared responsibility. They argue that Buddhist teachings encourage individuals to act for the welfare of all beings, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life. This ethical perspective is grounded in the concept of *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā* (loving-kindness), which direct individuals to prioritize collective well-being over personal gain (Harvey, 2000 & Keown, 2005).

scholars increasingly recognize compassion as a critical -component of social cohesion and collective action. Research in psychology and neuroscience shows that compassion enhances emotional intelligence, fosters prosocial behavior, and strengthens interpersonal relationships. Within Buddhist traditions, practitioners view compassion not merely as an emotion but as an active commitment to alleviate suffering. This commitment is evident in the Mahāyāna ideal of the *Bodhisattva*, who vows to work for the liberation of all beings. Although Theravāda Buddhism does not emphasize the bodhisattva ideal in the same way, it equally upholds compassion as an indispensable quality for spiritual and ethical development. This study explores how Buddhist principles of compassion contribute to global unity by fostering empathy, inclusivity, and collective responsibility. It examines the role of compassionate leadership in governance, peace-building initiatives, and social justice movements, emphasizing the need for ethical policies rooted in Buddhist ethical frameworks. Additionally, the research investigates how integrating compassion into education and community development creates sustainable solutions for contemporary global challenges. By drawing on textual sources, scholarly analyses, and contemporary applications, this paper demonstrates that compassion is not only a personal virtue but also a societal imperative. The discussion highlights the transformative potential of Buddhist compassion in addressing poverty, environmental degradation, and social injustices. It advocates for a compassionate world where individuals recognize their shared humanity and collective responsibility in shaping a just and peaceful society.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Humanity faces numerous crises in the contemporary world, including social division, economic inequality, political conflicts, and environmental pollution. These challenges threaten global stability and hinder efforts to create a just and harmonious society. Despite advancements in technology, governance, and international cooperation, divisions persist among communities, nations, and individuals. This raises a crucial question: What fundamental ethical and philosophical principles can unify an increasingly fragmented world? In response, Buddhist philosophy offers a profound perspective, emphasizing compassion (*karuṇā*) as a transformative principle that fosters global unity and collective responsibility. This study examines the role of compassion in bridging socio-political and cultural divides while fostering collective responsibility for addressing global challenges. Buddhism teaches that compassion extends beyond an emotional response; it serves as a guiding ethical principle that motivates individuals to act selflessly for the well-being of others. Both Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions consider compassion essential for personal and social transformation. However, the practical application of compassion in addressing global issues requires further academic exploration. Modern scholars and practitioners acknowledge the relevance of Buddhist teachings in contemporary ethical discourse. However, the need remains for a more comprehensive analysis of how Buddhist compassion can systematically integrate into global policies. This research explores key questions: How can Buddhist ethical principles resolve conflicts, promote

sustainable development, and enhance social cohesion? How can compassion-driven leadership reshape political and economic structures to prioritize inclusivity and social justice? This study investigates the practical implications of Buddhist compassion in fostering global unity and encouraging collective responsibility. Although Buddhist teachings emphasize compassion, historical and cultural variations have shaped its interpretation and application across different Buddhist traditions. The Mahāyāna ideal of the *bodhisattva* illustrates boundless compassion and actively engages in alleviating suffering. In contrast, Theravāda Buddhism, while equally valuing compassion, often focuses on individual ethical purification and meditative practices. By addressing these issues, this study contributes to the growing discourse on Buddhist ethics and its role in shaping a more compassionate and united world. The research highlights the necessity of integrating Buddhist principles into contemporary discussions on global responsibility, ethical leadership, and social harmony.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study primarily examines the role of compassion (*karuṇā*) in fostering global unity and promoting collective responsibility through Buddhist perspectives. As political, economic, and social conflicts increasingly divide the world, this research highlights the transformative potential of compassion as a unifying force that transcends cultural and ideological barriers. By exploring the philosophical foundations and practical applications of compassion in Buddhism, this study emphasizes its relevance in addressing contemporary global challenges. One key objective of this research is to analyze the philosophical foundations of compassion in Buddhist teachings. This study examines canonical texts and doctrinal interpretations of *karuṇā*, particularly concerning loving-kindness (*mettā*), equanimity (*upekkhā*), and sympathetic joy (*mudītā*). By understanding the interconnections between these qualities, this research presents a holistic view of Buddhist ethical thought and its implications for social harmony. This study also explores the ethical and social implications of compassion in fostering unity and collective responsibility. In Buddhism, compassion serves as more than just an individual virtue; it shapes interpersonal relationships and social structures. This research investigates how compassion influences moral conduct, facilitates conflict resolution, and strengthens social cohesion by encouraging individuals to act with kindness and responsibility toward others.

Furthermore, this study examines the practical applications of Buddhist compassion in addressing contemporary global challenges. It analyzes how compassion applies to poverty alleviation, environmental sustainability, social justice, and conflict resolution. By reviewing case studies of Buddhist-inspired social movements, peace-building initiatives, and humanitarian efforts, this research illustrates how individuals and communities can translate compassion into concrete actions that benefit society. Additionally, this study assesses the role of compassionate leadership in governance, education, and community-building. Ethical leadership, informed by Buddhist principles of compassion, plays a crucial role in creating inclusive societies that prioritize the well-being of

all individuals. This research evaluates how Buddhist teachings on compassion can shape leadership models and policymaking, ensuring that decision-making processes reflect empathy, fairness, and a commitment to social harmony. Finally, this study proposes a framework for integrating Buddhist compassion into modern approaches to global unity and responsibility. By drawing from Buddhist ethical insights, this research develops practical strategies for incorporating compassion into contemporary discussions on global ethics, human rights, and sustainable development. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on ethical leadership and collective responsibility, emphasizing the need for compassion as a foundational value in addressing the pressing challenges of our time.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research begins by conducting an extensive textual and doctrinal analysis of primary Buddhist texts, including the *Pāli Canon*, *Mahāyāna Sūtras*, and commentarial literature. These sources offer critical insights into the conceptual foundations of *karuṇā* and its ethical significance. In addition to examining primary texts, the study reviews secondary sources, such as modern Buddhist scholarship and philosophical interpretations, to contextualize traditional teachings within contemporary ethical discourse. The study employs a thematic analysis of Buddhist ethical principles to identify key themes related to compassion, collective responsibility, and social engagement. This approach categorizes different perspectives on *karuṇā* within Buddhist traditions and assesses their relevance to modern ethical and social issues. By analyzing common themes across various Buddhist doctrines, the research clarifies how compassion is conceptualized and practiced. The study conducts a comparative analysis to explore how Buddhist perspectives on compassion align with or diverge from contemporary ethical theories and global governance models. By identifying similarities and differences, the research situates Buddhist ethics within the broader global discourse on morality and social responsibility. Using an interpretative approach, the study analyzes how Buddhist compassion addresses global issues. By synthesizing textual, thematic, and case study findings, the research assesses how traditional Buddhist principles contribute to fostering global unity and collective responsibility. This interpretative method enables a nuanced understanding of how to apply Buddhist ethics in modern contexts.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

I examine the concept of compassion (*karuṇā*) in Buddhism by reviewing classical Buddhist texts and contemporary academic studies. To explore *karuṇā* about global unity and collective responsibility, I analyze canonical sources, commentarial traditions, and modern interpretations of Buddhist ethics. In this section, I review existing literature on Buddhist compassion, its role in social harmony, and its practical applications in addressing global challenges. Buddhist teachings describe compassion (*karuṇā*) as one of the four *Brahmavihāras* (Divine Abodes). The *Brahmavihāra Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* presents *karuṇā* as an essential quality for attaining spiritual liberation.

In the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa explains *karuṇā* as the antidote to cruelty and a necessary virtue for developing wisdom and ethical conduct.⁶ The *Mettā Sutta* discusses the connection between compassion and loving-kindness (*mettā*), emphasizing their role in fostering harmonious relationships. These canonical texts establish the foundation of Buddhist ethical teachings on compassion and illustrate its applications in daily life.⁷ Mahāyāna Buddhism regards compassion (*karuṇā*) as a defining quality of the Bodhisattva path. The *Lotus Sūtra* highlights the Bodhisattva's commitment to relieving all beings from suffering, portraying *karuṇā* as a universal responsibility rather than a personal virtue.⁸ In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva extensively discusses the cultivation of *karuṇā* and argues that genuine compassion manifests through altruistic actions that promote societal welfare. These texts present *karuṇā* as a guiding principle for ethical engagement and collective responsibility, emphasizing its relevance to contemporary global issues.⁹ Modern scholars explore the intersection of Buddhist compassion and global ethics. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes engaged Buddhism, which applies *karuṇā* to social and political activism. He introduces the concept of interbeing to highlight the interconnectedness of all beings, advocating for compassionate actions that transcend cultural and national boundaries.¹⁰ Similarly, the Dalai Lama promotes *karuṇā* as a fundamental principle for fostering world peace and resolving conflicts through non-violent means. These perspectives align with Buddhist teachings on collective responsibility and demonstrate their relevance in addressing contemporary issues such as poverty, environmental crises, and human rights violations.¹¹ Several studies examine the role of *karuṇā* in fostering social harmony. Jones analyzes Buddhist peace-building initiatives in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, showing how monastic communities use *karuṇā* to mediate conflicts and promote reconciliation.¹² King investigates Buddhist approaches to social justice and argues that compassion-driven activism contributes to sustainable peace efforts. These studies demonstrate how Buddhist ethical principles, particularly *karuṇā*, shape conflict resolution, and community development.¹³ Despite its ethical strengths, the practical application of *karuṇā* in addressing global challenges encounters difficulties.

⁶ AN 10. 208.

⁷ Sn 1.8. p. 143 - 152.

⁸ Nichiren Buddhist International Center. (n.d.). *Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthiness*. In *The Lotus Sutra and its opening and closing sutras*. Retrieved from <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/lsc/Content/28>

⁹ Padmakara Translation Group. (1997). *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Shambhala Publications.

¹⁰ Nhat Hanh, T. (1998). *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*. New York: Broadway Books. p. 222.

¹¹ Dalai Lama. (1999). *Ethics for the New Millennium*. New York: Riverhead Books. p. 22.

¹² Jones, S. (2019) *Compassion and Peacebuilding: A Case Study of Buddhist Initiatives in Sri Lanka*. Buddhist Studies Review, vol. 36, no. 2, 2019, p. 153 - 170.

¹³ King, Sallie B. (2016). *Socially Engaged Buddhism*. Wisdom Publications, p. 76.

Garfield critiques the limitations of purely ethical solutions in complex political and economic systems.¹⁴ Gethin argues that while Buddhist compassion provides a strong moral framework, its implementation requires adaptation to diverse cultural and institutional contexts. These discussions indicate the need for further interdisciplinary research to integrate Buddhist ethics into contemporary policymaking and global governance.¹⁵ The literature on Buddhist compassion highlights its profound ethical significance and potential applications in fostering global unity. Classical Buddhist texts establish *karuṇā* as a core ethical principle, while Mahāyāna traditions emphasize its universal and active dimensions. Contemporary interpretations extend their relevance to modern social and political contexts, emphasizing the importance of engaged Buddhism. However, scholars recognize the challenges in translating Buddhist ethical ideals into practical solutions for global issues. Future research should explore interdisciplinary strategies to apply *karuṇā* in governance, international relations, and peace-building initiatives.

VI. DISCUSSION

The exploration of *karuṇā* (compassion) within the framework of Buddhist ethics reveals its profound potential as a catalyst for global unity and collective responsibility. This discussion synthesizes insights from the literature and examines how the philosophical foundations and practical applications of compassion can address contemporary global challenges. Canonical Buddhist texts emphasize *karuṇā* as a vital aspect of ethical conduct and spiritual development. The *Brahmavihāra Sutta* describes compassion as more than an emotional response, portraying it as a deliberate practice essential for spiritual liberation. The interrelation between *karuṇā*, *mettā* (loving-kindness), *upekkhā* (equanimity), and *muditā* (sympathetic joy) presents a holistic approach to ethical behavior that fosters social harmony.¹⁶ This interconnected framework suggests that cultivating compassion naturally encourages individuals to engage with and support one another. Buddhist teachings highlight how practicing *karuṇā* expands one's ethical responsibility beyond personal well-being, emphasizing its importance in building collective responsibility within

¹⁴ Garfield, Jay. (2021). *Buddhism and Global Ethics: A Buddhist Approach to Environmental Ethics*. In *Journal of Global Ethics*, vol. 17, no. 3, p. 301 - 312.

¹⁵ Gethin, Rupert. (1998), *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press, p. 98.

¹⁶ The *Brahmavihāra Sutta* presents *karuṇā* (compassion) as an intentional, active practice that reduces suffering. It highlights *karuṇā* as one of the four *brahmavihāras* (divine abidings), alongside *mettā* (loving-kindness), *upekkhā* (equanimity), and *muditā* (sympathetic joy). The sutta underscores how these qualities interconnect and support one another, helping practitioners develop ethical behavior. *Karuṇā* directly targets alleviating suffering, while *mettā* fosters unconditional love, *upekkhā* maintains emotional balance during adversity, and *muditā* celebrates others' happiness. Together, these practices create a comprehensive approach to spiritual growth and social harmony, guiding individuals toward liberation and fostering collective well-being (AN. 10.208).

social contexts.¹⁷ Mahāyāna Buddhism extends the concept of compassion beyond individual virtue, advocating for a universal ethical responsibility. The *Bodhisattva* ideal exemplifies this approach, as Bodhisattvas dedicate themselves to alleviating the suffering of all sentient beings. Texts such as the Lotus Sūtra¹⁸ and the Bodhicaryāvatāra¹⁹ emphasize the necessity of active and transformative compassion. These teachings demonstrate that compassion should not remain a passive sentiment but must manifest through altruistic actions that promote societal well-being. The Bodhisattva's commitment to relieving suffering aligns with the contemporary need for collaborative efforts to address global challenges such as poverty, social inequality, and environmental degradation. By applying this broader understanding of compassion, societies can develop more inclusive and cooperative approaches to resolving pressing global issues. Modern Buddhist scholars and practitioners have extended these ethical principles into real-world applications. Figures such as Thich Nhat

¹⁷ Buddhist teachings, particularly in the *Dhammapada* and *Brahmavihāra Sutta*, emphasize that the practice of *karuṇā* (compassion) extends beyond individual well-being, urging practitioners to take on broader ethical responsibilities. In the *Dhammapada* (verses 223–224), the text states that “one who, while seeking their own happiness, harms others, will not find happiness.” This teaching underscores that compassion is not merely a personal practice but a universal one, compelling individuals to care for others’ suffering. The *Brahmavihāra Sutta* further elaborates that *karuṇā* forms part of a comprehensive ethical framework that calls for a commitment to social harmony. The *sutta* emphasizes that by cultivating compassion, individuals develop a sense of interconnectedness, which naturally leads to collective responsibility within a community, promoting a more ethical and harmonious society (Ṭhāṇissaro, 1997 & Ñāṇamoli, 1995).

¹⁸ The *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*) is a foundational Mahāyāna text that teaches the universality of Buddhahood and the capacity of all beings to attain enlightenment. It emphasizes the use of *upāya* (skillful means), where the Buddha’s compassion is not limited to simple benevolence but actively works to help all beings realize their potential for liberation. In the context of compassion, the *Lotus Sūtra* highlights the bodhisattva’s role in actively engaging with suffering and providing the means for others to transcend it, aligning closely with the notion of compassion as a transformative and societal responsibility (Nichiren, n.d.).

¹⁹ The *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, authored by the Indian scholar Śāntideva, provides a detailed guide on the path of the bodhisattva. It teaches that compassion must be more than a feeling; it must manifest in active, selfless actions aimed at relieving the suffering of all sentient beings. The text stresses the cultivation of the six perfections (*pāramitās*) and embodies the bodhisattva’s commitment to working for the welfare of others, urging practitioners to embrace altruism as a fundamental aspect of their practice. In this way, it underscores the necessity of compassionate actions, which resonate with the contemporary need for collective, compassionate efforts to address global challenges (Padmakara, 1997, p. 43).

Hanh²⁰ and the Dalai Lama²¹ advocate for the role of compassion in social and political activism. Engaged Buddhism, a movement that promotes socially active interpretations of Buddhist ethics, encourages individuals to translate ethical principles into concrete actions that challenge systemic injustices. Thich Nhat Hanh's concept of interbeing underscores the interconnectedness of all living beings, emphasizing the idea that individuals bear responsibility for one another's well-being. This perspective fosters a sense of global citizenship and encourages people to recognize their role within a larger human family. By integrating compassion into social activism, individuals and communities can work toward addressing systemic injustices, promoting non-violent conflict resolution, and strengthening ethical governance. Several studies demonstrate how *karuṇā* contributes to peacebuilding and social cohesion. Buddhist communities in conflict-affected regions, such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar, have utilized compassion-based approaches to mediate disputes and promote reconciliation.²² Monastic leaders and practitioners have played active roles in fostering dialogue between divided groups, emphasizing understanding and healing rather than retaliation and division. The application of *karuṇā* in these settings suggests that compassion serves as an effective tool for conflict resolution. Furthermore, by emphasizing moral conduct rooted in compassion, societies can strengthen social cohesion. Encouraging individuals to act with kindness and responsibility toward one another creates an environment of trust and mutual respect, reducing tensions and fostering a harmonious coexistence. Despite the strengths of compassion-based approaches, several challenges arise when implementing *karuṇā* in complex social and political

²⁰ He developed the concept of interbeing to emphasize the profound interconnectedness of all beings. This teaching highlights the idea that no one exists in isolation; rather, individuals are interdependent and bear collective responsibility for one another's well-being. For Thich Nhat Hanh, compassion is not merely an internal or personal virtue but a call to action for social responsibility and global citizenship. His work has encouraged practitioners to incorporate Buddhist ethical principles into practical actions that challenge injustice, promote peace, and foster an interconnected sense of shared humanity (Nhat Hanh, T, 2008, p. 45).

²¹ He has consistently emphasized the importance of compassion in both personal life and global social activism. His teachings advocate for the cultivation of compassion as a transformative force for peace, justice, and ethical governance. He argues that compassion must extend beyond personal well-being to address collective societal issues such as poverty, human rights, and environmental degradation, urging individuals to take compassionate action in the world (Dalai Lama, 1999, p. 34).

²² Jones explores the application of *karuṇā* (compassion) in Buddhist peace-building efforts, particularly within the monastic communities of Sri Lanka and Myanmar. He examines how Buddhist monks and lay practitioners use *karuṇā* to mediate conflicts, foster reconciliation, and promote social harmony in contexts marked by ethnic and religious tensions. Jones highlights the ways in which Buddhist teachings on compassion are put into practice to heal divisions and encourage dialogue between conflicting groups. His work underscores the potential of Buddhist ethical principles to contribute to peacemaking and conflict resolution in regions affected by long-standing social and political unrest (Jones, 2019, p. 78).

systems. Some scholars have pointed out that ethical solutions grounded in compassion often face resistance when confronting deeply entrenched economic and political structures. Garfield argues that although *karuṇā* provides a strong moral framework, its practical application requires nuanced adaptations to diverse cultural and institutional contexts.²³ Additionally, systemic issues such as economic disparities, political corruption, and social inequalities demand more than ethical persuasion alone. Addressing these challenges necessitates interdisciplinary approaches that integrate Buddhist ethical principles with contemporary research in governance, psychology, and social sciences. By combining ethical teachings with empirical strategies, societies can create more effective and sustainable solutions for global challenges. To translate Buddhist ethical principles into global governance and policymaking, it is crucial to develop practical frameworks that align with contemporary societal needs. Governments, institutions, and policymakers can integrate *karuṇā* into education, healthcare, and environmental policies to foster more compassionate societies.²⁴ By promoting compassionate leadership, decision-makers can prioritize ethical considerations in governance, ensuring that policies reflect humanitarian values rather than purely economic or political interests. Educational curricula that incorporate Buddhist ethical teachings on compassion can help instill empathy and social responsibility in future generations, fostering a culture that values cooperation and mutual respect. Similarly, applying compassion-based approaches in healthcare

²³ In his discussions on *karuṇā* (compassion), Garfield has highlighted that while compassion provides a strong moral framework, its application in complex social and political systems often requires adaptation to different cultural, institutional, and contextual factors. He argues that *karuṇā* alone may not suffice in addressing deeply ingrained structural issues like economic inequality and political corruption and that it must be combined with practical, interdisciplinary strategies to be effectively implemented. Garfield's work emphasizes the need to integrate Buddhist ethics with modern research from fields such as governance, psychology, and social sciences to create more comprehensive and sustainable solutions to global challenges (Garfield, 2021).

²⁴ Integrating *karuṇā* (compassion) into global governance, education, healthcare, and environmental policies requires developing actionable frameworks that address contemporary societal needs. Compassionate leadership prioritizes people's well-being, ensuring that policies reflect humanitarian values rather than economic or political interests. This approach leads to inclusive, just, and responsive policies that meet the needs of marginalized groups. In education, incorporating *karuṇā* into curricula fosters future generations with a strong sense of social responsibility and empathy, creating environments that value collaboration and mutual respect. In healthcare, compassion-driven policies improve patient outcomes by addressing both physical and mental well-being, promoting a holistic approach to health. Environmental policies rooted in Buddhist teachings of interdependence encourage respect for nature and advocate for sustainable practices. These policies inspire individuals, governments, and institutions to take collective responsibility for the planet's long-term health. By applying Buddhist ethics to policymaking, societies can create solutions that promote human and environmental flourishing (Dalai Lama, 2011).

can enhance patient-centered care and improve mental health support systems. Environmental policies that incorporate Buddhist perspectives on interdependence and ethical responsibility can promote sustainable practices and encourage global cooperation in addressing climate change. The role of *karuṇā* in promoting global unity and collective responsibility is both profound and multifaceted.²⁵ Buddhist ethics provide a strong foundation for fostering social harmony, while contemporary applications of compassion demonstrate its relevance in addressing modern challenges. Although practical difficulties exist, the integration of Buddhist compassion into governance, education, healthcare, and global policymaking can contribute to a more just and harmonious world. By embracing *karuṇā* as a guiding principle, societies can cultivate a global culture rooted in ethical responsibility, cooperation, and collective well-being.

VII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, exploring *karuṇā* (compassion) within the framework of Buddhist ethics highlights its immense potential as a catalyst for fostering global unity and collective responsibility. Rooted in classical Buddhist texts, *karuṇā* emerges as an essential ethical principle for both individual and communal well-being. The teachings of the *Brahmavihāra Sutta* and the *Visuddhimagga* emphasize that compassion is not merely an emotional response but a deliberate practice that is crucial for spiritual liberation and social harmony. The Mahāyāna perspective broadens the scope of compassion by highlighting its role as a universal responsibility, a core aspect of the *Bodhisattva* path. This understanding aligns with contemporary interpretations advocating for engaged Buddhism, which actively applies compassion to address systemic injustices and global challenges. By encouraging individuals to recognize their interconnectedness and shared responsibility for the welfare of all beings, *karuṇā* becomes a guiding principle for ethical engagement in an increasingly complex world. However, applying *karuṇā* to address global issues presents significant challenges. Ethical solutions rooted in compassion often face resistance within complex political and economic systems. This resistance underscores the urgent need for interdisciplinary research that integrates Buddhist ethics with contemporary social sciences, enabling the development

²⁵The role of *karuṇā* (compassion) in promoting global unity is both profound and multifaceted, as it serves as a foundational ethical principle in Buddhist teachings. Buddhist ethics emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings, calling for the alleviation of suffering and the promotion of social harmony. Contemporary applications of *karuṇā* show its practical relevance in addressing modern global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and conflict. While integrating *karuṇā* into governance, education, healthcare, and global policymaking presents practical challenges, it offers significant potential for fostering more just and harmonious societies. By embracing *karuṇā* as a guiding principle, societies can cultivate a culture that emphasizes ethical responsibility, mutual cooperation, and collective well-being, fostering global unity. This approach encourages societies to prioritize compassion over self-interest, creating sustainable solutions that benefit all beings and promote lasting peace (Dalai Lama, 2011).

of actionable frameworks for compassionate governance. Ultimately, fostering *karuṇā* can lead to more inclusive societies that prioritize empathy, justice, and social responsibility. By embedding compassion into sectors like education, healthcare, and environmental policy, we can lay the foundation for a more harmonious global community. As we navigate the challenges of our time, the principles of *karuṇā* hold great promise in inspiring collective action toward a more compassionate and equitable world.

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KARUṆĀ: TRANSFORMATIVE POWER IN BUDDHIST PRACTICE AND ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract:

Buddhism teaches compassion (*karuṇā*) to guide personal growth and social harmony. Rooted in ethical conduct (*sīla*), meditation (*bhāvanā*), and wisdom (*pañña*), *karuṇā* is essential to alleviating suffering and fostering peace. It transforms individuals and shapes communities, promoting justice and sustainable development. A key component of the Brahmavihāras (Four Immeasurables), *karuṇā* bridges inner peace with outward action, driving ethical living and collective well-being. The paper explores how *karuṇā* aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), addressing poverty (SDG 1), education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), and peace (SDG 16). Drawing from Buddhist teachings and leaders, this study demonstrates how compassion contributes to reconciliation, non-violence, and community resilience. The following writing will illustrate how *karuṇā* can be a practical force for achieving peace, justice, and sustainable development today.

Keywords: *Karuṇā, Buddhist compassion, ethical living, sustainable development, social justice, environmental ethics, non-violence.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly recognized Vesak as a global Feast of Peace, reflecting the Buddha's pragmatic teachings addressing personal transformation and societal well-being. Central to these teachings is compassion, a transformative force bridging inner peace and compassionate

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action to alleviate the suffering of others. As the Buddha says, ‘Compassion, cultivated through the *Tathāgata*’s teachings, leads to inner peace’,¹ and ‘May all beings dwell in happiness and security’,² ‘*karuṇā*’ fosters individual growth and contributes to global goals. This paper examines ‘*karuṇā*’ as a cornerstone of Buddhist practice and its role in advancing the SDGs.

II. KARUṆĀ: TRANSFORMATIVE POWER IN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY AND MODERN PRACTICE

2.1. Concept and philosophical meaning

The term *karuṇā* (Sanskrit: करुणा; Chinese: 慈悲), translated as compassion, is a foundational concept in Buddhism with profound importance for personal and collective spiritual development.³ As a feminine noun in Sanskrit, it encompasses meanings such as ‘compassion,’ ‘sympathy,’ and ‘kindness toward those in suffering.’ Its etymological roots, derived from $\sqrt{kṛ}$ or \sqrt{kr} , highlight an intrinsic connection to action, emphasizing that *karuṇā* is not merely a passive emotional response but an active, transformative force. This dynamic quality sets *karuṇā* apart from mere emotional empathy by motivating individuals to act compassionately to alleviate the suffering of others, based on the awareness of interdependence (*paṭicca-samuppāda*).⁴ Thus, *karuṇā* is not only an awareness of others’ pain but a dynamic, action-oriented response aimed at addressing it.

Closely related terms, such as *anudayatā* (state of sympathy), *dayā* (kindness, mercy, or pity), and *avihiṃsā* (non-injury), illuminate complementary facets of *karuṇā*. While *anudayatā* emphasizes the empathetic resonance of compassion, *dayā* reflects its tender, nurturing kindness, and *avihiṃsā* reveals its commitment to non-harm and universal love. Together, these synonyms capture the benevolent and proactive nature of *karuṇā*, exemplifying its role as a force to combat and eradicate the suffering of others, embodying the Buddhist ideal of compassionate action.⁵ The following aspects examine *karuṇā*’s deeper dimensions: its three strands of meaning, role in the Four Immeasurables (*Brahmavihāra*), distinction from ‘*mettā*,’ significance in Mahāyāna and Tibetan Buddhism, connection to collective responsibility, and interconnection with compassion.

¹ *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, (*Majjhimanikāya*/ MN), Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), 1995, Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 374 – 375.

² *An Ancient Collection of the Buddha’s Discourses together with Its Commentaries*, (*The Suttanipāta*/ Sn). Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.) 2017, Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 179 (Sn 1.8.3).

³ T.W. Rhys Davids, William Stede (eds) 1921 – 25, *The Pali Text Society’s Pali – English Dictionary*. London: Pali Text Society, p. 197.

⁴ “yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passatī’ti yo paccaye passati. so dhammaṃ passatī’ti so paṭiccasamuppānnaḍhamme passati” (He who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; he who sees the Dhamma sees dependent-arising phenomena).

⁵ A. Chaudhary, ‘*Karuṇā*’, *Topics Connected with Buddhism*. Accessed 24 Dec 2024, URL: <https://learning.pariyatti.org/mod/page/view.php?id=1967>

First, there are three strands of meaning in *karuṇā*. *Karuṇā* is a cornerstone of the Buddhist ethical and spiritual framework, actively responding to suffering and guiding personal and collective growth. The Pāli commentaries define *karuṇā* as the desire to remove harm and suffering (*ahita-dukkha-apanaya-kāmatā*), setting it apart from ‘*mettā*’ (loving-kindness), which focuses on promoting happiness and well-being.⁶ This distinction highlights *karuṇā*’s dynamic nature as an active, transformative force supporting individuals’ and communities’ moral and spiritual progress. Three strands are:

(1) *Karuṇā* serves as a prerequisite for a just and harmonious society. It provides the ethical foundation necessary for societal stability by aligning with the first, second, and fourth precepts of the Five Precepts (*pañcaśīla*), which advocate for non-harming (*ahiṃsā/ apāṇātipātā*), non-stealing (*adinnādānaṃ pahāya*), and truthful speech (*musāvādaṃ pahāya*).⁷ This alignment is reflected in the *Vasala Sutta*, which states: ‘Whoever in this world harms living beings in whom there is no compassion for living beings – know him as an outcast.’⁸ Furthermore, compassion fosters empathy and non-violence by recognizing that all beings value life and fear harm. By cultivating mutual respect and understanding, it acts as a powerful force for peace, as emphasized in the *Dhammapada*: “All tremble at violence; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not harm nor cause harm to others.”⁹ (2) *Karuṇā* is essential for progress toward wisdom (*paññā*). In meditation, *karuṇā* is deliberately cultivated to transcend egocentric views, fostering inner clarity and insight. This transformation bridges personal growth with the ethical imperative to alleviate suffering, guiding practitioners toward enlightenment by intertwining self-realization with a compassionate response to others’ pain.¹⁰ (3) *Karuṇā* manifests as liberating action within society, addressing systemic issues such as poverty and inequality. The *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta* warns of societal collapse when the needs of the poor are ignored, emphasizing that compassion is integral to justice and shared responsibility. By prioritizing collective well-being, a compassionate society thrives on fairness and interconnectedness, ensuring stability and equity for all

⁶ Sn-*Aṭṭhakathā* 128, cited by Rhys Davids, William Stede, loc. cit.

⁷ *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, (Anguttara Nikaya/ AN), Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.) 2012. Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 790-791/ AN 10.178-79; Guṇabhadra [求那跋摩], ‘佛說優婆塞五戒相經 (Upāsaka-śīla-sūtra)’, Taishō Vol. 24, No. 1476, p. 0939c17- 0943b09.

⁸ Sn 1.7.

⁹ *The Dhammapada: The Buddha’s Path of Wisdom*, Ā. Buddharakkhita, 1985 [1996]. Buddhist Publication Society, v. 129. Available at: <https://mail.dhammadata.net/suttacentral/sc2016/sc/en/dhp.html>.

¹⁰ Elizabeth J. Harris, 2017, ‘Detachment and Compassion in Early Buddhism’, in *Collected Bodhi Leaves*, Buddhist Publication Society, volume V, p. 279.

members.¹¹ These three strands—compassion as a moral foundation, a path to wisdom, and a force for social transformation—illustrate the profound depth and practical relevance of *karuṇā* in creating a harmonious, enlightened, and equitable world.

Second, *karuṇā* plays a pivotal role within the *Brahmavihāras*, alongside *mettā* (loving-kindness), *muditā* (empathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity).¹² Together, these qualities foster wholesome actions and form the foundation of ethical behavior. The Buddha emphasizes the universal cultivation of these virtues, encouraging practitioners to radiate compassion in all directions. As stated in the *suttas*: ‘He dwells pervading... the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with compassion: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.’¹³ The practice of the *Brahmavihāras*, particularly *karuṇā*, not only purifies the mind but also helps avoid negative karmic consequences. Furthermore, it contributes to happiness in this life and supports progress toward higher spiritual attainments in future lives. As a central component of the four immeasurables, *karuṇā* exemplifies the transformative power of compassion in personal growth and ethical living.

Third, the distinction between *mettā* and *karuṇā* is significant in understanding their respective roles within Buddhist practice. While *mettā* represents goodwill and unconditional love toward all beings, *karuṇā* specifically arises in response to suffering and is characterized by a desire to alleviate it. *Karuṇā* is an action-oriented quality; as Buddhaghosa explains in the *Visuddhimagga*, it motivates virtuous individuals to respond to the suffering of others and work toward its cessation through compassionate actions.¹⁴

Fourth, the concept of *karuṇā* is deeply enriched within Mahāyāna and Tibetan Buddhism, where it is elevated to a foundational principle of spiritual development. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, *karuṇā* is paired with enlightened wisdom (*prajñā*) as the cornerstone of the *Bodhisattva* path. This path is defined by the *Bodhisattva*’s vow to liberate all sentient beings, emphasizing selflessness and the accumulation of both merit and insight. Figures like *Avalokiteśvara* exemplify *mahākaruṇā* (great compassion), serving as embodiments of boundless compassionate activity.¹⁵ In Tibetan Buddhism, *karuṇā* is considered the root of enlightenment. Kamalaśīla’s ‘Stages of Meditation’ highlight the

¹¹ *The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Dīghanikāya/ DN)*. Maurice Walshe (trans.) 1995, Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 398-402/ DN 26, PTS vol.3, p. 64-74.

¹² R. Gethin, 1998, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 186–187; Rhys Davids, William Stede, loc. cit.

¹³ AN 3.65.

¹⁴ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli (trans.) 2010, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 311.

¹⁵ R. Gethin, 1998, *op. cit.*, p. 228; Kālayaśas [量良耶舍], 佛說觀無量壽佛經 第一卷, Taishō Vol. 12, No. 365, p. 0340c29 - 0346b18. Available at: https://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T12n0365_001

Bodhisattva's unwavering commitment to compassionate action,¹⁶ while Śāntideva's *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* emphasizes the interconnected nature of joy and suffering among all beings.¹⁷ Practices such as the meditative cultivation of *karuṇā* and the recitation of "Om maṇi padme hūṃ."¹⁸ reflect the transformative power of compassion in guiding practitioners toward enlightenment.

Fifth, connection between *karuṇā* and collective responsibility. *Karuṇā* inspires action that benefits not only individuals but also the collective and the environment, aligning with the law of *kamma* (*kamma-vipāka*).¹⁹ Far from being a burden, collective responsibility emerges as a noble and practical expression of compassion. The *Saṅgha-vatthu Sutta* underscores this connection by emphasizing four principles of social solidarity: generosity (*dāna*), kind speech (*piyavācā*), beneficial conduct (*atthacariyā*), and cooperation (*samānattatā*).²⁰ These practices serve as ethical cornerstones for building harmonious and equitable communities. Furthermore, the application of *upekkhā* (equanimity) within social contexts ensures a balanced perspective, fostering equality and harmony among diverse groups. Compassion, therefore, transcends personal virtue to become a communal ethic, forming the moral foundation for a just and flourishing society.

Sixth, the interconnection of compassion. Compassion for others is inseparable from compassion for oneself. The *Dhammapada* teaches, If one, desiring happiness, harms others who also desire happiness, one will not find happiness after death,²¹ emphasizing the mutual reinforcement of self-awareness and altruism. Similarly, modern psychology supports this perspective. Kristin Neff's work on self-compassion highlights that compassion for oneself enhances compassion for others, reinforcing the interdependence of self-awareness and empathy.²² This alignment between ancient wisdom and contemporary psychological insight underscores the transformative nature of compassion. In addition, the *Visuddhimagga* describes *karuṇā* as "a mind moved at the suffering of others, seeking to remove their pain,"²³ highlighting its active and transformative nature. Furthermore, the *Mettā Sutta*²⁴ calls for boundless compassion, likening it to a mother's unconditional love. This

¹⁶ T. Gyatso & Kamalaśīla, 2019, *Stages of Meditation*, Translated by Geshe Lobsang Jordhen, Losang Choephel Ganchenpa, & Jeremy Russell, Snow Lion Publications, p. 42–43.

¹⁷ Śāntideva, 2011, *The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra)*, Boston: Shambhala, p. 122 – 123.

¹⁸ "Om maṇi padme hūṃ," a six-syllable mantra of *Avalokiteshvara*, first appears in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha-sūtra* as the *sadaksara* (six syllabled), embodying all Buddhist teachings.

¹⁹ DN 2; MN 135 – 6, and Taishō 78 – 81, etc.

²⁰ AN 4.32, 8.24.

²¹ Dhṛp 131.

²² Kristin Neff, 2011, *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*, New Zealand: Auckland, p. 146 – 150.

²³ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli (trans.) 2010, op. cit., p. 312.

²⁴ Sn 1.8.

universal empathy bridges personal growth and societal change, making *karuṇā* a dynamic force for ethical living and collective harmony.

In Buddhism, *karuṇā* encompasses a multi-dimensional approach to ethical living, spiritual development, and communal harmony. Far from being passive, it demands an intricate balance of inner cultivation and outward action, harmonizing personal enlightenment with collective responsibility.

2.2. Transformative power in personal practice

2.2.1. Transformation of mind

Compassion is not merely an admirable quality but a transformative practice that liberates individuals from suffering and defilements, forming the foundation for wisdom and ethical conduct. Through meditative practices like *karuṇā/ mettā-bhāvanā* (loving kindness meditation), compassion becomes a powerful tool for personal transformation, enabling practitioners to purify their minds and cultivate a deep sense of inner peace and ethical awareness.²⁵

To cultivate compassion, one must first reflect on the dangers of lacking compassion and the benefits of practicing it. Compassion should not initially be directed toward dear ones, as emotional attachment may interfere, nor toward neutral or hostile persons, the opposite sex, or the dead, as these are unsuitable objects for genuine compassion. Instead, one should begin by focusing on a truly unfortunate individual, such as someone helpless due to severe disabilities, or, if unavailable, on an evil-doer who, despite appearing happy, will inevitably face suffering due to their actions. Gradually, as the practice strengthens, compassion can be extended to one's relatives, ensuring a methodical and progressive approach.²⁶

Besides, *mettā-bhāvanā* is a methodical meditation that begins with cultivating loving-kindness toward oneself and gradually expands to encompass all beings, including loved ones, neutral individuals, and even those who are difficult or hostile.²⁷ Practitioners calm the mind through mindfulness of breathing, then use phrases of goodwill like 'May I be happy' while visualizing warmth and light as symbols of loving-kindness. This process is expanded to all beings in the universe. Avoiding focus on the opposite sex or the deceased, they radiate *mettā* universally, fostering boundless awareness free from hostility. The *Mettā Sutta*²⁸ and *Saṅkhatta Sutta*²⁹ highlight the transformative power of *mettā*

²⁵ Loving-kindness meditation is commonly practiced by monks, as the *Ānāpānassati Sutta* (MN118) states: Monks, there are monks in this Saṅgha devoted to cultivating loving-kindness (*santi, bhikkhave, bhikkhū imasmim bhikkhusaṅghe mettābhāvan'ānuyogam'ānuyuttā viharanti*).

²⁶ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli (trans.) 2010, op. cit., p. 302-309.

²⁷ *Visuddhimagga* 1.9.2: "*karuṇābhāvanākathā: evaṃ taṃ puggalaṃ karuṇāyitvā tato paraṃ eten'eva upāyena piyapuggale, tato majjhatte, tato verimhi'ti anukkamena karuṇā pavattetabbā.*"

²⁸ AN 4.125.

²⁹ AN 8.63.

and the other *brahmavihāras* – compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity – culminating in deep meditative states like the fourth *jhāna*, which provide clarity, peace, and insight.

The practice of compassion transforms the practitioner’s mindset from selfishness to altruism, fostering awareness of interconnectedness and inspiring empathetic actions. This bridge between inner cultivation and external engagement addresses others’ suffering while advancing spiritual growth. As noted in the *Visuddhimagga*,³⁰ *mettā-bhāvanā* reduces defilements like anger and jealousy, purifies the mind, and nurtures wisdom and ethical conduct, making practitioners cherished even by non-human beings.

Numerous modern studies have explored how practicing loving-kindness and compassion meditation can alter brain function and enhance emotional well-being. For instance, researchers at the University of Wisconsin–Madison found that cultivating compassion through meditation affects brain regions associated with empathy, suggesting that such practices can increase empathetic responses.³¹ Similarly, a study from Stanford University indicated that compassion meditation might reduce mind-wandering and promote mental focus.³² Their findings align with ancient teachings, showing that self-compassion fosters emotional balance, deepens empathy, and highlights the transformative power of *mettā-bhāvanā* in linking personal healing with alleviating others’ suffering.

Compassion extends beyond personal benefits, fostering harmony and ethical living in society. By radiating loving-kindness, as the *Mettā Sutta* suggests, practitioners transform themselves and contribute to societal well-being, laying the foundation for compassionate actions and community-building.

2.2.2. Transformation of Actions

The transformation of actions through the personal practice of compassion is exemplified by the Buddha, whose life embodied *karuṇā* as liberating action. He guided individuals like Angulimāla, Paṭācārā, and Kisāgotamī, etc., from suffering to healing, while his care for the sick and directive to monks to serve others demonstrated compassion’s communal dimension. His charge to the first Arhats, ‘Go forth for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world,’³³ highlights compassion as a catalyst for societal change.

³⁰ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli (trans.) 2010, op. cit, p.307.

³¹ D. Land, 2008, *Study Shows Compassion Meditation Changes the Brain*, University of Wisconsin–Madison. Accessed 26 Dec 2024, URL: <https://news.wisc.edu/study-shows-compassion-meditation-changes-the-brain/>

³² C.B. Parker, 2015, *Compassion meditation reduces ‘mind-wandering.’* Stanford research shows, Available at: <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2015/04/mindful-meditation-benefits-042215>

³³ D. II. 46.

This ethos inspires using resources and talents to alleviate suffering, as seen in Thich Nhat Hanh's active approach to *karuṇā*. His 'Engaged Buddhism' integrates mindfulness with real-world efforts to address social and environmental issues, emphasizing 'compassion as a verb'.³⁴ Ethical conduct (*sīla*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*) form the foundation for compassionate action, where inner transformation nurtures outward care. Practices like mindful breathing, deep listening, and the 'bell of mindfulness' further infuse daily interactions with compassion.

Compassionate action operates through bodily (*kāyakammā*), verbal (*vacīkammā*), and mental acts (*manokammā*), beginning with intentions manifesting outwardly³⁵ forming the basis for verbal and physical deeds.³⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh's Five Mindfulness Trainings underscore how individual efforts ripple into societal harmony, reinforcing the interdependence of personal and collective well-being. Rooted in the Buddha's teachings, compassion transforms individuals and society, fostering healing and harmony at every level.

2.2.3. Transformation in Communities

Fostering harmony and rejecting isolation lies at the heart of Buddhist practice, with compassion driving transformative social movements. Importantly, compassion transcends sentiment, inspiring actions such as aiding the poor, protecting victims, and fostering harmony. For instance, the *Appamaññāvibhaṅga* states, 'Just as one might feel compassion upon seeing a person who is destitute and unfortunate, so too does one pervade all beings with compassion.'³⁷ This universal compassion, therefore, supports initiatives such as relief efforts, conflict resolution, and environmental protection, transitioning communities from discord to peace.

In addition, Plum Village, founded by Thich Nhat Hanh, exemplifies *karuṇā* in action through projects like ethical consumption, environmental sustainability, and mindfulness training. While individual transformation forms the foundation of these efforts, systemic change is equally crucial. This dual approach is further reflected in Soka Gakkai International (SGI)'s mission, which combines personal growth with global advocacy. For example, initiatives such as Josei Toda's 1957 atomic disarmament declaration³⁸ and climate action campaigns highlight the importance of addressing both personal and global challenges simultaneously.

Furthermore, Engaged Buddhism effectively transforms compassion

³⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, 1993, *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change*, Berkeley: Parallax Press, p. 49 - 57.

³⁵ MN 61.

³⁶ MN 56.

³⁷ Walshe & Sujato, *Vibhaṅga* 13, 1.2: "Seyyathāpi nāma ekaṃ puggalaṃ duggataṃ durūpetam disvā karuṇāyeyya; evameva sabbe satte karuṇāya pharati."

³⁸ Josei Toda Website Committee, 2020, *Josei Toda*, Soka Gakkai Accessed 26 Dec 2024, Available at: <https://www.sokaglobal.org/about-the-soka-gakkai/lives-of-the-founding-presidents/josei-toda.html>

into action by applying principles like *karuṇā* and *ahiṃsā* to tackle societal issues. Similarly, Humanistic Buddhism³⁹ integrates compassion into daily life by emphasizing interconnectedness and community empowerment. Correspondingly, SGI embodies these values through grassroots activism and global peace initiatives, such as their advocacy for the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Thus, compassion serves as a bridge between the inner and outer worlds, transforming individuals and communities alike. From the Buddha's teachings to Thich Nhat Hanh's work, *karuṇā* emerges as a powerful force that fosters personal growth, systemic change, and collective harmony.

III. KARUṆĀ AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In the Fourth Industrial Revolution era, practicing compassion faces mounting challenges due to systemic injustices, conflicting interests, and the dominance of consumerist and competitive cultures. These forces often distort compassion's purpose, emphasizing material success over empathy. Individualism and technological distractions further isolate individuals, especially youth, undermining self-esteem and fostering disconnection. Additionally, the relentless pursuit of economic and technological advancement often overshadows moral responsibility and inner development, deepening the imbalance between material and spiritual well-being.

To address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is essential. Compassion education can nurture empathy and moral responsibility from an early age. Collaboration between Buddhist and international organizations can facilitate large-scale initiatives, while modern technology offers tools to connect communities and amplify compassionate practices. These efforts counteract consumerism and isolation, positioning compassion as a transformative force for achieving the SDGs, such as eradicating poverty, ensuring quality education, promoting gender equality, and fostering global peace. The following will explore how compassion contributes to major social changes, aligning with specific SDGs to advance equity, harmony, and sustainable development worldwide.

3.1. Eradicating poverty and ensuring food security

Compassion plays a vital role in addressing the global challenges of poverty eradication and food security, aligning closely with SDGs 1 and 2. These goals, "No Poverty" and "Zero Hunger," aim to eliminate poverty and promote sustainable agriculture to ensure universal access to nutritious food. Compassion, deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings and practices, is embodied through acts of generosity (*dāna*) and a commitment to shared welfare, inspiring individual and collective actions that effectively contribute to these global objectives.

³⁹ Nan Tien temple, 2017, What is Humanistic Buddhism?, Available at: <https://www.nantien.org.au/en/buddhism/knowledge-buddhism/what-humanistic-buddhism>

The Buddhist practice of *dāna* underscores the transformative power of generosity in reducing inequality and fostering harmony. Through unconditional giving, whether in the form of material resources like food, money, and medicine or spiritual offerings such as preaching the Dhamma, *dāna* alleviates suffering, purifies the giver's mind, and addresses immediate needs while cultivating long-term well-being. The *Dīghajāṇu Sutta*⁴⁰ further links generosity to happiness and future prosperity, illustrating the interconnectedness of material aid and spiritual growth.

Modern Buddhist organizations, such as Buddhist Global Relief, exemplify compassion in action by combating poverty and hunger through initiatives like food aid, sustainable agriculture, and educational opportunities for girls.⁴¹ Collaborative efforts, such as those with Sravasti Abbey, emphasize ethical consumption and sustainable practices inspired by Buddhist values. These initiatives address physical and spiritual needs and raise awareness and funds to advance these causes,⁴² reflecting the enduring relevance of compassion in alleviating suffering and promoting social welfare.

Compassionate action also extends to supporting disaster victims through relief and reconstruction, fostering hope and solidarity in alignment with Buddhist principles. Teachings like the *Sīgālovāda Sutta*⁴³ emphasize the righteous use of wealth to assist others, reinforcing the moral imperative of generosity in advancing societal welfare. Similarly, the *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Sutta*⁴⁴ highlights the duty of leaders to ensure property and welfare for all social classes, underscoring the systemic role of compassion in building a just society. Furthermore, the *Pañcabhoga-ādiya Sutta*⁴⁵ and related texts⁴⁶ outline righteous ways to utilize wealth - such as providing for one's family, supporting friends, and aiding those in need - thereby reducing poverty and promoting social welfare in alignment with SDGs.

Cultural practices in Buddhist communities further highlight compassion's role in ensuring food security, as seen in the egalitarian food distribution in Himalayan households, which fosters autonomy, particularly for women. Compassion's impact on poverty and hunger integrates Buddhist teachings with modern innovations, addressing immediate needs while promoting long-term well-being. These contributions underscore compassion's relevance in achieving SDGs.

⁴⁰ AN 8. 54.

⁴¹ S. M. Emmanuel, 2015, *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, John Wiley & Sons, p. 527.

⁴² T. Chonyi, 2021, *Join a Buddhist Action to Feed the Hungry*, Sravasti Abbey Outreach, Available at: <https://sravastiabbey.org/join-a-buddhist-action-to-feed-the-hungry/>

⁴³ Maurice Walshe (trans.) 1995, *op. cit.*, p. 461-469/ DN 31, or *Taishō* 16 & 17; *Madhyamāgama* 135; *Dīrghāgama* 16/ 善生經, SN 45.141 – 148.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 395 - 405/ DN 26.

⁴⁵ AN 5. 41.

⁴⁶ AN 4. 61; *Madhyamāgama* 1.26/ T01n0026_030, etc.

3.2. Quality education

SDG 4 promotes equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning, enhancing individual and societal well-being. Compassion, central to Buddhist philosophy, directly supports this goal by integrating morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). As Matthieu Ricard emphasizes, education must prioritize ethical values for inner transformation.⁴⁷ The Lotus Sutra echoes this, teaching that Buddhas guide beings to awaken and enter wisdom,⁴⁸ fostering lifelong growth in alignment with SDG 4.

Compassion transforms education by merging ethical values with academics, creating harmonious societies. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness framework demonstrates this by combining mindfulness, ethics, and social responsibility with traditional learning. Similarly, U. S. programs like Mindful Schools use mindfulness and compassion to help students manage stress and build social skills.⁴⁹ The Lotus Sutra underscores the impact of sharing knowledge, stating that teaching even a single phrase of this sutra makes one a messenger of the Tathagata.⁵⁰

Compassionate education also addresses learners' unique needs while inspiring growth. The Lotus Sutra's parable of the burning house illustrates how skillful means (*upāya*)⁵¹ guide learners to safety and greater rewards: 'To save the children, the father promised carts suited to their desires. Once outside, they received a cart beyond their expectations.'⁵² This aligns with SDG 4's focus on inclusivity and equity.

Moreover, Buddhist teachings emphasize balancing self-development (*attattha*) and social development (*paratta*), ensuring education benefits individuals and communities. Compassion fosters personal and societal well-being through qualities such as faith (*saddhā*), virtue (*sīla*), generosity (*dāna*), etc. Stories like *Angulimāla's* transformation from violence to peace, realizing himself while chasing the Buddha, and *Kisā Gotamī's* realization of impermanence through her search for mustard seeds highlight compassionate guidance toward self-awareness and harmony.

Ultimately, Buddhist education seeks liberation (*nibbāna*) through wisdom, promoting intellectual and spiritual enlightenment aligned with SDG 4's focus on quality education. Integrating compassion and ethics, Buddhist

⁴⁷ M. Ricard, 2001, *The Quantum and the Lotus*, New York: Three Rivers Press, p. 264.

⁴⁸ T. Kubo; A. Yuyama (trans.) 2007, *The Lotus Sutra (Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtram/ 妙法蓮華經*, Taishō Vol. 9, No. 262), Translated from the Chinese of Kumārajīva. Berkeley, Calif.: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, p. 35.

⁴⁹ C. L. Shultz, 2024, *Meditation Breaks in School Can Improve Students' Mental Health*, Georgia. Accessed 31 Dec 2024, Available at: <https://people.com/meditation-in-school-helps-kids-mental-health-georgia-8690265>

⁵⁰ T. Kubo; A. Yuyama (trans.) 2007, op. cit., p. 158 – 159.

⁵¹ *Upāya* refers to enlightened beings' compassionate methods to adapt teachings based on individuals' needs, a concept central to Mahayana and present in Theravāda Buddhism.

⁵² T. Kubo; A. Yuyama (trans.) 2007, op. cit., p. 56 – 69.

teachings offer a transformative framework for equitable and inclusive education that uplifts and empowers all.

3.3. Gender equality

Compassion, a cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy, is essential for achieving SDG 5: Gender Equality. Grounded in compassion, Buddhism fosters gender equity by affirming women's spiritual potential, advocating for their rights, and promoting inclusivity beyond gender distinctions.

Buddhism's recognition of women's equal spiritual potential exemplifies *karuṇā* in action. Unlike pre-Buddhist traditions, Buddhism declares that 'as long as anyone gives up evil, and impurities, and lives in peace, they are called a recluse' (*Dhammapada*, v. 388). The establishment of the *Bhikkhunī Saṅgha* (order of nuns) allows women as slave girls like *Puṇṇa*, *Puṇṇikā*, or a prostitute *Āmrapālī*, etc., to enter monastic life and achieve liberation, dismantling societal barriers. This inclusivity, grounded in compassion, ensures spiritual opportunities for all.

Karuṇā also drives Buddhism's advocacy for women's rights in familial and social contexts. The *Sigālovāda Sutta*⁵³ emphasizes mutual respect in marriage, and urges husbands to 'honor, support, and cherish their wives.' Furthermore, the Buddha's support for Queen *Mallikā*'s daughter,⁵⁴ and even as *Isidāsi* in *Therīgāthā*, she got married three times before becoming a *Bhikkhunī*, challenges gender biases, emphasizing dignity and equality for women.

Compassion continues efforts to revive women's higher ordination in *Theravāda* traditions, addressing institutional challenges in Sri Lanka and Thailand. Beyond the monastery, compassion advocates for societal harmony and addresses discrimination against women. Inclusivity in Buddhism extends to diverse genders, as seen in the *Bhikkhu-vibhaṅga*, where true transgender individuals are accepted, and in *Bhikkhunī Soma*'s assertion: What can gender matter when one is skillful, virtuous, and wise?.⁵⁵

Through compassion, Buddhism dismantles gender biases, advocates for equality, and fosters inclusivity, offering a framework for achieving SDG 5. Its teachings inspire a world where all individuals are valued and empowered, regardless of gender.

3.4. Health and well-being

The Buddhist principle of compassion (*karuṇā*) offers transformative insights into achieving SDG 3, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives, physical and mental care, and promoting well-being for all.

In therapeutic contexts, compassion creates a supportive environment that reduces emotional barriers, fosters trust, and facilitates recovery. Compassion-

⁵³ Maurice Walshe (trans.) 1995, op. cit., p. 467 (DN. 31).

⁵⁴ Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.) 2000, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, (*Samyutta Nikāya/ SN*), Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 179 (SN 3. 16).

⁵⁵ SN 5. 2.

based communication and therapeutic strategies effectively alleviate stress, depression, and other mental health challenges, aligning with SDG 3's emphasis on mental health promotion.

In families and communities, compassion strengthens social networks that support emotional resilience and rehabilitation. Acts of care and kindness cultivate psychological well-being, underscoring the interconnecting of personal health and community support.

Mindfulness, closely linked with compassion, is a proven tool for mental health. Compassion-guided mindfulness practices, such as mindfulness of breathing,⁵⁶ reduce anxiety, depression, and stress while enhancing mental clarity and physical well-being. These practices align with SDG 3's goals by promoting both emotional stability and improved physiological functions, such as normalized blood pressure and organ health.

At the societal level, compassion drives equitable healthcare and public health governance. The *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Sutta*⁵⁷ highlights the role of compassionate leadership in ensuring healthcare access, disease prevention, and reduced child mortality. Such policies create inclusive systems that prioritize the well-being of all individuals, fulfilling SDG 3's objectives.

In addition, compassion bridges ancient wisdom with modern innovation. Mental health platforms like Headspace and Calm exemplify how compassion-inspired technology brings mindfulness and meditation practices to a global audience. These platforms, rooted in principles like those found in the *Mettā Sutta*,⁵⁸ advocate for the cultivation of loving-kindness and emotional well-being. By providing accessible tools for managing stress, anxiety, and depression, such technologies ensure that mental health resources transcend geographic and socioeconomic barriers, directly contributing to SDG 3's vision of inclusive health and well-being for all.

In essence, compassion is indispensable to achieving SDG 3. Through individual practices, familial care, systemic governance, and technological innovation, compassion fosters holistic health and supports equitable systems, paving the way for a more harmonious and healthy world.

3.5. Social justice and access to opportunities

Compassion contributes to SDG 8 by promoting decent work and sustainable economic growth through fairness, inclusivity, and ethical practices. Rooted in the Buddhist principle of Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*),⁵⁹ it encourages individuals and businesses to earn a living without harm, fostering

⁵⁶ Mindfulness of breathing appears in MN 118, MN. 10, DN. 22, *Ekottarāgama* 12.1, and *Madhyamāgama* 98, and others.

⁵⁷ Maurice Walshe (trans.) 1995, op. cit., p. 395 - 405. DN 26.

⁵⁸ Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.) 2017, op. cit., p.180. *Sn* 1.8.7.

⁵⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.) 2012, op. cit., p 790/ AN 5.177: "A lay follower should avoid engaging in these five types of business: dealing in weapons, living beings, meat, intoxicants, or poisons".

workplaces where exploitation is avoided, fairness is prioritized, and mutual respect underpins labor relations. This approach ensures humane treatment of workers, fair wages, and growth that benefits society as a whole.

In addition, compassionate leadership further enhances workplace harmony and productivity. By resolving conflicts with empathy, it reduces turnover and fosters cooperation, boosting morale and overall output. Compassion-driven initiatives create equitable employment opportunities, ensuring that economic progress benefits everyone, particularly disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, Buddhist principles offer a model for a “compassionate economy.” The concept of *dāna* (almsgiving) inspires ethical consumption, sustainable investment, and fair resource-sharing, reducing greed and exploitation. Examples like Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness framework and Buddhist-inspired projects in India demonstrate how compassion can balance material needs with spiritual well-being, promoting decent work for all.

Compassion’s contribution to SDG 10 highlights its role in reducing inequalities by addressing structural and systemic barriers. Buddhist teachings on interconnectedness emphasize that societal well-being depends on reducing disparities between rich and poor. Compassion-driven governance prioritizes marginalized groups, ensuring equitable access to resources, education, and opportunities. This awareness of shared humanity prompts individuals and institutions to address systemic inequities.

The rejection of caste-based discrimination in early Buddhist texts exemplifies this ethos. By affirming that all individuals are biologically equal and share the same fundamental nature,⁶⁰ Buddhism counters notions of inherent superiority or inferiority.⁶¹ The Buddha’s teachings promote merit, effort, and skills over hereditary privileges, aligning with the principles of equal opportunity and flexibility in career choice. Inside the Sangha, social status is irrelevant,⁶² providing a model of equality where liberation is accessible to all regardless of background.

Compassion empowers disadvantaged communities through initiatives like skill-building programs and microfinance, helping individuals overcome barriers and fully engage in societal growth. This approach shifts the focus from charity to empowerment—providing tools and opportunities that foster self-reliance. Compassionate conflict resolution bridges inequalities by addressing root causes of disputes, ensuring all voices are heard and respected.

In practical terms, compassion promotes non-discrimination in workplaces, education, and healthcare, ensuring fair treatment for all. Compassionate policies address the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups, driving efforts to create equitable societies. This reflects the Buddhist ideal of a compassionate culture where exploitation is eradicated, and social

⁶⁰ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), 1995, op. cit., p. 800/ MN 98.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 698 - 699 & p. 764/ MN 84 & 93; T01n0010_001/ 婆羅門緣起經; etc.

⁶² Ibid., p. 736 - 37 (MN. 90).

and economic justice prevails.

3.6. Environment and Sustainable Communities

Compassion plays a vital role in advancing SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). Rooted in Buddhist ethics, compassion extends to all beings and the planet, fostering sustainable practices and inclusive communities.

For SDG 6, Buddhist environmental ethics and interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) emphasize the necessity of conserving natural resources. Practices like tree ordination protect forests and maintain water cycles, ensuring sustainable water management.⁶³ The Dalai Lama highlights how deforestation and poor water management threaten clean water supplies, showing the need for compassionate action in managing water to protect resources for future generations.⁶⁴

Regarding SDG 11, compassion fosters inclusive, resilient communities. Buddhist communities like Sanephong in Thailand exemplify sustainable living through self-reliance and shared resources, reflecting compassion and promoting harmonious settlements. The *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*⁶⁵ underscores compassionate leadership's role in providing shelter and services, contributing to sustainable urban and rural development.

For SDG 13, compassion inspires action against climate change. Buddhist teachings frame climate change as a result of greed and materialism, driving efforts to combat deforestation like the Buddhist forest movement in India and Thailand and sustainable agriculture in Nepal's Manang region. The *Aggañña Sutta* highlights how compassionate actions restore environmental harmony.⁶⁶ Similarly, the Dalai Lama calls for global cooperation, urging collective efforts to address climate impacts.⁶⁷

Integrating compassion into environmental and social policies fosters sustainable development, prioritizing the well-being of all beings and ecosystems. Compassionate ecology offers a holistic path to achieving SDGs 6, 11, and 13 through empathy, responsibility, and interconnection.

3.7. Peace and Justice

SDG 16, which emphasizes promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, ensuring access to justice, and building effective, trustworthy institutions, resonates deeply with the Buddhist *karuṇā* (compassion) principle.

⁶³ T. Mongkolrat, 2023, *Tree Ordination: Preserving Nature through Spiritual Connection*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok. Accessed 26 Dec 2024, URL: https://www.thailandfoundation.or.th/culture_heritage/tree-ordination-preserving-nature-through-spiritual-connection/

⁶⁴ Tibet Policy Institute, 2017, *Dalai Lama on Environment*, Collected Statements, Central Tibetan Administration, p. 12 & 18.

⁶⁵ Maurice Walshe (trans.) 1995, op. cit., p. 395 - 405. (DN 26).

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 407 - 415 (DN. 27).

⁶⁷ Tibet Policy Institute, 2017, op. cit., p.1 & 19.

Compassion, a cornerstone of Buddhist practice, serves as both a moral guide and a practical tool for addressing the root causes of conflict, injustice, and societal inequity. Compassion aligns with the vision of peace and justice central to SDG 16 by fostering empathy, nonviolence, and ethical conduct.

Compassion's role in promoting nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) and conflict resolution is central to achieving lasting peace. The Buddha's teachings, such as his advice in the *Vatthūpama-sutta* and the *Kakacūpamasutta*, emphasize maintaining a mind free from hatred even when faced with hostility: 'Our minds will be unaffected...we shall dwell in compassion for their welfare, with kind minds, devoid of internal hatred.'⁶⁸ Historical figures like Mahātmā Gandhi exemplified this principle in actions. Gandhi's nonviolent resistance against colonial oppression demonstrated how compassion and forgiveness could transform systemic injustice into meaningful social change. His legacy underscores the power of compassion as a force against aggression and injustice.

Compassion and forgiveness are essential for resolving disputes and fostering social harmony, aligning with SDG 16. The Buddha taught, "Fools deny or refuse to pardon transgressions, while the wise acknowledge and forgive them."⁶⁹ This principle is reflected in real-world efforts by Buddhist leaders to promote reconciliation in post-conflict societies. In Sri Lanka, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement organized forgiveness ceremonies to unite former combatants and civilians, while in Cambodia, Maha Ghosananda's Dhammayietra peace walks helped mend communities after the Khmer Rouge era. These initiatives exemplify the power of compassion to rebuild trust, restore peace, and strengthen communal resilience.

Compassion plays a key role in promoting inclusivity and justice. It drives equitable resource distribution and addresses systemic discrimination. The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* highlights the interdependence of all beings and the power of compassionate action, inspiring Engaged Buddhism. Leaders like Thich Nhat Hanh apply this to social issues, tackling poverty and gender inequality.⁷⁰ Buddhist communities exemplify this by providing education and healthcare to marginalized groups, demonstrating compassion's dedication to justice and human development.

Compassionate speech and dialogue further advance SDG 16's goals by promoting understanding and solidarity. The Buddha's guidance on 'speech that is true, gentle, beneficial, and spoken with loving-kindness'⁷¹ underscores the importance of communication in resolving disputes and building trust. The Dalai Lama's 'Middle Way Approach' reflects compassionate speech, promoting nonviolence and dialogue to seek Tibetan autonomy through reconciliation. His

⁶⁸ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), 1995, op. cit., p. 118-122 & 217-223 (MN. 7 & 21).

⁶⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.) 2000, op. cit., p. 339/ SN 11. 24.

⁷⁰ A. Pimentel, 2024, *Six Buddhist Sutras You Should Know*, University of California, Lion's Roar. Accessed 31 Dec 2024, URL: <https://www.lionsroar.com/six-buddhist-sutras/>

⁷¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.) 2012, op. cit., p. 816. AN 5. 198.

focus on empathy and understanding embodies Buddhist principles of truthful, kind, and beneficial speech.

Furthermore, compassion inspires community cooperation and grassroots action to build strong institutions. In the *Sārandada-sutta*, the Buddha highlights harmony's value: "Licchavis, as long as the Vajjis assemble often and hold frequent assemblies, only growth is to be expected for them, not decline."⁷² Compassionate actions drive grassroots efforts like the Sarvodaya Movement,⁷³ Nepal's post-earthquake rebuilding,⁷⁴ and Lao monks mediating disputes, guided by the Five Precepts⁷⁵ and the *Mettā Sutta*, demonstrate how compassion-based approaches resolve conflicts and uphold social cohesion.

Concisely, compassion is indispensable for achieving SDG 16's vision of peace, justice, and inclusivity. Rooted in Buddhist wisdom and exemplified by leaders, it transforms societies by addressing injustice, fostering reconciliation, and building trust, creating a more peaceful and equitable world.

IV. LESSONS AND PRACTICAL PROPOSALS FOR COMPASSION IN ACTION

Karunā, or compassion, is a dynamic and transformative force in Buddhist philosophy that inspires ethical living, wisdom, and social harmony. It fosters empathy, non-violence, and altruism, addressing both personal growth and societal issues like poverty and inequality. Compassion begins with self-awareness and extends outward to benefit communities, bridging inner transformation with external action.

New proposals for the future should focus on expanding compassion into modern societal structures in innovative ways. First, the creation of Compassion Institutes dedicated to training leaders in compassionate decision-making can promote ethical governance, entrepreneurship, and social work. These institutes would offer courses on mindful leadership, ethical business practices, and community engagement, emphasizing compassion as a core value in professional settings.

Second, Compassion Tourism could be developed to combine travel with charitable activities. Visitors to Buddhist sites and temples could participate in local community service projects, promoting cross-cultural understanding and active compassion in diverse contexts. These experiences would allow tourists

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.1010. AN 7. 21.

⁷³ The Sarvodaya Movement, founded by Gandhi, promotes non-violence, self-reliance, and the welfare of all. It inspired leaders like Vinoba Bhavé and Jaiprakash Narayan to continue its goals in post-independence India.

⁷⁴ Nepal's 2015 earthquakes caused severe loss and destruction, prompting rebuilding efforts centered on resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability. See more: <https://nepalnews.com/s/issues/seven-years-after-the-earthquake-how-has-nepal-rebuilt>.

⁷⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.) 2012, op. cit., p. 790 - 791 / AN 10.178-79; Gunabhadra [求那跋摩], '佛說優婆塞五戒相經 (*Upāsaka-sīla-sūtra*)', Taishō Vol. 24, No. 1476, p. 0939c17 - 0943b09.

to engage with local communities meaningfully and support sustainable development initiatives.

Third, a global Compassion Certification for businesses and organizations could be introduced. Companies would be assessed on their ethical practices, employee well-being, and social impact. This certification would encourage businesses to adopt compassionate policies, promoting fairness, sustainability, and community welfare.

Fourth, Compassion Labs could be established as innovation hubs for developing compassionate technologies and social programs. These labs would bring together technologists, social workers, and spiritual leaders to create solutions addressing global issues like mental health, poverty, and environmental challenges.

Lastly, a Compassion Youth Movement could be initiated to empower young people as ambassadors of compassion in their communities. Through workshops, campaigns, and social media, this movement would inspire the next generation to lead with empathy, kindness, and a commitment to social justice.

Buddhist teachings on compassion offer solutions to modern challenges. By promoting education, governance, entrepreneurship, and community engagement rooted in compassion, these proposals create a more just, sustainable, and harmonious world. Compassion in action transforms individuals and societies, addressing present needs and fostering a better future.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *karuṇā* in Buddhist teachings is a dynamic force for ethical living and social change. Compassion guides personal growth, strengthens communities, and addresses global challenges. By integrating compassion into meditation, ethics, and social engagement, it bridges inner growth with outward action, fostering justice and harmony. This aligns with contemporary goals like poverty eradication, education, gender equality, and sustainability, highlighting compassion's enduring relevance. *Karuṇā* drives personal and collective transformation, promoting peace and equity. Ultimately, compassion is an active commitment to alleviating suffering and advancing the common good, offering practical insights for ethical governance and sustainable living, and contributing to a more compassionate and flourishing world.

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INTEGRATING BUDDHIST LOVING-KINDNESS INTO HOLISTIC PATIENT CARE: A CASE STUDY OF THE COMPASSIONATE CARE FACILITY AT WAT AMARINTHRARAM WORAWIHAN AND SIRIRAJ HOSPITAL, BANGKOK, THAILAND

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Abstract:

This study examines the integration of Buddhist loving-kindness (*mettā*) into holistic patient care through a case study of the “Compassionate Care Facility” at Wat Amarintharam Worawihan, developed in collaboration with Siriraj Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand. The facility provides comprehensive support for terminally ill patients and their families, merging spiritual practices with medical care to address physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Key interventions include mindfulness-based practices, end-of-life care that upholds dignity, and structured family support systems. Findings indicate that this integrative model fosters a nurturing environment, enhances quality of life, and alleviates emotional distress. Challenges in implementing this model and its implications for broader healthcare systems are also explored. The research advocates for adopting such integrative approaches globally, with adaptations to align with diverse cultural and religious contexts. This study contributes to discussions on the role of spirituality in healthcare and the practical application of Buddhist principles in compassionate care.

Keywords: *Buddhist loving-kindness (mettā), holistic patient care, mindfulness-based practices, end-of-life care, compassionate care*

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhist teachings emphasize loving-kindness (*mettā*) as a foundation for ethical living and compassionate action. Integrating these principles into contemporary healthcare offers a framework for addressing patient’s physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Wat Amarintharam Worawihan, a prominent

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Bangkok temple, has historically supported community well-being.¹ Its collaboration with Siriraj Hospital, Thailand's oldest medical institution, exemplifies the integration of Buddhist values with modern healthcare practices. This partnership seeks to create a culturally relevant model of holistic care.²

The "Compassionate Care Facility" at Wat Amarintharam Worawihan, established with Siriraj Hospital, serves as a case study in applying Buddhist compassion to holistic patient care. The initiative aims to support terminally ill patients and their families, providing care that transcends conventional medicine. The facility's holistic approach reflects the Buddhist understanding of suffering (*dukkha*) and mindfulness (*sati*) as tools for alleviating distress. This paper evaluates the philosophical underpinnings, operational framework, and outcomes of the "Compassionate Care Facility," illustrating the transformation potential of *mettā* in patient care.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of spirituality and emotional support into patient care is increasingly being recognized as essential for enhancing overall well-being, particularly in palliative and holistic healthcare contexts. Holistic care emphasizes the interconnection of physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, providing a comprehensive approach to address the needs of patients with chronic illnesses, terminal conditions, or complex healthcare challenges. This literature review examines key studies on spiritual care, the role of loving-kindness (*mettā*), and the challenges associated with implementing these practices in modern healthcare settings, with a focus on the contributions of Buddhist monks and institutions.

2.1. Spirituality in healthcare

Spirituality is increasingly recognized as essential for holistic patient care, particularly in palliative and end-of-life settings. Puchalski et al. (2004) emphasize that addressing spiritual needs enhances a patient's overall quality of life by fostering emotional well-being, acceptance, and peace during critical phases of illness.³ They developed the FICA Spiritual History Tool, a practical framework for assessing and integrating patient's spiritual needs into care plans. Similarly, Koenig et al. (2012) explored the relationship between religion, spirituality, and health, illustrating how spiritual practices enhance resilience, strengthen coping mechanisms, and improve emotional well-being. 65 These studies underscore the necessity of integrating spirituality into healthcare as a complement to medical interventions.

¹ "Wat Amarintharam Worawihan," *Thapra Library, Silpakorn University*, accessed on [February 19, 2025], available at: http://www.thapra.lib.su.ac.th/web-temple/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=42.

² Siriraj Hospital, *Faculty of Medicine Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University*, accessed on [February 19, 2025], available at: <https://www2.si.mahidol.ac.th/en/>.

³ Christina M. Puchalski et al., "Spirituality, Religion, and Healing in Palliative Care," *Clinics in Geriatric Medicine* 20, no. 4 (2004), p. 689 - 714.

Despite these benefits, the integration of spirituality into clinical practice remains inconsistent. Barriers such as time constraints, lack of training, and institutional resistance hinder widespread adoption.⁴ Overcoming these challenges is critical for making spiritual care a standard component of patient-centered healthcare.

2.2. Loving-kindness (*mettā*)

Rooted in the *Metta Sutta* (*Khuddakapāṭha* 9), *mettā* (loving-kindness) is a foundational Buddhist virtue that promotes unconditional goodwill and compassion. The Buddha describes *mettā* as a means to cultivate inner peace and harmonious relationships, stating that it leads to “a mind free of enmity and ill-will.”⁵ This principle is exemplified through various accounts in Buddhist texts, where the Buddha demonstrates compassion toward the sick and suffering, reinforcing the ethical responsibility of the monastic community to care for one another.

One illustrative example of *mettā* in practice is found in the account of the Buddha tending to a gravely ill monk. Upon discovering the monk abandoned and lying in his filth, the Buddha personally bathed and cleansed him, embodying the principle of boundless compassion. He then admonished the monastic community, emphasizing their duty to care for the sick, stating, “Whoever would tend to me should tend to the sick.”⁶ This narrative underscores the central role of compassion in Buddhist ethical teachings and monastic life, reinforcing the view that caring for the ill is an essential aspect of spiritual development. Another significant instance of the Buddha’s compassionate engagement is found in the story of **the monk** Puṇṇa, who fell seriously ill. The Buddha visited him personally, offering words of solace and encouragement. He expounded on the doctrine of impermanence (*aniccā*), reminding Puṇṇa of the transient nature of all conditioned phenomena and urging him to remain steadfast in his spiritual practice. This act of compassionate guidance not only provided Puṇṇa with emotional and psychological resilience but also reinforced the Buddhist emphasis on mindfulness and equanimity in the face of suffering.⁷

The account of the leper Suppabuddha, who sought to hear the Buddha’s teachings, further exemplifies the Buddha’s profound *mettā* and inclusivity. Despite his affliction, Suppabuddha was deeply moved by the Buddha’s discourse and ultimately attained enlightenment. The Buddha’s unwavering acceptance and compassionate engagement with him, irrespective of his physical

⁴ Christina M. Puchalski et al., “Spirituality, Religion, and Healing in Palliative Care,” *Clinics in Geriatric Medicine* 20, no. 4 (2004), p. 689 - 714.

⁵ *Karaniya Mettā Sutta: Good Will*, Sn 1.8, translated from the Pāli by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2004, and *Mettā (Mettānisamsa) Sutta: Discourse on Advantages of Loving-kindness*, AN 11.16. PTS: A. V. 342, translated from the Pāli by Piyadassi Thera, 2005.

⁶ *Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga*, “Kucchivikara-vatthu: The Monk with Dysentery,” Mv 8.26.1 - 8, vol. 4, trans. I. B. Horner. Oxford: Pāli Text Society, 1997, p. 431 - 434.

⁷ S. VI. 60, CDB, II 1167, trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1997.

condition, underscores the Buddhist principle of universal compassion and the transformational power of the *Dhamma*. This narrative serves as a testament to the inclusive nature of the Buddha's teachings, emphasizing that spiritual liberation is accessible to all, regardless of societal status or physical affliction (*Udāna* 5.3).⁸ The Buddha's engagement with the sick and marginalized serves as a foundation for modern applications of *mettā* practice, particularly in the form of loving-kindness meditation (LKM). Beyond its religious significance, LKM has been shown to provide substantial psychological and emotional benefits. Neff and Germer (2017) highlight how LKM reduces stress, fosters self-compassion, and enhances emotional resilience, making it particularly valuable for caregivers facing the emotional demands of supporting others.⁹ The integration of *mettā* into both spiritual and secular contexts demonstrates its enduring relevance as a practice that cultivates both inner well-being and compassionate action in society.

Labrague (2012) underscores the importance of emotional support and compassion in nursing practice, noting that the principles of loving-kindness align closely with patient-centered care.¹⁰ By incorporating *mettā* into caregiving interactions, healthcare providers can foster empathy, emotional relief, and acceptance. These practices enrich the caregiver-patient relationship, addressing the holistic needs of individuals in vulnerable states.

2.3. Integrating *mettā* into healthcare

The integration of loving-kindness practices into healthcare demonstrates significant potential for enhancing holistic patient care. The Compassionate Care Facility (CCF) at Wat Amarintharam Worawihan, in collaboration with Siriraj Hospital, exemplifies this approach. By combining Buddhist principles with modern medical interventions, CCF addresses the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of underprivileged patients. Buddhist monks, such as Phrakhrusamu Yannaphop, provide spiritual guidance that complements clinical care and creates a supportive and culturally relevant model of holistic care.

Kinman and Leggetter (2016) explored the emotional labor involved in caregiving, particularly in palliative care settings, emphasizing the need for emotional support for both patients and caregivers. Incorporating practices such as loving-kindness meditation into healthcare settings can alleviate emotional burdens, improve caregiver resilience, and foster mindfulness.¹¹ These practices are particularly valuable in the context of Thailand's healthcare system, where the integration of Buddhist values and modern medical care

⁸ Ud 5.3 (PTS: Ud 48), trans. Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2012.

⁹ Kristin D. Neff and Christopher K. Germer, "Self-Compassion and Psychological Well-being," in *The Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science*, ed. Emma M. Seppälä et al. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 371 - 385.

¹⁰ Leodoro J. Labrague, "Stress, Stressors, and Stress Responses of Student Nurses in a Government Nursing School," *Health Science Journal* 6, no. 4 (2012), p. 424 - 435.

¹¹ Gail Kinman and Sandra Leggetter, "Emotional Labour and Wellbeing: What Protects Nurses?" *Healthcare* 4, no. 4 (2016), p. 89, doi:10.3390/healthcare4040089.

is increasingly recognized as essential for providing comprehensive patient support. However, systemic barriers persist. Time constraints, inadequate training, and cultural differences in accepting spiritual practices limit the implementation of models such as CCF in non-Buddhist contexts. Addressing these barriers requires institutional support, advocacy for spiritual care training, and efforts to adapt to diverse cultural settings. Moreover, the emotional and spiritual aspects of caregiving are still not widely recognized as integral components of healthcare, despite their demonstrated benefits.

In summary, the integration of spirituality and loving-kindness into healthcare offers immense potential for improving the well-being of both patients and caregivers. By addressing emotional and spiritual needs, these practices foster resilience, compassion, and acceptance, which are essential for both holistic and palliative care. The compassionate care facility serves as a compelling model for integrating spiritual care into healthcare, demonstrating the synergy between cultural traditions and modern medical practices. Future research should explore the scalability of such models across diverse cultural contexts and evaluate the long-term impact of integrating *mettā* into patient care.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative case study methodology to explore the integration of loving-kindness (*mettā*) into holistic patient care at the Compassionate Care Facility (CCF) at Wat Amarintharam Worawihan, in collaboration with Siriraj Hospital, Bangkok, Thailand. The research investigates how Buddhist principles, particularly *mettā*, are applied in healthcare to address the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of patients. The methodology is designed to ensure depth and rigor in understanding both the challenges and benefits of incorporating spiritual care into medical practice.

3.1. Participant observation

On-site observations were conducted at the CCF over three months. This involved observing daily operations, and interactions between staff, patients, families, and monastic members. Observations provided valuable insights into the practical application of *mettā* in caregiving and highlighted the interplay between spiritual and medical practices. Detailed field notes captured explicit behaviors, implicit attitudes, and subtle interactions, offering a nuanced understanding of the facility's operations.

3.2. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 key stakeholders, including (1) Founders and administrators of the CCF. (2) Buddhist monks involved in spiritual care, such as Phrakhrusamu Yannaphop. (3) Medical and nursing staff from Siriraj Hospital. (4) Social workers, volunteers, and caregivers at the facility. (5) Patients and their family members who have experienced the CCF's services. The interviews explored the motivations behind the project, operational challenges, and the impact of integrating Buddhist philosophy into care. Questions also addressed stakeholder perceptions of *mettā*'s effectiveness in enhancing emotional and spiritual well-being.

3.3. Document analysis

Relevant documents, including project proposals, official reports, patient testimonials, and operational records, were reviewed. This analysis provided contextual information about the facility's history, services, and collaborative framework. The documents enriched the understanding of how Buddhist values have been institutionalized within the CCF's model.

3.4. Data analysis

Data from all sources were systematically analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved coding recurring themes related to *mettā's* integration, identifying patterns, and synthesizing findings within the context of existing literature. Cross-validation ensured the reliability and credibility of the results. This comprehensive approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the Compassionate Care Facility's holistic care model, providing actionable insights for similar initiatives in diverse cultural contexts.

IV. RESULTS

The study reveals the transformation impact of integrating loving-kindness (*mettā*) into holistic patient care at the Compassionate Care Facility (CCF). It highlights how spiritual principles, coupled with practical support, address the multidimensional needs of patients and their families. The findings are organized into the following themes:

Theme 1: Loving-kindness and emotional well-being

The practice of loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) has proven to be a cornerstone of emotional care at the CCF. Patients who engaged in *mettā bhāvanā* practices consistently reported significant reductions in anxiety and emotional distress. This form of meditation involves generating feelings of goodwill and compassion towards oneself and others, creating a profound sense of emotional stability and inner peace.

Terminally ill patients, in particular, described feeling deeply comforted by caregivers who embodied these Buddhist principles in their interactions. The compassionate presence of caregivers, characterized by attentive listening, gentle communication, and acts of kindness, fostered a supportive and calming environment. Many patients highlighted how these interactions not only alleviated their fears but also provided them with a renewed sense of dignity and self-worth during challenging times. Furthermore, this compassionate approach extended beyond the patients themselves to include their families. Families often noted that the caregiver's loving-kindness had a ripple effect, creating a nurturing atmosphere that eased their emotional burdens. In several instances, caregivers were described as "pillars of strength" who helped families navigate the complexities of terminal care with grace and resilience. For patients in end-of-life care, the integration of loving-kindness practices cultivated a sense of acceptance and spiritual readiness. By fostering emotional connections and creating a space for open and compassionate dialogue, the CCF enabled patients to find peace and closure in their final days. One family member shared, "The loving-kindness shown here made my father's last days

not only bearable but filled with moments of joy and connection.”

In summary, the practice of loving-kindness at the CCF has profoundly impacted emotional well-being, providing patients and their families with the emotional and spiritual support necessary to face life’s most challenging transitions.

Theme 2: Mindfulness and mental clarity

Mindfulness practices, including guided meditation, reflective exercises, and breathing techniques, played a crucial role in helping patients achieve mental clarity and acceptance of their conditions. These practices provided patients with a framework to focus their attention on the present moment, thereby reducing the psychological burden of dwelling on past regrets or future uncertainties. Patients reported that mindfulness exercises helped them manage pain more effectively by fostering a heightened awareness of their physical and emotional states without judgment. This awareness allowed them to approach their experiences with greater equanimity, transforming pain from an overwhelming obstacle into a manageable aspect of their journey.

The guided meditation sessions conducted by monks and trained facilitators at the CCF were particularly impactful. These sessions often incorporated Buddhist teachings on impermanence and acceptance, encouraging patients to embrace their conditions with grace. By internalizing these teachings, patients gained a sense of control over their emotional responses to fear and anxiety, enabling them to navigate the challenges of terminal illness with resilience. Reflective exercises, such as journal and group discussions, further complemented the mindfulness practices. These activities provided patients with an outlet to process their thoughts and emotions, fostering a sense of mental clarity and emotional relief. For many, sharing their experiences in a supportive group setting helped to normalize their feelings and build a sense of community. Family members and caregivers also benefited from mindfulness practices. By participating in these activities, they developed tools to manage the emotional toll of caregiving and foster a deeper connection with their loved ones. The CCF’s emphasis on mindfulness not only improved the mental well-being of patients but also strengthened the overall support system surrounding them, reinforcing the interconnected nature of holistic care.

Theme 3: Supportive environment for caregivers and families

The Compassionate Care Facility (CCF) implemented a holistic model that emphasized the well-being of caregivers and families, recognizing the vital role they play in the care process. This approach created a supportive community where caregivers felt connected, supported, and understood. By integrating Buddhist practices into the caregiving experience, the CCF provided emotional resilience through meditation, mindfulness, and spiritual guidance, allowing caregivers to process the challenges of their roles in a nurturing environment. These practices not only alleviated the mental and emotional burdens of caregiving but also helped strengthen their spiritual well-being, providing them with the tools needed to approach their responsibilities

with compassion and patience.

The facility's environment fostered a sense of community, with caregivers finding solace in shared experiences, mutual support, and opportunities to connect with others in similar situations. Family members were encouraged to participate in activities that promoted emotional healing and understanding, further enhancing their bond with patients. The integration of Buddhist teachings, such as the practice of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karunā*), deepened their emotional connections with patients, helping them offer care not only from a place of duty but also from a place of profound empathy and spiritual alignment. This holistic model of support helped caregivers and families navigate the often-overwhelming challenges of caregiving, while also fostering a deeper sense of peace and fulfillment in their roles.

4.1. Holistic are in practice

The Compassionate Care Facility (CCF) adopts a comprehensive care model that integrates both spiritual and material support, recognizing that the well-being of patients and families is shaped by much more than just physical health. This approach seeks to address the full spectrum of human needs – emotional, spiritual, and material – creating a balanced and supportive environment where individuals can thrive. The facility's holistic model goes beyond traditional medical care, incorporating Buddhist teachings and practices as integral components of the healing process.

Spiritual care is central to the CCF's approach. Meditation sessions, led by experienced monks, provide patients and their families with the tools to cultivate inner peace, reduce stress, and foster emotional resilience. These sessions allow individuals to connect with their inner selves, fostering a sense of calm and acceptance in the face of illness. Additionally, chanting, a deeply rooted Buddhist practice, is used to promote healing, create a peaceful atmosphere, and offer comfort through sacred words and mantras. Personalized guidance from monks further enhances the emotional and spiritual support available to patients and their families. Monks provide counseling and spiritual guidance, addressing concerns related to suffering, life, and death, and offering advice on how to navigate these difficult experiences with compassion and understanding.

At the same time, the CCF is committed to alleviating the logistical and financial challenges that often accompany long-term care. Material support is provided through a range of practical services, ensuring that patients and their families can focus on the more important aspects of their well-being. Temporary housing accommodations are offered for those who need a place to stay near the facility, allowing them to remain close to their loved ones during their treatment. Nutritious meals are provided daily, ensuring that patients receive the nourishment they need to support their recovery. Transportation services are also available, easing the burden of travel for patients who require frequent visits to the facility or medical appointments. By combining spiritual guidance with tangible material support, the CCF creates a holistic care model that not only meets the immediate medical needs of patients but

also addresses their emotional, psychological, and practical concerns. This comprehensive approach fosters an environment where patients and their families feel supported in all aspects of their lives, promoting overall well-being and facilitating a deeper, more meaningful journey of healing.

4.2. *Mettā* in action

The principle of loving-kindness, or *mettā*, is at the heart of the Compassionate Care Facility (CCF) and is woven into every aspect of care provided to patients and their families. Rooted in Buddhist teachings, *mettā* emphasizes the cultivation of goodwill, compassion, and an unwavering desire for the happiness and well-being of others. At the CCF, this transformation principle is not just an abstract concept but an active, lived experience, guiding the daily interactions and practices of staff, volunteers, and monks.

One of the most prominent ways in which *mettā* manifests at the CCF is through mindful communication. Staff and volunteers are trained to practice deep listening, offering patients and families their full attention without judgment or interruption. This compassionate listening helps build trust and provides emotional comfort, allowing individuals to express their concerns, fears, and needs openly. For example, when a patient expresses anxiety about the future or a family member seeks guidance on how to care for a loved one, the response is not only a practical solution but an emotional one, rooted in empathy and understanding. The simple act of being heard can offer profound relief, turning what might otherwise be a cold, clinical encounter into a deeply human connection. In addition to attentive listening, acts of compassion are visible throughout the facility. Staff and volunteers routinely offer emotional reassurance, checking in on patients and families not just in terms of their medical needs but also their emotional state. The focus is on creating a space where people feel safe, supported, and understood. For instance, staff members go out of their way to ensure that patient's individual dietary preferences are respected, sometimes going so far as to prepare special meals that align with cultural or spiritual beliefs. This level of care, tailored to the specific needs and desires of each individual, exemplifies *mettā* in action.

One example of *mettā* in practice at the CCF is the work of Phrakhrusamu Yannaphop (Phra Pugdee Yatintharo), a monk who has become known for his compassionate approach to patient care. Phrakhrusamu Yannaphop regularly leads meditation sessions for both patients and their families, offering guidance in mindfulness and loving-kindness. He takes the time to listen to their concerns, offering spiritual counsel and support in a way that resonates with each person's unique experience. His calming presence and words of encouragement create a space where individuals can release their anxieties and connect with their inner peace. One family member shared that Phrakhrusamu Yannaphop's guidance helped them navigate a particularly challenging moment with their loved one, saying, "his words brought me so much peace, and I felt my heart soften with compassion as I cared for my mother." The impact of *mettā* extends beyond direct interactions with patients. Families also benefit from the supportive environment fostered by the staff,

volunteers, and monks. Many families have expressed profound gratitude for the care they received, often commenting on how the facility's focus on loving-kindness made a difficult journey more bearable. As one participant put it, "The gentle and attentive care made a difficult journey more bearable. I felt like we were not just patients and caregivers, but part of a community that truly cared for us." Through the ongoing practice of *mettā*, the CCF creates an atmosphere of compassion that nurtures the emotional and spiritual health of all who enter. By integrating this principle into daily life, the facility not only provides care for the body but also fosters a sense of peace, connection, and healing for the mind and heart.

4.3. The role of the monastic community

Monks play a central and **transformational** role in delivering spiritual care at the Compassionate Care Facility (CCF), serving as both caregivers and spiritual guides. Rooted in Buddhist traditions, their presence and practices provide an essential source of comfort and solace for patients and families, particularly in the challenging environment of palliative care. The monk's role extends far beyond the ritualistic; they offer emotional support, spiritual guidance, and a sense of peace that helps patients and families navigate the emotional and existential struggles associated with illness and end-of-life transitions.

A key component of the monk's spiritual care is their involvement in chanting, a practice that holds deep significance in Buddhism. Chanting sacred mantras and *sūtra* is a powerful tool for promoting calm, healing, and spiritual protection. At the CCF, monks regularly conduct chanting sessions, which are tailored to the needs of patients and their families. The sound of the chants, with their rhythmic flow and deeply resonant vibrations, creates a peaceful atmosphere that has a calming effect on both the body and mind. The repetition of sacred words is believed to purify the environment, reduce negative energies, and invite positive blessings. Many families have shared how these chanting rituals helped them feel more connected to the divine and their loved ones during moments of distress. One family member recalled, "During my father's final days, the chanting brought him peace and comfort. It was as if the space itself was infused with love, and we were all able to release our anxieties." In addition to chanting, the monks also offer blessings to patients and their families, which are deeply meaningful acts that serve to invoke protection, healing, and spiritual strength. These blessings are often sought at key moments of care, particularly when patients are experiencing physical or emotional pain. The monks' words are filled with compassion, and their prayers are seen as a source of spiritual refuge, helping to ease suffering and promote a sense of emotional peace. For families, receiving blessings from the monks is an opportunity to feel spiritually supported, knowing that their loved ones are being cared for in both a physical and spiritual sense.

A central theme in Buddhist teachings is the concept of impermanence, or *aniccā*, which emphasizes that all things are in a constant state of change, including life and death. The monks at the CCF actively incorporate this

concept into their spiritual care, helping patients and families come to terms with the transient nature of existence. Through discussions on impermanence and acceptance, the monks encourage individuals to embrace the present moment and let go of fear and attachment. This philosophical approach helps to ease anxieties about death, fostering a sense of peace and acceptance. One family member shared, “The monk spoke about impermanence and the nature of life and death in a way that was both profound and comforting. It helped me understand that death is not something to fear, but a natural part of our journey.” The monks also offer spiritual counsel on *dukkha* (suffering) and *mettā* (loving-kindness), teaching patients and families how to navigate pain and suffering with compassion and mindfulness. This guidance often provides deep emotional support, offering a perspective that suffering is not something to be avoided, but a part of the human experience that can be transformed through mindfulness, acceptance, and loving-kindness.

In palliative care, where the focus is on comfort rather than cure, the role of the monks becomes even more significant. Their presence helps create a spiritually nurturing environment, where patients can experience a sense of spiritual fulfillment and emotional peace as they approach the end of their lives. Many families have expressed profound gratitude for the monks’ ability to facilitate emotional closure, particularly in end-of-life situations. Through chanting, blessings, and spiritual discussions, the monks provide a sense of spiritual continuity that comforts both the patient and their family, allowing them to find meaning, peace, and acceptance during a profoundly difficult time. As one participant shared, “The monk’s presence at the end gave us the space to grieve, but also to feel a sense of peace. His guidance helped us understand that my mother’s passing was not an end, but part of the natural cycle of life. It gave us all the emotional closure we needed to move forward.” By embracing their role as spiritual caretakers, the monks at the CCF provide not only the necessary physical care but also the emotional and spiritual support that patients and families need to navigate the complexities of illness and death. Their compassionate presence and Buddhist practices create an environment where individuals can experience healing, peace, and acceptance, making the CCF a place of profound spiritual care during life’s most difficult moments.

4.4. Impact on patient well-being

Between 2016 and 2019, the Compassionate Care Facility (CCF) served 206 patients, accommodating up to 17 individuals daily. Following renovations in 2019, supported by donations from the Capital Market Academy’s Executive Program (Batch 28), the facility expanded its capacity to support approximately 30 patients and family members per day. This increased capacity has allowed the CCF to provide services to an even greater number of individuals in need.

As of January 2025, the CCF has further enhanced its operations through ongoing community support and additional infrastructure improvements. It now supports an average of 35 patients and family members daily, reflecting its continued commitment to addressing the growing demand for holistic care. Patient testimonials consistently emphasize the profound benefits of the CCF’s integrative approach, including reduced anxiety, enhanced emotional

resilience, and a sense of peace cultivated through *mettā* practices. For terminally ill patients, these effects are particularly transformational, fostering acceptance, emotional closure, and a sense of spiritual well-being during end-of-life care.

The facility has also introduced new programs, such as advanced mindfulness workshops and tailored spiritual counseling sessions, to further address the needs of patients and their families. These additions have strengthened the CCF's ability to provide comprehensive, culturally sensitive care that aligns with its core Buddhist principles.

4.5. Challenges and adaptations

The Compassionate Care Facility (CCF) has encountered several challenges in implementing its holistic care model, including resource limitations, cultural sensitivity, and institutional barriers. These challenges have required creative solutions and adaptations to maintain the quality and inclusivity of care. One significant challenge was resource limitations, particularly before 2019 when the facility struggled with capacity issues. Donations from the Capital Market Academy's Executive Program helped expand the facility's infrastructure, adding beds and essential amenities to meet growing demand. This expansion improved both capacity and the overall quality of care provided.

Cultural sensitivity was another challenge, especially with non-Buddhist patients who initially felt uncomfortable with certain Buddhist practices, such as chanting and meditation. To address this, the CCF emphasized universal values like compassion and dignity, ensuring that spiritual care was inclusive and accessible to patients of all backgrounds. Additionally, the CCF faced institutional barriers related to the integration of spiritual care into the medical setting. Limited training in spiritual care among hospital staff hindered the seamless incorporation of Buddhist practices. In response, the CCF organized workshops and collaborative dialogues with healthcare providers, enhancing staff understanding of the importance of spiritual care and fostering a more integrated approach to patient support. Despite these challenges, the CCF has successfully adapted its practices, ensuring that all patients receive compassionate, holistic care.

4.6. A culturally relevant model

The Compassionate Care Facility (CCF) stands as a powerful example of a culturally sensitive healthcare model that is deeply rooted in Thai Buddhist values. By integrating Buddhist principles such as *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karunā* (compassion) into its care approach, the CCF offers a form of healthcare that not only addresses the physical well-being of patients but also nurtures their emotional and spiritual health. This approach resonates strongly with the local Thai community, where Buddhist teachings are a cornerstone of daily life and cultural identity. The CCF's model reflects a broader vision of healthcare that goes beyond traditional medical practices, recognizing the importance of spirituality and emotional well-being in the healing process. At its core, the CCF's care model emphasizes compassion in all aspects of treatment, whether

through the monks' spiritual guidance, the practice of mindfulness, or the emphasis on creating a peaceful and supportive environment. The facility's integration of Buddhist values into its care processes allows patients and their families to feel understood, supported, and spiritually nurtured. For the Thai community, this approach to healthcare aligns with their cultural and religious beliefs, making the CCF not just a medical facility but a place of healing that honors their traditions and values.

Beyond its local context, the CCF's model holds the potential to inspire similar initiatives worldwide, particularly in areas where cultural and religious values play a central role in the healthcare experience. The integration of both spiritual and material support offers a comprehensive model of care that could be adapted to different cultural traditions and belief systems. Whether in countries with predominantly Christian, Muslim, or indigenous populations, the concept of blending spiritual and emotional care with practical medical treatment can be tailored to meet the unique needs and values of each community. For example, Christian communities could adapt the CCF model by incorporating prayer and Christian counseling, while Muslim communities could integrate Quranic readings and Islamic spiritual guidance. What makes the CCF model particularly valuable is its recognition that health is not solely a physical condition but a complex interplay of mind, body, and spirit. By offering holistic care that respects and incorporates cultural beliefs, the CCF demonstrates a flexible, adaptable approach to healthcare that prioritizes the dignity and well-being of patients in a culturally relevant context. This model serves as a blueprint for creating compassionate, inclusive, and spiritually nurturing healthcare environments worldwide, where diverse cultural and religious traditions are embraced and integrated into care practices.

In conclusion, the CCF's success in aligning its care practices with Thai Buddhist values presents an inspiring example of how healthcare can be both culturally relevant and spiritually enriching. Its holistic model of care, which blends physical, emotional, and spiritual support, offers a transformative approach that can be adapted to various cultural contexts, promoting healing that is truly aligned with the values and beliefs of local communities.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the transformation potential of integrating loving-kindness (*mettā*) into holistic patient care, exemplified by the Compassionate Care Facility (CCF) at Wat Amarintharam Worawihan in collaboration with Siriraj Hospital. This discussion highlights key insights into the implementation, impact, and broader implications of the CCF model.

5.1. Integration of spiritual and material support

The CCF demonstrates a seamless integration of spiritual and material support, addressing not only the physical but also the emotional and spiritual dimensions of patient care. The facility's emphasis on meditation, chanting, and personalized guidance reflects a deep understanding of the holistic needs of patients and their families. These spiritual practices, rooted in Buddhist

principles, provide emotional relief, foster acceptance, and help patients and families navigate the complexities of illness and end-of-life challenges. Complementary material support – such as temporary housing, meals, and transportation – alleviates logistical and financial burdens, further enhancing the overall care experience. This integration aligns with existing literature, which emphasizes the importance of addressing spiritual and emotional needs in healthcare (Puchalski et al. 2004, Koenig et al. 2012).¹²

5.2. Loving kindness as a core principle

The explicit application of *mettā* within the CCF showcases how loving-kindness can be operationalized in a healthcare setting. Practices such as mindful communication, active listening, and small acts of kindness contribute to a nurturing environment that promotes trust and emotional well-being. The study's findings affirm that *mettā*-based care not only supports patients but also strengthens caregiver-patient relationships, fostering a sense of community and mutual respect. These outcomes align with Neff and Germer's (2017) findings on the psychological benefits of loving-kindness meditation, including reduced stress and enhanced emotional resilience.¹³

5.3. The role of the monastic community

The involvement of Buddhist monks, particularly the leadership of Phrakhrusamu Yannaphop, is pivotal in bridging spiritual care with modern healthcare. Their presence and practices, including chanting and teachings on impermanence and acceptance, provide a source of comfort and peace for patients facing terminal illnesses. This integration highlights the synergy between Buddhist ethics and palliative care, creating a culturally relevant model that resonates with Thai patients and families. The findings further emphasize the monk's role in addressing gaps in spiritual care that are often overlooked in conventional healthcare settings.

5.4. Challenges and Adaptive Strategies

Despite its success, the CCF has encountered challenges that offer valuable lessons for similar initiatives. Resource limitations, cultural sensitivities, and institutional barriers have required adaptive strategies, such as facility expansions, personalized care approaches for non-Buddhist patients, and training workshops for healthcare providers. These adaptations illustrate the importance of flexibility and cultural sensitivity in implementing holistic care models, particularly in diverse healthcare contexts.

¹² Christina M. Puchalski et al., "Spirituality, Religion, and Healing in Palliative Care," *Clinics in Geriatric Medicine* 20, no. 4 (2004), p. 689-714; and Harold G. Koenig, Dana E. King, and Verna B. Carson, "Religion, Spirituality, and Health: The Research and Clinical Implications," *ISRN Psychiatry* 2012, Article ID 278730, doi:10.5402/2012/278730.

¹³ Kristin D. Neff and Christopher Germer, "Self-Compassion and Psychological Well-being," in *Oxford Handbook of Compassion Science*, ed. J. Doty. Oxford University Press, 2017, chap. 27.

5.5. Broader implications and scalability

The CCF serves as a compelling example of how traditional spiritual practices can complement modern medical interventions. Its culturally grounded approach highlights the potential for integrating local values and traditions into healthcare, offering a blueprint for other settings. However, scalability remains a critical consideration. Replicating this model in non-Buddhist or multicultural contexts will require careful adaptation to ensure inclusivity and alignment with local beliefs. Additionally, systemic barriers such as time constraints and lack of spiritual care training must be addressed through institutional support and policy advocacy.

5.6. Contribution to holistic care

This study contributes to the growing discourse on holistic patient care by demonstrating the practical application of Buddhist principles in a healthcare setting. The findings reinforce the need for a multidimensional approach to patient care that integrates physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. By emphasizing loving-kindness as a core principle, the CCF exemplifies how compassion-driven care can enhance well-being and foster resilience for both patients and caregivers.

5.7. Future directions

Future research should explore the long-term impact of integrating *mettā* into healthcare practices, particularly in diverse cultural settings. Comparative studies across different models of spiritual care could provide further insights into best practices and highlight opportunities for global application. Additionally, the role of policy in supporting such initiatives warrants further investigation to ensure that holistic care becomes a standard component of patient-centered healthcare.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the transformation potential of integrating loving-kindness (*mettā*) into holistic patient care, exemplified by the 'Compassionate Care Facility' (CCF) at Wat Amarintharam Worawihan in collaboration with Siriraj Hospital. By blending Buddhist spiritual practices with practical support mechanisms, the CCF addresses the multifaceted needs of patients and their families, fostering emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. The research reveals that the principle of *mettā* – embodied through mindful communication, spiritual guidance, and acts of compassion – significantly enhances the healing process, particularly for those facing terminal illnesses.

The monastic community, under the leadership of Phrakhrusamu Yannaphop, plays a pivotal role in the success of the CCF. Through their spiritual care practices, including chanting and blessings, they create an environment conducive to peace, acceptance, and emotional resilience. This approach has improved the quality of life for patients and provided families with emotional support and a sense of closure during challenging times. Despite facing challenges such as resource limitations and cultural sensitivities, the CCF has demonstrated adaptability in maintaining its patient-centered,

inclusive approach. The facility's ability to meet both material and spiritual needs reflects its commitment to providing culturally relevant care. This study suggests that the CCF model can be adapted to diverse healthcare settings, incorporating universal values of compassion, dignity, and respect for patient's spiritual needs.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of integrating holistic care models that address both physical and emotional aspects of healing. This approach offers valuable insights for healthcare providers and policymakers aiming to implement similar practices in culturally diverse contexts. Integrating loving-kindness into patient care not only enhances individual well-being but also contributes to the broader goal of compassionate, person-centered healthcare. Furthermore, this research advocates for the replication of the CCF model in diverse healthcare environments, highlighting its adaptability and potential to improve the quality of life for terminally ill patients. Future studies should explore the long-term impacts of integrating spiritual practices into healthcare and assess the applicability of this model in non-Buddhist cultural settings.

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MINDFULNESS AS A TOOL FOR STRESS REDUCTION IN VIETNAM'S KNOWLEDGE WORKFORCE DURING GLOBAL INTEGRATION

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Abstract

In the context of global integration, Vietnam's knowledge workers are under tremendous pressure from professional competition, the speed of technological development, and the need to improve their capacity constantly. Popular methods of stress reduction, such as online entertainment or social media, often only have a temporary effect, even increasing distraction and stress. Mindfulness, a practice rooted in Buddhist philosophy, has been shown to help reduce stress through training concentration, controlling emotions, and growing awareness of the present. Mindfulness can be practiced through meditation, regulating breathing, and observing emotions objectively. When applied regularly, this method helps improve mental health and work performance, creating a work-life balance for Vietnamese knowledge workers.

Keywords: *Mindfulness, knowledge labor, stress reduction.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of global integration, Vietnam's knowledge workers are facing increasing pressure from technological development, the requirement for constant innovation, and fierce competition in the labor market. Prolonged stress can negatively affect mental health and work performance. This study aims to understand how to practice mindfulness to reduce anxiety for knowledge workers based on the document analysis method and empirical survey of the effectiveness of mindfulness in the work environment. The study results show that practicing mindfulness through meditation, breath control, and maintaining attention in the present helps reduce stress levels, enhance labor performance, and improve quality of life (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). To promote the effectiveness of mindfulness, knowledge workers can apply techniques such

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as body scan meditation, deep breathing (mindful breathing), and intentional attention at work. In addition, businesses can help by organizing mindfulness training, creating flexible workspaces, and encouraging employees to participate in stress-reducing activities. Mindfulness practice effectively reduces stress and is a long-term strategy to help Vietnamese knowledge workers better adapt to the globalized work environment (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical framework

Mindfulness has its roots in Buddhist philosophy and Sanskrit; it is called “*smṛti*” (स्मृति), which means remembering, being aware, or focusing on the present. In Pali, the language used in many of the Theravada Buddhist scriptures, mindfulness is called “*sati*,” which has the same meaning as awake awareness and non-judgmental observation of what is happening in the present. Mindfulness plays a vital role in the Buddhist Eightfold Path, especially in Mindfulness (*Sammā-sati*), on the path of practice the Buddha taught to attain enlightenment and end suffering. Mindfulness is the seventh element of the Eightfold Path and plays a vital role in developing the intellect, helping people to live consciously, control their emotions, and act consciously.

Mindfulness means focusing entirely on the present and not getting carried away by thoughts about the past or the future. It helps people objectively observe their body, mind, and world without judgment and attachment, thereby maintaining inner peace. Thus, mindfulness refers to deliberate awareness, focusing on the present, and accepting all experiences without judgment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

According to Buddhist scriptures, Mindfulness has four primary areas of practice, called the Four Mindfulness Lands (*Satipaṭṭhāna*), which include 1) Mindfulness (*Kāyānupassanā*) – Awareness and observation of the body, breath, posture, movement of the body; 2) Mindfulness (*Vedanānupassanā*) – Recognizing and observing sensations (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral) without overreacting or clinging; 3) Mindfulness (*Cittānupassanā*) – Observing the state of mind, recognizing changes in consciousness such as joy, sadness, anxiety, peace; 4) Mindfulness (*Dhammānupassanā*) – Recognizing and observing spiritual phenomena and the laws of all things according to Buddhist teachings.

Mindfulness is an effective method that helps individuals control their thoughts and emotions by identifying and observing them objectively without letting themselves get carried away or react negatively. When practicing mindfulness, people minimize past reflection and worry about the future, which helps the mind to become calmer and more balanced. Focusing entirely on the present not only improves productivity but also improves the quality of decisions. At the same time, mindfulness helps develop empathy and connection with others through observing oneself and the world deeply. In addition, the practice of mindfulness assists the individual in recognizing the impermanent nature of things, thereby minimizing mental entanglements and achieving a peaceful state of mind.

Today, mindfulness is applied in Buddhism and widely studied and used in fields such as psychology, medicine, education, and the work environment. Popular practices such as Mindfulness Meditation, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), and mindfulness-based stress reduction programs (MBSR) have been scientifically proven to reduce stress and anxiety and improve mental health.

Many studies have shown that mindfulness helps individuals improve their ability to focus, regulate their emotions, and enhance their awareness of themselves and their surroundings (Bishop et al., 2004). In particular, maintaining attention to the present helps to minimize negative thoughts, thereby making mindfulness an essential tool in managing stress, enhancing resilience, and improving quality of life (Baer et al., 2006).

In the modern context, increased work pressure and high-performance requirements make knowledge workers face prolonged stress. Career competition, rapid technological changes, and the global economy force them to remain creative, process information, and make accurate decisions quickly. In addition, the complexity of social relationships in a multicultural environment and constantly changing values also increase the level of stress.

Koolhaas, J. M., Bartolomucci, A., Buwalda, B., de Boer, S. F., Flügge, G., Korte, S. M., ... & Fuchs, E. (2011) state that stress is the body's natural response to environmental stimuli, including large workloads, social pressures, and life fluctuations. Physiologically, stress acts as a survival mechanism, helping the body respond quickly to danger by activating the sympathetic nervous system and promoting the production of cortisol and adrenaline hormones to maintain alertness and enhance reflexes. However, when stress persists, it can have many serious consequences for physical and mental health. Chronic stress is associated with an increased risk of conditions such as anxiety disorders, depression, cardiovascular issues, sleep disorders, and impaired immune function (Zefferino, R., Di Gioia, S., & Conese, M., 2021). In addition, Agorastos A. & Chrousos G. P. (2022) suggest that prolonged stress increases the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure, negatively affecting long-term health. Not only does stress affect the individual, but it also impairs the ability to maintain social relationships, causing disconnection in the family and community and creating a sense of isolation and imbalance in life. Therefore, effective stress identification and management is essential for knowledge workers to protect their mental health, maintain work performance, and improve their quality of life. Measures such as practicing mindfulness, work-life balance, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and building a supportive work environment can help mitigate the adverse effects of stress and enhance resilience in a modern environment.

Mindfulness helps reduce stress through three main mechanisms: enhancing cognition and regulating emotions, impacting the nervous system, and improving concentration. Mindfulness lets individuals observe thoughts and feelings objectively, thereby minimizing adverse reactions and maintaining mental equilibrium (Garland et al., 2015). When faced with pressure, rather

than reacting in a bursting or negative way, the mindfulness practitioner can recognize their emotions and accept them without getting caught up in the stress. This helps them maintain psychological stability, make more informed decisions, and avoid the adverse effects of stress on mental health (Hölzel et al., 2011).

In addition, neuroscience studies suggest that mindfulness can help reduce amygdala activity, the emotional processing center involved in stress responses, and strengthen the connection to the *prefrontal cortex*, the area responsible for emotional control and planning (Tang et al., 2015). This adjustment helps individuals respond more flexibly to pressure, limit overreactions, and strengthen psychological control. For Vietnamese knowledge workers, who often face large workloads and high competition, maintaining calm and regulating their emotions effectively will help them improve their productivity and reduce the risk of psychological problems such as anxiety and depression.

Finally, mindfulness improves concentration and reduces negative thoughts by directing attention to the present, limiting overthinking the past or worrying about the future – the two main stressors (Zeidan et al., 2010). In the context of global integration, Vietnam's knowledge workforce must be highly focused to adapt to rapid changes in technology and markets. Mindfulness helps them minimize distractions, improve work performance, and maintain creativity at work. In conclusion, practicing mindfulness helps reduce stress and is a vital tool to help Vietnam's knowledge workers develop sustainably in the modern working environment.

Literature Review

Building on previous research, this paper focuses on three main directions to clarify the role of mindfulness in stress management for Vietnamese youth:

2.2. Research directions on the application of mindfulness to control and reduce stress

In the context of global integration, Vietnam's knowledge workers face increasing pressure due to the continuous development of technology, the requirement for innovation, and fierce competition in the labor market. These stresses not only affect work productivity but also negatively impact mental health, increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, and other psychological problems. In this situation, mindfulness has become a method that many studies have proven to be effective in reducing stress, increasing self-awareness, and improving the quality of life.

Recent studies have shown that practicing mindfulness can help reduce rates of anxiety and depression and enhance emotional control and behavior regulation (Desrosiers, A., Vine, V., Klemanski, D. H., & Nolen-Hoeksema, S., 2013). A study in Vietnam found that when adolescents participate in mindfulness programs, not only do they significantly reduce their stress levels, but they also have a marked improvement in self-regulation of emotions and maintaining a more stable mental state. In addition, mindfulness activities such as breath meditation, listening to mindful music, and practicing self-

compassion have been shown to have a positive impact on mental health and stress management (Conversano, C., Ciacchini, R., Orrù, G., Di Giuseppe, M., Gemignani, A., & Poli, A., 2020). These results are meaningful not only for adolescents but may also extend to the knowledge workforce, which is also under much pressure in their work and daily lives.

Besides the psychological impact, neuroscience studies have demonstrated that mindfulness can help reduce the activity of the sympathetic nervous system, enhance a state of relaxation, and reduce the production of stress hormones such as cortisol (Tang et al., 2015). This mechanism helps students minimize chronic stress, improve their ability to absorb knowledge, and maintain a stable mental state. Therefore, integrating mindfulness into the education curriculum can have long-term benefits in developing learning capacity and psychological sustainability for students in Vietnam.

Luy, K. C. (2013) surveyed Vietnamese psychotherapists' perceptions of mindfulness. Using a questionnaire based on Bloom's cognitive model, the study assessed knowledge, understanding, and the ability to apply this therapy in practice. The results show that although therapists have a basic understanding of attention therapy, its application to practice is limited due to the lack of instructional materials and in-depth training. The study suggests that training and documentation on attention therapy should be strengthened to improve the effectiveness of psychotherapy in Vietnam.

Although mindfulness has been shown to benefit education and stress management, the above studies have not mentioned its application to knowledge workers in Vietnam because mindfulness has not been widely integrated into professional training programs and work environments. This leads to a lack of awareness and regular practice. Due to high-pressure work and limited time, it is difficult for many knowledge workers to maintain mindfulness practice.

2.3. Research directions on the application of mindfulness practices for Vietnam's knowledge workers in the context of digital transformation

The vigorous development of technology has opened up many opportunities to apply mindfulness to life, especially in supporting knowledge workers to reduce stress and improve work performance. Digital-based mindfulness apps such as *Headspace*, *Calm*, or *Insight Timer* provide guided meditation exercises, breathing guides, and stress-monitoring tools, making it easy for users to access and practice daily mindfulness. A study by Holland, B., & Sinha, K. (Eds.) (2024) found that using these apps can help reduce anxiety levels by 40% and improve sleep quality by 30%. This demonstrates the potential of technology in proactively and flexibly promoting mindfulness practice.

Research by Thùy, N. L. Đ. (2021) at the University of Economics in Ho Chi Minh City explored the relationship between mindfulness and employee performance in Vietnamese businesses. The results showed that mindfulness positively impacted work performance through participation in the creative process. Specifically, mindfulness helps employees reduce stress at work,

increasing creative participation and improving performance. This study contributes to the research system on mindfulness in the Vietnamese context. It provides a reference for managers to apply mindfulness to improve employee mental health and performance.

Research by Thach, N. M. (2022) has investigated the impact of mindfulness on the work and quality of life of programmers in the information technology industry. The results of data analysis from 200 programmers show that mindfulness significantly reduces stress levels and increases job satisfaction. In addition, mindfulness also indirectly reduces the interference of work in personal life, thereby improving the overall quality of life of programmers. This study highlights the critical role of mindfulness as a psychological resource, helping employees manage stress and improve work-life balance.

Research by Le, N. H., Mai, M. Q. T., & Le, K. G. (2024) at Ho Chi Minh City businesses. Ho Chi Minh City has investigated the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship between work pressure and the emotional fatigue of employees. Based on the theory of resource conservation, the study proposes that stressful behavior in the workplace negatively impacts the state of mindfulness and impairs employees' mental resources. The results of data analysis from 300 employees show that mindfulness plays an important mediating role. Specifically, pressure behavior in the workplace increases emotional fatigue and reduces the employee's state of mind. Therefore, the study highlights the importance of maintaining mindfulness and preventing stressful behavior in the workplace to improve employees' mental health and work performance.

One of the most significant limitations is the lack of awareness of the benefits of mindfulness in the knowledge labor community. Most current research and applications focus on the application of technology and with a specific group of audiences. Moreover, competition from the digital environment, with the explosion of social media and multi-dimensional information, can reduce the ability to concentrate and make users susceptible to distractions when using mindfulness apps. In addition, maintaining mindfulness practices through digital platforms requires a high level of commitment and discipline, which not all knowledge workers can do continuously. In addition, many studies have not thoroughly evaluated the long-term effectiveness of mindfulness in the actual work environment.

2.4. Methods

This study uses a literature review method to evaluate the effectiveness of mindfulness practices in reducing stress for Vietnam's knowledge workers in the context of global integration. The literature review method involves collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing scientific studies, academic reports, and articles on mindfulness and mental health in the work environment. In particular, the study focuses on materials related to knowledge workers, who often face job pressure, career competition, and the need for continuous innovation.

During the analysis, the study identified general trends in the effectiveness of mindfulness in stress management. Specifically, the study looked at factors

such as mindfulness techniques, the impact of mindfulness on cognition, emotional regulation, and physiological effects on the nervous system. The data were categorized by key topic groups, including (1) the impact of mindfulness on stress management, (2) the physiological and psychological mechanisms of mindfulness, (3) the application of technology in mindfulness practice, and (4) the applicability of mindfulness in the work environment in Vietnam.

The integrated approach combines mindfulness practice programs implemented at home and abroad, including training courses in enterprises, digital applications that support mindfulness practices, and success models in international working environments. Synthesizing these lessons and experiences helps propose solutions suitable for Vietnam's knowledge workers' cultural characteristics and needs.

This study clarifies the role of mindfulness in stress reduction by using a literature review combined with data analysis and synthesis techniques. It provides a scientific basis for developing application models suitable for the Vietnamese context in the era of global integration.

2.5. Results

Mindfulness is a meditation technique and a holistic approach that helps people maintain awareness and identify their mental states in all daily activities. To apply mindfulness effectively in relieving stress for Vietnamese knowledge workers, it can be done through three main methods: (1) enhancing cognition and regulating emotions, (2) affecting the nervous system, and (3) improving concentration and reducing negative thoughts.

First, the practice of mindfulness helps to enhance awareness and regulate the emotions of intellectual workers.

Mindfulness is an effective method that helps individuals increase awareness and regulate emotions, which is especially useful for knowledge workers who frequently face high work pressure and expectations. When practicing mindfulness, individuals can observe their thoughts and feelings objectively, thereby minimizing adverse reactions and maintaining a state of mental equilibrium (Garland et al., 2015). Research by Tran, M. A. Q et al., (2022) in Vietnam has shown that mindfulness can improve the ability to focus and regulate emotions, especially in negative mental states (Tran, M. A. Q, Vo-Thanh, T., Soliman, M., Khoury, B., & Chau, N. N. T., 2022).

To apply mindfulness to daily life, some of the following practices can be used: **Body scan meditation:** This method requires the individual to spend 5-10 minutes a day focusing on each part of the body, recognizing and feeling stress, thereby actively relaxing. This helps to increase awareness of the body and current emotional state and aids in regulating responses to stressors. **Mindfulness journaling:** Recording daily thoughts and emotions helps individuals identify and reflect on their mental state. This method provides an opportunity to look at emotional reactions objectively, thereby adjusting behavior and thinking in a more positive direction. **Practice gratitude:** Taking a few minutes daily to think about positive things helps improve your mood and

reduce stress. Research has shown that gratitude is positively associated with happiness and mindfulness, enhancing quality of life.

Applying these mindfulness methods helps knowledge workers reduce stress and enhance their ability to self-regulate their emotions, improve work performance, and improve social relationships. In the context of global integration, as work pressure increases, the practice of mindfulness has become an important tool to help individuals maintain mental health and achieve balance in life (Ngân, T. T. B., Thăm, P. T. H., & Tâm, N. T., 2022)

Second, mindfulness practice exercises affect the nervous system of intellectual workers.

Mindfulness practice has positively impacted the nervous system, especially in reducing stress and improving emotional control. Mindfulness significantly affects the brain, especially the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex, two areas that play an essential role in processing emotions and controlling behavior. The amygdala, a structure of the limbic system, is responsible for regulating stress and fear responses. When encountering a stressful situation, the amygdala triggers a “fight-or-flight” response, which increases the levels of the hormones cortisol and adrenaline in the body, leading to a state of stress and anxiety. However, neurological studies indicate that mindfulness can reduce the activity of the amygdala, which helps limit the excessive stress response. Specifically, when people focus on their breath or the present moment through meditation, the parasympathetic nervous system is activated, which helps calm the brain and reduce the production of stress hormones. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) also showed that those who practiced mindfulness regularly had lower levels of amygdala response than those who did not, thereby improving their ability to cope with stress in life and enhancing mental stability.

In addition to reducing the amygdala’s activity, mindfulness positively impacts the prefrontal cortex (PFC), the area responsible for emotional control, decision-making, logical thinking, and concentration. When the amygdala is overstimulated due to stress or anxiety, it can impair the function of the prefrontal cortex, leading to impulsive and uncontrollable emotional responses. Mindfulness helps strengthen the connection between the amygdala and the PFC, assisting the individual in regulating emotions more effectively and responding calmly and more controllably in stressful situations. Furthermore, studies show that regular mindfulness practice can increase gray matter density in the prefrontal cortex, which improves concentration, reduces negative thoughts, and enhances flexibility in thinking.

Thanks to its positive effects on the brain, mindfulness can be applied in many aspects of life to improve mental health. The practice of mindfulness helps reduce stress and anxiety, thereby preventing stress-related conditions such as anxiety disorders, depression, and insomnia. At the same time, a stronger connection between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex helps individuals better control their emotions, avoid adverse reactions, and maintain calm in difficult situations. In addition, mindfulness helps to enhance concentration and decision-making by improving the cognitive function of the prefrontal cortex,

assisting individuals to make more informed choices in work and life. In the field of psychotherapy, mindfulness has been integrated into many methods, such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) or Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which helps to support the treatment of psychological disorders such as PTSD, depression, and chronic anxiety.

Mindfulness not only helps reduce the activity of the amygdala, which regulates the stress response, but also strengthens the connection to the prefrontal cortex, helping the individual to control their emotions better and maintain calm in challenging situations. These effects make mindfulness an effective method to improve mental health, improve quality of life, and develop a more flexible mindset in a stressful modern environment (Tang et al., 2015).

Some mindfulness techniques that can positively impact the nervous system include mindful breathing, which focuses on slow and deep breathing and positively impacts the nervous system, especially the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). When people consciously regulate their breathing, the parasympathetic nervous system is activated, which helps calm the body and reduce the production of stress hormones such as cortisol. Not only does this help reduce stress and anxiety and bring calm and clarity to thought, but it also supports better control of emotions. The connection between this method and mindfulness lies in directing attention to the breath, which helps the practitioner practice the ability to focus on the present moment instead of getting caught up in negative or stressful thoughts. When combined with meditation, this technique can optimize the stress reduction effect.

Guided meditation through mindfulness apps such as Simple Habit – Provides short meditations (5 minutes/ day) to fit into busy schedules; MyLife Meditation (Stop, Breathe & Think) – Helps monitor your mental state and recommends appropriate meditations; Pzizz – Uses neuro sounds to support deep sleep and effective naps; Headspace – Provides guided meditations, which improve sleep, reduce stress, and enhance focus; Calm – Supports meditation, good sleep, and relaxation with light music, sleep stories, and meditation guides; Insight Timer – Free app with thousands of meditations from experts around the world; Waking Up – Developed by Sam Harris, offers guided meditation and a deep mindfulness philosophy. These tools have effectively aided in the practice of mindfulness. These apps provide a variety of meditation exercises, from breathing meditation to body scan meditation, making it easy for users to maintain their daily meditation routine. As a result, the application of guided meditation in combination with breath control effectively reduces stress levels. It improves the quality of life, awareness, and the ability to control emotions in everyday situations.

4 – 7 – 8 breathing technique: Inhale for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 7 seconds, and exhale for 8 seconds to help stabilize your heart rate and calm your nervous system. The 4 – 7 – 8 breathing technique (inhaling for 4 seconds, holding the breath for 7 seconds, exhaling for 8 seconds) is a method of controlling breathing that helps regulate the activity of the nervous system, especially the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS). This method directly impacts

the brain, helping to reduce stress, stabilize heart rate, improve concentration, and improve sleep quality. Precisely, prolonging the exhalation time activates the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS), which reduces cortisol levels - the stress hormone - helping to relax the mind and reduce anxiety. In addition, holding your breath for 7 seconds helps increase oxygen absorption, improve blood circulation to the brain, regulate blood pressure and heart rate, and help the body reach a more stable state. This method also stimulates the activity of the prefrontal cortex, which helps control emotions more effectively, increase concentration, and reduce adverse emotional reactions. In particular, applying the 4 – 7 – 8 breathing technique before bed helps the body transition to a state of deep rest, supporting the treatment of insomnia caused by stress. It positively impacts the brain, and the 4 – 7 – 8 breathing technique is also closely related to mindfulness. Practicing this method helps people focus more on the present moment, limiting distractions from anxious thoughts. In mindfulness, the breath is a core element that helps the practitioner practice concentration and observe the inner state without judgment. When combined with mindfulness, the 4 – 7 – 8 breathing technique helps the practitioner quickly put the body into a state of deliberate relaxation, reduce stress responses, and control emotions more effectively. In addition, paying attention to each inhalation - hold breath - exhale helps strengthen the connection between mind and body, helping people maintain calm even in stressful situations.

With practical benefits, the 4 – 7 – 8 breathing technique can be applied at any time, especially when feeling anxious, stressed or before bedtime. This method can also be combined with mindfulness meditation to optimize relaxation and enhance concentration. When practiced regularly, this technique helps form better breathing control habits, sustainably improving mental and physical health. Thus, the 4-7-8 breathing technique effectively regulates neurological activity and supports mindfulness practice, bringing comprehensive benefits to human health (Lin, Z., Kunze, K., Ueki, A., & Inakage, M., 2020). In addition, practicing mindfulness can also enhance *neuroplasticity*, the brain's ability to change and restructure itself based on new information and experiences. Meditation helps improve neural connection patterns between different brain regions, improving cognitive function, information processing, and emotional regulation (Hölzel, B. K., Lazar, S. W., Gard, T., Schuman-Olivier, Z., Vago, D. R., & Ott, U., 2011).

The practice of mindfulness not only helps reduce stress but also positively impacts the structure and function of the brain, especially in regulating emotions and improving cognitive abilities. Techniques such as mindful breathing, guided meditation, and the 4-7-8 breathing technique can effectively support maintaining mental health and improving quality of life (Brown, R., & Gerbarg, P. L., 2012).

Third, Mindfulness helps improve concentration and reduce negative thinking for knowledge workers.

Knowledge workers are often distracted by large workloads, pressures from the work environment, and disruptions from digital technology. Practicing

mindfulness helps to enhance the ability to concentrate and limit overthinking the past or worrying about the future – two significant factors that cause stress (Zeidan et al., 2010).

Some effective practices include focusing on a single task: Instead of doing multiple tasks simultaneously, giving full attention to a specific task improves performance and reduces mental fatigue. A 2023 study shows that mindfulness can effectively enhance the brain's functional organization, helping to create neuroplasticity and allowing neural networks to grow and change (Joglekar, S., 2024). *Walking meditation*: This method helps train concentration and create short periods to regenerate energy during the workday. Mindfulness meditation practices, including walking meditation, have been shown to help reduce stress and anxiety and improve psychological health (VinUni, 2024). *Limit digital screen time*: Set aside time off your phone or social media to focus on work. Incorporating mindfulness and meditation into your daily routine can improve focus and reduce stress. Simple mindfulness exercises, like deep breathing or short meditation, can help calm the mind and enhance concentration (Bhatia, P., & Sethi, S., 2024).

In addition, mindfulness helps individuals become more aware of their thoughts and feelings, thereby minimizing adverse reactions and maintaining mental balance. Mindfulness is considered the spiritual function of recognizing and accepting all phenomena in the present moment (thoughts, feelings, and feelings) and, as a form of meditation, is the applied dimension of Buddhist philosophy (Williams, J. M. G., 2010). Applying these mindfulness methods helps knowledge workers reduce stress and enhance their ability to self-regulate their emotions, improve work performance, and improve social relationships. In the context of global integration, as work pressure increases, mindfulness has become an important tool to help individuals maintain their mental health and achieve balance in their lives.

III. DISCUSSION

Mindfulness is widely recognized as an effective method to reduce stress and improve work performance, especially for knowledge workers in the context of deep international integration today. However, applying mindfulness in the Vietnamese working environment brings advantages and difficulties, requiring a clear awareness of the causes of these challenges and proposing appropriate solutions.

Currently, Vietnamese people are increasingly attaching importance to mental health, mainly due to intellectual stagnation, so there is a need to find effective methods to control stress and improve the quality of life. In particular, mindfulness is a valuable solution to help individuals practice concentration and maintain psychological balance. In particular, with the rapid development of information technology, knowledge workers can access many materials, online courses, and mindfulness applications. As a result, they can easily practice mindfulness according to scientific guidance, using their schedules, improving stress management effectiveness, and optimizing

work performance. In addition, mindfulness increases mental health and labor performance in a working environment that requires innovation, adding value to businesses. Many firms and organizations have actively implemented mindfulness training programs for employees. These initiatives help improve the work environment, promote a healthy corporate culture, and encourage employees to apply mindfulness at work to enhance productivity and maintain a balance between personal and professional life.

However, mindfulness in the knowledge labor environment in Vietnam still faces many difficulties due to time, knowledge, and cultural awareness barriers. First, high work pressure and busy schedules make it difficult for many knowledge workers to maintain mindfulness practices regularly and effectively. When they have to handle a large workload quickly, they have less opportunity to spend time on activities that help them balance their minds. Second, although there are many mindfulness manuals and applications available, the lack of intensive training programs tailored to Vietnamese cultural characteristics can reduce the effectiveness of this approach. Knowledge workers need more specific and practical guidelines to optimally apply mindfulness to the work environment. Finally, in some businesses, mindfulness is not recognized correctly and may even be considered unnecessary or inappropriate for the work culture. This leads to a lack of support from colleagues and superiors, which reduces the individual's motivation to practice. These factors have created significant barriers, requiring changes at both the individual and organizational levels to apply mindfulness effectively in the knowledge labor environment in Vietnam.

In the context of deep international integration, Vietnam's knowledge workers face many challenges regarding stress, work pressure, and the need to improve work performance. To practice mindfulness effectively to improve mental health and optimize productivity, appropriate solutions are needed at both the individual and organizational levels. First, knowledge workers should integrate mindfulness into their daily routines rather than seeing it as a separate activity. Applying mindfulness techniques to work and daily activities, such as focusing entirely on the task, performing short breathing exercises during breaks, or participating in short meditation sessions before and after work, can help reduce stress and improve concentration.

Participating in mindfulness training and communities is also an effective method of raising awareness and staying motivated to practice. These courses provide in-depth knowledge of mindfulness and create a supportive environment, giving individuals more motivation to maintain their practice habits. Mindfulness communities can also help participants share experiences, learn from others, and improve the effectiveness of applying mindfulness to their lives.

Another important factor is creating a work environment that supports mindfulness. Businesses and organizations can play an essential role by implementing employee mindfulness training programs, providing quiet spaces for meditation, or practicing mindfulness in the workplace. At the same

time, encouraging a healthy work culture and reducing stress through flexible policies and a friendly working environment also promote the effectiveness of mindfulness practices. In addition, knowledge workers can use technology intelligently to support mindfulness practices. Online mindfulness apps such as *Headspace*, *Calm*, or *Insight Timer* can help individuals practice on a flexible schedule. However, it is essential to set reasonable limits when using technology to avoid distractions and minimize the negative impact of excessive exposure to digital information. Finally, self-awareness and personal commitment are crucial in mindfulness practice. Each individual needs to understand the benefits of mindfulness for mental health and work performance, forming a habit of regular and persistent practice. Practicing mindfulness requires strong personal commitment despite time constraints or work pressures.

In conclusion, mindfulness helps Vietnamese knowledge workers reduce stress and improves their ability to adapt, be creative, and work more effectively in a globalized environment. To practice mindfulness sustainably, support from individuals and organizations is needed, along with building a conducive work environment and a culture that supports mindfulness in society.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study's results suggest that mindfulness can provide significant benefits, including improved self-awareness, reduced adverse reactions, and enhanced ability to adapt to changes in the work environment. Techniques such as body-sweeping meditation, mindful breathing, and walking meditation are effective in helping knowledge workers maintain mental equilibrium. Besides, integrating mindfulness into daily work, rather than just practicing it in individual intervals, can make it easier for individuals to keep this habit.

However, applying mindfulness to the working environment of knowledge workers in Vietnam still faces many challenges. First, the pressure of work and busy schedules make it difficult for many people to arrange time to practice mindfulness regularly. Second, mindfulness awareness in the knowledge labor community has not yet been widely disseminated, leading to inconsistent practices and a lack of support from management and organizations. Third, the impact of technology and the digital working environment can cause distractions, reducing the effectiveness of mindfulness without proper management measures.

In conclusion, mindfulness is an effective method to help Vietnamese knowledge workers relieve stress, improve mental health, and improve work performance in global integration. The application of mindfulness requires commitment from the individual and support from the organization and the community to create a conducive practice environment. If implemented systematically and synchronously, mindfulness will become an important tool to help Vietnam's knowledge workers better adapt to the fluctuations of the digital age, maintain a stable mental state, and achieve a work-life balance.

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND BUDDHIST THOUGHT: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HARMONIZING PROGRESS WITH NATURE

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Abstract:

The study explores the profound intersection between Buddhist philosophy and sustainable development, offering a critical analysis of how foundational Buddhist principles - such as interdependence (*pratityasamutpāda*), mindfulness (*sati*), and compassion (*karuṇā*) - can be effectively integrated into the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By drawing upon both classical Buddhist teachings and contemporary applications, the research underscores the relevance of Buddhist wisdom in addressing some of the most pressing environmental, social, and economic challenges of the modern era. Central to the study is the recognition that the Buddhist worldview inherently aligns with the core tenets of sustainability. The doctrine of interdependence emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms, advocating for an ethical responsibility that extends beyond human society to include the natural world. Mindfulness, as both a contemplative practice and a way of being, fosters conscious consumption, ethical decision-making, and a deeper awareness of the long-term consequences of human actions. Compassion, meanwhile, serves as a moral compass, guiding policies and behaviors toward greater social equity, economic justice, and ecological harmony. Despite these philosophical synergies, the study also critically examines the structural and ideological barriers that hinder the practical implementation of Buddhist principles in contemporary economic and political systems. The dominant global economic paradigm, driven by consumerism, short-term profit maximization, and an anthropocentric view of progress,

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often stands in stark contrast to Buddhist notions of simplicity, moderation, and non-attachment. Furthermore, the commodification of natural resources and the prioritization of economic growth over environmental preservation present significant obstacles to realizing a truly sustainable future. In response to these challenges, the research proposes a transformative approach that reimagines sustainable development through a Buddhist ethical lens. This involves advocating for systemic change at both policy and grassroots levels, encouraging the adoption of alternative economic models such as Buddhist economics, and fostering a cultural shift towards values of sufficiency, cooperation, and well-being rather than endless accumulation. The study ultimately calls for a paradigm shift - one that moves beyond a mechanistic and materialistic understanding of development towards a more holistic vision that integrates wisdom, inner fulfillment, and ecological integrity as essential pillars of sustainability.

Keywords: *Buddhism, sustainable development, harmonizing progress, nature.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The modern world is grappling with a series of interconnected crises, including environmental degradation, climate change, resource depletion, poverty, hunger, social inequalities, and economic disparities. These challenges demand a strategic and holistic approach to sustainable development that balances environmental, social, and economic considerations. In response to these global concerns, the United Nations (UN) introduced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which builds upon and expands the mandates established in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

At the core of this agenda are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a comprehensive blueprint aimed at fostering a better and more sustainable future for all. The SDGs address critical global issues, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental sustainability, prosperity, and peace and justice, with the guiding principle of “leaving no one behind”. These 17 Goals are interconnected and categorized into three broad themes: (1) People (SDGs 1 - 5): Addressing fundamental human needs such as poverty, hunger, health, education, and gender equality. (2) Prosperity (SDGs 7 - 11): Promoting economic growth, innovation, infrastructure, and sustainable urbanization. (3) Planet (SDGs 6, 12 - 15): Protecting natural resources and combating climate change.

Additionally, two overarching goals SDG 16 (peace and justice) and SDG 17 (global partnerships) serve as an enabling framework to facilitate SDG implementation. The success of the SDGs will be measured through 169 predefined targets and 167 indicators, with the ultimate achievement set for 2030.¹

¹ Uganda Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Review, pp. 104 - 104. Daniels, P. (2007). Buddhism and the transformation to sustainable economies.

<https://doi.org/10.1556/socec.29.2007.2.3>

While modern sustainability strategies primarily emphasize technological solutions, economic policies, and regulatory mechanisms, there is growing recognition of the role that philosophical and ethical traditions can play in achieving long-term sustainability. Buddhist philosophy, rooted in principles such as interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), impermanence (*anicca*), non-self (*anattā*), mindfulness (*sati*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and non-attachment, provides a holistic approach to sustainability that fosters balance, harmony, and ethical living.

Buddhism originated in ancient India through the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha), whose fundamental doctrines - the Four Noble Truths - outline the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), its causes, its cessation, and the path to liberation. Complementing these truths is the Noble Eightfold Path, which consists of right understanding, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. This path offers a practical and ethical framework for individuals and societies to cultivate wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline, ultimately leading to a harmonious and sustainable way of life.

This research paper explores the intersection of Buddhist thought and sustainable development, examining how Buddhist principles align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By integrating theoretical insights with practical applications, the study highlights the potential of Buddhist wisdom to address contemporary sustainability challenges. Through its emphasis on interdependence, ethical living, and environmental stewardship, Buddhist philosophy offers a transformative perspective that can guide humanity toward a more balanced, equitable, and sustainable future. By bridging ancient wisdom with modern imperatives, this research seeks to illuminate pathways for harmonizing human progress with the natural world.

II. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

Development is fundamentally a positive force, representing the advancement of human life across various domains. Yet, its economic dimension has unveiled significant drawbacks, particularly the overexploitation of natural resources. In the modern era, driven by industrial machinery and energy-intensive processes, the rapid depletion of resources raises urgent questions about the viability of such practices. Are these resources truly inexhaustible? What are the long-term environmental consequences of unchecked consumption? These critical concerns have ignited global dialogues on sustainable development, emphasizing the necessity to harmonize progress with ecological preservation. Since the Industrial Revolution, development has largely prioritized economic growth, often neglecting human, social, and environmental well-being. This narrow focus has led to widespread degradation, prompting a revaluation of development models to address interconnected issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental harm.

A pivotal moment in this revaluation was the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, which marked the dawn of global environmental consciousness. Over the past three decades, numerous initiatives have emerged, culminating in the adoption of the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. These goals aim to tackle global challenges like poverty, inequality, and climate change while advocating for a balanced approach to progress. However, many efforts remain confined to conventional frameworks such as green growth, which often prioritize economic metrics over holistic well-being. In this context, Buddhist philosophy offers a transformative perspective, emphasizing inner contentment, mindfulness, and interconnectedness. This approach, termed “Buddhist Sustainable Development,” aligns with the principles of sustainable happiness, rooted in wisdom and ethical living. The Brundtland Report’s² definition of sustainable development — meeting present needs without compromising future generations — resonates deeply with Buddhist teachings, which advocate for mindful consumption and a harmonious relationship with nature.

Central to the Buddha’s teachings are the *Tilakkhana*, or the Three Marks of Existence, which describe the fundamental characteristics of all phenomena: (1) *anicca* (impermanence), (2) *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness), and (3) *anatta* (non-self). These principles form the foundation of Buddhist theory and practice, highlighting that all conditioned things are transient, inherently unsatisfactory, and devoid of a permanent self. Among these, *anicca* (impermanence) holds particular relevance to sustainable development, as it challenges the notion of permanence and underscores the ever-changing nature of existence.

The concept of *dukkha* (suffering) further illuminates the human condition, where suffering arises from desire — whether it is the desire to acquire what one lacks or to eliminate what one possesses. This desire for change, inherent in all socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts, perpetuates suffering. For instance, in the absence of industrialization, societies suffer from poverty, while its presence often leads to environmental degradation. The Buddha’s Middle Path offers a balanced approach, advocating for wisdom and moderation to achieve genuine happiness, free from extremes. This perspective encourages reflective and mindful approaches to development, ensuring that progress does not come at the expense of environmental well-being.

The concept of sustainability, often understood as the preservation of a static state, is inherently at odds with the Buddhist principle of impermanence. From a Buddhist perspective, the pursuit of sustainability as an unchanging state is futile, as all phenomena are subject to decay and transformation. Instead, sustainability must be reimagined as a dynamic process that embraces impermanence and adapts to evolving conditions. Clinging to the idea of permanence, as implied in traditional sustainability frameworks, can lead to suffering. Buddhist philosophy, therefore, calls for a shift in focus from preserving a fixed state to cultivating mindful and compassionate practices that align with the natural flow of existence.

² Hajian, M. and Kashani, S. J. (2021). Evolution of the concept of sustainability. From Brundtland Report to sustainable development goals. *Elsevier eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-824342-8.00018-3>

Building on this idea, the principle of interdependence highlights the intricate relationships between all forms of life and their environments, fostering a deeper understanding of ecological systems. Mindfulness encourages individuals to become aware of their consumption patterns and their environmental impact, leading to more responsible decision-making. Compassion, extending beyond humans to all sentient beings, supports conservation efforts and the protection of biodiversity. These principles provide an ethical foundation for addressing global sustainability challenges, promoting a sense of shared responsibility toward the planet and its inhabitants. By integrating Buddhist wisdom into sustainable development practices, humanity can move toward more holistic and effective solutions to environmental and social problems.³

Buddhist teachings offer profound insights into sustainable development by addressing the nature of suffering, its causes, and the path to its cessation. Central to this is the Noble Eightfold Path, which includes principles such as right view, resolve, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.⁴ These principles provide practical guidance for sustainable living, encouraging individuals to cultivate awareness, ethical behavior, and balanced consumption. For example, the self-sufficiency economy model in Thailand demonstrates how these principles can be applied in practice, fostering economic resilience while respecting ecological limits.⁵

However, challenges remain in aligning donor expectations with authentic compassionate actions and standardizing corporate sustainability reporting. These challenges can sometimes create a disconnect between local influences and organizational practices, risking the dilution of culturally rooted principles. Despite these hurdles, the integration of Buddhist teachings into sustainable development offers a meaningful path forward, promoting a balanced, ethical, and interconnected approach to addressing global sustainability challenges.

By integrating Buddhist principles such as mindfulness, compassion, and interdependence into sustainable development, humanity can forge a path toward a more balanced and equitable future. This approach not only addresses the environmental and social challenges of our time but also fosters a deeper connection with the natural world and all its inhabitants.⁶ By embracing the

³ Ruhana, F., Suwartiningsih, S., Mulyandari, E., Handoyo, S. & Afrilia, u. a. a. (2024). Innovative Strategies for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals Amidst Escalating Global Environmental and Social Challenges. *The International Journal of Science and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.54783/ijssoc.v6i1.1054>

⁴ Bodhi, B. (2020). The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering. . <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB08716164>

⁵ Prasert, S. (2024). Buddhist Ethics and Environmental Conservation in Thailand. *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. <https://doi.org/10.47604/jpcr.2606>

⁶ Ruhana, F., Suwartiningsih, S., Mulyandari, E., Handoyo, S. & Afrilia, u. a. a. (2024). Innovative Strategies for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals Amidst Escalating Global Environmental and Social Challenges. *The International Journal of Science and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.54783/ijssoc.v6i1.1054>

dynamic nature of existence and cultivating ethical living, we can create a sustainable future that honors both present and future generations.

III. BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES AND THEIR APPLICATION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

Sustainable development seeks to achieve a harmonious balance between economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection, ensuring long-term well-being for present and future generations. In this regard, Buddhist principles serve as a profound ethical and philosophical framework that aligns seamlessly with sustainability objectives. Grounded in mindfulness, compassion, interdependence, and moderation, Buddhist philosophy offers a holistic perspective for tackling pressing global issues such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality. Key principles that contribute to sustainable development include:

3.1. Interconnectedness

The Buddhist concept of interconnectedness underscores the holistic approach essential for sustainable development. It encourages individuals and societies to consider the far-reaching impacts of development initiatives on ecosystems, communities, and future generations. Central to this idea is the principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* or dependent origination, which posits that all phenomena are interdependent and arise about one another. This principle aligns closely with the interconnected nature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognize that progress in one area often depends on advancements in others.

For instance, the health of human societies is deeply intertwined with the vitality of natural ecosystems. This interconnectedness is echoed in the Buddhist view of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, which emphasizes the interdependence of all life forms and their environments. While the SDGs and *paṭiccasamuppāda* share a philosophical foundation in recognizing interconnectedness, the practical implementation of this principle faces significant challenges. Research suggests that improved coherence and integration in sustainable development strategies could benefit from a deeper consideration of philosophical concepts like *paṭiccasamuppāda*.⁷ By embracing this holistic perspective, policymakers and practitioners can foster more balanced and inclusive approaches to development.

3.2. Non-Harm (*Ahimsa*)

The principle of *ahimsa*, or non-harm, is a cornerstone of Buddhist ethics and has profoundly influenced cultures and civilizations throughout history. It advocates for a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature, inspiring social, political, and economic reforms rooted in peace, equality, and

doi.org/10.54783/ijssoc.v6i1.1054 (n1)

⁷ Abidi, S. A. and Jamil, M. (2023). Examining Progress on Sustainable Development Goals Across Regions through an Intertemporal Lens. *Journal of policy research*. <https://doi.org/10.61506/02.00011>.

sustainability. The moral and ethical values derived from Buddhism and *ahimsa* have shaped the works of numerous thinkers and leaders, driving movements for social justice, environmental conservation, and conflict resolution.

In the modern context, the principles of Buddhism and *ahimsa* offer a unique framework for addressing pressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, conflict, and environmental degradation. By integrating spirituality, morality, and sustainability, these principles provide a pathway toward a more compassionate and sustainable world. For example, applying *ahimsa* in production processes can lead to practices that prioritize the well-being of workers, communities, and the environment. This approach aligns with the need for a more holistic and ethical model of development, one that balances economic growth with social and environmental responsibility.⁸

The concept of *ahimsa* closely aligns with several SDGs, particularly those focused on social and environmental well-being. SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), which aims to promote peaceful societies and reduce violence, embodies the spirit of *ahimsa* by seeking to minimize harm at societal levels. Similarly, SDGs 14 (Life Below Water) and 15 (Life on Land) reflect the principle of non-harm toward ecosystems and natural resources. These goals emphasize the conservation and sustainable use of the environment, resonating with the broader Buddhist ideal of extending compassion beyond humans to all living beings and nature.⁹ The holistic nature of the SDGs, which integrate economic, social, and environmental dimensions, complements the comprehensive ethos of *ahimsa*, suggesting that progress toward these goals can contribute significantly to realizing the ideals of non-violence and sustainability on a global scale.

3.3. Mindfulness

Mindfulness, a core practice in Buddhism, cultivates self-awareness and ethical decision-making. When applied to sustainability, it encourages conscious consumption, ethical business practices, and a deeper appreciation for the resources we use daily. By fostering mindfulness, individuals and societies can make more informed and responsible choices that contribute to a sustainable future. Mindfulness cultivates awareness of unsustainable consumption habits, empowering individuals and communities to make informed choices that reduce environmental harm.¹⁰

While mindfulness is not explicitly linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the provided context, its potential contributions can be

⁸ Fukuoka, S. and Fukuoka, S. (2023). Mindfulness-Based Nonviolence and Engaged Buddhism: Thich Nhat Hanh's Contributions to Sustainable Peace. *World sustainability series*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-1972959_12.

⁹ Kjaerulf, F., Lee, B. X., Cohen, L., Donnelly, P., Turner, S., Davis, R., Realini, A., Moloney-Kitts, M., Gordon, R. M., Lee, G. & Gilligan, J. (2016). The 2030 agenda for sustainable development: a golden opportunity for global violence prevention.. *International Journal of Public Health*, 61(8). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-016-0887-8>.

¹⁰ Kaza, S. (2000), p. 67 – 9.

inferred. The SDGs, a set of 17 interlinked global goals, address social, economic, and environmental challenges, aiming to create a more sustainable future. Mindfulness practices, which emphasize present-moment awareness and self-reflection, could support several SDGs. For instance: (1) SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being): Mindfulness can enhance mental health and overall well-being. (2) SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production): It can promote conscious consumption patterns, reducing waste and overconsumption.

Although direct references to mindfulness in the SDGs are absent, its principles align with the goals' emphasis on holistic well-being and sustainable living. Future research could explore how mindfulness interventions might contribute to specific SDG targets or enhance the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives. Such integration could address challenges like the tension between economic growth and ecological sustainability, offering a more balanced approach to development.

3.4. The middle way

The Buddha's teaching of the Middle Way advocates for a balanced life, avoiding extremes. By embracing simplicity and contentment, individuals can reduce overconsumption and waste, minimizing their ecological footprint and living more sustainably.¹¹ This principle aligns with the holistic approach of the SDGs, which aim to create a "blueprint for a better and more sustainable future for all. The Middle Way emphasizes balance - between spirituality and materialism, self and nonself, and individual and collective well-being. It promotes a life of sharing, care, and harmony, rooted in Buddhist virtues and precepts. These principles regulate behavior, strengthen meditation, and cultivate wisdom, fostering peace and socio-economic development. The Middle Way's adaptability and context-specific solutions resonate with the SDGs' need for nuanced approaches tailored to different geographic and socio-economic contexts.

While the SDGs provide a concrete framework for global action, the Middle Way offers a philosophical foundation that complements these efforts. Integrating the Middle Way's emphasis on balance and moderation into sustainable development strategies could enhance their effectiveness, addressing complex challenges through holistic and adaptable solutions.¹²

3.5. Compassion (*Karuṇā*)

Compassion, a central theme in Buddhism, inspires actions that protect wildlife, preserve natural habitats, and support biodiversity. By extending compassion to all living beings, individuals and communities can engage in conservation efforts and promote ecological balance.

¹¹ Bulughapitiye, N. (2025). Train Human Resources with Buddhist Teachings for Sustainable Economic Development. *Kelaniya Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(2). <https://doi.org/10.4038/kjhrm.v19i2.147>.

¹² Ibid.

In the context of sustainable development, compassion ensures that the needs of all stakeholders, including marginalized communities, are considered in development plans. While compassion is not explicitly mentioned in the SDGs, it is inherently linked to their core principles of leaving no one behind and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable.

Compassion plays a critical role in achieving the SDGs, particularly in areas such as poverty eradication, social development, and inequality reduction.¹³ For example: (1) Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) Organizations: These grassroots initiatives, rooted in compassion and social justice, align closely with the SDGs and can deepen their impact through local implementations. (2) Social Work Profession: Anchored in compassion and equity, social work parallels the values of the SDGs and contributes richly to public impact scholarship.

Compassion inspires actions that protect biodiversity, support marginalized communities, and prioritize collective well-being over corporate profits (Harvey, 2000).¹⁵ By integrating compassion into sustainable development practices, humanity can create a more inclusive and equitable world, ensuring that progress benefits all living beings and preserves the natural environment.

3.6. Impermanence (*Anicca*)

Impermanence (*anicca*) is a core teaching of Buddhism, emphasizing that all phenomena — both material and immaterial — are transient and subject to constant change. This principle underscores that nothing in the phenomenal world remains static, including human societies and the natural environment. The quality of human life and nature is deeply influenced by the moral forces at work within society. When immorality prevails, both humanity and nature decline; when morality is upheld, they flourish.

The recognition of impermanence encourages individuals and societies to adopt adaptive, mindful, and sustainable approaches to development. By understanding that all conditions are in flux, development strategies can be designed to remain flexible and responsive to changing environmental and social circumstances. While the provided context does not explicitly link impermanence to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the principle aligns with the SDGs' acknowledgment of the need for transformative change.¹⁵

The SDGs aim to address pressing global challenges and create a more sustainable future by 2030,¹⁶ reflecting an understanding that current societal,

¹³ Douglas, L. (2024). Ethical underpinnings and social work: a case study on the role of Buddhist compassion in Cambodian sustainable development. *Social Thought*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2024.2365803>.

¹⁴ Harvey, P. (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*. Cambridge University Press, p. 92.

¹⁵ Kovács, G. (2014). Buddhist Approach to Sustainability and Achieving Millennium Development Goals, p. 56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

economic, and environmental conditions are not permanent. This aligns with the Buddhist view of impermanence, which suggests that all phenomena are in a constant state of flux. Furthermore, the SDGs themselves are not static; they succeeded the Millennium Development Goals and are designed to evolve in response to changing global circumstances. This dynamic approach to development resonates with the principle of impermanence, highlighting the need for adaptable and resilient strategies to achieve long-term sustainability.

3.7. Non-attachment

Non-attachment (*Vairāgya* or *Upasana-less* state) is a fundamental Buddhist principle that advocates detachment from material possessions, desires, and ego-driven pursuits. It does not imply neglecting responsibilities but rather fosters a balanced, mindful, and sustainable approach to life. This principle plays a crucial role in sustainable development by promoting responsible consumption, ethical economics, and environmental harmony. The principle of non-attachment challenges the modern obsession with material wealth, advocating for a shift from growth-driven economic models to well-being-centered alternatives, such as Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH).¹⁷

Non-attachment encourages a shift away from excessive materialism and overconsumption toward more sustainable modes of production and consumption. It also emphasizes self-reliance and detachment from workday pursuits, offering a unique perspective on the SDGs.

For instance, Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) index, rooted in Buddhist principles, prioritizes well-being over economic growth, challenging conventional development paradigms.¹⁸ This approach aligns with non-attachment by advocating for inner contentment and harmony with nature, rather than relentless material progress.

The contrast between Buddhist philosophy and the SDGs highlights a tension in global development agendas. While the SDGs focus on measurable targets and economic progress, Buddhist principles emphasize inner growth, ethical living, and ecological balance. This difference raises important questions about the universal applicability of the SDGs and whether they adequately address diverse cultural perspectives on development. Integrating nonattachment into sustainable development practices could foster a more holistic approach, balancing economic and environmental considerations with spiritual and philosophical dimensions.

IV. INTEGRATING BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES INTO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: OBSTACLES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THE ROAD AHEAD

The integration of Buddhist principles into sustainable development

¹⁷ Masaki, K. (2024). Reorienting the Sustainable Development Goals: Lessons from Bhutan's Gross National Happiness. *Journal of Developing Societies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796x241241254>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

provides a transformative framework that extends beyond conventional economic and environmental strategies. By emphasizing interconnectedness, mindfulness, compassion, and non-attachment, Buddhist thought fosters a deeper awareness of the consequences of human actions on both society and the environment. These principles encourage responsible consumption and production patterns and promote social equity and justice.

However, despite the potential benefits of incorporating Buddhist wisdom into sustainability efforts, several challenges persist. Aligning these principles with modern economic systems requires navigating complex factors such as corporate sustainability reporting, donor expectations, and culturally specific development models.¹⁹ Many sustainability initiatives are driven by short-term financial interests rather than long-term ethical considerations, making it difficult to implement Buddhist-inspired approaches at a structural level.²⁰ Additionally, conventional development paradigms prioritize economic expansion over ecological and social well-being, creating resistance to alternative frameworks that advocate moderation and balance.²¹ Overcoming these challenges requires a fundamental shift in how societies perceive progress - moving away from unchecked consumption toward mindful, equitable, and ecologically responsible living.

Despite these obstacles, integrating Buddhist thought into sustainable development presents a promising path forward. By embracing interconnectedness, societies can recognize their shared responsibility toward the planet and future generations.²² The principle of impermanence encourages adaptive strategies that respond to evolving environmental and social conditions, fostering resilience in the face of global crises.²³ Non-attachment, when applied to sustainability, promotes minimalism, reduced waste, and equitable resource distribution - key elements in addressing climate change and social disparities.²⁴

Ultimately, Buddhist-inspired approaches offer a more balanced and ethical vision for the future - one that harmonizes economic progress with ecological preservation and social justice. To build a truly sustainable world, societies must move beyond profit-driven models and embrace holistic frameworks

¹⁹ Loy, D. (2010). *Money, Sex, War, Karma: Notes for a Buddhist Revolution*. Wisdom Publications, p. 138.

²⁰ Hershock, P.D. (2006). *Buddhism in the Public Sphere: Reorienting Global Interdependence*. Routledge, p. 98.

²¹ Zsolnai, L. (2011). *Buddhist Economics: An Ethical Approach to Sustainable Development*. Society and Economy, 33 (1), 1 - 15.

²² Loy, D. (2019). *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*. Wisdom Publications, p. 145.

²³ Kearns, L. (2015). *The Role of Religious Ethics in Sustainability Movements*. Environmental Humanities, p. 87.

²⁴ Hanh, T. N. (2013). *Love Letter to the Earth*. Parallax Press, p. 55.

that prioritize wisdom, well-being, and environmental integrity.²⁵

V. CONCLUSION

This article examines the integration of Buddhist principles into sustainable development, demonstrating their potential to address global challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, and social inequality. By exploring core Buddhist concepts—interconnectedness, mindfulness, compassion, and the Middle Way—it highlights how these teachings align with sustainable development goals and contribute to a more holistic and ethical approach to progress.

The convergence of Buddhist philosophy and sustainable development presents a transformative framework for harmonizing human advancement with ecological preservation. Both perspectives emphasize a balance — between economic growth and environmental responsibility, individual well-being and collective welfare, and present needs and long-term sustainability. Rooted in interdependence and mindfulness, Buddhist thought provides a strong ethical foundation for building a just, equitable, and ecologically responsible world, aligning seamlessly with the mission of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Buddhist teachings stress the interconnectedness of all life, reinforcing the idea that every action has far-reaching consequences for both society and nature. This mirrors the SDG commitment to inclusive and holistic development, ensuring that both people and the planet thrive together. Core Buddhist values such as mindfulness, non-harming (*ahimsa*), and right livelihood closely align with sustainable practices, advocating for responsible consumption, ethical economic models, and compassionate approaches to social and environmental justice. By integrating these values into modern sustainability efforts, societies can foster development models that do not exploit resources or communities but instead promote harmony, resilience, and longevity.

Sustainable development is not merely an economic or environmental issue — it is also a moral and philosophical challenge. Buddhism, as both a philosophy and a way of life, offers profound insights for societies seeking to transition toward more sustainable living. Mindfulness encourages individuals and institutions to be conscious of their choices and to minimize harm to people and nature. Moderation fosters reduced waste and curbs overconsumption, while compassion cultivates a sense of collective responsibility, inspiring policies that prioritize the well-being of vulnerable populations. Through these ethical and practical dimensions, Buddhist wisdom enhances global efforts to tackle pressing issues such as climate change, resource depletion, inequality, and economic instability.

At its core, sustainable development seeks to balance three key pillars: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. Buddhist principles naturally align with this vision by advocating an economy rooted

²⁵ Zsolnai, L., & Flanagan, B. (2019). *The Routledge International Handbook of Spirituality in Society and the Professions*. Routledge, p. 134.

in ethical responsibility, a society founded on compassion and equity, and an ecological perspective based on the interdependence of all life.

Much like the SDGs' call for integrated approaches to mitigating poverty, inequality, and environmental harm, Buddhist philosophy underscores the idea that individual well-being is inseparable from societal and planetary well-being. This shared ethical foundation strengthens the case for policies and practices that drive meaningful, lasting progress.

In the face of ecological crises and socio-economic uncertainties, the integration of Buddhist wisdom into sustainability offers a viable path toward a more balanced and mindful existence. By incorporating Buddhist teachings into contemporary sustainability strategies, individuals, communities, and policymakers can cultivate a future that prioritizes both human and environmental well-being. This synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern sustainability is not just a theoretical model but a practical roadmap for fostering a more compassionate, resilient, and sustainable world for generations to come.

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

The article provides a profound exploration of compassion (*karuṇā*) as an ethical and transformative practice rooted in Buddhist philosophy. The essay emphasizes the Four Noble Truths and interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*) as foundational to cultivating universal compassion, which extends beyond individual well-being to encompass collective responsibility for societal development. Key contributions include the alignment of Buddhist compassion with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), advocating for empathy and ethical responsibility to address poverty, inequality, and environmental sustainability. Through themes such as “The Philosophical Foundations of Compassion” and “Compassion as a Catalyst for Social Equity,” the article highlights the importance of nonviolence, mindfulness, and altruistic action in resolving modern global challenges. A significant innovation lies in integrating ancient Buddhist wisdom with contemporary human development frameworks, emphasizing that compassionate practices can foster peace, social justice, and sustainable growth. This work resonates as a call for action to bridge spiritual ideals with pragmatic solutions for building harmonious and equitable societies.

Keywords: *Buddhist compassion, human development, interdependence, social responsibility, ethical living, global challenges, sustainable development.*

I. BUDDHIST TEACHINGS ON COMPASSION (*KARUṆĀ*) AND ALIGNMENT WITH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT GOALS.

Buddhism, with its profound emphasis on inner transformation and ethical conduct, highlights compassion (*karuṇā*) as a central virtue. The term *karuṇā*, derived from Sanskrit, refers to the deep empathy and active wish to alleviate

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the suffering of others. In Buddhist teachings, compassion is inseparable from wisdom and is seen as a path to enlightenment. The compassionate heart goes beyond mere emotional response; it involves a commitment to alleviate suffering through action and understanding.

In Buddhist philosophy, compassion is often taught in conjunction with the Four Noble Truths, which outline the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), its causes, the possibility of its cessation, and the path leading to that cessation. The Buddha's teachings suggest that suffering is an inherent part of human existence, and through cultivating compassion, one can begin to understand and mitigate this suffering, both for oneself and others (Rahula, 1974). Compassion, in this context, is not a passive feeling but an active engagement in alleviating suffering through wisdom, skillful action, and ethical behavior.

Buddhist compassion emphasizes a universal approach to suffering, transcending individual ego and extending to all beings, regardless of their race, nationality, or social status. This universal compassion, referred to as *maitrī* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā*, is the foundation for cultivating ethical behavior in society and the world. According to the *Bodhisattva* vow, a central aspect of Mahayana Buddhism, a practitioner pledges to work for the liberation of all sentient beings. This vow underscores the interconnectedness of all beings and the responsibility to act for the welfare of others.

The alignment of Buddhist compassion with human development goals can be seen in the way these teachings encourage sustainable and holistic development. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focus on reducing poverty, ensuring quality education, achieving gender equality, and promoting well-being for all. Buddhist compassion resonates with these goals by promoting a vision of human flourishing that extends beyond material wealth to include mental and emotional well-being, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

In particular, Buddhist compassion encourages the cultivation of empathy and ethical responsibility toward others, which aligns with goals such as *SDG 1* (no poverty), *SDG 3* (good health and well-being), and *SDG 10* (reduced inequalities). By promoting empathy, Buddhism fosters a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all life, encouraging individuals and societies to address social, economic, and environmental issues holistically. This aligns with the *Interconnectedness Principle* that underpins many human development frameworks, which emphasizes the necessity of balancing human needs with the health of the planet (Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach, 2013).

Additionally, Buddhist compassion encourages non-violence (*ahimsa*) and mindfulness, which are practices that contribute to peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution, essential for sustainable development (Hanh T. N., *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*, 1998). This emphasis on peace and ethical conduct directly correlates with the UN's *SDG 16*, which promotes peace, justice, and strong institutions.

II. THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION

The philosophical foundations of Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) are deeply rooted in the core principles of Buddhist teachings, primarily the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the concept of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Compassion, in the Buddhist context, is not merely an emotional response but a fundamental ethical virtue that aligns to reduce suffering for all sentient beings.

2.1. Compassion and the Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths outline the Buddhist understanding of suffering (*dukkha*) and the path to its cessation. The first truth asserts that suffering is inherent in the human condition from birth to death. The second truth identifies attachment (*tanha*) and ignorance (*avidyā*) as the causes of suffering. The third truth offers the cessation of suffering, which is achieved through the cessation of attachment and ignorance. Finally, the fourth truth presents the Noble Eightfold Path, a practical guide to ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom.

Compassion directly addresses the first truth, as it involves an empathetic response to the suffering of others. The Buddhist ideal of compassion is to recognize suffering as a universal condition and, in doing so, develop a sincere wish to alleviate the suffering of others. This aligns with the Buddha's exhortation in the *Dhammapada* (verse 223) that "hatred does not cease by hatred, but by love," suggesting that compassion is the antidote to the root causes of suffering, such as hatred and ignorance.

2.2. The role of interdependence (*Pratītyasamutpāda*)

Buddhist compassion is also closely linked to the concept of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which asserts that all phenomena arise due to the interaction of various causes and conditions. This interconnectedness means that the well-being of one being is dependent on the well-being of others. According to the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, one who comprehends the interconnected nature of existence naturally develops compassion for others because they recognize that all beings are subject to the same existential conditions of suffering and desire.

The Buddha's teachings on interdependence, found in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and other texts, highlight that compassion emerges from an understanding of the fundamental interconnectedness of all life. As the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* by Nāgārjuna explains, the realization that all phenomena lack inherent existence fosters a deep sense of empathy and interconnectedness with all beings. Compassion, therefore, arises from the understanding that the suffering of one is the suffering of all, and the liberation of one contributes to the liberation of all.

2.3. Compassion as a Bodhisattva ideal

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, compassion reaches its highest expression in the ideal of the Bodhisattva – a being who seeks enlightenment not for personal liberation alone but for the sake of all sentient beings. The Bodhisattva vows to

remain in the cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*) until all beings are liberated from suffering. The *Bodhisattvācaryāvatāra* (The Bodhisattva's Way of Life) by Śāntideva articulates the central role of compassion in the Bodhisattva path. Śāntideva emphasizes that a Bodhisattva's compassion is active, not passive, and manifests in the form of the wish to relieve the suffering of all beings through selfless actions, even at the cost of personal sacrifice.

This ideal is seen in the famous Bodhisattva prayer: "May all beings be happy; may all beings be free from suffering." This prayer encapsulates the essence of Buddhist compassion, emphasizing universal concern, altruism, and the aspiration to end the suffering of others through both wisdom and compassion.

2.4. The practice of compassion

Buddhist compassion is not merely theoretical; it is a practice that involves cultivating a mind of loving-kindness (*metta*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) toward all beings. The practice is closely tied to the meditation techniques of the *Brahmavihāras* (the Four Immeasurables), which include loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. These qualities are cultivated through meditation and mindfulness, gradually transforming the practitioner's heart and mind into an embodiment of compassion.

2.5. The role of compassion in human development

Compassion is often viewed as an emotional response to another's suffering, but its significance in human development extends far beyond empathy and kindness. The development of compassion is intricately linked to social, emotional, and cognitive growth. Throughout history, various scholars have explored how compassion impacts human well-being, personal growth, and the collective progress of societies. Understanding compassion is essential not only for enhancing individual lives but also for fostering interconnected communities. This essay will explore the role of compassion in human development, concerning key theories and empirical research.

2.6. The concept of compassion

Compassion is more than just sympathy or pity; it is an active response to suffering, characterized by a desire to alleviate or prevent pain. Psychologist Paul Gilbert (2005) defines compassion as "a sensitivity to the suffering of oneself and others, with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it." Compassion is also seen as a moral virtue that facilitates prosocial behaviors and supports personal development.

While compassion has been recognized in religious, philosophical, and psychological traditions for millennia, the study of compassion in psychological science gained prominence in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Researchers such as Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer have been at the forefront of studying self-compassion, emphasizing its role in emotional resilience and mental health.

2.7. Compassion and emotional development

One of the most crucial roles of compassion in human development

is its impact on emotional growth. As infants and young children, humans develop emotional intelligence through interactions with caregivers and peers. Compassion is central to these early interactions, as caregivers who model compassionate behaviors teach children not only how to understand their own emotions but also how to relate to others' feelings.

The work of Daniel Goleman (1995) on emotional intelligence underscores the importance of empathy and compassion in social relationships. Emotional intelligence involves recognizing, understanding, and regulating emotions in oneself and others, and it plays a significant role in building healthy, supportive relationships. Compassion fosters emotional regulation by promoting a sense of safety and acceptance. For example, children who experience compassionate caregiving are more likely to develop secure attachment styles, which are linked to better emotional regulation and social competence in adulthood (M. D.S. Ainsworth, 1979).

2.8. Compassion and cognitive development

Compassion also influences cognitive development, particularly in the realms of perspective-taking, problem-solving, and moral reasoning. Cognitive development theories, such as those proposed by Jean Piaget (1932) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1981), suggest that as individuals mature, they progress through stages of moral understanding, from simple, self-centered judgments to more complex, other-centered ethical reasoning.

Compassion plays a vital role in this process by encouraging individuals to consider others' perspectives. Piaget's concept of moral development highlights the shift from egocentric thinking to a more balanced understanding of the needs and feelings of others. Compassion helps foster this shift by promoting empathy and understanding, enabling individuals to internalize moral values and act in ways that benefit others, not just themselves. In Kohlberg's stages of moral development, compassion supports the higher stages of moral reasoning, where individuals begin to consider fairness, justice, and the well-being of others.

Furthermore, compassion can stimulate problem-solving abilities by encouraging individuals to consider diverse viewpoints and solutions. This ability to empathize with others' needs can lead to more collaborative and cooperative approaches to resolving conflicts and addressing challenges.

2.9. Compassion and social development

At the social level, compassion is critical for the development of prosocial behaviors, social cohesion, and community building. Humans are inherently social creatures, and our survival and flourishing depend on our ability to work together, share resources, and support one another. Compassion fosters these behaviors by motivating individuals to help others in need, share resources, and build trust.

Research by Dacher Keltner (2009) emphasizes that compassion is a key element in the development of social bonds and cooperation. Compassionate individuals are more likely to engage in acts of kindness, such as helping others in distress, sharing resources, and providing emotional support. These behaviors

are not only beneficial to the recipients of compassion but also reinforce social networks, strengthen relationships, and enhance community resilience.

Moreover, the cultivation of compassion can help reduce prejudice and promote social harmony. Studies have shown that practicing compassion can decrease negative biases and increase empathy toward individuals from different backgrounds (Amy Cuddy, 2007). Compassion, when extended to people from different cultures, races, or social groups, can break down barriers and foster a more inclusive, equitable society.

2.10. Compassion and mental health

The role of compassion in mental health cannot be overstated. Both self-compassion and compassion for others contribute significantly to emotional well-being and resilience. Kristin Neff (2003), a leading researcher in the field of self-compassion, defines it as “being kind and understanding toward oneself when encountering personal failure or suffering.” Self-compassion involves treating oneself with the same kindness and understanding that one would offer to a friend in times of difficulty.

Research has shown that self-compassion is associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress, as well as higher levels of life satisfaction and emotional resilience (Kristin D Neff 1, 2013). People with high levels of self-compassion are more likely to embrace their imperfections, learn from their mistakes, and cope effectively with adversity. This contributes to healthier mental states and a greater sense of well-being.

Similarly, compassion toward others can improve mental health by fostering positive social interactions and reducing feelings of isolation. Acts of kindness and empathy activate brain regions associated with pleasure and reward (Lieberman, 2013), which can enhance feelings of satisfaction and happiness. Engaging in compassionate behaviors not only benefits the recipient but also enhances the emotional well-being of the giver, creating a cycle of positive reinforcement.

2.11. Compassion and human flourishing

Compassion is not only a response to suffering but also a catalyst for human flourishing. Positive psychology, a field developed by Martin Seligman and others, emphasizes the importance of fostering positive emotions, relationships, and strengths to promote overall well-being. Compassion aligns with these principles by encouraging individuals to contribute to the well-being of others, thereby creating a more interconnected and harmonious world.

Studies have shown that compassionate individuals tend to experience higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and fulfillment (C.R. Snyder, 2009). Compassionate behaviors, such as volunteering, caregiving, and supporting others in need, create a sense of purpose and meaning, which are central to human flourishing. Furthermore, compassion can lead to greater social connectedness, which is a key predictor of long-term happiness and well-being (Elizabeth Dunn, 2008).

III. INTERDEPENDENCE AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

Buddhism, with its teachings of interconnectedness, emphasizes interdependence and shared responsibility as central aspects of ethical living and spiritual practice. Rooted in the concepts of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) and *karuṇā* (compassion), Buddhist philosophy illustrates that all beings, phenomena, and actions are interconnected. This interconnectedness requires individuals to adopt a shared sense of responsibility towards others, nature, and the world around them. This essay explores the notions of interdependence and shared responsibility within the Buddhist tradition, supported by key teachings and philosophical interpretations, while also referencing specific texts and practices that illustrate these concepts.

3.1. The concept of interdependence in Buddhism

At the heart of Buddhist thought lies the concept of *pratītyasamutpāda*, or dependent origination, which asserts that all things arise in dependence upon causes and conditions. The Buddha's first teaching in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (Bhikkhu, 1993) emphasizes that everything is interrelated and that nothing exists independently or in isolation. This interdependence is not only a metaphysical observation but also an ethical one, indicating that the actions of one individual affect the greater web of existence.

According to the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, phenomena (both physical and mental) are not inherently existent but arise from other phenomena. The teachings of dependent origination highlight the interconnectedness of all things. This framework establishes a fundamental responsibility for individuals to recognize their role in the broader system, encouraging them to act mindfully in ways that minimize harm and contribute positively to the collective well-being.

For example, the principle of interdependence calls attention to the deep connection between sentient beings and their environment. The *Sūtra of the Great Liberation* (*Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*.) teaches that all beings are interwoven in the matrix of existence, emphasizing that one's actions toward the environment, animals, and other humans reverberate throughout the universe.

3.2. Shared responsibility in the Buddhist ethical framework

In light of this interdependence, the Buddhist tradition emphasizes shared responsibility in terms of moral conduct. The Buddha's teachings on *sīla* (ethical conduct) stress the importance of living harmoniously with others and taking responsibility for one's actions. Ethical living is seen as a practice of both personal transformation and collective well-being. The *Vinaya Pitaka* offers detailed codes of conduct for monks and lay practitioners, which underscore the need to act in ways that benefit not just oneself but also the larger community.

The concept of shared responsibility is further developed in the doctrine of *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā* (loving-kindness). Compassion involves

recognizing the suffering of others and taking responsibility for alleviating that suffering. In *The Dhammapada*, one of the most important collections of sayings attributed to the Buddha, it is taught that “all beings are the owners of their actions” (*Dhammapada* Verse 165 Culakala Upasaka Vatthu), which suggests that individuals should act with compassion because the welfare of others is intimately connected to one’s spiritual journey.

One of the key aspects of shared responsibility in Buddhism is the recognition that all living beings are subject to the law of *karma*, which dictates that actions have consequences. The *Karma Sūtra* teaches that harmful actions towards others – whether physical, verbal, or mental – inevitably lead to suffering, not just for the person harmed but for the perpetrator as well. Thus, the moral responsibility to avoid harm and promote good is not solely for individual benefit but is shared with the community and the world at large.

3.3. Buddhism and social responsibility

In addition to the personal ethical dimension, Buddhism also addresses the larger societal context in which shared responsibility plays a vital role. Buddhist teachings on interdependence stress that one’s responsibility extends beyond personal conduct to societal and global issues such as poverty, injustice, and environmental degradation. The *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* (Lotus Sūtra).) teaches that all beings are interconnected, and it is the responsibility of the enlightened to guide others toward liberation, both individually and collectively.

Buddhism does not advocate withdrawal from the world; rather, it encourages active engagement in social issues through the lens of wisdom and compassion. The historical example of the Buddha’s engagement with society, as seen in the *Anguttara Nikāya* (*Anguttara Nikaya* 3.70), shows that social issues such as caste discrimination and the treatment of women were addressed within the monastic community and beyond. His message of equality and shared responsibility for alleviating suffering was radical for its time, offering a model for how Buddhist communities could approach broader social and environmental issues.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND INTERDEPENDENCE

One of the contemporary applications of the Buddhist principle of interdependence is in the realm of environmental ethics. The teachings on interdependence suggest that humans are not separate from the natural world but are an integral part of it. The Buddha’s emphasis on mindfulness, particularly in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sūtra*, encourages individuals to be aware of their impact on the environment and to act with care and respect for nature.

Buddhist environmental ethics focus on minimizing harm to the earth and its ecosystems, emphasizing sustainable practices and living in harmony with nature. Modern Buddhist thinkers such as Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama have called for a recognition of humanity’s role as stewards of the earth, advocating for a lifestyle that prioritizes ecological balance and sustainability. In his teachings, the Dalai Lama frequently stresses that the

earth is not merely a resource to be exploited but a living entity that we must treat with respect and care.

4.1. Interdependence in the *Sangha* and community

The principle of interdependence is also evident in the structure of the Buddhist community, or *Sangha*. The *Sangha*, which includes both monastics and lay practitioners, is based on the understanding that individuals cannot achieve liberation alone but require the support and guidance of others. In the *Sangha*, each member shares responsibility for the spiritual well-being of others, and this collective effort ensures the flourishing of the community.

The *Bhikkhuni Sangha* (community of female monks) and the *Laity Sangha* provide examples of how the principle of interdependence extends beyond the monastic community to include all practitioners. In the *Sāmaññaphala Sūtra* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 2), the Buddha emphasizes the importance of community in supporting each individual's path to enlightenment. This recognition of collective responsibility underscores the idea that spiritual progress is not solely an individual endeavor but a communal effort.

4.2. Practical applications of Buddhist compassion for human development

Buddhist compassion, also known as *karuṇā*, is a fundamental concept in Buddhism, embodying the desire to relieve suffering and promote the well-being of all beings. This compassion is not just a theoretical or spiritual ideal but a practical guide to human development, both individually and collectively. The application of Buddhist compassion can enhance emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and social harmony, providing a model for addressing personal and societal challenges. This essay explores the practical applications of Buddhist compassion in fostering human development, focusing on individual growth, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and social development.

4.3. Compassion as the basis for emotional development

Buddhist compassion begins with the recognition of suffering, both in oneself and in others. According to the Buddha's teachings, suffering (*dukkha*) is inherent in life, and understanding it leads to the cultivation of compassion. In a world where emotional distress is prevalent due to stress, anxiety, and interpersonal conflicts, Buddhist compassion offers a pathway to emotional healing and personal growth. By practicing mindfulness (*satī*) and developing insight (*vipassanā*), individuals can become more aware of their emotions and cultivate an empathetic response to the suffering of others.

Compassion allows individuals to address their suffering with patience and kindness. This not only aids in emotional resilience but also enhances one's capacity to manage negative emotions such as anger, jealousy, and resentment. Buddhist teachings emphasize the importance of *metta* (loving-kindness) meditation, which encourages individuals to extend goodwill and compassion to themselves and others. Research on the benefits of loving-kindness meditation supports the idea that such practices improve emotional regulation, increase positive emotions, and reduce stress (Hofmann, 2011). By integrating

compassion into their daily lives, individuals can cultivate emotional balance and resilience, which are essential components of personal development.

4.4. Compassion in interpersonal relationships

One of the core applications of Buddhist compassion is in improving interpersonal relationships. Buddhist philosophy emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings, encapsulated in the concept of *interdependence* or *pratityasamutpāda*. This understanding encourages individuals to view others not as separate entities but as interconnected beings deserving of compassion and respect. In practice, this can significantly improve relationships by promoting empathy and reducing selfish tendencies.

Compassionate actions in interpersonal relationships manifest in various ways. For instance, actively listening to others, offering emotional support, and understanding the underlying causes of their suffering are all forms of compassionate behavior. These actions foster trust, understanding, and cooperation, which are essential elements in building strong, healthy relationships. Buddhist texts such as the *Dhammapada* and the *Metta Sutta* emphasize the importance of treating others with kindness, which, in turn, nurtures social harmony.

Additionally, Buddhist compassion can aid in conflict resolution. When conflicts arise, rather than reacting with anger or frustration, Buddhist teachings encourage individuals to respond with understanding and a willingness to alleviate the suffering of all parties involved. This compassionate approach encourages dialogue, mutual respect, and the search for peaceful solutions. Studies on conflict resolution have shown that empathy and compassionate communication can significantly reduce hostility and promote cooperation (Pinker, 2011). By practicing compassion in relationships, individuals can contribute to a more harmonious and supportive environment.

4.5. Compassion in social development

Buddhism's emphasis on compassion extends beyond individual and interpersonal realms to encompass broader social development. The concept of compassion, in a societal context, calls for the alleviation of suffering not only on an individual level but also on a collective scale. Buddhist teachings advocate for social justice, the reduction of poverty, and the promotion of well-being for all. The idea of *right action* and *right livelihood* within the Noble Eightfold Path stresses the importance of ethical conduct in contributing to a just society.

Socially engaged Buddhists, such as Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama, have long promoted the application of compassion in addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. These leaders emphasize that true human development cannot be achieved without considering the welfare of others and the planet. In modern contexts, Buddhist principles of compassion inspire movements focused on social justice, environmental sustainability, and peacebuilding.

For example, the Dalai Lama's advocacy for human rights and his promotion of *secular ethics* demonstrates how Buddhist compassion can be

applied to social and political contexts. He emphasizes that compassion and ethical behavior should guide policies and actions that affect communities and nations. By fostering compassion in governance and public life, societies can work toward reducing injustice and promoting equity. A study by Batson et al. (2002) indicates that compassion can lead to prosocial behavior, such as charitable donations and volunteerism, which are essential for building social cohesion and addressing societal issues.

4.6. Compassion and global development

In the context of global human development, Buddhist compassion offers a lens through which to examine global challenges, such as climate change, human rights violations, and global inequality. The interconnectedness of all beings, a central Buddhist teaching, suggests that the suffering of one group of people impacts the whole world. In this sense, global development must include compassion for both human beings and the environment.

The concept of *deep ecology*, which emphasizes the intrinsic value of all life forms and the interconnectedness of humans with nature, is deeply rooted in Buddhist thought. Buddhist monks and activists have been instrumental in advocating for environmental protection, understanding that human flourishing is intrinsically linked to the well-being of the planet. Buddhist teachings encourage sustainable living and the reduction of greed and consumption, which are major contributors to environmental degradation. In the face of the climate crisis, Buddhist principles of simplicity, mindfulness, and compassion offer a framework for promoting global development that is both sustainable and compassionate.

4.7. Buddhist compassion and global challenges

Buddhism, a philosophical and spiritual tradition that originated in ancient India, offers profound teachings on compassion (*karuṇā*) as one of its core principles. Compassion in Buddhism is not just an emotional response but a deep, transformative understanding of the interconnectedness of all living beings. This essay will explore Buddhist compassion and how its teachings can be applied to address contemporary global challenges such as poverty, climate change, conflict, and inequality.

4.8. The concept of compassion in Buddhism

Compassion in Buddhism is rooted in the understanding of *dukkha*, the inherent suffering of life, and the notion of *interdependence* (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which asserts that all phenomena are interconnected. According to Buddhist teachings, human suffering arises from ignorance (*avidyā*) and the attachment to self-centered desires, which leads to harmful actions toward others. Compassion is seen as the antidote to this ignorance, providing a way to alleviate suffering by recognizing the shared vulnerability of all sentient beings.

The *Karuna Sūtra*, a significant Buddhist text, describes compassion as the wish for all beings to be free from suffering and its causes. Compassion is practiced by the cultivation of loving-kindness (*metta*), empathy (*sympathetic joy* or *mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), which together form

the Four Immeasurables (*appamaññā*), a set of virtues in Buddhist ethics (Rhys Davids, 1910).

V. THE ROLE OF COMPASSION IN ADDRESSING GLOBAL CHALLENGES

5.1. Poverty and economic inequality

Buddhist compassion emphasizes generosity (*dāna*) and the alleviation of suffering caused by material deprivation. The teachings of the Buddha call for an ethical approach to wealth, urging individuals to recognize the impermanence of material goods and to share resources equitably. In his sermon on the “Great Renunciation,” the Buddha advises his followers to avoid excessive attachment to possessions and to use their resources for the benefit of others (Bodhi, 2010).

In addressing global poverty, compassion would manifest in efforts to redistribute resources and ensure that basic needs such as food, healthcare, and education are accessible to all. The principle of *right livelihood* (*sammā-ājīva*) in the Noble Eightfold Path encourages ethical economic practices that promote fairness and reduce exploitation. Compassion-driven initiatives, such as microfinance programs and social entrepreneurship, seek to empower the disadvantaged by providing opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

5.2. Climate change and environmental degradation

Climate change and environmental degradation are among the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century. From a Buddhist perspective, the interconnectedness of all beings implies that human actions have a direct impact on the natural world. The concept of *interdependent origination* teaches that the well-being of human beings is inseparable from the health of the planet. The destruction of the environment, therefore, not only affects human beings but all sentient beings that rely on the earth’s ecosystems for survival.

Buddhist compassion calls for a shift in how humans interact with nature, emphasizing respect for all life forms and the need for sustainability. The Dalai Lama has often spoken about the importance of ecological responsibility, stating that caring for the environment is a moral duty grounded in compassion for future generations (*Bstan-’dzin-rgya-mtsho*, *The World of Tibetan Buddhism: An Overview of Its Philosophy and Practice*, 1995). Buddhist teachings on mindfulness (*sati*) also encourage individuals to develop an awareness of their actions and their consequences, leading to more sustainable consumption patterns and lifestyle choices.

The Buddhist practice of simplicity and non-attachment can also offer a pathway to mitigating the effects of overconsumption. By reducing desires and living with a sense of contentment, individuals can contribute to the reduction of environmental degradation. For instance, Buddhist monks and nuns often follow strict ethical guidelines around consumption and waste, which can serve as a model for communities to adopt more sustainable lifestyles (Hanh T. N., *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, 1992).

VI. CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

In a world marred by wars, terrorism, and political conflict, Buddhist

compassion offers a pathway to peace through nonviolence (*ahimsa*) and reconciliation. The Buddha's teachings on *right speech* and *right action* in the Noble Eightfold Path highlight the importance of resolving conflicts peacefully and with respect for others. In his teachings, the Buddha stressed the need for cultivating love and compassion for one's enemies, a radical departure from the cycle of revenge and hatred that often perpetuates violence (Batchelor, 1998).

Buddhist practitioners are encouraged to recognize the shared humanity of all individuals, even those perceived as adversaries. Compassion in the face of conflict calls for forgiveness and understanding rather than retaliation. This philosophy of peace and reconciliation is exemplified by the efforts of Buddhist leaders such as Thich Nhat Hanh, who has advocated for peace in the context of the Vietnam War and beyond (Hanh T. N., 1992). His teachings promote the idea that peace begins within the individual and that cultivating compassion in everyday life can have transformative effects on society at large.

Furthermore, Buddhist conflict resolution techniques, such as dialogue, active listening, and mindfulness, have been used in peacebuilding initiatives around the world. For example, in Sri Lanka, Buddhist monks have played a key role in peace processes, calling for interethnic understanding and reconciliation during the nation's civil war.

VII. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Buddhism's commitment to compassion extends to the promotion of social justice and the protection of human rights. The Buddha's teachings on equality and non-discrimination, particularly in his rejection of the caste system, emphasize that all human beings are worthy of compassion, regardless of their social status, ethnicity, or gender. The Buddha's rejection of the caste system was a radical stance at the time, highlighting the inherent dignity and equality of all people (Gombrich, 2009).

Buddhist activists have drawn on these teachings to advocate for human rights and social justice movements. In modern times, figures such as Aung San Suu Kyi have used Buddhist principles to champion the rights of marginalized groups despite facing political oppression (Aung San Suu Kyi, 1995). The Dalai Lama has also been an outspoken advocate for human rights, particularly in advocating for the rights of Tibetans in China and the protection of religious freedom worldwide.

Buddhist compassion also calls for an end to the exploitation of vulnerable populations, such as refugees, migrants, and those affected by systemic inequalities. In practical terms, this has led to various humanitarian efforts and global campaigns aimed at alleviating human suffering and promoting justice.

VIII. THE FUTURE OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

Buddhism, with its profound teachings on compassion (*karuṇā*), wisdom (*prajna*), and interconnectedness (interdependence), offers a distinctive perspective that is increasingly relevant in today's rapidly globalizing and interconnected world. As societies across the globe face escalating social,

economic, and environmental challenges, Buddhist compassion presents a powerful and transformative tool for promoting sustainable development, social justice, and global harmony. This essay explores the future role of Buddhist compassion in global development, focusing on how its core principles can guide efforts toward a more equitable, peaceful, and environmentally conscious world.

8.1. The core concept of compassion in Buddhism

In Buddhist philosophy, compassion (*karuṇā*) is an essential quality that arises from the understanding of interconnectedness and the desire to alleviate the suffering of others. Compassion in Buddhism is not just a passive emotion but an active force that drives individuals to engage in actions that reduce suffering and promote well-being. According to the Dalai Lama, “Compassion is the radicalism of our time” (*Bstan-’dzin-rgya-mtsho*, Ethics for the New Millennium, 1999), reflecting the urgency with which the world needs this practice in modern society.

The Buddhist approach to compassion extends beyond personal altruism; it encompasses a deep sense of responsibility toward all sentient beings. The principle of interdependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) teaches that all things are interconnected and that the well-being of one is inseparable from the well-being of others. This interconnectedness implies that promoting the welfare of others is not only beneficial to them but ultimately leads to the flourishing of all beings, including oneself. In this context, global development must move beyond self-interest and embrace an ethics of care that considers the needs and dignity of all people, especially the most vulnerable.

8.2. Buddhist compassion in global development

Global development today faces multiple crises, from poverty and inequality to environmental degradation and conflict. Conventional development models, focused primarily on economic growth, have often exacerbated these problems by prioritizing material wealth over human well-being. In contrast, Buddhist compassion offers a framework for a more holistic, people-centered approach to development. (Swearer, 2012)

8.3. Addressing poverty and inequality

Buddhist teachings on compassion emphasize the alleviation of suffering, particularly the suffering caused by poverty, hunger, and social inequality. The Buddhist concept of right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*) encourages economic and social practices that are ethical and beneficial to all. In the context of global development, this principle suggests the need for development models that prioritize social justice, equitable distribution of resources, and the well-being of all individuals.

A Buddhist approach to development would advocate for policies that address the root causes of poverty and inequality, focusing on creating opportunities for the marginalized and disenfranchised. This can include promoting education, access to healthcare, and empowering local communities to participate in decision-making processes. It would also challenge the systems of exploitation that often underpin global economic structures, advocating for

a more just and compassionate approach to international trade, labor rights, and environmental stewardship.

8.4. Environmental sustainability

The principle of interconnectedness (*pratītyasamutpāda*) also has profound implications for the environment. Buddhism teaches that human beings are not separate from the natural world but part of a vast, interdependent ecosystem. This perspective calls for a deep respect for nature and the cultivation of a sense of ecological responsibility. As the world faces unprecedented environmental challenges, including climate change, deforestation, and pollution, Buddhist compassion offers a framework for developing a more sustainable relationship with the Earth.

Buddhism's emphasis on moderation (*madhyamā-pratipada*) encourages individuals to adopt lifestyles that are mindful of their environmental impact, promoting sustainable consumption and reducing waste. In global development, this means prioritizing environmentally sustainable practices, investing in renewable energy, and promoting conservation efforts that protect ecosystems for future generations.

Moreover, Buddhist communities worldwide are increasingly involved in environmental activism, with initiatives such as the Buddhist Climate Action Network bringing together monks, nuns, and laypeople to advocate for climate justice. By integrating the principles of compassion and interconnectedness into the global dialogue on sustainability, Buddhist compassion can play a key role in shaping a more ecologically conscious future.

8.5. Conflict resolution and peacebuilding

Buddhist teachings also offer valuable insights into conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Central to Buddhism is the concept of non-violence (*ahimsa*), which calls for the rejection of all forms of harm toward others. This extends beyond physical violence to include verbal and mental harm, such as hatred, anger, and intolerance. The cultivation of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion is seen as essential to overcoming these negative states and promoting peace.

In the context of global development, Buddhist compassion encourages dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation in regions torn by conflict. This is particularly relevant in areas where ethnic, religious, or political divisions have led to violence and war. Buddhist-inspired peacebuilding efforts often focus on fostering mutual respect and empathy, offering a non-violent alternative to the militarized approaches that dominate many global peace initiatives.

One prominent example is the role of Buddhist monks and activists in promoting peace in Myanmar, where they have advocated for human rights and peaceful coexistence in the face of ethnic violence. Similarly, the Dalai Lama's advocacy for human rights and non-violence in the context of Tibet's political struggles demonstrates the power of Buddhist compassion in addressing global issues of conflict and injustice.

IX. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

While the potential of Buddhist compassion in global development is vast, its integration into mainstream development practices faces several challenges. One major obstacle is the predominance of economic models that prioritize profit and efficiency over human well-being and ethical considerations. In many parts of the world, economic growth remains the primary metric of success, often sidelining the ethical concerns raised by Buddhist teachings.

Additionally, there is the challenge of interpreting and applying Buddhist principles in diverse cultural contexts. Buddhism, like any other spiritual tradition, is deeply influenced by the cultural and historical context in which it is practiced. Adapting Buddhist teachings to contemporary global development requires careful consideration of local needs, values, and challenges.

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for integrating Buddhist compassion into global development. With increasing recognition of the need for alternative development models that prioritize human well-being, sustainability, and social justice, Buddhist principles are gaining traction among global leaders, policymakers, and activists. Initiatives such as the Buddhist Global Relief and Buddhist Action to Protect Children demonstrate the growing influence of Buddhist compassion in addressing critical global issues.

Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development is a concept that emphasizes the importance of compassion, care, and mutual responsibility in promoting human development. In Buddhism, compassion is not just an emotional state but a guiding principle for action aimed at alleviating suffering and fostering the well-being of all beings. This shared responsibility involves recognizing interconnectedness and understanding that the welfare of others is integral to one's well-being.

The core idea is that true human development is not only about individual progress but also about contributing to the collective good. This includes taking actions that promote peace, social justice, environmental sustainability, and care for others, particularly those in vulnerable situations. Buddhist teachings advocate for mindfulness, loving-kindness, and wisdom in interactions with others, suggesting that when individuals act with compassion, they help build a harmonious society.

Furthermore, Buddhist compassion involves practical engagement, where individuals and communities actively work to address social issues, reduce inequalities, and support human flourishing through service, charity, and ethical living. This approach to human development stresses that compassion should not be passive but should drive concrete actions to improve lives and societies.

Ultimately, the shared responsibility for human development, as seen through the lens of Buddhist compassion, is about fostering a sense of interconnectedness and recognizing that the development of one is bound to the development of all.

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: PROMOTING EDUCATION, HARMONY AND STRENGTHENING UNITY THROUGH BUDDHIST MISSIONARY SCHOOLS IN CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS OF BANGLADESH

Jhubhur Chakma*

Abstract:

This paper examines the role of Theravāda Buddhist monks in Bangladesh, how Buddhist monks actively demonstrated compassion by providing free formal education to disadvantaged and underprivileged indigenous children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. Since the independence of Bangladesh, many Buddhist monks have played a significant role in promoting educational advancement, social welfare, fostering peace, and enhancing harmony within multicultural ethnic and religious minority societies, particularly in CHT, regardless of race and religion in the region. Their contributions have left a substantial impact on indigenous children in the region, many of whom have since achieved professional success across diverse fields around the world. This study explores how Buddhist monks put compassion into action through accessible general education for disadvantaged indigenous communities, thereby fortifying community bonds and contributing to regional peace and harmony. Despite the critical nature of this work, previous scholarship has largely overlooked the contributions of Bangladeshi Buddhist monks in promoting peace and harmony through education in the CHT. However, this research addresses this gap by documenting the significant educational and societal contributions of Bangladeshi Buddhist monastics, emphasizing their role in promoting peace across CHT's multicultural and multilingual indigenous societies. Additionally, this study highlights and preserves the legacies of key monastic figures whose efforts have significantly

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expanded educational access and exemplified Buddhist compassion in action in the region.

Keywords: *Buddhist compassion, promoting education, harmony, strength, unity, Buddhist missionary, school, Theravāda Buddhism, monk.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in post-independence Bangladesh enjoyed a unique excluded status under the administration of the British government.¹ In 1884, the British colonial administration had divided the CHT into three circles: the Chakma Circle, the Bohmong Circle, and the Mong Circle. Each of these circles maintained a distinct self-administrative structure based on ethnic leadership while preserving their diverse cultures, traditions, and religious practices.² However, the Bengal Border Commission allocated the CHT region to Pakistan in 1947.³ Following Bangladesh's independence in 1971, the CHT experienced widespread human rights violations and conflicts between the mainstream Bengali Muslim population and various ethnic groups.⁴ Additionally, from 1975 to 1997, the region experienced bloody armed conflicts between government security forces and an ethnic armed group known as Santi Bahini (Peace Force), the militant wing of the CHT Solidarity Party (PCJSS).⁵

During the period of armed conflict from 1975 to 1997, Buddhist monks came forward to support orphans and poor indigenous children who had lost their parents during the war and other armed conflicts. Therefore, Buddhist monks went from house to house, collected and brought poor orphaned children to the city, where they provided them with free food, accommodation, education, health care, and other necessities. Within this context, Theravāda Buddhism monks emerged as pivotal figures in advancing social welfare, particularly in the education of indigenous children and the promotion of Buddhism. Through their engagement with disadvantaged communities, Buddhist monks actively applied the Buddhist principle of *karunā* (compassion) by offering free educational programs and other social services.

¹ Amena Mohsin (2003). *The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, p. 17.

² R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson (1909). *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts*. Allahabad: The Pioneer Press, p. 12 – 13.

³ Hosana Jahan Shewly (2023). Sixty-Six Years Saga of Bengal Boundary-Making: A Historical Expose of Bangladesh-India Border. *BISS Journal*, 34 (3), p. 205 - 219.

⁴ Md. Faridul Islam (2006). Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict and Discrimination Against Ethnic Minorities of Bangladesh. *Journal of Ethnic Affair Ethnic Community Development Organization*. II, p. 27 - 30.

⁵ Anurug Chakma and Kisha Chakma (2024). Nation-building policies and ethnic conflict in Bangladesh. In A. Author & B. Editor (Eds.), *The aftermath of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971* (1st ed., p. 19 - 22). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003463627>

The monk's initiatives have not only provided critical educational opportunities while fostering peace, inclusivity, and inter-communal harmony within these multi-ethnic communities in the region. Despite the socio-political challenges within the CHT, where ethnic tensions and language barriers often hinder access to traditional education, Buddhist monks have consistently promoted unity and cultural resilience. Their efforts have empowered indigenous children to overcome socio-economic limitations, with many achieving professional success in diverse fields worldwide.

However, the vital role of these monks in promoting peace and educational equity has remained largely unacknowledged in academic literature.⁶ In response to this gap, this paper explores the educational contributions of these monastics, who, motivated by the Buddhist principle of compassion, have worked tirelessly to provide access to both general and Buddhist education for indigenous children. This study also fills the current research gap in existing literature by documenting the significant educational and societal contributions of Theravāda Buddhist monastics, emphasizing their role in fostering interethnic and interreligious peace in the CHT. Furthermore, it seeks to honor the legacies of key monastic figures whose dedication to education accessibility and community service has not only shaped individual lives but also strengthened the social fabric of the region. Through a detailed exploration of their work, this paper underscores the monks' commitment to social justice, cultural preservation, and peacebuilding within CHT's diverse communities, placing these efforts in the broader context of the transformative role of religious actors in multicultural, post-conflict societies.

II. BUDDHIST MONKS AS EDUCATORS IN BANGLADESH

Buddhism functions as a comprehensive educational system rooted in both conventional and ultimate realities, centering on two foundational learning principles: moral education and the exploration of the way of natural phenomena. This dual emphasis integrates ethical development with a deep understanding of reality, guiding practitioners through a process that cultivates both personal virtue and insight into the nature of existence.⁷ Buddhist educational theory is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Buddha and emphasizes compassion and moral integrity as central elements of education. Muangkaew (2024) proposes a Buddhist-based learning model to cultivate compassion in higher education students, highlighting its significant impact on their ethical and character development. This approach encourages students to internalize Buddhist principles, reinforcing that educational systems should cultivate empathy and compassion toward others, thereby supporting holistic

⁶ Ranabir Samaddar (1999). *The marginal nation: Transborder migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 68.

⁷ K. Muangkaew, P. Boonsriton, C. Mangkhang, and J. Dibyamandala (2024). Model of Buddhism-based learning to enhance the compassionate mind of higher education students. *Community and Social Development Journal*, 25(1), p. 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.57260/rc-mrj.2024.264481>

growth.⁸ Similarly, Ozawa-de Silva and Dodson-Lavelle (2011) emphasize training in compassion within educational contexts, focusing on its role in developing moral sensitivity. They illustrate how Buddhist practices of compassion can be integrated into broader educational frameworks to foster empathy and ethical awareness, underscoring their essential role in students' moral development.⁹

Therefore, the Buddha's teachings on education, particularly on developing wisdom and understanding, can be found in several suttas within the *Pāli Canon*. For example, in the *Kālāma Sutta*¹⁰, the Buddha encourages a form of education based on critical inquiry, personal experience, and direct knowledge rather than unquestioning acceptance of authority or tradition.¹¹ In the *Kālāma Sutta*, the Buddha advises the *Kālāma* to critically evaluate teachings and avoid accepting ideas solely based on tradition, hearsay, or authority. Instead, the Buddha emphasizes learning through personal experience and reasoning, promoting an educational approach that values wisdom, discernment, and compassion. This *sutta* underscores the importance of a reflective and investigative approach to learning, aligning with the principles of experiential learning and moral discernment. Another *sutta* that highlights the importance of education and wisdom is the *Parābhava Sutta*¹² (*Sutta Nipāta* 1.6), where the Buddha discusses the causes of downfall and the qualities needed for success and spiritual growth. Here, the Buddha emphasizes that ignorance is a primary cause of suffering and downfall, advocating for the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom as essential to overcoming life's challenges.¹³

The teachings of the Buddha have inspired numerous Buddhist monks to cultivate compassion alongside wisdom, actively engaging in community welfare for the benefit of many. In Bangladesh, particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Buddhist monks assumed the role of guardians, serving as pillars of education, cultural preservation, and religious traditions in the region. Unfortunately, these contributions have largely remained unacknowledged, with previous scholarship ignoring this significant field of study within Bangladesh. Historically, many Buddhist monks devoted their entire lives to

⁸ Muangkaew et al. (2024), p. 199.

⁹ Brendan Richard Ozawa-DeSilva (2011). An education of heart and mind: Practical and theoretical issues in teaching cognitive-based compassion training to children. *Practical Matters*, 1(4), p. 1 – 28.

¹⁰ AN. 3. 65.

¹¹ F. L. Woodward (Trans.). (1979). *The book of the gradual sayings (Anguttara-Nikāya): Vol. I (Ones, Twos, Threes)* (p. 170 – 178). London: Pāli Text Society. Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Trans.). (2013). *With the Kālāmas of Kesamutta (Kesamuttisutta)* (A. I. 188). In *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*. Accessed on November 22, 2024, available at: <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html>

¹² Sn. 1. 6

¹³ H. S. Jarrett (Trans.). (1913). *The Sutta Nipāta, Vol. I: "The Causes of Downfall"* (p. 11 – 13). London: Pāli Text Society.

community development and to propagating Buddhism through education. This legacy endures today, with many monks still actively involved in social activism and education within the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Somaratne (2019) expands on the role of Buddhist ethics in global moral education, proposing that Buddhist moral teachings can serve as a universal model for ethical education. His study highlights compassion as a guiding principle for ethical living and respect for all life forms, advocating for the integration of Buddhist values, such as kindness and mindfulness, into educational models to promote moral awareness and global citizenship.¹⁴

Goodman (2014) also emphasizes the centrality of compassion within Buddhist ethics, arguing that the Buddha's teachings offer a practical framework for compassion-centered education. He asserts that this approach encourages students to develop social responsibility and empathy, which in turn contributes to a harmonious and morally aware society.¹⁵ Bijoy P. Barua (2007), "Colonialism, Education, and Rural Buddhist Communities in Bangladesh," provides a comprehensive analysis of the effects of colonial and postcolonial educational policies on the Buddhist communities in Bangladesh.¹⁶ Barua explores how British, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi educational frameworks sought to reshape cultural and social dynamics in these communities, often marginalizing traditional Buddhist educational practices in favor of centralized, economically driven models. Barua contrasts this colonial and state-imposed structure with the Buddhist model, which emphasizes liberation, critical thinking, and environmental consciousness. The paper dissects the colonial education system's motives, including economic exploitation, cultural imposition, and the undermining of Buddhist values. In addition, Barua demonstrates how Buddhist communities have resisted these cultural intrusions through nonviolent actions and educational decolonization, incorporating formal, non-formal, and informal learning approaches. The study presents a detailed historical narrative and advocates for preserving the unique contemplative practices within Buddhist education, while highlighting the contrast with the colonial model's focus on materialism and control.

The chapter "The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord: Promises and Performances" by Fardaus Ara and Md Mostafizur Rahman Khan, published in *Migration, Regional Autonomy, and Conflicts in Eastern South Asia* (2023), explores the unique role that Buddhist monks have played in fostering peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh.¹⁷ This region,

¹⁴ G. A. Somaratne (2019). Early Buddhist moral theory for global education in ethics. In Thich Nhat Tu & Thich Duc Thien (Eds.), *Buddhist approach to global education in ethics* (p. 41–60). Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: Vietnam Buddhist University Publications.

¹⁵ C. Goodman (2014). *Consequences of compassion: An interpretation and defense of Buddhist ethics* (p. 3 – 5). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶ Bijoy P. Barua (2007). Colonialism, education, and rural Buddhist communities in Bangladesh. *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 37 (1), p. 60 – 76.

¹⁷ Ara, F., & Khan, M. M. R. (2023). The Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord: Promises and

characterized by a history of ethnic and political tensions, has benefited from the peace-oriented efforts of Buddhist monks, who focus on fostering social harmony through educational and community initiatives. Buddhist monks have contributed not only to conflict resolution but also to the construction of an inclusive societal framework that emphasizes cultural understanding and tolerance. This chapter contextualizes the 1997 Peace Accord, signed between the Bangladesh government and the Parbhatia Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (PCJSS), which marked a critical turning point in the region's peace efforts. While initially celebrated, the accord's implementation encountered significant challenges from various opposing forces, complicating efforts toward sustainable peace. As highlighted in this work, the involvement of Buddhist monks exemplifies a grassroots approach to peacebuilding, effectively bridging communities across ethnic and religious lines.

In his 1997 work, "Forgotten Community and Indifferent State", Mannan explores the post-colonial challenges faced by indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and highlights the pivotal role of Buddhist monks in educational and cultural preservation.¹⁸ As local leaders, Buddhist monks fostered education as a means of cultural resistance, countering state-driven integration policies that often marginalized indigenous cultural practices and values. Mannan's analysis underscores how Buddhist monks championed cultural and educational autonomy, positioning themselves as key figures in preserving the CHT's unique heritage and identity amid government standardization efforts. Similarly, Khan's 1997 study, "Social Dimension of Sustainable Development: An Inquiry into the Forest Sectors of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India," extends this view by situating Buddhist monks within the larger framework of sustainable development in Bangladesh's forested regions, including the CHT.¹⁹ Although his primary focus is on sustainable forestry, Khan illustrates how Buddhist monks contributed significantly to education by integrating cultural knowledge with sustainable practices. Beyond their religious roles, monks actively used education to foster environmental awareness and preserve traditional values, reinforcing the community's resilience against socio-economic and political pressures.

Therefore, the monks played a central role in preserving indigenous educational practices, which emphasized Buddhist spiritual and philosophical teachings as a means of cultural resilience. By prioritizing localized education rooted in Buddhist values, the monks established an alternative framework that resisted colonial erasure, advocating for non-violent decolonization and

performances. In A. Ranjan & D. Chattoraj (Eds.), *Migration, regional autonomy, and conflicts in Eastern South Asia* (p. 310). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-28764-0_12

¹⁸ M. Mannan (1997). *Forgotten community and indifferent state*. In Professor Satya Narayana (Ed.), *Society: Tribal studies*. Concept Publishing Company. p. 147

¹⁹ M. R. Khan (1997). *Social dimension of sustainable development: An inquiry into the forest sectors of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India*. Concept Publishing Company, p. 150.

community autonomy. This approach, which prioritizes community-specific values over colonial education, underscores the critical role of Buddhist monks as leaders in cultural preservation. In “Faith and Education in Bangladesh: A Review of the Contemporary Landscape and Challenges,” Roy, Huq, and Rob discuss the intersection of religious and secular education in the CHT, highlighting basic primary and secondary school-based education provided by Buddhist missionary schools. This model integrates secular and religious instruction, fostering a learning environment grounded in Buddhist traditions while adapting to contemporary challenges. The study illustrates how Buddhist missionary-based education serves as a culturally resonant alternative in a predominantly secular educational landscape, preserving indigenous values within a system that lacks consistent governmental support.²⁰ Buddhist missionary-based education offers a critical perspective on the resilience of general education alongside Buddhist principles, serving as both a source of knowledge and a safeguard for indigenous cultural integrity.

Further, in “Samaj as a Form of Self-Organisation among Village Communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts,” Chakma and Gerharz explore the “Samaj” institution in CHT communities, in which Buddhist monks play a crucial role in education, social cohesion, and welfare.²¹ The authors illustrate how monks act as both spiritual and practical leaders within the Samaj, offering informal education and mobilizing community resources to meet collective needs. This structure enables monks to preserve cultural continuity within a framework of self-organization that empowers the community, adapting traditional Buddhist leadership roles to address the evolving demands of local governance. In “Arakanese Chittagong Became Mughal Islamabad: Buddhist-Muslim Relationship in Chittagong (Chottogram), *Bangladesh*,” Barua provides historical context to the interfaith relations that have shaped CHT’s social fabric, emphasizing the role of Buddhist monks in safeguarding educational and cultural institutions amidst religious tensions.²² Buddhist monks in CHT serve as protectors of heritage sites and educators who preserve religious teachings while promoting peaceful cohabitation. By navigating these interfaith dynamics, Buddhist education in CHT fosters stability and cultural resilience, underscoring the monks’ dual role as religious and community leaders in a complex socio-religious landscape.

²⁰ S. Roy, S. Huq, & A. B. A. Rob (2020). Faith and education in Bangladesh: A review of the contemporary landscape and challenges. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 79, p. 453 – 455. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2020.102290>

²¹ Bablu Chakma & Eva Gerharz (2022). Samaj as a form of self-organisation among village communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. In D. Neubert, H. J. Lauth, & C. Mohamad-Klotzbach (Eds.), *Local self-governance and varieties of statehood* (p. 139). Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-14996-2_7

²² D. M. Barua (2020). Arakanese Chittagong became Mughal Islamabad: Buddhist-Muslim relationship in Chittagong (Chottogram), Bangladesh. In *Buddhist-Muslim relations in a Theravāda world*. Singapore: Springer, p. 88 – 90.

A research dissertation conducted by Urmee Chakma, which deserves further review for this paper. In her dissertation, *Empowerment and Desubalternising Voices through Education: A Case Study of Diasporic Indigenous Chakma in Melbourne*, Chakma provides an analysis that, while primarily focusing on the diasporic Chakma community – a Buddhist community – it offers insights into the foundational role Buddhist monks have played in promoting education in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh, particularly during periods of socio-political turmoil.²³ While her primary focus is on the diaspora, her discussion of cultural resilience and empowerment through education strongly aligns with the role of Buddhist monks in CHT in preserving indigenous culture and identity. Chakma's study highlights how Buddhist monks historically provided free education to underprivileged indigenous children, particularly during periods of conflict and social unrest. Bangladeshi Buddhist monks traditionally served as both spiritual and educational leaders, founding schools and monasteries that provided both Buddhist teachings and secular education. This approach not only brought stability to communities affected by armed conflict but also served as a vital means of cultural preservation, ensuring the transmission of Buddhist and indigenous values to future generations.

The monks' initiatives aligned with Buddhist principles of compassion and service, promoting a holistic approach to education that encompassed moral, spiritual, and academic elements. Buddhist monks in CHT empowered indigenous communities and protected them from cultural erasure by offering free education in a structured, supportive environment. Chakma's work underscores how such efforts by Buddhist monks in education extended beyond conventional teaching, positioning them as pillars of resistance and autonomy, contributing to the community's resilience and continuity. Through these efforts, Buddhist monks emerged as central figures in the socio-cultural landscape of the CHT, reinforcing education as a powerful tool for empowerment and cultural preservation.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to examine and document the contributions of Theravāda Buddhist monks in the field of education and community welfare in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. This approach provides a rich and nuanced framework for collecting empirical data directly from participants. It enables a comprehensive understanding of the monks' roles in education, social welfare, community building, and cultural preservation. The research design involved in-depth interviews with 15 key informants, including students, teachers, and Buddhist monks from missionary schools in CHT. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to ensure flexibility, allowing participants to share their unique

²³ Urmee Chakma (2021). *Empowerment and desubalternising voices through education: A case study of diasporic indigenous Chakma in Melbourne*. Doctoral dissertation, Monash University, Faculty of Education, p. 45.

experiences while maintaining focus on the study's objectives.

Therefore, the qualitative education research emphasizes studying natural settings to deeply understand behaviors and processes in context. It collects rich, descriptive data, focusing on participants' perspectives and interpretations rather than numerical analysis or predetermined hypotheses.²⁴ This method uses tools like participant observation and in-depth interviews, often involving small sample sizes, to explore complex educational phenomena. Grounded in an inductive and flexible approach, qualitative research draws from interdisciplinary frameworks, ensuring findings are shaped by historical, social, and cultural contexts. Lichtman's *Qualitative Research in Education: A user's guide* emphasizes a step-by-step approach to designing and conducting qualitative studies, rooted in educational contexts. It highlights the importance of ethics, reflexivity, and rigor while addressing evolving challenges through practical examples and strategies.²⁵

Ethnographic observation complemented the interviews by providing an immersive understanding of the monks' educational practices within the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh. This fieldwork involved observing classroom dynamics, teaching methods, and the integration of school curricula, offering valuable insights into how Buddhist educational programs function and their impact on students and the broader community. Additionally, this ethnographic approach highlights the cultural and environmental context of the CHT, emphasizing how local traditions, challenges, and available resources shape the monks' educational efforts. Archival research further provides a historical perspective on the contributions of Buddhist monastics to education in the region. By analyzing literature, records, news reports, and publications, the study traced the evolution of Buddhist monks' involvement in serving the community with broader socio-educational, religious, and cultural objectives, particularly during the post-conflict period.

Moreover, this qualitative approach-incorporating interviews, ethnographic observation, and archival research-offered a multi-dimensional understanding of the Theravāda Buddhist monk's role in education and community development. Interviews captured personal narratives, ethnographic observation provided an immersive understanding of the community's lived experiences, and archival research contextualized these efforts within a historical framework. Collectively, these methods ensured comprehensive documentation and a nuanced understanding of the monk's educational and social contributions, as well as their lasting legacy, thereby preserving their impact for future generations.²⁶

²⁴ Robert C. Bogdan & Sari Knopp Biklen (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed). Boston: Allyn & Bacon, p. 4 – 6.

²⁵ Marilyn Lichtman (2023). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide* (4th ed). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003281917>, p. 12.

²⁶ Samuels, J. D. (2004). Toward an action-oriented pedagogy: Buddhist texts and monastic education in contemporary Sri Lanka. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 72 (4), p. 955 - 971.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Four key findings emerged from this research study. Buddhist monks in Bangladesh have historically played an integral role in promoting education and Buddhism for social welfare and community development. The findings indicate that without the proactive involvement of Buddhist monks in advancing education, particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the literacy rate among the region's Buddhist population would likely stagnate at approximately 77%, as limited access to basic education remains a critical challenge. Therefore, the monks' educational campaigns have had a significant and lasting impact on indigenous Buddhist communities, raising awareness about the importance of education and fundamental human rights, ultimately leading to improved socio-economic opportunities. This shift has not only empowered individuals but has also strengthened the collective resilience of these communities in overcoming structural inequalities and political marginalization.

On November 21, 2024, an interview was conducted with the Most Venerable Jnanashree Mahathera, the 13th Sangharaja of the Bangladesh Sangharaja Bhikkhu Mahasabha Nikāya – the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh (SSCB). As a prominent monastic leader dedicated to education and humanitarian efforts, Jnanashree Mahathera reflected on his initial visit to the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1980. During his visit, he witnessed the widespread suffering of indigenous Buddhist communities, who faced severe deprivation in education, healthcare, and even the fundamental practice of Buddhism. These hardships, he noted, were exacerbated by political instability and systemic persecution against indigenous groups in the region. Recalling this experience, Jnanashree Mahathera made the following statement:

When I first visited the Chittagong Hill Tracts, I saw profound suffering among indigenous Buddhists. Despite their deep devotion, they had lost touch with fundamental Buddhist practices and lacked access to education, healthcare, and basic human rights, all amid political instability. This dire situation disheartened me but also inspired action. I realized education was key to empowering this marginalized community. Engaging with local leaders, I proposed a Buddhist missionary orphanage school to support underprivileged children. With their encouragement, I decided to settle in Dighinala, Khagrachari district, where I founded the first Buddhist missionary school.²⁷

Ven. Jnanashree Mahathera has played a pivotal role in addressing the socio-educational needs of Indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. His contributions became particularly significant with the establishment of the Buddhist Orphanage Residential School in Dighinala, Khagrachari Hill District, in 1981. This initiative directly responded to the humanitarian crisis caused by war and conflict, providing essential education

²⁷ Interview with Most Ven. Jnanashree Mahathera, personal communication, November 21, 2024.

and support to children who had lost their parents. Mahathera's efforts align with broader findings on the transformative role of education in fostering peace and addressing post-conflict challenges in CHT.²⁸ His work also underscores the importance of culturally sensitive educational frameworks, a critical factor in overcoming barriers such as inadequate infrastructure and policies that fail to address Indigenous realities.²⁹ Furthermore, his leadership exemplifies the role of community-led initiatives in empowering Indigenous communities and fostering social cohesion – an approach widely recognized in development research on the CHT.³⁰ Through his unwavering commitment to education and humanitarian service, Mahathera has left a lasting legacy of empowerment and unity among the Indigenous Buddhist community.

Venerable Jnanashree Mahathera, whose contributions extend beyond the establishment of Moanoghar Residential School, exemplifies the legacy of educational initiatives in the region. He has also established numerous other Buddhist and educational institutions across Chittagong, Joypurhat, and Rangpur districts, leaving an enduring impact on Buddhist education and community welfare in Bangladesh. Similarly, the contributions of other prominent Buddhist monks, such as the 4th Sangharaja of the Parbatya Bhikkhu Sangha Bangladesh (PBSB) – Chittagong Hill Buddhist Association – Venerable Aggamahapandita Tilakananda Mahathera, highlight the transformative role of Buddhist welfare in education and community development.

Venerable Tilakananda Mahathera also made a remarkable impact through his unwavering commitment to community service and educational advancement in CHT. In response to these needs, he founded Kajalong Shisusadan School in Baghaichari, a sub-district of Rangamati, which became a sanctuary for thousands of orphaned and disadvantaged ethnic children during the armed conflict in the CHT. Driven by deep compassion, Venerable Tilakananda Mahathera dedicated his life tirelessly to uplifting underprivileged indigenous children. The school he founded, Kajalong Shisusadan, is now one of the most respected residential schools in the region, offering free education, shelter, and meals for community children. As a result, the institution has created a nurturing environment that fosters growth, learning, and hope for countless children in need, making it a cornerstone of educational and social development in the CHT.

²⁸ Ala Uddin (2015). Education in Peace-building: The Case of Post-Conflict Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. *The Oriental Anthropologist: A Bi-annual International Journal of the Science of Man*, 15, p. 59 - 76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972558X1501500105>.

²⁹ Emerson Chakma (2024). Challenges of indigenous children's primary education in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: Insights from individuals working in education. *International Journal of Educational Management and Development Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.53378/353050>.

³⁰ Choudhury Farhana Jhuma & Sanjay Krishno Biswas (2021). Exploring the Roles of Grassroots Organizations as Potential Agency: The Case of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. 05, p. 391-400. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRIS.2021.5420>.

Buddhist monks in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) play a vital role in advancing education and social welfare among the indigenous communities. Through their dedicated efforts, the illiteracy rate within indigenous communities has significantly declined, highlighting their transformative impact on the region. Among the notable figures, the most venerable Pannya Jota Mahathera, widely recognized as Usala Bhante or Guru Bhante, is well known for his remarkable contributions to spiritual practice and the propagation of the Buddha Dhamma in the CHT. He was one of the most dedicated Buddhist monastic figures and educators in the region. Therefore, his efforts have profoundly shaped education, culture, and the preservation of Buddhist traditions. His initiatives led to the establishment of key religious and educational infrastructures, including Buddhist temples, stupas, and schools, particularly in the Bandarban district, significantly enhancing access to education and preserving Buddhist traditions.

On November 18, 2024, the researcher interviewed with Venerable U Virocana Panna, the abbot of Ramajati in Bandarban and one of the chief disciples of the Most Venerable Pannya Jota Mahathera. Reflecting on the legacy of Guru Bhante, Venerable U Virocana Panna highlighted his transformative role, stating:

Guru Bhante played a crucial role in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities in the Bandarban district, serving as a guiding figure for all indigenous groups by addressing their spiritual, social, and educational needs. He established numerous religious and educational institutions to support underprivileged indigenous children and was a strong political advocate for their rights and welfare. Despite facing challenges from both Buddhist and Muslim groups, particularly over land disputes and political tensions, Guru Bhante remained steadfast. We often stood by him in protecting our temple lands from illegal occupation. The police and army attempted to arrest him multiple times, but we believe his spiritual strength prevented them from succeeding. I cannot imagine what would have happened to our Buddhist community without Guru Bhante. We might have lost all our lands to Muslim settlers, and many of us would have remained uneducated and underprivileged. Today, as we continue to face political and religious challenges in a Muslim-majority country, we fully recognize the hardships he endured for our survival and progress. With his passing, we now confront these challenges without his guidance, and his absence is deeply felt.³¹

Additionally, data suggests that Venerable Pannya Jota's educational and humanitarian contributions to the Bandarban Hill District are deeply rooted in addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by the region's indigenous communities. As highlighted by Hossain and Ahmad, hill dwellers in Bandarban struggle significantly with food security and limited access to education, underscoring the critical need for interventions such as Pannya

³¹ Interview with Ven. Virocana Bhikkhu, personal communication, November 18, 2024.

Jota's efforts in establishing welfare centers and educational institutions.³² The results of Rizwan et al.³³ make these projects even more crucial as they highlight the importance of community-based support systems in ensuring that women and children in Bandarban do not face food insecurity or financial losses. Furthermore, Jannat et al.³⁴ illustrate how education and alternative livelihoods can reduce dependence on natural resources, aligning with Pannya Jota's holistic approach to empowering marginalized families. Together, these studies provide a contextual foundation for understanding how Pannya Jota's compassionate leadership has brought lasting positive change to impoverished communities in Bandarban.

On the other hand, Professor Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu, a distinguished Bengali Buddhist leader from the plains, is another prominent monastic figure within the Buddhist community of Bangladesh. His profound influence extends across both the plains and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). With unwavering dedication to education, spiritual guidance, and community welfare, he has significantly improved the lives of underserved populations. As the General Secretary of the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh, Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu has tirelessly promoted the teachings of Buddhism, emphasizing spiritual enrichment and educational empowerment. His early exposure to Buddhist teachings within a devout family laid the foundation for his lifelong commitment to serving marginalized communities and preserving Buddhist values.

Among his numerous contributions, Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu has established a variety of religious and educational institutions that integrate Buddhist principles with formal education. His initiatives specifically target underserved populations, addressing both their spiritual and academic needs. Research interviews indicate that he actively contributes to the preservation and dissemination of Buddhist heritage through the publication of Buddhist literature and the organization of cultural events. His academic role as a professor at Chittagong University further underscores his commitment to nurturing future generations in Pāli language studies and Buddhist philosophy, combining scholarly rigor with spiritual depth. On November 25, 2024, Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu shared insights into his motivations and achievements in an online interview. Reflecting on his upbringing, he stated:

³² Hossain, M., & Ahmad, A. (2017). Livelihood status of hill dwellers in Bandarban, Bangladesh. *The International Journal of Business and Management*, 3 (1), p. 154 - 161. <https://doi.org/10.18801/ijbmsr.030117.18>.

³³ Rizwan, A., Zafrullah Shamsul, S., Alauddin Chowdhury, B., & Khan, R. (2021). Dietary Behavior of Pregnant and Lactating Women of Bandarban Hill District, Bangladesh. *Journal of Nutrition and Food Sciences*, 11(1), p. 1 - 5. <https://doi.org/10.35248/2155-9600.21.11.785>.

³⁴ Jannat, M., Hossain, M., & Uddin, M. (2020). Socioeconomic Factors of Forest Dependency in Developing Countries: Lessons Learned from the Bandarban Hill District of Bangladesh. *American Journal of Pure and Applied Biosciences*. <https://doi.org/10.34104/ajpab.020.077084>.

My father fought for Bangladesh's independence in 1971, while my mother worked as a school teacher. Growing up, the country's poor economic conditions and the low financial status of its people discouraged many from pursuing education beyond school, college, or university. My mother always told me that when I grew up and achieved success, I must help underprivileged individuals access education. This deeply influenced my lifelong commitment to education. Another pivotal moment came during my attendance at one of Mother Teresa's Feast Days in India, likely in 2008. Learning about her social and community welfare activism profoundly inspired me. Since then, I have actively focused on education and social welfare for community development, particularly for our Buddhist community in both the plains and the hill tracts. I have successfully established eight schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, two dormitories for indigenous students at Chittagong University, and more than ten temples across various locations throughout Chittagong and the CHT.³⁵

However, the study also highlights Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu's tireless efforts, which exemplify his dual commitment to education and social welfare. Through his initiatives, he has not only expanded access to education for marginalized communities but also ensured the preservation and promotion of Buddhist cultural and spiritual traditions across Bangladesh. In addition to his scholarly achievements, Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu has distinguished himself through his extensive writings on Buddhist history, culture, and philosophy, which have been published in numerous local and international academic journals and periodicals. His dedication to educating both the Buddhist community and the broader public is evident in his contributions to Buddhist scholarship. Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu's holistic approach to education – integrating academic scholarship with spiritual practice – continues to have a profound influence, enriching Bangladesh's religious and cultural fabric while providing valuable resources for future generations.

According to research participants, the humanitarian crisis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), characterized by severe human rights violations – including armed conflict, communal attacks, arson, sexual violence, and killings – left the local population highly vulnerable, particularly during hostilities between ethnic armed groups and Bangladeshi security forces from 1980 to 1997. The escalating violence eventually necessitated the relocation of the orphanage school from Dighinala to Rangamati city in 1984, just four years after its founding. Renamed Moanoghar School, this institution has since evolved into one of the most esteemed educational centers for both Buddhist and non-Buddhist indigenous children in the region. In December 2024, Moanoghar Residential School & College celebrated its Golden Jubilee Anniversary, marking 50 years of educational excellence and community service.

³⁵ Interview with Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Jinabodi Bhikkhu, personal communication, January 25, 2024.

The second finding highlights that Buddhist monks operating missionary non-governmental schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) adhere to the government-prescribed curriculum. This curriculum includes all general and secular subjects, as well as religious studies, ensuring alignment with national educational standards. To analyze the curriculum structure and teaching methodologies of three such schools in the CHT, the researcher conducted fieldwork from October 7 to 10, 2024, at Moanoghar Residential School in Rangapani, Rangamati district.³⁶ Moanoghar Residential School, registered under the Education Board Act in the Chittagong Division, follows the government-prescribed curriculum and adheres to its educational framework.

Therefore, the Bangladeshi education system classifies grades 1–5 as primary school, grades 6–8 as junior high school, grades 9–10 as secondary school, and grades 11–12 as higher secondary school. After completing the grade 8 board examination and advancing to grade 9, students are encouraged to choose a division of study – arts, science, or commerce – based on their interests. The researcher observed classroom instruction across all levels, including primary, junior high, secondary, and higher secondary divisions at Moanoghar Residential School. At the primary level, core subjects such as Bengali, English, and mathematics form the foundation of the curriculum. At the junior high and secondary levels, students study a broader range of subjects, including Bengali (with a distinct focus on grammar), English (which incorporates grammar as a separate subject), religion (Basic Buddhism), sociology, geography, and history.

In the upper grades of secondary school, students take at least 10–11 subjects, including general subjects and specialized courses based on their chosen division, such as higher mathematics, computer science, chemistry, physics, economics, biology, and accounting. The school follows the government-mandated examination structure, requiring students to participate in four key board examinations throughout their academic journey: at the primary (grade 4), junior high (grade 8), secondary (grade 10), and higher secondary (grade 12) levels. These board exams are administered at government examination centers, where students from both governmental and non-governmental schools sit for standardized evaluations. Successfully passing the grade 12 board examination qualifies students for enrollment in higher education programs in Bangladesh. This analysis of Moanoghar School's curriculum and teaching practices highlights its comprehensive approach to education.

Likewise, other Buddhist missionary and non-governmental schools adhere to the national curriculum while integrating Buddhist values, fostering both academic and moral development to equip students for future academic pursuits and meaningful contributions to society. A distinctive finding of this study is the integration of basic Buddhist practices into the daily routines of residential students at Buddhist missionary schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

³⁶ Observation conducted by the researcher at Moanoghar Residential School & College, Rangamati, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, on October 7 – 10, 2024.

(CHT), Bangladesh. These schools encourage both Buddhist and non-Buddhist indigenous students to participate in Buddhist practices during their stay on campus, while allowing non-Buddhist students to follow their own traditional beliefs upon returning home. This exposure provides non-Buddhist students with early-life experiences of Buddhist principles, fostering a broader understanding of cross-cultural, linguistic, and religious dynamics. Such interactions play a crucial role in promoting peace and harmony among the diverse multicultural indigenous communities of the CHT.

The third finding highlights two distinct types of indigenous ethnic Buddhist missionary schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh, each employing different teaching methods. These schools are associated with the two largest and most influential indigenous groups in the region – the Chakma and Marma communities. The educational practices within these groups reveal notable differences in their approaches to Buddhist and general education. Chakma Buddhist monks, who primarily manage Buddhist non-governmental and monastic schools, adhere to the government-prescribed curriculum without incorporating a formal monastic system for Buddhist theological studies. Unlike traditional monastic institutions, Chakma Buddhist temples typically do not offer specialized education in Buddhist scriptures, such as the Tripitaka or Pāli language studies. Instead, students from these monastic schools pursue general education through public schools, colleges, and universities, focusing on secular subjects aligned with the national curriculum.

In contrast, Marma Buddhist monks integrate both monastic and general education within their temples and non-governmental Buddhist schools. These institutions adopt a dual approach, combining traditional Buddhist education – such as studies in Pāli and the Tripitaka – with government-mandated secular subjects. This integrated system ensures that students in Marma Buddhist-run schools receive a comprehensive education encompassing both Buddhism and general academics. As a result of these differing educational models, knowledge gaps between the two communities have emerged. The Chakma Buddhist community excels in general education due to their strong emphasis on secular studies through public institutions, but their limited access to formal Buddhist theological education has left them comparatively less advanced in Buddhist studies. Conversely, the Marma Buddhist community demonstrates a more balanced proficiency in both Buddhist and general education, owing to their integration of monastic teachings within their educational framework. This distinction highlights the unique contributions and challenges of the two educational systems within the Buddhist communities of the CHT.

The fourth finding of this study highlights a distinctive approach to education in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), where Buddhist monks play a crucial role in supporting the educational needs of disadvantaged and underprivileged indigenous children. Observations and analysis of existing literature reveal the existence of two distinct forms of Buddhism in Bangladesh, shaped by ethnic and cultural identities. The first form, Bengali Barua Buddhism, is practiced by the ethnically Bengali Barua community,

who share cultural and traditional commonalities with Bengali Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. Their religious practices closely resemble those of Western-style Buddhism, adopting Buddhism primarily as a religious practice rather than an ethnic identity. In contrast, the second form, referred to as Jumma Buddhism, represents the indigenous Buddhist traditions of the Hill Buddhists in the CHT, encompassing a diverse range of indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions. Despite their distinct identities, these two forms of Buddhism – Bengali Barua and Jumma – have coexisted peacefully for centuries, fostering harmony without significant political, social, or cultural conflicts. This brotherhood was particularly evident in the post-armed conflict and civil war periods in the CHT, when both groups collaborated to advance education and Buddhism in the region.

This finding suggests that Jumma Buddhist monks have emerged as the primary driving force behind educational and social welfare initiatives for indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), while Bengali Buddhism has played a supportive role in reinforcing their efforts. Together, their combined initiatives have facilitated the propagation of Buddhist teachings and the strengthening of educational frameworks in the region. As a result, this collaboration has established a strong Buddhist presence in the CHT, ensuring the protection of both the spiritual and educational needs of indigenous populations. This finding underscores the transformative role of Buddhist monks in advancing formal education and preserving Buddhist traditions in the region. Without their active participation in educational and religious campaigns, the CHT might have continued to experience severe social, religious, and political challenges, particularly in the realm of education. The dedication and collective efforts of Buddhist monks have had a profound and lasting impact on indigenous communities, fostering resilience and ensuring the preservation of their cultural and spiritual heritage.

Additionally, numerous dedicated Buddhist monks, such as Venerable Aggavamsa Mahathera, Venerable Bimal Tissa Bhikkhu, and Venerable Prajnananda Bhikkhu, among others, played a pivotal role in supporting the community during the post-armed conflict period in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Despite facing significant challenges, many of these monks remained steadfast in their commitment to the welfare of the indigenous population. Some were even forced into political exile due to their involvement in community welfare and advocacy for the Buddhist community in the country.

V. DISCUSSION

This study identifies four key findings that highlight the transformative role of Buddhist monks in advancing education and social welfare in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), particularly among disadvantaged indigenous communities. Through an analysis of these findings in connection with existing literature, the study explores how the initiatives of Buddhist monks in the CHT embody Buddhist principles of compassion, the factors contributing to their success in promoting education and Buddhism, the challenges they face, and the long-term implications of their efforts for the region. Compassion

(*karuṇā*), a central tenet of Buddhist philosophy, serves as a guiding principle for the monks' initiatives. They manifest compassion not only as a moral ideal but as a practical virtue, addressing both material needs and spiritual guidance through their actions. The Buddhist monks of Bangladesh exemplify this principle by providing essential support, including free formal education and Buddhist teachings, while fostering the moral and spiritual growth of the communities they serve.³⁷ Their compassionate approach forms the foundation of their efforts to uplift underprivileged populations in the CHT, demonstrating how Buddhist teachings foster resilience and development in marginalized communities.

VI. EMBODIMENT OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION

The first research finding offers profound insight into the multifaceted role of Buddhist monks in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh during periods of armed conflict. Guided by the Buddhist principle of compassion (*karuṇā*), these monks emerged as key agents in addressing the socio-educational needs of marginalized communities. Rather than remaining passive observers in the face of human-made and natural crises, they actively engaged in initiatives that advanced education, social welfare, and cultural preservation. Their contributions reflect a unique intersection of spirituality, social activism, and resilience. This finding underscores their holistic approach, which extends beyond material support to foster moral and spiritual development among younger generations. The establishment of schools and monasteries as sanctuaries embodies Buddhist ideals of selfless service and communal harmony, nurturing resilience and empathy within their communities.

Buddhist figures such as Dr. Jnanashree Mahathera exemplify the transformative impact of monks in the field of education in the region. As the 13th Sangha Raja of the Bangladesh Sangharaja Bhikkhu Mahasabha Nikāya (BSBMN) and the founder of Dighinala Buddhist Orphanage School and Moanoghar Residential Buddhist Missionary School, his work underscores a deep commitment to addressing the educational needs of disadvantaged children, particularly within the indigenous Jumma community in the CHT. His contributions align with Bijoy Barua's study on the role of Buddhist monks in promoting education in remote areas³⁸ and Dipen Barua's documentation of his broader societal impact.³⁹ The finding also suggests that Dr. Jnanashree's initiatives extended beyond education, encompassing the development of key educational and religious infrastructures that have provided long-term support

³⁷ Zysk, K., & Chaudhuri, S. (1985). Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 45, p. 166. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2056861>.

³⁸ Bijoy Barua (2007). Colonialism, education, and rural Buddhist communities in Bangladesh. *International Education*, 37(1), p. 60 – 76.

³⁹ Dipen Barua (2020, May 29). Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh appoints Ven. Jnanashree Mahathera as 13th Buddhist Patriarch. *Buddhistdoor Global*. <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/supreme-sangha-council-of-bangladesh-appoints-ven-jnanashree-mahathera-as-13th-buddhist-patriarch/>

for marginalized communities.

The findings also highlight the presence of several influential Buddhist figures, including Venerable Tilakananda Mahathera, the 4th Sangha Raja of Parbattya Bhikkhu Sangha Bangladesh (PBSB); Venerable U Panna Jota (also known as Usala Bhante); Venerable Prof. Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu; Venerable Bimal Bhikkhu; Venerable Prajnananda Bhikkhu; and many other Buddhist monks dedicated to promoting Buddhist teachings and advocating for education in the region. For instance, the results indicate that Venerable Tilakananda Mahathera has played an active role in supporting underprivileged Jumma Buddhist children in the CHT. He established the Kajalong Shisusadan Buddhist Missionary School, which has provided thousands of indigenous orphaned children with permanent homes, along with access to education, food, and accommodation in Rangamati Hill Tract, CHT, Bangladesh.

Conversely, the community in the Bandarban district of Bangladesh recognizes Venerable U Panna Jota as a prominent Jumma Buddhist leader dedicated to promoting both Buddhism and formal education. Data indicates that Venerable U Panna Jota Bhante's contributions extend beyond education and religion, as he has played a crucial role in establishing numerous religious and educational institutions. His tireless efforts have not only improved access to education but have also helped preserve community cultures and traditions. This finding aligns with Subrata Roy's article, "Founder of Golden Temple Passes Away."⁴⁰

On the other hand, Venerable Prof. Dr. Jinabodhi Bhikkhu has made significant contributions to education, spiritual guidance, and community welfare, particularly focusing on improving the lives of underprivileged indigenous children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Data suggests that his early engagement with the community prioritized both spiritual enrichment and educational empowerment. As one of the most influential contemporary Buddhist figures, Prof. Dr. Jinabodhi has tirelessly promoted Buddhism and education across both the plains and hill districts of Bangladesh. The findings further indicate that his dedication has significantly enhanced access to education and the teachings of Buddha for many marginalized indigenous Buddhist communities. Consequently, he has established numerous religious monastic schools and educational institutions, providing essential support for indigenous students in both education and cultural preservation. These results align with his online biography (Jinabodhi Mahathero, n.d., para. I - IX).⁴¹ The findings also highlight the severe consequences of wars and conflicts in the aftermath of armed clashes between Bangladeshi security forces and ethnic armed groups from 1980 to 1997. These conflicts led to widespread

⁴⁰ Subrata Roy (2020, April 17). Founder of Golden Temple passes away. *Dhaka Tribune*. Accessed on December 8, 2024, available at: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/206749/founder-of-golden-temple-passes-away>.

⁴¹ *About Jinabodhi Mahathero*. (n.d.). *Jinabodhi Mahathero*, Accessed on December 8, 2024, available at: <https://www.jinabodhimahathero.com/about.html>

persecution, including mass killings, arson, communal violence, physical attacks, the rape of Jumma Buddhist women and girls, forced marriages, and coerced religious conversions to Islam. Such events represent multifaceted human rights violations in the region. This finding aligns with Jhubhur Chakma's work, *Jumma Nation and Persecution in Bangladesh*⁴² and Richard A. Gray's "Genocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh."⁴³

VII. BUDDHIST MISSIONARY EDUCATION AND SCHOOL CURRICULUMS

The second finding examines the educational curricula implemented by Buddhist missionary schools in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. The study reveals that these schools adhere to the government-mandated curriculum, ensuring alignment with national educational standards. However, some Buddhist missionary schools supplement the national curriculum with Buddhist studies. The government curriculum itself encompasses a broad spectrum of secular subjects, including religious studies, catering to diverse educational needs while maintaining consistency with the national framework. The Bangladeshi education system is structured into four distinct levels: primary school (grades 1–5), high school (grades 6–8), secondary high school (grades 9–10), and higher secondary school (grades 11–12). Each level culminates in a government board examination administered by the Ministry of Education. Upon completing high school, students are encouraged to choose an academic stream—arts, science, or commerce—based on their interests. Additionally, vocational subjects are introduced from grade 8, allowing students to develop specialized skills through vocational schools.

This finding aligns with existing scholarship, including Md. Al-Amin and Janinka Greenwood's study, "The Examination System in Bangladesh and Its Impact: On Curriculum, Students, Teachers, and Society,"⁴⁴ and Mirza Mohammad Didarul Anam and Jaohar Nusrat Bina's study, "Implementation of the National Curriculum 2022 of Bangladesh: Possibilities and Challenges."⁴⁵ Buddhist missionary schools in the CHT, therefore, integrate this national curriculum into their educational programs.

Further, the third finding highlights two distinct types of Buddhist missionary schools, distinguished by the ethnic identities of their founders:

⁴² Jhubhur Chakma (2021). *Jumma nation and persecution in Bangladesh*. *Journal of International Buddhist Studies*, 12(1), p. 71 – 84.

⁴³ Gray, R. A. (1994). *Genocide in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. *Reference Services Review*, 22 (4), 59 – 79. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb049231>

⁴⁴ Amin, A. I., & Greenwood, J. (2018). The examination system in Bangladesh and its impact: On curriculum, students, teachers and society. *Language Testing in Asia*, 8(4), p. 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-018-0060-9>

⁴⁵ Anam, M. M. D., & Bina, J. N. (2024). Implementation of National Curriculum 2022 of Bangladesh: Possibilities and challenges. *RIME Journal of Education (RIMEJE)*, 1 (1), p. 65 – 75.

“The Chakma and Marma ethnic groups, both of which play significant roles in the region. Chakma Buddhist missionary schools do not include specific Buddhist literature or Tripitaka studies in their curriculum but focus on delivering formal education in temple or monastic settings. Conversely, Marma Buddhist monastic schools offer both formal education and Buddhist studies, providing a broader knowledge base across various disciplines. The findings indicate notable differences between these two groups. The Chakma community exhibits the highest rate of general education among ethnic groups in the CHT, while the Marma community demonstrates a deeper understanding of Buddhism. This reflects the distinctive priorities and contributions of each group to the region’s educational landscape.

VIII. CHALLENGES AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

The fourth finding of this study highlights the collaborative efforts between Jumma and Bengali Buddhists in advancing education and community welfare in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The research suggests that Jumma Buddhist monks have played a crucial role as the primary agents driving education and community welfare in the post-conflict period of the CHT. In contrast, Bengali Buddhist monks have provided vital external support, reinforcing the initiatives of Jumma monks when challenges arise, as noted in K. Zysk and Sukomal Chaudhuri’s study.⁴⁶ Additionally, Bengali Buddhist monks have established numerous Buddhist missionary schools that have served as educational sanctuaries for many underprivileged Jumma Buddhist children. Despite these successes, Buddhist monks in the CHT face significant barriers to expanding educational services. Financial constraints and inadequate infrastructure limit their ability to improve both the quality and scope of education.⁴⁷ Political instability and land disputes further complicate these challenges, as monks often face resistance or are monitored by various government agents over their activities. For instance, interviews revealed that monks have had to protect temple lands from encroachment and navigate intricate socio-political dynamics to preserve their institutions. Additionally, there is a lack of a standardized curriculum for Buddhist studies across monastic schools, which has created knowledge gaps between communities. The differences in how the Chakma and Marma groups are taught serve as an example of this.

Nevertheless, the combined efforts of both Jumma and Bengali Buddhist monks have been instrumental in promoting Buddhist teachings and strengthening formal educational frameworks in the region. Their collaboration has fostered a strong Buddhist presence in the CHT, effectively safeguarding the spiritual and educational needs of the indigenous populations. This finding underscores the transformative impact of Buddhist monks in advancing both

⁴⁶ Zysk, K., & Chaudhuri, S. (1985). Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 45, p. 166. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2056861>.

⁴⁷ Uddin, A. (2015). Education in Peace-building: The Case of Post-Conflict Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. *The Oriental Anthropologist: A Bi-annual International Journal of the Science of Man*, 15, p. 59 - 76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972558X1501500105>.

formal education and Buddhist practice in the region. Without their dedicated involvement in educational and religious initiatives, the region might have continued to face severe social, religious, and political challenges, particularly in the field of education. The sustained commitment and teamwork of Buddhist monks have had a profound and lasting influence on the indigenous communities, fostering resilience and ensuring the preservation of their cultural and spiritual heritage.

IX. CONCLUSION

In summary, Buddhist monks have dedicated themselves to several factors that contribute to the success of monastic educational programs in the CHT. First, the integration of secular and spiritual education equips students with academic skills while keeping them grounded in ethical and cultural values. Second, the monks' ability to mobilize local communities and foster trust plays a critical role in sustaining these initiatives. As community leaders, the monks act as mediators and advocates, effectively navigating local challenges. Third, collaboration between Bengali Barua and Jumma Buddhist communities has created a unified front that strengthens the institutional foundations of education in the region. This cooperative effort aligns with previous studies highlighting the collective impact of community-driven educational programs in culturally marginalized regions.

The results show that the long-term implications of monastic education for the CHT are profound. By addressing the immediate educational needs of underprivileged children, monks lay the groundwork for socio-economic upliftment and cultural preservation. The integration of Buddhist principles into education ensures that students develop a strong sense of identity and ethical responsibility, which contributes to community cohesion and resilience. Furthermore, these educational initiatives foster interethnic understanding and harmony, reducing potential conflicts in a region historically marked by political and social unrest.

Moreover, over time, the contributions of Buddhist monks may lead to a more equitable and informed society in the CHT, where education becomes a cornerstone of sustainable development. However, addressing systemic barriers, such as resource limitations and political challenges, remains crucial to maximizing the potential of these programs. Future policies and partnerships that support monastic education can amplify its impact, ensuring that these initiatives continue to benefit generations to come.

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN CAMBODIA

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Abstract:

Buddhist compassion manifests through secular and religious human development efforts worldwide, with immense case studies. Despite the focus on these programs, a systematic study is missing in the existing scientific literature documenting the compassion in action of various Buddhist traditions working for human development. This paper reviews the concept of human development without leaving out the religious resources available and then sheds some light on the idea of compassion in Buddhism. An in-depth sectoral case study from Cambodia then follows this. After setting out the initial understanding of Buddhist compassion in action, the paper develops a qualitative research method that gathers data from Buddhist informants who have worked and were directly involved in human development programs. The paper then uses qualitative data analysis to show how Buddhism in Cambodia puts its compassion into action through various human development programs. This case study aims to contribute to secular and religious development practices by demonstrating how harmonious collaboration can ensure people's happiness and development in general. This paper can inform about the key elements of human development in the Sangha education model and significantly contribute to education by sharing a rich set of experiences from the perspective of Buddhists who have worked effectively for over a thousand years. A better understanding of religious initiatives and the engagement of the Buddhist community in various national spheres could be a good complement for achieving shared responsibility towards the goals of human development. Overall, the study aims to contribute to achieving a shared sense of responsibility for action through dialogue and partnership in spiritual human development, by which Buddhist insight related to life as

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interpretations of human needs and finding ways to understand human vision through moral development in society can be applied.

Keywords: *Compassion in action, shared responsibility, human development, Buddhist.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Development aims to enhance people's social, economic, and political freedoms, including expanding their choices and opportunities to improve their quality of life.¹ The focus has shifted from purely economic growth to a broader consideration of human development, encompassing health, education, dignity, and security. Global challenges ranging from epidemics and corruption to water scarcity and violent extremism - affect human dignity and well-being. While human dignity is universally recognized, it is also deeply personal, making it a shared responsibility. Despite the increasing emphasis on quality of life and dignity, little empirical research has examined this important political initiative concerning human rights protection. Therefore, this study aims to explore the concept of Buddhist compassion in action and its role in fostering shared responsibility for human development in Cambodia. Buddhist compassion can play a profound role in promoting shared responsibility for human development in Cambodia. This research seeks to investigate how Buddhist principles contribute to positive social change. In Cambodia, Buddhist principles have long been interwoven with the social fabric, influencing various aspects of life, including education, healthcare, and community development. Buddhism appears to align with a range of human dignity and human rights theories. The teachings of Siddhattha form the foundation of Buddhism, emphasizing compassion, wisdom, and loving-kindness. Accordingly, racism, sexism, exploitation, and other forms of injustice directly contradict these fundamental teachings. As Cambodia remains one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia, many Cambodians continue to lack adequate living conditions, fundamental freedoms, and security - issues that stand in direct contradiction to the principles of shared responsibility for human dignity.² While individuals, local communities, and global organizations address these challenges through direct action and intervention, the extent to which Buddhism influences the approaches these actors adopt remains underexplored.³ This gap in research

¹ Shaturaev, J. (2021). *Indonesia: Superior policies and management for better education (Community development through Education)*. Архив научных исследований, 1(1). Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357271101>, p. 1 - 16.

² Phan, H. P., et al. (2020). Introducing the study of life and death education to support the importance of positive psychology: An integrated model of philosophical beliefs, religious faith, and spirituality. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, Article 580186. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.580186>.

³ Gangopadhyay, P., Jain, S., & Suwandaru, A. (2020). What drives urbanisation in modern Cambodia? Some counter-intuitive findings. *Sustainability*, 12(24), Article 10253. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su122410253>.

is significant because a deeper understanding of this intersection can help international organizations, local institutions, and other stakeholders design and refine interventions that address human development and social welfare needs more effectively.

II. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

International development is an inherently complex and interdisciplinary project involving many stakeholders. Through these stakeholders' actions, global development is sustained and achieved. Many critiques of contemporary international development, however, question the sustainability of current development actions, mainly whether such actions genuinely support and enhance human and social well-being.⁴ These critiques argue that international development, as conceived, designed, and practiced, is often incomplete, disempowering, and short-sighted, focused excessively on economic growth or relief from the symptoms of poverty rather than the structural and systemic causes that contribute to and exacerbate conditions of poverty and vulnerability.⁵

Significantly, within international development policy and practice, there is persistent resistance and negation of marginalized voices and perspectives in the development process and outcomes.⁶ The importance of local and contextually specific cultures, beliefs, and practices in needs assessment, problem-solving, and policy creation is generally recognized within international development.⁷ However, many international development practitioners primarily focus on rewarding and amplifying progress within an often narrow, state-centric, expert-centric, and Western-centric process. Locally driven and implemented projects are usually limited in scale and reach. This essay explores the potential of pedagogical engagements with local stakeholders, inculcated with significant principles, that could generate more sustainable, efficacious, inclusive, and empowering international development policy

⁴ Bertel, L. B., Winther, M., Routhe, H. W., & Kolmos, A. (2021). Framing and facilitating complex problem-solving competences in interdisciplinary megaprojects: An institutional strategy to educate for sustainable development. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 23(5), 1173–1191. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijshe-10-2020-0423> & Ika, L. A., Söderlund, J., & Munro, L. T. (2020). Cross-learning between project management and international development: Analysis and research agenda. *International Journal of Project Management*, 38(8), 548–558. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2020.10.005>.

⁵ Cadesky, J. N. (2022). *Lifetimes, not project cycles: Exploring the long-term impacts of gender and development programming in Northern Sri Lanka* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Ottawa.

⁶ Lykes, M. B., Bianco, M. E., & Távara, G. (2021). Contributions and limitations of diverse qualitative methods to feminist participatory and action research with women in the wake of gross violations of human rights. *Methods in Psychology*, 4, Article 100043. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.metip.2020.100043>.

⁷ Gunawardena, C. N. (2020). Culturally inclusive online learning for capacity development projects in international contexts. *Journal of Learning for Development*, 7 (1), p. 5 – 30.

and practice. It focuses on the relationships between compassion and social engagement in the broader social sphere. It is interesting in discerning possible implications when diverse understandings, as expressed by those living within social circumstances of conditional poverty, are embedded within a more conventional international development process.⁸ There is a pressing need to reevaluate the existing strategies and approaches employed in international development. It is crucial to shift towards a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of development that encompasses economic growth and the pursuit of social justice, equality, and environmental sustainability.⁹ Adopting a multidimensional perspective can address the underlying structural and systemic causes perpetuating poverty and vulnerability. To achieve this, it is imperative to empower marginalized voices and perspectives. Their knowledge, experiences, and insights can provide invaluable guidance in shaping inclusive and effective development policies and practices. We must create meaningful participation and collaboration spaces, allowing local stakeholders to actively contribute their unique perspectives and expertise. Moreover, we must challenge the prevailing power dynamics prioritizing state-centric and expert-centric approaches. Western-centric models and frameworks do not always account for different communities' specific cultural contexts and diverse needs.¹⁰ By embracing a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach, we can ensure that development initiatives are tailored to the local context, increasing their relevance and impact. Compassion and social engagement are essential drivers at the heart of this transformative process. Genuine empathy and a deep understanding of social realities are crucial in addressing the root causes of poverty.¹¹ We must foster an environment that encourages compassionate actions and promotes community solidarity. Doing so can create an enabling environment that empowers individuals and communities to overcome challenges. We must shift towards a more sustainable and empowering paradigm in international development. By embracing inclusive practices, respecting local cultures and perspectives, and prioritizing compassion and social engagement, we can pave the way for a more equitable

⁸ Stevens, F., & Taber, K. H. (2021). The neuroscience of empathy and compassion in pro-social behavior. *Neuropsychologia*, 159, Article 107925. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuropsychologia.2021.107925> & Yitshaki, R., Kropp, F., & Honig, B. (2022). The role of compassion in shaping social entrepreneurs' prosocial opportunity recognition. *J Bus Ethics*, 179 (2), p. 617 – 647. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04860-x>.

⁹ Anand, J., McDermott, G., Mudambi, R., & Narula, R. (2021). Innovation in and from emerging economies: New insights and lessons for international business research. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 52 (4), p. 545 – 559. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-021-00426-1>

¹⁰ Jin, D. Y. (2020). Encounters with Western media theory: Asian perspectives. *Media, Culture & Society*, 43 (1), 150 – 157. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720939482>.

¹¹ Xu, S., & Ma, P. (2021). CEOs' poverty experience and corporate social responsibility: Are CEOs who have experienced poverty more generous? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 180 (2), p. 747 – 776. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04899-w>.

and just future.¹² It is time to rethink our current approaches and strive for international development that uplifts human and social well-being, leaving no one behind.

2.1. Research aim and objectives

The proposed study aims to understand and address the conditions under which Buddhist compassion can lead to greater sharing of responsibility for human development in Cambodia. To reach this aim, the study will be guided by the following objectives: To explore and analyze the cultures, activities, discourses, and actors that shape the translation and enactment of Buddhist compassion into the field of shared responsibility for human development in the daily lives of young people in Phnom Penh. To investigate the association between religious belief and shared responsibility as perceived and experienced by various actors representing the micro, midi, and macro levels of universities, faith-based institutions, and educational NGOs. Religious and non-religious actors will be interviewed to build a narrative about character and trust. At the same time, insights will be drawn from semi-structured interviews with actors to understand what they are doing to shape emerging initiatives in the field of education that embrace a compassionate worldview. To assess the consequences of reflexive oppositional practice and compassionate innovation if oppositional practices create a redistributive policy change on the perceived state of human development among beneficiaries from educational innovations, particularly students and their families in Phnom Penh.

2.2. Research questions

This research addresses the shared responsibility of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and communities in addressing poverty and related challenges identified within the government's National Human Development Priority Framework. The framework is an affirmative action policy that provides Cambodians with the means to reduce vulnerability, manage risk, and resolve and avoid conflicts without violence. A twofold investigative focus was selected to address the research objective: leadership and management within NGOs and community practices in implementing complementary framework criteria focused on social conditions and cultural, historical, and spiritual resources. The two research areas allow the exploration of operational management structures and practices that can impact the ability of organizations to effectively work within a framework designed to improve the lives of all Cambodians and the capacity of community practices to create collaborative and sustainable human development solutions. The research questions to be addressed ascertain the impact of approaches demonstrated by the framework upon: (1) communities and (2) their NGO development partners in practice and principle. These areas allow the investigation of whether NGOs' claims to governance legitimacy, preparedness, and willingness to engage with

¹² Ahmad, I., & Islam, M. R. (2024). The road ahead in the 21st century: Mapping global progress in ethical approaches to inclusive community development. In I. Ahmad & M. R. Islam (Eds.), *Building strong communities: Ethical approaches to inclusive development*. p. 91 – 131. Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83549-174-420241005>.

governance strengthening measures and accountability measures can be found within their management structures or in their field practice. Additionally, the principles that are believed to be operating in social relations are examined to determine whether rights and sustainable human development concepts are also, in fact, occurring in practice. Impacts are delineated using the framework sectors and social and human rights indicators, including cultural, historical, and spiritual resources criteria of success.

2.3. Significance of study

Most clearly, as a program of applied research, the study can provide immediate and practical feedback to program planners and managers in participating in human development-related projects within the recovery and reconstruction process taking place in Cambodia following the promulgation of the Transitional Authority in Cambodia in 1991 and the subsequent general elections of 1993. In brief, the study has considerable potential to meet the priority needs related to developing practical activities and programs. The research on the role of compassion, which this study represents, is unique. Little attention has been given to the broader question of shared responsibility, mainly where it is cultivated and encouraged within cultures that draw their values from Buddhism. Such a study, however, is valuable, given the pressing need to conceive of community programs for promoting human welfare in general and human development in particular. The study is particularly timely given recent calls to ensure the promotion of democratic values and human rights through active participation and the non-violent expression of national concerns by all social groups. The explicit rationale is that shared responsibility for decision-making leads to “self-rule” or economic and social reforms. In this context, shared responsibilities concern Cambodian development aid programs, and the intended beneficiaries of such programs have emerged with the resulting transformative nature of individuals and organizations participating in development projects to assert control over decisions that would affect their welfare. It is precisely this transformative behavior that the concept of compassion addresses, and it is also just such development intent that I believe the idea of compassion nurtures.

2.4. Scope and limitations

Although several texts related to community development in Pāli and post-Pāli Buddhist societies exist, debates over the feasibility and relevance of applying self-help and other change agents to vastly different or culturally diverse communities often assume that such practices have been and should continue to be a relative part of this process, actual spiritual behaviors in Pāli and post-Pāli Buddhist communities have rarely been subjected to quantitative or qualitative analysis. However, this study assumes that such data is limited to Buddhist organizations with personnel with significant, long-term involvement with regional or local-level development communities. Further validation through data-generating research can be expected and would further enrich the basic formulation’s descriptive, theoretical, and operational aspects. The initial and primary phases of data collection have some limits to scope. First, only

people in the salaried bureaucracies of Buddhist development organizations are consulted. Second, all such people to be interviewed are voluntarily involved in compiling developmental materials, board minutes, journals, news, book articles, and more personal experiences through fieldwork. There are several practical causes of these limitations. Although competent and already identified priests, monks, and other religious specialists are considered for salaried staff positions, no specific complementary, quantitative, or qualitative data are available. Additionally, travel and other accessibility limitations restrict the study to Thailand and the areas within reach of Bangkok. Such locations could exhibit sufficient variability to provide a representative dataset suitable for tentative assertions regarding relational processes associated with the social structures of small Buddhist development organizations in non-Sri Lanka, with rapidly developing post-Buddhist China, formerly war-torn Laos, and both rich and poor sections. It is also essential to conclude with a challenge - level description in order to explore, through further research, the contours of a social structure that is not solely shaped by referential, highly normed, and over-determined doctrines.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will thoroughly investigate the extensive and comprehensive literature on the profound and enlightening concept of Buddhist compassion, exploring its multifaceted dimensions and invaluable contributions to society. Within this exploration, the summary will effectively present a comprehensive overview of Buddhist compassion and its significance in fostering two distinct and interconnected levels of social activities, each with its own essence and purpose.¹³ Buddhist compassionate action at the transcendent and spiritually profound *Dhammika* level is imbued with profound spiritual meaning and imbued with deep spiritual meaning and a purpose that transcends the material realm. Its essence lies in the selfless and altruistic dedication to alleviating suffering and bringing profound solace to those in need, nurturing a sense of deep interconnectedness and unity among all sentient beings. This transcendental level of compassionate action holds immense transformative power, permeating the fabric of human existence and propelling individuals towards spiritual enrichment on their enlightenment.¹⁴ Similarly, Buddhist compassionate action at the societal level plays a crucial role - in uplifting and benefiting the progress of human development, particularly in societies where the teachings of Buddhism and principles of compassion are held in the highest

¹³ Gilbert, P., & Gordon, W. V. (2023). Compassion as a skill: A comparison of contemplative and evolution-based approaches. *Mindfulness*, 14 (10), 2395 – 2416. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-023-02173-w>.

¹⁴ Dollahite, D. C., Marks, L. D., Witting, A. B., LeBaron, A. B., Young, K. P., & Chelladurai, J. M. (2020). How relationship-enhancing transcendent religious experiences during adversity can encourage relational meaning, depth, healing, and action. *Religions*, 11 (10), 519. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11100519>. & Keltner, D. (2023). *Awe: the transformative power of everyday wonder*. Random House.

regard.¹⁵ This level of compassionate action, rooted in the noble intention to enhance the welfare and well-being of all individuals, unleashes a wave of positive change and fosters positive change and cultivates an environment conducive to the flourishing of human potential and happiness.¹⁶ By fostering harmonious coexistence, this societal level of compassionate action nurtures an inclusive sense of community, where the needs and aspirations of every individual are recognized, valued, and revered. Within this profound exploration lies a comprehensive analysis of the implications and profound impact that the teachings of Buddhist compassion have on human development.¹⁷ The original and authentic Buddhist teachings on compassionate action discussed herein provide invaluable guidance, acting as a guiding light for individuals seeking to lead a joyous, meaningful, and purposeful existence in the present day. These teachings serve as the fundamental pillars upon which one can build a fulfilling life that embodies compassion, empathy, and selflessness while in harmony with the interconnected tapestry of life.¹⁸ Moreover, this discourse will unravel the justifications and the precise criteria essential to guarantee the truthfulness and authenticity of Buddhist compassionate action.¹⁹ By elucidating these guidelines, this section aims to shed light on the ethical and moral dimensions underlying compassionate action, reinforcing its integral role in human growth and development while serving as a profound source of inspiration for all individuals seeking a deeper understanding of the human experience.²⁰ The profound beauty of compassionate action lies in the unity and interdependence it cultivates among individuals. The feeling of being embraced and cared for by the entire community, with no one left behind or overlooked, resonates as a

¹⁵ Ekman, E., & Thomas, E. S. (2021). Teaching the science of human flourishing, unlocking connection, positivity, and resilience for the greater good. *Glob Adv Health Med*, 10: p. 1 – 11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21649561211023097>

¹⁶ Kotera, Y., & Gordon, W. V. (2021). Effects of self-compassion training on work-related well-being: A systematic review. *Front Psychol*, 12: p. 1 – 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.630798> & Matos, M., et al. (2021). Building compassionate schools: Pilot study of a compassionate mind training intervention to promote teachers' well-being. *Mindfulness*, 13(1): p. 145 – 161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-021-01778-3>.

¹⁷ Tanabe, J. (2022). A Holistic Peace: Buddhism and Liberal Peace. In M. S. Cogan & H. Sakai (Eds.), *Alternative Perspectives on Peacebuilding: Theories and Case Studies*. p. 131 – 161. Springer.

¹⁸ Venty, V. (2021). Kalyana Mitta as the fundamental potential for happiness and suffering in Buddhist mindfulness counseling. *Jurnal EDUCATIO: Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia*, 7 (2). <https://doi.org/10.29210/1202121151>

¹⁹ Jetabut, M. (2020). *How cultural constructs of the mind influence the experience of mindfulness and learning* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Bath). University of Bath Research Portal.

²⁰ Gilbert, P. (2020b). Creating a compassionate world: Addressing the conflicts between sharing and caring versus controlling and holding evolved strategies. *Front Psychol*, 11: p. 1 – 38. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.582090>

testament to the incredible strength that lies within a united collective.²¹ This profound inner satisfaction and solace induces calm and tranquillity, acting as a powerful catalyst for rejuvenation and recovery from the burdens of fatigue and exhaustion. Furthermore, this intrinsic connection and sense of belonging to a harmonious whole contribute to a profound and ineffable feeling akin to an idyllic paradise.²² As a result, the tangible benefits of compassionate action extend far beyond individual well-being, embracing a more expansive outlook that encompasses the well-being of all sentient beings. It is through this holistic perspective that all Buddhists are wholeheartedly encouraged to adopt and prioritize the well-being of every being equally and unconditionally.²³ This all-encompassing approach ultimately leads to the creation and manifestation of a distinctive and transformative realm of Buddhist ideas and principles, one that has the potential to profoundly benefit not only individuals but also the entirety of the world at large. This remarkable manifestation of Buddhist compassionate action, operating at the philanthropic level of society, is a testament to Buddhism's boundless and empathetic nature, offering solace, hope, and profound transformation to all corners of the world.

3.1. Conceptual framework

To thoughtfully implement a qualitative research design, we are guided by specific rationales and understandings that form the basis for the overall research design. In a field research process informed by qualitative methodologies, the development of these strategies and theoretical framing emerged from the body of research literature that has asked similar research questions, literature that we must critically reflect upon and ultimately apply to data collection methods. How do lay community members collaborate with Buddhist organizations in a shared caregiving model to support the spiritual, ethical, and human development of individuals and communities in Cambodia, and what are the benefits of a faith-based model in relation to the legitimation theorem? This chapter aims to explain how these research questions will be examined and why they are central to guiding this study. The objective is to present the research methodologies, design, and theoretical considerations that underpin the rationale for adopting a qualitative research approach in this study.

3.2. Buddhist principles and compassion

Buddhist thought is built on a rich and profound religious tradition that has meticulously evolved over two and a half millennia.²⁴ With its ancient wisdom and timeless teachings, Buddhism encompasses individual spiritual disciplines,

²¹ Halifax, J. (2024). *Being with dying: Cultivating compassion and fearlessness in the presence of death*. Shambhala Publications.

²² Ma, M. S. (2024). *Place and placelessness: An ecocritical approach towards the mountain imagery in country music* (Doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University).

²³ Quartz, S. (2022). Becoming more-than-human: Realizing earthly eudaimonia to (e)coflourish through an entangled ethos. *Journalism and Media*, 3(2), p. 238 – 253. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia3020018>

²⁴ Laumakis, S. J. (2023). *An introduction to Buddhist philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.

and while providing a comprehensive ecological framework. Within this framework, Buddhism acknowledges and upholds the fundamental principle of interdependence among all living beings and their intricate connection with the physical and social environment that envelops them.²⁵ In exploring Buddhist thought, we engage with various interpretations and engage with the profound influence of social dynamics. As we meticulously navigate the complex economic conditions, Buddhism gracefully offers invaluable insight and practical suggestions on effectively addressing these challenges.²⁶ Embedded within its core teachings are the resolute justifications for Buddhist values of compassion, which fundamentally underscore the notion of shared responsibility.

Compassion serves as both the guiding light and driving force behind Buddhism's noble pursuit of contributing to the common good.²⁷ It illuminates the path towards creating a socially harmonious and universally beneficial world. With profound wisdom, Buddhism highlights the social conditions that foster and encourage compassionate actions. It emphasizes that true compassion and genuine progress stem from a collective dedication to interconnectedness and shared outcomes.²⁸ Buddhism serves as a moral compass, providing a solid foundation for addressing humanity's shared vulnerabilities and collective responsibilities.²⁹ It instills a deep sense of accountability and urges individuals to strive to improve the world. By nurturing a profound sense of responsibility, Buddhism empowers us to seek safety, enhance well-being, and extend genuine support to all corners of the globe.³⁰ Throughout the millennia, Buddhism has continually played an invaluable role in promoting compassionate action and

²⁵ Lee, S., & Northcut, T. B. (2024). The ecospiritual approach for the advancement of social work: A concept and practice of 'interconnectedness' in Won Buddhism. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 43(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2024.2384381> & Zhang, S. (2024). The self and the other: A further reflection on Buddhist – Christian dialogue. *Religions*, 15 (3): pages 1 – 12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030376>

²⁶ San, P. (2024). Buddhist governance: Navigating today's role of Saṅgha and Dhammarājā, with special reference to Cambodia. *Halduskultuur - The Estonian Journal of Administrative Culture & Digital Governance*, 22 (2), 26 – 49.

²⁷ King, S. B. (2022). Mindfulness, compassion, and skillful means in engaged Buddhism. *Mindfulness*, 14 (10), 2516 – 2531. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-022-01847-1> and Stenzel, J. C. (2020). The sciencization of compassion. *Journal of Dharma Studies*, 3 (2), 245 – 271. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42240-020-00084-w>

²⁸ Vu, M. C., & Tran, T. (2019). Trust issues and engaged Buddhism: The triggers for skillful managerial approaches. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 169(1), p. 77 – 102. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04273-x>

²⁹ Smith, A. B. (2021). Reducing suffering during conflict: The interface between Buddhism and international humanitarian law. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 21(1–2), p. 369–435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2021.1976016>

³⁰ Macy, J. (2021). *World as lover, world as self: Courage for global justice and planetary renewal*. Parallax Press.

enriching human development. It serves as a radiant beacon, illuminating the transformative power of empathy and kindness.³¹ Buddhism underscores the interconnected nature of humanity by placing a profound emphasis on shared responsibilities. It reminds us of our innate interdependence and reinforces the belief that our collective well-being depends on the well-being of others.³² The essence of Buddhism's "shared accomplishment" concept lies in its unwavering commitment to foster human development through compassion. It echoes the need for cooperation and collective endeavors aimed at building a just and equitable society.³³ In acknowledging this, Buddhism cautions against actions that diminish the fabric of society and jeopardize the health and happiness of individuals.³⁴ It encourages us to seek sustainable paths and build a thriving society that nurtures the flourishing of all life. At the heart of Buddhism's moral compass lies an unwavering dedication to improving the common good of all living beings.³⁵ By nurturing a deep sense of interconnectedness, Buddhism paves the way for individuals to cultivate their moral gifts and contribute to the world's flourishing. It reminds us that pursuing personal enlightenment is inherently intertwined with pursuing the greater good, sparking a ripple effect of positive change that knows no bounds.

3.3. Human development theories

In this extensive and in-depth research study, a profoundly complementary and comprehensive perspective can be drawn from the profound and enlightening Buddhist theory, which is of utmost importance to understanding and acknowledging the delicate social and cultural context in Cambodia, a land rich in history and spirituality.³⁶ Buddhism, a timeless philosophy and way of life, places tremendous emphasis on the ultimate and transcendent goal for human existence, which is none other than the attainment of profound inner peace, lasting happiness, and an encompassing understanding of the intricate

³¹ Chodron, B. T. (2022). Compassion manifesting in skillful means. *Mindfulness*, 14(10), 2383–2394. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-022-02007-1>

³² Lee, S., & Northcut, T. B. (2024). The ecospiritual approach for the advancement of social work: A concept and practice of 'interconnectedness' in Won Buddhism. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 43(1), p. 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2024.2384381>

³³ Badal, B. P. (2021). Buddhists hermeneutics: An analysis of *Dhammapada* in sustainable development. *Research Nepal Journal of Development Studies (RNJDS)*, 4 (1), p. 27 – 43.

³⁴ Segall, S. Z. (2021). Mindfulness in and out of the context of Western Buddhist modernism. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 49 (1), p. 40 – 55. <https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000159>

³⁵ Justin, P. (2024). *The Buddha code: Hacking the psychology and philosophy of enlightenment*. Phil Justin.

³⁶ Lee, S. (2020). Local resilience and the reconstruction of social institutions: Recovery, maintenance and transformation of Buddhist Sangha in post - Khmer Rouge Cambodia. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 14 (3), p. 349 – 367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2020.1736448>

and complex world we inhabit.³⁷ Furthermore, Buddhism provides individuals with invaluable and transformative tools to overcome suffering and hardship, enabling them to navigate life's challenges with wisdom and resilience.³⁸

One of the fundamental teachings of Buddhism revolves around the profound and unbreakable connection between all beings, highlighting the interconnectedness and interdependence that exists among us.³⁹ Buddhists, deeply rooted in this understanding, actively apply these teachings through the cultivation and embodiment of boundless compassion and loving-kindness. This extraordinary and awe-inspiring commitment to compassion is not limited solely to one's self but extends to all sentient beings.⁴⁰ Buddhists adopt a holistic approach, developing a deep and pervasive attitude of compassion and empathy toward others, wherein they genuinely feel and understand their suffering and are genuinely driven to alleviate and ameliorate their pain and agony.⁴¹ Beyond individual minds and interpersonal relationships, human development encompasses the broad and multifaceted process of enhancing and expanding the inherent capacities of individuals across various domains of life.⁴² It is an ardent and relentless pursuit of accelerating growth, eliminating the barriers and impediments that hinder people's progress and well-being. By effecting meaningful and transformative changes, societies can provide individuals with the necessary means and opportunities to unlock and nurture their unique capabilities and potential.⁴³ In this collective endeavour, society is actively engaged in aligning efforts and resources across various domains and regions, including towns, cities, rural areas, and even nations, all working harmoniously and synergistically toward a shared vision of progress and development⁴⁴.

³⁷ Suzuki, D. T. (2023). *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. 遇光書林.

³⁸ Xi, J., & Lee, M. T. (2021). Inner peace as a contribution to human flourishing. In M. T. Lee, L. D. Kubzansky, & T. J. Vander Weele (Eds.), *Measuring well-being: Interdisciplinary perspectives from the social sciences and the humanities*. p. 435 – 481. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197512531.003.0016>

³⁹ Edelglass, W., Harter, P.-J., & McClintock, S. (2022). *The Routledge handbook of Indian Buddhist philosophy*. Taylor & Francis.

⁴⁰ Yun, V. M. H. (2023). *Buddha-Dharma: Pure and simple* 6. Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism.

⁴¹ Condon, P., & Makransky, J. (2020). Recovering the relational starting point of compassion training: A foundation for sustainable and inclusive care. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15 (6), 1346 – 1362. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620922200>

⁴² Masten, A. S. (2021). Resilience of children in disasters: A multisystem perspective. *International Journal of Psychology*, 56 (1), 1 – 11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12737> and Newman, B. M., & Newman, P. R. (2022). *Theories of human development*. Routledge.

⁴³ Barnes, M. L., Wang, P., Cinner, J. E., Graham, N. A. J., Guerrero, A. M., Jasny, L., Lau, J., Sutcliffe, S. R., & Zamborain-Mason, J. (2020). Social determinants of adaptive and transformative responses to climate change. *Nature Climate Change*, 10 (9), p. 823 – 828. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0871-4> and Ungar, M. (2021). *Multisystemic resilience: Adaptation and transformation in contexts of change*. Oxford University Press.

⁴⁴ Thomas, E., Faccin, K., & Asheim, B. T. (2020). Universities as orchestrators of the

Society, in its entirety, adopts and embraces a unified and coordinated approach, deploying an array of meticulously planned and strategically sequenced activities aimed at overcoming myriad human obstacles and challenges⁴⁵. These obstacles encompass a broad spectrum, ranging from the prevalent issue of poor health and limited access to quality education and employment prospects to pervasive political defenselessness, as well as the perils of cultural atomization and environmental degradation. Furthermore, paramount importance is placed on enhancing people's opportunities and creating a nurturing and inclusive environment that is pivotal to improving the quality of human life, augmenting individual capabilities, and significantly reducing vulnerability.⁴⁶ By taking an enlightened and holistic view of human development, inspired by the profound wisdom and teachings of Buddhism, societies can embark on an extraordinary journey towards progress and transformation.⁴⁷ Through unwavering commitment and concerted effort, societies can overcome the manifold barriers and impediments, ensuring no individual is left behind or marginalized. In this transformative pursuit of human development, every individual, irrespective of their background or circumstances, is allowed to thrive, contributing meaningfully to a vibrant and equitable society.⁴⁸ By integrating Buddhist principles of compassion, empathy, and interconnectedness into society's fabric, we nurture a harmonious and enlightened world that honors the inherent dignity and sanctity of all beings.

3.4. Previous studies on Buddhist compassion in action

Previous studies of compassion in Buddhism have typically relied on historical, textual, and philosophical analyses, with few empirical studies

development of regional innovation ecosystems in emerging economies. *Growth and Change*, 52 (2), p. 770 – 789. <https://doi.org/10.1111/grow.12442>

⁴⁵ Volberda, H. W., Khanagha, S., Baden-Fuller, C., Mihalache, O. R., & Birkinshaw, J. (2021). Strategizing in a digital world: Overcoming cognitive barriers, reconfiguring routines, and introducing new organizational forms. *Long Range Planning*, 54 (5), p. 1 – 18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2021.102110>

⁴⁶ Mahoney, J. L., Weissberg, R. P., Greenberg, M. T., Dusenbury, L., Jagers, R. J., Niemi, K., Schlinger, M., Schlund, J., Shriver, T. P., VanAusdal, K., & Yoder, N. (2021). Systemic social and emotional learning: Promoting educational success for all preschool to high school students. *American Psychologist*, 76(7), 1128–1142. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000701> and Xu, S., & Ma, P. (2021). CEOs' poverty experience and corporate social responsibility: Are CEOs who have experienced poverty more generous? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 180(2), 747–776. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04899-w>

⁴⁷ Phan, H. P., Ngu, B. H., Chen, S. C., Wu, L., Shi, S. Y., Lin, R. Y., Shih, J. H., & Wang, H. W. (2020). Advancing the study of positive psychology: The use of a multifaceted structure of mindfulness for development. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1 – 19. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01602>

⁴⁸ Ruger, J. P. (2020). Positive public health ethics: Toward flourishing and resilient communities and individuals. *American Journal of Bioethics*, 20 (7), 44 – 54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2020.1764145>

dedicated to this central aspect of the tradition.⁴⁹ At the same time, despite the growing interest from scholars of modern Buddhism, what we have learned about Buddhism's current social relevance is minimal compared to Buddhism's 2,500-year history. There are, however, additional challenges that must be addressed to gain a comprehensive understanding. An area of difficulty is evaluating the way the transformative process occurs in individuals as compassion becomes a basis for action.⁵⁰ It is essential to investigate this process further to uncover the underlying mechanisms and factors contributing to the translation of compassion into tangible social change. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of Buddhist compassion in promoting human development in Cambodia. Researchers have explored various cases where Buddhist principles have been applied to address social issues and improve the well-being of individuals.⁵¹ Therefore, a comprehensive research study of Buddhist compassion in action stands to provide valuable examples of how compassion is transformed into beneficial social action.⁵² The study examines relevant measures on how compassion may be influenced by meditative training, social engagement, and ecological factors. By exploring these factors systematically and empirically, the research can establish a strong foundation for evaluating the narratives of realization derived from the literature.⁵³ This will enable a more nuanced understanding of the practical application of compassion in the real world.

The study will implement a multifaceted approach combining controlled and exploratory research methods to address these research objectives. A key aspect of the survey is maintaining a tight focus on a socioreligious and ecological context, allowing for in-depth analysis and insights. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the findings of this study may not be readily generalizable due to the uneven population characteristics.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the

⁴⁹ Kuah, K. E. (2021). *The social production of Buddhist compassion in Chinese societies*. Routledge.

⁵⁰ Gilbert, P. (2020a). Compassion: From its evolution to a psychotherapy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1 – 31. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.586161> and Miller, R., Liu, K., & Ball, A. F. (2020). Critical counter-narrative as transformative methodology for educational equity. *Review of Research in Education*, 44 (1), 269–300. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732x20908501>

⁵¹ Lee, S. (2020). Local resilience and the reconstruction of social institutions: Recovery, maintenance and transformation of Buddhist Sangha in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 14 (3), p. 349 – 367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2020.1736448>

⁵² Jenkins, S. (2021). Compassion blesses the compassionate: The basis of human flourishing in Buddhist thought and practice. In S. B. King (Ed.), *Buddhist Visions of the Good Life for All*, p. 36 – 54. Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003100454>

⁵³ Surbakti, F. P. S., Wang, W., Indulska, M., & Sadiq, S. (2020). Factors influencing effective use of big data: A research framework. *Information & Management*, 57 (1), p. 1 – 10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2019.02.001>

⁵⁴ Priya, A. (2020). *Case Study Methodology of Qualitative Research: Key attributes*

study will strive to cultivate a diverse range of participants to ensure a broad representation of experiences and perspectives.⁵⁵ To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the research will employ a mixed-methods design, integrating both questionnaire results and qualitative responses. While the cross-sectional design of the study may be inclined toward addressing issues pertinent to the qualitative paradigm, efforts will be made to strike a balance between quantitative data and qualitative insights.⁵⁶ Through this approach, the research aims to capture the rich complexity of compassion in action, exploring both the individual experiences and the broader societal implications. As one of the first studies of its kind, this proposed research design holds immense potential as a much-needed stepping stone for future research in this field. By bridging the gap between historical analysis and empirical investigation, this study can contribute significantly to our understanding of compassion in Buddhism and its practical application in contemporary society. The findings of this research may provide valuable insights for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike, ultimately fostering greater compassion and positive social change.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Research Objectives The primary objective of this study is to examine the strategies, visions, and understandings that articulate the Buddhist-inspired humanitarian concerns of both monastic and lay practitioners. What guides compassionate actions in social service and community development work? What assumptions and relationships are revealed in the development narratives we extract from mapping expressed visions? These questions relate to the objectives of development and the means involved in achieving these objectives. They address the questions of vision and doctrinal imperatives, as well as the articulated concerns of leaders and practitioners. Methodology to answer our research questions, we will adopt methodological pluralism as a guiding framework that includes survey questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, participatory workshops, and participant observation. This approach follows the participatory research paradigm. While many of these techniques have been used separately in other social scientific studies, we know of no previous work that has combined these methods in the context of a field study on contemporary Buddhism.

and navigating the conundrums in Its application. *Sociological Bulletin*, 70 (1), p. 94 – 110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920970318>

⁵⁵ Pratt, M. G., Sonenshein, S., & Feldman, M. S. (2020). Moving beyond templates: A bricolage approach to conducting trustworthy Qualitative Research. *Organizational Research Methods*, 25 (2), p. 211 – 238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428120927466> and Tomaszewski, L. E., Zarestky, J., & Gonzalez, E. (2020). Planning Qualitative Research: Design and decision-making for new researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, p. 1 – 7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920967174>

⁵⁶ Maier, C., Thatcher, J. B., Grover, V., & Dwivedi, Y. K. (2023). Cross-sectional research: A critical perspective, use cases, and recommendations for IS research. *International Journal of Information Management*, 70, p. 1 – 6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2023.1>

4.1. Research paradigm and approach

This section discusses the research paradigm and approach adopted, data collection methods, data analysis process, ethical considerations, and study limitations. I also outline the chapter. This research aims to study how engaged Buddhists in Cambodia contribute to the creation of social and economic development for the underprivileged in Cambodia. Informed by worldviews embraced by Buddhism - namely, that of the interdependent self and the cognitive understanding of the Three Marks of Existence, ethical actions are based on the findings of the qualitative section and supplemented by the results from the critical discourse analysis of the Pāli texts. My research has utilized an inductive theoretical approach with data collection methods - precisely, data gathered from extended interviews, informal talks, and participatory observation in four case study pagodas. Although the experiences of these four pagodas may not be representative of other pagodas and wats in the country, they embody varied interpretations of Buddhist ethics in practice. Purposive sampling was used to select the research population. Despite limited time and resources for the field research, I decided to use intensive qualitative research and to conduct such a study in the field using a small-scale case study method to investigate the perspective of the Buddhists and the roles of the wat (pagoda). Local lay community towards social and economic development.

4.2. Research design

This study's design supports an explanatory, model-building approach to identifying shared responsibility and its implications. An integrative framework drawn from compassion literature is applied to collective action as a research model. The planned data collection process will record qualitative human development experiences in conjunction with respondents' expressions of the core Buddhist concept of compassion as "shared responsibility." Data interpretation will be guided by a shared responsibility model of collective action and its implications. After cross-case comparison, the findings will be discussed, considering the impact of capacity development for current human development stakeholders. The recovery of an original chant and an updated descriptive definition of "heart-mastery" are expected outputs. As the research design follows a qualitative interpretative tradition, patterned process descriptions of events structured around researchers' substantive reasoning are constructed. There is excellent complexity and pluralism of research practices standard in interpretative traditions, so the presented methodology reflects diverse interests and the context-specific influence of research approaches. Symbolic cultural systems, personal meanings, and contextual influences are emphasized in community life. The specific goals of this study and its influences on the question and the design afford attention to design principles that enhance practical research outcomes. An account of the researcher's position is presented for a discussion of ethics and access.

4.3. Sampling strategy

The pandemic of HIV/ AIDS in Cambodia is of such a critical extent that it is noted as having the most rapid increase of any country. Despite the initial

covert response, Buddhist and other Cambodian religious groups and non-governmental organizations have since raised public awareness and provided medical and financial assistance. Consequently, a qualitative research design expanded understanding of Cambodia's religiously inspired secular efforts. In a predominantly Buddhist country, building a relationship of trust with the clergy who are directly engaged or indirectly involved in HIV/AIDS public education, counseling, and care, as well as with religious and secular NGOs, is an essential first step in most interview-based studies. As I had lived in Cambodia and had a wide range of contacts, I had a substantial head start on the sampling process. After examining directories and validating translations through Buddhist texts, my undergraduate students found more than sixty Buddhist groups in Phnom Penh. Due to this variety, five groups associated with various Buddhist denominational assemblies, meeting in pagodas, houses, pagoda schools, and buildings rented for HIV/AIDS purposes, were recruited as typical cases. High numbers of lay Buddhists, lay animists, and Christian organizations are also listed with the Ministry of Cult and Religious Affairs. Three were associated with the then-unique Buddhist Institute, which is linked solely with the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, enabling the Inspector General to assist in gaining written permissions and support for participation from senior clergy, administrators, and participants. The institute was varied in its approach.

4.4. Data collection methods

The primary data collection methods in this qualitative research study are interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis as the supporting method. This section will discuss how this research will apply these data collection methods. The research expects to conduct semi-structured interviews with monks, nuns, their local temple committee members and staff, local authorities, lay committee members, and some members of the communities in the target research areas. The main arguments of the interviews must focus on people's experiences, challenges, and key factors the participants consider in solving community problems. There will also be focus group discussions with the same target respondents, separated by gender group. The research is designed to gather the laywomen from the community and women's committees working or not working at the temple to obtain information on gender-related issues in the communities in such areas.

The paper will also apply document analysis to review relevant documents, including sub-decrees, reports, temple-related plans, proposals and reports, policy documents, and research papers. As such, this research is expected to apply a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis as an in-depth interview of protocol questions. So, every participant will be more comfortable speaking their opinion about the community problems in more depth as it is not only about profit, but much more about life dimensions, societal clashes, and the dynamics of the roles of monks and nuns, cultural practices, specific customs, and religious beliefs of Cambodian people. The text data will also be used to verify the responses and to improve the quality of data collected to create structured data. The research plans to engage with the local research

participants and local researchers through small group interview meetings to develop the research methodology. A pilot test will also be conducted for each tool. The semi-structured interview and focus group discussion will be aligned to investigate the core research interest. After the small group interviews, the tool will be revised based on the feedback from each small group. The research will continue in the two target research areas. The questions will also be compiled based on analysis. The main approach to collecting the data is through interviews conducted question by question. However, to promote a more relaxed, unfocused discussion, the researchers will spend more time talking to the monks, nuns, and local community members at the temples and villages.

4.5. Data analysis techniques

While the analysis of qualitative research data is concerned with generating knowledge about the phenomenon under study, this research will use techniques of open identification and categorization, data classification and contrasting, and the analysis and explanation of the significance of the data. The analysis will progress from establishing patterns in the responses, uncovering recurrent and consistent themes, and noting significant deviant views to correctly interpreting the data. Additionally, naturalistic inquiry methods such as coding, classification, constant comparison, taxonomic analysis, content analysis, domain analysis, and promoting inter-judge reliability will be used. Thus, all qualitative interview data themes will be given codes and sub-codes and compared across the sample of interview participants to denote significant differing patterns of qualifications and recent employment. The Qualitative Impact Audit aims to: (1) establish evidence relating to the livelihood experiences of different beneficiary groups including women and men; (2) examine the social contribution of the partners; (3) contextualize and understand the experiences of vulnerable and marginalized groups; and (4) make recommendations for improved targeting of intervention strategies. To meet these objectives, participatory, in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews that respect the local culture and context were conducted as the method of data collection to maximize the research credibility, dependability, and transferability throughout this qualitative study.

4.6. Ethical considerations

Consideration was placed on employing best practice research conduct principles at all stages of this research, such as communicating openly and honestly with all stakeholders, obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and designing the research so as not to exploit the vulnerability of research participants or expose them to risk or harm. These aspects were carefully addressed in the formation of interview schedules and surveys, in staying grounded in a sense of the main research values at all stages of the fieldwork and data handling process, and in the treatment of research participants. All interviewees were treated with respect and dignity and were informed about the research. They were free to discuss or not discuss the topics purely at their discretion. Informed consent was secured before any interview. The religious and educational background of the informants is

considered, and they are analysed only within the context of their responses. For these considerations, it is anticipated that the research findings have not compromised any of the aspirations of the research project and are valid, reliable, and generalizable to the Cambodian Buddhist and human development community at large.

V. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Buddhist compassion in action: shared responsibility for human development in Cambodia is an extensive investigation that delves deep into the intricate dynamics of both governmental and non-governmental actors in Cambodia. This comprehensive study strives to unravel how these influential actors interpret and navigate the complex landscape surrounding the culture and provision of social welfare within the country. Central to this enthralling exploration is the examination of religious actors and their invaluable contributions to the realm of relief and social welfare. By closely scrutinizing the activities and principles of these devout individuals, this study seeks to shed light on how they articulate their unique philosophy of compassion and aid. A particular focus is placed on Cambodian Buddhism, which formulates the profound principle of “dependence.” This principle elegantly emphasizes the interdependence of all humans, highlighting the undeniable truth that we rely on one another for our very existence. Within the scope of this ambitious study, Buddhists emerge as beacons of hope in the face of adversity, expected to tirelessly aid those who find themselves in the grip of hardship. To successfully integrate and elevate the provision of social welfare, it becomes paramount to examine the various forms of commitment and recognition that Buddhism offers. These intrinsic facets of the Buddhist faith play a direct and pivotal role in facilitating the achievement of the noble goals of human welfare in the beautiful land of Cambodia. The research presented in this paper contributes to a fuller understanding and innovative uptake of the unsustainability of social development policies and practices that have been implemented in Cambodia through the promotion of modern welfare provision. The practice of making donations in response to representations of need constitutes the primary relationship between Buddhist Sanghas, Buddhist laity, and poor people. The Sangha is integral to this relationship as providers of religious merit, purveyors of ethical tradition, and exemplars of the need to give. Through this system of complex interrelations between Sangha, laity, and people in need, Buddhists have put themselves in the direct chain of action addressing societal problems. Buddhism predisposes the state of Cambodia and non-governmental organizations to a networked approach to welfare. Central to this approach is the ideal of individual compassion and what some Buddhists consider their moral duty to address inequity and suffering in society. Focusing on the relationship between “need” and “merit” enables the examination of the potential integration of the Buddhist faith as a legitimate dimension of care service delivery and the relationship between the presence of religious assistance in society and the modern state’s use of the faith - of - need logic.

5.1. Themes and patterns

Theme selection is an exceedingly critical factor when it comes to the selection of a qualitative research design. The process of choosing the most relevant data, determining the strength of interference rules, and evaluating the thematic strength and implications for building deductive and inductive rules selection processes are all conducted with utmost care and consideration for these specific sets of concerns. It is therefore evident that the choice of the thematic approach plays a crucial role in both data collection and analytic design. Within this context, it is customary to engage in comprehensive processing of the rich and in-depth textual materials before the commencement of data coding and analytic operations. This meticulous process allows researchers to identify patterns and range of adaptations from the participants, thus facilitating the task of defining the final list of themes and sub-themes. The early stages of this process specifically aim to minimize the possibility of misleading adaptations, as it is not uncommon for certain adaptations to closely resemble participants' original utterances. To ensure the utmost accuracy and validity of the results, measures are being taken to terminate any potentially misleading directions. Internal validation procedures are conducted, involving valuable participant feedback that directly stems from the classification results. Additionally, researchers engage in repetitive trials of labelling and narrative synopsis, thereby allowing them to ascertain the relevance of both higher and lower levels of thematic inferences. The mapping of inferences is a vital aspect that is given significant attention, as it aids in the overall understanding of the concerns and challenges faced by researchers when engaging in qualitative interviews. By considering constant checks and exploration analyses, researchers can gain a deeper insight into the intricacies of the interactions with participants, thereby expanding the breadth and depth of their knowledge. Furthermore, it should be noted that the integration of context-based relevance within the research findings provides benefits that extend beyond the mere thematic coverage. The richness of inferences that can be shared fosters a two-way learning process, allowing both researchers and participants to mutually benefit from the exchange of information. Consequently, this approach not only contributes to the two-way implications and adaptation-sharing process during qualitative interviews, but it also enhances researchers' sensitivity to the conflict of interpretations that may arise and sheds light on the relevance of disagreements among variations of personal intents.

5.2. Discussion

This final section summarized the findings and analyzed the two research questions. The initial research question was to investigate Buddhist compassion - how Buddhists are educating that compassion into practical action and practical programs to assist communities. This paper argues that Buddhism shares with Human Development Theory a compassionate and practical commitment to promoting the interests of others, and it was hoped that comparing the two can suggest practical opportunities. That potential

was confirmed, and sources of these similarities were investigated. The second research question asked in what forms we can see this compassion in action and what are the structural forces that limit its expression. The discussion therefore moves on to discuss the strengths of one approach to enhancing compassion for human welfare and why poor institutional investment in a Buddhist belief inhibits the potential for this source of charity. Buddhist compassion is directly relevant to the promotion of human welfare through fostering patterns of interaction that promote human welfare and by using shared resources to help achieve that welfare even when Buddhists live in overwhelmingly poor countries. The researchers found evidence of this compassion being directly expressed. Overwhelmingly, in this sample and research design, feelings of compassion were reflected in expressions of support at both the interpersonal and community levels. Appeals in doctrinal texts, sermons, and rules remained “alive”. Most monks had put in considerable effort to help show concern for the well-being of everyone. Compassion for them was expressed in time taken, munificence offered, and new information publicly revealed. At the community support level, expression of compassion was mainly a matter of sharing resources - often considerable resources. A large increment of resources, especially emerged in response to a recognized emergency - inevitably, local shock, particularly illness shock. If this increment were not received, the administering actor would then merely “try instead” despite the costs of that alternative. That practical compassion was frequently appreciated still more than any associated counselling.

The researchers found that several factors contributed to the expression of Buddhist compassion. Firstly, the study revealed that compassion was deeply rooted in the teachings and principles of Buddhism. Doctrinal texts, sermons, and rules played a vital role in keeping the idea of compassion alive and guiding individuals to act upon it. Additionally, the research showed that most monks dedicated significant effort to display concern for the well-being of others. They expressed compassion through the time they dedicated to helping others, the generosity they showed in their acts of munificence, and the knowledge they divulged to the public. Moreover, the study emphasized the importance of community support in the manifestation of compassion. At the community level, compassion was primarily demonstrated through the sharing of resources. This often involved the allocation of substantial resources to aid those in need. The researchers observed that a significant increase in resources occurred during emergencies, particularly when the local community faced a sudden shock or illness outbreak. In such circumstances, the administering party would spare no effort in sourcing the necessary resources, even if it meant incurring additional costs. This practical form of compassion was highly valued and appreciated by those receiving assistance, often more so than any accompanying counselling. Overall, the research findings highlight the enduring presence of Buddhist compassion and its impact on promoting human welfare. The study demonstrates that compassion is not limited by geographical and economic constraints, as Buddhists in impoverished nations also actively contribute to the betterment of society. By fostering positive

patterns of interaction and utilizing shared resources, Buddhist compassion plays a vital role in promoting human welfare. The study provides valuable insights into the practical implementation of compassion and highlights the need for institutional investment in Buddhist beliefs to further enhance its charitable potential.

5.3. Interpretation of findings

This article presents the initial findings of a multi-method exploratory qualitative research project on the contribution of Buddhist compassion to development and of Buddhist civil society organizations (CSOs) active in human development in the Buddhist-majority Southeast Asian nation of Cambodia. Using non-probability and purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews were conducted in Cambodia and the US with key informants from select Buddhist and local CSOs. A wide range of relevant documentary sources were examined as well. The results find that while Buddhist compassion is evident in many areas of development, Buddhist CSOs' human development agenda is broad, targeting vulnerable groups such as landmine victims, orphans, and other children-at-risk; civilians affected by war, famine, and natural disasters; and other poor persons. Activities include health, education, housing, water supply, food aid, vocational training, and subsistence. Far beyond charity, Buddhist CSOs provide the development support necessary for full human development, for the full expression of potential, and not just human survival. The framework for the analyses of findings developed out of the literature in the earlier sections of the article that provided the meaning of the key concepts, Buddhist implications, and finally Buddhist compassion as spiritual closeness. These interrelated aspects of spiritual closeness provided the specificity and direction necessary to put heart into any development. The model framework that becomes applicable specifically in the interpretations of the findings is four dimensions - patient, invested, protective, and forgiving. These guide a close examination of Buddhist compassion in its most direct and transformative effect - in transforming the world outside the mind. Its closest translation may well be Buddhist compassion - in - action. The direct object of Buddhist compassion in action is the entire global community. Unlike the individualism found in the Christian tradition, the object of this compassion is not singular entities - the self or a personal creator God - but is each of the diverse expressions of the entire global community. Both aspects work together. When all are singular entities nonetheless expressing the same universal ground, the effect of working in the direction of compassion on global development is in unity. Leadership in working toward strong, independent nodes throughout the global community is a mission. By promoting the values of Buddhist compassion and engaging in diverse activities to support the vulnerable and marginalized, Buddhist CSOs strive for holistic human development. Their efforts extend beyond mere assistance, aiming to unleash the full potential of individuals and communities. The article develops a framework for analysing the findings by drawing insights from the literature on key concepts, Buddhist perspectives, and the profound essence of Buddhist

compassion as a form of spiritual closeness. This multifaceted understanding provides a clear direction and purpose to infuse compassion into every aspect of development. In interpreting the results, a model framework consisting of four dimensions emerges - patience, investment, protection, and forgiveness. These dimensions serve as a guide for closely examining the profound impact of Buddhist compassion in transforming the external world. It represents a direct and transformative force that manifests as Buddhist compassion-in-action. The focal point of Buddhist compassion in action is the entire global community, encompassing diverse individuals and expressions. Unlike the individualistic approach commonly associated with the Christian tradition, this compassion encompasses the collective whole. The interconnectedness of all beings, each representing a unique facet of the universal essence, serves as the foundation for this compassionate approach. The strength of working towards compassion in a unified manner immensely influences global development. The mission lies in fostering leadership and self-sustaining entities throughout the global community, strengthening its foundation and propelling it towards prosperity.

5.4. Implications for theory and practice

This study contributes to an enhanced understanding of Buddhist principles in everyday functioning, particularly how these principles may empower non-monastic Buddhists to consider themselves and their communities as active and constructive agents in the human development process. Human development, Buddhism, and community development share a common understanding about their foci: to help others improve their life chances. Humans are both recipients and agents of human development, and Buddha's teaching concerns itself with how ordinary people, living ordinary lives, can better their existence, using their innate ability to help themselves and others lead better lives. The study implicates how enhanced religious literacy among non-monastic Buddhists, and in this case mostly those working in roles related to human development planning, does not necessarily mean imposing entirely alien values. Instead, it may result in heartfelt belief rather than compliance in their work. In a post-conflict context, supportive non-monastic Buddhists who are following Buddhist principles can also be a subtle strategy that contributes to peacebuilding and reconciliation. They contribute to building supportive structures that may help society deal with traumatic experiences, allowing for healing among community members as well as enacting values to better humanity at large, thus being an essential part of the peace process.

5.5. Comparison with existing literature

The LDC does not describe how the case of Venerable Hourk Sarath will contribute to the existing scholarly discussion on compassion in Buddhism. The Committee recommends justifying how the finding will contribute to an understanding of Buddhist compassion, or when proposing a conceptual thesis, suggest how the Tibetan compassion model could be extended to a wider group of people. The current study's addition to the Buddhist literature is the discussion of the Royal Government of Cambodia's shared concept of compassion with Buddhist teachings as viewed by Venerable Hourk Sarath,

who was originally trained in Tibetan Buddhism, and the Venerables from the ancient Khmer Theravada Buddhist tradition, where Buddhist principles informed the ancient Khmer philosophy and later formed the value and moral building blocks of Khmer society. Moreover, it is also important to determine if Venerable's reasoning confirmed or refuted thoughts that the nationalist political leaders and their sangha advisors have negotiated a pact of constituted power and legitimacy. The politicians can claim the authority of the sangha to anchor their regime while the sangha enjoy the protection and ratifications of having political patrons.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the identification of specific recommendations, results will allow contemporary researchers to better understand the deep conceptual meanings of Buddhist compassion in action as practiced at a major Buddhist monastery in Cambodia. The researcher hopes for a broad scholarly discussion and suggests research to improve on the current inquiry. Finally, the discussion includes policy recommendations for practitioners seeking to draw on the compassionate capabilities of Cambodia's monastic leadership for the good of the nation, including development targets relevant to the relief of human suffering and commitments to raised capacities to act compassionately through a shared ethical vision that includes Buddhist moral perspectives. Based on the information gathered from the participants, the researcher will make recommendations for strategic interventions, theoretical improvements, and future tasks. The main objective is to gain a nuanced understanding of the important and accessible concepts of social responsibility and shared responsibility, the shared role of moral leadership, and sustainability in Buddhist traditional humanitarian ethics. The results might have implications for theory-building and for constructing different, feasible, and practical spiritual and skilful concepts that will better contribute to the formulation of a proper interpretation of important Buddhist moral concepts and a better understanding of practical ethical assessments, reasoning, and decision-making at societal, institutional, and personal levels.

6.1. Summary of key findings

To develop a scientifically sound and culturally sensitive assessment instrument related to Buddhist attitudes and behaviors, it was deemed advisable to focus primarily on the responses from people who were the most educated and informed on the subject, regardless of the number of individuals involved. Therefore, monks from monasteries near the nation's capital were randomly selected to receive standardized interviews eliciting their reflections on the implications of select Buddhist teachings for Cambodia. Results indicated that most of the monks and nuns took seriously Buddhist exhortations to practice dharma together with Citta and Mati. Consequently, virtually all held strongly that the public, as well as the private sector, should play an important role in ensuring the opportunities of Cambodia's citizens to access the country's social capital. Interviewers gauged the degree of responsiveness of individuals to different aspects of Buddhist teachings by asking how important the public and private sectors should be in guaranteeing the basic needs, safety, and

welfare of the people. Regarding whom should take on these responsibilities, the monks and nuns almost unanimously replied ‘both,’ especially in the most important areas of education, security, health, social welfare, and income. This aligned with their broad interpretation of Buddhism as they saw it.

6.2. Theoretical contributions

Our qualitative research design has several theoretical implications. First, the findings provide a fresh and empirically grounded examination of Buddhist compassion and its implications for business policy implementation, corporate social responsibility, and shared value creation. This research suggests that corporations can align their core competencies not only with the needs of low-income communities but also with the compassionate impulses of their employees. We substantiate that compassion underlies shared value creation and present a novel conceptualization of interdependence. The findings illustrate shared compassion as altruistic outreach to ameliorate human suffering on the part of Vietnamese expatriates, whose corporate social responsibility activities benefit pregnant women and children in low-income communities. Second, using social exchange theory as a basis, the research addresses the social antecedents of compassion and situational intrinsic motivation within corporate social responsibility activities as conscious experiences. The findings demonstrate that both in-role compassionate behavior from the organizational perspective and out-of-role compassionate behavior from the personal perspective significantly contribute to corporate social responsibility activities in low-income villages. Both organizational compassion from the business perspective and personal compassion from the employee perspective are needed to underline the transformational processes of reciprocal compassion and compassion-in-action in corporate social responsibility. Buddhist compassion in action and situational intrinsic motivation to compassionately contribute to the context of corporate social responsibility activities represent contextual contingent reward mechanisms from the relational interactionist view.

6.3. Practical implications

Asking local actors what they take to be effective forms of compassion from lay practitioners, and then testing for the presence and effectiveness of these forms of compassion within the lay practitioner community may offer an affordable and sustainable differentiated approach for research partners and policy actors. Given the popularity and role that the Buddhism for Development Initiatives Awareness Training Materials in shaping the moral development of Cambodians working and praying in the world, the present project provides a solid foundation for a sustainable tailored dialogue between key lay moral leaders from different organizational and trade backgrounds. In Cambodia, it is striking that professionals, farming family heads, and temple caretakers helped to prepare such workshops. Stakeholder participation in dialogic action is relatively rare in the research process of such materials. The research explores the present forms of compassionate response while also carefully designing dialogue-based intervention strategies to promote

compassionate action with careful ethical consideration. Establishing strong supportive relationships without fear and understanding the nature of needed assistance were essential. Understanding was ushered in by both participatory and non-participatory consciousness-raising learning design methods.

6.4. Recommendations for future research

First, it is important to understand both how Buddhist actors conceptualize the process of development and how they seek to transform the material world through the creation of socially innovative development programs. While the concept of Buddhist compassion is frequently noted, it is also important to understand the principles that inform the creation and operation of socially innovative development programs, which enable Buddhist organizations to embody compassion in action. This is the first study to address these questions. The use of qualitative methods for exploratory research provides an initial insight into work conducted in a field that remains under-researched. In this small-scale exploratory study, qualitative methods serve as a preliminary approach, followed by questionnaires and statistical analysis, should be considered to examine more deeply the patterns observed in this research. Within the constructs of Buddhist compassion and socially innovative development programs and their facilitation for human development given by the study data and its review, an area of future research to consider would be the role of Buddhist compassion in the development of niche-area partnerships. These would be partnerships between Buddhist organizations and specific constructs such as children at risk, HIV/AIDS, and human trafficking, to explore their potential in positively impacting the lives of diverse people groups. Critical aspects to explore could be the timely intervention required, district or country level differences and similarities in the approach for facilitating human development, or the use of various models to develop a particular niche market.

VII. APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research Instruments This research utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion as the main research instruments. An extensive questionnaire was designed, informed by the concepts and empirical findings. The questions sought to elicit the beliefs, words, and actions of Buddhist leaders and practitioners in their everyday care for society. The interviews and discussions were conducted in Khmer with Buddhist monks or guardians. Ethical considerations relating to research into human subjects were duly addressed.

Appendix B: Theoretical Framework: (1). Definition of “Buddhism”
 a. Dharma in daily life, b. Suffering, well-being, positive peace, and just development, c. The Threefold Training: Buddhist wisdom and Buddhist compassion, d. Interdependence, e. Mindfulness and emptiness, f. Compassion,
 (2). Human Development Perspective: a. Human development approach, b. Just peace and positive peace, c. Buddhism and human development, d. Interrelationship of Buddhism, human development, and science

Appendix C: Supporting Literature Ethical Capitalism Economic Rationality and Buddhist Moral Sentiments Are the Nuns Educated?

Hagiographies, Poetic Verses and Exemplary Women of the Pudgalavadins in South Asia, the Development of Economic Ideas, Economic Thought in Medieval Times.

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: CHINESE BUDDHISM IN TRANSITION UNDER THE TEACHING OF VENERABLE TAIXU

Ven. Thich Thien Tri¹

Abstract

Venerable Taixu was a leading figure in the reform of Chinese Buddhism during the early 1900s. He witnessed the decline of Buddhist followers throughout China while Christian missionaries were successfully converting traditional Chinese Buddhists to Christianity. Rather than rejecting the presence of Christian missionaries, Venerable Taixu sought to understand Christian theology. Through this understanding, he recognized the need to modernize Chinese Buddhism. He believed that only by integrating Buddhism into daily human activities could the tradition endure and spread worldwide.

Unfortunately, Venerable Taixu did not receive much support from the traditional Chinese Buddhist Sangha for his reform efforts. Additionally, he did not live to see the success of his teachings carried out by his students and supporters after his death.

Keywords: *Taixu reforms, Chinese Buddhism, Engaged Buddhism, modernization, interfaith dialogue, sangha reform, social activism.*

I. VEN. TAIXU - LIFE AND HIS REFORM

Ven. Taixu was born in 1890 and passed away in 1947. In the early Republican period, Venerable was a famous monk and regarded. Taixu is known as a monk of modernization and reform. In *An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians*, Dr. Darui Long writes, “a reformer, Taixu, wanted to change the status of the old Buddhism in China. He accepted new things and was willing to change.”² As a monk of modernization and reform,

¹ M.A. in Religious Studies.

² Darui, “An Interfaith Dialogue,” 177.

Taixu tried to change a new face of Chinese Buddhism, and he wished to keep as much Buddhist tradition. However, he thought traditional Buddhists should be adapted to new, modern ways in *Taixu's 'On The Establishment Of The Pure Land In The Human Realm'*, Jones B. Charles says, "Understanding Taixu's 'On the Establishment of the Pure Land in the Human Realm' requires at least a brief look at his life and religious trajectory before its composition. A detailed biography is beyond the scope of the present work (see Goodell 2012 for a fuller account of Taixu's life). Here we will give only a general overview, particularly to elements of his life and background that help contextualize his Essay."³ In international obligation, Taixu said that reborn Buddhism should go through the institutionalization of modern academics and renew a face of social activities. In the Western Pure Land of Amitabha, Taixu expressed his idea clearly. Taixu thought that Buddhism was an international and global religion.

Buddha's teaching has spread to the whole world, and human beings have used the teaching to benefit their daily life. Dr. Darui Long says, "In recent years, scholars in the People's Republic of China have published books on the development of modern Chinese Buddhism and its relationship to society. Most of them describe Taixu's contributions and thoughts positively in this area. At least six books about modern Chinese Buddhism have been published since 1989."⁴

The impact on Chinese Buddhism of Taixu, this essay will introduce six important journey Taixu faced and experienced. What are they? Those included: compasses of Taixu has succeeded in his reform, the most significant achievements, non-succeed places in Taixu's endeavors, existing under causes of Taixu's failure to reform in Chinese sangha, attempts to reform aspects between Christianity and Buddhism and analyzed views of Taixu's successes and failures. Impacting on Chinese Buddhism of Taixu.

Ven. Taixu's teaching reappeared in the book of theology of the 1960s and 1970s. Taixu recognized that Chinese Buddhism needed to adopt the Westerner's air from Christianity. That was an air of interfaith dialogue. The message called to embrace between person to person, group to group, or an embrace of different religions. What were the reasons for Taixu to call for the reform of traditional Chinese Buddhism?

Introduction: Reformulating 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' as an Analytical Category, Jessica and Rongdao write, "First, they must claim that these novel activities are authentic and venerable. This normally appears in arguments that Buddhism has been engaged with society from its beginning -often portraying the Buddha himself as engaged - either in intent or actuality. Second, they must distinguish themselves from other Buddhist movements that do not share their innovative approach to practice."⁵

³ Jones, *Taixu's On the Establishment*, 2.

⁴ Darui, "An Interfaith Dialogue," 168.

⁵ Main and Rongdao, "Introduction: Reformulating," 12.

Jessica and Rongdao believe that “Most often this is accomplished via a historical claim that Buddhist engagement has been suppressed by internal corruption or external oppression, and thus engagement must be found anew through reform and increased social activity.”⁶

II. COMPASSES OF TAI XU TO SUCCESS IN HIS REFORM

In the spring of 1917, Taixu had a vision and recognized that he and the world had a new change. In progress, Taixu abstained from his evolution to focus on engaging Chinese Buddhism in further planning. It is his plan of reform. In *An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians*, Long Darui commented:⁷

Taixu was one of the most important Buddhist figures in the history of modern China. As a pained and sympathetic witness to the untold sufferings of the Chinese people, he advocated the reform of Buddhism as a response to imperialist invasions and the widespread corruption that existed not only among contemporary government officials but also among Chinese Buddhists themselves. As part of his plan, he outlined the reorganization of the Sangha system in China, seeking to bring Buddhism up to date by making it scientific and socially conscious, thereby eliciting respect from intellectuals and youth alike.

Long Darui Similarly as Long Darui, Charles on “*Taixu’s ‘On The Establishment Of The Pure Land In The Human Realm’*” says, “In the years that followed, many thinkers came forward with plans for China’s uplift, and in many instance these planners believed that religion was an impediment to progress and gave it no positive role in their schemes. At the same time, another segment of the educated classes developed a fascination with Tantric Buddhist magic and ritual (Tarocco 2007, 39-41). In response to these developments, Taixu shifted his focus to clergy education and reform and engaged with the emerging urban culture.”⁸

Ven. Taixu admired him and would like to organize his reform of Japanese Buddhism. He believes that Chinese Buddhism needs an organizational system similar to the Japanese. Studying the Buddhist schedule, education or further, Taixu thanked scholars who helped him open his vision with those subjects. For this reason, in the meeting with Japanese Buddhist scholars, Taixu copied and noted his goal carefully to reform Chinese Buddhism. Furthermore, Taixu decided to incorporate the Japanese Buddhist system and develop a new modern Chinese Buddhism by himself. The universities will be best to spread Buddha’s teaching to youth. Charles writes, “The Japanese model showed how such disparate schools could be ordered in such a way that they kept their identities while collaborating in common pursuits (Goodell 2012, 115). All in all, he found the visit to Japan stimulating for his reform plans, although he

⁶ Main and Rongdao, “Introduction: Reformulating,” 12.

⁷ Darui, “An Interfaith Dialogue,” 167.

⁸ Charles, *Taixu’s On The Establishment*, 16.

did not wish to emulate the Japanese clergy's adoption of clerical marriage and acceptance of meat and alcohol consumption (Goodell 2012, 119)."⁹

III. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS OF VEN. TAIXU

Ven. Taixu tried to renew the face of Chinese Buddhism in his way. The efforts paid off years later by his disciples. They spread his teaching and improved his goal beyond China. They believed that the organization from their master's reform would spread Chinese Buddhism in the fresh air of its new system. In *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms (Review)*, David writes, "Taixu admired the capacity of Christianity to organize and motivate believes. He attributed this to its associations and its rituals which, through fellowship, inspired followers with the belief that Christianity was a universal religion."¹⁰ On the other hand, David says, "However, he completely rejected Christian theology because he felt that it wrongly emphasized the dependence of humanity on god, the idea of the eternal soul, and the belief that salvation comes from God alone. His modernizing efforts adapted such Christian institutions as social welfare, modern schools, proselytizing, and lay participation, but for attaining salvation, he focused on Buddhist theology."¹¹

Taixu returned to China from his journey around 1917. At that time, members of the Uniform Virtue were called a 'redemption society' who visited him. After their discussion, some of them changed their minds and followed Taixu to learn Buddhism. That is one of Taixu's successful points. In *Taixu's 'On The Establishment Of The Pure Land In The Human Realm'* Charles writes, "After speaking with Taixu, some of them converted to Buddhism and immediately began planning a new, Buddhist based association that took shape as the Bodhi Society. Several of its first recruits were highly placed members of society who had the means to provide financial support for various activities, such as publishing some of Taixu's early works."¹² At a good point, Taixu knew that he should open a new history of Chinese Buddhism's reform. In this way, Charles writes, "he organized like-minded believers into societies for the joint practice of nianfo so that their practice would, through the mechanism of sympathetic resonance (ganying), allow each practitioner to enjoy the benefit of everyone's practice, thus maximizing the purifying effect."¹³

The other significant achievement of Taixu could be found in his organizational skills to link Buddhist systems. This link will communicate the association of worldwide Chinese Buddhism in different countries. Charles expresses, "Members of this organization would donate all of their private property to it and settle into Buddhist communities, within which each would receive what they needed to maintain an appropriate standard of living. Significantly, Zang says that the result of this plan would be to bring about a

⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰ Wank, "Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism," 222 - 223.

¹¹ Ibid., 222 - 223.

¹² Charles, *Taixu's On The Establishment*, 17 - 18.

¹³ Ibid., 19.

‘magnificent Pure Land in this present world’”¹⁴

Taixu’s thought: the need for Buddhist solutions to accord with modern trends; the centrality of grasping at life and property in the genesis of current conflict; the need for a Buddhist association and the establishment of ideal Buddhist communities; the need for cooperation with local governments; and the use of a term analogous to Taixu’s ‘Pure Land in the Human Realm’ to describe the final result.”¹⁵ From those points above, Charles would like to show people Taixu’s ideas in the form of reform of his goal. On the other hand, Charles says, “Nevertheless, Taixu appears to have built on ideas that were in the air when developing this concept, and one may well wonder whether or not he would have come up with the ‘Pure Land in the Human Realm’ without these influences.”¹⁶

It is pressing on significant achievements of Ven. Taixu, Charles writes, “When Taixu wrote his Essay in 1926, the Republican government had not yet begun the task of determining its religious policies (Nedostup 2009, 16), leaving Taixu free to imagine an ideal cooperative relationship between Buddhism and the state. This dream of Buddhism working closely with the government and receiving its full support pervades the vision of the Essay.”¹⁷ In the end, Taixu’s life is confirmed by Jiang Canteng. It took at least twenty years for it to reach. Charles has not forgotten to press ‘*On The Establishment Of The Pure Land In The Human Realm*’ again. “However, our purpose here has simply been to contextualize the Essay by placing it within the arcs of Taixu’s life and modern Chinese history. With that done, we may now move on to a survey of past Western writings on Taixu and an analysis of the Essay’s contents.”¹⁸

IV. NON-SUCCEEDING PLACES IN VEN. TAIXU’S ENDEAVORS

In national leadership, in 1912, Ven. Taixu and his friend, Renshan, were struggling with involvement. The reason for working at Jinshan Monastery in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, they organized to make a new modern school. Taixu and his friend did not let the abbot of Jinshan Monastery know their ideal to make plan for Buddhist advancement activities, but it was built as a school. After that, they were allowed to create their goal but were shocked to find out that “they had been tricked. Violent altercations broke out, foreshadowing a long period of conflict and distrust between conservatives and radical reformers in the sangha.”¹⁹

A different place Ven. Taixu was not successful with his endeavor under the totalitarianism of Maoism. Religion was excruciating at this time. The authoritarianism of Maoists declined even obedience. In *Lay Buddhism in*

¹⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹⁵ Ibid., 21.

¹⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹⁷ Ibid., 28.

¹⁸ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹ Darui, “An Interfaith Dialogue,” 170.

Contemporary China: Social Engagements and Political Regulations, Zhang and Zhe commented:²⁰

The Anti-Right campaigns of 1957 eroded the last vestiges of Buddhism's autonomy. Then, the Cultural Revolution (1966 - 1976) brought an unprecedented degree of destruction to Buddhism, as both pro-communist and traditional forms of Buddhism were prohibited. Temples were destroyed, and monks were forced to return to lay life. Countless Buddhist relics (including the stūpa of Taixu in Zhejiang) were destroyed.

Zhang and Zhe

In another case, Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese monk, faced many similar challenges as Ven. Taixu. Thich Nhat Hanh was exiled to another country and was not allowed to return to his country.

In an *Introduction: Reformulating "Socially Engaged Buddhism" as an Analytical Category*, Jessica and Rongdao write, "Throughout Lotus in the Sea of Fire, Nhat Hanh makes two arguments that we believe are typical of socially engaged rhetoric: he rejects 'disengaged' Buddhism, either as a false stereotype or as the result of political oppression; and, he posits 'engaged' Buddhism as its authentic and original form. In other words, he argues that authentic Buddhism is always engaged in society."²¹

In the endeavors of Ven. Taixu and Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh had the organizational skills to set up their goals, but it did not mean that they had someplace not successful.

However, at the end of their lives, they gave life to their endeavors of reforms.

V. EXISTING UNDER CAUSES OF VEN. TAI XU'S FAILURE TO REFORM IN THE CHINESE SANGHA COMMUNITY

Ven. Taixu gave an entire life to reform for Buddhism. He had the best endeavors to find a new way to Chinese Buddhism and the next generation. However, Taixu faced many problems in conflicts with the sangha. The cause happened because they disagreed with the new goal of reform from Taixu. In the end, Taixu knew what he needed to do as a Buddhist leader, and he did it by himself. He believed and followed his private path as Buddha and Bodhisattva blessed. Whenever Ven. Taixu saw problems in his sangha, such as corruption or idleness; he hurt himself. His heart broke in pain. For these reasons, as a leader of the sangha, Taixu endeavored to build a new education system. He hoped that his next generation of the sangha would improve and spread Buddhist education to the whole world through their ideals. Dr. Long Darui commented:

Knowing Chinese weaknesses, Taixu often emphasized Mahayana Buddhism because he considered it to be capable of accepting outside

²⁰ Zhang and Zhe, "Lay Buddhism," 38.

²¹ Main and Rongdao, "Introduction: Reformulating," 13.

influences, including the work of academics from all countries and the heritage of Chinese culture over the past thousand years. He thought it necessary to attach equal importance to all doctrines arising from the eight sects of Chinese Buddhism. He also held that Chinese Buddhism should not only absorb Chinese Confucianism and Taoism but should also learn from Christianity. This was where the differences lay between Taixu and Yuanying regarding their respective views as to how best to absorb things from other schools of thought.²²

Long Darui

Ven. Taixu recognized problems in Buddhist sangha as corruption or idleness. These painful scenes needed to be set up in a new way. It was an inner conflict that Taixu had problems with his sangha community. Buddhist monks' and nuns' responsibilities were not only to chant for dead people or different regular practices.

Instead, their responsibilities needed to engage and improve themselves in a new reform for their education. The Buddhist Sangha's organization needed to breathe fresh air of positive energy. It was a big challenge for Taixu to face, and he endeavored to find a new way to the sangha. However, Ven. Taixu had his existing causes of failure to reform the Chinese Sangha community. Jessica and Rongdao commented, "To simply label the first 'bad' and the second 'good' does not answer this question. Nevertheless, we should say more about the nature of this continuity - the shared soteriology and moral reasoning which lie at the heart of our analysis."²³ On the other hand, they said, "Socially engaged Buddhism is the mirror image of secularization, and will view social action within the 'secular,' as it is structured by a given polity, to be essentially religious and fundamental to awakening. And, interestingly, it will view action within the 'religious,' as structured by a given polity, to be non-essential."²⁴ Ven. Taixu's new reform was an engaged Buddhism and an educated organization. To him, Buddhism is a belief and practice that enhances human life. It is not a religion that chants only for death. Similar to Jessica and Rongdao, Zhang and Zhe commented:²⁵

In this respect, Taixu, who with his "Buddhism for human life" is considered to be the closest to the Nationalist regime, did not renounce his universalist stance, the moral supremacy of religion, nor did he give up on an ideal of independence for monastic authority. Taixu and his disciples maintained that Buddhist cosmology constituted a foundation of values for a genuine democratic state. They were opposed to radical nationalism and had neutralized to a certain degree the xenophobic content of nationalism with the Buddhist notion of "non-self" (*Wuwo Mffe*). Using non-self, Taixu put forward a nationalism that was non-violent and non-existentialist.

²² Darui, "An Interfaith Dialogue," 175.

²³ Main and Rongdao, "Introduction: Reformulating," 3.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 3.

²⁵ Zhang and Zhe, "Lay Buddhism," 52.

Zhang and Zhe

As a sangha leader, Taixu endeavored to build the beauty of change in an organization. In his thought, Buddhist education should be vital in a beautiful community. Taixu saw that both Buddhism and Christianity had problems in their ways. It did not develop as his wishes. In *Toward a modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's reforms*, Don writes, "A moderate number of educated persons were appreciative of the Buddhist heritage and hoped expectantly for Buddhist reform and revitalization, but many more concluded that there were few Chinese Buddhist masters of ability anymore, that the average monk had little education or moral virtue, and that institutional Buddhism was effectively and justifiably moribund. Most members of the Chinese sangha were seen to be primarily engaged in performing rites for the dead for personal financial gain and were judged largely incapable of contributing much of significance toward national goals."²⁶

Taixu concluded that the Buddhist Sangha and the Christian community faced many similar dilemmas. Ministers and monks were struggling to understand the real purpose of their religious mission. They did not have a strong belief in themselves or what their purposes were. As the leader of communities, Taixu soon found out his view on reforming. However, it was an uneasy goal to serve or say it out. Ven. Taixu received many unexpected conflicts from the sangha and other groups. Don continued his comments:²⁷

Turning to Buddhism in China, as it is at present, the first thing to be said is that *externally*, that is, regarding temple buildings, processions, the grandeur of public festivals, etc., Buddhism is decidedly on the decline. In all the provinces, many temples and monasteries have been ruined or badly damaged by the soldiers or by the young people ... In many places, the temple lands and other sources of revenue have been confiscated by the authorities, and the funds used for educational purposes. As a consequence, the monks are hustled back into some of the corner buildings where they can't conduct religious ceremonies decently. In some districts, the temples seemingly stand intact, but even there, a marked decrease in income is noticed, and the monks have to struggle hard to secure the most necessary means of living. The result is that many of the inmates are driven to the big cities, where they join the despised crowds of "business monks," who operate in rented houses in bigger or smaller teams, as exorcists or as common priests, chanting masses for departed souls or practicing all kinds of obscure divining methods.

Pittman Don

On the other hand, Taixu had his ideals to reorganize the structure of his own Sangha. He did a restructure and reformed the group and created a perfect organization system within the Buddhist society. Step by step, Taixu tried to keep the sangha community in order. Don expresses on this way,

²⁶ Don, *Toward a modern Chinese Buddhism*, 28.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

“Chan master Yekai (1852 - 1922) was elected to serve as president and a basic national structure was rapidly developed, the association failed to operate effectively within the year. Its new periodicals, which Taixu had been appointed to edit, ceased publication for lack of adequate funding. Apathy within the sangha, factional distrust, organizational inexperience, and general economic difficulties were all contributing factors.”²⁸

From another perspective, David Wank has his different and strong idea about Taixu more than Don Pittman. David says, “Furthermore, his peripatetic travels and personal fame in China and abroad, as well as his close contacts with members of the political elite, led many to see him as a publicity hound. But Pittman maintains that Taixu was misunderstood. He cultivated elites because of the reality that a revitalized Sangha would need approval by those who held political power.”²⁹ Furthermore, David keeps his comments: “His foreign travels were efforts to proselytize and engage others in interfaith dialogue. For example, Pittman cites Taixu’s trip abroad in 1939 - 1940 as a representative of the Nationalist government, which expected him to enlist foreign support for China’s war of resistance against the Japanese invaders.”³⁰ Alternatively, an intense pressing on David’s idea, “Taixu’s official status allowed him to meet with many people on his travels, but it seemed that he was intent on discussing the Dharma and never mentioned the war effort.”³¹

They were going through the existing under causes of Ven. Taixu’s failure to reform the Chinese Sangha community, many different authors, gave their thinking negative and positive ways to Taixu. However, Taixu did his best for the Buddhist sangha. Surely, Taixu rebuilt a new organization for the Chinese Buddhist sangha, and he did it well. Therefore, he did not need to look back from his effect.

VI. VEN. TAI XU’S ATTEMPTS TO REFORM ASPECTS BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND BUDDHISM

Ven. Taixu often met with Chinese Christians, and he supported their Union in Chongqing of Chinese Religions. Furthermore, Taixu was in meetings between Buddhism and Christianity to reform a new organization for both religions. In *An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians*, Dr. Darui Long writes, “Seeing what Christians had done, Taixu pointed out that ‘Buddhists should fulfill their obligations as persons, but they also should do something to benefit the public. The Christians devote themselves to advancing the general social welfare. They propagate their teachings by practicing altruism. This is something of significance, and we may adopt it.’”³²

People will not believe that when Taixu was young, he did not accept

²⁸ Ibid., pg. 51

²⁹ David, “Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism,” 223.

³⁰ Ibid., 223.

³¹ Ibid., 223.

³² Darui, “An Interfaith Dialogue,” 177.

Christian ideology or agree with any teaching of Christianity. He knew that World War I had destroyed many lives and many countries, and it was a terrible conflict but less evil than the Westerners' decision. Moreover, Taixu did not believe that China and Christianity could coexist, and that would be the same as having Christianity and Buddhism together in the same setting. Taixu thought that Christianity and Buddhism's beliefs were entirely different. For those reasons, Taixu rejected the teachings of Christianity.

However, Taixu changed his mind after his journey to different countries, and he recognized the Chinese Buddhist organization's need to change its face. Darui Long writes, "Chinese scholars have mainly focused on Taixu's thought and his activities in terms of the reorganization of the Sangha system that he proposed to accomplish. His call for a dialogue between Chinese Buddhism and Christianity has been generally neglected. Now, as this speech was delivered at a Christian university in Chengdu, one might ask: What was the response? Professor Holmes Welch asked a missionary who heard Taixu's speech about his impression of it. This record is not available in other Chinese sources."³³

In China, Taixu found the path of Mahayana Buddhism needed in his new reform. Why? Because it did not update for centuries. Mahayana practitioners could not bring their path close to life. Instead, Buddha's teaching should engage in daily living. Don Pittman says, "In response to secular humanists, Taixu argued that their position was fundamentally relativistic. They had misjudged the beneficial contribution that a modern form of Buddhism could make to China's reconstruction and emerging global culture. In response to Christian evangelists, he claimed that a theistic faith was no longer tenable in the modern scientific world. The particular form of civilization that Christianity had spawned was destructive of human community everywhere."³⁴

Ven. Taixu exceedingly admired the organizational abilities of Christians. He believed that Chinese Buddhism needed to adopt a comprehensive view. Chinese Buddhism should not hold an old culture and stay in the same step. Taixu expected Chinese Buddhism to update and improve in a new reform. Darui Long writes, "It has exerted a tremendous impact on Chinese life in such areas as modern culture, social benefits, and human spirituality. Chinese Buddhism, however, has made few contributions to our society, though it has a long history and has been very popular in China."³⁵

In his later life, Ven. Taixu respected Christian doctrines, and he looked forward to the Chinese's improvement in their spiritual life as Christianity did. On the other hand, Darui Long writes, "When we recall and analyze the background behind the interfaith dialogue that Taixu maintained with Christians during the period in question, we can better our understanding of

³³ Ibid., 175.

³⁴ Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, 11.

³⁵ Darui, "An Interfaith Dialogue," 178.

such efforts at communication among religions. At least we can foster a kind of mutual understanding among people by tracing the significance of the dialogue that took place more than a half century ago.”³⁶

In different thinking about Taixu to Don Pittman and Long Darui, David Wank has his private seeing that Taixu tried to reform Chinese Buddhism as a modernization. Nevertheless, David says, “His reform efforts were squarely in the mode of Chinese intellectuals who saw themselves as using Western institutions to ‘modernize’ China while rejecting the ideas and values they were seen as harboring.”³⁷

David agrees with Don and Long that Taixu admired the organization of Christian activities. However, Taixu did not wholly accept the theology of Christianity. David believes that Taixu recognized a wrong belief of Christian upon on blessing of god. David writes, “His modernizing efforts adapted such Christian institutions as social welfare, modern schools, proselytizing, and lay participation, but for attaining salvation he focused on Buddhist theology.”³⁸ On the other hand, David comments:³⁹

He rationalized Buddhist theology in an approach that Pittman terms ‘ethnic piety.’ Taixu interpreted the visionary dimensions of truth in Buddhism as norms for this-worldly behavior. He held that the Buddhist ideal of emptiness could be achieved not by renouncing this-worldly concerns but rather through selfless engagement with social and political realities. Not only could the path to salvation be found in becoming a monk or nun, but it could be trod by any layperson who followed Buddhist precepts in daily life.

David L. Wank

Going through comments from different authors to Taixu, those writings above give more details about Taixu’s attempts to reform aspects between Christianity and Buddhism. Suppose Christianity is known in the whole world for its successful system of educational endeavors and its strong traditions. At the same time, Buddhism has a long history and a power of compassion and wisdom. Taixu had an excellent view of an Interfaith Dialogue, and he endeavored to refresh Chinese Buddhism. Christianity and Buddhism had a good connection in a new reform through an Interfaith Dialogue as Taixu wished.

VII. ANALYZED VIEWS OF VEN. TAIXU’S SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

Ven. Taixu had a hard-working to reform Chinese Buddhism for his entire life. His disciples, Yinshun and Xingyun, became influential Buddhist leaders in Taiwan. They followed and kept Taixu’s reform to continue. Taixu’s disciples have spread their Buddhist organizational reform to human beings in different countries as Taixu did. Dr. Darui Long comments:

³⁶ Ibid., 168.

³⁷ Wank, “Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism,” 222 - 223.

³⁸ Ibid., 222-223.

³⁹ Ibid., 223.

Another student, Xingyun, also went to Taiwan and established the Fo-kuang Shan Buddhist movement, which is the most successful propagator of Chinese Buddhism world, with centers in Southeast Asia, America, Australia, and Europe. Xingyun has also established a Buddhist high school and college in Taiwan and a Buddhist university in Los Angeles, namely, Hsi Lai University. His temple in Los Angeles, also called Hsi Lai Temple, is the largest Buddhist temple in America and was the host of the 1989 Cobb-Abe Theological Encounter with Buddhism Conference involving the leading Christian theologians in the West.⁴⁰

Long Darui

Although Taixu had his reform endeavors and received good results, he received failures under the causes of the Chinese Buddhist sangha. Taixu had significant conflicts happening to sangha by his reform. The Chinese Buddhist organization did not agree with his ideals of adapting Westerner's spiritual cultures.

They would like to keep their old ones. Taixu faced too many problems between himself and the sangha. For those reasons, he got his failures. In *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms*, Don Pittman writes, "Taixu's assessment of his ultimate failure to convert the majority of the sangha to his point of view about the need for a complete 'Buddhist revolution' (*fojiao geming*) referred not to the extremity of his ideas but to his unfortunate inability to inspire and lead people in a difficult and divisive time."⁴¹ Furthermore, Don presses, "Holmes Welch, however, in *The Buddhist Revival in China*, asserts that Taixu's most serious failing was that he did not seem 'to have pondered deeply enough on whether, if Chinese Buddhism was reformed in the manner he proposed, it would still be Buddhist or even Chinese.'"⁴²

Like Taixu, Thich Nhat Hanh had faced failure with his sangha in Vietnam. The government and the sangha did not accept his reforms. Moreover, engaged Buddhism and new reforms were strange to an old culture for many centuries. From those same points, Taixu and Thich Nhat Hanh received their failures. In *Introduction: Reformulating "Socially Engaged Buddhism" as an Analytical Category*, Jessica L. Main and Rongdao Lai write, "To illustrate a few features of our revised definition, we will take a closer look at the early writings of the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, to highlight the ways that he embodies the continuity between prewar and postwar socially engaged Buddhism. Next, as an example of resistance to secularism typical of socially engaged Buddhism, we discuss the political struggles of the Chinese reformer, Taixu, and Chinese student-monks active during the first half of the twentieth century. These actors attempted to create the conditions for, and to legitimate, Buddhist social action."⁴³

⁴⁰ Darui, "An Interfaith Dialogue," 174.

⁴¹ Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴³ Main and Rongdao, "Introduction: Reformulating," 8.

Between 1928 and 1940, Ven. Taixu came to Vietnam to visit. Vietnamese monks and nuns knew him as a Chinese Buddhist Revival. A reformist Vietnamese monk, Tri Hai, propagated the reforms of Taixu in Vietnam. The other famous Vietnamese monk, named Tri Quang, also admired Ven. Taixu's endeavors of reform.

In *The Influence of Chinese Master Taixu on Buddhism in Vietnam*, Elise A. DeVido writes, "Indeed, the Vietnamese monk Tri Quang (b. 1924), a leader in the 1960s Buddhist Struggle Movement, praised Taixu as "the first person to promote Buddhist integration and standardization... (he) organized many conferences for Buddhists all over the world to come together, he drafted a charter for Buddhists in the whole world, he proposed meetings for Buddhists all over the world. He's the first person to say, to standardize and integrate Buddhism, we should spread Buddhism to Europe and America."⁴⁴

Analyzed views of Taixu, he is a reformer and leader of Chinese Buddhism and a champion of Interfaith Dialogue. He passed away in 1947, and subsequent generations of disciples have kept spreading his reforms to many different countries. Darui Long says, "Exhausted from his many labors, he died in 1947, by which time he had barely succeeded in winning control of the Chinese Buddhist association. Taixu's theory aimed at offering benefits to the society and therefore, its functionally lay in its ability to meet the ethical needs of society."⁴⁵ Taixu went through his successes and failures to build his reform. He faced many difficult things to succeed in his goal. Like Taixu, Thich Nhat Hanh used to leave Vietnam to rebuild his new reform sangha in French, America, or other countries when Vietnam's political ideologies did not accept his Buddhist modernization. Both Taixu and Thich Nhat Hanh faced socialist, fascist, and democratic or struggling in wars, but they jumped over those to achieve their goals.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a beautiful picture has been drawn about Taixu's entire life through the six steps above, helping readers recognize his great reformed Buddhism. "*An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians*"⁴⁶ was a modern system. This affiliated organization's religions embraced religious communities. In Taixu's new creation, he received the most significant achievements, but he also received non-succeeding places in his endeavors.

Ven. Taixu and Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh recognized that Buddhism must bring a newly organized system to obtain peace, freedom, and acceptance. Therefore, they renewed the beliefs and practices of Buddhism with their views of wisdom. Both received many disastrous results from the government and sangha; however, they endeavored to succeed in their personal goals.

⁴⁴ DeVido "The Influence of Chinese," 421.

⁴⁵ Darui, "An Interfaith Dialogue," 173,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 167 – 189.

Moreover, they spread a fresh air of engagement to the next generations, different countries, and other religions. Taixu used his youth attempts to reform aspects between Christianity and Buddhism, and he did it well even though he faced many harmful conflicts. Nowadays, Taixu's disciples, a next-generation, have continued to build many Buddhist Universities in different countries. They have tried to spread an excellent reform organization as Taixu's dream. Modernized Buddhism has to start with the effects of Buddhist leaders, and Taixu was a great one.

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ORIGIN OF BUDDHISM AND ITS TIMELESS WISDOM: UNLOCKING A FUTURE FOR GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

This article explores the origin of Buddhism and its timeless wisdom, revealing the profound relevance of Buddhist teachings to global sustainable development. By examining the historical context of Buddhism's emergence and its core principles, this research demonstrates how Buddhist wisdom can inform and inspire sustainable development practices. From the interconnectedness of all living beings to the importance of mindfulness and compassion, Buddhist teachings offer a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities of sustainable development. This article argues that integrating Buddhist timeless wisdom into sustainable development efforts can unlock a more equitable, just, and environmentally conscious future for all. By integrating ancient Buddhist wisdom with modern sustainability insights, this article seeks to foster a more holistic and sustainable approach to global development, illuminating Buddhism's enduring relevance in addressing the complex sustainability challenges of our time.

Keywords: *Buddhism, sustainable development, timeless wisdom, global development, Buddhist universities, mindfulness, compassion, interconnectedness.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The world is at a critical juncture, facing unprecedented challenges that threaten the very foundations of our existence. Climate change, environmental degradation, social inequality, and economic instability are just a few of the pressing issues that demand our attention and collective action.¹ As we navigate these complex problems, it is essential to draw upon timeless wisdom

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¹ IPCC (2020); UNDP (2020): <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

that offers insights into the human condition, our relationship with the natural world, and the path to a more sustainable and equitable future.

One such source of timeless wisdom is Buddhism, an ancient philosophy that originated over 2,500 years ago in ancient India.² Founded by Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, or the “Awakened One,” Buddhism offers a profound and nuanced understanding of the human experience, the nature of reality, and the path to liberation.³ At its core, Buddhism teaches the importance of mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom, providing a framework for living that is both deeply personal and profoundly universal.

The Buddhist concept of “interdependence” (*Paticcasamuppāda*), highlights the intricate web of relationships between human beings, other living beings, and the natural environment.⁴

Furthermore, Buddhist teachings on the nature of suffering (*dukkha*) and the causes of suffering (*samudaya*) can provide valuable lessons for addressing the root causes of our global challenges.⁵ By cultivating mindfulness, wisdom, and compassion, we may develop a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between human actions, environmental degradation, and social inequality. The Buddha’s teachings have had a profound impact on human thought and culture.⁶

This exploration of the origin of Buddhism and its timeless wisdom offers a unique opportunity to unlock a future for global sustainable development. By drawing upon the insights and principles of Buddhism, we may cultivate a more nuanced understanding of the human experience, our relationship with the natural world, and the path to a more sustainable and equitable future.

1.1 The birth of Siddhartha Gautama⁷

The birth of Siddhartha Gautama, *the Buddha*, is a significant event in Buddhist history and tradition. The Buddha was born in Lumbini, Nepal in 563 BCE. This historic town was formally identified by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE, who honored the Buddha’s birth with a commemorative pillar. (Pic. 1)⁸

² Hastings (1922): 669.

³ Rahula, W. (1974): 168.

⁴ Macy, J. (1991): 56

⁵ Bodhi, B. (2010): 32 - 35

⁶ Bodhi, B. (2000): 297 - 303

⁷ Lamotte, É. (1988): 159 - 165

⁸ DN 14; Conningham, R. A. E. (2013): 121 - 125; Conningham, R. A. E., & Ali, I. (2007): 103 - 128; Rhys Davids, T. W. (Trans.). (1899): 172 - 196.

S. Hultzsch, E. (1925): 12 - 27, 51 - 55, 82 - 88.



Pic. 1. Ashoka's Pillar Inscription (249 BCE): Discovered in Lumbini, this inscription by Emperor Ashoka mentions the site as the birthplace of Buddha.

1.2. A Clash of ideals: Conflict with the Sangh⁹

As war loomed between the Sakya and Koliya kingdoms over *Rohini river's* water rights. Siddhartha, a peace advocate, opposed the Sakya Sangh's decision. When ignored by the saṅgha, he selflessly offered himself for exile or execution to protect his family. This act marked a turning point, leading to his spiritual journey, disillusionment with worldly pursuits, and eventually, the founding of Buddhism.¹⁰

1.3. Siddhartha's renunciation¹¹

Troubled by suffering, Prince Siddhartha renounced his luxurious life to seek enlightenment. He left his palace and family, embarking on a spiritual journey. Unsatisfied with various teachers, he realized true liberation came through self-realization. Under a Bodhi tree, he attained profound spiritual awakening, becoming the Buddha, the Enlightened One.¹²

1.4. In search of the middle way¹³

Siddhartha studied under renowned teachers like Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta, then practiced extreme asceticism for six years. However, he found these practices insufficient to liberate him from suffering. Siddhartha abandoned asceticism and adopted the "Middle Way," a path that avoids extremes of indulgence and austerity. The Middle Way is a path that emphasizes balance, moderation, and wisdom. It involves cultivating mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom while avoiding extremes of indulgence and austerity.

⁹ Siddhartha's Path to Enlightenment, *Vinaya Pitaka, Mahavagga*, Chapter 1, Section 6 - 8.

¹⁰ 1. Horner, I. B. (Trans.). (1938 - 1952): 3 - 5.

2. Nanamoli, B. (Trans.). (1995): 256 - 60.

3. Ambedkar, B. R. (1957): 73 - 78.

¹¹ *Dhp* 153 - 154; *Buddhavamsa*, Chapter 1, Verse 1 - 5.

¹² Rhys Davids, T. W., & Oldenberg, H. (Trans.). (1882): 1 - 5.

¹³ Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu Bodhi (2002): 85 - 86.

1.5. A spark of enlightenment

Siddhartha sat on the bank of the river *Niranjana* in Gaya, Bihar, India, under the Bodhi Tree, meditated intensely, overcoming obstacles and purifying his mind through four stages:

- (1) Reason and inquiry
- (2) Concentration
- (3) Equanimity and mindfulness
- (4) Purification

With newfound clarity, he realized the world's suffering and his power to illuminate a path to liberation. Filled with compassion, loving-kindness, and wisdom, Siddhartha attained *enlightenment on Vesak full moon day*, and became the Buddha.¹⁴

1.5.1. Beyond dogma: The Buddha's rejection of unexamined truths¹⁵

The following are the ideas which the Buddha rejected:

- (1) Metaphysical speculation: He condemned pondering questions like "Who am I?", "Where did I come from?", and "Where do I go after death."
- (2) Dualistic views of the soul: He disagreed with idea that the soul is separate from the body or identical to it, sensations, or consciousness.
- (3) Nihilistic beliefs: He rejected pessimistic views promoted by some religious figures.
- (4) Heretical doctrines: He opposed views held by those considered unorthodox.
- (5) Creationism: He dismissed the idea of a divine creator or the soul originating from a cosmic being.
- (6) The beginning of the universe: He rejected the notion of a definable start to cosmic evolution.
- (7) The existence of the soul: He either denied or ignored the concept of the soul.

Thus, He rejected abstract metaphysical concepts and favoured a more pragmatic approach to understanding reality.¹⁶

1.5.2. Innovations in thought: The Buddha's synthesis

- (1) Law of cause and effect: He accepted the great grand law of cause and effect with its corollaries but rejected fatalism
- (2) Karma: He redefined Karma, moving away from fatalistic interpretations of past actions determining the present. He emphasized the present moment and the impact of current actions.
- (3) Rebirth: He replaced the concept of transmigration (reincarnation

¹⁴ Ambedkar, B. R. (1957): 73 - 78; Rahula, W. (1974): 11 - 17.

¹⁵ AN 3.65.

¹⁶ Ambedkar, B. R. (1957): 103 - 105.

of the soul) with the doctrine of rebirth, focusing on the continuous cycle of existence.

(4) *Moksha*: He substituted the concept of moksha (liberation of the soul) with *nibbāna*, a state of ultimate peace and freedom from suffering.

1.5.3. The path to liberation: What the Buddha accepted¹⁷

Gautama Buddha emphasized the central role of the mind:

(1) Mind as the Creator: The mind precedes all things and shapes reality.

(2) Mind as the Source of Good and Evil: Our thoughts and actions, both positive and negative, originate from the mind.

(3) Mind as the Object of Cultivation: Purifying the mind is the essence of true religion.

(4) Practice over Theory: True religion lies in action, living ethically, not mere belief, or not just in adhering to religious texts.

By understanding and controlling the mind, one can attain enlightenment and liberation from suffering.¹⁸

II. THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING

After His enlightenment, He spent the rest of his life teaching his insights to others, establishing the Buddhist community, and guiding his followers on the path to enlightenment. The Buddha's teachings emphasized the following key principles:

(1) The Four Noble Truths;

(2) The Noble Eightfold Path;

(3) The Three Jewels: The Buddha, the Dhamma (the teachings) and the *Saṅgha* (the community).

(4) The Five Precepts;

(5) The Three Marks of Existence: The impermanence, suffering, and non-self-nature of all phenomena.

2.1 The Buddha's first sermon

The Buddha's first sermon was given to five ascetics in the Deer Park at Sarnath, Varanasi, India. In this sermon, HE taught the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, Ten *Pāramitās*, *Pañcasīla's*, *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, and many more.¹⁹

¹⁷ SN 56.11; SN 45. 8.

¹⁸ Ambedkar, B. R. (1957): 103 - 105.

¹⁹ SN 56.11, circa 29 - 19 BCE. See also *Vinaya Mahavagga* (I. 1 - 10) (Hirakawa, 1990, circa 21 - 15 BCE); *Mahavagga* (MSV I. 1 - 10) (Lamotte, 1958, circa 200 - 150 BCE); *Lalitavistara Sutra* (Chapter 22) (Foucher, 1949, circa 200 - 300 CE); *Fo-shuo fa-chi jing* (T. 764) (Taisho Tripitaka, translated by Kumarajiva in 406 CE); *Ashvagoshā's Buddhacarita* (Chapter 14) (Olivelle, 2008, circa 100 - 150 CE); and *The Tibetan translation of the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta* (Tibetan Buddhist Canon, circa 8th -9th century CE).



Pic. 2. A Monument to the Buddha's Historic First Sermon, the Wheel of Dhamma turned, circa 528 BCE, Sarnath, Varanasi, India

About Monument

This 5th-century Gupta period Statue of Preaching Buddha embodies the Buddha's compassionate essence. The pedestal features a Dhammachakka (Wheel of Dhamma) flanked by deer, symbolizing the Deer Park. The image depicts the Buddha's First Sermon to five disciples, conveying a message of compassion and wisdom.

2.2. Four Noble Truths²⁰

(i) The Truth of Suffering (*Dukkha*): Siddhartha realized that suffering is an inherent part of life.

(ii) The Truth of the Origin of Suffering (*Samudaya*): He understood that suffering arises from craving, aversion, and ignorance.

(iii) The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (*Nirodha*): Siddhartha realized that suffering can be overcome by eliminating its causes.

(iv) The Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering (*Magga*): He understood that the path to the cessation of suffering is *the Noble Eightfold Path*.

2.3 Noble Eightfold Path²¹

The Eightfold Path is a fundamental concept in Buddhism, providing a framework for ethical and spiritual development.

(i) Right Understanding (*Sammā Ditt̥hi*): Developing a deep understanding of the true nature of reality, including the Four Noble Truths and the law of karma.²²

(ii) Right Intention (*sammā-saṅkappa*): Cultivating a commitment to renounce worldly attachments and to develop a mind of compassion, loving-

²⁰ SN 56. 11.

²¹ SN 56.11.

²² Rahula, W. (1959): 45 - 50.

kindness, and wisdom.²³

(iii) Right Speech (*Sammā Vācā*): Practicing truthful, kind, and wise communication, avoiding false, divisive, harsh, or idle speech.²⁴

(iv) Right Action (*Sammā Kammanta*): Engaging in wholesome actions, avoiding harm to oneself or others, and cultivating compassion and kindness.²⁵

(v) Right Livelihood (*Sammā Ājīva*): Earning a living in a way that does not harm others, promoting well-being and sustainability.²⁶

(vi) Right Effort (*Sammā Vāyāma*): Cultivating the four right efforts: preventing unwholesome states from arising, abandoning unwholesome states that have arisen, developing wholesome states, and maintaining wholesome states.²⁷

(vii) Right Mindfulness (*Sammā Sati*): Developing mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects, cultivating a non-judgmental awareness of the present moment.²⁸

(viii) Right Concentration (*Sammā Samādhi*): Developing concentration through various meditation techniques, leading to a unified and focused mind.²⁹

2.4. Ten Pāramitās³⁰

(i) *Dāna Pāramī* (Generosity): Cultivating generosity and giving without attachment or expectation of reward.³¹

(ii) *Sīla Pāramī* (Morality): Practicing moral conduct, such as following the Five Precepts and cultivating a sense of ethics and responsibility.³²

(iii) *Nekkhamma Pāramī* (Renunciation): Cultivating detachment and renunciation of worldly desires and attachments.³³

(iv) *Prajñā Pāramī* (Wisdom): Developing wisdom through the study of Buddhist scriptures, critical thinking, and meditation.³⁴

(v) *Vīrya Pāramī* (Effort): Cultivating effort, energy and perseverance in spiritual practice.³⁵

(vi) *Khanti Pāramī* (Patience): Practicing patience, tolerance, and

²³ Bodhi, B. (2010): 98 - 109.

²⁴ Harvey, P. (2013): 197 - 206.

²⁵ Rahula, W. (1959): 45 - 50.

²⁶ Bodhi, B. (2010): 98 - 109.

²⁷ Harvey, P. (2013): 197 - 206.

²⁸ Analayo, B. (2013): 217 - 219.

²⁹ Bodhi, B. (2010): 98 - 109.

³⁰ *Dhp* 95 - 96, 273 - 274; *Buddhavaṃsa*: Chapter 2, verses 58 - 71; *Mahayana Sūtras*: Such as the *Prajnaparamita Sūtras*, the *Lotus Sūtra*, and the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*.

³¹ Bodhi, B. (2010): 98 - 109.

³² Harvey, P. (2013): 197 - 206.

³³ Bodhi, B. (2010): 98 - 109.

³⁴ Lopez, D. S. (2018): 64 - 66.

³⁵ Bodhi, B. (2010): 98 - 109.

acceptance in the face of adversity.³⁶

(vii) *Sacca Pāramī* (Truthfulness): Cultivating honesty, integrity, and truthfulness in all interactions.³⁷

(viii) *Adhiṭṭhāna Pāramī* (Resolution): Developing determination, resolve, and commitment to spiritual practice.³⁸

(ix) *Metta Pāramī* (Loving-kindness): Cultivating loving-kindness, compassion, and empathy towards all living beings.³⁹

(x) *Upekkhā Pāramī* (Equanimity): Developing equanimity, balance, and composure in the face of changing circumstances.⁴⁰

2.5. Five Precepts (*Pañcasīla*)⁴¹

The *Pañcasīla*, also known as the Five Precepts, are a set of ethical guidelines in Buddhism that promote moral conduct and spiritual growth. These precepts are considered essential for lay Buddhists and are often recited and observed in Buddhist communities.

(i) *Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*: Abstain from harming living beings (*Ahimsā*): Avoid killing, harming, or causing suffering to any living being.⁴²

(ii) *Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*: Abstain from taking what is not given (*Asteya*): Avoid stealing, cheating, or taking something that does not belong to you.⁴³

(iii) *Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*: Abstain from sensual misconduct (*Kāmēsūmicchācārā*): Avoid engaging in sexual misconduct, such as adultery or sexual harassment

(iv) *Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*: Abstain from false speech (*Musāvādā*): Avoid lying, deceiving, or using harsh language.⁴⁴

(v) *Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*: Abstain from intoxicants (*Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā*): Avoid consuming intoxicants, such as alcohol or drugs, which can cloud the mind and lead to unwholesome actions.⁴⁵

³⁶ Harvey, P. (2013): 197 - 206.

³⁷ Rahula, W. (1959): 45 - 50.

³⁸ Lopez, D. S. (2018): 64 - 66.

³⁹ Bodhi, B. (2010): 98 - 109.

⁴⁰ Harvey, P. (2013): 97 - 206.

⁴¹ *Khuddakapatha* 3rd century BCE; *Dhammapada* 3rd century BCE; *Anguttara Nikaya* 3rd century BCE).

⁴² Rahula, W. (1959): 45 - 50.

⁴³ Bodhi, B. (2010): 98 - 109

⁴⁴ Rahula, W. (1959): 45 - 50

⁴⁵ Rhys Davids, T. W. (1903): 112 - 113.

2.6. *Pratityasamutpada* (Pali: *Paṭiccasamuppāda*)⁴⁶

It is a central concept in Buddhism, often translated as “dependent origination” or “interdependent arising.” It describes the process by which phenomena arise and exist in dependence on other factors and conditions.⁴⁷ *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is often summarized in the following formula: “Because this exists, that arises; because this does not exist, that does not arise.”⁴⁸

2.6.1. The twelve links of dependent origination⁴⁹

The Buddhist scriptures describe twelve links in the chain of dependent origination, which are often depicted as a wheel.⁵⁰ These links are:

- (i) *Avijjā* (ignorance)
- (ii) *Saṅkhāra* (volitional formations)
- (iii) *Viññāṇa* (consciousness)
- (iv) *Nāma-rūpa* (name and form)
- (v) *Salāyatana* (the six sense bases)
- (vi) *Phassa* (contact)
- (vii) *Vedanā* (feeling)
- (viii) *Taṇhā* (craving)
- (ix) *Upādāna* (clinging or grasping)
- (x) *Bhava* (becoming)
- (xi) *Jāti* (birth)
- (xii) *Jarāmaraṇa* (old age and death)

2.6.2. Implications of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*

This concept has far-reaching implications for our understanding of the self, the nature of reality, and the human condition.

(i) Rejection of a permanent self: Challenges the notion of a permanent self, suggesting it’s an illusion.⁵¹

(ii) Interdependence: Highlights that all phenomena exist in dependence on other factors.⁵²

(iii) Causality: Describes a causal process where each link depends on the previous one.⁵³

⁴⁶ *Sutta Nipāta* (c. 5th - 3rd century BCE); *Dhammapada* (c. 3rd century BCE); *Samyutta-nikāya* (c. 3rd century BCE).

⁴⁷ Rahula (1974): 53.

⁴⁸ SN 12.23.

⁴⁹ *Majjhima Nikāya*, Ed.V. Trenkner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols., PTS. London, 1948 - 1951. Tr. R. Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, 2 vols., PTS. London, p. 1888 - 2017.

⁵⁰ Rahula (1974), p. 55.

⁵¹ SN 22. 59.

⁵² Rahula, W. (1974): 55 - 60.

⁵³ SN 12. 23.

(iv) Emptiness: Implies that phenomena are empty of inherent existence, arising and existing in dependence on other factors.⁵⁴

III. BUDDHA'S ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY: A HOLISTIC APPROACH⁵⁵

Buddha's economic philosophy emphasizes balance, moderation, and social responsibility. Key principles include simple living, hard work, fair trade, honesty, wealth distribution, environmental sustainability, mindful consumption, social responsibility and compassion in economic decision-making. (Rhys Davids, T. W. 1900); Payutto, 1994; Müller, F. M. 1881; Oldenberg, H. 1879; Woodward, F. L. 1932).

Here are some key principles of Buddhist economics:

(i) Non-attachment to wealth: Buddhist economics emphasizes the importance of non-attachment to wealth and material possessions. (Rahula, 1974).

(ii) Mindful consumption: It encourages mindful consumption, which involves being aware of one's consumption patterns and avoiding unnecessary and excessive consumption (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

(iii) Simple living: It promotes simple living, which involves living a simple and modest life, free from unnecessary desires and attachments (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1976).

(iv) Compassion and social welfare: Buddhist economics emphasize the importance of compassion and social welfare. (Sivaraksa, 1992).

(v) Environmental sustainability: Buddhist economics recognizes the importance of environmental sustainability and encourages economic policies that promote the conservation of natural resources and the protection of the environment (Payutto, 1994).

3.1. Buddhist economic concepts:⁵⁶ Principles for a more equitable and sustainable economy

Buddhist economics offers a unique perspective on economic activity, one that prioritizes human well-being, social equity, and environmental sustainability.

(i) *Dāna* (Generity): Sharing resources, reducing poverty, and promoting well-being through charitable giving, volunteer work, and social entrepreneurship.

(ii) *Sīla* (Ethics): Practicing sustainable business, fair labor, and corporate social responsibility to ensure environmentally and socially responsible economic activity.

(iii) *Bhāvanā* (Mental Development): Cultivating mental clarity and awareness through meditation to make informed economic decisions balancing personal and societal needs.

⁵⁴ Nagarjuna. (1995): 69 - 115.

⁵⁵ Oldenberg, H. (1879): 287.

⁵⁶ DN 31, AN 4.79; DN 6.

3.2. Critique of mainstream economics⁵⁷

Buddhist economics offers a unique perspective on economic activity, one that challenges the fundamental principles of mainstream economics. Buddhist economics highlights the need for a more holistic and sustainable approach to economic development.

(i) Growth and profit: Buddhist economics emphasize the importance of balance and moderation in economic activity, recognizing that excessive growth and profit can have negative consequences.

(ii) Materialism: Buddhist economics, encourages a more mindful and moderate approach to consumption, recognizing that true happiness and fulfillment arise from within.

(iii) Individualism: Buddhist economics recognizes the interconnectedness of human and natural systems, emphasizing the importance of cooperation, mutual support, and collective well-being.

3.3. Implications for economic policy⁵⁸

Buddhist economics informs economic policy in three key areas:

(i) Redistributive policies: Reduce economic inequality and poverty through progressive taxation and social security programs (Rahula, 1974).

(ii) Environmental protection: Promote sustainable practices, renewable energy, and eco-friendly infrastructure to ensure a liveable future⁵⁹.

(iii) Social welfare: Prioritize human well-being through universal healthcare, free education, and social safety nets⁶⁰.

IV. BUDDHISM'S GLOBAL JOURNEY: A HISTORY OF PROPAGATION

Buddhism's global spread began in ancient India, where the Buddha established the *Saṅgha* to preserve and transmit his teachings. Over 2,500 years, Buddhism propagated worldwide, starting from north-eastern India, where Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment and shared his philosophy.

4.1 Early expansion in India (563 BCE - 250 CE)

Buddhism originated in north-eastern India, where Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment. The Buddha spent his life teaching, and Buddhism spread throughout northern India. King Ashoka (268 - 232 BCE) significantly promoted Buddhism, expanding its reach throughout his empire.

4.2 The Buddhist emperor: Ashoka's contributions to the propagation of Buddhism

Ashoka (304 - 232 BCE) was the greatest emperor who ruled over a vast portion of the Indian subcontinent.⁶¹

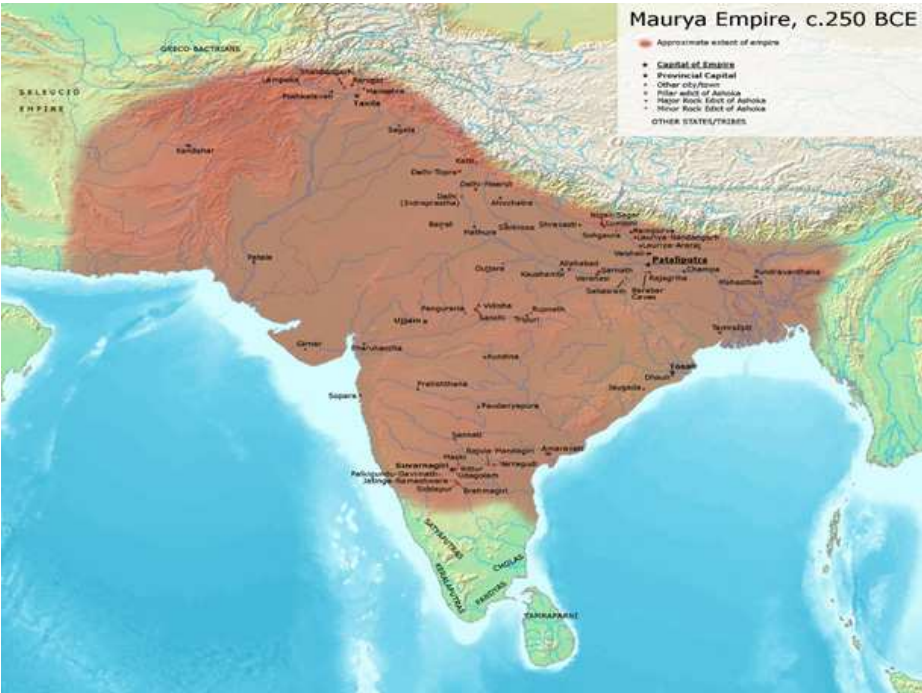
⁵⁷ Sivaraksa, S. (1992): 134 - 140.

⁵⁸ Rahula, W. (1974): 55 - 60.

⁵⁹ Payutto, P. A. (1994): 1 - 27.

⁶⁰ Sivaraksa, S. (1992): 147 - 152.

⁶¹ *Mahavamsa*. (circa 5th century CE). Translated by W. Geiger. (1912). *Mahavamsa: The*



Pic 3: The Ashoka’s empire

Ashoka propagated Buddhism throughout his vast empire, which stretched from present-day Afghanistan to Bangladesh and from Kashmir to Tamil Nadu (Thapar, 2012). Ashoka sent his son Mahinda to Sri Lanka to spread Buddhism (Geiger, 1912).

Ashoka established numerous Buddhist institutions, including monasteries, temples, and stupas (Seneviratna, 1994). According to Buddhist tradition, Emperor Ashoka built 84,000 stupas to enshrine the relics of the Buddha, spreading Buddhism throughout his vast empire. He also built the famous Ashoka Pillars, which featured the Lion Capital of Ashoka. He constructed the famous Sanchi Stupa (Cunningham, A., 1879)

great chronicle of Ceylon. London: Pali Text Society, 27.



Pic. 4. Echoes of the Past: The Sanchi Stupa, Built by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd Century BCE, Madhya Pradesh, India. Pic. 4. Symbol of Lion capital of ashoka.

4.3. Propagation of Buddhism beyond India

Ashoka's efforts led to the propagation of Buddhism beyond India to other parts of Asia, including present-day Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (Gombrich, 1988). Buddhism also spread to Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan.^{62, 63, 64, 65}



Pic 5. Journey of Buddhism beyond India

⁶² Dipavamsa. (circa 3rd - 4th century CE). Translated by H. Oldenberg. (1879). *The Dipavamsa: An ancient Buddhist historical record*. London: Williams and Norgate.

⁶³ I-Tsing. (circa 7th century CE). *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago* (A.D. 671 - 695). Translated by J. Takakusu. (1896): 159 - 165.

⁶⁴ Ilyeon. (circa 1280s CE). *Samguk Yusa: Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea*. Translated by T. H. Lee. (2007): 167.

⁶⁵ 1. Dōgen. (circa 1243 CE). *Shōbōgenzō*. Translated by N. Waddell & M. Abe. (2002): 45
2. Aston, W. G. (1896): 128-140.

V. ILLUMINATING THE PAST, INSPIRING THE FUTURE:
THE GLORIOUS HISTORY OF BUDDHIST UNIVERSITIES IN
REBUILDING THE WORLD

Ancient Buddhist universities in India played a pivotal role in shaping the country’s sociocultural landscape. These institutions not only disseminated Buddhist philosophy, art, and culture but also facilitated social mobility, cultural exchange, and intellectual discourse. These universities attracted scholars from diverse social backgrounds, including monks, Brahmins, and laypeople.

(1) Nalanda University (5th -12th century CE)⁶⁶

Nalanda University (5th-12th century CE) was a renowned Buddhist university in ancient India. Founded by Kumara Gupta I, it attracted scholars from Asia, offering courses in Buddhist philosophy, logic, and more. Notable scholars included Dharmakirti, Dignaga, and Atisha. The university played a significant role in Buddhist philosophy and logic. Its archaeological remains were excavated in the 20th century and are now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. (Sircar, D. C.,1971)



Ashoka Pillar at Vaishali, Bihar

Pic 6. Ancient India's Centers of Learning: Unveiling the Legacy of Takshashila, Nalanda, and

(2) Takshashila (Taxila) University (6th century BCE-5th century CE)⁶⁷

One of the oldest universities globally, Taxila University in ancient India (now Pakistan) was renowned for Vedic studies, philosophy, medicine, and martial arts. Founded by King Taksha, it was patronized by the Mauryan and Kushan Empires. (Altekar, 1965).

⁶⁶ Xuanzang. (circa 646 CE). *Datang Xiyu Ji*. Translated by S. Beal. (1884): 174 - 176.
⁶⁷ Charaka. (circa 400 CE). *Charaka Samhita*. Translated by P. V. Sharma. (1999). *Charaka Samhita: Text with English translation and critical exposition*. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia.

(3) Vikramashila University (8th -12th century CE)⁶⁸

A renowned Buddhist university in ancient India, Vikramashila flourished under the Pala Empire. It offered courses in philosophy, logic, and tantric studies. (Sircar, D. C. (1971), (4) Odantapuri University (6th -12th century CE) (Mukhopadhyaya, S. (1981); (5) Nagarjuna University (2nd century CE), India⁶⁹ (Murti, 1960), (Lamotte, É. (1988), Sastri, H. (1924); (6) Somapura Mahavihara University Bangladesh (8th century CE) (Hasan, 2007, p. 147.) and (6) Atisha University (10th century CE), Tibet^{70, 71}

VI. GLOBALIZATION AND MODERNIZATION (1500 CE - PRESENT)⁷²

In the modern era, Buddhism has spread globally, with many Western countries embracing its teachings. The Internet, social media, and migration have facilitated the dissemination of Buddhist ideas and practices worldwide (Bodhi, B. 2010; Harvey, P. 2013; Rahula, W. 1959; Skilton, A. 1997).

6.1. Buddhist principles and global sustainable development

Buddhism's relevance to global sustainable development in the present context is multifaceted. At its core, Buddhism teaches individuals to cultivate mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom, which are essential values for achieving sustainable development. Buddhist principles, such as the Four Noble Truths, *Pañcasīla*, and the Eightfold Path, offer valuable insights into addressing global challenges like climate change, poverty, and inequality. (Harvey, P. (2000).

6.2. Environmental protection and sustainable development⁷³

In Buddhist philosophy, the natural world is seen as an integral part of human existence, and harming the environment is considered a form of suffering. The concept of "*Paṭiccasamuppāda*" or "dependent origination" emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and the environment (Harvey, 2000). This perspective encourages individuals to adopt sustainable lifestyles, reduce their ecological footprint, and promote environmental conservation. (Schmithausen, L. (1997) Badiner, A. H. (1990). Tucker, M. E. (2003).

6.3 Measuring quality of life and sustainable development

Buddhism offers a unique perspective on measuring quality of life and sustainable development. Rather than focusing solely on economic growth and material wealth, Buddhism emphasizes the importance of spiritual well-being,

⁶⁸ 1. Sircar, D. C. (1971). *Studies in the geography of ancient and medieval India*. Motilal Banarsidass.

2. *Dipankara Srijnana*. (circa 11th century CE). Vikramashila-vihara-vrittanta. Translated by C. T. Tartakov. (1992). Vikramashila: The ancient Buddhist university. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.

⁶⁹ Murti, T. R. V. (1960): 79.

⁷⁰ Atisha. (Circa 11th century CE). *Bodhipathapradīpa*. Translated by R. Sherburne. (2003): 143.

⁷¹ Snellgrove (1987): 456.

⁷² Skilton, A. (1997): 175.

⁷³ Schmithausen, L. (1997): 6 - 10.

social relationships, and environmental sustainability (Kaza, S. (2005)). This holistic approach encourages policymakers and individuals to adopt a more comprehensive and sustainable definition of development.

VII. CASE STUDIES AND EXAMPLES

Several case studies and examples illustrate the relevance of Buddhism for sustainable development:

(i) Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index:⁷⁴ Bhutan's GNH Index is a unique approach to measuring sustainable development, which incorporates Buddhist principles and values. They prioritize human well-being and happiness over economic growth. (Ura, 2001).

(ii) Thailand's Sufficiency Economy: Thailand's Sufficiency Economy philosophy, inspired by Buddhist principles, emphasizes moderation, self-reliance, and sustainable development. (Matsukawa, 2007).

(iii) Cambodia's Buddhist Environmental Movement:⁷⁵ Cambodia's Buddhist Environmental Movement promotes environmental conservation and sustainable development through Buddhist principles and practices. (Huy, H. 2024, Suy, 2015).

(iv) Buddhist-inspired Sustainable Agriculture in Sri Lanka: Buddhist principles have inspired sustainable agriculture practices in Sri Lanka, such as organic farming and agroforestry. These practices have improved soil health, biodiversity, and the livelihoods of farmers (Weerakoon, 2011).

(v) Buddhist-led Conservation Efforts in Mongolia: Buddhist monks and communities in Mongolia have led conservation efforts to protect the country's natural habitats and wildlife. These efforts have resulted in the protection of endangered species and the preservation of natural habitats (Lkham, 2013).

(vi) Buddhist-inspired Eco-Tourism in Nepal:⁷⁶ Buddhist principles have inspired eco-tourism initiatives in Nepal, such as sustainable trekking and homestay programs. These initiatives have promoted sustainable livelihoods and environmental conservation in local communities (Gurung, 2015).

VIII. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

While Buddhism offers valuable insights and principles for sustainable development, there are also challenges and opportunities to consider:

(i) Integrating Buddhist principles into policy-making: Policymakers and governments can benefit from incorporating Buddhist principles and values into their decision-making processes.

(ii) Promoting sustainable lifestyles: Individuals can adopt sustainable lifestyles and reduce their ecological footprint by applying Buddhist principles such as mindfulness and moderation.

(iii) Addressing social and economic inequality: Buddhism's emphasis on

⁷⁴ Ura, K. (2001): 1 - 17.

⁷⁵ Huy, H. (2024): 4713 - 9.

⁷⁶ Gurung, T. (2015): 34 - 50.

compassion and interconnectedness can help address social and economic inequality, which is a major challenge for sustainable development.

IX. CONCLUSION

The origin of Buddhism and its evolution over time have endowed it with a rich legacy of wisdom, compassion, and sustainability. As the world grapples with the challenges of global sustainable development, Buddhism's timeless principles and practices offer a unique and valuable contribution. By embracing the Four Noble Truths, cultivating mindfulness and compassion, and promoting a culture of peace and non-violence, Buddhism can inspire and guide humanity toward a more sustainable and equitable future. As we move forward in this critical century, the relevance of Buddhism in global sustainable development is clear: it offers a powerful framework for transforming ourselves, our societies, and our relationship with the natural world. By integrating Buddhist values and principles into our pursuit of sustainable development, we can create a brighter, more compassionate, and more sustainable future for all.

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE IMPACT OF BUDDHIST SOCIAL ETHICS ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

The existence of society depends on human civility. Ethics can be introduced as one of the main concepts that drive the development of that civilization. Since the beginning of mankind, ethical systems, which have evolved through human behavior, have developed across various fields such as politics, culture, social well-being, and religion in the present. When examining history, it is evident that philosophers and scholars from both the East and the West have paid significant attention to ethics. Considering unity as a fundamental principle on which human existence depends, the development of interpersonal relationships and their emphasis highlights ethics as a major factor influencing the growth, stability, and decline of society. In Western philosophy, ethics has been identified as a science according to many philosophical perspectives, whereas in the East, it has been emphasized as subjective. The main objective of this paper is to discuss the ethical foundation of Buddhist philosophy, regarded as the most profound philosophy in the East, through the analysis of Buddhist sutras and concepts. Accordingly, in exploring the Buddhist ethical system, the ethical principles established by the Buddha in his philosophy are vital for societal harmony and unity. Therefore, this research paper aims to examine the ethical foundations of Buddhism, their applications, and how they foster harmony through personal development. Initially, the definition and nature of society are identified. The paper then explains how the practice of morality changes based on factors such as personal development, social well-being, duties, and responsibilities. The primary objective is to explore the significance of ethics in personal development and societal harmony, based on the Buddhist philosophy of Eastern thought. To provide a foundational understanding of ethics and personal development, this study offers a summarized discussion of

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these topics. Following this, theoretical aspects and their practical implications for personal growth are examined in detail. In analyzing modern approaches to human development, it is evident that both material and spiritual dimensions play a role. Accordingly, this study prioritizes spiritual development grounded in social ethics rather than the material aspects of human progress. Through this research, an understanding can be gained of how Buddhist ethical principles shape human development and contribute to societal strength.

Keywords: *Buddhist ethics, personal development, social harmony, human civility, ethical philosophy.*

I. INTRODUCTION

“Society” is a concept that we consistently use in our everyday lives. However, defining the concept of “society” is extremely challenging. This is because the term “society” is inherently linked to the term “individual.” Nevertheless, it is important to focus on the definitions of society presented by sociologists and various philosophers. In particular, the definition of society put forward by Mr. Abeyratne Samarakoon holds significant value. His perspective is that “society forms the backdrop of moral life.”

The concept of society originates from ancient cultures. This fact is evident in the Pāli literature, where the term “*samajja*” appears.¹ Here, he has made an effort to substantiate his views on how the term “society” emerged, presenting numerous examples and evidence to support his assertions.

Also, it is very important to inquire about how this “society” is defined in the English language. Accordingly, the original form of the English word “society” used to refer to society is the Latin word “*socius*”. The Latin word means helper or partner. This reflects social activity. The basis for the existence of society is sociability. That is, members of society associate with other members.² According to this reference, it appears that the task of the society is to deal with the people living in the society in harmony.

The definition of society by Herbert Spencer, a famous social and Anthropologist, is also very important here. Accordingly, he states, “A society is not just a collection of individuals, but a group of people who are well organized and work together according to common norms for the undivided existence of their species. It is cultural values and ideals that provide protection here. All these are called society, but one section cannot be called society³. Namely. According to his statement, it is clear that the society should be a unit that works sociably and harmoniously.

Similar and different definitions of society have been presented by Western philosophers. Accordingly, the philosopher Maurice Ginsburg has defined society as “society is a collection of individuals.” Similarly, according

¹ Samarakoon (2003), p. 43.

² Abhayasundara (2005), p. 57.

³ Ratnapala (1995), p. 20.

to sociologist Mac Iver, "Society is a network of social relationships."⁴ A single person cannot create a network of social relationships. There should be at least two people for that.

Thus, when paying attention to the above definitions, it is seen that the society is a collection of a group of people and a society is not created only by joining together, but social existence is based on the harmonious interrelationships between each individual.

II. DEFINITION OF ETHICS

"Ethics" is generally considered as the study of human behavior, goals, aspirations, intentions, and lifestyles. On the other hand, ethics refers to moral knowledge and the evaluation of these. On the other hand, ethics can be called a philosophical inquiry method that tries to answer some general questions about the meaning of moral statutes and the standards of moral evaluation.⁵ Although this is being discussed here, especially in the East, it is not possible to see a science or a philosophical foundation for it being formed linguistically. Regarding the Sinhala language, the use of the word "ethics" and the generation of related conceptual meanings happened later. But this does not mean that there was social abuse of immorality or immorality. Professor P. D. Mr. Premasiri confirms this idea as follows: "...The term *ācāra vidyāva* in modern Sinhala is a recently adopted translation for the English word *Ethics*. Although the traditional Sinhala linguistic usage, which evolved from the flow of Indian philosophical thought, does not exhibit a term precisely equivalent to the English word *Ethics*, it can be inferred that similar processes and corresponding concepts existed in the Eastern world, akin to what is referred to in the Western world as moral philosophy."⁶

Although not explicitly as a discipline of ethics, various interpretations can be found for the term *ācāra* (conduct). The *Sumangala* dictionary provides its definition as follows: behavior, action, proper conduct, tradition, and habit.⁷ The Pāli equivalent of this term is understood to have similar meanings, as explained in the Pāli-Sinhala Dictionary by Ven. Polwatte Buddhaddatta Thero. He interprets it as conduct, behavior, and adherence, highlighting the essence of the term in both linguistic and conceptual contexts.

The mention of proper conduct here aligns with the later concept of ethics. The term *ācāra* is a word derived from Sanskrit. It originates from the root term *purva char*, which has evolved into its current form. Its meaning is explained in the Sanskrit-Sinhala Dictionary by Puwithisi Alagiyawanna as follows: "Behavior, tradition, habit, established customs, social norms (including the first member, image, and general appearance of an organization)."⁸ This meaning

⁴ Abhayasundara (2005), p. 57.

⁵ Premasiri (1998), p. 10.

⁶ Soratha Thero (2009), p. 124.

⁷ Buddhaddatta Thero (1998), p. 93.

⁸ Alagiyawanna (2004), p. 31.

corresponds to the definitions provided in Monier William's dictionary. In it, ethics (*ācāra vidyāva*) is defined as conduct, manner of action, behavior, and good conduct.⁹

Ethics is derived from a Greek word, and its basic philosophical meanings can be found through philosophy itself. One of the most important concepts here is that the Greeks used the word ethics to mean 'character'. Also, in the English language, the word Ethics, which is borrowed from the Greek language, is used. In English, the word means ethics. Because of these facts, many commentators point out that the beginning of modern ethics originated in Greece.¹⁰ In English the etymology seems to have advanced further. There it has been discussed under the name of the science of morality.

III. BUDDHIST ETHICS

Since the study of ethics is called ethics, the study of ethics taught in Buddhism can be called Buddhist ethics. Focusing on the ethical concepts between Buddhism and other religions and philosophies enables us to understand the uniqueness of Buddhist ethics. According to the opinions of many believers, ethics is a meaningless term in world religions and irrational agnostic and deterministic philosophies, and the only religion in the world that can realistically be interpreted as ethics is Buddhist philosophy. One can use the words Christian ethics, Islamic ethics, Hindu ethics. But even one of them does not give an aura to ethics.¹¹ Buddhism is the only 12 religion that directly revealed the predominance of science by saying "*Paññāudapādi vijjāudapādi ālokoudapādi*".¹² Buddhism is not a revelation of God or an apocalypse without causality. It is a scientific supreme revelation of humanity.

According to this reference, the Buddha period has a direct relationship to ethics that is clear. Accordingly, the moral terms that were used in the Buddha's time were "*kusala-akusala, puñña-pāpa, sāvajja-anavajja, dhamma-adhamma, samacariyā-visamacariyā, karaṇiya-akaraṇiya, ariya-anariya, seṭṭha-hīna, sammā-micchā, anāsava-sāsava, parisuddha-aparisuddha, sucārīta-duccārīta, sukata-dukkhata, sappurisa-asappurisa, kalyāṇa-pāpaka, sukka-kaṇahaca*" can be pointed out from." these ethical applications. The concept of 'good-bad' has an important place.¹³

Ethical science cannot be associated with anything outside of Buddhism, and this can be further confirmed by exploring the ethical theories of Buddhism. Some *śramaṇa Brahmins* with *Sanighaṇṭuketubhavaśikṣā nirukti* with history in the fifth section with Trivedic knowledge highlighted themselves as having *vijjajācaraṇa*.¹⁴ However, the Buddha emphasized the ethics of Buddhism as an absolute ethics

⁹ Williams (1995), p. 137.

¹⁰ Hettiarachi (1965), p. 422.

¹¹ Premasiri Thero (2010), p. 3.

¹² SN 56. 11.

¹³ Mahinda Thero (1986), p. 67.

¹⁴ DN 4.

free from casteism, humanism, and casteism. It has been shown in the *Ambattha Sutta* that one who is bound by casteism, casteism, and humanism is far from *Anuttara Vijjā-caraṇa*. Therefore, the person who wishes to reach *anuttara* ethics is bound by casteism, casteism, and tribalism. From humanism The Buddha era emphasizes that one should become a Vinibandha by marriage (*Pahāya kho ambatṭha jātivādavinibaddhañca gottavādavinibaddhañca mānavādavinibaddhañca anuttarāya vijjācārāṇasampadāya sacchikiriyāya hoti*).¹⁵

In today's world, divisions among individuals based on race, ethnicity, human ideologies, and other factors are widespread. For social unity, peace, and coexistence to thrive through human development, it is imperative to eliminate such divisions. Divisions based on politics, religion, and geographical disparities are common. The nature of individual perspectives profoundly affects the well-being of society. Accordingly, the Buddhist concept of detachment being unbound lays the foundation for a good and ethical society.

The Buddha's teaching is that it is difficult even for the layman who wears precious cloths such as *kāsi* shawls, uses perfumes, gold and silver meat, and uses *vijjācārāṇa* (ethical science) in a proper way to understand the Supreme Being. "*Dujajānaṃ kho sataṃ mahārāja tayā gihinā kāmabhoginā puttāmbādha sayanaṃ ajajhāvasantena kāsika candanaṃ paccuhontena mālāgandhavilepanaṃ dhārayantena jātārūparajataṃ sādīyantena imevā arahantā imevā ahaṇtā maggaṃ samāpannāti*."¹⁶ It is said that ethics is not practical for householders. It is true that erotic domesticity does not embody a complete ethics.

Every individual must adhere to a system of ethics to maintain social harmony and well-being. Accordingly, each person must follow a relative and unique ethical policy based on their society, fostering their spiritual development. Those who fail to adhere to these ethical norms are likely to be alienated from society. Through Buddhist concepts of ethics, every individual can utilize moral principles for their spiritual growth, making it an essential area for further exploration.

Buddhist ethics begins with the *sīla*. It is enlightened by Nirvana. For the householder, the five virtues and *uposatha* virtues are *caraṇa* or *ācariya*. Being a layman is a hindrance to the realization of *anuttara caraṇa* Dhamma, which came in the Buddha's time.¹⁷ That is why the householder's behaviour is likened to the peacock's speed and the monk's speed to the swan's speed. Just as the peacock can never come close to the speed of the swan, it is difficult for the layman to approach the *caraṇa* (ethics) of the monk.¹⁸

IV. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Modern approaches to human development and character building can be

¹⁵ DN 3.

¹⁶ SN 23.2.

¹⁷ MN 27.

¹⁸ Sn 4.7.

divided into two categories: Secular development and spiritual development. Secular human development can be illustrated by the various scientific and evidence-based research conducted in different countries. With the involvement of international organizations, this development spans multiple sectors, including economic, social, and cultural domains. The focus here is to discuss how concepts from Buddhist philosophy contribute to spiritual development. Before that, attention must be directed to the definitions of personal and human development. It is essential to recognize both society as an institution and the individual as its unit.

There have been diverse perspectives on the relationship between society and individuals throughout history. Society is essentially a collection of individuals, and without interpersonal connections, society cannot exist. The individual and society are inseparable. Sociologists such as Aristotle, C. H. Cooley, and Margaret Mead have expressed varying views on this subject. C. H. Cooley, for example, emphasized that society and the individual are not separate entities but rather a unified whole.

The United Nations identifies two primary dimensions of human development: Direct enhancement of human capabilities and creation of conditions for human development.¹⁹ Under the first dimension, the focus is on long and healthy lives, acquisition of comprehensive knowledge, and maintaining a decent standard of living. These are indicators of physical development. In terms of spiritual development, the UN also provides recommendations for creating conditions that influence individuals, such as participating in political and social life, maintaining environmental sustainability, ensuring human security and rights, and promoting gender equality.

In summary, personal development should occur both physically and spiritually. Spiritual development facilitates the management of physical development. Moving forward, we will discuss how the scientific foundations of Buddhism influence human development spiritually.

4.1. Buddhist ethics and human development

Buddhism places significant emphasis on social structures, categorizing society broadly into lay and monastic communities and further into monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. It acknowledges the strong connection between individuals and society, emphasizing that an individual is inherently a member of a family unit and, as they age, forms relationships with various institutions such as schools and organizations.

According to Buddhism, individuals live with specific goals within a framework of rules and systems. Actions performed consciously by individuals are fundamentally categorized into two main types: *Kusala* and *akusala*. These actions are expressed through bodily, verbal, and mental means. Evaluating these actions based on their qualities is referred to as the distinction between

¹⁹ <https://hdr.undp.org/content/what-human-development>

wholesome and unwholesome. Buddhist texts frequently reference dual terms, with “*kusala*” (wholesome) and “*akusala*” (unwholesome) being highly significant.²⁰

“*Kusala*” refers to what is healthy, correct, pure, and skillful. In contrast, “*akusala*” refers to what is diseased, incorrect, impure, and unskillful. Actions driven by mental weaknesses such as greed, hatred, and delusion lead to unwholesome outcomes, whereas reducing these mental weaknesses makes the mind healthier and more manageable. Understanding the roots of wholesomeness (*alobha*, *adosa*, *amoha*) and unwholesomeness (*lobha*, *dosa*, *moha*) is essential. Actions rooted in wholesomeness are termed “wholesome.”

Buddhist teachings regard human development as the cultivation of a refined and disciplined mental state. The three universal characteristics impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*) are pivotal in developing positive attitudes. Recognizing that everything conditioned is transient, suffering, and devoid of a permanent self is a universal truth leading to profound insight and enlightenment.²¹ Through meditation, mental disturbances caused by cravings and anger are alleviated. This enhances decision-making capabilities, reduces negative thought patterns, and promotes focus. Meditation helps control impulses like attachment and aversion, fostering inner peace and enabling individuals to make sound decisions for a successful life.

Self-awareness is central to mental development, requiring attention and mindfulness to understand one’s true nature. This introspection reveals hidden tendencies such as jealousy, anger, and arrogance, allowing individuals to eliminate them effectively. The *Ratana Sutta* emphasizes the importance of understanding truth and overcoming self-centered views, doubts, and misconceptions. A purified and wholesome mind serves as the foundation for developing positive attitudes.

Buddhist teachings on ethical living include principles like the Five Precepts, the Four Sublime States (*Brahmavihārā*), the Thirty-Eight Blessings (*Maṅgala Sutta*), the Ten Perfections (*Pāramitā*), the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Seven Noble Riches (*Ariyadhana*). The complexities of contemporary society stem from the inability to cultivate a peaceful, harmonious way of living that benefits oneself, others, and nature. Buddhism provides profound guidance to heal such societal issues.

4.2. Buddhist social ethics and its relevance to human development

When asking about Buddhist social ethics, it is extremely important to gain some understanding of the teachings of Buddhism about the beginning of society. The *Aggaṇṇa Sutta* of *Dīgha Nikāya* clearly shows how society and social system started. It says how the environment was favourable for *ābhassara*, who was devoid of lust, and how the environment gradually became harsher

²⁰ <https://buddhistbrotherhood.net>

²¹ *ibid.*

as he became more and more lustful, also the evolution of man, the descent of the league. It presents a good analysis of marriage, the emergence of the state and religious traditions, trade and crime. According to the Four Noble Truths, it seems that lust, which is the cause of material suffering, is also the cause of material suffering. The Buddhist philosophy of social ethics is presented as a teaching that suppresses this unrestrained desire or lust. Its foundation is compassion. Man should spread compassion not only to himself or his kind but to all beings, born and unborn, seen and unseen, near and far, hell, two-footed, four-footed, multi-footed, etc. Thus, the Buddhist period presents a philosophy of social ethics in which compassion is the first step.

By nurturing thoughts of *mettā* (loving-kindness), an individual's spiritual development occurs, enabling them to contribute actively to social progress and unity. The society, which is loaded with Buddhist social ethics based on peace, non-violence, and compassion among the community, can be divided into two parts, namely lay society and the monastic society.²² Buddhist social ethics presents a set of virtues and moral principles that not only foster the well-being of individuals within society but also address the shortcomings and challenges observed within that same society.²³ It is to present a group of virtues that make one. The social ethics that are the basis for are prominent here. There are many such social ethics, but only a few of the most prominent ones can be listed as follows: Five precepts, Buddhist standards of good and bad, directional worship, the four treasures, degradation gates, Buddhist economic proposition, Buddhist teaching on karma. When asking about Buddhist social ethics, the above teachings can be pointed out as the most prominent ones. Hereafter, some teachings are expected to be discussed in the next topic.

V. FIVE PRECEPTS

In the "Buddhist society" that emerged in a society that evolved over time, there was a classification of standard good and bad as necessary for living in society. Its basic concept and basic principles can be called the *pañcasīla* principle.²⁴ These five virtues can also be pointed out as a characteristic of a civilized society. These virtues are not found in undeveloped barbaric societies, but the society is somewhat advanced in terms of civilization and culture. It can be pointed out that *pañcasīla* is also a measure that promotes human civilization.²⁵

The first precept of the *pañcasīla* is to abstain from killing animals. In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, this is restricted to separation from murder. Animals are created for the benefit of man. One use is to kill and eat. Christians, Jews, and Muslims say.²⁶ But the Buddhist first discipline does not mean the freedom to kill such animals. It is not compatible with civilization

²² Menike (2007), p. 86.

²³ Hettiarachchi (2003), p. 166.

²⁴ Perera (1996), p. 13.

²⁵ Perera (1996), p. 38.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 38.

and humanity to kill weak animals by treating humans with highly developed thinking power as beasts. Likewise, in a society where animal and human killings occur. A set of problems also arises regarding the safety of human life. Protecting the product alleviates that insecurity and thereby directly secures the unique bond between the community.

In all the religions of the world, stealing, lying, and sexual immorality have been accepted as wrong. *Pañcasīla*. However, three virtues are unquestionably accepted in all religions. Being accepted in this way helps the moral existence of the human being, social peace and happiness. The man who lives in a society that observes the *Pañcasīla* is given the opportunity to lead a good life with joy and peace, maintaining peace, happiness and goodwill among his fellow human beings. This can be pointed out as a very special milestone in the subject of Buddhist social ethics.

The precept against drinking alcohol is found in all religions of the world, and it is unknown only in Christianity. Judaism, which has a Christian background, prohibits alcohol consumption. Also, in many religions of the world, drinking wine has been mentioned as a vice. According to the medical opinion, if the liver of the alcoholic man gets a disease called “Cirrhosis of Liver”, his life will be shortened by 10 years. The Buddha preached that the use of alcohol is a way to avoid diseases as “*Rogānaṃ āyatanaṃ*.”²⁷ It is mentioned in the Buddha’s sermon that the bad effects of drinking alcohol, such as loss of shame, loss of consciousness, leading to quarrels, leading to disgrace, becoming disgraced, etc. “*Apuññāyatanaṃ*” are a source of sin.

Buddhist standards of good and bad: Discussions on ethical principles confirm that personal development leads to societal growth. In Buddhism, moral measures concerning good and bad play a significant role. These moral standards contribute to personal development and foster social cohesion, making them critical aspects for discussion.

Because Buddhism is a path of liberation, it is based on ethics. A person’s actions are divided into two parts: Good-bad, right-wrong, do not-do. The part that should be good or better is called by the ethical term merit. Actions contrary to it are ‘evil’. The path of liberation revealed to the world by Buddhist teachings is known as the Noble Eightfold Path. Its eight elements are called “*sammā*”. The opposite path is called “*micchā*”. These “*sammā*” characteristics show that they are meritorious persons who need to be improved.²⁸ In this Noble Eightfold Path, a set of Buddhist social ethics is integrated, which has an influence on social friendliness.

A number of criteria are presented in the Buddha’s time to distinguish between good and bad or meritorious. Let’s take the three most prominent criteria among them. Through that, many Buddhist social ethics that should be established in the society are revealed during the Buddhist period. We can

²⁷ Perera (1996), p. 38.

²⁸ Hettiarachi (2001), p. 30.

understand the ethical basis among them.

If any action causes harm to oneself or harm to others, it should not be done. If a certain action brings good to oneself and also to others, it is a merit.²⁹ It should be done. (2) According to another criterion, three dominant doctrines are considered. Making oneself the ruler or making decisions according to one's mind (*attādhīpateyya*), making decisions according to world standards (*lokādhīpateyya*) and making decisions according to dharma (*dhammādhīpateyya*).³⁰ (3) The other criterion is to accept that one should not do deeds that are despised by wise men and that one should do deeds that are praised by wise men.³¹ Sociable people are interpreted as sages here.

All the three criteria mentioned above are considered by the society as one of the strong factors for the judgment of the individual's actions. A bad act that should not be accepted by the society. The good deed to be done is approved by the society. Thus, in explaining the individual and society in Buddhism, it is possible to gain some understanding about the basis of Buddhist social ethics. The person should live in the society in a manner favourable to the society as mentioned above. Buddhism appreciates such men as good men. The emphasis on society in defining the good man is a prominent feature in Buddhist teachings. In Buddhism, there are four people mentioned. In that concept, the social ethics expressed in the individual and the social activities are included. According to that sermon, people are divided into four parts. That is: (1) He who acts neither for his own sake nor for the sake of others. (2) He who acts for the benefit of others and does not act for his benefit. (3) He who acts for his own sake and does not act for the sake of others. (4) He who acts for the benefit of himself and others.³²

Here others mean the other social beings living in the society. Lord Buddha has introduced as the greatest, the greatest among these persons the fourth person. That is, the independent person. That is about himself as well as the person who thinks about the society. In this way, Buddhism teaches the individual to develop himself. Also, they should perform their activities for social development. This individual and society by inquiring deeply about the concept of context itself, the existing social ethics. Through an in-depth examination of the dual concepts of the individual and the social context, it becomes possible to gain a certain understanding of the prevailing social ethics within it. The Buddha emphasized that fulfilling social duties and responsibilities fosters social development and well-being. This is evident not only in the *Sigālovāda Sutta* but also in other discourses like the *Parābhava Sutta*, *Maṅgala Sutta*, *Vasala Sutta*, *Vyagghapajja Sutta*, *Vāseṭṭha Sutta*, and *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta*. These teachings advocate social ethics and proper governance to promote societal progress and good interpersonal relationships.

²⁹ MN 61.

³⁰ AN 3.40.

³¹ Sn 1.8.

³² Hettiarachi (2001), p. 31.

The ultimate goal of Buddhism, personal liberation, is directly supported by these ethical applications. Moving forward, let us explore how fulfilling duties and responsibilities enhances ethics and influences personal development.

VI. ETHICAL ASPECTS OF DIRECTIONAL WORSHIPPING BUDDHISM

The *sadisā* concept of the *Sigālovāda Sutta* includes almost the Buddhist social ethics that the individual should follow towards the society. A good understanding of how individual actions contribute to society, and also his responsibilities and duties is embodied in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*. There are six basic social parts of any society. As parents, teachers, spouses, friends, venerable clergy, and honourable servants. The person builds social relationships with these people while living in the society. They are the basic groups of the society. In the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, these six sections of society are presented through the concept of *sadisā*. This is an analysis of how the individual should be towards the society and the ethics that should be fulfilled from the individual to the society in the Buddha's time. The *sadisā* of *Sigālovāda Sutta* is as follows: "*Mātāpitādisāpubbā-ācariyā dakkhiṇādisā puttadārā disā paccā- mittāmaccā ca uttarā dāsakammakarā heṭṭhā- uddham samañabrāhmaṇā.*"³³ (1) Eastern Direction - Parents - Children. (2) Southern Direction - Teacher - Student. (3) Under Direction - Employer - Employee. (4) Western Direction - Husband - Wife. (5) Northern Direction - Friends - Companions. (6) Upper Direction - Laypeople - Monastics.

A person in society should maintain harmonious and orderly relationships in accordance with these guidelines. By doing so, it becomes evident that they fulfill their duties to society. When one fulfills the duties taught within these principles, both personal and social development occur, as emphasized by Buddhism. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* assigns a set of duties that should be carried out. In this context, it is particularly important to explore the social ethics involved. The first social ethical duty here is how children should respect and care for their parents. (1) Should be fed. (2) His various activities should be done. (3) Generation must be preserved. (4) Inherited property must be preserved. (5) At the time of death, merit should be given.³⁴

These five duties are the duties that children should perform for their parents. On fulfilling these five duties, parents' love for their children increases. Through it, social connection is intensified. Also not nurturing parents. Disobeying them, sending parents to old people's homes, etc., are considered wrong in the society and can be eliminated by following the above solution. Also, the proper status of the parents in the society and their mental happiness will also develop. It is also worth asking about the duties to be performed by parents for the children. (1) Prevention of sin. (2) Establishment of good. (3) Teaching of the arts. (4) Arranging a marriage at the appropriate time. (5) Making donations at the appropriate time.³⁵

³³ DN 31.

³⁴ DN 31.

³⁵ DN 31.

It directly contributes to the elimination of social deviations from the society as social progress occurs when the duties to be fulfilled from parents to children are fulfilled. Among the problems in modern society, many problems such as murders, rapes, kidnappings etc., are highlighted through the individual's failure to do good things. If the person is not engaged in good by his parents, he will not be a detriment to social progress. Don't be a person who destroys society. Also, in teaching the person skills, he will work for social development. The person will learn something well and contribute to the social development through it. Also, social development takes place by marrying people at the right age. It also has the ability to prevent many social problems that arise based on sex. The ethical Dharma (duties) that must be fulfilled from parents to children taught during the Buddha's time is an extremely practical and important social ethical system. In the proper fulfillment of those ethics, social progress and development will occur, and in the non-fulfillment of those social ethics, social decline and social deviation will occur. Therefore, the fulfillment of those ethics is emphasized in the Buddhist period. Also, it is worth asking about the ethics that should be fulfilled by the teacher towards the student. (1) By behaving with dignity. (2) By teaching well. (3) By teaching without reduction. (4) By introducing to good friends. (5) By providing care at all times.³⁶

Buddhist social ethics that confirm social existence are embodied in the duties to be fulfilled by the teacher. A teacher is a person who formally adapts to society. The student improves his life because of the teacher. The individual improves his life and contributes to social development. To properly discipline a student means to accustom him to live in a way that is favorable to the society and does not oppress others living in the society. Also, in good teaching, the person learns well and acts for the social good. Thus the society becomes better through the duties performed by the teacher. Buddhist social ethics are well integrated in almost all these duties. Also, the system of duties performed by the student has not been forgotten here. (1) By standing up on sight. (2) By attending. (3) By listening carefully. (4) By warning. (5) By learning well.³⁷

When the student fulfills the above duties, the relationship between the teacher and the student is intensified. Only then does the teacher feel affection for the student. The teacher, out of affection for the student, strives to make him a good person. Through it, the person becomes better. Also, by fulfilling these duties, a student also gets the fortune of becoming a very good student, and as a student, he gets a proper education from the teacher and becomes dedicated to social development. Social existence is established through these duties.

Also, the relationship between husband and wife is directly related to social progress. The human family is the basic unit of society. It is good for the society if it is well maintained. The human family is formed by the marriage of a man and a woman. It introduces a new member to the society. If there is no good

³⁶ DN 31

³⁷ DN 31.

relationship or polite foundation in the human family, the new members will be harmful to the society. Therefore, there should be an unbreakable strong relationship between the two partners, not only the marriage relationship but also full of virtues. It is included in the Buddhist philosophy that the husband and wife can fulfil many virtues based on their marriage and can make their life a divine plane by enjoying life with good faith and existence. It is stated in the *Kosala Samyutta* that when the husband and wife are virtuous and virtuous, the children they introduce into the society are even fit for kingship.³⁸ According to the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, there are five duties that a husband should perform to his wife. (1) By acting respectfully. (2) By not disrespecting. (3) By not engaging in evil. (4) By handing over property. (5) By bringing the jewel.³⁹

Thus, the husband who fulfills his duties towards his wife receives respect from his wife in five ways. (1) By performing household duties well. (2) By properly entertaining the entourage. (3) By not engaging in evil. (4) By not destroying money etc. (4) By doing all things skillfully and not lazily.⁴⁰ In this way, when the husband and wife fulfil their duties, the individual life is satisfied and the growing children who grow up in their company are also good for the society. This leads to social progress.

Friendship leads to social good as well as social decline. *Vyagghapajja Sutta* points out friendship as an asset during Buddha's time. Ananda Thero once asked a question to the Lord Buddha whether the existence of half of the Buddha's seat is based on the friendship of *kalyāna*. From this, it can be understood how much friendship is essential to good social existence. In particular, Buddhism emphasizes that one should associate with friends who are superior in virtue or have the same virtues as oneself. How to entertain friends is described in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*? (1) By donating. (2) From the favourite words. (3) By promoting development. (4) By considering equality. (5) From the honesty.⁴¹

Duties to be performed by friends in turn as follows: (1) By protecting when operating in default. (2) By protecting wealth while doing so. (3) By not giving up when a fear arises. (4) By not giving up in times of disaster. (4) By supporting the family as well.⁴² The society is degraded by the evil actions carried out through it. The good actions done by them improve the society. Thus, by asking about the duties to be performed towards the friends in the, the Buddhist social ethics that contribute to the social progress in it are clearly highlighted.

The basis that strengthens the economy of a society is the master-servant relationship. If this is good, the economy of the society will be good. Although the facts about domestic workers are presented in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, it also

³⁸ SN 15.19.

³⁹ SN 15.19.

⁴⁰ SN 15.19.

⁴¹ SN 15.19.

⁴² SN 15.19.

includes ethics to be fulfilled in business and economic organizations. Here it is worth examining the duties that the master must fulfil for the servant. (1) Assignment of suitable tasks considering qualifications. (2) Disbursement of rice wages properly. (3) Providing health facilities when necessary. (4) Encouraging by offering incentives. (5) Provision of leave and pension at appropriate age.⁴³

Similarly, the servants who receive these privileges should return to the master and entertain them with five ethics. (1) Stage before Master (Reporting to Service). (2) Sleeping after master (Leaving service). (3) Taking only what is given. (4) Performing the service properly. (5) Spreading the reputation of the employer on behalf of the organization.⁴⁴ In this way, a good master-servant relationship strengthens the society's economy. The master-servant relationship in an organization is very important for the physical development of the society. The above solution is most effective to intensify the relationship between the master and the employee in any government or private institution. By following such a provision, it is unlikely that the development of those institutions will take place, through which personal development as well as social development will take place.

In terms of lay and clergy, two parts can be seen in the social context. This is known in different societies as clergy and common people. What a religion does is fulfill the spiritual development and external development of the individual. It directly contributes to social progress. The main task performed by the priest or any religion is to make the person living in the society a good person. That means turning bad people to good. A law, as well as a religion, controls the misdeeds committed by a person in the society. Therefore, there should be a respectful and respectful relationship between the clergy and the laity. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* shows how householders should entertain the monks. (1) Engaging in actions of the body that are friendly. (2) Engaging in speech that is friendly. (3) Engaging in thoughts that are friendly. (4) Having doors that are always open. (5) Providing support in all four directions.⁴⁵

Also, the priests should treat the household with six things. (1) Avoiding bad deeds. (2) Practicing virtue. (3) Compassion with a good heart. (4) Making unheard teachings heard. (5) Explaining heard things clearly. (6) Pointing the way to liberation.⁴⁶ Based on the discussions above, the Buddha's teachings in the *Sigālovāda Sutta* clearly emphasize the creation of a developed and harmonious society founded on duties, responsibilities, and friendly openness. For such a virtuous society to emerge, it is essential to uphold duties and responsibilities and maintain ethical principles. Moreover, the collective effort to uphold purity and openness, along with cultivating qualities such as effort, diligence, wisdom, and generosity, is of paramount importance.

⁴³ SN 15.19.

⁴⁴ SN 15.19.

⁴⁵ SN 15.19.

⁴⁶ SN 15.19.

VII. CONCLUSION

Buddhism is not only for the liberation of the individual but also for the creation of social well-being. That fact is well confirmed through many sermons found during the Buddha's time. Buddhist social ethics can be seen from the beginning of the Buddhist noble path, especially the regular conduct of the domestic layman. This feature is clearly seen in many sutra sermons and various practical teaching methods in the Vedas, starting from that time. Accordingly, it goes without saying that a free and peaceful society will be created by preserving these social ethics building strong religious connections across diverse societal sectors, enhances spiritual growth and external development. The duties outlined in the *Sigālovāda Sutta* emphasize Buddhist social ethics, which directly influence the society in which an individual lives. As such, these teachings and principles highlight that every ethical obligation aligns with Buddhist social ethics, significantly impacting personal development. Furthermore, various Buddhist teachings support personal growth through the application of social ethics.

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ELIMINATION OF POVERTY AS A MORAL IMPERATIVE: A BUDDHIST ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

The problem of poverty is a perennial issue that human civilization has been facing for millennia. Within the last two decades, the United Nations introduced two programs to eliminate extreme poverty globally, one in 2000 as the Millennium Goal and one in 2015 as the Millennium Sustainable Development Goal. Efforts to eliminate poverty must be renewed from time to time. Regarding the problem of poverty in the world, Buddhist scholars have revealed textual teachings and interpretations over the last decades. Since the historical Buddha, the Buddhist tradition has kept a close eye examining the problem of poverty and produced teachings to overcome it. The present paper is intended to study first how Buddhism perceives the problem of poverty and how teachings on philanthropy have stressed helping the poor. By analyzing both teachings in the Pali tradition and Mahayana tradition in relation to poverty and the path to moral cultivation in the context of fulfilling perfections, it is expected to show how these teachings have treated the removal of poverty as a duty by a being given to attain enlightenment. In the second step, it is planned to examine Buddhist organizations currently engaged in eliminating poverty. Finally, it is pointed out that on the preposition that for Buddhists eliminating poverty is a moral imperative as it is an invincible component of suffering, whose ending is the sole goal of Buddhists. In this study, Pali canonical teachings, and commentarial explanations of *Ācariya Dhammapala* and Shantideva's views presented in *Bodhicaryavatara* will be addressed. In glossing the textual teachings secondary sources will be utilized.

Keywords: *Buddhism, poverty, moral imperative, dhammapala, Buddhaghosa.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, due to the COVID-19 effect, the world has fallen into an economically difficult situation. The United Nations though expected to reduce poverty in the world, could not achieve the goal by 2015. In contrast, poverty has increased. Due to poverty, basic needs such as food, drinks, and education have become so expensive things. Currently, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has reset its goal to reduce poverty as the Millennium Sustainable Development Goal and it expects to achieve 17 goals by 2030. In the process aimed at achieving these goals, there are many challenges to overcome.

Buddhism originated in India in 600 BC and its teachings spread in Asia during the first millennium A. D. By the second millennium, the spread of Buddhism had expanded to all the continents. Today everywhere in the world, there are Buddhists. Being inspired by Gautama the Buddha, Buddhists have articulated ideas and practices that address human suffering. Human suffering is both physical and mental. Buddhism sees that what exists in the world is suffering and everyone has to work towards eliminating suffering. Once the Buddha himself stated that what he tried to do was to teach about suffering and ending of it (*Pubbe cāhaṃ bhikkhave, etarahi ca dukkhañceva paññāpemi, dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ.*)¹ Following his footsteps, Shantideva, a *Mahayana* Buddhist monk and philosopher said it is one's duty to remove suffering from other's life-dropping discrimination between oneself and others.

Removal of poverty is a compulsory component of human development. Development studies have addressed the main question of how to change the world for the better. So, the problem of poverty alleviation is seen as essential for economic development. Both poverty alleviation and economic development must go together. Despite the unprecedented progress of human civilization, poverty remains the main challenge. As to the developing world, it poses a serious barrier. A vast majority of people under the poverty line are living in developing regions like South Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Connected with poverty, the people in the developing world are experiencing many issues.

In the face of this situation, secular economy developing agencies such as International Monetary Fund and World Bank have proposed and implemented various programs. However, as the studies indicate, all these solutions have not worked well in the developing world and the gap between the developed world and the former is ever-increasing (The number of poor people has increased across all regions, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. Extreme poverty in low-income countries has rapidly increased, setting back progress by eight to nine years, while progress in upper-middle-income countries has been set back by five to six years).² As the United Nations accepts:

¹ M I. 140.

² Sánchez-Páramo, Carolina, Daniel, Ruth Hill, Ambar, Gerszon Mahler, Yonzan, Narayan Nishant (2021).

We are meeting at a time of immense challenges to sustainable development. Billions of our citizens continue to live in poverty and are denied a life of dignity. There are rising inequalities within and among countries. There are enormous disparities in opportunity, wealth, and power.³

What are the lessons we can learn from the status quo? Are there other ways that the world can adopt to address the problem of poverty?

For several decades, the theorists and practitioners considered economic development as a purely secular task and religion has no place in it. Recently, scholarship on development has recognized that religion is embedded with great potential in development.⁴ Faith-based organizations in Asia and Africa are operating programs aimed at reducing poverty within their communities. It is worthwhile to examine further the potential of religion in the context of human development and poverty elimination.

The Buddha appeared in the sixth century B. C., opted to lead a simple life despite inherited luxury life by birth, and was well aware of the extremes of his society. This led him to perceive a wealthy life as a blessing and a poor life as suffering. In finding solutions to these extremes in society, he came up with both moral reasoning and socio-economic reasoning. Finally, he laid a path of moral development to transform society. His teachings related to both aspects are recorded in the canon. Later, his ideas were developed by his disciples. Dhammapala, the commentator of *Cariyapitaka Atthakathā* has developed the doctrine of ten perfections (*dasa pārami*) and Shantideva, the Sanskrit Buddhist poet and philosopher, and monk developed the theory of moral development in his texts. Investigating ideas included in these texts will shed much light on the Buddhist perception of the elimination of poverty as a moral duty.

The present study selects Buddhism, one of the world religions, and tries to understand both Buddhist teachings on the problem of poverty and Buddhist emphasis on the elimination of suffering in which poverty is an invincible element. Further, the Buddhist organizations in the world are operating actively to meet the challenge and take ground-level actions. However, the contribution from the Buddhist activists in this case is not satisfactory. Highlighting the historical emphasis is eliminating poverty, is expected to draw attention of the contemporary Buddhists to this burning global issue.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The problem to be addressed in the present study is how Buddhist teachings have treated the elimination of poverty as a moral imperative.

2.1. Literature survey

Several studies have shed light on the issue of poverty from the Buddhist perspective. Premasiri (1999) points out that Buddhism considers poverty as part of suffering and it should be eliminated and contentment is the solution.⁵

³ Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, p. 5 (PDF).

⁴ Jeff Heyness (2007): 1.

⁵ P. D. Premasiri (1999): 12 - 14.

Loy (2003) also has addressed the issue of poverty (Buddhism and poverty) and shows that the modern economic approach to alleviating suffering through the promotion of consumption is not a solution but part of the problem itself. According to Buddhism, as Loy points out, poverty arises as a result of injustice of economic distribution; For Loy, philanthropy is an important practice in removing poverty.⁶ Sinha also explains that Buddhism does not approve of poverty for both communities lay and monastics, further, poverty is seen as a woeful condition.⁷

The present study getting insight from the previous studies, plans to examine Buddhist teaching both in Theravada and Mahayana sources that emphasize helping the poor and examine how according to Buddhist principles, alleviation of poverty is a moral imperative. It is proposed from the concept of the Bodhisattva ideal. Bodhisattva ideal means working to alleviate suffering from the world. Suffering is both mental and physical. Then, it has to be extended to poverty in the contemporary world. The Buddhist world has established various social welfare organizations to help the needy but it seems that they have not yet taken the issue of poverty in full scale. Buddhist teachings furnish us with both motivation and command to work.

2.2. Research methodology

The present study is a qualitative study that involves a personal interpretation. Data are collected from primary and secondary sources of Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist literature mainly. In support of this argument, new studies on religious studies will be utilized. First, the teachings relevant to poverty and eradication of it in the Buddhist literature will be examined and then will turn to contemporary Buddhist organizations which are working to eliminate poverty.

2.3. Analysis and discussion

Over one billion people in the world today live in unacceptable conditions of poverty, mostly in developing countries, particularly in rural areas of low-income countries in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the least developed countries. Poverty has various manifestations: hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion.⁸

III. POVERTY AS A BARRIER TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT - CONTEMPORARY READINGS

Human development requires economic development. When economic development does not take place properly, poverty increases. The other way

⁶ David R. Loy (2001): 98.

⁷ Neelima Sinha, (2007): 306 - 315.

⁸ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/hunger-and-poverty-wpay.html> googled 2/6/2025:11:13 PM

round, when poverty remains the main characteristic of a society, it becomes difficult to achieve economic development. It can be termed as a 'vicious circle'. In societies where the poverty ratio is very high, there are a lot of social and economic issues. Uncertainty is recognized as a prevalent feature in poverty-stricken societies. According to Geof Wood:

Apart from the general conditions of uncertainty that afflict the total population and threaten a general sense of personal well-being, the poor experience and exaggerated sense of uncertainty. This derives from: the paucity of effective resources under their command; their inferior position in relation to other, superior, power-holders in the society; and their resulting vulnerability to hazards and shocks. Such vulnerability comprises therefore a series of risks, which have to be managed effectively.⁹

Explaining further on the vulnerability of the poor to hazards, Geof points out:

The poor are more vulnerable to hazards than others because they have less resistance to them and less room for maneuvering to prepare for them in terms of resource mobilization. Hazards are what we can expect to happen at different stages in a family life-cycle, as well as the predictable threats more widespread in a society.¹⁰

Another difficulty faced by the poor is deprivation of well-being:

Poor people operating under conditions of severe inequality and hostile political economies have less control over the institutions through which they must seek their livelihood and well-being, in all four of the well-being dimensions (emotional, material, subjective, and objective).¹¹

Current scholarship argues that contemporary efforts to eliminate poverty based on modern economic philosophy have failed. David Loy argues that the modern economy is based on eighteenth-century utilitarian ethics and it does not reflect actual human values. As he argues:

In fact, contemporary economics is much more "idealistic" in the sense that it offers an unrealistic image of human nature based upon an eighteenth-century ethical system, utilitarianism, not derived from empirical observation but conceived in a philosopher's study. As a result, economists today tend to live in an idealized, one-dimensional world of statistics and equations that do not accurately reflect human values and goals in the world we actually live in. ...From a Buddhist perspective, it is not surprising that the institutional efforts of the last fifty years have aggravated the social problems they purported to solve. Far from providing a solution, the development approach still taken for granted today is better understood as the problem itself. Buddhism can

⁹ Geof Wood, (2008): 116.

¹⁰ Geof Wood, (2008): 117.

¹¹ Geof Wood, (2008): 118.

help us to see that, and to envision more viable alternatives.¹²

A similar argument has been produced by Jeff Heyness in *Religion and Development* by pointing out that the governments, United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and other secular agencies though have worked for several decades to reduce poverty, and abject poverty exists in the developing world.¹³

3.1. Buddhist understanding of poverty

In the first instance, Buddhism recognizes that poverty is suffering (*Dāḷiddiyaṃ bhikkhave dukkhaṃ lokasmiṃ*). In the *Ina Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the Buddha points enumerates several problems related to poverty.¹⁴ The two more important suttas for study are *Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta* and *Kutadanta Sutta*, both are included in the *Digha Nikaya*. The *Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta* is illustrative of the perils caused by poverty. Further, poverty is perceived as an effect of neglecting necessary welfare activities for society. According to the sutta, the seventh generation of the universal monarch Dalhanemi, neglects social welfare activities. Consequently, poverty increases in society. With the increase of poverty, theft, weapons, killing, etc... also increased. Finally, the moral system failed in society, life span decreased and animal-sense arose in the human mind leading to rise against each other. As the sutta reports:

And, having listened to them, the King established guard and protection, but he did not give property to the needy, and as a result poverty became rife. With the spread of poverty, a man took, what was not given, thus committing what was called theft. ... Thus, from the not giving of property to the needy, poverty became rife, from the growth of poverty, the taking of what was not given increased, from the increase of theft, the taking of life increased - and from the increase in the taking of life, people's life-span decreased, their beauty decreased, and as a result of this decrease of life-span and beauty, the children of those whose life-span had been eighty thousand years lived for only forty thousand... a time will come when the children of these people will have a life-span of ten years. Among those of a ten-year life-span no account will be taken of mother or aunt, of mother's sister-in-law, of teacher's wife or one's father's wives and so on - all will be promiscuous in the world like goats and sheep, fowl and pigs, dogs and jackals. Among them, fierce enmity will prevail one for another, fierce hatred, fierce anger, and thoughts of killing, mother against child and child against mother, father against child and child against father, brother against brother, brother against sister, just as the hunter feels hatred for the beast he stalks.¹⁵

In detail, due to the increase in poverty, people began to steal from others. In order to protect property from being stolen and to steal both, people start

¹² David R. Loy (2003): 45.

¹³ Jeff Heyness (2007): 101.

¹⁴ Bhikkhu Bodhi (2012): 914.

¹⁵ Maurice Walshe (1995): 401 - 403.

to use weapons. In a society, wherein civil citizens use weapons, it is highly insecure to live. As the sutta reports, due to weapon use, killing increased. With this chaotic situation, another side of society also started to degenerate, that is, respect for elders. According to the sutta, the respect for maternal sisters and paternal aunts was lost and incest became widespread. Thus, one can see that human civilization is losing its value.

The effects of poverty are multiple. When society was healthy and prosperous, people enjoyed longevity. With poverty, morality decreased. With degenerated morality, life span lowered from eighty-thousand to ten years; beauty was lost. Girls reach maturity by the age of three or four years. We can verify the fact from the developing world where people live below the poverty line. In societies, where poverty dominates, child marriages, abuses, weapon use among civilians, etc... are common issues. Thus, it is observable that the problems discussed in the *Cakkavattisihanada Sutta* are valid problems for any society that suffers due to poverty.

We can get some more Buddhist insights into the issues of poverty from the *Kutadanta Sutta*. Further, the sutta comes up with a poverty alleviation method. As the Sutta reveals, the legendary King Mahavijitavi was ready to prepare to perform a sacrifice. He inquired about the opinion of his counsel Brahmin (the *Bodhisatta*). The latter pointed out to the former that it was not the time to perform a sacrifice for the country was plagued with poverty, theft, and rebellion. Insightfully, the counselor points out that if the king thinks to wipe out theft and rebel by military means, it is wrong. Descendants of those who would be killed will rise again at a later time against the king. Therefore, it is futile to resort to violence as a solution. The remedy lies in coming up with a rational program that would serve every segment of society. For the farmers, seeds and other necessary things for farming should be provided; for the tradesmen, the capital should be provided, and for the government servants wages should be increased. When people are busy with their work, they do not think to rise against the government. Due to the proper function of the economic sector, the citizens would pay taxes to the royal treasury, and then the king could perform the sacrifice at will. The people start to live in peace and contentment.¹⁶

Here, it is shown that when poverty is prevalent, theft and civil struggles arise in societies. Such struggles may be temporarily wiped out by military means but they are not durable solutions. The root causes must be identified and rooted out.

3.2. Poverty as causally-conditioned

According to early Buddhist understanding, everything in the world is causally conditioned. So, poverty is also a causally conditioned phenomenon. If poverty is to be eliminated, its causes have to be eliminated. What are the causes of poverty? As the *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta* indicates, when the management

¹⁶ Maurice Walshe, (1995): 401 - 403.

system fails, poverty arises. Therefore, economic management should function properly so that it would benefit every section of society. From the history of mankind, there are lessons learned. With the industrial revolution, a class of laborers arose and their life quality was so pathetic to the extent that they revolved against the governments. The French Revolution and Russian Revolution are well-known in human history. When the majority of society suffers, it may express in a violent form causing loss of lives and properties.

If it is causally conditioned and exists, then, by removing causes, its existence can be negated. According to the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, if the citizens were provided with what they needed to do their work, they would start working. To learn from modern history, before the revolution, China suffered from hunger. Due to a few years of hard work, it could overcome hunger within a few years. It was the same case with Soviet Russia and the collapse of Russia again led the country to poverty for some period.

According to the Buddhist understanding of the causal process, an agent is capable of entering into the process and changing. This offers freedom for man to change his/ her life. Maybe one would be born into a poor family or in a poor society. Through personal effort and collective support, he/ she is capable of changing the environment.

Regarding the personal capacity for winning a better life, the Buddha had a great belief in mankind. The Buddha was highly critical of fatalism proposed by his contemporaries like Makkhali Ghosala (the theory called *Samsara suddhivada*—purity through the natural process). Buddhism is full of terms that indicate human potential for betterment and freedom, *purisathāma*, *purisabala*, *virīya*, and *parakkama* are a few of them.¹⁷ The Buddha maintained a warrior-type mentality in overcoming challenges. Just before his enlightenment, he thought to himself, it would be better to die in the battleground than to live defeated. With a determined mind and a highly scrutinized method, anything is achievable.

In the last century, the world was struggling with poverty alleviation programs. However, the current situation in the world shows that they have not succeeded. As David Loy points out, the solutions have turned out to be the problem itself.¹⁸

3.3. Alleviating poverty as a moral imperative

Despite the measures taken by the Institutions like United Nations Development Programme, World Bank, and IMF, poverty remains worldwide. One of the reasons to fail poverty alleviation, according to Thomas Pogge is, that it is not perceived as a moral duty (*Extensive, severe poverty can continue, because we do not find its eradication morally compelling*).¹⁹ In order to provide inspiration to work for the removal of poverty, western academia has proposed

¹⁷ D. J. Kalupahana (2017): 69.

¹⁸ David R. Loy (2001): 55 - 77.

¹⁹ Thomas Pogge (2002): 3.

ethical cosmopolitanism.²⁰

In enhancing the sense of moral duty to work to eliminate poverty from the world, Buddhist tradition is full of insights that can serve us. In this section, it is planned to examine teachings found mainly in Dhammapala's *Cariyāpiṭaka Aṭṭakathā* (=CPA) and Shantideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (=BCA). These texts come up with teachings to guide practitioners towards Buddhahood.

The *Buddhavamśa*, a text belonging to the *Khuddhaka Nikāya* reports the initiation of the Bodhisattva career of Gautama Buddha at the feet of Dīpankara Buddha in a previous life. According to the text, the Sumedha ascetic, the future Buddha gave up the opportunity to attain arahanthood and end suffering by listening to the Dīpankara Buddha due to compassion for other beings. Sumedha was determined to become a fully enlightened Buddha so that it would be able to help many people as the Dīpankara Buddha was doing.²¹

In the CPA, Dhammapala the commentator (who seems to be a contemporary of Shantideva of Nalanada), produces a fully-developed version of altruism based on the doctrine of ten perfections which is the practice of a *bodhisatta*. The teachings presented in the CPA do motivate philanthropy. Through embracing 'other-regardless' into the practice of ten perfections, the elimination of suffering in the world is turned into a moral obligation for a person seeking liberation. Theoretically, all the Buddhists are working towards liberation. Consequently, it becomes a duty for them to alleviate suffering in the world. Poverty is a complicated aspect of suffering among various forms of suffering. Thus, it is a part of moral perfection for Buddhists to work to eliminate suffering from the world.

IV. MORAL IMPERATIVE IN DHAMMAPALA'S PHILANTHROPY

The Buddhist imperative to alleviate poverty can be ideally strengthened through the textual teachings. Both *Theravada* and *Mahayana* Masters have developed a strong emphasis on supporting each other. In the context of poverty alleviation, this "other" has to be confined to the "needy/ poor". First, let us examine Pali commentator Dhammapala who teaches to help the needy. As it is mentioned in the CPA:

"Everything I acquire should be obtained only to give to others." And: "When will beggars feel free to take my belongings on their own accord, without asking?" And: "How can I be dear and agreeable to beggars, and how can they be dear and agreeable to me? How can I give and, after giving, be elated, exultant, filled with rapture and joy? And how can beggars be so on my account? How can my inclination to give be lofty? How can I give to beggars even without being asked, knowing their heart's desire?" And: "Since there are goods, and beggars have come, not to give them something would be a great deception on my part."²²

²⁰ Paul Wendel (2008): 89.

²¹ N. A. Jayawickrema (2017): 6f.

²² Ācariya Dhammapala (1996): 14.

This is a remarkable reference to show the connection between “other” and the “needy” in the connection of providing support for living. Moreover, the author uses the commanding verb ‘should’ in the first sentence. Buddhist philanthropy is connected with moral development. Here, moral development is directed at helping the needy in the world. This statement offers several insights into helping the helpless. A person must cultivate accessibility for the poor. There is a great gulf between the haves and have-nots in the world. The poor even cannot reach out to the rich to find help. From the Buddhist point of view on philanthropy, it can be learned that the rich in the world have a role in reducing poverty in society.

In the Buddhist tradition, giving is highly valued and practiced. By practicing giving, both the donor and receiver get benefits. A receiver of a gift may fulfill his/ her need at the moment whereas a donor enjoys both mundane and supra-mundane benefits. Giving is a way to overcome “*lobha*”- desire, one of the root causes of existence. Here, the author tries to bring about a revolutionary view to the perspective of earning money. An ordinary person earns money for him/ her and family, at length for close relatives. According to the *Mahadukkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN 13), one who earns wealth dislikes even the children who are not dear to him to possess wealth. This shows how much a person desires for what he/ she earns. But, Dhammapala asks his audience, the bodhisattvas, whatever is earned, should be earned for the wellbeing of others.

If we place, earnings at macro-levels by multi-national or national level companies, resources, and labor are bought at very low costs. In the developing world, Africa, Latin America, and some parts of Asia have experienced the issue over centuries. African countries though rich in gold, diamond, and other minerals, people living in those countries lead a very pathetic life. Further reckless mechanisms used in the mineral industry have caused serious environmental problems:

Overall, the conversion of growth into poverty reduction in Africa is much slower than in the rest of the developing world. People living in Africa’s resource-rich countries are 3 percent less literate, have a shorter life expectancy of 4.5 years, and have higher rates of malnutrition among women and children, compared to other countries in the region. This slow pace of poverty reduction is frequently attributed to economic growth that is led by natural resources, the so-called natural resource curse.²³

It is a well-known fact that larger companies like to operate in countries where they pay low salaries for workers. This sort of practice has to be questioned.

Practicing philanthropy is common among many secular and faith-based organizations and individuals. It is advised to offer something with love and

²³ Punam Chuhan-Pole, Andrew L. Dabalen, and Bryan Christopher Land (2017): XVII.

compassion. In the Buddhist tradition, it is explained a donor may donate due to several causes like fear, anger, and shyness. But, here, valued only by giving through loving-kindness and compassion.

If a dear person asks for something, he should arouse joy by reflecting: “One who is dear is asking me for something.” If an indifferent person asks for something, he should arouse joy by reflecting: “Surely, if I give him something he will become my friend, since giving to those who ask wins their affection.” And if a hostile person asks for something, he should be especially happy, thinking: “My foe is asking me for something; though he is hostile towards me, using this gift he will surely become my dear friend.” Thus, he should give to neutral and hostile people in the same way he gives to dear people, having first aroused loving-kindness and compassion.²⁴

Promoting the welfare of the world is a must for a person who is determined to attain enlightenment. Elaborating on the *suttanta* teaching “*param-rakkhanto attānam rakkhati*” (one who protects others, so does himself too), Dhammapala, comments on the perfection of loving-kindness (*mettā-pārami*) emphasizing activism to bring about wellbeing for others. The CPA presents:

The noble qualities of loving-kindness should be reflected upon as follows: “One resolved only upon his welfare cannot achieve success in this world or a happy rebirth in the life to come without some concern for the welfare of others; how then can one wish to establish all beings in the attainment of *nibbāna* succeed without loving-kindness? And if you wish to ultimately lead all beings to the supramundane achievement of *nibbāna*, you should begin by wishing for their mundane success here and now.” And: “I cannot provide for the welfare and happiness of others merely by wishing for it. Let me put forth the effort to accomplish it.”²⁵

In the world we are living, more than one billion fellow beings suffer due to lack of food and other necessities. In the light of Buddhist teaching, in such a condition, one cannot imagine enjoying one’s luxury. However, the reality is quite the contrary. As it was mentioned at the beginning, the United Nations Development Program failed to achieve its goal of reducing global poverty by 2015. Therefore, it is required to set new goals to achieve by 2030. It shows that the world is still not fully committed to reducing poverty in the world.

According to the Buddhist tradition, to ensure the proper function of a society, providing people with necessary welfare is a must. For instance, the *Cakkavattisihanada sutta* traces the collapse of society to the negligence of an aspect of welfare by the government (*adhanānam dhane anuppadiyamāne adinnādānam vepullam agamāsi*). In order to promote the overall well-being of a society, welfare services also play a critical role (However, support and services in many areas of life aid welfare in the broader sense and are critical

²⁴ Ācariya Dhammapala (1996): 14.

²⁵ Ācariya Dhammapala (1996): 23.

to the well-being of an individual and their family).²⁶ In contrast to the position in the *Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta* that the provision of welfare is a duty of the government, for Dhammapala, even the individuals are responsible for providing welfare of fellow beings. In an attempt to overcome global issues, the contribution of each global citizen would matter.

Religions can play several roles in the task of removing poverty. One is actively engaging in certain organizational and entrepreneurial efforts and the other is motivating individuals and society to work to reduce poverty.²⁷ By familiarizing the religious teachings, religious leaders can motivate followers to take seriously the issue of poverty and lead them to think creatively about how to eliminate poverty and make fellow beings free from suffering. Dhammapala's method is to treat other's well-being and one's own as equal would be an effective way of providing motivation.

We can see in the next section, that Dhammapala connects the practice of loving-kindness with compassion (*karuṇā*). As Dhammapala reasons, loving-kindness arouses compassion which in turn brings about active involvement in removing suffering and promoting happiness of sentient beings. Thus, compassion becomes the foundation for maturing the path of Buddhahood. As it is put in the text:

Thus, one should arouse an especially strong inclination towards promoting the welfare of all beings. And why should loving-kindness be developed towards all beings? Because it is the foundation for compassion. For when one delights in providing for the welfare and happiness of other beings with an unbounded heart, the desire to remove their affliction and suffering becomes powerful and firmly rooted. Compassion is the first of all the qualities issued in Buddhahood—their footing, foundation, root, head, and chief.²⁸

A *bodhisattva* must take responsibility personally to work for the goodness of others. As many of us are used to thinking, either governments or other agencies are responsible for everything in our lives today, especially when it comes to global issues. The individual role is neglected. A *bodhisattva* is a different personality. He/she individually takes upon himself the duty of working towards others' happiness and well-being: He should suffuse all beings with universal loving-kindness and compassion. Whatever causes suffering for beings, all that he should be ready to take upon himself.²⁹

Prioritizing the removal of suffering from the world is the main characteristic embedded in the *bodhisattva* path. How beings given to practice the *bodhisattva* path had sacrificed themselves to remove or avoid suffering at the individual level and collective levels has been extensively discussed

²⁶ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/understanding-welfare-and-well-being>; googled: 1/27/2025-11:43 AM.

²⁷ Gottfried Schweiger (2019): 2.

²⁸ Ācariya Dhammapala (1996): 23.

²⁹ Ācariya Dhammapala (1996): 41.

throughout the Buddhist literature.³⁰ The concern of the *Bodhisatta* is not limited to spiritual guidance and upliftment but he/she is sensitive to suffering that may come in various forms. Here, we can see a great demand in Buddhist ethics from the moral agents by asking them to sacrifice even both body and life to remove suffering in the world: Further, having relinquished his own body and life for the use and protection of beings, the bodhisattva should seek out and apply the antidotes to the various kinds of suffering to which beings are exposed - hunger, thirst, cold, heat, wind, sun, etc.³¹

Social inequality is the main cause of poverty.³² According to the evolutionary theory presented in the *Aggañña Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, social conditions and structures are man-made. In maintaining poverty in society, human society cannot deny its responsibility. Self-centered love leads to neglect of others and insensitivity to their suffering. Therefore, many religions teach us to give up self-love and instead embrace universal love (Hinduism: *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*-whole world is one family; Jesus: I live with you and among you in the presence of the poor and the outsider. Serve them and you are serving me. Befriend them and you will be friends of God. Shut them out, harass them, deny them what they need to sustain their lives, and you deny God.”). In straightforward language, Dhammapala explains that moral perfection lies in eliminating self-love and cultivating love for others: In brief, the destruction of self-love and the development of love for others are the means for the accomplishing of the *pāramīs*.³³ Dhammapala forges the path of enlightenment to the level that a *bodhisattva* becomes an ideal social worker. Every aspect of his/ her conduct turns out to be beneficial to fellow beings; values such as generosity and equality are expressed in the behavior. For the great compassion and the great wisdom of the Great Beings are adorned by giving. ... When the bodhisattvas are practicing the requisites of enlightenment, they treat all beings without exception as equal to themselves and perfect their sense of equality by remaining the same under all circumstances, pleasant or painful.³⁴ Thus, we can observe that Buddhist teachings in the Pali tradition provide a lot of motivation for the enhancement of concern for fellow beings’ suffering, especially, poverty, hunger, illness, etc ... these worldly issues.

³⁰ Vyāghri Jātaka, Sasa jātaka, and Mahāsīlava Jātaka in Buddhist Sanskrit and Pali Jātaka literatures are evidence for sacrifice by the bodhisatta.

³¹ Ācariya Dhammapala (1996): 42.

³² See: The overall persistent high level of poverty in the EU suggest that poverty is primarily the consequence of the way society is organised and resources are allocated, whether these are financial or other resources such as access to housing, health and social services, education and other economic, social and cultural services. (<https://www.eapn.eu/what-is-poverty/causes-of-poverty-and-inequality/>)

³³ Ācariya Dhammapala (1996): 52.

³⁴ Ācariya Dhammapala (1996): 52f.

V. UTILITY OF SHANTIDEVA'S TEACHINGS

Shantideva's ethical altruism is inspiring individuals to serve others. Using poetic language, he forms compelling ideas. Mahayana Buddhism is known for its emphasis on social emphasis. Compassion (*karuna*) became the most important value for Mahayana followers. Shantideva in the initial chapters of *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, puts forth some altruistic views that have direct relevance to the alleviation of poverty. Let us examine below: For all those ailing in the world, until their every sickness has been healed, May I become for them the doctor, nurse, the medicine itself. Raining down a flood of food and drink, May I dispel the ills of thirst and famine. And in the eons marked by scarcity and want, May I appear as drink and sustenance. For sentient beings, poor, May I become a treasure ever-plentiful, And lie before them closely in their reach, A varied source of all that they might need. (BCA III-8-10).

From the last stanza, it is clear, that a bodhisattva must pay attention to the poor in the world. Poverty is a form of suffering that deprives a person of many fundamental needs of life. On the other hand, poverty requires sufficient wealth and other necessities to get out of it. Compassionate beings always have walked with the poor and attended to their need. In the world, the poor are disdained by the rich. It is an eternal practice (BCA VIII-23: People scorn the poor who have no wealth). Even though poverty is a social construct or a result of previous *karma*, those who are poor need others' help to get released from the suffering of poverty.

5.1. Equality in all and eliminating suffering

One of the arguments advanced by Shantideva in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is that there is no suffering that can be called belonging either to oneself or the other. What exists in the world is suffering. Pain has no discrimination. Suffering has no "possessor," Therefore no distinctions can be made in it. Since pain is pain, it is to be dispelled. What use is there in drawing boundaries? (BCA VIII-102)

In the chapter on *Dhyāna Pārami* (Meditation Perfection), Shantideva has advanced his altruistic thought. As Shantideva points out, pain is simply pain whether it is mine or yours. There is no difference between mine and yours. I like happiness, and so do others. Therefore, I make others happy: And therefore, I'll dispel the pain of others, for it is simply pain, just like my own. And others I will aid and benefit, for they are living beings, like my body. Since I and other beings both, in wanting happiness, are equal and alike, what difference is there to distinguish us, That I should strive to have my bliss alone? (BCA VIII-94 - 95).

Here, Shantideva reminds the early Buddhist teaching that treating oneself and others equally (As am I, so are they; as are they, so am I' - Treating others like oneself, neither kill nor incite to kill.³⁵

³⁵ *Sutta Nipāta* (Trans), Bhikkhu Sujāto, Verse 705 <https://suttacentral.net/snp3.11/en/sujato>

Shantideva's frequent reference to the consent of devoting one's body and life for the service of others, strengthens motivation and consequent activism. Here also, Shantideva shares the early Buddhist tradition. Placing the well-being of other beings as prime importance in Buddhist tradition indicates its commitment to a better society free from poverty, discrimination, and inequality. The following stanza in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is illustrative of Shantideva's spirit of other regards: Thus, sentient beings will be my chief concern./ And everything I see my body has/ Will all be seized and offered/ For the use and service of all other beings. (BCA VIII-139)

5.2. Buddhists today in eliminating suffering

Buddhists are engaged in large-scale programs supportive of reducing human suffering. Buddhi's activism does vary from typical religious services to political struggles. Throughout history, Buddhists have contributed to the progress of human civilization and the removal of pain as much as they can. Developing socio-economic conditions, education, providing health facilities, and disaster relief programs are carried out by Buddhist organizations.

5.3. Santi Sena in Cambodia

Santi Sena is an organization established by Buddhist monks in 1994 to address poverty in Svay Rieng province in Cambodia. The Leader was Venerable Nhem Kim Teng, head of the Prey Chhak Pagoda. By this time, Cambodia was passing a period of political transition and prevalent poverty. Monks wanted to address the pathetic condition and bring about a remedy for the poverty-stricken Rieng province. The then situation of the province is reported by a researcher as follows:

... it is a poverty-stricken and economically weak area, with most local people involved in rice farming but only managing to collect one annual harvest. As a result, farms tend to be poor, with each hectare capable of producing an average of only about 800kgs. Lacking access to much in the way of natural resources, most local people do not have alternative or additional sources of income to augment their earnings. Consequently, many people travel to surrounding population centers, where some find work as poorly paid wage laborers, while others beg for food in neighboring Vietnam.³⁶

Using traditional knowledge and resources available within the area, Santi Sena implemented its program of alleviating poverty in the province. Their main focus was the weaker people: Santi Sena's philosophy has its origins in the Buddhist belief that 'development' is invariably "human development" whose target is necessarily and primarily poorer people.³⁷ Here, it is obvious that Buddhism had focused on the poorer segment of society. Putting Buddhist compassion, wisdom generosity, and many other values into practice, working at the grass-root level is remarkable.

³⁶ Jeffrey Heynes (2007): 117.

³⁷ Jeffrey Heynes (2007): 118.

5.4. Tzu Compassionate Foundation in Taiwan

The Tzu Compassionate Foundation in Taiwan is well-known for its international disaster relief programs. Including non-Buddhist countries such as the Middle East, they operate in all five continents when there are either natural disasters or man-made disasters. The organization delivers its relief services in two stages, just after the disaster medical supplies and other humanitarian aid are supplied for victims, and in the second stage, they build houses, schools, hospitals with many other sustainable facilities.

In addition to disaster relief programs, the Tzu-chi Foundation delivers a well-advanced health service in Taiwan. There are seven hospitals run covering the country while medical universities and a Born-marrow Research Centre are maintained. The main objective of these services is to provide poor and incapable people with the necessary facilities. The motivation of the founder of the Organization describes what are the values it is based on. When Chen Yen Master (the Founder Nun) was young, had experienced a young mother dying due to poor health facilities in her area. With a female group of followers, Master had worked for several years to establish the first hospital with facilities in the region.³⁸

5.5. Suggestion: Duty of Buddhists

The Buddhists are working in various fields to support the people in difficulty. However, there is a scarcity of organizations solely dedicated to addressing the problem of poverty. The services they are rendering at the moment to the world have to be extended to cover the people living below the poverty line all over the world.

By nature, Buddhism is a moral universalism. It spreads love and compassion for all sentient beings transcending all boundaries. Therefore, Buddhists are compelled to work to make the world better in every aspect with their best. If the Buddhists make a universal call for Buddhists living all over the world to unite for the course of reducing poverty and set up a one-world Buddhist organization inclusive of all the members from Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, and operate at least in the Buddhist countries, it would be a great effort from the side of Buddhists.

VI. CONCLUSION

As it was discussed based on the teachings of Buddhist tradition, first Buddhists consider poverty as suffering and it has developed a strong demand for followers to eliminate every form of suffering from the world. The Buddhist activists today show that they inherit and practice the teachings presented in the textual tradition. By extension, poverty is a serious form of suffering, it should be a priority for Buddhists to work as the United Nations has done.

In emphasizing generosity, the authors have paid attention to providing the poor with necessities. This indicates that Buddhist tradition had been sensitive

³⁸ Julia C. Huang (2009): 24.

to the issue of poverty in the world when it was engaged in forging its moral teachings through which they were building its world. Buddhist teachings can serve to motivate people to work individually and collectively to remove poverty from the world. Finally, Buddhist tradition turns the duty of removing poverty from the life of people into a moral imperative for every human being.

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VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM COMPASSION IN ACTION: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract:

This paper explores the pivotal role of Vietnamese Buddhism in promoting compassion and unity during the Covid-19 crisis. Philosophical Foundations of Compassion delves into the ethical and spiritual principles guiding Vietnamese Buddhists, emphasizing teachings from the *Dhammapada* and the Mahayana ideal of the Bodhisattva. Humanitarian Relief Efforts highlight tangible contributions such as food distribution, medical aid, and spiritual support, embodying loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). Resilience through Interdependence examines the Buddhist principle of dependent origination, illustrating how interconnectedness fosters community well-being and sustainable human development. Innovations in Sustainable Development underlines the paper's novel perspective on applying Buddhist wisdom to modern crises, advocating for selfless service as a means of societal healing. This work contributes significantly to the discourse on global challenges, positioning Vietnamese Buddhism as a model of compassion in action, resonating with the timeless truth: "Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love." The paper offers a blueprint for future humanitarian and spiritual responses, reaffirming the transformative power of compassion in achieving unity and sustainable development.

Keywords: *Vietnamese Buddhism, compassion and unity, dependent origination, humanitarian relief efforts, sustainable development.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Buddha imparted a timeless truth: “Hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love, this is the eternal rule.”¹ These simple yet profound words have served as a guiding star for humanity, illuminating the path through the shadows of suffering and discord. They resonate like the melodic ringing of a temple bell, calling on all beings to transcend animosity and embrace compassion. In the darkest hours, when fear clouds the heart and despair threatens to engulf the spirit, these teachings remind us that love is the balm that heals the wounds of animosity, and kindness is the bridge that spans the vast chasm of isolation and division.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis unparalleled in modern history, Vietnamese Buddhism has brought this eternal teaching to life. Like the lotus, a symbol revered in Buddhist thought for its purity emerging unsullied from the mud, the Vietnamese Buddhist community arose to meet the unprecedented suffering and challenges of this era. The pandemic, much like the ever-turning wheel of *samsara*, exposed humanity’s vulnerabilities, laying bare the fragility of life and the interconnected nature of existence. In response, Vietnamese Buddhists have woven a rich tapestry of compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness (*metta*), extending their hands to alleviate suffering and nurture resilience. United in purpose, they acted as both guardians and beacons, illuminating the way forward with the light of hope and the warmth of solidarity.

Rooted in the timeless teachings of the Buddha, the actions of the Vietnamese Buddhist community were far more than acts of mere charity. They embodied a profound realization of the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (*paticcasamuppada*), which teaches that all beings are interconnected and that the well-being of one is intrinsically tied to the well-being of all. In this recognition lies the seed of true strength – strength that is born not from self-interest but from selfless service. As the Bodhisattva vow declares, “For as long as space endures, and for as long as living beings remain, until then, may I too abide to dispel the misery of the world.” This vow echoes through the compassionate acts of Vietnamese Buddhists, whose every effort during the pandemic was a testament to their commitment to the shared humanity of all beings.

Compassion in Buddhism is not a passive emotion but an active force - a transformative energy capable of alleviating suffering and fostering inner peace. As the *Mettā Sutta* teaches, “Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let one cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.” This boundless compassion, which transcends the limitations of self and others, becomes particularly salient in times of global crisis. During the pandemic, Vietnamese Buddhists brought this teaching to life in their unwavering dedication to serving those in need. From providing food and medical supplies to offering financial assistance and spiritual guidance, their actions reflected the essence of the Buddha’s teachings, breathing life into

¹ *Dhp* 5.

the timeless wisdom that compassion is the foundation of both personal and collective liberation.

The pandemic not only tested the physical resilience of societies but also the mental and emotional fortitude of individuals. Fear, grief, and uncertainty became pervasive, casting long shadows over the lives of countless people. In this context, the spiritual support provided by Vietnamese Buddhist communities was akin to the cool shade of a *bodhi* tree under which one finds solace and clarity. Through meditation, chanting, and mindfulness practices, they offered a sanctuary for the weary mind and a refuge for the troubled heart. These practices, deeply rooted in the teachings of the Buddha, served as a reminder that inner peace is both a sanctuary and a source of strength in the face of external turmoil.

Moreover, Vietnamese Buddhism's response to the pandemic highlighted the enduring relevance of the Mahayana ideal of the Bodhisattva. This ideal, which calls on practitioners to seek enlightenment not only for their own benefit but for the liberation of all sentient beings, was vividly illustrated in the selfless acts of monks, nuns, and lay practitioners alike. Their efforts transcended religious boundaries, reaching out to individuals and communities regardless of their faith or background. This inclusivity, a hallmark of Vietnamese Buddhist practice, reflects the universal applicability of the Buddha's teachings, which emphasize the unity of all beings and the inherent dignity of life.

The profound impact of these compassionate actions extends beyond immediate relief. Vietnamese Buddhists have sown the seeds of sustainable human development by fostering a sense of unity and interdependence. Their actions exemplify the Buddhist principle that true peace and resilience arise not from isolation but from harmony and mutual support. As the Buddha taught, "Just as the great ocean has one taste, the taste of salt, so too does the *Dhamma* have one taste, the taste of liberation."² Similarly, the efforts of Vietnamese Buddhists during the pandemic carried the single, unifying taste of compassion, which nourished both individuals and communities.

The legacy of these actions offers valuable lessons for the future. In a world increasingly marked by division and discord, the example of Vietnamese Buddhism serves as a beacon, guiding humanity towards a more compassionate and inclusive path. It underscores the transformative power of Buddhist wisdom in addressing global challenges. It reminds us that the teachings of the Buddha are not confined to the meditation hall or the monastery. Rather, they are lived and realized in the everyday acts of kindness and service that uplift others and affirm the shared dignity of all beings.

As we navigate the uncertainties of the future, the words of the Buddha resound with renewed urgency: "Conquer anger by love, conquer evil by good, conquer the miser with generosity, and conquer the liar with truth."³ These teachings, brought to life by the Vietnamese Buddhist response to the

² *Udāna* 5. 5.

³ *Dhp* 223.

pandemic, offer a blueprint for building a world where all beings can live with dignity, harmony, and peace. By embodying the spirit of loving-kindness and compassion, Vietnamese Buddhism has shown that even in the darkest times, the light of the *Dhamma* can illuminate the path forward, guiding humanity toward a future of unity and sustainable development.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM

Vietnamese Buddhism, steeped in centuries of spiritual wisdom and cultural depth, epitomizes the virtues of compassion, selfless service, and the cultivation of collective well-being. Rooted in Mahayana principles, this tradition emphasizes the Bodhisattva ideal – a profound aspiration to attain enlightenment not for one’s liberation alone but for the salvation of all sentient beings. This ideal, described in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* as “a heart as vast as the great ocean, embracing all beings without distinction,” found its most luminous expression during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the face of a crisis that tested the limits of resilience and unity, Vietnamese Buddhists, including monks, nuns, and lay practitioners, embodied the Bodhisattva spirit through tireless efforts to alleviate suffering, radiating love and hope amid widespread fear and despair.

At the heart of Vietnamese Buddhist practice lies the principle of dependent origination (*paticcasamuppada*), which teaches that all phenomena arise in interdependence. The Buddha described this truth in the *Samyutta Nikaya*: “When this exists, that comes to be, with the arising of this, that arises. When this ceases, that ceases.” This doctrine reflects the intricate web of connections that binds all beings together, a reality starkly illuminated by the pandemic. Vietnamese Buddhists recognize that the well-being of each individual is inextricably linked to the well-being of the community. Their compassionate actions, rooted in this understanding, served as a profound affirmation of interdependence. They knew that “just as the hand removes a thorn from the foot,” so too must each person strive to relieve the suffering of others, for in doing so, they heal themselves and the world.

The Vietnamese Buddhist response to the pandemic was not merely an act of charity but a living embodiment of *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā* (loving-kindness). The Buddha taught in the *Mettā Sutta*: “Let one’s thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world – above, below, and across – without obstruction, without hate, without enmity.” Guided by this teaching, Vietnamese Buddhists organized food distributions, provided medical supplies, and offered financial assistance to the needy. They reached beyond the walls of their temples, extending their hands to people of all faiths and backgrounds. Their efforts exemplified the inclusive nature of the *Dhamma*, which, as the *Mahāparinibbana Sutta* states, “is well-proclaimed, open to all, and to be realized individually by the wise.”

In the *Mahāyāna* tradition, the Bodhisattva’s vow to alleviate the suffering of all beings is the highest expression of spiritual commitment. Vietnamese Buddhists, inspired by this vow, transformed monasteries into centers of humanitarian relief. Chanting halls resonated with prayers for global healing,

while meditation sessions provided solace to those overwhelmed by grief and anxiety. These acts of compassion were infused with the wisdom of the *Lotus Sutra*, which declares, “To those who are suffering, I reveal the great path to those in fear, I bring peace.” The monks, nuns, and lay practitioners became living Bodhisattvas, their actions a beacon of light in the darkness of uncertainty.

The pandemic also revealed the transformative power of *dāna* (generosity), one of the six perfections (*pāramitās*). The Buddha emphasized the importance of giving in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*: “If people knew the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of selfishness overcome their hearts.” Vietnamese Buddhists embraced this teaching wholeheartedly, offering not only material aid but also spiritual nourishment. Their generosity was not transactional but deeply rooted in the understanding that true giving arises from a heart untainted by ego. Through their acts of *dāna*, they sowed seeds of unity and resilience, nurturing a spirit of togetherness that transcended the divisions of race, religion, and class.

The lotus, a powerful symbol in Buddhism, finds its perfect metaphor in the Vietnamese Buddhist response to the pandemic. Just as the lotus blooms pure and radiant above the muddy waters, so too did their compassion shine through the adversity of the global crisis. This resilience is mirrored in the Buddha’s teaching: “As a lotus flower is born in water, grows in water, and rises out of water to stand unsoiled, so I, born in the world, raised in the world, having overcome the world, live unsoiled by the world” (*Samyutta Nikāya*). The Vietnamese Buddhist community stood as a testament to this truth, exemplifying purity of intention and clarity of action amid chaos.

Their response also underscores the relevance of *sammā-kammanta* (right action) on the Noble Eightfold Path. This principle, which calls for actions rooted in compassion and wisdom, guided their efforts to create sustainable benefits for society. The Buddha taught, “He who sees others as himself will not harm others. He who sees the suffering of others as his own suffering will not oppress others” (*Sutta Nipāta*). Guided by this wisdom, Vietnamese Buddhists worked not only to address immediate needs but also to foster long-term harmony and well-being.

In addition to material support, Vietnamese Buddhists provided spiritual guidance, helping people navigate the emotional and psychological challenges of the pandemic. Through meditation, mindfulness, and the recitation of protective chants (*parittas*), they offered a refuge for the weary and a balm for the distressed.

The Buddha’s words in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* – “Dwell contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having removed covetousness and grief for the world” – resonated deeply in these practices. By teaching mindfulness, they empowered individuals to cultivate inner peace, even amid external turmoil.

The enduring impact of these actions extends far beyond the immediate

crisis. Vietnamese Buddhists demonstrated that the *Dhamma* is not confined to the meditation cushion or the monastic cell, it is alive in every act of kindness, every gesture of solidarity, and every moment of understanding. Their response serves as a model for global compassion, reflecting the Buddha's timeless teaching: "Better than a thousand hollow words is one word that brings peace."⁴

As the world continues to grapple with challenges of division and discord, Vietnamese Buddhism offers a blueprint for compassionate leadership. It reminds us that true strength lies not in power or wealth but in the ability to love unconditionally and to act selflessly. The Buddha's words in the *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta* – "Just as the great rivers, when they reach the ocean, lose their names and are simply called the great ocean, so too does the *Dhamma* embrace all beings without distinction" – capture the essence of their actions.

We can say the Vietnamese Buddhist response to the pandemic stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of the Buddha's teachings in modern times. It illuminates the path of compassion, resilience, and interdependence, inviting all of humanity to walk together toward a future of unity and peace. Like the *bodhi* tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment, Vietnamese Buddhism has offered shade and shelter to countless beings, proving that the *Dhamma* is indeed a light that cannot be extinguished. Their actions remind us that the journey to enlightenment is not a solitary pursuit but a shared endeavor – a collective awakening to the truth that all beings are interconnected, and that in the happiness of others, we find our own.

III. VIETNAM BUDDHISM COOPS WITH THE PANDEMIC – EXPRESSING THE PEAK OF LOVE

The history of the development of Buddhism in Vietnam over the past 2,000 years, not only during the struggle to protect the independence of the country as well as build a strong country, we can clearly see the key role of Vietnamese Buddhism, today. Now that is even more evident in cultivating compassion, solidarity, and mutual care during the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a time marked by isolation and suffering, Vietnamese Buddhist institutions exemplified the timeless teaching: "With compassion as their guiding star, the wise bring comfort to those in distress" (*Itivuttaka*). The Buddhist response to the pandemic highlighted the power of spiritual principles to inspire collective resilience and sustainable growth, demonstrating the profound relevance of the *Dhamma* in modern crises.

Guided by *Mahāyāna* values, Vietnamese Buddhists fully embodied the ideal of the Bodhisattva – one who postpones personal enlightenment to aid all sentient beings. They embraced the transformative force of compassion (*karuṇā*), not as an abstract ideal but as an active principle manifesting through tangible support. Food donations, healthcare resources, and mental health initiatives became channels through which this compassion flowed, affirming

⁴ *Dhp* 100.

that “the wise rejoice not in what they receive but in the joy they bring to others.” (*Dhammapada*). These acts of service transcended distinctions of religion or status, reflecting the universality of Buddhist compassion.

The teaching of ‘*paṭiccasamuppāda*’ (dependent origination), which reveals the interconnectedness of all beings, provided the philosophical backbone for these efforts. Vietnamese Buddhists deeply understood that individual suffering ripples through communities, just as healing and harmony can spread outward. By addressing the needs of others, they upheld the Buddha’s declaration: “In protecting others, one protects oneself, in protecting oneself, one protects others” (*Samyutta Nikāya*). Their actions became a vivid expression of the mutual care that is both a duty and a privilege in a shared world.

Spiritual aid was just as integral to the Buddhist response as physical relief. Vietnamese temples and monasteries transformed into havens of emotional solace and mindfulness training. Through meditative practices, communities were reminded of the Buddha’s teaching in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*: “By focusing on the breath, one can still the storm within.” These teachings provided a sanctuary for those grappling with fear, loss, and uncertainty, equipping them with tools to cultivate inner peace and resilience amidst external chaos.

A key feature of Vietnamese Buddhism’s pandemic relief was its emphasis on non-discriminatory generosity (*dāna*). Inspired by the Buddha’s words, “Generosity is the ornament of the world, the surest path to peace” (*Jātaka Tales*), lay practitioners and monastics gave freely, not only of material goods but of their time and presence. Acts of *dāna* reinforced a sense of shared humanity, creating ripples of goodwill that extended far beyond the immediate crisis. It was not only the recipients who were transformed but also the givers, who discovered that “in giving, one becomes rich in spirit.”

Moreover, Vietnamese Buddhism’s emphasis on collective welfare aligned seamlessly with the Buddhist ethical code of *śīla* (moral discipline). The commitment to harmonious action, as prescribed in the *Sigālōuvāda Sutta*, guided their approach to fostering societal unity. In addressing both immediate and systemic needs, they demonstrated that moral conduct is not a personal endeavor but a foundation for communal flourishing. Their work reinforced the idea that “to act for the good of others is to plant seeds of happiness in the field of the world” (*Itivuttaka*).

What makes this response particularly notable is its foresight in addressing the long-term implications of the pandemic. Vietnamese Buddhists did not simply alleviate suffering they laid a foundation for sustainable human development by fostering resilience, interdependence and a deeper appreciation of life’s sacred interconnectedness. As the Buddha proclaimed, “He who contemplates the interconnected nature of life will act with wisdom and compassion” (*Dīgha Nikāya*). These efforts showcased how timeless Buddhist teachings can guide humanity toward enduring peace and harmony.

Furthermore, the pandemic highlighted Vietnamese Buddhism’s capacity to serve as a bridge between ancient wisdom and contemporary needs. Its

actions echoed the Buddha's declaration that "the *Dhamma* is not stagnant, it is like a river flowing ever onward, finding its way to nourish and renew" (*Anguttara Nikāya*). Through their innovative responses, Vietnamese Buddhists demonstrated how the wisdom of the past can dynamically address the challenges of the present.

It can be said that looking at it positively, the pandemic provided a stage for Vietnamese Buddhism to manifest its highest ideals – compassion, wisdom, and service. These efforts have not only addressed immediate suffering but have also inspired a vision for a more compassionate and interconnected future. Like a guiding light in the darkness, their work reminds us of the Buddha's words: "As the full moon shines in the darkness of the night, so does the light of the *Dhamma* illuminate the world."⁵ The Vietnamese Buddhist response serves as a model for how spiritual traditions can offer profound solutions to global challenges, affirming that, through the *Dhamma*, the world can indeed find its way to healing and unity.

3.1. From Buddhist scriptures and teachings, the philosophical and ethical foundation of compassion in Vietnamese Buddhism is clarified

To elucidate the philosophical and ethical foundations of compassion in Vietnamese Buddhism, one must delve into the profound teachings of the Buddha, which serve as both the guiding star and the fertile soil nurturing this spiritual virtue. Compassion, or "*karuṇā*", finds its root in the Buddha's enlightenment, encapsulated within the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. It is not merely an emotional response but a dynamic force, likened to a river that carves its way through the hardened terrain of human suffering, uniting all sentient beings under the canopy of empathy and interconnectedness.

Vietnamese Buddhism, with its profound blend of culture and history of the nation, embodies a unique synthesis between Māhāyāna and Theravāda traditions. Originating from the Bodhisattva's Māhāyāna ideal, compassion transcends the individual and becomes universal, expressing a boundless desire to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings in whatever form they manifest. The Bodhisattva vow, often recited with reverence, proclaims: "Beings are numberless, I vow to save them. Desires are inexhaustible, I vow to end them." This aspiration mirrors the lotus flower, which blossoms unstained amidst the murky waters, symbolizing purity and altruistic action despite worldly defilements.

Scriptural references such as the "*Mettā Sutta*"⁶ and the "*Avataṃsaka Sūtra*"⁷ offer luminous insights into the application of compassion. The "*Mettā Sutta*" extols the cultivation of loving-kindness (*mettā*) towards all beings "as a mother loves her child, her only child". In contrast, the "*Avataṃsaka Sūtra*" expands this love into

⁵ *Dhp* 387.

⁶ *Snp* 1.8.

⁷ Flower Garland *Sūtra*.

an interdependent cosmic vision, where “all beings are interwoven like pearls upon Indra’s net”. This metaphor eloquently expresses the interconnectedness of existence, wherein the suffering or joy of one being reverberates across the entire web of life.

Ethically, compassion in Vietnamese Buddhism is a call to action – an invitation to transform suffering into joy through right thought, speech, and action, as delineated in the Noble Eightfold Path. The Vietnamese Buddhist practice of “*từ bi*” (compassion) is often illustrated through charitable acts, community-building initiatives, and disaster relief efforts. For example, the enduring principle of “*hộ quốc an dân*” (protecting the nation and bringing peace to the people) reflects the Buddhist commitment to societal harmony and the alleviation of collective suffering.

However, compassion is not devoid of wisdom (*prajñā*); it is a union of heart and mind. Without wisdom, compassion risks descending into sentimentality, whereas wisdom devoid of compassion becomes cold and detached. The Buddha’s teaching on the “middle way” (*Majjhima Paṭipadā*) illustrates this balance, encouraging practitioners to navigate the extremes of indulgence and asceticism with discernment and care. Compassion thus becomes a radiant gem, polished by wisdom and luminous in its capacity to reflect the innate Buddha nature within every being.

In its essence, compassion in Vietnamese Buddhism is not confined to human interactions but extends to all sentient beings, embracing animals, plants, and the natural world. The practice of vegetarianism, common among Vietnamese Buddhists, symbolizes this expansive care, embodying the principle of “*ahimsa*” (non-harming). It is a reminder that compassion, like the sun, shines impartially upon all, regardless of form or station.

As the *Dhammapada* (Verse 129 - 130) poignantly states: “All tremble at violence, all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause others to kill.” This profound truth underscores the ethical imperative of compassion – a bridge between self and other, a light dispelling the shadows of ignorance and greed. In the Vietnamese context, this compassion resonates as a cultural ethos, a beacon guiding both individuals and communities toward a harmonious coexistence.

Thus, compassion in Vietnamese Buddhism emerges as a symphony of philosophy, ethics, and action – a sacred thread weaving together the aspirations of countless practitioners across centuries. It is the voice of the Buddha echoing through time, calling all beings to awaken, to act, and to embrace the boundless heart of *karuṇā*. Like the ever-flowing river, compassion nurtures life, erodes the barriers of separation, and carries all beings toward the ocean of liberation.

3.2. The humanitarian efforts of Vietnamese Buddhists during the pandemic demonstrate their commitment to alleviating suffering

To document the humanitarian efforts undertaken by Vietnamese Buddhists during the pandemic reveals a profound tapestry of selflessness interwoven with the timeless teachings of the Buddha. Beyond the tangible

acts of aid, such efforts reflect a spiritual resilience and a collective embodiment of the Buddha's call to "work out your salvation with diligence."⁸ Vietnamese Buddhists transformed the suffering wrought by the pandemic into an opportunity to actualize the Dharma, nurturing not just physical relief but also spiritual upliftment.

One of the most remarkable initiatives was the establishment of mindfulness and grief-healing workshops designed for families who had lost loved ones. Rooted in the Buddha's teachings in the '*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*,'⁹ these workshops encouraged participants to observe their emotions mindfully, transforming despair into understanding. Such programs were not just for individual healing but a means of fostering a collective resilience, akin to the interconnectedness described in the "*Avatamsaka Sūtra*", where each being supports the other like jewels in Indra's Net.¹⁰

In addition to physical aid, Vietnamese Buddhists spearheaded ecological recovery efforts as part of their pandemic response, embodying the Buddha's teaching in the '*Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta*' that a just ruler ensures the preservation of nature.¹¹ Monastic communities initiated tree-planting drives and water purification projects, underscoring the symbiotic relationship between human welfare and the environment. Such actions highlighted the interconnected nature of all life, as expounded in the doctrine of '*pratītyasamutpāda*' (dependent origination).



Buddhism and other religions jointly signed to implement a coordinated program to protect the environment and respond to climate change for the period 2021 - 2025.
Source [1]

⁸ *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.

⁹ MN 10.

¹⁰ Indra's net (also called Indra's jewels or Indra's pearls, Sanskrit *Indrajāla*, Chinese: 因陀羅網) is a metaphor used to illustrate the concepts of *Śūnyatā* (emptiness).

¹¹ DN 26.



Ven. Thich Quang Man instructs children to plant trees (Lien Hoa Pagoda (Kien Duc, Dak Nong)



Young monks at Giac Ngo Pagoda (BR-VT) take care of lotus like they take care of the bodhi mind.

Source [2]

Furthermore, a unique dimension of Vietnamese Buddhist humanitarianism during the pandemic was their focus on emotional and ethical education for front-line workers. Drawing from the ‘*Sigālovenāda Sutta*’¹², which emphasizes reciprocal responsibilities, monks and nuns provided spiritual counsel and ethical frameworks for health workers. They introduced practices of equanimity *upekkhā* to help these individuals navigate the moral and emotional dilemmas of their roles, ensuring that they were supported not just physically but spiritually.

Vietnamese Buddhists also took to leveraging digital platforms, offering virtual Dharma talks, meditation retreats, and chanting sessions that reached thousands across the globe. This creative adaptation to technology echoes the Buddha’s principle of skillful means ‘*upāya*’, as articulated in the ‘*Lotus Sūtra*’, demonstrating the adaptability of Buddhist compassion to modern contexts. These virtual efforts cultivated a sense of unity that transcended physical boundaries, embodying the Buddha’s vision of a universal sangha.

Notably, Vietnamese Buddhist humanitarianism during the pandemic was not confined to the immediate crisis. Recognizing the long-term impact of COVID-19, they established scholarship funds for children orphaned by the virus and vocational training programs for those left unemployed. These initiatives, grounded in the teachings of ‘*dāna*’ (generosity), emphasized sustainability and the creation of enduring opportunities for marginalized communities, transforming short-term relief into lasting empowerment.

We can say Vietnamese Buddhist’s efforts reflected a profound spiritual commitment to alleviating not just external suffering but the internal afflictions of fear, anger, and despair. The Buddhist practice of *karuṇā* (compassion) was manifest not only in their acts of giving but also in their ability to embody hope and equanimity amidst adversity. As the ‘*Dhammapada*’ (Verse 223) teaches: “Conquer anger with non-anger, evil with good, and the miserly

¹² DN 3.

with generosity.” Vietnamese Buddhists demonstrated that compassion when grounded in wisdom, becomes an unshakable force capable of transforming even the most harrowing circumstances into opportunities for spiritual and societal growth.

Thus, the pandemic response of Vietnamese Buddhists stands as a beacon of engaged Buddhism – where timeless wisdom meets urgent action, crafting a legacy of hope, healing, and humanity that will inspire generations to come. Here are specific contributions and achievements of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha during the Covid-19 pandemic, along with detailed statistics and sources:

Financial and material contributions: During the peak of the pandemic, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha mobilized over 3,000 billion VND (approximately 130 million USD) to support COVID-19 prevention and relief efforts. This funding was used to purchase ventilators, and medical equipment, and provide direct aid to affected communities.¹³ The temples across the country provided millions of free meals to patients, impoverished individuals, and frontline workers in hospitals and quarantine zones. For instance, Giác Ngộ Pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City distributed over 400,000 meals in just six months of lockdown.¹⁴ (2) Provision of medical equipment: The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha donated more than 100 ventilators, thousands of oxygen saturation meters, and hundreds of thousands of medical masks and protective suits to field hospitals and quarantine zones in severely affected provinces such as Ho Chi Minh City, Bình Dương, and Long An.¹⁵ (3) Blood donation campaigns: During the critical blood shortage caused by the pandemic, Buddhist temples organized over 500 blood donation drives, attracting tens of thousands of Monks, Nuns, and lay Buddhists, contributing tens of thousands of blood units to the national blood banks.¹⁶ (4) Support for orphans and families in need: The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha established scholarship funds to support children orphaned by COVID-19. In Ho Chi Minh City alone, over 1,500 children received monthly financial assistance and long-term scholarships from temples such as Hoàng Pháp, Pháp Tạng, and Giác Ngộ Temple.¹⁷ Tens of thousands of care packages containing medicine, rice, essential food items, and daily necessities were distributed to poor families, ensuring no one was left behind during the crisis. (5) Establishment of field hospitals: Vĩnh Nghiêm Pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City collaborated with local authorities to set up a camp hospital with 300 beds, providing treatment and isolation for COVID-19 patients during the pandemic’s peak.¹⁸ Hundreds of monks and nuns volunteered to serve at field hospitals along with religious volunteers and Buddhists in the

¹³ Source: Giác Ngộ News, 2021.

¹⁴ Source: Thanh Niên News, 2021.

¹⁵ Source: Vietnam Fatherland Front Central Committee, 2021.

¹⁶ Source: Vietnam Red Cross Society.

¹⁷ Source: Pháp Luật TP.HCM, 2022.

¹⁸ Source: Sài Gòn Giải Phóng News, 2021.

campaign “Take off your cassock and put on a white blouse.” (6) Spiritual and mental support: The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha organized over 5,000 virtual memorial services for Covid-19 victims, providing solace to grieving families and fostering a sense of spiritual peace during a time of loss.¹⁹ Thousands of online mindfulness and meditation retreats were held, attracting over 2 million participants domestically and internationally, helping people alleviate stress and maintain spiritual well-being during lockdowns.²⁰ (7) Adoption of digital technology: Buddhist institutions adapted to the new normal by hosting online Dharma talks, meditation sessions, and chanting events and the requiem ceremony for victims who died during the Covid-19 pandemic. Over 1,000 online teachings were conducted through YouTube, Facebook, and Zoom, reaching millions and spreading positivity during challenging times.²¹ (8) Economic recovery and skills training: The temples in the Mekong Delta organized more than 200 free vocational training courses, teaching skills such as sewing, baking, and farming, helping individuals regain economic stability post-pandemic.²² (9) Raising awareness and promoting preventive measures: The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha issued public messages encouraging adherence to health guidelines, vaccination, and communal responsibility, exemplifying Buddhist principles of compassion and care for all beings.



Provide the ambulances & medical equipments.. Source [5] & [14]

¹⁹ Source: Giác Ngộ News, 2021.

²⁰ Source: Dân Trí News, 2022.

²¹ Xuân Hoàng, Đại lễ cầu siêu cho nạn nhân tử vong do Covid-19, Báo Quân đội nhân dân, (2021); <https://www.qdnd.vn/xa-hoi/dan-toc-ton-giao/dai-le-cau-sieu-cho-nan-nhan-tu-vong-do-covid-19-677864>

²² Source: Vĩnh Long News, 2022.



Blood Donation Campaigns in Buddhist Temples at HCMC. Source [3] & [4]



Children orphaned during the COVID-19 epidemic receive support. Source [11] & [13]



Support medicine, food, and necessities for people in epidemic areas. Source [5] & [8]



The campaign "Take off your cassock and put on a white blouse". Source [10]



Applying chanting events online & ceremonies for victims who died during the Covid-19 pandemic. Source [7] & [8]

In brief, The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha's contributions during the pandemic exemplify the principles of *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā* (loving-kindness), reflecting Buddhism's engagement in social welfare. Their efforts not only provided immediate relief but also laid the groundwork for long-term recovery and resilience. These achievements underscore the relevance of Buddhist values in addressing modern crises and fostering unity and compassion within society. The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha's actions stand as a beacon of hope, demonstrating how spiritual teachings can transform into tangible acts of service for humanity.

3.3. Assessing the far-reaching impact of the efforts of Vietnamese Buddhism's practical activities on community resilience and sustainable development, demonstrating compassion in action can lead to lasting social benefits

To assess the broader impact of these efforts on community resilience and sustainable development is to reflect on the transformative potential of compassion in action, where the seeds of selfless service bloom into forests of enduring social benefit. Rooted in the Buddha's teachings of '*karuṇā*' (compassion) and '*mettā*' (loving-kindness), the actions undertaken by Vietnamese Buddhists during the pandemic exemplify the idea that individual acts of care, when multiplied, create ripples of collective strength that transcend immediate relief to cultivate long-term resilience.

The teachings of the '*Dhammapada*' (Verse 118) remind us that "The doer of good rejoices here and hereafter", a principle that finds real-world resonance in how these efforts fortified communities against the multifaceted crises brought about by the pandemic. Through acts such as establishing field hospitals, funding scholarships for orphans, and distributing essential supplies, Vietnamese Buddhists not only alleviated immediate suffering but also laid the groundwork for societal recovery. Each act of giving, like the planting of a single tree, contributed to a canopy of protection under which communities could rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

The resilience fostered through these initiatives mirrors the concept of '*pratityasamutpāda*' (dependent origination) expounded in the '*Avatamsaka Sūtra*', which teaches that all phenomena arise in interdependence. The pandemic exposed the interconnected vulnerabilities of humanity, but it also revealed the profound strength that emerges when individuals and institutions act with a shared purpose. Vietnamese Buddhists embraced this interconnectedness, transforming compassion into a communal shield that protected the vulnerable while empowering the collective.

One of the most profound impacts of these efforts lies in the reinforcement of social trust, an essential ingredient for sustainable development. The '*Sigalovāda Sutta*' emphasizes the reciprocal responsibilities between individuals and their communities, teaching that mutual care is the foundation of harmony and prosperity.²³ By providing tangible support and fostering emotional well-being, Vietnamese Buddhists nurtured a sense of solidarity that strengthened communal bonds. This trust becomes the bedrock upon which sustainable initiatives – such as education programs, economic recovery efforts, and environmental conservation projects can flourish.

Moreover, these actions catalyzed a shift in cultural consciousness, promoting the Buddhist ideal of living in harmony with nature and one another. The Buddha's teaching in the '*Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta*' reminds us of the ruler's duty to ensure both human welfare and environmental stewardship.²⁴ Vietnamese Buddhists extended this principle beyond governance to grassroots action, integrating ecological recovery efforts – such as tree-planting drives and water purification projects – into their humanitarian response. These initiatives not only addressed immediate needs but also contributed to

²³ DN 31.

²⁴ DN 26.

the long-term health of the environment, reinforcing the interdependence of ecological and human resilience.

Symbolically, these efforts can be likened to the lotus flower, which rises unsullied from the mud, embodying purity and renewal. Just as the lotus thrives in adversity, so too did Vietnamese Buddhist compassion inspire renewal in the face of despair. The scholarships provided to children orphaned by Covid-19, for instance, represent not just an act of charity but an investment in a future where education becomes the bridge from vulnerability to opportunity.

Ultimately, the efforts of Vietnamese Buddhists during the pandemic serve as a luminous example of engaged Buddhism, where the teachings of the Dharma transcend theoretical wisdom to manifest as practical solutions. Their actions exemplify the Buddha's call in the '*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*' to strive on untiringly for the welfare of all beings. The legacy of these initiatives extends beyond the immediate crisis, offering a blueprint for how compassion, when activated, can transform crises into opportunities for sustainable growth and collective awakening. In this way, compassion becomes not just a moral imperative but a catalyst for enduring social and environmental harmony.

3.4. To provide recommendations for how Vietnamese Buddhism can continue to serve society in times of need, advocating for a compassionate approach to future global challenges

To provide recommendations for how Vietnamese Buddhism can continue to serve society in times of need requires an examination of the foundational values of compassion '*karuṇā*' and wisdom '*prajñā*', both of which remain timelessly relevant in addressing future global challenges. By leveraging these principles, Vietnamese Buddhism can expand its role as a source of solace, resilience, and sustainable action.

Enhancing disaster preparedness through compassionate action: Vietnamese Buddhism should establish dedicated disaster response units within its temples and monasteries, akin to modern humanitarian organizations, but deeply rooted in Buddhist ethics. Drawing from the '*Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta*', which underscores the importance of proactive governance, these units could provide immediate aid while advocating for policies that prioritize vulnerable populations. Temples can serve as community hubs for disaster preparedness, offering training in first aid, mindfulness, and crisis management. (2) Promoting mental health and emotional resilience: The pandemic highlighted the critical need for mental health support. Vietnamese Buddhism can expand its mindfulness and meditation programs to address anxiety, depression, and trauma on a global scale. Inspired by the '*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*', these programs can integrate Buddhist teachings with modern psychological methods, creating a holistic approach to mental wellness. Virtual platforms should be further developed to make these practices accessible to a wider audience. (3) Advocating environmental sustainability: Vietnamese Buddhism can take a leading role in addressing climate change by advocating for ecological mindfulness, inspired by the Buddha's teaching in the '*Vanaropa Sutta*', which extols the planting of trees as a meritorious act. Monastic communities can

lead reforestation projects, promote sustainable farming practices, and educate the public on the interconnectedness of human and environmental well-being. Incorporating these practices into temple activities would serve as a living example of engaged environmental ethics. (4) Fostering interfaith and cross-cultural collaboration: The global nature of future challenges necessitates unity across religious and cultural lines. Vietnamese Buddhism, with its history of inclusivity and adaptability, can act as a bridge for interfaith dialogue. Inspired by the '*Kālāma Sutta*', which encourages open inquiry and respect for diverse perspectives, Buddhist leaders can host forums that unite various traditions to tackle common issues such as poverty, inequality, and conflict resolution. (5) Expanding education and social services: Buddhist teachings emphasize the transformative power of education, as reflected in the '*Sigālovenāda Sutta*'. Vietnamese Buddhism can expand its scholarship programs, vocational training, and charitable schools to uplift marginalized communities. These initiatives should integrate modern curricula with Buddhist values, fostering not only academic excellence but also ethical responsibility and compassion among the younger generation. (6) Digital innovation for global outreach: To address future challenges, Vietnamese Buddhism should invest in technological advancements to extend its reach. Virtual Dharma talks, online meditation retreats, and mobile applications for mindfulness practice can help disseminate Buddhist wisdom to a global audience. Inspired by the '*Lotus Sūtra*', which highlights the use of skillful means '*upāya*', these innovations can adapt the Dharma to contemporary needs while maintaining its authenticity. (7) Advocating policy changes rooted in compassion: Buddhist leaders can engage with policymakers to advocate for laws and programs that reflect compassionate governance. This includes promoting healthcare access, poverty alleviation, and educational reform. Drawing from the '*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*', which emphasizes the Buddha's guidance on governance, these efforts can ensure that Buddhist ethics influence societal structures for the greater good.

IV. VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM'S SUPPORT ACTIVITIES FOR THE WORLD COMMUNITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha not only made significant contributions domestically during the Covid-19 pandemic but also extended its humanitarian efforts to the international community, embodying the universal Buddhist principles of compassion '*karuṇā*' and altruism '*mettā*'. These global initiatives highlighted Vietnam's spiritual diplomacy and its commitment to shared humanity during a time of unprecedented crisis. Below are the notable contributions of Vietnamese Buddhism to the international community.

4.1. Donations of medical supplies

Vietnamese Buddhists mobilized resources to provide critical medical supplies to countries severely impacted by the pandemic. For example: (1) India: Recognizing the severe wave of Covid-19 in India, the birthplace of Buddhism, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha coordinated shipments of oxygen tanks, ventilators, and medical equipment to Indian hospitals. This act of solidarity reflected deep gratitude and spiritual kinship between Vietnam

and India, honoring the Buddha's legacy. (2) Myanmar: During the peak of the pandemic, Vietnamese Buddhist delegations sent face masks, personal protective equipment (PPE), and essential medical supplies to support monasteries and medical facilities in Myanmar. This aid emphasized the interconnectedness of Southeast Asian Buddhist communities.



Donating medical equipment to the people of India during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Source [18] & [19]

4.2. Spiritual Support Across Borders

Vietnamese temples abroad, particularly in the United States, Europe, and Australia, provided crucial spiritual and emotional support to Vietnamese expatriates and local communities. Through online Dharma talks, chanting sessions, and mindfulness retreats, these temples created safe spaces for reflection and healing during lockdowns. The Sangha's emphasis on inner peace, as taught in the “*Ānāpānasati Sutta*” (Mindfulness of Breathing), helped foster resilience among international audiences.

By embracing these recommendations, Vietnamese Buddhism can continue to be a beacon of hope and resilience in an ever-changing world. Through compassionate action, ecological stewardship, and the integration of ancient wisdom with modern technology, it can address global challenges while inspiring communities to embody the timeless truth of the ‘*Dhammapada*’ (Verse 183): “To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to purify one’s mind – this is the teaching of all Buddhas.” With these guiding principles, Vietnamese Buddhism can serve humanity with unwavering commitment, ensuring that compassion and wisdom remain at the forefront of global progress.





The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha joins hands with the Government of Vietnam to support people around the world in preventing the COVID-19 epidemic. Source [6], [20], [21], [22]

V. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic, a profound test of human resilience, unveiled the transformative power of compassion when grounded in spiritual wisdom. Vietnamese Buddhism, steeped in the timeless teachings of the Buddha, rose to meet this unparalleled crisis with an ethos of service, unity, and boundless loving-kindness ‘mettā’. Through its humanitarian actions, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha became a luminous beacon of hope, exemplifying how the Dharma can transcend the theoretical to become a tangible force for societal healing and growth.

5.1. Contributions of Vietnamese Buddhism

5.1.1. Immediate relief and sustained support

The Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha mobilized an extraordinary network of resources to alleviate the immediate suffering caused by the pandemic. With over 3,000 billion VND (approximately 130 million USD) raised, temples distributed millions of meals, medical supplies, and financial assistance. Initiatives such as field hospitals at Vĩnh Nghiêm Pagoda and the provision of over 400,000 meals at Giác Ngộ Pagoda demonstrated the Sangha’s capacity to address both physical and emotional needs. This proactive approach echoed the Buddha’s teaching: “In protecting others, one protects oneself; in protecting oneself, one protects others.”²⁵

5.1.2. Mental and spiritual solace

In addition to material support, the Sangha emphasized mental and spiritual resilience, offering over 5,000 online memorial services and mindfulness retreats, which attracted millions of participants worldwide. Guided by teachings from the ‘Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta’, these initiatives empowered individuals to cultivate inner peace amidst external chaos. Temples became sanctuaries of solace, embodying the Buddha’s reminder that “By focusing on the breath, one can still the storm within” (Ānāpānasati Sutta).

²⁵ SN. 3.16.

5.1.3. Long-term development and sustainability

The response extended beyond immediate relief to address the long-term impacts of the pandemic. Scholarship funds for over 1,500 orphans and vocational training programs for unemployed workers illustrated the Sangha's commitment to sustainable human development. These actions reflected the Buddhist ideal of '*dāna*' (generosity), transforming temporary aid into enduring opportunities for growth and recovery.

5.1.4. Fostering unity and inclusivity

Vietnamese Buddhism's efforts transcended religious and cultural boundaries, promoting inclusivity as a cornerstone of its response. This universality is rooted in the '*Kālāma Sutta*', which teaches openness and respect for all. By reaching beyond the temple walls, the Sangha nurtured a sense of shared humanity, strengthening communal bonds during a time of global isolation.

5.2. Lessons learned

5.2.1. Compassion as a catalyst for resilience

The pandemic underscored the power of '*karuṇā*' (compassion) as both a moral imperative and a practical solution. Vietnamese Buddhists demonstrated that compassion, when activated, not only alleviates suffering but also fosters resilience and interdependence. This aligns with the Buddhist understanding of '*pratītyasamutpāda*' (dependent origination), where the well-being of one is intricately tied to the well-being of all.

5.2.2. Integration of ancient wisdom with modern needs

The Sangha's innovative use of technology – virtual Dharma talks, meditation sessions, and digital chanting – illustrated the adaptability of Buddhist wisdom. These efforts reflected the *Lotus Sūtra*'s principle of skillful means (*upāya*), proving that ancient teachings can dynamically address contemporary challenges.

5.2.3. The interdependence of humanity and nature

Through ecological recovery initiatives, such as tree-planting and water purification projects, Vietnamese Buddhism emphasized the interconnectedness of human and environmental well-being. The '*Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta*' reminds us of the responsibility to preserve nature, a lesson brought to life by the Sangha's efforts to integrate ecological mindfulness into its humanitarian response.

5.2.4. The enduring relevance of Buddhist leadership

The pandemic highlighted the pivotal role of spiritual leadership in fostering unity and hope. The actions of Vietnamese Buddhist leaders exemplified the Buddha's call in the '*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*' to strive tirelessly for the welfare of all beings. Their example offers a blueprint for how religious institutions can inspire collective action in times of crisis.

5.2.5. A model for global compassion

Vietnamese Buddhism's response to the pandemic serves as a testament to

the transformative potential of engaged spirituality. Its actions remind us that true strength lies not in wealth or power but in the ability to love unconditionally and to act selflessly. As the Buddha taught in the *‘Dhammapada’* (Verse 223): “Conquer anger by love, conquer evil by good, conquer the miser with generosity, and conquer the liar with the truth”.

The Sangha’s efforts offer a model for addressing future global challenges, emphasizing the need for compassion, unity, and sustainability. By embodying the principles of the Dharma, Vietnamese Buddhists have shown that spiritual wisdom, when translated into action, has the power to heal and transform societies.

5.3. The last words

As humanity continues to navigate the uncertainties of the future, the response of Vietnamese Buddhism to the Covid-19 pandemic shines as a guiding light. It illustrates that even in the darkest times, the teachings of the Buddha remain a source of solace, resilience, and inspiration. Like the lotus that rises pure and radiant above the muddy waters, Vietnamese Buddhism has demonstrated that compassion and wisdom are the keys to overcoming adversity and building a world of unity and peace.

The legacy of these actions serves as a call to all – inviting us to embrace the boundless heart of *‘karuṇā’*, to act with purpose and kindness, and to walk together on the path toward a harmonious and sustainable future. As the Buddha proclaimed, “Better than a thousand hollow words is one word that brings peace.” Let the example of Vietnamese Buddhism during this pandemic be that word – a beacon of hope and a testament to the enduring power of love in action.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF BUDDHIST GRATITUDE (*KATAÑÑUTA*) EDUCATION FOR MORAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

The importance of Buddhist gratitude (*Kataññuta*) education for moral development is the new dimension of Buddhist teaching. This paper is divided into three objectives: (1) the importance of Buddhist gratitude; (2) gratitude in Buddhist education; and (3) gratitude leading to moral development. The implication of gratitude will show how gratitude positively impacts social, emotional, and psychological well-being. The primary initiative of moral development in Buddhism begins within the family unit that is the parents teach their children how to be thankful or pay gratitude for others' helpful works. It is through their parents that children acquire knowledge about values such as gratitude, respect, honesty, and love. A child has the potential to undergo a moral transformation to bring about positive change in the world. Parents play a crucial role in shaping the moral teaching to their children. They impart important values such as gratitude, kindness, honesty, courage, perseverance, self-discipline, and compassion. Parents help shield their children from harmful influences in society by nurturing a strong moral foundation with the ability to distinguish between right and wrong.

Keywords: *Importance, education, development, gratitude (Kataññuta), moral, Buddhist.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Moral development commences during a person's childhood under the guidance of their parents. Children initially acquire the knowledge of showing respect or gratitude (*kataññuta*) towards their parents. This marks the initial stage where children undergo personality and spiritual development. Hence, gratitude (*kataññuta*) can be regarded as the primary ethical instruction amidst

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numerous other ethical instructions discovered within Buddhism.

The connotation of the English gratitude is more emotional but the connotation of *kataññu* is more intellectual.¹ The word *kataññu* refers to the acknowledgment of indebtedness towards others, while the second word *katavedi* refers to interpret as repaying debt.² Another English word or meaning of *kataññu-kataveditā* is “Filial Piety”³.

The parents play a crucial role in the family unit as the first teachers, imparting ethical, moral, and spiritual values to their children.⁴ This makes the family unit the primary institution for instilling moral behavior and spirituality. Buddhism emphasizes the importance of gratitude, considering it a virtuous quality that is rare among humans.

The *Maṅgala Sutta* highlights the significance of gratitude as one of the highest blessings, illustrating its pivotal role in ethical and spiritual growth. The underlying message is that cultivating gratitude is a clear indication of making spiritual progress and attaining the highest blessings in life.⁵

Buddhist doctrine states that our current existence is merely a single stage within an extensive cycle of birth and death, which has an unimaginable origin. As human beings, we enter this world through the assistance of our biological parents. Throughout the process of conception, our biological life relies heavily on our parents, particularly the mother, who endure significant physical and mental challenges for nine months while the fetus grows and develops, ultimately leading to our birth.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF GRATITUDE

From a social and life perspective, gratitude is regarded as a fundamental aspect of interpersonal relationships. Demonstrating gratitude after receiving assistance from others reflects the politeness of the recipient and signifies their moral integrity within society. A perceived absence of gratitude is frequently associated with rudeness and irrationality, which can diminish the willingness of others to offer help in the future to those who fail to express appreciation.

Adults often instruct children and teenagers to exhibit kindness and respect by expressing gratitude whenever they receive assistance. Consequently, gratitude is closely linked to societal moral values and serves as a key indicator of an individual’s character, determining whether they are perceived as “good” or “bad.”

The emotion of gratitude is characterized as a coping mechanism and a moral virtue that belongs to the “Exchange” category within the seven cooperative foundations.⁶ These seven moral values encompass kinship,

¹ Mahinda Wijesinghe (2008): 2 - 3.

² Widya, Sakyabhinand, Widya (2014): pp. 141 – 64; Pinit, Ratanakul (2013): 12 – 19.

³ Sanu Mahatthanadull (2020): 28.

⁴ Sanu Mahatthanadull (2020): 22.

⁵ Mahinda Wijesinghe (2008): 3.

⁶ Nathaniel M. Lambert, Steven M. Graham, and Frank D. Fincham (2009): 207.

mutualism, exchange, hawk, dove, division, and possession. Scholars and researchers have reached a consensus on defining gratitude as a virtue, an attitude, an emotion, a personality trait, and a coping response.⁷

Given that gratitude serves as emotional feedback for acts of kindness, its expression encourages supporters of hospitality and altruism.⁸ The discussion surrounding gratitude should focus on three key elements: the benefit, the beneficiary, and the benefactor. Typically, the beneficiary feels gratitude in response to the advantages provided by the benefactor.⁹

A significant correlation exists between gratitude and well-being, as gratitude exerts a beneficial emotional influence on both recipients and givers.¹⁰ It is associated with various positive emotions, including happiness, pride, hope, contentment, optimism, and vitality. In a study focused on the taxonomy of emotions, gratitude was classified among feelings that activate positive interpersonal connections rooted in respect and trust.¹¹

Conversely, gratitude was contrasted with emotions such as contempt, hate, and jealousy in the same research. A survey conducted by Gallup in 1998 supported this notion, revealing that 90% of participants reported feeling “somewhat happy” or “extremely happy” after expressing gratitude.¹²

Gratitude serves as a powerful motivator for prosocial behavior, fostering altruism by expressing appreciation to the benefactor, thereby acknowledging and commending their collaborative efforts. This emotional response from the recipient encourages the benefactor to engage in prosocial actions in the future. It has revealed that individuals who articulated their gratitude at least once daily. Therefore, cultivating a sense of gratitude at the moment exhibited greater levels of trust towards those who reflected on feelings of anger, guilt, or pride.¹³

Expressing thankfulness facilitates the recognition of others’ accomplishments. Given that trust and the inclination to acknowledge others’ successes are essential for nurturing healthy social interactions, the psychological effects of gratitude are significant. As trust builds among individuals, indifference towards assisting others transforms into reciprocal altruism.¹⁴

III. GRATITUDE IN THE *SUTTAS*

In India, where Buddhism originated, women had different social roles, and devotion of the child to the mother was an important virtue.¹⁵ The debt of

⁷ McCullough, M. E., & Tsang, J. A. (2004): 123 - 141.

⁸ McCullough, M. E., Kimeldorf, M. B., & Cohen, A. D. (2008): 281 - 285.

⁹ Roberts, R. C. (2004): 58 - 80.

¹⁰ Graham, S., & Weiner, B. (1986): 152 - 179; Fredrickson, B. L. (1998): 300 - 319.

¹¹ Overwalle, F. V., Mervielde, I., & De Schuyter, J. (1995): 59 - 85.

¹² Schimmack, U., & Reisenzein, R. (1997): 645 - 661.

¹³ Weiner, B. (1985): 548 - 573.

¹⁴ McCullough, M. E., Kimeldorf, M. B., & Cohen, A. D. (2008): 281 - 285.

¹⁵ Bret Hinsch (2002): 49 - 75.

a child to its mother was seen as more important than the debt to its father, and hurting one's mother was considered more severe than hurting one's father. Although a child was seen to be indebted to both parents, "the obligation to the father is a call of duty, whereas the obligation to the mother is a pull of love."¹⁶

In the early days, a number of apocryphal texts were written that spoke of the Buddha's respect for his parents, and the parent-child relationship. The most important of these, the discourse of Filial Piety, was written early period. This discourse has the Buddha make the argument that parents bestow kindness to their children in many ways, and put great efforts into ensuring the well-being of their child. The discourse continues by describing how difficult it is to repay one's parents' kindness but concludes that this can be done, in a Buddhist way.¹⁷

In early *Theravāda* Buddhist scriptures are often shown to encourage children from the age of experience to take care of their parents, to remember their gratitude to them, to honor them, and to do everything they can to repay their gratitude to them.¹⁸

In the *Dullabha Sutta* (Hard to Find), the Buddha states: "There are two persons who are rare in the world. Which two? First, the one who volunteers to help others selflessly (*pubbakari*). And second, the one who is grateful (*kataññu*) and helps in return (*katavedi*)."¹⁹ "The appearance of three persons is rare in the world. Which three? The appearance of a Buddha, ...The appearance of a person who can teach the Dhamma and Vinaya proclaimed by the Buddha, ...And the appearance of a person who is grateful (*kataññu*) and helps in return (*katavedi*), is rare in the world."²⁰

In the *Kataññu Sutta*, the Buddha states:

I tell you, monks, two people are not easy to repay. Which two? Your mother and father. Even if you were to carry your mother on one shoulder and your father on the other shoulder for 100 years, and were to look after them by anointing, massaging, bathing, and rubbing their limbs, and they were to defecate and urinate right there (on your shoulders), you would not in that way pay or repay your parents. If you were to establish your mother and father in absolute sovereignty over this great earth, abounding in the seven treasures, you would not in that way pay or repay your parents. Why is that? Mother and father do much for their children. They care for them, they nourish them, and they introduce them to this world. But anyone who rouses his unbelieving mother and father, settles and establishes them in conviction; rouses his unvirtuous mother and father, settles and establishes them in virtue; rouses his stingy mother and father, settles and

¹⁶ Reiko Ohnuma (2012): 12 - 14.

¹⁷ K. T. Sung (2009): 353 – 66.

¹⁸ Reiko, Ohnuma (2012): 28.

¹⁹ A I. 87.

²⁰ A I. 87.

establishes them in generosity; rouses his foolish mother and father, settles and establishes them in discernment: To this extent one pays and repays one's mother and father.²¹

Sigalovāda Sutta mentions several ways in which a child can repay their parents: "I will perform duties incumbent on them, I will keep up the lineage and tradition (*kula vaṃsa*) of my family, I will make myself worthy of my heritage." The deity Sakka is reported to have had seven rules of conduct according to which he lived his life, the first of which is "As long as I live, may I maintain my parents".

This rule is also cited in the commentary to the *Dhammapāda*, indicating the impact of filiality during that period.²² *Sabrahmā Sutta* describes parents are worthy of respect and gifts, because they have created their children, and were the ones who educated their children in their formative years. Parents have provided the basic requirements for the child to survive. Children who attempt to pay back their debt to their parents are considered "Superior People" (*Sappurisa*). Early Buddhist texts describe the children's devotion toward their parents as a good deed that will reap religious merit, lead to praise by the wise, and finally, a rebirth takes place in heaven.

Gratitude is an important part of Buddhist spiritual practice, helping practitioners to live with mindfulness, compassion, and a peaceful, open-hearted attitude. In Buddhism, gratitude means to have a sense of what was done is more than just a feeling or an expression of thanks. Practicing gratitude can help us cultivate mindfulness, compassion, an awareness of the interconnectedness of all beings, and a peaceful, open-hearted attitude toward life.

In the *Khira sutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, the Buddha has stated that the milk drunk from mothers during one's innumerable births in this beginningless and long cycle of birth and death is going to be larger in quantity than the water in all the four oceans. Parents play the biggest role in a child's physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual development and are indispensable for a child's healthy development. They teach the child how to eat, drink, speak, play, interact, and behave well in the family, outside the family, and in society. They attend to all the needs of the child in an unselfish way with unconditional love without expecting anything in return. They sacrifice their own needs for the welfare of their child and may even be prepared to sacrifice their life for the sake of their child.

In the Buddhist literature, it has been said that the parents support their children just as the earth supports all the plants and living creatures on it. Parents are always there with the child in happiness and sorrow providing emotional and moral support and guiding the child to be able to cope with the vicissitudes of life. The child learns the moral virtues from the parents to be able to lead a moral life within the society. Parents are also the children's first

²¹ A I 61.

²² I. B. Horner (1930): 10.

teachers well before they start their formal education in a school setting and continue to guide and support them during their education recognizing their strengths and weaknesses.

In the Brahma sutta of the *Itivuttaka* (a collection of the Buddha's short discourses included in the *Khuddaka nikāya*), the Buddha has described the parents as the Brahma (*Brahma*) in the house, first teachers (*pubbacariya*) and those deserve to receive gifts (*ahuneyya*). Brahma is a celestial God with immeasurable divine qualities existing in the heavenly worlds. Parents are so-called as the mother and the father through compassion for their children care for their children, nourish them, educate them, and introduce them to the world.²³

IV. GRATITUDE LEADS TO MORAL DEVELOPMENT

This subject supposed people learned the way and how to pay gratitude or respect to their parents, elders, and teachers. According to Buddhism, practicing precepts can lead to moral development. The core Buddhist ethics for lay practitioners is encapsulated in the Five Precepts, which are universally recognized across all Buddhist traditions. These precepts, referred to as "five moral virtues", are not directives but rather a collection of voluntary commitments or guidelines designed to facilitate a life characterized by happiness, tranquility, and effective meditation.²⁴ In terms of moral development, higher moral virtues (*Brahmavihara*) have been taken into account in this subject.

The Buddha first taught *Mettā* as an antidote to overcome terrible fear when it arises. *Mettā* is also said the quality of unconditional benevolence, a genuine wish and care for the wellbeing of the other, a gesture of acceptance, deeply welcoming, and opening. The simplest level of practicing *mettā* can be found in the contemplation and the wish expressed in the daily recitation of Buddhist practitioners: "May all beings abide in well-being, in freedom from hostility, in freedom from ill-will, in freedom from anxiety, and may they maintain well-being in themselves."²⁵

The *Mettā Sutta* consists of three parts.²⁶ Each part focuses on a distinct aspect of *mettā*. The first part (lines 3 to 10) covers that aspect which requires a thorough and systematic application of loving kindness in one's day-to-day conduct. The second part (lines 11 to 20) expresses loving kindness as a distinct technique of meditation or culture of mind leading to higher consciousness induced by absorption (*Samādhi*). The third part (lines 21 to 40) underlines a total commitment to the philosophy of universal love and its personal, social, and empirical extensions²⁷: loving kindness through all bodily

²³ John D (1997): 22.

²⁴ Damien Keown (2003): 268.

²⁵ M. I. 288.

²⁶ Ācariya Buddhārakkhita (1989): 7 - 8.

²⁷ Ācariya Buddhārakkhita (1989): 7 - 8.

(*mettā-kāyakamma*)²⁸, verbal (*mettā-vacīkamma*)²⁹ and mental activities (*mettā-manokamma*)³⁰.

The ethics of *mettā*, in the Buddhist context, is right conduct, which brings happiness and peace of mind and never gives rise to remorse, worry, or restlessness of mind.³¹ This is the immediate psychological benefit. Right, conduct also leads to a happy rebirth, enabling an aspirant to progress further on the onward path to spiritual liberation. It is also the basis for progress in Dhamma here and now.

Karuṇā means Compassion in English. It conveys the sense of wishing a person who is in trouble, to be free from suffering. The early and later texts unanimously see in the practice of *karuṇā* the direct antidote to anger, annoyance, and the notion of an alienated and isolated self.³² If many people or even one person is seen to be miserable, a noble-minded person wants to remove their suffering. This is nothing but compassion or goodwill.

If any other person is seen or heard to be in distress, good people, the heart trembles, moves the hearts of the virtuous, is called compassion, expressed authoritatively; or regarding another's suffering, being eager to remove is known as compassion.³³

The Buddha's great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) towards all beings is impartial without distinction irrespective of whether a person is intimate or unfamiliar.³⁴ The degree of compassion bestowed upon Rāhula, his son born while he was a prince, was on the same level as he conferred on Venerable Devadatta, who had done grievous wrong to him with animosity. At one time, Venerable Devadatta, in collusion with King Ajātasattu, conspired to assassinate the Buddha. They incited the royal elephant Nālāgiri to attack the Buddha while he was walking for alms. This elephant had a ferocious propensity and trampled to death all persons whom he met on his way. As instructed by Venerable Devadatta, the mahouts fed this great elephant with liquor and released the huge beast along the road where the Buddha would come to seek alms. On that occasion, a large number of the *Saṅgha* accompanied the Blessed One. The huge elephant, being intoxicated, rushed forward to the Buddha to attack him. Even human beings under the influence of liquor do and say what ought not to be done or said. Being an animal, nothing needs to be said of the

²⁸ All bodily gestures for the benefit of others arising out of goodwill and loving-kindness. This is in fact just the outer manifestation of mental *kamma*.

²⁹ All verbal gestures for the benefit of others arising out of goodwill and loving-kindness. A good piece of advice and admonitory words are notable examples of this kind.

³⁰ The mind that wishes and thinks about the benefit of well-beings of others.

³¹ Ācariya Buddhārakkhita (1989): 8 - 9.

³² D. III. 248.

³³ *paradukkhe sati sādhuṇaṃ hadayakampanaṃ karotīti karuṇā vacanaṭṭha, or paraduk-khaṃ kinātihiṃ sati vināsetīti karuṇā.*

³⁴ *Aññatara mayā sallānaṃ uddhatā añño koci natthi, iti passantānaṃ buddhānaṃ bhagavantaṃ sattesu mahākaruṇā okkamati.*

elephant, which came rushing towards the Buddha to bore him to death with its tusks. Seeing this danger, the monks, in great anxiety, requested the Buddha to retreat to avoid the charge. The Buddha, however, taught his disciples as follows: “Come monks! Do not retreat, do not be afraid. O, monks! No other person will be able to deprive the Tathāgata of life. It is usual for the Buddhas to attain *parinibbāna* without being subject to harmful death by anyone through conspiracy or attempt.”³⁵

His disciples repeated their plea three times. However, the Buddha remained adamant and replied as before a second and third time. Thereupon, Venerable Ānanda becoming anxious about the impending disaster, took his stance in front of the Buddha intending to sacrifice his own life in place of the Blessed One. The Buddha asked him three times to make way. However, since Venerable Ānanda failed to comply, the Buddha had to make him move from the place he had taken up by the exercise of his supernormal powers.

Sympathetic joy (*muditā*) means rejoicing and being pleased. It is rejoicing in the happiness and prosperity of others. Some people do not wish to see others prosperous, happy, and successful in their lives or careers. This reflects the nature of envy (*issā*). Sympathetic joy is diametrically opposite to envy. A person who is overwhelmed with envy will not wish to see another person becoming prosperous and happy. Nor is an envious person pleased to see others having a large following, attractive physical appearance, a good education, enjoying a high status, or getting a promotion. On the other hand, a person with sympathetic joy rejoices in seeing others successful in their business or career. He or she can easily bring to mind feelings of joy and pleasure, saying: “May they be prosperous.” This mental inclination of goodwill is sympathetic joy. It is the mental state of noble-mindedness with extreme moral purification. The meaning of ‘*Muditā*’ is pleased, glad, satisfied, that is ‘*mudita-mana*’ with a gladdened heart, pleased in mind (*pasanna-citta*).³⁶

The etymological definition of ‘*upekkhā*’ is derived from the combination of the prefix ‘*upa*’ the root ‘*ikkha*’, and the suffix ‘*ā*’. *Upa*, means, ‘impartially’, ‘justly’, and ‘evenly’; and the secondary meaning of ‘*upa*’ is ‘without’, and ‘*ikkha*’ means ‘to see’, ‘to view’, ‘to look’. So, the term ‘*upekkhā*’ is “discerning rightly”, “viewing justly”, and “looking impartially”, this means without attachment, or aversion, without favor or disfavor. *Upekkhā* is defined as “looking on”, “hedonic neutrality or indifference, zero point between joy and sorrow; disinterestedness, neutral feeling, equanimity, etc.

Sattesu majjhataṭṭakāraṇappavatti lakkhaṇā (*Upekkhā* is characterized as promoting the aspect of neutrality towards beings). Its function is to see equality in all beings. *Paṭighānūnaya vūpasamapaccupaṭṭhāna* (The manifestation of *upekkhā* has brought about the extinguishing of lust (*rāga*) and aversion

³⁵ Vin. II. 194f: “Āgacchatha, bhikkhave, mā bhāyittha. Aṭṭhānametaṃ, bhikkhave, anavakāso, yaṃ parūpakkamena Tathāgataṃ jīvitaṃ voropeyya. Anupakkamena, bhikkhave, Tathāgatā parinibbāyanti’ti”.

³⁶ Sn 680

(*paṭighā*) towards beings). “*Kammassakā sattā, te kassa rusiyā sukhitā vā bhavissanti, dukkhato vā muccissanti, pattasampattito vā na parihāyissantīti evaṃ pavattakammassakatā dassanapadaṭṭhāna*”.

There are ten kinds of *upekkhā* are enumerated at the commentary³⁷: (1) *Chalaṅgupekkhā*³⁸; (2) *Brahmavihārupekkhā*³⁹; (3) *Bojjhaṅgupekkhā*⁴⁰; (4) *Tatramajjhātupekkhā*⁴¹; (5) *Jhānupekkhā*⁴²; (6) *Pārisuddupekkhā*⁴³; (7) *Vipassanupekkhā*⁴⁴; (8) *Saṅkhārupekkhā*⁴⁵; (9) *Vīriyupekkhā*⁴⁶ and (10) *Vedanupekkhā*⁴⁷.

Equanimity is a perfect, unshakable balance of mind, rooted in insight. Looking at the world around us, and looking into our hearts, we see clearly how difficult it is to attain and maintain the balance of mind. Looking into life we notice how it continually moves between contrasts: rise and fall, success and failure, loss and gain, honor and blame. We feel how our heart responds to all this happiness and sorrow, delight and despair, disappointment and satisfaction, hope and fear.⁴⁸

V. CONCLUSION

The family unit is widely regarded as the primary arena for moral

³⁷ *Dhs*-a. 172

³⁸ Six-fold equanimity (*tatramajjhātattā*) is the equanimity of those who have destroyed the intoxicants (i. e., Arahants) with regard to the six kinds of desirable or undesirable objects when they come into contact with the six sense doors.

³⁹ Equanimity as a Sublime Abode (*tatramajjhātattā*) means the neutrality towards beings when one is intent on one quarter of the world, etc. with a heart full of equanimity.

⁴⁰ Equanimity as an enlightenment factor (*tatramajjhātattā*) is the neutrality towards co-existing mental states.

⁴¹ Equanimity as specific neutrality (*tatramajjhātattā*) is the equal efficiency or impartiality towards co-existing states.

⁴² Equanimity of *jhāna* (*tatramajjhātattā*) means producing impartiality even towards the highest bliss in the third *jhāna*.

⁴³ Equanimity of purification (*tatramajjhātattā*) is the equanimity purified of all opposition as in the fourth *jhāna*.

⁴⁴ Equanimity of Insight (*paññā*) is neutrality during investigating when realizing conditioned phenomena are impermanent etc.

⁴⁵ Equanimity of formations (*paññā*) is neutrality towards the conditioned things etc.

⁴⁶ Equanimity of energy (*vīriya*) is being neither too strenuous nor too lax in arousing energy.

⁴⁷ Equanimity as feeling (*vedanā*) is the sensation perceived as neither pain nor pleasure.

⁴⁸ Some of these pairs are appeared in the *Lokadhamma Sutta*, dealing with the 8 worldly conditions: Gain and loss (*lābho ca alābho ca*), fame and ill-fame (*yaso ca ayaso ca*), blame and praise (*nindā ca pasāṃsā ca*), joy and pain (*sukhaṇ ca dukkhaṇ ca*). There are two suttas of the same name, the *Lokadhamma Sutta* 1 (A. 8.5) and the *Lokadhamma Sutta* 2 (A. 8.6). The former is a brief statement, and is as such also called the (*Saṅkhitta*) *Lokadhamma Sutta*, the Discourse on the Worldly Conditions (in brief). The latter is more detailed, and is as such also called the (*Vitthāra*) *Lokadhamma Sutta*, the Discourse on the Worldly Conditions (in detail).

education, where parents serve as the first and most influential teachers of ethical conduct and values. Within this nurturing environment, individuals learn the fundamental principles of gratitude and respect - virtues that are deeply intertwined with Buddhist teachings. By adopting such values early in life, one lays the groundwork for personal growth across both physical and spiritual dimensions. Central to this developmental process is the cultivation of four equally vital qualities that are essential for higher spiritual progress: *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity). These qualities are not only instrumental in fostering an open, generous heart but also serve as stepping stones toward the attainment of higher wisdom. While wisdom primarily reflects intellectual and cognitive capacities, compassion - and its associated virtues such as generosity, benevolence, and patience - represents the emotional and ethical dimensions of human character. Although the mind is often seen as the central instrument through which human experience is processed and understood, the Buddha reminds us that physical well-being is of equal importance. This recognition is based on the inherent interconnectedness of body and mind, whereby the health and balance of one invariably influence the other. In this context, maintaining physical well-being becomes a prerequisite for achieving a state of mental clarity and emotional stability, which in turn facilitates the development of spiritual insight.

Furthermore, the Buddhist concept of “Right Livelihood” underscores the importance of integrating material and spiritual pursuits in a balanced manner. Right Livelihood offers a pragmatic pathway to a harmonious and fulfilling life by ensuring that one’s occupation and means of earning are in alignment with ethical principles. It suggests that material prosperity need not come at the expense of spiritual well-being; rather, when pursued mindfully, both can coexist and reinforce each other.

In summary, the foundational lessons imparted within the family not only shape an individual’s moral character but also provide the essential building blocks for spiritual advancement. By fostering qualities such as *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*, and by embracing principles like Right Livelihood, individuals are empowered to achieve a holistic form of wisdom that embraces both physical and spiritual dimensions. This integrated approach ultimately contributes to the development of a well-rounded, compassionate, and enlightened society.

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CARE OF INOCHI, OR HOLISTIC SPIRITUAL CARE, OFFERED BY BUDDHIST CHAPLAINS: REALIZATION OF BUDDHIST DHARMA AND PRACTICES

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Abstract:

The Rinbutsuken Institute for Engaged Buddhism, founded in Tokyo in 2007, promotes “clinical Buddhism” – the application of Buddhist compassion to social suffering. Since 2013, it has trained Buddhist chaplains (Rinsho Bukkyoshi) to offer spiritual and emotional care to needy people. These chaplains provide a safe space for individuals to face suffering and reconnect with sources of meaning in life and death.

This holistic approach, called *Care of Inochi*, views spiritual health as interwoven with physical, mental, and social well-being. In 2017, Rinbutsuken chaplains joined the palliative care team at Jikei University Hospital, a leading institution founded in 1887 with a vision of combining medicine and spiritual care.

Over five years, chaplains’ experiences were analyzed, revealing key sources of patients’ spiritual pain and eight modes of chaplain involvement. Two end-of-life case studies are presented.

Guided by Buddhist teachings – loving-kindness (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), wisdom (*prajñā*), and dependent co-arising (*pratītya-samutpāda*) – chaplaincy becomes a path of mutual growth. Inspired by “Strong back, soft front,” seven core capacities rooted in dharma were identified, emphasizing that chaplaincy is both service and spiritual cultivation.

Keywords: *holistic care, spiritual suffering, compassionate listening, end-of-life support, care of inochi, interfaith chaplains.*

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I. THE RINBUTSUKEN INSTITUTE FOR ENGAGED BUDDHISM

The Rinbutsuken Institute for Engaged Buddhism (*Rinsho-Bukkyo-Kenkyujo*, or 臨床佛教研究所, abbreviated as “Rinbutsuken” hereafter) was established in Tokyo, Japan, in 2007.² Affiliated with the Zenseikyo Foundation & Japan Buddhist Council for Youth and Child Education (全國青少年教化協議會, or “Zenseikyo”),³ it engages in comprehensive research and education on social issues and their solutions based on Buddhism.

Zenseikyo is a public interest incorporated foundation established in 1962 by over sixty Buddhist sects in Japan in cooperation with the related business enterprises. Its goal is to contribute to the healthy and sound growth of children and adolescents and support their families in Japan and worldwide. It is developing various projects to help the young people become familiar with the Buddhist teachings that do not drift in the changing world and grow as a person with the sturdy mind following the teachings. Some of the projects are:

(i) Education of the younger generation through the Buddhist teachings to help them cope with the challenges of the society, such as bullying, school absenteeism, and juvenile crimes

(ii) Aiding children in need overseas by offering education and welfare for those who live in the slums and on the streets

(iii) Natural disaster relief to aid the young people and others who are afflicted both materially and spiritually

(iv) Fostering the cooperation of the Buddhist priests and the society, including the training the practitioners to meet the various needs of the society

In the Japanese name of Rinbutsuken (*Rinsho-Bukkyo-Kenkyujo*), the word ‘rinsho’ (臨床) means “clinical,” ‘bukkyo’ (佛教) means “Buddhism,” and ‘kenkyujo’ (研究所) means “research institute.” As we approach the problems in the society from a Buddhist standpoint, we selected the word “Engaged Buddhism” as an English translation of the combination of Japanese words. We maintain the Buddhist emphasis on the practical transformation of the suffering (*dhuhka* or 苦) of human society. We regard the word “clinical” not only as the bedside of sick people but also as other actual scenes of suffering in society, such as poverty, homelessness, and recluses. In this way, we intend to develop the Engaged Buddhism that meets the contemporary needs of Japanese society.⁴

Entering the 21st century, we see that the form of globalization that prioritizes economic development has advanced rapidly all over the world. Looking at the situation in Japan, the values steeped heavily in the primacy of economics have become dominant in society. Not only adults but also children must make decisions about their lives based on these narrow-minded

² The Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism [on line].

³ Zenseikyo Foundation, Japan Buddhist Council for Youth and Child Education [on line].

⁴ The Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism (ed.) (2013).

values. Amidst this situation, Japanese youths have begun losing their dreams, committing crimes, and withdrawing from society, sometimes choosing suicide in the end. At Rinbutsuken, we base our work firmly on this social situation.

As we establish ourselves in a holistic point of view, we research the challenges of domestic, school, and social education as well as offer mainstream society a wide range of perspectives of Buddhism about the ideal forms of education and welfare that focus on human sentiment. Further, we support Buddhist priests and religious persons to carry out their roles in the contemporary society and to conduct activities at the temple that have a great benefit to the society. We also design and provide consultation concerning educational programs.

An outline of our activities is as follows:

(i) Investigative research: Investigation of people's awareness of Buddhism and funerals, which are the central activities of Japanese Buddhist priests and temples, as well as analysis of their underlying understanding and needs. Further investigation of temple-related activities.

(ii) Training: Holding training on activities that contemporary priests and temples are requested to and should engage in, based on our investigation and analysis.

(iii) Program development: Creating programs for young priests to expose themselves to the current social situation. Further, it creates public programs for youth education based on Buddhist educational themes.

(iv) Consulting: Conducting consultation with Buddhist priests and temples for developing activities at the temple that have a high level of public benefit and tackle contemporary issues, based on the needs of society and people.

(v) Disseminating information: Disseminate widely through the internet and our newsletter useful information about our research, analysis, and results on activities held by temples.

II. RINSHO BUKKYOSHI, OR BUDDHIST CHAPLAINS

The current major program among the Training (2) is to train and certify *Rinsho Bukkyoshi* (臨床佛教師), or Buddhist chaplains. A *Rinsho Bukkyoshi* is a Buddhist practitioner who faces and works on the various sufferings of the contemporary society related to birth, aging, sickness, and death and acts based on professional knowledge and practical experiences.

Recently, the role of the Buddhist practitioners in society is being reexamined in Japan, while the number of Buddhists who work on social issues such as poverty, suicide, solitude, and spiritual care is increasing. On the other hand, many Buddhists express the paucity of opportunities to learn the social contribution of Buddhists systematically and comprehensively. They are looking for a way to make use of their faith and belief in their social activities.

We sincerely wish that the number of *Rinsho Bukkyoshi* who have the understanding and expertise on social issues will grow, and they will support

as many people as possible to ease their sufferings. Rinsho Bukkyoshi who work in Japan are also expected to meet the spiritual needs of the Japanese people who have the spirituality that is inherently influenced by Buddhism.⁵

Rinbutsuken is conducting a training program to educate Buddhists to become Rinsho Bukkyoshi. Through the program, the students learn the knowledge and the practical and clinical skills required for serving in education, welfare, or medicine.

We have developed this training program with the training systems in other countries and regions as reference, such as Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)⁶ in the Western countries and Buddhist chaplaincy training in Taiwan⁷. We coach the Buddhists aiming for them to grow and to be certified as Rinsho Bukkyoshi who offer spiritual care at different locations where people suffer from birth, aging, sickness, and death.

The program consists of the following three steps spanning twenty-four months:

STEP 1 Classroom Lectures

To learn the basics of Buddhist spiritual care

STEP 2 Workshops

To master skills of care in a face-to-face situation

STEP 3 On-the-Job Training

To practice at the site of care, such as hospitals and nursing homes

After the completion of these steps and passing a final examination, a certificate will be given to the trainee.

This program started in 2013 partly in response to the emergence of the need for spiritual care for the survivors of the East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami that occurred in 2011. So far, eight programs have been conducted and about six hundred students have been trained as Rinsho Bukkyoshi. They are serving their local communities as spiritual caregivers at hospitals, nursing homes and other institutions.

III. CARE OF *INOCHI* – HOLISTIC SPIRITUAL CARE⁸

We named the spiritual care that the Buddhist chaplains provide “Care of *Inochi*” in Japanese. *Inochi* is one of the Japanese words that correspond to the English word “life.” The contemporary meaning of the word is the mortal life or the continuation of existence from birth to death, humanity, or the invaluable essence of things. *Inochi* came from the ancient Japanese words “*chi*,” which means the power, and “*i*,” which means the breath. Thus the *Inochi* meant the power of breath originally. The English word spirituality corresponds to *prāṇa*

⁵ Jin, Hitoshi (2024).

⁶ ACPE Manuals (2025)b [on line].

⁷ Yoshimizu, Gakugen (2017).

⁸ Jin, Hitoshi (2024).

in Sanskrit, which originally meant breath and developed to express soul and spirit. This naturally corresponds to Inochi.

We regard spiritual care as follows: Spirituality is the primordial source of power that enables humans to be existent with self-identity. Care of Inochi, or spiritual care, is the emancipation of this fundamental power of the care recipients.

In 1998, the World Health Organization (WHO) proposed a definition of health. A human is healthy when they are well physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. Spirituality is not dispensable for health.⁹ These four elements are not separate but interconnected. We believe that in spiritual care, we need to pay attention to the conditions of the other three elements of the care recipient at the time we meet with them. Care of Inochi is the holistic spiritual care that is based on this belief.

The primordial source of power for the existence of a person is their relationship with some things that give meaning to life and death for them. Something can be their essential self, the society including families, or something great. Something great may be God, the Buddha, nature, the universe, or ancestors.

People fall into crisis and feel spiritual pains when this relationship is not going well. Spiritual care is to support those people experiencing spiritual pain to find a safe space to face the pain and to open their hearts to share it with someone else and hopefully connect with something great and ease the pain.

An example of the activities of the Rinsho Bukkyoshi, who provided Care of Inochi, is shown in the following sections.

IV. INVOLVEMENT OF RINSHO BUKKYOSHI IN THE PATIENT CARE AT THE JIKEI UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL^{10, 11}

The Jikei University Hospital (東京慈恵會醫科大學附属病院) originates from the Seiikai (成醫會) Medical Training School that was founded in 1881 by Dr. Kanehiro Takagi. He was a military physician of the Satsuma Clan before the Meiji Restoration of 1868. In 1875, he moved to England to study at St. Thomas' Hospital and Medical School. He was deeply impressed by British medicine, which was based on humanitarianism, and upon returning to Japan, he resolved to build a hospital and medical school for the poor who had been abandoned by medical care. Later, in 1887, at the request of the Empress at that time, the hospital, named after "Jikei (慈恵)," was established as the Tokyo Jikei Hospital. Jikei means charity with compassion.¹² While he was in England, many people asked him what his religion was. He was embarrassed because he did not have the right answer to that question. He was not able to call himself a Buddhist, a Shintoist, or a Confucian with

⁹ Ministry of Health and Welfare (1999) [on line].

¹⁰ Jin, Hitoshi (2019).

¹¹ Jin, Hitoshi and Yoshimizu, Gakugen and Uchiyama, Miyuki (2022).

¹² The Jikei University Hospital [on line].

confidence. He found that he did not have a solid religious worldview or a view on life and death. On the other hand, the medical institutions in England had religion on the basis. When he came back to Japan he made up his mind to provide holistic care combined with medicine and religion in Japan.

“Treat the patient, not the disease.” This phrase, which is the philosophy of the Jikei University School of Medicine, expresses the importance of facing the person suffering from illness and treating them as they are, rather than just looking at the diseased “organ.”

As he thought that his spirituality was a syncretism of various religious faiths, just as many other Japanese, he kept a stance of interfaith stance. He was open to incorporating different religions into the basis of management of the hospital and the treatment of patients.

In 1902, he started a lecture series on spiritual cultivation for the medical staff and the patients. It continued for nearly thirty years with the lecturers including famous modern Buddhist scholars, such as Dr. Junjiro Takagusu, who led the edition of Taisho Tripitaka. It ended around 1930 when the national polity ideology started to propagate. The involvement of religious ministers and practitioners in patient care at the Jikei University Hospital was resumed in 2017. Three Buddhist chaplains from the Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism, the graduates of the training course at the institute, and the supervisor were welcomed by the palliative care ward of the hospital.

Here, we report the results of our Buddhist chaplains’ services during the first five years. The number of patients we met was one hundred and ten. Sixty-seven % were female, and the rest were male. From these numbers we sense the tendency of withdrawal of men. Most of them are reluctant to open their mind to others and lean on someone else.

The age groups were:

30s (6%), 40s (15%), 50s (27%), 60s (20%), 70s (15%), 80s (17%).

Most of them (93%) were cancer patients. The number of noncancer patients who receive spiritual care is growing. This reflects the fact that more and more medical staff has become interested in spiritual care. With the involvement of Buddhist chaplains in spiritual care as a part of patient care, the awareness has gradually spread in the hospital that all the patients and their families are prone to spiritual pains.

V. SPIRITUAL PAINS OF THE PATIENTS

We categorized the factors of spiritual pains of the patients we encountered into the following five items.

5.1. Struggling with self-identity

This includes

- The agony of watching myself becoming weak
- The pain of not being able to live life in the way I want up to the moment I die
- Loss of dignity because I am a patient in the hospital

A woman in her forties tried to move to the window, dragging her body, saying, "I feel miserable, having such an appearance. I want to jump to die from the window."

Another woman asked, "May I put on makeup?" Some "hated the wheelchair." A woman appealed with tears, "Doctors see me only as a set of data." A male patient who had been spending days with medical examinations lamented, "I feel just like being kept in a research institution."

The care providers, including the chaplains, need to remember the severity of the pain of losing self-dignity.

5.2. The pain of having to stay alive

This includes

- The pain of having to continue living the remaining short lifetime fighting with the disease
- The pain of causing a burden for the family and the society

Many patients expressed the hardship of being forced to continue to live by receiving various treatments against their original will to end their lives in the hospital when they arrived there. They appealed, saying, "Let me die soon," "Please kill me," "I am exhausted," "No more, it's over," or "It will be easier if I die in an instant."

Others suffer from the agony of necessity to continue their lives by asking their family members and the hospital staff to take care of their matters due to the loss of physical capabilities. Some patients said, "Please set the treatment expenses aside for the house mortgage."

The medical staff needs to establish a relationship of trust with patients. For example, they should avoid forcing patients to accept aggressive treatments against their will.

5.3. Feelings about life

This includes

- Fear of death or struggle with death
- The anguish of parting from one's loved ones (one of the eight sufferings in the first Noble Truth)
- Premonition of death
- The worldview of after afterlife
- Feeling of loneliness

Most patients naturally fear death. Fear has two elements: the physical pains before dying and the loss of self. However, few honestly put it into words. A woman expressed her fear: "I have never thought that dying is so fearful and lonely." A ninety-year-old man asked, "Isn't death painful?"

A young mother expressed her caring heart for her survivors: "I wish to come back to welcome my children when they end their lives."

We believe that it is important for a chaplain to send a message to the patients that will lessen their fear and loneliness before their final day.

5.4. Will to live

This includes

- I thought that I would recover health
- It is difficult to give up

Patients say, “I cannot pass before my parents,” “I want to celebrate another birthday,” or “I want to continue to watch my children grow.” The feeling of “I cannot give up” sometimes changes to “I will give up.” Behind the feeling of giving up lies an emotion of abandoning with the understanding of reality. There is no regret or resentment anymore.

When the reality of unavoidable death becomes clear, patients will be able to move forward by accepting themselves as they are.

5.5. Life reflection

This includes

- Meaning of life review
- Regret and reconciliation

It was an impressive and memorable scene to watch a patient who had been in discord with their family for a long time start to grow regret towards the end of the terminal stage and finally leave after reaching reconciliation. Some said, “I caused my wife a lot of trouble,” “I did not take good care of my family because I had been a workaholic,” or “I wanted to see my parents from whom I had been alienated for a long time.”

VI. ENGAGEMENT OF CHAPLAINS IN THE VISITS WITH PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The Involvement of chaplains in the meetings with the recipients of spiritual care consists of the following items.

6.1. Listen to storytelling

It is to encourage the care recipient to tell their stories and listen to them attentively. We Buddhist chaplains ask them the meaning of their words and make them clearer. We encourage them to recall the connection with their important persons. This way we support them to sort out their emotions and review their lives.

Late Dr. Hayao Kawai, a prominent clinical psychologist, repeated in his lectures, “The other’s mind cannot be known unless we hear their life stories.” This means that it is not possible to perceive a person’s mind without taking their relationship with others into consideration. It shows the importance of seeing human comprehensively in their relationship with others. This point of view has something in common with the fundamental thought of Buddhism, dependent co-arising (*pratītya-samutpāda* or 縁起).

During the attentive listening, we Buddhist chaplains try to accept what the care recipient says as their life story. It becomes necessary to reconstruct the part that they do not talk about or just cannot utter.

6.2. Accept their thoughts and feelings

We chaplains accept what the care recipient says as a matter of course. We chime in to acknowledge and affirm them. We follow the other golden rules of communication, such as rephrasing and summarizing what they said or speaking for them.

6.3. Send a message of “I am listening to you.”

We chaplains express sympathy with the patients and prepare an atmosphere in which they can feel a sense of belonging.

Buddhism teaches that there are donations (*dāna*) other than treasures: The seven non-treasure donations (無財七施)¹³. We Buddhist chaplains value them, especially eyes of loving-kindness (慈眼), tender face with smiles (和顔), and words of loving-kindness and compassion (愛語), when we meet with the care recipients.

6.4. Stay present

It is very important to continue to stay by the care recipient, even without doing anything. A motto for chaplains is “not doing but being.” It is to share the time with them and to keep them from loneliness.

Sometimes, no words are necessary. An old man was in the end stage of illness. He asked a chaplain to keep holding his hand. The chaplain stayed with him for nearly two hours without saying anything.

Being present is a valuable way of spiritual care for the person in need.

6.5. Focus on the now

We chaplains guide the patients to focus on the present time instead of dreaming of the future. We suggested a patient to live the given remaining life fully, asking him “Isn’t it a great present for your family?”

By focusing on the present time, patients will eventually realize that they have no hope or no future. This realization of emptiness (*śūnyatā* or 空) of themselves will lead to accepting the unavoidable death.

6.6. Religious care

Some patients, mostly male, said, “I will become nothing,” or “It is over when I die.” At those times, we talked to them, “There will be a life that continues after death,’ or “You will meet with your family and friends in the other world.” A patient was puzzled when he heard it. Later, at some point, he asked us, “May I believe in what you said?”

For us humans living in this age of advanced science, it is not easy to accept and believe such a view of the world after death. Moreover, it is not allowed to advertise or impose religious views in a public place such as the university hospitals. However, some people are unconsciously seeking a view of life and death. Buddhist chaplains play an important role in meeting such needs.

When appropriate, we chaplains offer prayers for patients and their families.

¹³ The Sutra of Miscellaneous Jewels (雜寶藏經) vol 6. in *Samgaṇikīkṛtaṃ Taiśotripitakam* (大正大藏經) No. 203 [on line].

6.7. Care for families

As the patients near the end of life, it becomes more and more valuable for them to have a close relationship with their families. We suggest the families stay with them and talk to them as much as possible.

We offer hugging or physical contact care for the families when we think it necessary.

6.8. Other offerings

Most patients can practice meditation while they are lying in bed. We guide them to focus their attention on their breaths and stay “here and now.” By being “mindful,” they gradually become thankful to the people around them, nature, and their ancestors.

Sometimes, chaplains recite poems and read picture books to the patients.

Among the spiritual pains that the patients expressed, the one related to dying was the majority. Naturally, almost all people are afraid of death. The phrase those who are facing death expect to hear most is “You do not have to be afraid of dying.” It is not an easy matter for the chaplains to utter this properly at an appropriate time.

The story that a patient tells often has many spiritual pains, which are complicatedly entwined. They sway from one direction to another. This is an example of challenges for the chaplains to face their spiritual pains. Not interrupting their talk or moving ahead of the conversation is the chaplain’s basic attitude in attentive listening. Listening to them will lead to having respect for their dignity.

Case 1

Mr A, who was in his fifties, had pancreatic cancer that had infiltrated to the spine and could barely raise his upper body because the lower body was paralyzed. He said that he could not die because he had two high school boys. On the other hand, he said, “Please kill me because there is no use living in such a state.” He could not eat or drink and kept his life only with the intravenous drip.

When the chaplain visited him for the first time, he tried to establish rapport by attentive listening and encouraging him to review his pains and his life.

When the chaplain visited him on the next and the last visit, the chaplain recognized that he was supported by his love for his family. The chaplain taught him about the donation of a smiling face (和顔施). “When you show your painful face to your family, they will feel pain too. The medical staff will feel the same way. It may be difficult, but could you show them your smiling face even a bit? It is the most valuable thing you can do at this moment.”

It was difficult for Mr A even to say a word. He stayed silent for a while with his head down then he raised his eyes and smiled at the chaplain. Seeing the smile, the chaplain learned that he had overcome his pains and even his death.

Case 2

The patient was a foreign woman in her forties. The palliative care doctor asked the chaplain to communicate with her in English as she was not fluent in

Japanese. When the chaplain met her, she had a life expectancy of one month with metastatic ovarian cancer.

At the first visit, the chaplain focused on attentive listening and confirmed her life history. At the second visit, the charge nurse said, “The patient seems to have delirium. She is pointing toward the ceiling, repeating to say ‘I am afraid.’” When the chaplain asked the patient what she was afraid of, she did not reply. However, he thought that she was afraid of the Lord’s judgment as she was Roman Catholic. He repeated to her, “God is always by your side. He will be your protector all the time.” He prayed together with her, too.

She had unfortunate experiences of an adulterous life. The chaplain thought that she was suffering from God’s judgment and the fear of falling to hell. At the later visits, he repeated to her, “God will surely save you.” Her delirium had gradually lessened, and she started to smile at the chaplain.

VII. THE FOUNDATION OF BUDDHIST CHAPLAINCY – BUDDHIST DHARMA AND PRACTICE

As the Buddha taught, we humans experience various sufferings during our lifetime from birth to death. He emphasized the practice of loving-kindness and compassion that saves others from suffering and wishes for their happiness (*maitrī and karunā* or 慈悲), which is inseparable from wisdom (*prajñā* or 智慧) that saves them from suffering. The Buddhist chaplains empathize with the suffering of people and empower them in their lives. Chaplains’s spiritual care is an act of Buddhist loving-kindness and compassion that is supported by wisdom.^{14, 15}

A bodhisattva is an ideal model of practitioner in Mahāyāna Buddhism, who postpones their liberation until all the others are freed from their sufferings. We value the four actions of bodhisattvas to save the sentient beings: *catur samgraha vastu*, or 四攝事¹⁶. They are donation (布施), words of loving-kindness and compassion (愛語), altruism (利行), and identity-action (同事). The fourth is to stand in the same place as the care recipient, share their emotions, and empathize with them. We emphasize this in training the Buddhist chaplain candidates.

For the Buddhist chaplains who offer spiritual care, the gaze of loving-kindness and compassion towards the care recipients is indispensable. Late Dr. Hajime Nakamura, a prominent scholar of Buddhism, explained loving-kindness and compassion as “to be in the same circumstances with the others.”¹⁷ It implies that loving-kindness and compassion are inevitable for spiritual care. The following are the important elements of loving-kindness and compassion.

- 隨喜 : Be happy when others are happy.

¹⁴ Komura, Fuminobu (2014).

¹⁵ Komura, Fuminobu (2019).

¹⁶ Nakamura, Hajime, et al, (ed.) (2009).

¹⁷ Nakamura, Hajime (2010).

- 髓悲：Try to share others' suffering by staying beside them even if the suffering has no solution.

- 恭敬：Meet with anyone with deep respect for their dignity.

- 還愚：Be always aware of our incompetence.

What is important in the Buddhist chaplaincy is to meet with all the living creatures with respect based on the deep understanding of the “mutual dependence of lives” taught by the Buddha as dependent co-arising (*pratītya-samutpāda* or 緣起). We are kept alive in the connections with our ancestors over time and in the spatial connections with the beings living now, not only humans but with animals and plants. We chaplains remember this fact and stand at the same or a lower level than the care recipients. For the people suffering from the pains of illness or the pains of facing death, the realization of dependent co-arising as the essential state of all beings will surely lessen their pains. We believe that having a view of the afterlife or the continuation of life after death will give them a light of hope.

Being a chaplain is not a one-way act of serving others who are in spiritual or emotional need. The chaplain can learn and grow. It supports the spiritual growth of the caregiver. “The religious professionals must undergo an inner transformation in becoming a chaplain.”¹⁸ The traditional principle of CPE education is the Action-Reflection-Action learning model.¹⁹ One of the current authors suggested an alternative model based on the traditional Buddhist teaching. It is the Triple Wisdoms (三慧) of 聞、思、修 that is the cycle of Learning, Contemplating, and practicing.²⁰

This incorporates meditation for a chaplain to center themselves to reflect on what they did for the care recipients and what they experienced in doing it. The style of meditation may vary depending on the Buddhist tradition of the chaplain. It may be *zazen*, *śamatha*, and *vipaśyanā*, or visualizing the Buddha or chanting the name of Buddha (念佛).

American Zen master and educator Joan Halifax expressed the ideal attitude of Buddhist chaplains as

“Strong back, Soft front.”²¹

This means that a chaplain opens their soft heart of loving-kindness and compassion to the care recipient, but the heart is supported by their unwavering belief in faith that is not visible to the other person. This way, Buddhist chaplains are ideally able to serve any person regardless of their religion or faith tradition, including non-religious or spiritual people.

This leads to the idea of interfaith spiritual care.²² We Buddhist chaplains

¹⁸ Jin, Hitoshi and Watts, Jonathan S (2016).

¹⁹ ACPE Manuals (2025)a [on line].

²⁰ Samford, Monica (2021).

²¹ Halifax, Joan (2008).

²² Konishi, Tatsuya (2023).

try to be interfaith, offering care to the recipients regardless of the difference of their religion or spirituality. They are ready to offer religious care, such as chanting prayers or reciting a part of sutra or Holy Scripture of the care recipient's faith tradition only when requested by them or it is regarded as appropriate at that time.

In summary, the following are the seven capacities required for the Buddhist chaplains that are supported by Buddhist dharmas and practices.

- Capacity to know oneself

It is to be aware of who I am and what I am.

- Capacity to listen

It is the basis of communication with care recipients.

- Capacity to understand the structure

It is important to know in what social structure or environment the care recipients are suffering.

- Capacity to empathize with the care recipients

It is to stand in the same shoes with the care recipients.

- Capacity of skilful means (*Upāya*, or 方便)

It is first to understand the recipient's capacity to learn. Then, the chaplain chooses the words to talk to them based on their life history or what is important for them.

- Capacity of perseverance

It is to keep staying with the care recipients, not leaving from the difficult situations. For chaplains to be fully present in a non-anxious and non-judgmental way in front of them means to be free from attachment.

- Capacity to believe

It is to believe in oneself and the Buddha. For the Buddhist chaplains, it is essential to have their solid view of life and death and believe completely in the Buddha Nature (佛性) that the person we meet is endowed with.

Thus chaplaincy is a valuable opportunity for the Buddhists not only to exercise loving-kindness and compassion but to reflect on themselves and grow as a Buddhist practitioner. We thank the Buddha for letting us encounter this valuable role of spiritual caregiving.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we presented the altruistic activities of the Rinbutsuken Institute of Engaged Buddhism, headquartered in Tokyo, Japan. The important element of the activities is the training of Rinsho Bukkyoshi, or the interfaith chaplains with firm faith in Buddhism. What they offer is named Care of Inochi, which means holistic spiritual care. It is based on our belief that spiritual health is deeply interconnected with other aspects of health: physical, mental, and social.

As a major activity of Rinsho Bukkyoshi, we presented the initiative of joining the palliative care team of the Jikei University Hospital. The chaplains

offered Care of Inochi to the patients who are mostly at the end-of-life stage and their families, as was shown in two example cases. Based on our experience of chaplaincy service at this hospital, we identified the factors of patients' pains and the main aspects of chaplains' involvement in meeting with the care recipients.

Spiritual care by chaplains is an act of benefiting others, which is loving-kindness and compassion of wishing others be happy and free from suffering as the Buddha taught. They are inseparable from wisdom to liberate the practitioners from their suffering.

The teaching of the Three Wisdoms, or learning, contemplating, and practice, is an ideal model of a chaplain's spiritual growth. We identified seven capacities that are required for Buddhist chaplains.

Thus chaplaincy is a valuable path for Buddhists to carry out loving-kindness and compassion as well as to grow spiritually.

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FROM PERSONAL PEACE TO COMMUNITY PEACE: A BUDDHIST COMPASSION APPROACH

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Abstract:

Compassion, one of the Four Immeasurable Minds in Buddhism, represents empathy and the capacity to assist others, fostering inner peace and understanding within individuals. In an increasingly complex multicultural society, practicing compassion not only reduces individual stress but also promotes understanding and compassion within communities, serving as a sustainable peace-building strategy. Research indicates that individuals who cultivate inner peace through compassion and mindfulness tend to exhibit better empathy and cooperation, thus reducing cultural and social conflicts. Compassion enables members of society to address conflicts peacefully and build trust among diverse groups, especially in multicultural contexts. This paper has two main objectives: (1) to analyze the Buddhist approach to compassion from the perspective of personal peace, and (2) to elucidate the role of compassion in building peace within multicultural societies.

Keywords: *Buddhist compassion, community reconciliation, mindfulness, multicultural society, personal peace.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly complex society, the concepts of personal peace and global harmony have become critical. The rise of global issues such as ethnic conflicts, religious disputes, social inequality, and climate change poses significant challenges to the security and stability of communities. Addressing these challenges requires not only resolving conflicts but also transforming the psychological and social roots of individuals. Numerous studies have shown that cultivating personal peace through mindfulness and compassion can bring about positive changes not only in individuals' lives but also in broader communities.

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Personal peace refers to a state of inner stability that enables individuals to face life's challenges without emotional upheaval. From a psychological perspective, achieving inner peace enhances emotional regulation, reducing the impact of external negative factors. In Buddhism, inner peace is considered the foundation for creating external harmony. Practicing compassion helps individuals alleviate personal suffering while fostering compassion for others, promoting mutual understanding and respect.

In today's multicultural society, these values can mend relationships and foster community cohesion. Compassion is one of the Four Immeasurable Minds in Buddhism, alongside loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. In Buddhist tradition, compassion embodies unconditional, impartial love. It extends beyond mere pity, involving actions to alleviate others' suffering and combining love with wisdom to address others' true needs. In Buddhism, practicing compassion is not solely for personal enlightenment but also for fostering a more harmonious and peaceful society.

Renowned Buddhist Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh highlighted that personal serenity is the first step toward world peace. By developing compassion and self-awareness, he believed that people could help bring about peace. He also believed that positive emotions, such as compassion, have a positive impact on others and promote healthy communities.

Numerous studies have shown that education on compassion can improve mental health and reduce individual stress. Incorporating compassion education into community development and educational programs has proven effective in helping individuals understand and alleviate both their own and others' suffering. By creating a cultural foundation based on compassion, Buddhism aims not only at personal liberation but also at promoting collective peace and well-being.

Practices such as compassion meditation and mindfulness meditation enable individuals to recognize and regulate their negative emotions, reducing conflict-driven behaviors and creating the conditions for peace to flourish.

This paper focuses on analyzing how compassion can transform personal peace into societal peace in multicultural contexts. In modern societies, where diverse values and cultures frequently intersect, compassion and mindfulness serve as essential tools for bridging divides between communities. When individuals cultivate compassion and practice mindfulness, they develop the capacity to accept and respect differences while mitigating the negative emotions that lead to conflict. The compassionate approach to peacebuilding holds significant potential for reconciling conflicts in multicultural societies.

Research indicates that when compassion and awareness are practiced in communities, members develop empathy and understanding, which helps reduce disagreements and conflicts. This paper explains the mechanisms through which personal peace can spread to community peace and even global peace through the individualization of compassion and the socialization of compassionate values.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The concept of compassion in Buddhism

In Buddhist philosophy, compassion (*karuna*) is one of the Four Immeasurable Minds (*Brahmaviharas*), along with equanimity (*upekkha*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and loving-kindness (*metta*). Buddhism views compassion as the intention to lessen the suffering of all sentient beings, not merely an act of sympathy. A potent transformative tool, compassion helps people overcome their pain and find inner peace. The *Pali* scriptures, such as the *Metta Sutta* and the *Satipatthana Sutta*, describe compassion as an innate quality that enables practitioners to attain serenity through deep empathy and understanding of others' suffering.²

Goleman, D. (1988)³ and Keown et al. (2007)⁴ argue that compassion is a crucial factor in emotional regulation, helping individuals reduce negative emotions and develop self-awareness. Practicing compassion allows individuals to confront their suffering without succumbing to external negativity. By acknowledging and accepting pain, practitioners can liberate themselves from attachment and attain genuine peace. This process not only deepens self-understanding but also fosters harmonious relationships with others.

Modern studies on compassion also support its role in transforming suffering into personal peace. Thich Nhat Hanh, in his works (1991, 1996a, 2002), emphasizes that the practice of compassion helps individuals manage their emotions and contributes to a meaningful and peaceful life. Those who practice compassion tend to react less negatively to external stimuli, maintaining inner stability. Thus, compassion is not only a personal quality but also a foundation for developing a peaceful society.⁵

2.2. Compassion and reconciliation

Compassion and mindfulness have been extensively researched and are recognized as valuable tools in educational and reconciliation initiatives in multicultural settings. According to Amoneeta (2022)⁶ and Flynn, J. E. (2023),⁷ mindfulness and compassion education initiatives can help community members understand and embrace diversity while reducing stress and conflict in multicultural educational settings.

² Nyanaponika, T. (1996). *The heart of Buddhist meditation*. Access to Insight. <https://www.accesstinsight.org/lib/authors/nyanaponika/heartofmed.html>

³ Goleman, D. (1988). *The meditative mind: The varieties of meditative experience*. TarcherPerigee.

⁴ Keown, D., et al. (2007). *The encyclopedia of Buddhism*. New York: Routledge.

⁵ Thich, N. H. (1991). *Peace is every step*. New York: Bantam Books; Thich, N. H. (1996a). *Breathe! You are alive: Sutra on the full awareness of breathing*. Berkeley: Parallax Press; Thich, N. H. (2002). *No death, no fear: Comforting wisdom for life*. New York: Riverhead Books.

⁶ Amoneeta. (2022). Multicultural considerations in teaching mindfulness: *Mindful Teachers*.

⁷ Flynn, J. E. (2023). Integrating mindfulness and social justice: Walking the path of change. *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 25(2), p. 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v25i2.3597>.

The authors highlight that practicing compassion enables students and teachers to develop empathy for others, reducing conflict and enhancing harmony. Similarly, Hui, L. G. I. (2021)⁸ emphasizes that compassion and mindfulness can be key methods for resolving social conflicts. Practicing compassion helps individuals approach conflicts calmly and with understanding, thereby reducing tension and fostering reconciliatory relationships in multicultural settings.

In education and reconciliation programs, the practice of compassion has been proven to facilitate mutual understanding and promote respect among diverse cultural groups, reducing hostility and fostering peaceful relationships. Furthermore, research on the psychological benefits of compassion demonstrates how effective it is at lowering stress and enhancing mental health. The Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, created by Kabat, Z. J. (1990), is founded on the concepts of mindfulness and compassion. This program, which is widely used in educational and community settings, aims to reduce stress and improve quality of life.⁹ Kabat, Z. J.'s research indicates that MBSR not only enhances self-awareness but also fosters compassion for others.

2.3. Theoretical models

Theoretical models for personal development through mindfulness and compassion have been extensively developed and applied. MBSR is a prime example of integrating mindfulness and compassion into personal development. It focuses not only on stress reduction but also on helping individuals develop clear self-awareness and the ability to face life's challenges with equanimity.

Kabat, Z. J. (2011) asserts that MBSR is an effective method for cultivating self-awareness and compassion, enabling individuals to regulate emotions and develop empathy and understanding for others.¹⁰ Research by Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003) also suggests that mindfulness programs are effective tools for personal development and improving mental health.¹¹ The authors argue that practicing mindfulness and compassion not only fosters inner peace but also creates opportunities for individuals to build positive relationships with others.

This is particularly significant in multicultural societies, where empathy and mutual understanding are core elements for building peace and unity. Studies

⁸ Hui, L. G. I. (2021). Mindfulness and motivation in self-transformation: Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on "interbeing". *Manusya: Journal of Humanities*, 24(3). <https://doi.org/10.1163/26659077-02403004>

⁹ Kabat, Z. J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Delta.

¹⁰ Kabat, Z. J. (2011). Reflections on the origins of MBSR, skillful means, and the trouble with maps. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12(1), p. 281 – 306.

¹¹ Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84 (4), p. 822 - 830.

on the role of compassion in community contexts indicate that compassion can be a key factor in fostering a peaceful and cohesive society. Community development programs based on compassion and mindfulness have been implemented in various settings to create safe and harmonious environments.

For example, in compassion education programs in Northern Ireland, Enright, R. D., and colleagues (2007) found that compassion education reduces hostility and promotes reconciliatory relationships among different population groups.¹²

In summary, theoretical models and research on Buddhist compassion demonstrate that compassion is not only a tool for achieving inner peace but also a means of spreading peace within communities and contributing to global harmony. From classical texts to modern research, compassion is recognized as an effective method for transforming personal suffering into peace and fostering a united and harmonious society.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Research design

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the contribution of compassion practices to peacemaking, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how these practices affect individual peace and communal harmony. The qualitative research method explores the psychological and social aspects of compassion practices in fostering personal peace through in-depth interviews and content analysis of participant responses. Meanwhile, the quantitative research method assesses the effects of compassion and mindfulness on indicators of peace and personal satisfaction. This combination helps to explain not only the mechanisms through which compassion enhances individuals' inner states but also its broader impact on the community, particularly in multicultural settings. The mixed-methods approach also supports hypothesis testing based on the theoretical framework while gathering rich, multidimensional data for subsequent analysis.

3.2. Study participants

This study focuses on participants from diverse communities, who are divided into three main groups:

(1) University Students: Students from urban universities represent younger generations who are often exposed to integrated education and cultural exchange. This group is significant as they are more likely to be influenced by cultural diversity and may exhibit either positive or negative reactions to cultural differences in their studies and daily lives. (2) Workers: Workers from various regions who have migrated to industrial zones and urban communities in Binh Duong province. Due to the nature of their work

¹² Enright, R. D., et al. (2007). Struggling for peace through forgiveness education in Belfast, Northern Ireland II: Educational programs to improve children's mental health. *Journal of Research in Education*, 17, p. 63 - 73.

and living environments, this group often faces challenges related to cultural adaptation, discrimination, and stress. The study examines how compassion practices can alleviate feelings of alienation and promote harmony in diverse living environments. (3) Residents in Multicultural Communities: Long-term residents, including families and individuals, living in multicultural areas for generations. This group offers diverse perspectives on cultural conflicts and reconciliation achieved through compassionate practices. The study evaluates the interactions between individuals and communities in developing compassion and acceptance, contributing to a peaceful and empathetic society.

3.3. Data collection methods

To collect data for both qualitative and quantitative analyses, the study employs the following methods:

(1) In-Depth Interviews: Direct interviews with representatives from the three participant groups explore detailed perceptions and personal experiences related to compassion practices and peacebuilding. Open-ended interview questions are used to elicit feedback from participants and shed light on how compassion affects their capacity for stress management and conflict resolution. (2) Questionnaire Surveys: A survey is designed to measure aspects such as individual reconciliation levels, compassion, and mindfulness. The questionnaire evaluates changes in perception and behavior after practicing compassion, as well as participants' willingness to accept and understand people from different cultural backgrounds. (3) Measuring Perceptions of Peace and Compassion: The survey includes items to assess perceptions of peace, levels of understanding, and compassion in daily interactions. Some questions ask participants to self-assess their compassion and willingness to reconcile, providing measures of the effectiveness of compassion practices in accepting cultural differences and reducing negative emotions.

3.4. Data analysis

To identify themes related to compassion and reconciliation, content analysis will be used to examine the data from the in-depth interviews. These themes may include how compassion reduces animosity, promotes acceptance, and strengthens individuals' capacity for reconciliation. Content analysis will also compare personal experiences across different cultural groups to clarify how compassion influences responses to cultural conflicts and feelings of insecurity. Quantitative data from the surveys will be analyzed using statistical methods, including tests to measure relationships between variables such as compassion levels, personal reconciliation abilities, and inner peace. The results of the analysis will clarify individual changes in perception and provide practical evidence of compassion's potential to promote reconciliation in multicultural contexts.

IV. RESULTS

4.1. The impact of personal compassion on inner peace

Survey results reveal that the practice of compassion significantly contributes to individuals' inner peace. Le Anh Minh, a 35-year-old office worker from Di An City, shared that he used to become easily irritated and

angry under work-related stress. However, after practicing compassion following the guidance of Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings, he learned to manage his emotions by focusing on understanding himself and others. This helped him feel more at peace and reduced his negative reactions under pressure. Nguyen Thi Lan, a high school teacher in the Bau Bang District, expressed that teaching often left her exhausted, particularly when dealing with difficult students. Practicing compassion made it easier for her to handle stressful situations while maintaining calmness and focus, which reduced her anxiety and stress at work. Nguyen Thanh Hung, a 21-year-old student in New Binh Duong City, used to react with anger and blame others when faced with challenges. After practicing compassion, he noticed a remarkable change: instead of getting angry, he learned to think positively and frequently read books on meditation and psychology. This helped him maintain psychological stability and overcome negative emotions. Similarly, after engaging in compassion, Do Thi Ha, a 20-year-old student at Binh Duong University of Economics and Technology, found it easier to forgive her classmates. Homemaker Nguyen Phuong Mai, who resides in Thu Dau Mot City's Hiep Thanh 3 Residential Area, revealed that after experiencing periods of despair and disappointment in life, compassion practice became a therapeutic intervention for her. She stopped focusing on her grief and anger over the past and instead cultivated self-compassion and compassion for others, bringing tranquility to her soul. Phan Van Tuan, a 60-year-old retiree in Thu Dau Mot City, mentioned that since practicing compassion, his mind has become calmer, replacing negative emotions like anxiety and frustration with patience and serenity. As a result, he feels healthier and happier each day, less affected by external stressors. These accounts from survey participants demonstrate that compassion practice not only helps reduce stress but also fosters inner peace, creating a balanced and peaceful life for individuals within the community.

The survey also indicates that practicing compassion significantly enhances individuals' sense of inner harmony and psychological balance. Ngo Thi Thu, a 40-year-old business manager in Thuan An City, shared that before learning about compassion practice, she often felt stressed and anxious about making important business decisions. Practicing compassion daily helped her accept herself and face work pressures more calmly, enabling her to approach challenges without being overwhelmed by negative emotions. Le Quang Binh, a 33-year-old healthcare worker in Binh Nham Ward, Thuan An City, reported that the stressful and challenging situations at the hospital often left him feeling tired and uneasy. After starting compassion practice, he found inner peace and better emotional control. He noted that compassion helped him develop self-awareness, reduce internal conflicts, and maintain psychological stability, even during high-pressure shifts. Le Thi Mai Hoang, a 29-year-old kindergarten teacher in Ben Cat Town, described how small challenges in her job, such as managing children or communicating with parents, used to make her anxious. Through compassion practice, she experienced a gradual reduction in stress and was able to face tasks with confidence and resilience, free from negative thoughts. Tran An Phuc, a 55-year-old truck driver in Ben Cat Town, shared

that past internal conflicts about life and work often left him feeling irritable and uncomfortable. However, since practicing compassion, he feels more at ease accepting situations as they are. Compassion practice helped him feel lighter, control his emotions, and avoid being dominated by negative feelings, even in difficult situations on the road.

Survey findings also highlight that compassion practice significantly reduces negative emotions such as anger, resentment, and envy while fostering positive qualities in individuals. Do Thi My Hanh, a 38-year-old sales staff member at Thu Dau Mot Market, mentioned that before practicing compassion, she often felt envious of her colleagues' success. However, after starting compassion practice, she found it easier to let go of such negative emotions and cultivate kindness, learning to celebrate others' achievements with a generous heart. As a result, she noticed her mind becoming more tranquil and peaceful. Phan Minh Quan, a 45-year-old mid-level manager in Chanh Nghia Ward, Thu Dau Mot City, shared that he used to get angry easily under work pressure. Through compassion practice, he learned to empathize with and connect to colleagues, reducing his anger in stressful situations. He stated that since practicing compassion, his mind has become more stable, free from negative emotions, and he feels more comfortable in his daily work.

4.2. The impact of compassion in communities

Survey results indicate that compassion has a positive impact not only on individuals but also on community harmony, particularly in multicultural environments. People who practice compassion often demonstrate better connectivity and cooperation with those around them, showing understanding and empathy that transcend cultural barriers. Lam Thi An, a 34-year-old teacher at an international school in New Binh Duong City, shared that practicing compassion helps her empathize more easily with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Previously, she found it challenging to handle cultural differences in her classroom. However, through compassion practice, she learned to let go of personal biases and open herself to different perspectives. She stated that understanding her students allows her to connect with them more easily and create a mutually respectful learning environment where all students feel accepted and safe to share. Compassion has become a bridge between her and her students from various cultures, fostering a close-knit and harmonious classroom community. Similarly, Chau Anh Quang, a 29-year-old employee at a multinational company in Thuan An City, observed that practicing compassion significantly improved his communication and teamwork skills in a multicultural workplace. He used to struggle with collaborating with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds due to language barriers and differences in customs. Minor tensions in communication often left him feeling stressed and reluctant to interact. Since practicing compassion, however, he has become more confident in collaborating without being hindered by cultural barriers. He shared that compassion enables him to see his colleagues from a genuine perspective, listen without judgment, and understand their motivations and values. This fosters natural connections, enhances teamwork, and helps

everyone work more effectively in a multicultural setting. Mai Thi Thu Hong, a 45-year-old active member of the Chanh Nghia Residential Community in Thu Dau Mot City, noted that practicing compassion makes it easier for her to accept and understand the differing customs of those around her. Previously, she often felt uncomfortable and confused during community activities when faced with unfamiliar behaviors or viewpoints. However, through compassion practice, she learned to view others through a lens of empathy and respect. This helped her maintain a calm attitude and avoid negative reactions, especially during events involving diverse cultural groups. She shared that the tolerance fostered by compassion has helped her open her heart, reducing minor conflicts and creating a joyful and united atmosphere at community events. She feels that compassion encourages people to work together, support each other, and share without being bothered by language or cultural differences. Ngo Thanh Long, a 40-year-old engineer working on an international project in New Binh Duong City, also recognized the positive impact of compassion on collaboration in multicultural work environments. Given the nature of his job, which requires close cooperation among colleagues from various countries, he had faced difficulties stemming from differing work styles. Misunderstandings in communication and varying perceptions of tasks often left him feeling dissatisfied and stressed. However, through compassion practice, he gradually learned to accept these differences and remain calm in tense situations. He found that compassion helped him develop patience, avoid hasty reactions or judgments, and instead strive to understand what his colleagues valued. Long stated that this empathy improved not only personal relationships but also contributed to a harmonious and effective work environment where everyone can focus on common goals without being hindered by cultural differences.

Most survey and interview participants shared a common belief that practicing compassion not only reduces conflicts but also fosters reconciliation within communities. Nguyen Van Tuan, a 43-year-old social work lecturer, shared that he used to feel anger and struggle with forgiveness when facing conflicts with colleagues. However, after practicing compassion, he gradually learned to be more patient and let go of grudges. He noted that compassion allows him to approach conflicts with a spirit of reconciliation, analyze problems objectively, and respond patiently. This has helped him maintain good relationships with colleagues and reduce minor workplace conflicts. Similarly, Cu Thi Thuy Minh, a 28-year-old teacher at a high school in Di An City, observed that since she introduced the value of compassion to her students, they have been less likely to engage in aggressive or violent behavior. She shared that her students now tend to resolve conflicts more peacefully, showing a greater willingness to understand and accept differences. Instead of reacting harshly, they have learned to listen and handle conflicts amicably. Compassion has fostered a friendly school environment, helping students develop positive traits and reducing the risk of escalating conflicts. In the local community, Phan Van Hoang, a 52-year-old charity worker in Di An City, found that practicing compassion helped him develop harmonious and sustainable relationships with those around him. He recalled that during neighborhood meetings, opposing viewpoints often led to

heated arguments among members. However, by practicing compassion and encouraging mutual understanding and respect, his community has become more cohesive. According to Hoang, compassion fosters empathy, helps people overcome preconceptions, and supports others during tough times, all of which contribute to a more cohesive and tranquil community. Lam Thi Hang, a 44-year-old leader of a volunteer group in Phu Tho Ward, Thu Dau Mot City, noted that when members of her group began systematically practicing compassion, they not only helped each other but also actively organized community support activities. She shared that compassion became a common foundation for fostering positive relationships, regardless of members' cultural backgrounds. Her volunteer group regularly organizes activities to assist disadvantaged families in the neighborhood, creating a safe and friendly social environment. Hang believes that compassion enables people to connect easily and feel responsible for one another, fostering a close-knit and harmonious living space.

4.3. From personal peace to community peace

Survey results reveal that practicing compassion and mindfulness not only brings peace to individuals but also creates positive ripple effects in surrounding communities. Lai Van Nam, a 30-year-old office worker in Tan Uyen City, shared that since practicing compassion and mindfulness, his ability to control emotions and remain calm under pressure has improved significantly. As a result, he no longer reacts angrily or harshly during minor workplace disagreements. He stated that his inner peace helps him become more tolerant and accepting of colleagues' differing opinions, reducing conflicts and contributing to a harmonious work environment where mutual respect thrives. Phan Thu Thao, a 45-year-old homemaker in Binh Chuan Ward, Thuan An City, shared that practicing compassion has not only lightened her spirit but also spread peace to her family and neighbors. Previously, when disputes arose with neighbors, she often became caught up in negative emotions and found it hard to forgive. Through practicing compassion, she learned to understand and respect others' perspectives, improving neighborly relationships and creating a more harmonious living environment. Thao noted that compassion helps reduce personal conflicts while fostering a friendly community where people support and help each other. Do Chau Hung, a 38-year-old resident of Phu Hoa Residential Area in Thu Dau Mot City, shared that attending mindfulness and compassion workshops at a community center transformed his attitude toward cultural differences. Previously, he felt uncomfortable with the customs of neighbors from other countries. However, practicing compassion made him more attuned to their needs, allowing him to accept and respect those differences. This not only strengthened his relationships with his neighbors but also encouraged others to create a harmonious and united multicultural community. Similarly, Do Thi Huyen Lan, a 50-year-old volunteer worker in the same neighborhood, said that practicing compassion and mindfulness encouraged her to help others selflessly. She frequently organizes donation drives and support activities for struggling families in her area. Inspired by her compassionate spirit, many residents joined these charitable activities, creating

a community filled with empathy. Lan emphasized that compassion is not only a method for achieving inner peace but also a powerful tool for connecting households and building a sustainable, responsible community.

These findings demonstrate that the transition from personal peace to community harmony is achievable through compassion and mindfulness practice. When individuals attain inner peace and develop compassion, they tend to spread this positive energy to those around them, contributing to a more harmonious environment. People who practice compassion not only manage their emotions and remain calm, but they also become more tolerant and understanding. This is especially important in multicultural societies, where diverse values and viewpoints can coexist peacefully through individual compassion and acceptance. From personal peace, these “waves of peace” radiate outward, helping to build a friendly and sustainable society where individuals live, work, and support one another in harmony.

The survey further indicates that community-based compassion and mindfulness groups play a significant role in transforming personal tranquility into social peace. Le Anh Khoa, a 28-year-old resident of Di An City, took part in a stress-reduction program centered on mindfulness. Before joining, he often felt stressed and irritable during minor conflicts with neighbors. After practicing compassion and mindfulness, he became more patient and less reactive in confrontational situations. He shared that the program taught him positive communication skills, enabling him to build friendlier relationships with those around him, contributing to a peaceful social environment in his neighborhood. Vu Tuyet Hanh, a 35-year-old middle school teacher in Thuan An City, shared that incorporating mindfulness into her teaching improved the classroom atmosphere. She noticed that her students, after being guided in compassion practice, became more harmonious and open. Previously, cultural and regional differences occasionally led to conflicts among students. However, since practicing mindfulness, the students have shown mutual respect and better collaboration in group activities. Hanh stated that compassion not only benefits individual students but also creates a harmonious learning environment where everyone can grow together, free from cultural barriers. In the An Phu community of Thuan An City, Tran Van Hoan, a 50-year-old resident, shared that neighborhood interactions were once limited, and misunderstandings often arose due to cultural differences. However, since the residents began practicing compassion through a community center program, they have gradually opened up and sought to understand one another better. Hoan observed that residents not only resolved minor conflicts but also willingly supported each other during difficult times. This has transformed the neighborhood into a cohesive community where members feel safe and maintain lasting relationships, especially during challenging times.

Insights from survey participants show that compassion and mindfulness have the potential to transform personal peace into social harmony through daily community activities. When individuals achieve inner peace and practice compassion, they naturally foster positive social relationships, creating a safe,

connected, and supportive living environment. This transformation not only helps individuals build harmonious relationships in multicultural settings but also establishes stable and cohesive communities where people live and work together with empathy and responsibility.

V. DISCUSSION

5.1. Analysis of results

The survey and interview results indicate that the practice of compassion and mindfulness provides substantial benefits, not only to individuals but also to communities, fostering harmonious and sustainable living environments. First, the impact of compassion on individuals' inner peace is evident. Participants such as Minh, Lan, and Hung demonstrated significant improvements in emotional regulation, reduced negative reactions, and maintained psychological stability. These stories illustrate that practicing compassion helps individuals manage their emotions under pressure, mitigating negative responses like anger, anxiety, and frustration. This suggests that compassion not only promotes psychological balance but also serves as a tool for maintaining inner peace, leading to a more balanced and tranquil life.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that practicing compassion promotes virtues like kindness and tolerance while reducing negative emotions such as resentment, rage, and envy. The cases of Hanh and Quan exemplify how compassion helps individuals diminish feelings of envy and anger, replacing them with empathy and a willingness to support others. This shift is significant not only on a personal level but also for fostering harmonious social relationships, encouraging tolerance, understanding, and maintaining positive interactions among individuals. A critical finding from the research is the ripple effect of compassion, extending from individuals to communities. The transformations seen in An, Quang, and Hong illustrate that people who practice compassion tend to connect better with others and show more empathy, particularly in multicultural settings. This, in turn, helps ease tensions arising from cultural and lifestyle differences, contributing to the creation of a multicultural community where members can live in harmony and collaborate effectively. In educational environments, the practice of compassion positively impacts students by encouraging mutual respect, reducing aggressive behaviors, and promoting peaceful conflict resolution. These findings demonstrate that compassion not only helps individuals adjust their behaviors but also creates positive influences within their surrounding communities.

Furthermore, compassion plays a crucial role in mitigating conflicts and fostering reconciliation. As seen in the cases of Tuan and Minh, individuals who practice compassion are more likely to approach conflicts with a spirit of understanding, avoiding grudges, and seeking reconciliation. This is especially important in multicultural communities, where cultural, religious, and belief differences often lead to conflicts. Compassion practice not only helps reduce these conflicts but also encourages community members to reconcile and restore relationships, contributing to a more harmonious and stable society.

Another key finding is that the transition from personal peace to community harmony can be achieved through consistent compassion and mindfulness practices. As shared by Khoa and Hanh, when individuals engage in regular compassion and mindfulness practices, they not only achieve inner peace but also develop better emotional regulation, improved communication skills, and stronger social relationships. This highlights how compassion practice can serve as a vital tool for creating “waves of peace” that extend from individuals to their communities. Moreover, the ripple effect of compassion contributes to long-term community cohesion. For example, Hang and Mai observed a transformation in how their volunteer group members interacted after consistently practicing compassion. The mutual support and empathy fostered by compassion not only created a sense of safety within the group but also promoted long-term solidarity, especially in volunteer and community support activities. This demonstrates that compassion can lay the foundation for a sustainable community, where individuals feel responsible for and willing to support one another through challenges.

In modern society, where social conflicts, stress, and cultural tensions are on the rise, compassion and mindfulness practices emerge as crucial methods for fostering peace. The research findings indicate that compassion is not just a spiritual value but also a practical tool for enhancing social well-being. Interviews with individuals from diverse professions, ages, and cultural backgrounds show that practicing compassion helps individuals attain peace and cultivate positive social relationships. Especially in multicultural communities, compassion plays a vital role in overcoming barriers and fostering a cohesive, harmonious living environment.

5.2. Applicability of compassion for community and social development

This discussion underscores that practicing compassion not only benefits individuals but also plays a crucial role in fostering a peaceful and harmonious society, especially in multicultural and value-diverse contexts. Research findings suggest that as individuals cultivate compassion, they not only reduce negative emotions but also extend compassion to those around them, promoting reconciliation and social cohesion. Consequently, compassion can be utilized as a sustainable strategy for reconciliation and community development, helping to create a peaceful, united, and understanding living environment.

One of the significant roles of compassion is its ability to help individuals understand and accept differences. In multicultural societies, variations in values, beliefs, and customs often lead to conflicts and tensions. Compassion, by enabling individuals to empathize with others' pain and perspectives, serves as a bridge for reconciliation among different cultural groups. Compassionate individuals are more inclined to tolerate and accept diversity, promoting peaceful and harmonious living conditions. This is supported by studies such as those by Diener, E., et al. (1985)¹³ and Brown K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003).¹⁴

¹³ Diener, E., et al. (1985). The Satisfaction With Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49(1), p. 71 - 75.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 831 - 848.

In educational settings, compassion has proven effective in reducing cultural stress and fostering empathy among students and teachers. According to research by Seagall and Flynn, J. E. (2023), compassion enables individuals to accept diverse cultural values, laying the groundwork for social harmony and cohesion.¹⁵ This is particularly significant in today's globalized world, where societies are becoming increasingly diverse and complex. Compassion also holds great potential for promoting sustainable community development, both socially and spiritually. Compassionate communities tend to be more cohesive, with individuals prioritizing collective welfare and a willingness to help others. Studies by Enright et al. (2007) show that teaching compassion to children and adolescents reduces violent behaviors and fosters unity within communities¹⁶. **Kabat, Z. J.** (1990, 2003, 2011)¹⁷ highlights that combining compassion with mindfulness helps individuals achieve inner stability and develop harmonious relationships. Communities with a high prevalence of compassionate and mindful individuals tend to experience fewer conflicts as empathy and mutual support become shared values.

In multicultural societies, where conflicts often arise from differences in beliefs and customs, compassion serves as a powerful reconciliation strategy that fosters mutual acceptance and respect. Research by De, V. M. (2015) shows that in multicultural communities, the practice of compassion positively impacts trust and understanding among diverse groups. Compassion, therefore, becomes not only a personal tool but also a method for communities to achieve harmony and promote values such as tolerance and mutual support.¹⁸

In the context of globalization, compassion also serves as a means to address global conflicts by building communities grounded in empathy and mutual respect. Garcia, C. J. (2017) emphasizes that compassion can reduce social issues such as stigma and discrimination, particularly in diverse communities.¹⁹ When members of society practice compassion, they cultivate kindness and approach conflicts with greater peace. Applying compassion to community development not only fosters a healthy living environment but also contributes to sustainable growth. In conclusion, the findings of this discussion suggest that compassion can evolve into a long-term strategy for fostering rapprochement and creating peaceful neighborhoods in multicultural settings. Compassion's ability to promote understanding, respect, and mutual support is essential in helping communities achieve harmony and unity. Implementing compassion

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 11 - 19.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 75 - 78.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 152 - 156 ; p. 303 - 306.

¹⁸ De, V. M., et al. (2015). Mindfulness training for stress management: A randomized controlled study for medical and psychology students. *BMC Medical Education*, 15(1), p. 107. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-015-0395-2>

¹⁹ García, C. J., et al. (2017). How cultural factors influence the teaching and practice of mindfulness and compassion in Latin countries. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, p. 1161. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01161>

not only addresses cultural conflicts but also contributes to the creation of a sustainably developed society, where members live and grow together in peace.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the crucial role of compassion in Buddhism, emphasizing its significance not only for personal development but also for fostering peace within communities and society as a whole. Through the practices of compassion and mindfulness, individuals can achieve inner peace, better manage negative emotions, and cultivate empathy and understanding for others. These elements form the foundation for a harmonious society, where cultural and social conflicts are minimized, and peace becomes a shared value.

Compassion serves as both a psychological and spiritual tool that helps individuals alleviate stress, reduce negative emotions such as anger and resentment, and cultivate empathy for others. In the Buddhist tradition, practicing compassion not only brings tranquility to the individual but also radiates outward, reinforcing societal values of harmony, respect, and tolerance. Compassion holds particular significance in modern multicultural contexts, where differences in beliefs, customs, and lifestyles can often lead to conflict. It enables individuals to accept and appreciate differing perspectives, fostering respect and understanding. When individuals achieve inner peace and compassion, their capacity for empathy and understanding grows, thereby reducing conflicts and contributing to a more harmonious community.

In multicultural societies, compassion goes beyond individual significance and becomes a sustainable strategy for community building. Research on Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) by Kabat, Z. J. (1990)²⁰ shows that cultivating compassion and mindfulness helps individuals navigate challenges while maintaining psychological stability. These practices are applied not only for personal growth but also in educational and multicultural settings to promote harmony and unity. Additionally, compassion serves as a strong foundation for reconciliation and community-building programs, equipping members with the skills needed to empathize and respect differences. Therefore, spreading compassion education can help heal the wounds caused by ethnic conflicts and rebuild trust between communities.

This study highlights that compassion is not only a personal value but also a societal force that fosters reconciliation and community stability. Compassion can be applied flexibly across various cultural contexts, helping to break down cultural barriers and promoting understanding and cooperation. By practicing compassion, individuals enhance their empathy and reduce reactive behaviors, contributing to a more peaceful and cohesive community. The findings from this study suggest that compassion can be integrated into educational and community development programs to cultivate peaceful and nurturing environments. In schools and community organizations, incorporating compassion and mindfulness can help reduce negative behaviors while

²⁰ Ibid.,

encouraging mutual support and understanding. Integrating compassion into education could serve as a long-term strategy for building a stable society where every individual feels responsible for their community and can face societal challenges with peace.

This study highlights the importance of cultivating compassion as an integral part of social education and community reconciliation. However, to harness the potential of compassion in fostering social peace fully, further research is necessary to explore how it can be integrated with other cultural and religious values. Applying compassion in culturally diverse societies not only helps mitigate social conflicts but also promotes peaceful and united international relations. In Buddhism, compassion is not merely a spiritual value but also a practical tool for building a peaceful and stable society. By practicing compassion, individuals can become peacebuilders, contributing to the creation of a healthy and sustainable living environment.

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THE IMPACT OF COMPASSION (*KARUṆĀ*) IN BUDDHIST PSYCHOTHERAPY ON CREATING A PEACEFUL WORLD

TN. Như Hiếu¹

Abstract:

In today's world, the rapid advancement of science and technology has persuaded people to believe that material success and physical wealth are the keys to lasting happiness. However, this is a misconception, as material advantages do not bring true peace or tranquility; instead, they often result in increased suffering and dissatisfaction. This paper aims to demonstrate that Buddhist mental training, used as a tool of psychotherapy, offering an effective remedy for significant physical and mental ailments. The researcher further seeks to help individuals find peace, alleviate worry, sorrow, grief, and lamentation, and reduce harm toward others.

Moreover, this paper examines Buddhist psychotherapy as outlined in Buddhist literature and supported by the teachings of the Buddha, specifically addressing mental problems and their treatment through relevant therapeutic practices. The research methods employed include analytical research, explanation, and comparison, drawing from the *Tiṭṭaka Pāli*, along with its commentaries and sub-commentaries. This study aspires to effectively address the mental issues of humanity through Buddhist psychotherapy and to facilitate the practical application of the Buddha's teachings in daily life.

Keywords: Buddhist psychotherapy, compassion, mental defilements, therapeutic techniques.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Buddha's teachings, delivered over two thousand five hundred years ago, emphasized the profound benefits of cultivating compassion. In recent decades, scholars have demonstrated that compassion significantly impacts psychological and physiological well-being, effectively addressing mental

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health issues. This paper explores compassion as a foundational method in psychotherapy, emphasizing the cultivation of compassion and skills for oneself and others as a key approach to curing mental illnesses. In today's world, individuals face numerous problems, including conflicts, depression, selfishness, and violence in everyday life. According to the World Health Organization (2012), depression is a significant contributor to the global burden of disease and affects people in all communities across the world. Today, depression is estimated to affect 280 million people.² At its worst, depression can lead to suicide. In response to this crisis, therapeutic approaches like Buddhist Psychotherapy (BP), Mindfulness-Based Therapy (MBT), and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) have been increasingly applied across various personal and societal contexts, providing practical solutions to foster peace and happiness in daily life.

Buddhism is one of the oldest religions in the world, while psychotherapy is one of the newest humanistic sciences. Both of them are dedicated to the pursuit of directing people toward the right understanding, and transformation of human behavior and activities in order to attain true happiness and peace. Buddhism also shares with psychotherapy an almost infinite faith in the inherent possibilities within human beings to the capacity to move mental suffering, to live productive and humane lives, and to establish communities where people can live in peaceful cooperation.

In the *Sammohavinodanī* stated that every individual except Arahant suffers from mental suffering, and worldling being looks like one who is mad (*ummattako viya hi puthujjhano*).³ It is also called *putthujjana* because the various defilements arise on them (*Puthu kilese janentīti puthujjanā*).⁴ It is understood that mental defilements (*kilesā*) within oneself are causing people to struggle with many problems which lead to physical and mental illness. At the heart of the teaching lies the idea that suffering (*dukkha*), is the principal focus of the core of the Buddha's teaching. Indeed, almost everyone who has had any passing acquaintance with Buddhism knows that among the Four Noble Truths identified by the Buddha, the first and most profound truth is that "*sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā*" (all things are sufferings). Life is never precisely as one would have it, and thus life is always to some degree unsatisfactory. The problem is that he becomes attached to his desires, and if he cannot be fully satisfied, he feels discouraged, disappointed, and resentful.

Therefore, cultivating compassion helps one to clearly perceive suffering. Compassion entails feelings of kindness, care, and understanding for people who are in pain so that the desire to ameliorate suffering naturally emerges. Finally, compassion involves recognizing the shared human condition, fragile and imperfect as it is. However, only compassion is not enough, it should go

² WHO, "Depressive Disorder (Depression)," accessed Dec 8, 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>.

³ Abh-a. II.176.

⁴ A-a. I. 61.

hand in hand with wisdom. Compassion without wisdom often is misguided sympathy, whereas Wisdom without compassion will be useful. That is why they are said to be like the two wings of a bird or the two wheels of a cart, for the bird cannot fly and the cart cannot roll with only one.⁵ Compassion has been taught and practiced for millennia in two main Buddhist traditions *Theravāda*, and *Mahāyāna*. These approaches to the alleviation of suffering could be viewed as more akin to psychology and philosophy than religion in so far as they do not require belief in a higher power to reap their benefits. Therefore, compassion is one of the most effective remedies for suffering, fostering peace and happiness throughout the world.

In addition, this paper also wants to emphasize the significance of Buddhist psychotherapy in society. There is hope for a healthy society if people are encouraged to bond to religions or spirituality to build a peaceful world.

II. DEFINITION OF THE TERM COMPASSION (KARUṆĀ)

Buddhist philosophy is a way of living that seeks to alleviate all suffering. It is compared to the feelings of a mother who has experiences when her child is suffering.⁶ As a result, compassion is one of the most powerful techniques that psychotherapists can use to treat mental illness. It requires the ability to empathize with and comprehend customers' experiences, emotions, and challenges. Compassion in psychotherapy fosters a secure and supportive environment in which clients can express their problems, recover from psychological suffering, and develop a stronger sense of self.

The *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* states that compassion should hold a significant position within any religion. It is only natural and appropriate for human suffering and misfortune to arouse compassion in those who observe it. Therefore, compassion is a fundamental virtue that should extend its practice to encompass not only human suffering but also the suffering of animals.⁷ Importantly, compassion knows no bounds and is devoid of any discriminatory feelings.

The Buddha explained compassion in every situation using three terms, *karuṇā*, *anukampā*, and *kāruṇṇā*, according to Pāli sources. The researcher will examine the usage of *karuṇā*, *anukampā*, and *kāruṇṇā* in the Pāli texts in this study. Generally speaking, the Pāli word "*karuṇā*" is frequently used while discussing compassion. According to the *Majjhima Nikāya*, a practitioner of meditation expands this mental quality in an infinite way. For instance, this meditative elongation appears frequently in the following formulaic passage:

A bhikkhu lives in dependence upon a certain village or town. He abides

⁵ K. Germer and Ronald D. Siegel, *Deepening Mindfulness in Clinical Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 5.

⁶ *Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttamaṃyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe, evampi sabbabhūtesu, mānaṣaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ*, Sn. 301.

⁷ G. P. Malalasekera and W. G. Weeraratne, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Vol. VI (Sri Lanka: Government of Sri Lanka Publisher, 1999), 201.

pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion... with a mind imbued with altruistic joy... with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with equanimity, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.⁸

According to etymology, the *Pāli* word *karuṇā* is derived from the root $\sqrt{\text{kar}}$ + *uṇā*. Hence, *karuṇā* is described as ‘the desire to remove what is detrimental to others’ misery’ (*ahita-dukkhāpanayanakāmatā karuṇā*).⁹ Furthermore, the definition of compassion is given in *Aṭṭhasālinī Aṭṭhakathā* “it is called ‘*karuṇā*’ because it makes the good person’s heart shake or move when they see the others’ suffering.”¹⁰ In the *Visuddhimagga*, compassion is also defined as: “when there is suffering in others it causes (*karoti*) good people’s hearts to be moved (*kampana*), thus it is compassion. Or alternatively, it combats (*kiṇāti*) others’ suffering attacks and demolishes it, thus it is compassion. Or alternatively, it is scattered (*kiriyaṭi*) upon those who suffer, it is extended to them by pervasion, thus it is compassion.”¹¹

From these definitions, one can understand compassion exactly in the sense of: ‘wishing a person who is in trouble, to be free from suffering or misery.’ That is why the intrinsic quality and characteristic of the term ‘*karuṇā*’ is explained as ‘*dukkhāpanayanākārappavattilakkhaṇā*’,¹² i.e., having the characteristic of removing the suffering. When a noble-hearted individual has seen the misery of others, their innate desire is to alleviate that suffering or miserable condition. This innate quality is synonymous with compassion and goodwill. Therefore, the word ‘*paradukkhe sati*’ means when they observe or hear of another person in distress or enduring hardship, their hearts (*hadayakampanam*) are stirred with empathy, and this profound emotional response is recognized as compassion.

⁸ *Bhikkhu aññataraṃ gāmaṃ vā nigamaṃ vā upanissāya viharati. so karuṇāsahagatena cetasā...pe... muditāsahagatena cetasā...pe... upekkhāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharivā viharati, tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthaṃ. iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbat-tatāya sabbāvantāṃ lokaṃ upekkhāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena abyābajjhena pharivā viharati*, M. II. 33; Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 648.

⁹ Sn-a. I. 116.

¹⁰ *Paradukkhe sati sādhuṇaṃ hadayakampanaṃ karotīti vā karuṇā*, Abh-a. I. 237.

¹¹ *Paradukkhe sati sādhuṇaṃ hadayakampanaṃ karotīti karuṇā. kiṇāti vā paradukkhaṃ hiṃsati vināsetīti karuṇā. kiriyaṭi vā dukkhitesu pharaṇavasena pasāriyaṭīti karuṇā*, Vsm. I. 311; Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification* (Tawain: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Education Foundation, 2007), 343 - 4.

¹² *Dukkhāpanayanākārappavattilakkhaṇā karuṇā, paradukkhasāhanarasā, avihiṃsāpaccupaṭṭhānā, dukkhābhībhūtānaṃ anāthabhāvadassanapadaṭṭhānā. vihiṃsūpasamo tassā sampatti, sokasambhavo vipatti*, Vsm. I. 311; Ñānamoli, *The Path of Purification*, 344.

A question may arise regarding whether compassion alone can entirely alleviate another person's suffering (*paradukkham*). When an individual experiences sympathy for someone facing suffering, they may help them by exercising his faculty of compassion. Even in situations where suffering cannot be entirely eradicated, a person with a compassionate feeling will still have a desire to alleviate that suffering. For instance, when encountering someone afflicted by illness, an automatic surge of compassion and empathy emerges, with the fervent hope for immediate relief or even a complete cure.

Much as one may wish, If one is not competent to give medical treatment, one cannot effectively assist another. Yet, one sincerely wishes to see the other recover from illness or be relieved of suffering. This intrinsic nature to alleviate another's suffering should be recognized as a manifestation of compassion.

However, according to *Samyutta Nikāya* and *Āṅguttara Nikāya* the term '*karuṇā*' is used to describe a condition of momentary liberation known as '*karuṇāceto vimutti*' (the liberation of mind based on compassion.)¹³ This state does not signify the ultimate enlightenment but rather a temporary liberation in which hindrances and other unwholesome mental states are temporarily absent, typically experienced during meditation. It is worth noting that in these texts, there is no indication that '*karuṇā*' is associated with the intention to alleviate the suffering of others. There is also no evidence to suggest that this ancient *Pāḷi* term aligns with the definition of compassion in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) which defines compassion as "a profound feeling of empathy for those who are suffering, accompanied by a strong desire to assist them."¹⁴ Furthermore, it is also mentioned in the discussion section of *karuṇā* meditation in the *Vibhaṅga Pāḷi*:

How does a bhikkhu dwell with a mind accompanied by compassion, suffusing one direction? Just as (he), seeing may have compassion for a miserable, wicked person, in the same way, he suffuses all beings with compassion.¹⁵

In this passage, the emphasis is on seeing someone suffering and arising *karuṇā* in response, but not on having wishes to alleviate the suffering. It appears to resemble "sympathy" which the OED defines as "feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune."

The second word is considered the closest meaning to *karuṇā* as *kāruṇṇa* meaning 'the state of compassion.' It is illuminated in the *Āghātaṭṭhapaṭiṣṭhāya*

¹³ *Karuṇāceto vimutti*, S. III. 103 - 4; A. III. 557.

¹⁴ OED, "Compassion," accessed Dec 23, 2023, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/compassion?q=compassion>.

¹⁵ *Kathaṇṇa bhikkhu karuṇāsaḥagatena cetasaṃ ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharati? seyyathāpi nāma ekaṃ puggalaṃ duggataṃ durūpetam disvā karuṇāyeyya, evameva sabbe satte karuṇāya pharate*, Vbh. 286; Ashin Thittila, *The Book of Analysis: (Vibhaṅga): The Second Book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (London: Pali Text Society by Luzac, 1969), 359.

*Sutta*¹⁶ (the Discourse on Removing Resentment) with a simile for how to overcome resentment. Venerable Sāriputta describes how a traveler might have *kāruṇṇa* and *anukampā* upon seeing a gravely sick person who is traveling the same road alone without appropriate food and medicine. From his *kāruṇṇa* and *anukampā* the traveler would wish the sick person would be able to obtain medicine and food, as well as meet a village headman.

This simile is used to illustrate how one can have a similar form of *kāruṇṇa* and *anukampā* for a misbehaving person who resents; and how one can wish the misbehaving person to stop the misconduct so as to avoid a bad rebirth. Here *kāruṇṇa* and *anukampā* are not for the suffering the bad person has in the present; it is for the person's potential suffering in the future. Because, in this sutta, *kāruṇṇa* and *anukampā* involve a concern for someone's suffering and a wish for the person not to have this suffering, these two words are used here in a manner that approximates the OED's definition of compassion.

However, if one has a deep empathy and concern for the suffering and well-being of others. It can take 'other's suffering' as an object as *Visuddhimagga* mentioned above. Even though the *Pāli* texts did not mention directly that compassion is the intention to alleviate the suffering of others. Yet, cultivating compassion can lead to greater kindness, understanding, and a genuine desire to alleviate the suffering of human beings. This mental state is highly valued in Buddhism as it promotes a compassionate attitude towards oneself and others, fostering harmony and well-being in both personal and societal contexts.

According to the *Abhidhamma* viewpoint, '*karuṇā*' is defined as one of the twenty-five beautiful mental factors (*sobhana cetasikas*). Among them, *karuṇā* is one of two illimitable mental factors (*appamaññā cetasikas*) "*karuṇā, muditā appamaññāyo nāmā ti*" (compassion and sympathetic joy are termed illimitable

¹⁶ *Tatrāvuso, yvāyaṃ puggalo aparissuddhakāyasamācāro aparissuddhavaśīsamācāro na ca labhati kālena kālaṃ cetaso vivaraṃ cetaso pasādaṃ, kathaṃ tasmim̐ puggale āghāto paṭivinetabbo? seyyathāpi, āvuso, puriso ābādhiko dukkhito bālāgilāno addhānamaggappaṭipanno. tassa puratopissa dūre gāmo pacchatopissa dūre gāmo. so na labheyya sappāyāni bhojanāni, na labheyya sappāyāni bhesajjāni, na labheyya patirūpaṃ upaṭṭhākaṃ, na labheyya gāmantaṇāyakaṃ. tamenāṃ aññataro puriso passeyya addhānamaggappaṭipanno. so tasmim̐ purise kāruṇṇāmyeva upaṭṭhāpeyya, anuddayaṃmyeva upaṭṭhāpeyya, anukampaṃmyeva upaṭṭhāpeyya – 'aho vatāyaṃ puriso labheyya sappāyāni bhojanāni, labheyya sappāyāni bhesajjāni, labheyya patirūpaṃ upaṭṭhākaṃ, labheyya gāmantaṇāyakaṃ! taṃ kissa hetu? māyaṃ puriso idheva anayabyasanaṃ āpajjī'ti ! evamevaṃ kho, āvuso, yvāyaṃ puggalo aparissuddhakāyasamācāro aparissuddhavaśīsamācāro na ca labhati kālena kālaṃ cetaso vivaraṃ cetaso pasādaṃ, evarūpepi, āvuso, puggale kāruṇṇāmyeva upaṭṭhāpetabbaṃ anuddayaṃmyeva upaṭṭhāpetabbā anukampāmyeva upaṭṭhāpetabbā – 'aho vata ayamāyasmā kāyaduccaritaṃ pahāya kāyasucaritaṃ bhāveyya, vacīduccaritaṃ pahāya vacīsucaritaṃ bhāveyya, manoduccaritaṃ pahāya manosucaritaṃ bhāveyya! taṃ kissa hetu? māyaṃ āyasmā kāyassa bhedaṃ paraṃ maraṇā apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ nirayaṃ upapajjī'ti ! evaṃ tasmim̐ puggale āghāto paṭivinetabbo, A. II. 166.*

mental factors).¹⁷ *Karuṇā* is a good mental state because when compassion arises towards others, then one wishes for them to be released from their sufferings. At that time, one of eight wholesome beautiful consciousnesses (8 *kāma sobhana kusala cittas*) will arise in the mind. Besides, the mind is also absent of hatred, lust, and so on. Simultaneously compassion invades him.

On the other way, *anukampā* also used as *karuṇā* in *Abhidhamma*'s point of view. It is translated according to *Dhammasaṅganī* as follows:

The absence of hate, hating, hatred; love, loving, loving disposition; tender care, forbearance, considerateness; seeking the general good, compassion; the absence of malice; of malignity; that absence of hate which is the root of good (*kusalamūla*).¹⁸

The *Pāli* word *anukampā* is derived from the prefix 'anu' meaning "after, alongside, with, by" and the noun *kampā*, which derives from the verb *√kamp*, meaning "to have pity on, to commiserate, to tremble." Therefore, *anukampā* means "trembling in conformity with or alongside something or someone."¹⁹ In *Abhidhānappadīpikā Tīkā*, the definition of the word *anukampā* is "*anu punappunam kampeti anukampā*"²⁰ meaning it is caused the mind to shake or tremble repeatedly.

Likewise, *anukampī* means "one who has pity" or "one who has anxiety for"²¹ and frequently forms a compound with *hita-* or *lokahita-* to refer to someone who acts with sympathy in benefitting the world. These terms can be seen in typical stock phrases that were in use from the time of early Buddhist scriptures. In the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, it is stated that: "for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human beings."²² In certain teachings, the emphasis on compassion is evident, with *Pāli* phrases as follows:

- *Bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānan'ti*.²³

- *Bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya, bahuno janassa atthāya hitāya*

¹⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma* (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1999), 89.

¹⁸ *Tattha katamo adoso? Yo adoso adussanā adussitattam metti mettāyanā mettāyitattam anuddā anuddāyanā anudāyitattam hitesitā anukampā abyāpādo abyāpajjo adoso kusalamūlam – ayaṃ vuccati adoso*, Dhs. 215; Caroline A. F. Rhys Davids, trans., *A Buddhist Manual of Psychological Ethics* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2004), 275 - 6.

¹⁹ T. W. Rhys Davids & William Stede, *The Pali-English Dictionary* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society Publishing, 1998), 41.

²⁰ Abhp-ṭ. 124.

²¹ T. W. Rhys Davids, *The Pali-English Dictionary*, 41.

²² *Bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānan'ti*, A. I. 22; Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Numeral Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of Āṅguttara Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), 107-8.

²³ A. I. 22.

sukhāya devamanussānaṃ.²⁴

The meaning is “out of compassion for the happiness of many people” (*bahujanasukhāya lokānukampayā*) and “for the welfare and happiness of many people” (*bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya bahuno janassa*). It should be noted that the phrases in the *Adhammavaggo* of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* have *bahuno janassa* (of many people) in place of *lokānukampāya* (out of compassion for the world). The expression “out of compassion for the world”, is unique and is used exclusively to describe the Buddha. Similarly, this expression found elsewhere in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* also applies to the Buddha only as follows:

Bhikkhus, while the Fortunate One or the Fortunate One’s discipline remains in the world, this is for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world.²⁵

Let the Fortunate One live on for an eon, for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world.²⁶

Accordingly, in the *Sugatavinaya Sutta* of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, the phrase ‘out of compassion for the world’ is referred to the Buddha, and the Arahant, the Enlightened One. This is probably intended to accentuate the Buddha’s compassion for the entire world and for all living beings. That is why it is claimed that: “Bhikkhus, there is one person who arises in the world for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human beings. Who is that one person? The Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Enlightened One.”²⁷

Therefore, compassion is a central aspect of the Buddha’s teachings. The Buddha’s teachings are rooted in the Four Noble Truths, which address the existence of suffering (*dukkha*) and the path to liberation from suffering (*dukkhanirodha*). Compassion plays a significant role in this path, as the Buddha taught his followers to develop loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karūṇa*) towards all living beings. The Buddha’s compassion is exemplified in his deep concern for the well-being and happiness of human beings.

Furthermore, in *Theravāda* Buddhism, ‘*karuṇā*’ is one of the four divine abodes (*cattāro brahmavihāre*),²⁸ sometimes known as the four unlimited

²⁴ *Ye te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū adhammaṃ adhammoti dīpentī te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū bahujanahitāya paṭipannā bahujanasukhāya, bahuno janassa atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussāna. ye te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū dhammaṃ dhammoti dīpentī te, bhikkhave, bhikkhū bahujanahitāya paṭipannā bahujanasukhāya, bahuno janassa atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ*, A. I. 19; Bodhi, *The Numeral Discourse of the Buddha*, 107.

²⁵ *Sugato vā bhikkhave loke tiṭṭhamāno sugatavinayo vā tadassa bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya*, A. I. 464; Bodhi, *The Numeral Discourse of the Buddha*, 526.

²⁶ *Itthathu bhante Sugato kammaṃ bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya*, A. III. 129; Bodhi, *The Numeral Discourse of the Buddha*, 1213.

²⁷ *Ekapuggalo, bhikkhave, loke uppaṃjamaṇo uppaṃjati bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ. Katamo ekapuggalo? Tathāgato ahaṃ sammāsambuddho*, A. I. 21; Bodhi, *The Numeral Discourse of the Buddha*, 107 - 8.

²⁸ D. II. 159.

states (*catasso appamaññā*),²⁹ which is along with loving-kindness (*mettā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). The Buddha in the *Dīgha Nikāya* just mentioned the name of four divine abodes, He did not enumerate them one by one, but Mahā Thera Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga* defined the term of ‘*karuṇā*’ as follows: “*Mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhāti ime cattāro brahmavihārā*” (there are four kinds of divine abodes: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity).³⁰

Thus, compassion is a concept that expresses empathetic attitudes. Many terms of compassion indicating helpfulness, kindness, affection, caring, and empathy are employed to enrich its meanings. Sometimes it is described with negative terms, such as *ahiṃsā*³¹ (non-harm), but should not be understood as purely negative. Like when someone controls anger if people harm him at that moment, he did not hurt them back, stopping the bad action which indignant over others as much as he can. After that, he develops certain good qualities, and the anger gradually disappears in his mind. However, absence of the anger occasionally does not mean compassion (*karuṇā*).

Nevertheless, “compassion has grief based on the home life as its near enemy since both share in seeing failure.”³² As regards the near enemy, grief or aversion, one may take as compassion what is actually aversion, *dosa*. When one sees someone who is in miserable circumstances, there may be different types of *cittas*, not only *kusala cittas* with compassion but also *akusala cittas*. There are moments of compassion when one wishes to help someone in order to allay his suffering and there can be moments of aversion about his suffering. It should be careful to understand that compassion and aversion can arise closely one after the other and it is difficult to know their different characteristics. Through the right understanding, one can come to know their difference. It is mentioned in the *Majjhima Nikāya* as: “Herein, what are the six kinds of grief based on the household life? When one regards as a non-gain, the non-gain of forms cognizable by the eye that are wished for, desired, agreeable, gratifying, and associated with worldliness or when one recalls what was formerly not obtained that has passed, ceased, and changed grief arises. Such grief as this is called grief based on the household life.”³³

When they are applied as meditation subjects in *Samatha*, these practices have the capacity to cultivate tranquility. Once *Jhāna*, a state of deep

²⁹ D. III. 187.

³⁰ *Mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhāti ime cattāro brahmavihārā*, Vsm. I. 107.

³¹ *Yaṃhi saccañca dhammo ca, ahiṃsā saṃyamo damo*, A-a. II. 44.

³² Vsm. I. 312; Nānamoli, *The Path of Purification*, 345.

³³ *Tattha katamāni cha gehasiṭṭāni domanassāni? cakkhaviññeyyānaṃ rūpānaṃ ... pe ... sotaviññeyyānaṃ saddānaṃ... ghānaviññeyyānaṃ gandhānaṃ... jivhāviññeyyānaṃ rasānaṃ... kāyaviññeyyānaṃ phoṭṭhabbānaṃ... manoviññeyyānaṃ dhammānaṃ iṭṭhānaṃ kantānaṃ manāpānaṃ manoramānaṃ lokāmisapaṭisaṃyuttānaṃ appaṭilābhaṃ vā appaṭilābhato samanupassato pubbe vā appaṭiladdhapubbaṃ atītaṃ niruddhaṃ vipariṇataṃ samanussarato uppajjati domanassaṃ. yaṃ evarūpaṃ domanassa idaṃ vuccati gehasiṭṭaṃ domanassaṃ. imāni cha gehasiṭṭāni domanassāni*, M. III. 260; Bhikkhu Nānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 2115.

concentration, has been achieved through their cultivating, they can be directed towards innumerable beings. In *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha states: “Rahula! Develop meditation on compassion; when you develop compassion, then any cruelty or anger will be abandoned.”³⁴

Regarding these definitions from Buddhist psychological perspectives, compassion is the recognition of suffering; understanding its universality; feeling sympathy, or concern for those who are suffering tolerating the distress associated with the witnessing of suffering; and motivation to act or act to alleviate the suffering. Therefore, compassion is a powerful healer, and it will boost and aid psychologists in developing a loving knowledge of their patients.

III. MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHIST AND OTHER RELIGIOUS VIEWPOINTS ON COMPASSION

In *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, *karuṇā* is one of the two qualities, along with enlightened wisdom (Sanskrit: *prajñā*) to be cultivated on the *Bodhisattva*'s path. Buddhism defines compassion as the mental state of wishing that others might be free from suffering. Compassion is closely related to loving kindness, which Buddhism defines as cherishing others feeling a sense of closeness with and affection for them, and as the state of mind wishing that others may be happy.³⁵ The Buddha's embodiment of compassion is seen in the concept of the *Bodhisattva*, particularly in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. As mentioned earlier, the *Bodhisattva* ideal is central to *Mahāyāna* teachings, wherein practitioners aspire to attain enlightenment not just for their own liberation but also for the liberation and well-being of all sentient beings. The *Bodhisattva*'s path is guided by compassion, and they vow to work tirelessly to help others along the path to liberation.

This orientation runs through all schools of Buddhism. Dr. Paul reiterated the compassion of Venerable Dalai Lama: “Compassion is more than just kindness, and involves a range of attributes, qualities, and capacities. It is a sensitivity to the suffering of others with a commitment to do something about it. He points to two key elements: attention (sensitivity) and motivation (commitment). The approach to compassion will develop here incorporates insights.”³⁶ Furthermore, Paul refers to this approach as Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) and compassionate mind training. CFT involves a therapeutic relationship and a way of thinking about psychological problems; compassionate mind training refers to specific exercises that anybody can use to train their minds to develop compassionate qualities. It is called CFT,

³⁴ *Karuṇaṃ rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhaveti karuṇāhi te rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhāvayato yā vihesā pahīyissati*, M. II. 87; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 1065.

³⁵ Lorne Ladner, *The Lost Art of Compassion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 14.

³⁶ Paul Gilbert, Dennis D. Tirsch, *The Compassionate Mind Approach to Overcoming Anxiety* (London: Robinson, 2012), 1 14-5.

because compassion begins with a deep understanding of how the brain works and recognizes the difficult emotions of others. CFT aims to help promote mental and emotional healing by encouraging people in treatment to be compassionate toward themselves and other people. Compassion, both toward the self and toward others, is an emotional response believed by many to be an essential aspect of well-being. Its development may often have the benefit of improved mental and emotional health. In the book *True Love* written by Master Thich Nhat Hanh, He stated that: "Compassion is not desired to ease the pain of another, but ability to do so."³⁷

CFT is linked to Buddhist approaches to mindfulness; for example, in the *Mahāyāna* tradition, compassion is seen as having a central transformational power and it trains people in particular kinds of attention, thinking, feeling, and behavior to help them transform their experiences of things such as anxiety. CFT shares the specific methods to bring about changes in attention, emotions, and compassionate action. Therefore, Lorne Ladner said, "Cultivating compassion is the single most effective way to make oneself psychologically healthy, happy, and joyful."³⁸

In Tibetan Buddhism, one of the foremost authoritative texts on the *Bodhisattva's* path is the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* by Shantideva. In the eighth section, entitled *Meditative Concentration*, Shantideva describes meditation on *karuṇā* as thus: when one experiences suffering, it is the basis for compassion, then he can easily understand the other of sorrow. In addition, he can help them without wishing for any reputation or benefits. When one sees the pain of others, his mind will open with a feeling of compassion and a desire to support them to be free from sorrow. This is compassion.³⁹

In *Theravāda* Buddhism point views compassion is the desire to alleviate the sufferings of others,⁴⁰ which leads to a happy and meaningful life. The Bhikkhu Bodhi states that:

Compassion supplies the complement to loving-kindness: whereas loving-kindness has the characteristic of wishing for the happiness and welfare of others, compassion has the characteristic of wishing that others be free from suffering, a wish to be extended without limits to all living beings. Like *metta* (loving-kindness), compassion arises by entering into the subjectivity of others, by sharing their interiority in a deep and total way. It springs up by considering that all beings, like ourselves, wish to be free from suffering, yet despite their wishes continue to be harassed by pain, fear, sorrow, and other forms of *dukkha*.⁴¹

³⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh, *True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart* (USA: Shambhala Publication, 2006), 3.

³⁸ Lorne Ladner, *The Lost Art of Compassion*, 13.

³⁹ Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (USA: Shambhala Publications, 2006), 122 - 123.

⁴⁰ *Kiṇāti vā paradukkhaṃ hiṃsati vināsetīti karuṇā*, Abh-a. I. 237.

⁴¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering* (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1994), 39.

Compassion without attachment is possible. Therefore, one needs to clarify the distinctions between compassion and attachment. True compassion is not just an emotional response but a firm commitment founded on reason. Because of this firm foundation, a truly compassionate attitude toward others does not change even if they behave negatively. Genuine compassion is based not on one's own projections and expectations, but rather on the needs of the other: irrespective of whether another person is a close friend or an enemy, as long as that person wishes for peace and happiness and wishes to overcome suffering, then on that basis we develop genuine concern for their problem. This is genuine compassion.

Feeling obligated to be compassionate can backfire, causing self-criticism and stress, which hinders the natural emergence of compassion. Buddhism does not demand one to feel empathy and care for others but acknowledges the potentiality for compassion in an individual to bring benefits to oneself, others, and the path to freedom. Compassion enriches rather than depletes someone.

IV. ALLEVATING SUFFERING BY SEEING LIFE THROUGH COMPASSION

Conflicts in the whole world are caused by people's greed, hatred, and delusion, which are known as the three poisons of the mind in Buddhism. It not only causes harm to others, but it also destroys their health. In the psychosomatic field, anger, hostility, and related constructs have received considerable attention as personality types that seem to relate to coronary heart disease (CHD). In one report, researchers found that healthy people who are often angry or hostile are 19% more likely than calmer people to get heart disease. Among people with heart disease, those who usually feel angry or hostile fared worse than others.⁴²

Therefore, if someone offends you with their words or actions, you should not respond by hurting them. Instead, you should be patient to develop compassion in the mind. To create a more harmonious and compassionate world, it's essential to foster empathy, and conflict resolution skills in the inclusive world.

Compassion is one of the most important factors to success, which gives people peace of life and happiness. The Buddha in his previous life always practiced compassion to attain enlightenment. The *Lakkhana sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* states thus:

Monks, in whatever former life...the Tathāgata, being born a human being, rejecting the taking of life and abstaining from it, and laying aside stick and sword, dwelt, kind and compassionate, having friendship and sympathy for all living beings, by performing that *kamma*, ... was reborn in a happy state ...

⁴² James Beckerman, MD, FACC, "How Anger Can Hurt Your Health," accessed Dec 8, 2023, <https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/features/how-anger-hurts-your-heart>.

Falling away from there and coming to be reborn on earth, he acquired these three marks of the Great Man: (3) projecting heels, (4) long fingers and toes, and (15) a divinely straight body.⁴³

Thus, people should develop compassion towards beings, and should not kill the animal, even if it is small such as a mosquito because it also has a faculty life (*Jīvitindriya*). The case histories that the canonical *Vinaya* appends to each of the rules of the *Pātimokkha* outline several situations that are potentially relevant to the issue of euthanasia. Euthanasia, when rooted in compassion, is a profound expression of empathy and mercy towards individuals who is struggling with unbearable suffering. It emerges from the nature of human beings to alleviate the pain of others and the heartfelt desire to have a good choice for them to be free from their afflictions. This compassionate perspective on euthanasia acknowledges the emotional and ethical, when one wants another to end the life because he does not want to see another's suffering become overwhelming and relentless. So, the option to peacefully end their life should be considered with the utmost compassion and respect for their autonomy. Compassion in euthanasia arises when individuals witness the agony of a loved one and, in their empathy, wish to honor their wishes to be free from prolonged suffering. That is why the Buddha said thus:

Now at that time, a certain monk was ill. Out of compassion, the monks praised the beauty of death to him, and that monk died. They were remorseful, and said: what now if we have fallen into an offence involving defeat? Then these monks told this matter to the Lord. He said: You, monks, have fallen into an offence involving defeat.⁴⁴

In fact, when someone with good intentions seeks to console a sick person in pain, they may inadvertently focus towards discussing the positive aspects of death as a means to alleviate the suffering. However, once the sick person passes away, they may experience feelings of guilt and uncertainty regarding the ethical nature of their actions. Thus, this passage underscores the significance of ethical conduct and the potential repercussions of actions, even when motivated by good intentions.

The *Lakkhaṇa Sutta* also proves the great personality of Buddha, and

⁴³ *Yampi, bhikkhave, tathāgato purimaṃ jātiṃ purimaṃ bhavaṃ purimaṃ nikaṭaṃ pubbe manussabhūto samāno pāṇātipātāṃ pahāya pāṇātipātā paṭivirato ahoṣi nihitadaṇḍo nihitasattho lajjī dayāpanno, sabbapāṇabhūtāhitānukampī vihāsi. So tassa kammaṣa kaṭattā upacitatā ussannattā vipulattā...pe... so tato cuto itthattaṃ āgato samāno imāni tīṇi mahāpurisalakkhaṇāni paṭilabhati. Āyatapaṇhi ca hoti, dīghaṅguli ca brahmajugatto ca, D. III. 122; Maurice Walshe, trans., *The Long Discourse of the Buddha: A Translation of Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1986), 826 - 7.*

⁴⁴ *Tena kho pana samayena aññataro bhikkhu gilāno hoti. tassa bhikkhū kārūṇṇena maraṇa-vaṇṇaṃ samvaṇṇesum. So bhikkhu kālam akāsi. Tesam kukkucçaṃ ahoṣi bhagavatā sikkhāpadam paññattam kacci nu kho mayaṃ pārājikaṃ apattim āpannā ti. bhagavato etaṃ atthaṃ ārocesum. Āpattim tumhe, bhikkhave, āpannā pārājikan ti, V. I. 100; I.B. Horner, M. A, trans., *The Book of the Discipline*, Vol. I (London: Luzac and Company LTD, 1949), 137.*

explains thirty-two marks; “He has feet with level treat, on the soles of His feet are wheels with a thousand spokes, complete with felloe and hub, He has soft and tender hands, He is proportioned like a banyan-tree; the height of His body is the same as the span of His outstretched arms, and conversely.”⁴⁵ The Buddha, in his role as a spiritual therapist, exemplified the embodiment of profoundly revered ethical conduct and four sublime qualities: *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity). These qualities were intrinsic to his works, guiding him in his spiritual healing endeavors.

After attaining Enlightenment, he could have lived comfortably if he restrained himself from teaching. However, for a continuous span of forty-five rains (*vassa*), he tirelessly conveyed his noble teachings day and night, enduring significant physical hardships and exertion. This benevolent performance with relentless effort was done because of his Universal Love and Great Compassion (*Mahā karuṇā*) for all beings who are drifting endlessly in the miserable whirlpool of *samsāra*.

All beings, no matter whatever existence they may be, wish to escape from the sufferings of old age, disease, and death, which are inevitable. Nevertheless, against their wish, they must endure the miserable conditions of existence continuously by getting old, becoming sick, and eventually meeting with death. That is why the Buddha taught His *kamma* with Great Compassion without regard to his discomforts and weariness, fully knowing that there was no one other than himself who could teach all living beings. This also bears witness to the extent that he had to undergo miseries while forgoing happiness due to his boundless compassion. Ordinarily, even without practicing *Bhāvanā*, one should have a feeling of sympathy towards a pitiable person, if seen or found. Every time a feeling of pity arises, it will have a chance to develop merits (*puñṇā*). Therefore, the concept of compassion, or loving-kindness, is conducive to merit and is articulated in *Mettā Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* that ‘If one arouses loving-kindness (*mettāyati*) towards just one being, with a mind free from hatred, one thereby becomes good (*kusalī*). Compassionate (*anukampī*) in mind towards all beings, the noble one generates abundant merit (*puñṇā*).’⁴⁶ The practice of compassion towards human beings and nurturing a compassionate mind is not only a path to personal well-being but also an enhancing for positive thought in the world. It is a reminder that one’s action, driven by loving kindness and compassion, can create a valuable merit and contribute to a more harmonious and interconnected global community.

Similarly, any counselor undergoing training must cultivate these mental qualities in their interactions with clients to produce a good relationship in the treatment process. Indeed, the teachings of the Buddha emphasized the importance of viewing life with a compassionate mind and especially

⁴⁵ D. III. 118.

⁴⁶ *Ekampi ce paṇamadutṭhacitto, mettāyati kusalī tena hoti, sabbe ca paṇe manasā-nukampī, pahūtamaṛiyo pakaroti puñṇaṃ*, A. III. 2.

cultivating a non-judgmental attitude. This quality is considered essential for spiritual growth and the path to liberation from suffering.

At the same time, the cultivation of a non-judgmental attitude should be encouraged in the mind. It is vital not to dwell on or criticize the mistakes of others. In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha stated that: “One should not have regard for the bad deeds and wrong behavior of others, nor the things done and left undone by others, but only for the things done and left undone by oneself.”⁴⁷ Criticizing the mistakes of others can create a hostile atmosphere and may harm relationships. It is one of the reasons to lead and to cause mental problems. It can lead to feelings of resentment, making it difficult for constructive communication and personal virtue. Instead, it is more beneficial to adopt a compassionate and understanding approach when dealing with the mistakes of others. It can help foster a positive and nurturing environment for personal development and learning from mistakes.

Furthermore, one should practice to see things with equanimity feeling (*upekkhā vedanā*) because equanimity is characterized by a sense of neutrality, neither intensifying nor diminishing associated mental states. Its function is to bring about a state of peacefulness. The manifestation of equanimity is peacefulness. Its proximate cause lies in consciousness without a sense of craving or excitement.⁴⁸ It involves maintaining an even-minded and balanced approach to the up and down of life, without being swayed by strong preferences or aversions. Non-judgment allows him or her to see things as they are, without imposing his biases and opinions onto the world. For example, when one hears a judgment or dispraises him, then he should not get angry, that will make him suffer more. In *Brahmajāla Sutta*, the Buddha said: “Monks, if anyone should speak in disparagement of me, of the *Dhamma* or of the *Sangha*, you should not be angry, resentful or upset on that account. If you were to be angry or displeased at such disparagement, that would only be a hindrance to you.”⁴⁹

According to the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī*, the meaning of neutral feeling (*upekkhā-vedanā*) is that perceiving, experiencing, or feeling appropriately or fittingly by staying in the manner of being in the middle is equanimity (*upekkhā*). Alternatively, equanimity is perception (*ikkhā*) or experience that

⁴⁷ *Na paresaṃ vilomāni, na paresaṃ katākataṃ. Attanova avekkheyya, katāni akatani ca, Dhp.* 20; K. R. Norman, *The Word of the Doctrine* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2000), 8.

⁴⁸ Bikkhu Bodhi, ed., *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Philosophical Psychology of Buddhism* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007), 116.

⁴⁹ *Mamaṃ vā, bhikkhave, pare avaṇṇaṃ bhāseyyuṃ, dhammassa vā avaṇṇaṃ bhāseyyuṃ, saṅghassa vā avaṇṇaṃ bhāseyyuṃ, tatra tumhehi na āghāto na appaccayo na cetaso anabhiraddhi karaṇīyā. mamaṃ vā, bhikkhave, pare avaṇṇaṃ bhāseyyuṃ, dhammassa vā avaṇṇaṃ bhāseyyuṃ, saṅghassa vā avaṇṇaṃ bhāseyyuṃ, tatra ce tumhe assatha kupitā vā anattamaṇā vā, tumhaṃ yevassa tena antarāyo, D. I. 3; Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourse of the Buddha*, 135 - 6.*

is possessed (*upeta*), is joined to, and not obstructed by pleasure and pain; for when pleasure and pain are not obstructions, it occurs adjoining them.⁵⁰ And the cause of it is a moderately desirable object, being reborn with equanimity, and being one who by nature thinks deeply.⁵¹

Sometimes, people think that to develop an open heart, to be truly loving and compassionate, means that they need to be passive, to allow others to abuse them, to smile and let anyone do what they want with them. They thought that it is the equanimity and compassion to beings. However, this is not what is meant by compassion. Compassion is not at all weak. The strength arises out of seeing the true nature of suffering in the world. Compassion allows one to see the suffering, whether it is in oneself or others, without fear and to act strongly, with all the skill at his disposal. To develop this mental state of compassion is to learn to live, as the Buddha used his compassion, with sympathy for all living beings, without exception.

In order to see with the eyes of compassion one should realize the characteristic of the Buddhist perspective on the “eye of compassion.” Here, in Buddhist philosophy and practice, the concept of the ‘eye of compassion’ refers to a metaphorical way of perceiving the world and others with deep understanding, empathy, and benevolence. This perspective transcends the ordinary physical eyes and relates to the spiritual insight that comes from cultivating compassion and wisdom. In the same way, in *Andha Sutta* of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha said that: “Bhikkhus, there are these three kinds of persons found existing in the world. What three? The blind person, the one-eyed person, and the two-eyed person.”⁵² Why the Buddha called blind person, and one-eyed persons is because they lack the kind of eye with which one can know wholesome and unwholesome qualities, blameworthy and blameless qualities, inferior and superior qualities, dark and bright qualities with their counterparts. One should avoid these kinds of people but should befriend the one with two eyes, the best kind of person. Because he perceives without the lens of worldly eyes, his vision is guided by the eyes of spirituality. Thus, in life, it’s advisable to view things through the lens of your heart or spiritual eye in order to prevent unwholesome states and harming each other.

In essence, the ‘eye of compassion’ is a way of perceiving the world through the lens of deep empathy, wisdom, and interconnectedness. It’s a perspective that is central to Buddhist teachings on compassion and is often cultivated through meditation, reflection, and the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path.

⁵⁰ R. P. Wijeratne and Rupert Gethin, trans., *Summary of the Topics of Abhidhamma and Commentary (Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha and Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī)* (Lancaster: The Pāli Text Society, 2007), 14.

⁵¹ *Īṭṭhamajjhāttārammaṇaṃ, upekkhāpaṭisaṇḍhikatā, gambhīrasabhāvatā ca upekkhāya*, Abhvi-t. 79.

⁵² *Tāyome, bhikkhave, puggalā santo saṃvijjamānā lokasmiṃ. katame tāyo? andho, ekacakkhu, dvicakkhu*, A. I. 126; Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, 224.

By nurturing this compassionate way of seeing, individuals can transform their relationships with others, fostering genuine care and understanding for all beings and moving toward their own spiritual awakening to the world.

V. THE METHODS FOR DEVELOPING COMPASSION IN DAILY LIFE

Buddhahood's enlightened attitude, based on compassion, leads to the development of enlightenment. It is therefore declared that "a being not subject to delusion has appeared in the world for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans."⁵³ Thus, the *Bodhisatta* manifests in the world as a result of compassion.

Therefore, Buddhism places compassion and care for others, especially those who are suffering. The compassionate Buddha's guidance to monks and practitioners extends to all people and highlights the importance of nurturing compassion in daily life.

Compassion should be developed initially towards individuals who are in extreme distress, such as someone struggling immensely, a homeless individual with no supported relative, a sick person enduring agonizing pain due to a lack of medical assistance or medicine, or a person afflicted with leprosy so loathsome that nobody would like to touch him. Feelings of pity will easily arise if such a person in distress is seen. For that reason, instruction is given to start developing compassion beginning with a pitiable person. In the *Vibhaṅga*, it is stated that: "How does a bhikkhu dwell with the mind accompanied by compassion, suffusing one direction? Just as one, seeing may have compassion for a miserable, wicked person; in the same way, he suffuses all beings with compassion."⁵⁴

There is only one mode of developing compassion, unlike developing loving-kindness (*mettā*) which involves many kinds. It is stated as: "May they be free from misery (*dukkhā muccantu*)."⁵⁵ This is how to develop compassion for all beings. However, if compassion is developed towards a particular individual, his name should be uttered and compassion should be radiated as: "May Mr. Thanh Luu be free from misery and suffering." This misery, from which he or she should be liberated, is occurring in the body and mind of that individual at this very moment. Compassion should be developed continuously, earnestly, and sincerely wishing that that person be free from misery.

However, loving-kindness goes hand in hand with compassion. Because loving-kindness is often a driving force behind compassionate actions. Even

⁵³ *Asammohadhammo satto loke uppanno bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokā-nukampāya atthāya hitāya sukkhāya devamanussāna'nt*, M. I. 117; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 335.

⁵⁴ *Kathaṇca bhikkhu karuṇāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharati? seyyathāpi nāma ekaṃ puggalaṃ duggataṃ durūpetam disvā karuṇāyeyya*, Vbh. 286; Vsm. I. 307; Ashin Thitṭila, *The Book of Analysis*, 359.

⁵⁵ *Vvi-t. II. 379.*

though there are different objectives. Without loving-kindness, it is difficult to develop an understanding of each other. However, sometimes, compassion is different from loving kindness. Loving-kindness is non-aversion (*adosa*). Buddha said that hatred does not cease hatred, only love can cease hatred.⁵⁶ Whereas compassion has the quality of desiring to eliminate suffering.⁵⁷ For example, in the case of visiting a sick person, there can be moments of loving-kindness when one gives him flowers or wishes him well, but there can also be moments of compassion when one notices his suffering. When one genuinely cares about others and their well-being, one naturally wants to alleviate their suffering and bring them to be comfort. Developing compassion can indeed contribute to a happier and more fulfilling life. There are three methods to cultivate compassion in your daily life, cultivating compassion related to oneself, practicing patience (*khanti*), and thinking of others as pitiful.

5.1. Cultivating compassion related to oneself

Compassion starts within oneself. Treating oneself with the same kindness and understanding that you offer to others is necessary. Practice self-care and self-acceptance, and recognize that you too are deserving of compassion. In the *Visuddhimagga*, Venerable Buddhaghosa mentioned that first of all it should be developed only toward oneself, doing it repeatedly thus: ‘May I be happy and free from suffering’ or ‘May I keep myself free from enmity, affliction, anxiety, and live happily.’⁵⁸ As you nurture your own growth towards becoming a well-behaved individual, with a desire for personal happiness and an aversion to pain, driven by the wish to live rather than to die, you should consider that other beings share this inclination as well. By embodying these principles, you desire to emergence of compassion and benevolence toward the well-being and happiness of others. This method is indicated by the Buddha saying: “Having traversed all quarters with the mind, One finds none anywhere dearer than oneself. Likewise, each person holds himself most dear; Hence one who loves himself should not harm others.”⁵⁹

When you learn to understand and care for your own suffering and challenges, you become more attuned to the struggles of others. This creates a deeper and more genuine sense of empathy. In the *Vibhanga*, it compares the

⁵⁶ *Na hi verena verāni, sammantīdha kudācanaṃ; averena ca sammanti, esa dhammo sanantano*, Dh. 14

⁵⁷ Venerable Visuddhācāra, *Loving and Dying* (Taiwan: Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Center, 1993), 42.

⁵⁸ *Sabbapaṭhamam pana “ahaṃ sukhito homi niddukkho”ti vā, “avero abyāpajjo anīgho sukhī attānaṃ pariharāmi”ti vā evaṃ punappunaṃ attaniyeva bhāvetabbā*, Vsm. I. 288; Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification* (Tawain: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Education Foundation, 1956), 322.

⁵⁹ *Sabbā disā anuparigamma cetasā nevajjhagā piyataramattanā kvaci evaṃ piyo puthu attā paresaṃ tasmā na hiṃse paramattakāmo’ti*, S. I. 75; Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 171.

bhikkhu's compassion to the feeling one would experience when encountering an unlucky or unfortunate person. In a similar manner, the bhikkhu extends his compassion to encompass all beings. This means that the bhikkhu's heart is filled with empathy and caring, much like the way one would naturally feel compassion upon witnessing the difficulties faced by someone in a disadvantaged or unlucky situation. This practice involves cultivating a sense of compassion that is all-encompassing, reaching out to all living beings. That is why, the Buddha expounded that compassion related to oneself is the fundamental factor to arise a deep understanding towards others.

In order to develop deeper compassion for others, it's essential to connect with and comprehend one's own suffering. The practice of mindfulness can be immensely beneficial in this regard. Through mindfulness, one can gain a clearer perspective on his suffering, its origins within him, and the path to liberation from it. It enables him to nurture both compassion and equanimity towards his suffering, while also facilitating his release from the underlying sources of suffering within him.

5.2. Practicing the patience (*khanti*)

Patience is the weapon of the good mental state in the development of noble qualities, for it dispels, without residue, anger. It is the adornment of those capable of vanquishing the foe. Patience is an ocean on account of its depth and a shore on account of bounding the great ocean of hatred. Patience should be fortified by reflection: A wrong-doer is a benefactor, for he or she is the basis for developing patience. Or, if there were no wrong-doers, how could I accomplish the perfection of patience? ⁶⁰

When there is patience, the mind becomes concentrated and free from external distractions. With the mind concentrated, all formations appear as impermanent. Practicing patience can indeed lead to a better understanding of others. When you're patient, you give yourself the time to observe, listen, and empathize with the perspectives and feelings of those around you. Patience is very useful in psychotherapy to understand your patients, improve communication and relationships, as well as a greater awareness of different viewpoints. Patience allows you to withhold judgment and give people the space they need to express themselves fully, which can foster mutual respect and deeper connections. It also can be considered a good mental state to develop compassion. Therefore, in some discourses, the Buddha praised the practicing of patience as follows: The best moral practice is patience and forbearance; *Nibbāna* is supreme, said the Buddha. A bhikkhu does not harm others; one who harms others is not a bhikkhu.⁶¹ Or Him I call a Brahmana, who without anger endures abuse, beating and being bound, and to whom the

⁶⁰ *Acetanaṃva koṭṭente, tiṇhena pharasunā mamaṃ, kāsirāje na kuppāmi, esā me khaṇtipāramī*"ti. –*evaṃ acetanabhāvena viya mahādukkhaṃ adhiṇāsentassa khaṇtipāramitā paramatthapāramī nāma jātā*, *Abh-a. I. 74*.

⁶¹ *Khaṇtī paramaṃ tapo titikkhā, nibbānaṃ paranaṃ vadanti buddhā. Na hi pab-bajito parūpaghātī, na samaṇo hoti paraṃ vihetthayanto*, *Dhp. 41*;

strength of patience is like the strength of an army.⁶²

Developing patience can have a profound impact on how you deal with various situations and how you convert others through patience, compassion, and the right understanding. Patience helps you to enhance your compassion for others, even if someone wants to harm you. In the *Kakacūpama Sutta*, the Buddha said that:

Bhikkhus, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching. Herein, bhikkhus, you should train thus: ‘Your minds will remain unaffected, and you shall utter no evil words; abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate. you shall abide pervading them with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; and starting with them, you shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will.’⁶³

From this *Sutta*, one can understand that your patience and compassion are the key factors that will aid you in overcoming challenges and serve as the foundation for influencing and guiding others. It helps you as:

Be patient with any situation: Patience helps you remain calm and composed when faced with difficult or stressful situations. Likewise, the Buddha used His patience and compassion to convert Paṭācārā’s life to overcome from serious mental sufferings.

Enhanced Compassion: Patience enables you to view situations from different perspectives. When you take the time to understand others’ feelings and points of view, you’re more likely to respond with empathy and compassion. This can lead to more harmonious relationships and a more supportive social environment.

Reduced Confliction: Impatience can often lead to conflict, as it may cause misunderstandings and miscommunications. When you are patient, you give both yourself and others the time needed to express thoughts and concerns clearly, which can prevent unnecessary conflicts from arising.

Stress Reduction: Patience can reduce stress levels. When you are patient, you are less likely to get frustrated or stressed over things not going exactly as planned. This can contribute to better mental and emotional well-being. Therefore, patience is a skill that can be cultivated over time. It’s not always easy, especially in fast-paced or challenging situations, but practicing patience

⁶² *Akkosaṃ vadhabandhañca, aduṭṭho yo titikkhati khantībalaṃ bālānīkaṃ tamaḥaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ, Dhp. 70.*

⁶³ *Ubhatodaṇḍakena cepi, bhikkhave, kakacena corā ocarakā aṅgamaṅgāni okan-teyyuṃ, tatrāpi yo mano padūseyya, na me so tena sāsanakaro. tatrāpi vo, bhikkhave, evaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ – ‘na ceva no cittaṃ vipariṇataṃ bhavissati, na ca pāpikaṃ vācaṃ nicchāressāma, hitānukampī ca viharissāma mettacittā na dosantarā, M. I. 181; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, 442.*

can lead to many positive outcomes in both your personal and professional life.

Thus, patience (*khanti*) is the main factor in psychotherapy to develop qualities of empathy, understanding, and healing of mental problems. Patients often face complex emotions and struggles, but it is through patience that therapists can create a safe for them to explore their inner peace. In this patient-therapeutic environment, people can gradually open their minds, reflect on their thoughts and feelings, and overcome their challenging situations. Patience helps psychotherapists to discover and foster belief in patients to recover their positive emotions from the difficulties in life. The Buddha expounded in *Sedaka Sutta* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* that: “And how is it, bhikkhus, that by protecting others one protects oneself? By patience, harmlessness, lovingkindness, and sympathy. It is in such a way that by protecting others one protects oneself.”⁶⁴

By developing patience, one can solve conflicts each others, preserving one’s own inner peace, fostering harmonious relationships as well. These qualities are to protect oneself and uplift others. Moreover, patience creates a good environment for personal growth, inner peace, and spiritual development.

5.3. Thinking others are in the correct way

The concept of viewing others in the correct way is rooted in compassion and empathy. This perspective involves recognizing the challenges, suffering, and difficulties that others might be experiencing in their lives. It’s a way of looking at people with a compassionate heart, understanding that everyone has their own struggles and pain. All beings have to be always exerting themselves and constantly worrying. Seeing living beings in such a miserable state, fiercely struggling for their own survival, Buddha’s heart goes out to them with great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*).⁶⁵

It is important to note that adopting this method does not mean pitying others in a condescending way. Rather, it’s about approaching others with an open heart and recognizing their shared humanity. This method aligns with the teachings of compassion found in many spiritual and ethical traditions. It is always considered that: All beings are like one’s own children; therefore, who becomes angry over the misdeeds of his or her own children?⁶⁶

In essence, adopting the perspective that others are pitiable is a way to develop a deep sense of compassion, empathy, and interconnectedness with all living beings. It’s a practice that can lead to a more harmonious and compassionate way of engaging with the world around you. However, cultivating the good qualities mentioned above requires mindfulness; they

⁶⁴ *Evam kho, bhikkhave, attānaṃ rakkhanto paraṃ rakkhati. kathaṃca, bhikkhave, paraṃ rakkhanto attānaṃ rakkhati? khantiyā, avihiṃsāya, mettacittatāya, anu-dayatāya, S. III. 147; Bodhi, The Connected Discourses of the Buddha, 1648.*

⁶⁵ *Uyyutto lokasannivāsoti passantānaṃ buddhānaṃ bhagavantānaṃ sattesu mahākaruṇā okkamati, Psm. 121.*

⁶⁶ *Sabbabhūtānukampī mahākaruṇāya sabbesatte piyaputtaṃ viya anugaṇhanasīlo, It-a. 308.*

are interlinked and cannot develop independently. Thus mindfulness (*sati*) is seen as a tool for developing compassion because it is used to monitor one's own feelings and to manage negative emotions when others bring them up. Practicing mindfulness also develops and strengthens specific skills, inner capacities, attitudes, and perspectives that increase happiness, as well as provide the possibility for profound and stable experiences of peace, ease, and freedom in body and mind.

Mindfulness is a way of noticing how attention gets pulled in different directions and it is a way of practicing the gentle, persistent art of returning one's attention to the present moment. Mindfulness training has been demonstrated to be an effective treatment for a range of psychological problems such as depressive relapse, anxiety, and emotion regulation difficulties.⁶⁷ By developing the ability to be mindful and learning how to apply mindfulness to more healthy methods of coping with stress, one may become able to break our habitual and unhelpful responses to anxiety.

VI. THE ADVANTAGE OF COMPASSION IN BUDDHIST PSYCHOTHERAPY

Cultivating compassion brings various significance to daily life. In reality, people who practice compassion are known to experience less stress and then more relaxation.⁶⁸ Understandably, this is useful in therapy, as anxiety, stress, and depression are some of the most common reasons people seek the help of a therapist.

Dr. Richard Davidson has investigated in his book that the brains of persons who practice compassion and found that it strengthens connections and functioning in those parts of the brain that calm such feelings as fear or anger.⁶⁹ Davidson is indeed a well-known neuroscientist who has conducted extensive research on the neural correlates of emotions, meditation, and well-being. When he did a study of the brain waves of an experienced meditator, he found the highest level of activity ever seen in brain areas associated with happiness and positive emotions. According to his study, meditation promotes the formation of pleasant feelings and emotions of happiness. When you practice compassion meditation, it brings various significations in psychotherapy as follows

6.1. Compassion and brain connectivity

Davidson's research has suggested that engaging in practices related to compassion can lead to strengthened connections and improved functioning in

⁶⁷ Ruth A. Baer, "Mindfulness Training as a Clinical Intervention: A Conceptual and Empirical Review," *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice* 10, no. 2 (2003): 125–43, <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg015>.

⁶⁸ Leo Babauta, "A Guide to Cultivating Compassion in Your Life, With 7 Practices," accessed Dec 3, 2023, <https://zenhabits.net/a-guide-to-cultivating-compassion-in-your-life-with-7-practices/>.

⁶⁹ Lorne Ladner, "Psychotherapy Meditation, Positive Psychology and the Buddhist Path of Compassion," accessed Dec 11, 2023, <http://www.buddhanet.net/compassion.htm>.

brain regions associated with calming emotions like fear or anger. This suggests that training in compassion might have the potential to enhance emotional regulation and reduce negative emotions. In the same way, the Buddha said that, if one cultivates compassion, anger or cruelty has no chance to envelop his heart. This emancipation through compassion is the cure for cruelty.⁷⁰ Or in the *Mahā Rāhulovāda Sutta*, the Buddha said if one develops compassion (*karuṇā*), all aggressiveness will be overcome.⁷¹ Therefore, the compassion meditation (*karuṇā-bhāvanā*) approaches as a way to prevent aggression, violence, anger, and annoyance.

Therefore, Buddhism places a strong emphasis on cultivating qualities such as compassion, loving-kindness, and empathy. By developing these qualities, one can reduce or eliminate negative emotions like anger, cruelty, and hatred. This transformation occurs because when compassion is present, there is less room for destructive emotions to take hold in the mind and heart. The concept of 'emancipation through compassion' highlights the liberating effect that compassion can have on an individual's mental and emotional state. By freeing oneself from the grip of negative emotions, such as cruelty, an individual can experience a sense of inner freedom and peace. In the *Dhammapada*, it is claimed that: "The bhikkhu who lives in loving kindness, with faith in the teaching of the Buddha, would attain the peaceful place, the happy cessation of conditioned things."⁷²

6.2. Compassion reducing stress and anxiety

It not only diminishes stress but also generates positive emotions. Meditators can exhibit the highest levels of brain activity ever observed in areas linked to happiness and positive emotions. This aligns with broader findings in the field of neuroscience that meditation can lead to changes in brain activity patterns that are associated with positive emotions and well-being. Additionally, when compassion is practiced regularly, it increases self-awareness, relaxation, and a sense of calm. It involves focusing on generating feelings of compassion and empathy towards oneself and others, which can naturally contribute to feelings of happiness and peace of mind.

In the book '*Destructive Emotions and How We Can Overcome Them*'⁷³ written by Venerable Dalai Lama, he explained the procedure of investigating the practitioner's brain during the practice of compassion meditation.

⁷⁰ *Yam karuṇāya cetovimuttiyā bhāvitāya bahulikatāya yānikatāya vatthukatāya anuṭṭhitāya paricitāya susamāradhāya. atha ca panassa vihesā cittaṃ pariyādāya ṭhassaṭṭi, netam ṭhānaṃ vijjati. nissaraṇaṃ hetam, āvuso, vehesāya, yadidaṃ karuṇācetovimuttī'ti, D. III. 206.*

⁷¹ *Karuṇaṃ, rāhula, bhāvanaṃ bhāvehi. Karuṇaṃhi te, rāhula, bhāvanaṃ bhāvayato yā vihesā sā pahīyissati, M. II. 87.*

⁷² *Mettāvihārī yo bikkhu, pasanno buddhasāsane; adhigacche padaṃ satam, saṅkhārūpasamaṃ sukhaṃ, Dhp. 66; Norman, The Word of the Doctrine, 52.*

⁷³ Daniel Goleman, ed., *Destructive Emotions: And How We Can Overcome Them* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 12.

Although the functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) results were in the early stages, the analysis of electroencephalography (EEG) had already yielded substantial insights when comparing Oser's brain⁷⁴ activity during rest and while engaging in compassion meditation. In the experiment, the left middle frontal gyrus, where a zone of the brain Davidson's previous research had pinpointed as a locus for positive emotions. Davidson's lab found that when people have high levels of such brain activity in that specific site of the left prefrontal cortex, they simultaneously report feelings such as happiness, enthusiasm, joy, high energy, and alertness.

Davidson's research has also found that high levels of activity in a parallel site on the other side of the brain in the right frontal area correlate with reports of distressing emotions. People with a higher level of activity in the right prefrontal site and a lower level in the left are more prone to feelings such as sadness, anxiety, and worry. The implications of these findings for our emotional balance are profound: The further to the left that ratio tilts, the better the frame of mind tends to be and experiences the happiness.

In short, Oser's brain shift during compassion seemed to reflect an extremely pleasant mood. The very act of concern for others' well-being, it seems, creates a greater state of well-being within oneself. Therefore, the Venerable Dalai Lama said that the person doing a meditation on compassion for all beings is the immediate beneficiary. According to Buddhist texts, engaging in compassion and loving-kindness meditation will bring similar benefits to individuals. In the *Mettā Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, there are 11 types of advantages of the cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion meditation:

1. One sleeps well
2. One wakes up happily
3. One sees no bad dreams
4. One is dear to humans
5. One is dear to non-humans
6. One is protected by devas
7. Fire, poison, and weapons cannot harm one
8. One's mind easily concentrates
9. One's countenance is serene
10. One dies unconfused, and if he penetrates no higher,

⁷⁴ Oser, a European-born convert to Buddhism, has trained as a Tibetan monk in the Himalayas for more than three decades, including many years at the side of one of Tibet's greatest spiritual masters. But today, Oser (whose name has been changed here to protect his privacy) is about to take a revolutionary step in the history of the spiritual lineages he has become a part of. He will engage in meditation while having his brain scanned by state-of-the-art brain imaging devices.

11. He goes to the Brahma world (*Brahma-loka*)⁷⁵

6.3. Reducing physical and mental pain

The Buddha personally employed his compassion to relieve both physical and mental suffering in individuals like Paṭācārā, Kisāgotamī, Bhikkhu Tissa, Venerable Cunda, and so on. Indeed, compassion is a quality of mind that can transform the experience of pain, even making it worthwhile. When one opens a compassionate mind to understand the other's suffering, it will lead to a good relationship and sympathy for the other's situation. Tsoknyi Rinpoche, a Tibetan meditation teacher, said:

What is the experience of true compassion? There is some sense of being wide awake and free at the same time, there's some tenderness that arises without any cause or condition. Not sad in a depressed in hurting way, and somewhat delighted at the same time. There is neither sadness for oneself nor is there sadness for anyone in particular. It is like being saturated with juice, just as an apple is full of juice.⁷⁶

Through the cultivation of compassion meditation, one is able to transform an emotional landscape of negative emotions into positive emotions. This meditation contributes to a greater life and brings life satisfaction. It indeed assuages depression, fear, worry, anxiety, and ill will. Compassion meditation also releases the aspects of stress and develops one's attitude to life which is infinitely beneficial to emotional well-being, peace of mind, and joy. The repeated cultivation of compassion meditation helps to adapt to one's circumstances, and potentially transformative process which keeps the mind calm and generates inner peace and happiness.

Buddhist philosophy emphasizes that compassion is essential for truly loving and caring for oneself, and without genuine love for self, it is impossible to love, care, and feel deeply for another, much less to act on his or her behalf. Nevertheless, many people find it easier to experience compassion for another than for oneself, especially if the other is a loved one, such as a child, intimate partner, close friend, or pet.⁷⁷ Developing compassion can indeed lead to a reduction in harm to each other and the creation of a more peaceful and harmonious life. Compassion is a fundamental quality that promotes empathy, understanding, and a genuine concern for the well-being of oneself and others. This is how developing compassion contributes to a better world, reduces

⁷⁵ *Katame ekādaśa? sukhāṃ supati, sukhāṃ paṭibujjhati, na pāpakaṃ supinaṃ passati, manussānaṃ piyo hoti, amanussānaṃ piyo hoti, devatā rakkhanti, nāssa aggī vā viṣaṃ vā satthaṃ vā kamati, tuvaṇṇaṃ cittaṃ samādhīyati, mukhavaṇṇo vippasīdati, asammūḷho kālaṃ karoti, uttari appaṭivijjhanto brahmalokūpago hoti. mettāya, bhikkhave, cetovimuttīyā āsevitāya bhāvitāya bahulikatāya yānikatāya vatthukatāya anuṭṭhitāya paricitāya susamāraddhāya ime ekādaśānisaṃsā pāṭikaṅkhā'ti, A. III. 542.*

⁷⁶ Tsoknyi Rinpoche. *Carefree Dignity: Discourses on Training the Mind* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic, 2004), 159.

⁷⁷ K. Germer and Ronald D. Siegel. *Deepening Mindfulness in Clinical Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 230.

conflict, and encourages individuals to see the perspectives of others with the right understanding. This can help prevent conflicts and facilitate peaceful resolutions.

Overall, compassion is a powerful factor for creating a world characterized by understanding, cooperation, and harmony. It has the potential to transform individual lives and entire societies, leading to a more peaceful and interconnected world.

Buddhist compassion provided techniques for cultivating positive emotions in various ways. There is a meditation of the four immeasurable consisting of pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with boundless loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), empathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). However, from a psychological perspective, what's important is to become aware of the great value of compassion for oneself and happiness for others and then apply practical methods in daily life to increase pleasurable feelings of loving-kindness and compassion. In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha affirmed that if a person develops the four boundless states of mind from his childhood, he will not do a bad deed (*duccaritakamma*), and such a death mind will lead to a good rebirth.⁷⁸

If one devotes more effort to cultivating these good qualities, one will inevitably start helping other people without any condition. By developing compassion deeply, powerful feelings of compassionate connection with others, one can learn to live a meaningful and joyful life. Only such feelings of compassion teach him how taking care of others is a suitable method for taking care of oneself.

6.4. Compassion creates a peaceful world

Compassion is the key to world peace, because when people approach others with compassion, they break down barriers created by cultural, religious, or societal differences, paving the way for harmony and cooperation. Compassion helps resolve conflicts by encouraging dialogue and mutual respect, creating a safe space where grievances can be addressed peacefully. It also inspires acts of kindness and support, alleviating suffering and nurturing a sense of belonging and unity. Moreover, compassion promotes equality and justice, ensuring that everyone feels valued and treated fairly. As compassion spreads, it creates a ripple effect, inspiring others to act with kindness and understanding. This collective effort transforms societies, strengthening bonds and reducing animosity. A world guided by compassion not only prevents conflicts but also builds lasting peace, reminding us of our shared humanity

⁷⁸ Pubbe kho me idaṃ cittaṃ parittaṃ ahosi abhāvitāṃ, etarahi pana me idaṃ cittaṃ appamāṇaṃ subhāvitāṃ. yaṃ kho pana kiñci pamāṇakatāṃ kammaṃ, na taṃ tatrāvasissati na taṃ tatrāvatitṭhati'ti. taṃ kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave, daharatagge ce so ayaṃ kumāro upekkhaṃ cetovimuttiṃ bhāveyya, api nu kho pāpakammaṃ kar-eyyā'ti? "no he taṃ, bhante. akarontaṃ kho pana pāpakammaṃ api nu kho dukkhaṃ phuseyyā'ti? "no he taṃ, bhante. akarontañhi, bhante, pāpakammaṃ kuto dukkhaṃ phusissatī'ti, A. III. 504.

and the importance of working together for a better future.

VII. CONCLUSION

Generally, the Buddha's teachings are to alleviate all human suffering. Regarding this, the Buddha pointed out that the mind should be purified to get rid of pain. This paper provides the Buddhist ethical principles and mindfulness meditation can be beneficial in the treatment of mental suffering. This teaching is not only appropriate and beneficial but also offers profound insights and serves as a healing methodology.

At the outset, one must gain a clear understanding of the *Dhamma*; then, in the middle, one should diligently practice it, and finally, it becomes a means to heal mental and physical afflictions and disorders. Buddha expounded the Four Noble Truths, which encompass suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. By embracing these truths, people can free themselves from mental stress, emotional distress, trauma, chronic pain, and all forms of suffering, ultimately attaining the ultimate happiness of *Nibbāna*.

The Buddha's teaching guides individuals to keep away from unwholesome things. It shines with perfect enlightenment, offering healing through its profound wisdom and systematic approach. Therefore, if one sees the truth of reality, one will be free from stress, mental illness, and disorder, achieving happiness and recovery. There are various instructions or discourses, especially for the healing of traumatic mental illness and disorder.

In this paper, the researcher attempted to analyze the importance compassion in Buddhist psychotherapy to remove mental defilements. It offered therapeutic techniques such as mindfulness meditation, and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy that are shown to be effective in reducing negative emotions and increasing well-being. Compassion is a quality desperately needed in the world today. The more compassion is in people's hearts, the more awareness of things in life could be developed by the people. All the cruel things human beings do to one another are due to a lack of compassion. From that, it leads to the war, butcher, and injure between people. Actually, compassion is something that already exists in everyone. With a good heart, one creates good health, because the mind always is happy with the absence of anger, and harmful thoughts. Simultaneously, it will produce good *kamma* not only in the present life but also in the future life.

In short, the primary goal of Buddhism is the attainment of *Nibbāna*, which necessitates the complete elimination of all forms of defilement. To achieve this objective, Buddhism has analyzed defilements until the end. It mentioned three main roots for every kind of defilement and explained the way to eradicate those roots. In contrast, Western psychology tends to perceive defilements as mental illnesses, but without the depth of analysis seen in Buddhism. This distinction arises from Buddhism's ultimate aim to be free from the cycle of birth and death, where illnesses are viewed as forms of suffering. Western psychology, on the other hand, primarily seeks healing without the

overarching goal of ending the cycle of birth and death. While there are certain similarities between Western psychology and Buddhism, their differences lie in their ultimate purposes.

Abbreviations

A. I.	<i>Ekaka Duka Tika Catukka Nipāta Pāḷi</i>
A. II.	<i>Pañcaka Chakka Sattaka Nipāta Pāḷi</i>
A. III.	<i>Aṭṭhaka Navaka Dasaka Ekādasaka Nipāta Pāḷi</i>
A-a. II.	<i>Dukādi Nipāta Aṅguttara Aṭṭhakathā</i>
Abh-a. I	<i>Aṭṭhasālinī Aṭṭhakathā</i>
Abh-a. II.	<i>Samohavinodanī Aṭṭhakathā</i>
Abhp-ṭ.	<i>Abhidhānappadīpikā Ṭīkā</i>
It-a.	<i>Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā</i>
D. I.	<i>Sīlakkhandhavagga Pāḷi</i>
D. II.	<i>Māhavagga Pāḷi (Dīgha Nikāya)</i>
D. III.	<i>Pāthikavagga Pāḷi</i>
Dhp.	<i>Dhammapada Pāḷi</i>
Psm.	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga Pāḷi</i>
M. I.	<i>Mūlapaṇṇāsa Pāḷi</i>
M. II.	<i>Majjhimaṇṇāsa Pāḷi</i>
M. III.	<i>Uparipaṇṇāsa Pāḷi</i>
V. I.	<i>Pārājika Pāḷi</i>
Vvi-ṭ.II	<i>Vinaya Vinicchaya Ṭīkā. Vol. II</i>
Vbh.	<i>Vibhaṅga Pāḷi</i>
Vsm. I.	<i>Visuddhimagga. Vol. I</i>
S. I.	<i>Sagāthāvagga Nidānavagga Saṃyutta Pāḷi</i>
S. III.	<i>Mahāvagga Saṃyutta Pāḷi</i>
Sn.	<i>Suttanipāta Pāḷi</i>
Sn-a. I.	<i>Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā. Vol. I</i>
OED.	Oxford Learner Dictionary
BP	Buddhist Psychotherapy
CBT.	Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy
CFT.	Compassion Focused Therapy
CHB.	Coronary Heart Disease
EEG.	Electroencephalography
WHO.	World Health Organization

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SHARING – NOT SAVING: EMPATHY AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS AS PATTERNS OF CONTEMPORARY FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

Jitka Cirklová*

Abstract:

This article examines the innovative charitable practices of the Czech NGO Brontosauři v Himalájích, focusing on their project “Czech Science to Little Tibet.” Rooted in the serene Himalayan village of Mulbekh, this initiative embodies the core Buddhist principles of interdependence (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and selfless giving (*dāna*), seamlessly integrating them with contemporary sustainable development frameworks. By fostering a holistic approach that harmonizes spiritual wisdom with ecological and social responsibility, it seeks to cultivate a more balanced and ethically grounded model of progress. Through qualitative research, the study explores how the NGO fosters mutual enrichment by positioning Western science and Tibetan traditions as equal contributors to a sustainable educational system. The NGO’s approach contrasts with conventional aid models by prioritizing shared values over asymmetrical relationships. This paper also highlights the transformative potential of Buddhist ethics, particularly as derived from the *Dhammapada* and *Majjhima Nikāya*, in fostering global solidarity. Ultimately, it situates Brontosauři v Himalájích within discussions on spiritual and symbolic capital, demonstrating Buddhism’s potential to inspire holistic development in secular societies.

Keywords: *Brontosauři v Himalájích, Czech science to little Tibet, Buddhist ethics, sustainable development, spiritual and symbolic capital.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

This text analyzes a contemporary form of charity practices, focusing on the activities of the Czech NGO Brontosauři v Himalájích, which has been active in the Himalayan village of Mulbekh in Little Tibet for over a decade. Their latest project, titled *Czech Science to Little Tibet*, aims to provide regular science education with the support of Czech scientists. Located at an altitude of 3,500 meters, Mulbekh is the first Buddhist village on the route from Kashmir to Little Tibet. Since 2008, Brontosauři v Himalájích has played a pivotal role in supporting the development of the local public school, resulting in its students achieving top academic results in the district. The NGO has raised approximately 14 million crowns (57,000 Euros) for school investments, with notable contributions from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Distinguished figures such as former presidential candidate and head of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Senator Jiří Drahoš, have pledged to attend the project's official launch in Tibet.

The research adopts an inductive strategy to explore the intersection of engaged Buddhism, sustainable development, and reciprocity as reflected in the NGO's activities. The study aims to deepen understanding of the role and significance of Buddhist ethics and cosmology in shaping contemporary environmental philosophy and social movements. The Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* (non-self) from the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*¹ emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings, aligning with the NGO's principles. Empathy and compassion (*karuṇā*) are central to the NGO's projects, reflecting the Buddha's teaching on compassion in the *Dhammapada*². Additionally, the case highlights the long-standing interest of Czech society in the political issues of Tibet. This public support reflects a modern form of *mettā* (loving-kindness), as exemplified in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*.³ The study also illustrates how cultural exchange and symbolic capital⁴ influence the success of non-profit marketing initiatives in global contexts.

II. FROM THE CONCEPT OF INTERDEPENDENCE TO A SHARING-BASED AID SYSTEM

Before delving into a concrete case study on the current practices of a local NGO, it is crucial to examine the increasing social influence of values traditionally associated with Buddhism, such as right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), compassion (*karuṇā*), generosity (*dāna*), and interdependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). These principles are increasingly aligned with the broader discourse on sustainable development, shaping ethical considerations and guiding both individual and collective decision-making in personal, professional, and philanthropic contexts. As value constructs, they serve as foundational frameworks that influence priorities and determine levels of

¹ *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2020): 56.

² *Dhp* 223.

³ *Khuddaka Nikāya* (2019): 112.

⁴ Bourdieu (1984): 56.

engagement with charitable and non-profit initiatives.⁵

The practice of generosity (*dāna*), for instance, is deeply embedded in the Buddha's teachings, as illustrated in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, where acts of giving are regarded not only as meritorious but also as essential for fostering mutual well-being and social harmony. When an individual's worldview is anchored in a profound recognition of the radical interdependence of all phenomena (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), their perspective on economic support for marginalized communities is fundamentally transformed. This doctrinal insight, extensively discussed in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, provides both a philosophical foundation and an ethical imperative for compassionate action that transcends mere theoretical contemplation.⁶ Such a perspective translates into concrete initiatives aimed at addressing urgent social challenges, such as expanding equitable access to quality education, thereby embodying the spirit of engaged Buddhism.

Support for educational initiatives has long been a cornerstone of charitable and developmental efforts. However, such endeavors are often shaped by mission-driven frameworks that seek to influence, if not entirely transform, the religious, cultural, and ethical orientations of students. This approach, particularly in the context of missionary education, has been subject to critical scrutiny, especially within Western cultural paradigms that prioritize harmony, empathy, and reciprocity as integral aspects of identity. In contrast, the Buddha's teaching on the Middle Path, as articulated in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, offers an alternative model—one that emphasizes balance and moderation rather than the imposition of external cultural or ideological values. This approach fosters an environment of ethical inquiry and self-cultivation, aligning with a more sustainable and inclusive vision of education, in which learners are encouraged to engage with knowledge through the lens of discernment (*paññā*) and personal experience rather than through externally imposed doctrines.⁷

In recent years, as societal and political interest in sustainability has grown, support for projects like the one presented here has shifted from religious to secular frameworks, even engaging the highest academic levels. Sustainability is now understood as a holistic system that requires simultaneous development of local culture, religion, education, and science. This broader interpretation has driven widespread interest in educational initiatives in the Himalayas. King⁸ introduced the term trans-Buddhist scales of values, describing “site-specific desires and measures of sought-after outcomes that privilege the economy and economic behavior as techniques for individual, social, and environmental well-being and emancipation.” Building on this, the case study presented here demonstrates how prestigious educational institutions in the Czech Republic

⁵ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (2021): 134

⁶ *Majjhima Nikāya* (2023): 45.

⁷ *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2020): 72

⁸ King (2016): 89 - 108.

have recognized Tibetan medicine, traditional knowledge, and local skills as equal partners alongside Western science in creating a high-quality elementary school project.

III. METHODOLOGY

The topics discussed in the text follow the inductive research strategy. The key terms around which our case study was presented in the above part of the paper are bringing together widely discussed issues of education, participation, community, and sharing. These are commonly associated with the study of region and charity. The dimension this paper is adding is directly linked with integrated marketing communication, social media, targeting and value structure changes, and information economy.

The methodology of the research is based on media content analysis, personal interviews, and observation extended through three consecutive years from 2019 to 2021, together with historical analysis of the organization. The interviews were conducted with about fifty informants of various ages, gender, and level of involvement in the support of an NGO. Many of these interviews could be defined as phenomenological⁹. Respondents were asked to describe their motives for support of BvH, their relation to Tibet, and to Buddhism in general. Moreover, their opinion on charity and volunteering in a broader context. Many of them elaborated on their personal experience with Buddhism and openly declared their support of Tibet in its political struggle. One part of the interviews also focused on the usage and role of social media as a communication tool that helped to establish the hybrid community of practice around the Brontosaurus in the Himalayas organization.

The data were codified according to the methodological recommendations for qualitative methods. In order to understand the contemporary dynamic phenomenon, an ongoing ethnography was conducted¹⁰, as well as social media and press releases were monitored throughout 2022.

IV. CASE-STUDY OF BRONTOSAURUS – NGO WITH HISTORY AND CREDIT

4.1. The role of institutions in connecting secular and Buddhist values

Among the factors cited as reasons for the growth of Western Buddhist communities is the proximity of Buddhist values, such as compassion (*karuṇā*), equanimity (*upekkhā*), and loving-kindness (*mettā*), to those of secular humanism. These values, often referred to as the *brahmavihāras*, resonate more strongly with contemporary secular societies than the values professed by traditional church groups¹¹. Consequently, institutions that integrate these values into their framework are perceived as more trustworthy and relatable.

If an institution employs metaphors and practices that are directly connected to meaningful and understandable implications, it can foster familiarity and

⁹Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989): 133 – 146.

¹⁰Kozinets (2010): 1 – 13.

¹¹*Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2021): 98.

trust among individuals from secular environments. This is especially true for NGOs that, while rooted in Buddhist values, declare their alignment with secular humanism. Such organizations are often seen as more approachable than religious institutions that openly pursue missionary objectives alongside their charitable efforts.

Another significant dimension of institutions in societies where individualism is strongly emphasized is their enabling role. Institutions not only provide structure but also empower individuals by offering opportunities and influence that they could not achieve independently. This enabling capacity aligns with the Buddha's teachings on harmonious communities in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, which emphasizes cooperation and mutual support for achieving societal goals¹².

Bellah¹³ expanded the idea of institutions as mechanisms for understanding individual or collective identity, proposing that institutions are also tools for cooperative efforts to build desired forms of society. Respect for cultural heritage, as demonstrated by NGOs like Brontosauři v Himalájích, aligns with the Buddha's guidance on preserving the *Dhamma* in the *Saddhammapaṭirūpaka Sutta*¹⁴. This case study highlights the process by which an autonomous institution – valuable to Czech society since its inception – became an instrument for supporting shared values. Through financial and material donations, such NGOs embody principles of reciprocity and mutual respect, characteristic of a science-based secular humanistic society in Czechia and a Tibetan community grounded in traditional Buddhist values.

Hnutí Brontosaurus is a large nature conservation group in the Czech Republic, concentrated on the youth. Brontosaurus was founded in 1974, being the first such organization in Czechoslovakia. Hnutí Brontosaurus is a non-profit organization founded back in 1974. There is a symbolic connotation connected with this specific year, since it has been considered and claimed as “The Year of the Natural Environment” at the UN conference in Stockholm, Sweden. The 70s were still very hard for Czech Republic, Moravia, and Slovakia. They are often characterized by the comeback of totalitarianism, censorship, oppression, and less freedom, resulting in the “normalization” era and occupation of the Soviet troops. Those who opposed have no longer been executed, at least not officially; they were still fired from work, imprisoned, beaten up; their families were controlled, and their kids had a hard time being admitted to universities and getting decent jobs. Back in 1975, the final act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, facilitated in Helsinki, Finland, was signed even by the former Czechoslovakia. Although the general objective was to respect human rights and freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience or religion. The Czech Communist Party struggled to implement and keep this promise. For them, it was just a formality. In 1976, the members of the music

¹² *Dīgha Nikāya* (2018): 168.

¹³ Bellah (1991).

¹⁴ *Majjhima Nikāya* (2023): 122.

group The Plastic People of the Universe were arrested, which caused so much hatred and resistance in the exile environment, and the dissidents. Charter 77, an informal social initiative/ community/ party, was formed and aimed at all the commitments agreed upon in Helsinki back in 1975.

Upon this social and political background, the oldest environmental NGO was established. It was named after Brontosaurus, a name which was at the time widely used as a synonym for dinosaur among the Czechs.

Their main motto, translated from the Czech language: "*Brontosaurus to nepřežil, protože přerostl své možnosti.*" – The Brontosaurus did not make it, since he outgrew his options." Meaning his possible options at the time to survive. Even though it is impossible to perceive this claim "literally", it was still very catchy, approachable and relatable for society at the time – both in political and ecological terms.

The founding organization was The Institute of Landscape and Ecology of CSAV of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, along with the members of the "*Mladý Svět* – Young World" editorial board at the time, recognized the lack of a social group of like-minded individuals who:

- (1) Cleanse, protect, and respect mother nature. (2) To work on, solidify and spread awareness about the beautiful local cultural legacies that our land has to offer. (3) To convey, spread and chant the message of respecting mother nature, all the jeopardized creatures and each other. (4) To cultivate social empathy, responsibility, tolerance, and mental resilience. (5) To set one's priorities straight. (6) To contribute to the upbringing of our youth by exposing them to "what matters in life". (7) To help form teams and communities of proactive individuals, support them in their drive, ideas, and sustain them while embarking on their self-realization and self-development journey for the sake of all the goals and values mentioned above.

Still, in the same year (1974), many weekend and summer break events already took place both indoors and outdoors. The time spent together at the respective events ended up being so fulfilling, satisfying, fun, and meaningful that later in 1978, the members of the Hnutí Brontosaurus at the time decided to organize the first Summer Camps and summer activities conducted in the summer months once the children finished their studies. This activity was sustained and organized within the Czechoslovak Socialist Youth Union, a politically oriented youth group operating as one of the wings of the Communist Party in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic between the years 1970 to 1990. It elaborated on the so-called "Pioneer organization" which intended to create a "safe place" for children, where all of them were fully and deeply exposed, indoctrinated and lectured about communist ideology.

The Brontosaurus movement and their activities combined meaningful volunteer work with lifelong experiences. Currently, they are based on more than forty years of tradition, visible success, clear goals, and more than 1,000 active members. Every year volunteers of the organization go to cut grass with

scythes, vast mountain orchid meadows, plant trees, conduct archaeological and conservation work at excavations and castles, or build a school in the Himalayas.

4.2. From ecological awareness to community of practice

The primary goal of the NGO is to bring together young people and offer them the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities, enjoy themselves, grow, and contribute positively to the world around them. The Brontosaurus events are designed to be open to the public, with no prerequisites for membership, experience, or prior knowledge. Universalism is emphasized as a core value of the organization:

It doesn't matter if you are a boy or a girl, what your religion is, whether you are doing IT or working in a tearoom. It is in our diversity that our greatest strength is. It is important to have an open mind and a desire to help the world around us. Our events are organized by volunteers for volunteers. Together we help nature, monuments, and people, and the reward is a good feeling and time spent with friends.

This ethos reflects the Buddhist principle of non-harm (*ahiṃsā*) as taught in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, which emphasizes the importance of protecting biodiversity and living harmoniously with nature¹⁵. Additionally, the NGO's ecological focus aligns with the *Rukkha Sutta* from the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, which highlights the interconnectedness of humans and the natural environment¹⁶.

Volunteer events not only promote ecological restoration but also offer participants the chance to develop valuable skills and work-related experience:

We're still learning something. Whether it is building hedgehog houses, team management, castle tower repair, or soft skills from every event, we take away. We are interested in the world around us. Taking into account the opinions and attitudes of others, we seek solutions to the problems of the present and support healthy efforts to move away from the consumer-centered way of life. This spirit of collective learning mirrors the communal ethics outlined in the *Cūḷavagga*, where cooperation and mutual support are emphasized as key to addressing societal challenges¹⁷.

As Bauman¹⁸ argued - community is nowadays another name for paradise lost. This sentiment resonates strongly with the objectives of the NGO. Volunteer events are not only about benefiting the natural environment or preserving cultural heritage; they also aim to foster teamwork, build a sense of community, and encourage personal reflection and growth. Expert hosts and facilitators ensure that events are inclusive, flexible, and engaging, welcoming both new and returning participants. Activities range from weekend events to one-day initiatives, incorporating a mix of charitable work, psychological games, and

¹⁵ *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2020): 94.

¹⁶ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (2021): 75.

¹⁷ *Vin.* (2015): 232.

¹⁸ Bauman (2013): 231.

team-building exercises. The NGO's activities are divided into two main areas: ecological restoration and the preservation of cultural and historical legacies.

4.2.1. Ecological restoration

These initiatives include planting trees, creating flower beds to restore diversity, and enhancing old orchards. Other activities involve meditation and self-discovery while maintaining natural habitats, such as cutting and burning overgrowth to protect rare species in the Bohemian Karst. Volunteers may also plant tree lines near Břeclav in southern Moravia, focusing on native species like oaks, cherries, and shrubs, and sowing herbs for insects. Projects such as restoring old country roads or building natural barriers to prevent soil erosion reflect the NGO's commitment to holistic environmental care.

4.2.2. Cultural and historical preservation

Volunteers engage in renovating old cultural centers, castle gardens, and natural settlements while also learning folk dances. These activities take place in stunning locations, such as castles and palaces, fostering an appreciation for cultural heritage and creating shared memories.

The concept of a “community of practice,” originally denoting groups sharing a craft or profession, has been expanded to reflect the process of collective learning within groups united by shared concerns and interests. In this context, the NGO promotes collective efforts to solve societal and environmental problems while offering opportunities for personal growth, such as meditation or self-development programs. The interconnectedness of self, nature, and society-history underpins the organization's worldview, which aligns with both the common dimensions of sustainability and Buddhist values.

4.3. Unique value proposition – creating biotopes of harmony

The *Brontosauři v Himalájích* movement is acutely aware of Tibet's fragile position in the geopolitical landscape, surrounded by powerful neighbors such as Pakistan and China. Since 1950, India has served as Tibet's primary ally, striving to modernize local infrastructure while safeguarding its sacred culture and traditions. Balancing modernization with cultural preservation remains a key challenge, and the NGO actively works toward integrating technological advancements without disrupting the spiritual and ecological equilibrium of the region.

In 2007, an initiative to foster Czech-Ladakhi educational collaboration was launched through the *La Ngonpo* project, under the Ministry of Culture. This initiative facilitated the first communication between Czech and Ladakhi schoolchildren. By 2008, *Brontosaurus* had established connections with schoolteachers in Mulbekh, leading to the first financial support for school equipment in 2009. Over time, the NGO transitioned from organizing summer camps to managing structured aid projects, mirroring the organization's long-standing tradition in the Czech Republic of combining leisure-time activities with cultural and educational restoration – particularly in Buddhist monasteries.

The NGO's core objective remains unchanged: to introduce modern technology while preserving Tibetan cultural identity. It aims to provide the local community with knowledge on innovations in construction (solar panels, water systems, and sustainable engineering) while reinforcing traditional Tibetan values, principles, and holistic worldviews. The NGO's outreach is not merely a one-way transfer of knowledge but a reciprocal exchange: Czech volunteers learn from Tibetan communities about Buddhist practices, traditional medicine, and sustainable living in harmony with nature. These exchanges exemplify equanimity (*upekkhā*), ensuring that aid is provided without imposing external cultural dominance¹⁹. As part of this cultural exchange, the NGO also facilitates classes on Buddhism and Tibetan medicine for Czech volunteers, reinforcing mutual learning and shared ethical responsibility. By 2012, *Brontosaurus in the Himalayas* (BvH) had become a legally recognized entity, allowing it to dedicate long-term resources to improving education in the region ever since.

The NGO's Unique Value Proposition (UVP) lies in its ability to bridge modern science and Tibetan heritage while fostering global solidarity. This approach aligns with Buddhist ethics regarding generosity and the ethical dimensions of giving, as described in the *Dāna Sutta*²⁰. However, despite its mission-driven strengths—such as a well-established tradition and diverse activity scope—the NGO faces several challenges. Limited marketing resources and low public awareness relative to organizations like the Czech scout movement and Greenpeace remain persistent obstacles. Opportunities include partnerships with influencers, educational institutions, and corporate sponsors, particularly in the areas of sustainability and team-building programs. However, the emergence of competitors with stronger marketing strategies, a more diverse range of activities, and better digital engagement poses a long-term threat to the NGO's outreach and fundraising efforts.

4.4. The role of storytelling in value-based engagement

To strengthen its impact, the NGO leverages narrative-driven outreach as a key tool in engaging new supporters. This practice echoes the Buddha's use of parables and storytelling to convey moral lessons, as seen in the *Jātaka Tales*²¹. Digital communication platforms, particularly video storytelling, serve as a means of sharing rather than simply advertising. Current digital trends underscore the effectiveness of visual content: video campaigns account for nearly 80% of global online consumer traffic,²² with social media-driven engagement playing an increasingly dominant role in fundraising efforts.

However, the mere presence of digital media does not guarantee success. Effective storytelling requires understanding audience values and aligning content with their worldview. A well-crafted narrative transforms donor

¹⁹ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2021): 87.

²⁰ *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020): 113.

²¹ *Jātaka Tales* (2022): 56.

²² Levit (1986): 35.

participation into a symbolic act of global harmony, reinforcing the perception of giving as an extension of one's ethical and social identity. Through this approach, the NGO cultivates a network of engaged supporters who see their contributions not just as acts of charity but as part of a broader, meaningful movement.

V. MARKETING, DIGITAL MEDIA, AND THE ETHICAL FRAMING OF SPIRITUAL ENGAGEMENT

Using marketing and economic theories to describe a spiritually oriented non-profit organization may initially seem counterintuitive or even inappropriate. McKenzie²³ points out that global consumer culture is often perceived as a threat to traditional and authentic religious or spiritual life. However, rather than being inherently opposed to spiritual practice, certain market mechanisms can be adapted to enhance accessibility and engagement without compromising core ethical values. In this sense, digital communication platforms, strategic branding, and storytelling techniques can serve as tools for ethical engagement rather than purely commercial enterprises.

Figure 1: Unique Value Proposition Structure²⁴

This adaptation is evident in how social networks and digital media have become facilitators of value-based communities, enabling individuals to connect around shared ethical and spiritual principles. The Buddhist concept of *dāna* (generosity) exemplifies this dynamic. The *Dāna Sutta* emphasizes that ethical giving fosters social cohesion and generates merit, reinforcing the principle that generosity is not merely transactional but a means of sustaining collective well-being²⁵. By applying these principles to digital fundraising and social media campaigns, non-profits can frame acts of giving as ethical participation rather than passive donation.

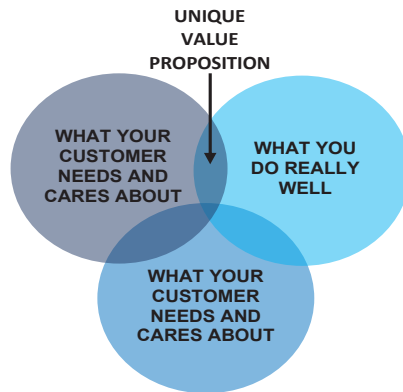
As discussed earlier, institutions can be enabling – they create structures that elevate individual acts of generosity into collective and meaningful engagements. The Buddha's teachings on *upekkhā* (equanimity) further support this approach, advocating for fairness in distribution and impartiality in engagement²⁶. This resonates with the Unique Value Proposition (UVP) model, where successful non-profit marketing aligns organizational values with donor expectations, ensuring that both ethical and practical considerations are met.

²³ McKenzie (2015): 598 – 614.

²⁴ Based on Levitt, Theodore (1986): 67.

²⁵ *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020): 113.

²⁶ *Anguttara Nikāya* (2021): 87.



VI. THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN CONTEMPORARY ENGAGEMENT

Today, video content has emerged as a dominant force in digital communication. Facebook alone records over 8 billion video views per day, and online videos accounted for nearly 80% of global consumer traffic as of 2020. Despite this, the effectiveness of video-based fundraising or outreach depends not merely on production quality but on strategic audience engagement. A survey found that 83% of marketers and small business owners would create more video content if time and budget constraints allowed. However, the mere existence of digital media does not guarantee success – it requires aligning messages with the values and interests of target audiences.

Buddhist ethics offer a compelling framework for understanding this dynamic. The Buddha frequently used parables and narratives to teach complex moral and philosophical ideas, a strategy reflected in the Jātaka Tales, which convey ethical and social values through storytelling²⁷. Similarly, successful non-profit campaigns rely on storytelling to construct compelling narratives that resonate with audiences, turning abstract causes into emotionally engaging and ethically motivating experiences.

Moreover, gift-giving, as seen in Buddhist traditions, is not merely about donation but about reinforcing social and ethical bonds. The act of giving (*dāna*) is a form of self-expression, deeply embedded in both religious merit-making and contemporary value-driven philanthropy. In this way, digital platforms can transform fundraising into participatory engagement, where supporters are not simply financial contributors but active members of a global ethical movement.

By leveraging these insights, the process of creating a “harmonious biotope” becomes not just an ideal but a practical strategy – where marketing, ethics, and spiritual values converge to build resilient, engaged communities.

²⁷ Ja. (2022), vol. 2, p. 56.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of NGO Brontosaurus in Himalaya

SWOT Analysis	Details
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Nearly 50 years of tradition and a well-established presence.- Wide scope of activities, attracting diverse members and stakeholders.- Focus on blending modern science with Tibetan traditions, creating a unique appeal.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Limited marketing and PR capabilities compared to competitors.- Low awareness of the NGO’s activities relative to more prominent organizations, such as the Czech scout movement, Greenpeace, and international initiatives like The Duke of Edinburgh’s Award.- Dependence on volunteers and local partnerships may limit scalability.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Expanding collaboration with influencers and digital media for outreach.- Partnering with schools, orphanages, and corporations for cultural and environmental team-building activities.- Potential to enhance visibility through innovative marketing strategies and by leveraging their unique blend of cultural and scientific initiatives.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Emergence of competitors with better marketing and PR strategies.- Risk of other organizations copying the NGO’s model while offering broader or more diversified activities.- Challenges in maintaining donor interest and engagement over the long term in a competitive charitable landscape.

Source: Adapted from the analysis of the section “Unique Value Proposition – Creating Biotopes of Harmony” in the provided text

Based on the SWOT analysis, it may seem that a non-profit or charitable

organization faces significant challenges in the competitive and market-driven environment. However, leveraging a Unique Value Proposition (UVP) and the strategic use of digital media – which operate on principles of sharing rather than commercial promotion – can be key to success. As McLuhan²⁸ famously stated, “the medium is the message,” underscoring that the way an organization communicates is just as important as the content it delivers.

The concept of *dāna* (generosity) in Buddhist teachings reinforces the ethical value of giving, extending beyond financial contributions to sharing knowledge, skills, and support²⁹. In this framework, effective non-profit marketing is not about selling a product but fostering genuine connections based on shared principles. The equanimity (*upekkhā*) taught in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* further reinforces the importance of fairness and impartiality in aid distribution³⁰.

VII. BUILDING LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT THROUGH STRATEGIC STORYTELLING

The Brontosaurus in the Himalayas operates like any other NGO, serving social and political purposes without commercial interests. However, in an era of increasing competition for visibility and donor engagement, marketing strategies have become essential. Unlike traditional fundraising, which often relies on emotional appeals, non-profit marketing is rooted in the principles of engagement, reciprocity, and alignment with shared values. This approach mirrors the Buddhist principle of skillful means (*upāya*), which suggests that methods must be adapted to context while remaining true to ethical principles.

A key moment in the NGO’s media strategy was the 2019 social media video campaign, which framed physics education as an urgent need for Tibetan students. The video was shot in Mulbekh, depicting daily life and the aspirations of local children. The narrative followed a mother asking Czech citizens for a physics teacher to help “tame the physics demon” that had captivated her son and other village children. The humorous yet compelling storytelling technique was reminiscent of Buddhist Jātaka Tales, where parables serve to convey ethical and educational values³¹.

The public response was overwhelming: 750,000 views in 9 days, with 7,500 shares. 85 new Himalayan patrons in one week. 130 within two weeks, a total of 225 new donors in a year – significantly exceeding expectations. Senator Jiří Drahoš and Ambassador Hovorka pledged support. Czech Senate recognized the initiative, appointing Drahoš as an official representative.

Despite initial skepticism about whether the campaign would gain traction, it quickly became clear that the video resonated deeply with the

²⁸ McLuhan (1966): 310.

²⁹ *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2020): 113.

³⁰ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (2021): 87.

³¹ *Ja.* (2022), vol. 2, p. 56.

audience. The campaign illustrated the effectiveness of storytelling in value-driven engagement, reflecting the role of media in shaping social narratives and fostering global solidarity. The momentum from the campaign translated into tangible results. By summer 2022, a new school building was completed, featuring state-of-the-art physics, chemistry, biology, and IT classrooms. The grand opening on July 31, 2022, attracted leading scientists, educators, community leaders, and political representatives. Following the ceremonial opening, volunteers stayed on to deliver the first-ever structured science curriculum in Mulbekh.

The campaign's reach extended beyond financial contributions, fostering a sense of participation among Czech citizens. Donors actively chose which lab equipment to fund (microscopes, thermometers, laboratory scales, etc.). Although only 1 liter of acid was needed, donors contributed 8 liters – indicating enthusiasm for scientific education. Social media comments highlighted public engagement, with responses such as: (1) “For the first time in my life, I’m laughing at the word PHYSICS!” (2) “I regret that I only studied social sciences – maybe I should go teach physics in Tibet.” (3) “I can teach applied physics! Where do I sign up?” These responses demonstrated how storytelling transformed public perception, making science education in Tibet not just an abstract cause but a shared mission.

The long-term success of the campaign was reinforced by widespread endorsements from leading Czech academic institutions, including the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Czech Technical University, Charles University, and Technical University Brno. Support also came from science and education-focused organizations such as Brno Science Centre VIDA, the Czech Astronomic Observatory, and various NGO networks. Public figures actively shared and promoted the campaign, presenting it not merely as a charitable initiative but as a broader commitment to global education and scientific development.

This emphasis on reciprocity and ethical giving was further amplified by extensive media coverage and discussions on Tibetan autonomy, Czech-Tibetan relations, and transnational solidarity. The campaign's impact was felt beyond financial contributions – donors and supporters engaged with the initiative as an opportunity to be part of a movement that transcended traditional philanthropy.

The Buddhist concept of *dāna* (generosity) encapsulates this idea, highlighting how gift-giving is not merely an economic act but a spiritual and social commitment to mutual growth³². This was evident in the enthusiastic responses from contributors, many of whom described their involvement as a meaningful investment in a collective vision rather than a simple donation.

By applying digital storytelling, ethical marketing, and Buddhist-inspired reciprocity, the campaign demonstrated how non-profits can shift from

³² *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020): 113

transactional fundraising to value-driven engagement. This approach allowed the NGO to reinforce shared ethical commitments between donors and recipients, fostering a long-term, active community rather than a one-time contributor base.

The Brontosaurus in the Himalayas case study exemplifies how ethical marketing and Buddhist principles can intersect to create sustainable engagement models. Through storytelling, reciprocity, and shared ethical commitments, the NGO transformed what might have been a standard physics education campaign into a widely recognized and deeply resonant movement.

This model aligns with the Buddhist teaching on the interconnectedness of actions and consequences (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), reinforcing the idea that philanthropy is not simply about giving – it is about co-creating ethical communities. By leveraging strategic media outreach and embedding Buddhist ethical principles into its messaging, the NGO successfully built an initiative that was not only financially sustainable but also socially transformative, fostering a global network of engaged, ethically motivated participants.

VIII. POWER OF SHARING – NOT SAVING: A BROADER PERSPECTIVE ON BUDDHIST VALUE EXCHANGE PRINCIPLES

An analysis of social media contributions and interviews with participants reveals a shared perception of the Brontosaurus in the Himalayas initiative as both valuable and trustworthy. Supporters appreciated the humorous and positive approach to advertising, particularly its avoidance of emotional manipulation. Additionally, the campaign's low production costs and efficient messaging were widely acknowledged, reinforcing its credibility and effectiveness. By carefully integrating Buddhist values into the campaign's narrative, the NGO fostered high-quality collaborations between influencers, media professionals, and socially engaged institutions. This interaction created a self-sustaining cycle, in which the media message, the project itself, and public engagement reinforced one another, ensuring continued support.

The rise of digital technologies and social media has drastically lowered the cost of producing personalized advertisements, making them more accessible to a broad audience. However, visual narratives often construct an idealized reality rather than reflecting lived experiences. For instance, a dedicated academic might find himself immersed in the romanticized imagery of volunteering in a remote Himalayan village, drawn in by the idea of authentic engagement in an exotic locale. Social networks have played a crucial role in codifying specific conventions for storytelling, shaping how images and narratives are presented to global audiences.

This phenomenon reflects what scholars have termed “romantic ethic”³³ – the pursuit of authenticity through consumption, where experiences, services, and even ethical engagement are packaged as purchasable opportunities. This dynamic not only fuels consumer culture but also drives individuals to

³³ Campbell (1987): 289.

seek symbolic participation in projects that align with their personal values and aspirations. In this way, modern philanthropy and cause-based engagement become vehicles for self-representation, creating new forms of social belonging.

8.1. Buddhist perspectives on identity and representation

The Buddhist understanding of “being” provides a meaningful contrast to Western consumerist approaches to identity construction. Unlike monotheistic traditions, which often emphasize absolute truth and moral authority, Buddhism offers a flexible framework of ethical and philosophical guidelines for shaping one’s life³⁴. Rejecting the misconception of Buddhism as an ascetic withdrawal from society, this perspective highlights its active role in structuring meaningful existence within contemporary social contexts.

This approach aligns with Stuart Hall’s theory of representation, which argues that identity is not fixed but is negotiated through social, cultural, and linguistic structures. Hall distinguishes between three modes of representation – reflexive, intentional, and constructivist – which together explain how individuals engage with and interpret complex ideas³⁵. Case studies on engaged Buddhism provide valuable insights into how Buddhists shape their identities through a combination of inherited traditions and contemporary cultural influences, illustrating a dynamic process of adaptation and self-construction within modern society.

8.2. The role of Buddhist value exchange in contemporary philanthropy

A striking example of Buddhist ethical engagement in philanthropy can be found in a widely circulated text from the *Brontosaurus in the Himalayas* website. Accompanied by an image of two hands – one in a business suit drawing cogwheels, the other belonging to a Tibetan Buddhist monk—the text articulates a vision of mutual exchange rather than unilateral aid. Despite lacking explicit religious terminology, the message resonated deeply with both individual supporters and institutions, becoming a widely shared declaration of alignment with the NGO’s principles:

We exchange energy and do not save. We believe that the Czechs have more financial and technical knowledge that can improve the lives of the people of Little Tibet. They have inspirational cultural customs, Buddhist teachings, medicine, and close contact with nature, which can be an important alternative for the Czechs. *Brontosaurus in the Himalayas* allows for a mutual exchange of benefits. We believe that they can secure a better future on their own and do not need our salvation.

This statement challenges the traditional paradigm of charitable aid, which often assumes a one-way transfer of resources from the Global North to the Global South. Instead, it positions philanthropy as a reciprocal relationship, where knowledge, cultural practices, and ethical values flow in both directions, fostering a sense of equality and respect rather than dependency.

³⁴ Cirklová (2020):134.

³⁵ Hall (1997): 59.

8.3. Buddhist capital and the principle of endless reciprocity

Borup³⁶ explores the Buddhist approach to value exchange, emphasizing its difference from Western economic models. He describes the foundational principles of Buddhist value transactions as comprising: (1) The cosmological principle of *karmab* – ensuring that ethical actions have ongoing consequences. (2) The institutionalized ritual of *dāna* (generosity) – a structured form of giving that reinforces social bonds. (3) The accumulation of *punya* (merit) – which extends beyond material wealth into spiritual and symbolic capital.

Unlike Western models of economic exchange, which often operate on zero-sum principles, Buddhist value exchanges are fundamentally open-ended and expansive—allowing for continuous accumulation, redistribution, and renewal of ethical and spiritual wealth³⁷. This system encourages ongoing engagement rather than finite transactions, reinforcing the long-term sustainability of social projects.

By embracing a global framework of reciprocity and symbolic capital, philanthropic initiatives based on Buddhist ethics create a powerful dynamic for continued engagement and problem-solving. Unlike societies governed by rigid theological or economic constraints, this model fosters a self-sustaining cycle of ethical action, enriching both donors and recipients alike.

At its core, the Brontosaurus in the Himalayas project embodies this search for harmony, aiming to establish a sustainable ecosystem of value exchange, where individuals and institutions collaborate not out of obligation but out of shared ethical commitment. The widely cited text from the NGO's website not only articulates this ideal but also offers a pointed critique of traditional aid models – challenging both missionary-style charity work and neoliberal globalization.

8.4. Future directions: Trans-humanism and spiritual capital

A promising area for further research is the intersection of trans-humanism and Buddhist spiritual capital. Ferrando³⁸ explores trans-humanism's core vision of human enhancement through science and technology, positioning it as a secular form of salvation. This raises compelling questions about how Buddhist principles of ethical accumulation interact with emerging technological paradigms. Could the merit-based accumulation of *punya* serve as a conceptual bridge to trans-humanist ideals? How might Western Buddhists or Buddhist sympathizers integrate digital and biotechnological advancements into their ethical frameworks?

Such inquiries open up new possibilities for understanding how Buddhist ethics, symbolic capital, and contemporary scientific thought can intersect to create new models of ethical engagement – ones that move beyond traditional divisions between religion, economics, and technology.

³⁶ Borup (2019): 49-58.

³⁷ Borup (2019): 60 - 9.

³⁸ Ferrando (2013): 26-32.

IX. CONCLUSIONS

In the case presented here, Buddhism serves as a form of a certain stabilization network, a structure that offers clear and comprehensively formulated fixed orientation points and trust providers. At the same time, Buddhism does not contradict what is known, and customary for the contributors – i.e. the need for quality education and the problems of its solution, science as an important part of the transformation processes around us. It positively reflects the current secular diverse concept of self, one's own identity and belonging in more complex terms such as sustainability, resilience and the importance of local cultural heritage and community that are not only Western-oriented but also open to other than singular identity with empathy and understanding³⁹.

The case of Brontosauři v Himalájích exemplifies how contemporary philanthropy can move beyond traditional donor-recipient dynamics to establish relationships rooted in mutual exchange and shared responsibility. By integrating Buddhist ethics of interconnectedness, compassion, and reciprocity the organization fosters an alternative fundraising model that prioritizes collaboration over unilateral aid. The success of the “Czech Science to Little Tibet” initiative demonstrates the effectiveness of such an approach, illustrating how digital fundraising and ethical marketing can harness storytelling to engage supporters in meaningful ways.

Rather than positioning itself as a savior, the NGO embraces a philosophy of sharing –acknowledging that both Czech and Tibetan communities have valuable knowledge, traditions, and resources to contribute. This reciprocal engagement redefines the role of charity in a globalized world, shifting from transactional giving to participatory involvement. Digital storytelling has played a critical role in fostering this engagement, demonstrating that fundraising success hinges not merely on financial contributions but on cultivating a shared sense of purpose and ethical commitment.

By aligning its practices with both Buddhist principles and contemporary marketing strategies, Brontosauři v Himalájích has positioned itself as a model for sustainable and ethical philanthropy. Its approach highlights the potential for Buddhist ethics to inspire innovative fundraising techniques that resonate with secular audiences, bridging cultural and philosophical divides. The organization's ongoing efforts suggest a broader applicability of Buddhist-inspired reciprocity in shaping philanthropic initiatives that prioritize long-term engagement and collective growth over short-term relief.

Moving forward, further exploration of Buddhist ethical principles in digital fundraising and transnational solidarity could provide valuable insights for the non-profit sector. The intersection of trans-humanism, symbolic capital, and Buddhist ethics also presents promising avenues for future research, particularly in understanding how technological advancements

³⁹ Cirklová (2020): 222-240.

might influence contemporary models of ethical engagement. Ultimately, the *Brontosau v Himalájích* case demonstrates that philanthropy, when approached as a dynamic exchange rather than mere financial aid, can cultivate a deeper, more sustainable impact on global development.

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THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs): WHAT THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY CAN DO

Dr. Henry Dang^{*}

Abstract:

The paper explores the significant role the Buddhist community can play in advancing the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The paper highlights the deep alignment between Buddhist teachings and SDG principles, emphasizing peace, quality education, environmental care, and ethical economic development. A major contribution of the paper is its practical proposals, including establishing a global Buddhist center for peace education, organizing Earth Care Day campaigns, developing Buddhist-based business ethics networks, and appointing Buddhist representatives to national SDG committees. The author underscores that Buddhist values—embodied in compassion, mindfulness, and the Noble Eightfold Path - are not only timeless but urgently relevant in addressing today's global challenges. The success of the SDGs, the paper argues, hinges not only on governmental actions but also on the unified and committed engagement of religious communities. With only five years left to 2030, the Buddhist community is called upon to step forward as a powerful force for sustainable peace, well-being, and inclusive development across the globe.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Buddhist values and education, peacebuilding and interfaith cooperation, dhamma-based leadership, environmental ethics in Buddhism.*

I. INTRODUCTION

We are now living in a world of immense challenges to sustainable development and well-being. Billions of world citizens continue to live in poverty, and they are denied a life of dignity. There are rising inequalities

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between and among countries. Unemployment is a major concern. Global health threats, more frequent and intense natural disasters, conflicts, and violence in families, societies, and nations occur around the world. Moreover, we are facing a time characterized by the depletion of natural resources and the effects of adverse impacts of environmental degradation, including desertification, drought, land degradation, freshwater scarcity, and loss of biodiversity.

Truthfully speaking, we, as human beings, are the center of the problem as well as the solution to these global challenges. Intelligent people have created innovations that have bolstered the lives of mankind, such as modern medicine, computers, transportation, communication devices, clean energy, and advanced science and technology. On the other hand, people with selfish and wicked minds have troubled the world with economic crises, environment pollution, climate change, and inequalities, not to mention many more severe problems, such as violence, mass killings, terrorism, and regional conflicts that lead to wars. This is a world of paradox. The world's community is in urgent need of new, creative, and powerful solutions to these challenges for the benefit of all.

In response to the above adverse situation, on September 2015, at a historic UN General Assembly, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (hereunder referred to as the 17 SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were adopted by 193 United Nations member states and came into force on 1 January 2016.

This presentation briefly discusses the meaning of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and what the Buddhist Community can contribute at both local and international levels to ensuring the successful implementation of these sustainable development goals.

II. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

2.1. What are the goals?

The 17 SDGs to transform our world are:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages.

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6: Ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth,

full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation.

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal 14: Conserve and Sustainably Use Oceans.

Goal 15: Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.



The Goals aim to mobilize global efforts to put an end to all forms of poverty, tackle climate change, and fight inequalities while ensuring that no one is left behind. Unanimously adopted by the United Nations' 193 member states (**1**), the 17 SDGs apply to all countries and recognize that social, economic, and environmental factors, as well as peace, justice, and effective institutions, are interconnected and vital for sustainable development.

2.2. How do they work?

The 17 SDGs and 169 targets are monitored and reviewed using a set

of global indicators. While all countries have the primary responsibility to implement, review, and follow up, everyone also has a responsibility to contribute to the success of the Goals for the benefit of all living beings.

2.3. Progress and report

The SDGs Report 2024 is the only UN official report that monitors global progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It finds that only 17% of the SDG targets are on track, nearly half showing minimal or moderate progress, and over one-third has stalled or even regressed. The convergence of multiple global crises has severely hindered progress (2)

With only 5 years remaining until 2030, all countries are mobilizing their efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda to bring tremendous benefits to the world's community. This Agenda is a comprehensive plan of collective action regarded as an incredible turning point for every country, stakeholder, and human being, acting in collaborative partnership, to make this earth a much more livable place where humanity can enjoy sustainable development, prosperity and peace with dignity and tolerance, with no one left behind.

For further information, please go to the United Nations Website: www.un/sustainabledevelopment

III. WHAT THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY CAN DO

The 17 SDGs seem not to attract much attention of the faith communities, including Buddhism.

It should be noted that a thorough understanding of the SDGs and Buddhist values reveals that the SDGs' philosophy can be found within the Buddha's teachings, delivered more than 25 centuries ago. It is, therefore, believed that they are of close relevance and significance. The key tenets of Buddhist values are profoundly explained in the Five Precepts, Eight-fold Right Path, Dhammapada Sutra, Lotus Sutra, Four Bases of Bonding (Generosity, Endearing Speech, Beneficial Action, Impartiality) in Sangha Sutra, Ten Royal Virtues (*Dasa-rajadhamma*), Four Sublime Mental States (Four *Brahma viharas*), Seven Rules (*Satta Apari Haniya Dhamma*), Three Characteristics of Life (Impermanence, Unsatisfactoriness, Non-self) and Six Harmony Rules. These teachings can be appropriately applied to several areas of the 17 SDGs, such as Peace (SDG 16), Quality Education (SDG 4), Climate Change (SDG 13), Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3)

For example, Buddhism is well known as a religion of Peace as well as a way of meaningful life in peace and compassion. Such Buddhist values have been practiced over the past 25 centuries and are still being valid and observed by this contemporary generation. Adequate peace and compassion practice based on the Buddha Dhamma would certainly enrich and further develop SDG 16 to a higher standard.

Buddhists are therefore expected to play a greater role in addressing and implementing the 17 SDGs, based on adequate Buddhist strategies and action plans, in the next 5 years.

As part of the world community, the Buddhist communities in every country have a responsibility to take part in and significantly contribute to the successful implementation of these SDGs for the benefit of humanity.

What can the Buddhist community do?

Due to time constraints, I wish to briefly recommend some Buddhist SDG programs and initiatives for your consideration.

3.1. Peace and quality education programs (SDG 16 and SDG 4)

3.1.1. World Peace conferences and activities

Over the past many years, interfaith peace conferences /forums and other activities have been convened locally and globally by many Buddhist organizations, in particular the well-known ones such as the World Conference of Religion for Peace, the World Fellowship of Buddhists, Fo Guang Shan, Tzu Chi Foundation, the UNDV, Dhammakaya Foundation. Such Buddhist activities would be absolutely of greater significance and strength in collaboration with the United Nations, relevant countries, and other Buddhist organizations.

On the **International Day of Peace 21 December each year**, the Buddhist communities in every member country can, in cooperation with the United Nations Regional Centre and other religions, organize a **Peace action Conference** to observe the International Day of Peace, which was first endorsed and declared in 1981 by the United Nations Assembly as a shared date to build a culture of peace and promote action for peace (3)

In Australia, the World Inner Peace Australia 2018 conference, to which I had the great pleasure to contribute as Chairman of the Organizing Committee, was held on 22 September 2018 at the Sydney Convention Centre. Australian community and religious leaders and the United Nations representatives came together to celebrate the International Day of Peace, promoting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) and introducing the Inner Peace Education and Practice.

It is also recommended that annually, on the auspicious UNDV celebrations, the Buddhist leaders and participants conduct a mass prayer and/or walk for World Peace along with the UNDV conference.

IV. PEACE EDUCATION

Peace education has been conducted by many Buddhist temples and organizations based on their traditions and resources. Such efforts and activities are much appreciated but would have been more powerful and effective if globally and systematically coordinated. Considering the urgent need for World Peace and responsibility for the United Nations SDGs, it is recommended that.

4.1. The Buddhist Communities work closely with the relevant government to provide Peace and Mindfulness education for the community and schools concerned. These collective efforts aim at eliminating domestic violence and encouraging reasonable conflict resolutions in peace

4.2. For Buddhist unity and solidarity purposes, Buddhist organizations join hands to

i. establish an international Buddhist coordinating institution, i.e., “International Buddhist Centre.

ii. for Sustainable Peace Education” to formulate, develop, and support the healthy development.

iii. and implementation of a comprehensive Peace and Mindfulness education program based on the

iv. Buddha’s teachings.

V. QUALITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING BASED ON THE BUDDHA DHAMMA

This world really needs a new creative and powerful method to uphold the morality (sila) downturn in this society. This world really needs a proper and balanced education that promotes not only academic excellence but also focuses on selfless and compassionate character building.

Such a Buddhist quality education provided at kindergarten, primary, and secondary schools is necessary to help the young generation understand and practice the Buddhist values to live a meaningful and healthy life in compassion, wisdom, and sustainable development.

Australia is a Christian-dominated country. Occupying about 2.4% of the Australian population -27,204,809 people, according to the 2024 Census (4)- the Buddhist community is highly commended by both the government and other political parties. Every year since 2006, the Prime Ministers and Opposition leaders have sent Vesak messages to the Australian Buddhist community as well as to the UNDV international celebrations in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. The first Buddhist school - Daylesford Dhamma School - was founded in 2009 in Daylesford, Victoria, where its population is almost all of Christian faith. It is, however, a significant fact that students and parents are very happy with the quality of education which this school has provided. The following are Pal Buddhist school in Canley Vale, New South Wales; Hoa Nghiem Buddhist school in Springvale, Victoria ... It is worth noting that Nan Tien Institute is Australia’s first government-approved Buddhist University, while there are many Buddhist studies courses and programs at several Australian universities. The Australian government is considering a Peace and Mindfulness education program recommended by BuddhaCare and the other faith communities.

VI. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE (SDG 13)

6.1. Earth care campaign

The Buddhist community can cooperate with the local and national authorities to run a well-planned campaign to make the people more aware of everyone’s responsibility for environmental protection and climate change.

6.2. Earth care day

With the approval of the government concerned, Earth Care Day can be carried out twice a year. On this day, everyone observes the following:

- . Refrain from littering
- . Clean own house and streets
- . Refrain from using motor vehicles and machines if not necessary. Use public transport instead
- . Save energy and water
- . Refrain from killing and consuming alcohol
- . Have vegetarian meals (optional)
- . Behave appropriately with smiling
- . Practice loving kindness and compassion when and where applicable.

VII. DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH (SDG 8)

7.1. Dhamma-based business development

Many businesspeople, when talking about Buddhism and business and politics, tend to assume that the Buddha Dhamma (Buddha's teachings) has little or no role to play in this field. Doing business is nothing relevant and even contrary to the Buddha Dhamma. Some managers and leaders may want to distance themselves from the Buddha Dharma. Some others go as far as to regard Buddhism as a hindrance to business and economic development. In fact, this is a misunderstanding of the Dhamma as taught by the Buddha.

The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutra* tells us what the Buddha talked about sustainable business when he inspired the five trade men through his conduct, personality and teaching. As a result, they became the first disciples of the Buddha, who continued to run their business based on the Buddha Dhamma. Business should be understood in a positive, meaningful way that can bring about well-being, inspiration, benefits, and positive changes in peace and happiness. In this context, Buddha is regarded as a great sustainable business teacher. Following his path, many well-known Buddhist organizations such as Fo Guang Shan, Rissho Kosei Kai, Tzu Chi International, Dhammakaya Foundation, World Fellowship of Buddhists, just to name a few, have demonstrated their great achievements in sustainable business development led by their highly esteemed leaders who base their leadership and management on the Buddha Dhamma.

7.2. Dhamma-based leadership and management

Considering current economic, social, and political crises, challenges, and conflicts potentially igniting more extended wars, the world needs more than ever before the right leadership and management that can bring about genuine, mutual benefits, well-being, and happiness in sustainable peace for humanity. Over the past many decades, thoughts of leadership and management have changed significantly shifting from egocentricity to altruism; from profit focus to well-being focus; from individual-family possession to owner- employee

share; from concealment and dishonesty to transparency and integrity; from owner-centered to employee and client-focused management and human-centered leadership, etc. If these theories combine with the key tenets of Buddhist values as stated in Dhammapada Sutra, Lotus Sutra, Four Bases of Bonding (Generosity, Endearing Speech, Beneficial Action, Impartiality), Sangha Sutra, Ten Royal Virtues (Dasa-raja-dhamma), Four Sublime Mental States (Four Brahma viharas), Seven Rules (Satta Apari Haniya Dhamma), Three Characteristics of Life, just to name a few (5), the world community would be able to formulate and develop an advanced humanistic philosophy and model of leadership and management to make this world a much happier place of sustainable development. I am delighted to have learned that some Buddhist researchers and leaders have been raising their voices on this matter. May I request you to give more thought of and take it into your serious consideration.

7.3. Buddhist business mutual assistance network

Business Buddhists have been talking about this network over the past many years at various Buddhist business conferences in Thailand, Korea, Japan, Singapore, and the USA. But no adequate action plan has been developed. In the wake of the ongoing unstable and challenging business landscape, would it be the right time for the Buddhist business community to join hands in establishing a Buddhist Business Mutual Assistance Network? Would it be feasible and necessary to have a special conference on this subject – Buddhist Business Mutual Assistance Network as soon as possible?

VIII. PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS (SDG 17)

Buddhist Committee on United Nations SDGs

In each United Nations member country, the Buddhist communities and businesses join and actively contribute to the National Government Committee for the UN SDGs. At the international level, the world Buddhist community should have Buddhist representatives working on the SDGs at the UN headquarters in New York.

May I briefly conclude this presentation with the belief that our Buddhist unity and solidarity together with a strong commitment to working for peace, well-being, and a better future of all sentient beings are key contributing factors to success. May I trust that the fruitful outcome lies in the hands of the Sangha, Buddhist leaders, and the Buddhist practitioners like you, who have kindly spared your precious time and energy to join this knowledgeable and meaningful conference.

Thanks for your kind attention.

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM IN INDIA & WORLD: AN AMBEDKARITE BUDDHIST RESPONSE

Dr. Kirtiraj D C*

Abstract:

The constitution of India was thought to be a social document to bring about the silent social, economic, and Cultural Revolution in one of the most complex and iniquitous societies that we had at the time of independence. The constitution laid down the agenda, framework, and blueprint of our future nation based on human dignity, equality, liberty, and social and economic justice for all its citizens more particularly for socially and historically downtrodden, oppressed, and excluded people. There is no doubt that India has made spectacular progress in many areas, including space and technology. However, it has a dark side, too. Another part of India's growth story is not much talked about. This model of development has pushed more poor people into the vicious cycle of poverty after 1990, and growth has widened the disparity further between rich and poor in India. It is high time to take an introspective view of India's development paradigm from a Buddhist perspective.

The paper is an attempt to examine to what extent we have lived up to the commitment to human dignity and development and where do we stand after 75 years of our democratic experiment and to what extent we have been able to tackle the problem of Sustainable Human Development, inequality and inclusive growth how we can address and solve this dilemma by applying Buddhist methods.

Keywords: *Human Development, Indian constitution, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Neo-Buddhism, Democracy, Inequality and Ambedkarites Buddhist.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

India is a caste-ridden, stratified society based on graded inequality as per the Hindu Dharmas Varnashram system. People were divided and redivided into different caste-class based on their birth. It was impossible to create the notion of fellow feeling and a sense of unity. Transforming this caste-based society into an egalitarian one was a herculean task at the hands of the makers of the Indian constitution. In 1950, we embarked on creating a new India by planting seeds of social revolution in the constitution itself. The American celebrated constitutional historian Granville Austin, who paved the way for Indians to understand the meaning of their constitution and authored two groundbreaking books on the Indian Constitution, remarked that the 'Indian Constitution is first and foremost a social document'. The makers of our constitution were well aware of glaring social and economic inequalities that existed in Indian Society. They understood the need to provide a form of justice that would fulfill the expectations of the freedom movement. The commitment to social economic change and human development is reflected in part III of the constitution by way of the fundamental rights and part IV as directive principles of state policies. Democratic values like social Justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity are closely rooted in Buddhism. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, an architect of the Indian Constitution, made this clear in his speech broadcast on All India Radio on 3rd October 1954: "My social philosophy is enshrined in three words-liberty, equality, and fraternity. Let no one, however, assume that I have borrowed this from a French revolution. I have not. I have borrowed this from my master, the Buddha."¹

When we look at the history of India, republican, democratic values and democratic institutions are not new to India. Its roots can be traced back to the early Buddhist era. In one of the most popularly recited Sutta called 'Mahaparinibban Sutta', it is on record that Mallas, tribal people in the time of the Buddha (c. 6th – 4th century BCE), settled in the northern parts of modern Bihar state, India. Their two most important towns were Kushinagara (Kusinara) and Pava (located east of modern Gorakhpur). The Mallas had a republican form of government with an assembly. When the message of Buddha's passing away was sent to Mallas, the assembly session was in progress and therefore, the funeral ceremony of the Buddha was reported to be delayed at the request of the Mallas. The references to the use of secret ballots, and ballot papers (Salapatraks grahukas) are not uncommon in Buddhist literature, especially in deciding the *saṅgha*.²

II. POLITICAL STRUCTURE IN ANCIENT INDIA

Democracy is not new to India. Liberty, equality, and fraternity are the message Buddha delivered 2500 years before the French Revolution. The slogan Bahujan Hitay Bahujan Sukhay indicates the creation of a welfare state. There were thirteen Mahajanpadas (States) in Buddhist India. Most of the

¹ Ambedkar, B. R. (2003): 503.

² Ambedkar, B. R. (2003): 424.

states were monarchies, but some were republics known as *Ganas* or *Saṅgha*s. These *Gana-saṅgha*s were oligarchies where the king was elected and ruled with the help of a council. Vajji was an important Mahajanapada with a *Saṅgha* form of government. The founders of Jainism and Buddhism came from republican states. Each Mahajanapada had a capital city. Most of them had forts built around them for protection from other kings. Regular armies were maintained by these new kings or Rajas. They also collected taxes from the people. Usually, the tax on crops was 1/6th of the produce. This was known as *Bhaga* or share. Even craftsmen, herders, hunters, and traders were taxed.³ We lost this entire past heritage and its valuable democratic institutions Dr. B. R. Ambedkar calls upon the historians of the modern time to tackle this question as to why these parliamentary institutions disappeared from our land.⁴

We lost Democracy in Brahmanic India; the contemporary name is Hindu India. Brahmanism/ Hinduism does not teach liberty, equality, and fraternity, instead, it teaches caste and varnas. In such a divisive system there cannot be any place for the sense of brotherhood that is fraternity. The sense of fraternity is a founding stone for any nation to be recognized as a strong nation. We lost our independence several times in history and became slaves of foreign rulers because of the divisive nature of our society, which is religiously sanctioned and considered sacred by the Dharmashastras. Now, we have reached a stage where even uttering a single word against such historical wrongs can cost one his/her life or can lead one to jail.

III. DEMOCRACY RE-ENTERED INDIAN SOIL

Democracy came back to India with the advent of British rule in India. British rule was a great boon to India. Without the contact of Indo-European civilization with its basic concepts of equality, liberty, and fraternity, Indian society would never have been ashamed of the tyranny of their social customs, which they considered as their culture. The live contact between the two civilizations forced India to revisit its social and cultural values. British have prepared the soil of India to take the roots of democracy.⁵

3.1. Preconditions for Democracy to succeed

An architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a true democrat and a great revolutionary, has pondered over the issue of what makes democracy succeed in any country. He has laid down the following seven conditions to make democratic system and democracy function-able in any society.

(i) There must not be inequalities in society - It means that there should not be any oppressed class or no depressed class, no privileged class and no underprivileged class existing in a society. If such a class exists, it will be a hindrance to the working of a democracy.

³ BYJU's, Ancient History Notes for UPSC, (2025).

⁴ Ambedkar, B. R. (2003), vol. 17, III, 424.

⁵ Ambedkar, B. R. (2003), vol. 17, III, 45.

(ii) Existence of a strong opposition - There must be people in the parliament immediately to challenge the government. The survival of democracy rests on the shoulders of a strong opposition party in the parliament. If the opponent's leaders are looked down upon as enemies by the ruling party, it means we are not a democratic nation. The presence of opposition is a condition precedent for democracy.

(iii) Equality before law and equality of treatment in administration - There should be a rule of law and not rule by law.

(iv) Observance of constitutional morality - It was something "Indians" lacked. He thought that in India, democracy is "top dressing on Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic." He critically remarked in the Constituent Assembly that Indians are yet to learn constitutional morality. For a population that is yet to learn constitutional morality, it is possible to run the administration against the "spirit of the Constitution" without changing the form of the Constitution in a society that lacks diffusion of constitutional morality.⁶ Dr. Ambedkar further remarked that even the worst constitution can bring the best out of it if the custodian and implementer are moral to the spirit of the constitution.

(v) There should not be tyranny of majority over minority - otherwise people (minority) will develop a revolutionary spirit and that will be very undemocratic.

(vi) Functioning of moral order of the society - According to Laski, moral order is always taken for granted in democracy. If there is no moral order, democracy will go to pieces, as it is going on now in our society.

(vii) Democracy requires a public conscience - Public conscience means a conscience that becomes agitated at every wrong no matter who is suffering.⁷

3.2. Objectives

(1) To study, understand, and investigate the human development paradigm in India with respect to the issues of income disparities, equity, and inclusivity.

(2) To evaluate the constitutional working and its role in sustainable human development in India.

(3) To examine the need and potential of the Buddhist theory of conflict resolution to address the problem of socioeconomic inequalities, disparities, and social justice in India and other parts of the world.

3.3. Methodology

It is an analytical study based on primary data in the form of *Pāli* canonical literature and the secondary data made available in the public domain by the union and state governments of India. The studies conducted by individual scholars and international agencies on the economic and human development

⁶ Nikhil Erinjingat (2023), p. 65.

⁷ Ambedkar B. R. Cited by Sontakke Y. D., (2004): 129 - 131.

scenario in India during the past few years will also be referred to as secondary sources of data. The qualitative and empirical data thus collected is scrutinized, and some selected statistics about India specifically have been separated and presented in a tabular form, and the same is analyzed keeping in view the scope and objectivity of this study. The researcher has also used qualitative data from different books and articles, both online and in hard copy format, related to Buddhist response to the problem of growing inequalities, unrest, hatred, and disharmony.

The study is divided into two parts: The first part outlines the theoretical introductory background of this study followed by a discussion on the secondary empirical data presented in a tabular form. The second part of the study discusses the Ambedkarite Buddhist response to the problems of inequality, disparities, and sustainable human development from the lens of Ambedkarite Buddhists and tries to indicate a way out of unrest, disharmony, and disunity from a crisis-driven world with the help of Buddhist theory of conflict resolution.⁸

3.4. Result and discussion

Against this backdrop, it will be interesting to see what we have achieved during the last 75 years of independence and the functioning of our constitution. There can be no second opinion that we have marched a long way starting from a 3.5 percent Hindu growth rate to almost a double growth rate during the last two decades. We are also the second fastest-growing economy in the world and are projected to become third third-biggest economy by 2027 overtaking Japan and Germany. However, when we look at the figures and numbers empirically the reality is something different. For example, looking at the per capita income of India with that of the other developed countries it seems that we are far behind in economic terms. The IMF data speak for itself.

Table 1. Per capita income India and the world

Country	Per capita Income (USD)
USA, Canada, Japan, Australia, and other West European Countries	25,000 USD +
China and Russia	10,000 -25,000
India and Bangladesh	2,500 -10,000
Pakistan and Afghanistan	No Data Available

Source: IMF, World Economic Outlook, (October, 2024).⁹

⁸ It primarily focuses on root causes of conflict like desire, greed anger and cultivating inner peace.

⁹World Economic outlook, (2024). <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO>.

In 1961, the top 10% wealth share was 45%. It declined by 1 percentage point between 1961 and 1971, the only decade when a decline was observed. Between 1961 and 1981, the top 10% shares did not change much. The same applies to the top 1% and top 0.1% shares as well. This is perhaps not very surprising given that this was the era when socialist policies were at their peak and we see that the wealth concentration process was more-or-less brought to a stand-still. Post-1981, with the shift away from socialist policies towards market-based reforms, we find the top 10% wealth shares consistently rose over the next three decades reaching 63% in 2012. There has been greater financialization of wealth as evidenced by a growing stock market (as a % of GDP), gains from which are bound to be restricted to a few. The SENSEX (S&P Bombay Stock Exchange Sensitive Index), a free-float market-weighted stock market index of 30 companies listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange, grew by 7300% between 1990 and 2023.¹⁰

Broadly speaking, the top 10% shares followed largely similar trends as the top 1% shares. Between 1950-1980, the top 10% of income shares declined from nearly 40% at the turn of independence to just about 30% by 1982. In the wake of the liberalization reforms of 1991, the top 10% of shares started galloping and have reached astonishingly high levels by 2022, closing in on 60%. In other words, in the four decades between 1982 and 2022, the top 10% national income share has almost doubled.¹¹

Table 2. Income Inequality in India, 2022 - 23

Income Group	Income share (%)
Top 10%	57.7
Top 1 %	22.6
Middle 40 %	27.3
Bottom 50 %	15.0

*Source: Estimates based on national income accounts aggregates, tax tabulations and surveys on income and consumption.*¹²

The table above shows the grim reality of income disparity in India. Almost 60 percent of the income goes into the hands of the top 10 percent of the population. When we look at the social composition of those who are extremely well off and richest, they belong to the upper caste-class of Indian society, who have also been the ruling class for hundreds of years. Whereas the

¹⁰ Nitin Kumar Bharati, Lucas Chancel and others (2024). <http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/files/Bhartietal2024.pdf>.

¹¹ Nitin Kumar Bharati, Lucas Chancel and others (2024). <http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/files/Bhartietal2024.pdf>.

¹² Nitin Kumar Bharati, Lucas Chancel and others (2024). <http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/files/Bhartietal2024.pdf>.

bottom 50 percent of people who earn only 15 percent of income are from the lowest rungs of society and are traditionally excluded -socially, economically, and culturally from the mainstream of Hindu Society.

Table 3. Wealth Inequality in India, 2022 - 23

Wealth Group	Wealth Share (%)
Top 10%	65.0
Top 1 %	40.1
Middle 40 %	28.6
Bottom 50 %	6.4

Table 4. Wealth Group in India, bottom 50%

Year	Wealth Share (%)
1960 - 61	25.5
2015 - 16	24.1
2020 - 21(Post Covid)	15.8
2022 - 23	22.8

Source: Estimate combines National Wealth Aggregates, wealth Surveys, and Forbes Billionaire Rankings.¹³

Table 5. Wealth Group in India, lowest 10%

Year	Wealth Share (%)
1960 - 62	3.3
2015 - 16	NA
2020 - 21(Post Covid)	1.1
2022 - 23	2.4

Source: National Council of Applied Economic Research and Peoples Research on India's Consumer Economy Reported by Divya Marathi, dated 12/01/2025.¹⁴

When we look at the Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5 the distribution of wealth in India amongst the top ten percent and lowest ten percent is extremely unevenly divided and there is no improvement instead it has deteriorated in 2022 - 23 in compared to 1960-62.

A study conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research and Peoples Research on India's Consumer Economy (Reported by Divya

¹³ Anmol Somanchi (2024): 23.

¹⁴ Reported by Marathi Daily News Paper 'Divya Marathi' on 12/01/2025.

Marathi, dated 12/01/2025) also threw light on our economic inequality index it shows that inequality has not decreased instead it has increased in 2023-24 in compared to 1951.

Table 6. Economic Inequality Index in India (1951-24)

Year	Economic Inequality Index *
1951	0.371
2023 - 24	0.41

**Calculated according to the Gini Index on a scale of 0 to 1. 1= complete Economic Inequality, 0 = No Economic inequality¹⁵*

3.5. Global Hunger Index and India

India’s global hunger index is at an extremely poor rank of 103 among 119 countries indicating a serious hunger crisis. There is a marginal improvement in 2024, otherwise did not change much during the last decade. It is behind Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. It was 55 in the year 2014 but shows a steep increase in ranking during the ‘Amrut Kal.’ Hunger is still considered alarming in 6 countries and serious in 36 countries according to the latest GHI report.

Table 7. India Ranking in Global Hunger Index

Year	Rank
2014	55
2018	103
2023	111
2024	105

Source: Compile from Concern Worldwide Welthungerhilfe Reports.¹⁶

3.6. Human Development Index and India

The HDI was first published in 1990 to be a more comprehensive measure of human development than purely economic measures such as gross domestic product. The index incorporates three dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, knowledge, and decent living standards. Various indicators are used to quantify how countries perform on each dimension. The indicators used in the 2022 report were life expectancy at birth; expected years of schooling for children; mean years of schooling for adults; and gross national income per capita. The indicators are used to create a health index, an education index, and an income index, each with a value between 0 and 1. The geometric mean of the three indices - that is, the cube root of the product of the indices - is the human development index. A value above 0.800 is classified

¹⁵ Calculated according to Gini Index in the scale 0 to 1. 1= Complete economic Inequality, 0= No economic inequality.

¹⁶ Compile from concern Worldwide Welthungerhilfe Reports.

as very high, between 0.700 and 0.799 as high, 0.550 to 0.699 as medium, and below 0.550 as low.

Countries ranked from 1 to 69 in 2022 are designated “very high” HDI; those ranked from 70 to 118 are designated “high” HDI; those ranked from 119 to 159 are denoted “medium” HDI; and those ranked from 160 to 193 are designated “low” HDI (The Human Development Report includes data for all 193 member states of the United Nations as well as Hong Kong SAR and the State of Palestine. However, the Human Development Index is not calculated for two UN states).¹⁷

The table below shows the performance of India in terms of its HDI regularly published by the UN agencies every year. It gives the country wise ranking about their human development status. For the last decade, there has been no major change rather it has either remained stagnant or has decreased further since the 1990s. This is even though the Indian economy is the second fastest-growing economy in the world after China. It poses a serious question about our development scenario and where we are heading.

Table 8. Human Development Index Rankings India and World

Country	HDI Rank	HDI Value	Category
USA	20	0.927	Very High
China	75	0.788	High
Iran	78	0.780	High
Sri Lanka	78	0.780	High
Vietnam	107	0.726	High
South Africa	110	0.717	High
Bhutan	125	0.681	Medium
Bangladesh	129	0.670	Medium
Nicaragua	130	0.669	Medium
India	134	0.644	Medium
Pakistan	164	0.540	Low

Source: compiled from United Nations, Data For 2022, published in 2024.

(India had a score of 0.429 in 1990 and was ranked 114th out of 144 countries. The HDI rank of India as per the HDR-2014 was 135 showing a marginal improvement in the year 2022).

¹⁷ UN Report, (2024).

3.7. Spending on social welfare

Spending on social welfare indicates the policy priorities of the government in power. It has been observed that as the economy of the country improves more allocations are made available for the welfare of the people by the developed countries. India has a different story. Its social expenditure has either remained stagnant or deteriorated after the economic reforms initiated by the successive Indian governments after the 1990's. The following table shows the position of India concerning its spending on social welfare % to GDP in compare to the developed countries. Looking at the size of India's huge population its spending on social welfare is highly disappointing and the Indian government has failed miserably to address the problem of poverty and justice to weaker and vulnerable sections of the society.

Table 9. Countries by spending on social welfare (% of GDP)

SR. No.	Country	2010	2016	2019
1	France	30.7	30.7	31.2
2	USA	19.3	19.3	18.7
3	UK	22.8	21.5	20.6
4	Japan	NA	NA	21.9
5	Australia	16.7	19.1	17.8
6	India	10.3	11.6	12.08

Source: compiled from OECD Social Expenditure database.¹⁸

The structure of government expenditure indicates the government's policy priorities among other things. Over the 30 years, the share of social spending in GDP rose by 1 % from 5.8 to 6.8 percent, whereas HD expenditure in GDP hovered around 4 percent. There is no significant upward change on social and HD spending.

Table 10. Social Spending, Government of India

Year	Education	Health	Others	Total
1990 - 91	2.97	0.92	1.88	5.77
2019 - 20	2.88	1.36	2.55	6.79

Source: Compiled from Economic Survey, GOI.¹⁹

International experiences indicate that with rising per capita incomes Human Development spending to GDP increases on an average across countries whereas the trend has been stagnant in India.

¹⁸ Compiled from OECD data base.
¹⁹ Economic Survey, Government of India.

IV. AN AMBEDKARITE BUDDHIST RESPONSE

According to the census of India 2011, the Buddhist population in India is around 8.4 million which is around 0.7% of the total population, which makes Buddhism a minority religion in India. In India, Buddhist folk is divided into two social categories- traditional Buddhist and modern Buddhist or Ambedkarite Buddhist. The majority of traditional Buddhists in India are concentrated in the northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland, West Bengal, and the union territory of Ladakh. Whereas the majority of (Neo) Buddhists and the followers of DR. B. R. Ambedkar live in the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Karnatka. Buddhism disappeared from India after the 12 century AD and was brought back by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in the mid-20th century by converting lacks of untouchables into Buddhism at Nagpur city in October 1956. These converted Buddhists have a long history of social and economic exclusion, isolation, discrimination, and social oppression. All human developmental parameters in India are to be understood in the context of how it has favored or not favored the development of these former untouchable (Neo) Buddhists. Historically they are the most disadvantaged social group in India and therefore Government social spending and welfare policies have adversely affected the developmental prospects of these communities, the majority of them are working in non-farm sectors as casual laborers or landless agricultural laborers in rural India and those who migrated in metropolitan cities and towns for want of jobs and life free from discrimination are living in slum areas along with Muslims as their neighbors.

Table 11. State-wise Distribution of Buddhist/Neo-Buddhist Population in India

Sr No	State	Total Population	Buddhist Population	Buddhist %
1	Sikkim	610,577	167,216	27.39%
2	Arunachal Pradesh	1,383,727	162,815	11.77%
3	Mizoram	1,097,206	93,411	8.51 %
4	Maharashtra	112,374,333	6,531,200	5.81%
5	Tripura	3676917	125,385	3.41%
6	Himachal Pradesh	6864602	78,659	1.15%
7	Jammu and Kashmir	12541302	112,584	0.90%
8	Nagaland	1978502	6,759	0.34%

9	Meghalaya	2,966,889	9,864	0.33%
10	West Bengal	91,276,115	282,898	0.31%
11	Madhaya Pradesh	72,626,809	216,052	0.30%
12	Chhattisgarh	25,545,198	70,467	0.28%
13	Manipur	2,855,794	7,084	0.25%
14	Assam	31,205,576	54,993	0.18%
15	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	343,709	364	0.18%
16	Karnataka	61,095,297	95,710	0.16%
17	Uttarakhand	10,086,292	14,926	0.15%
18	Punjab	27,743,338	33,237	0.12%
19	Delhi	16,787,941	18,449	0.11%
20	Chandigarh	1,055,450	1,160	0.11%
21	Uttar Pradesh	199,812,341	206,285	0.10%
22	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	380,581	338	0.09%
23	Daman and Diu	243,247	217	0.09%
24	Goa	1,458,545	1,095	0.08%
25	Gujarat	60,439,692	30,483	0.05%
26	Andhra Pradesh	84,580,777	36,692	0.04%
27	Puducherry	1,247,953	451	0.04%
28	Orrisa	41,974,218	13,852	0.03%
29	Jharkhand	32,988,134	8,956	0.03%
30	Haryana	25,351,461	7,514	0.03%
31	Bihar	104,099,452	25,453	0.02%
32	Tamil Nadu	72,147,030	11,186	0.02%
33	Rajasthan	68,548,437	12,185	0.02%

34	Lakshdweep	64,473	10	0.02%
35	Kerala	33,406,061	4,752	0.01%

*Source: Census of India, 2011.*²⁰

4.1. Characteristics of Neo-Buddhist community

(i) Despite transacts of cases of upwardly mobile Neo-Buddhists, their masses are still in the city slums and are rural landless laborers.

(ii) There has been a great psychological and cultural change among them after the conversion. The majority of them no longer perform and practice Hindu rituals and festivals.

(iii) The literacy rate and level of education among Neo Buddhists are better than other non-converted scheduled castes.

(iv) Few of them could manage to enter into government services holding high positions due to the policy of positive discrimination. However, a chunk of the Neo-Buddhist population lives in rural areas, and slums in urban areas are economically poor, educationally backward, and socially disorganized.

(v) Neo Buddhists are politically conscious and awakened communities, but due to a lack of strong organization and repeated splits of their political organizations, their ability to be a potential political and social force is diminished.

(vi) Neo-Buddhist has a strong influence of Dr. Ambedkar, Jotirao Phule, Gautama Buddha, and Saint Kabir and they believe in their teachings and philosophy.

(vii) Neo Buddhists, though in small numbers, have created their own social, educational, cultural, political, and religious institutions as an alternative to the existing institutions established by upper-caste Hindus.

(viii) The literacy level of Neo Buddhist women is comparatively better than that of other Hindu women.²¹

4.2. Policy implications for Ambedkarites/ Neo-Buddhist

The Neo Buddhists are formerly untouchables caught in a vicious cycle of poverty for generations. The state's response to their precarious conditions has not been satisfactory. The constitutional space enjoyed by them from 1950 to the 1990s made few of them capable of entering into the power structures at various levels. Despite its little implementation given rise to a microscopic educated and economically sound class who could compete with upper castes people. The protective policies of the government by way of reservations in services and educational institutions played an important role in empowering the (Neo) Buddhists Community during the last five decades. However, the reversal of these policies and closing down or selling off the public sector to private parties,

²⁰ Census of India (2011): 46.

²¹ Kirtiraj D C (2010): 30-31.

withdrawal of food and agricultural subsidies, privatization, and marketization of higher education have serious implications for (Neo) Buddhist communities. The government’s apathy towards the development of these marginalized communities is reflected in cutting down social expenditure and expenditure on social welfare even though there has been a better growth and performance of the Indian Economy after the 1990’s.

Dr. Ambedkar’s main aim was to liberate and emancipate the ‘untouchables of India’ from the yoke of Hindu social slavery, to achieve this object he fought, relentlessly, against the unjust society on all fronts-Social, Religious, Economic, and Political. Ambedkar was clear that the real emancipation of his followers could only be possible under the self-rule and they should have it as their aim ¹⁹. While his contribution to social, political, law, and Religion is well acknowledged by the Indians, his contribution to the Indian Economy has been overlooked and remained underestimated not only by the ordinary people but by the so-called experts in the areas of economics. His economic ideas are more relevant today than ever before since the ruling elites have done away with what they had promised in the Constitution.

Table 12. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s economic ideas vs ideas in action by the governments

Dr Ambedkar’s Policy Pre- scription	Policies in Action by the successive Govt. In Power since 1990’s
State Socialism as an Ideology	Neoliberalism as an Ideology
Strong Interventionist State	Statelessness, Withdrawal of State.
Protective Discrimination & Reservation	Pseudo merit & Favoritism
Democracy (Social and Eco- nomic)	Oligarchy & Chorney Capitalism.
Social Inclusion	Social Exclusion
Principle of Moral Economy	corruptions, bribes, Economic crime, rampant scams
State not to have any official religion.	Making of Hindu nation by the state.
Nationalization of Land for its Redistribution among the landless poor	Land Acquisitions by MNCs and TNCs in the name of SEZ

Water, Housing, and electricity are to be provided by the state at minimum charges to the masses.	Privatization of Water, electricity, and pro-capitalist housing policies against the masses
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Source: The Author, (2011)²²

Dr. Ambedkar did not develop a special economic theory, he developed a general theory of the caste system of which economic dimensions were an integral part.²¹ Dr. Ambedkar examined the economic foundations of the caste system and its characteristics. He was the first thinker who initiated a debate on the Economics of the Caste system. He was probably the first thinker to analyze the economic dimensions of social maladies in India, such as the caste system and untouchability. It is a fact that the Constitution of India has embodied more economic and financial provisions than any other constitution in the world, which can be attributed to the influence of Dr. Ambedkar as an Economist²³ As a socialist he is different than the traditional socialists in India and Europe. While making his point very clear and exposing the fallacy of so-called pseudo-socialists, he said:

Can the socialists ignore the problems arising out of the social order? The socialists of India, following their fellows in Europe, are seeking to apply the economic interpretation of history to the facts of India. They propound that man is an economic creature and his activities and aspirations are bound by economic facts, that property is the only source of power. One may contend that economic motive is not the only motive by which man is actuated. Then Dr. Ambedkar concludes that Religion, social status and property are also sources of power and authority, which can control the liberty of others. If liberty is the ideal, if liberty means the destruction of dominion which man holds over another, then it cannot be insisted upon that economic reform is the only kind of reform worth pursuit. If the sources of power and dominion are social and religious then social reform and religious reforms must be accepted as the necessary sort of reforms.²⁴

4.3. The way out... Buddha's way

According to Buddhist doctrine and teaching the core of conflict resolution lies in understanding the root causes of conflicts and analyzing them with the help of our own experiences. The root of all suffering according to Buddha lies in our desire, ignorance, and greed. Buddhism identifies 'three poisons' namely-greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) as primary drives of conflict. Therefore, resolving social conflict involves cultivating inner peace through the practice of mindfulness, compassion and non-attachment by practicing mediation. Engaging in open and respectful communication to understand

²² Kirtiraj, D. C., (2010): 66.

²³ Jadhav Narendra, (1933): 56.

²⁴ Ambedkar B.B R., (1979), vol. I.

other people's perspectives and initiate a dialogue with the opponent is also an effective way of solving a conflict. We can also apply Buddhist principles like self-reflection, active listening, mediation, and forgiveness to resolve the issues of inequalities, disparities, and social exclusion.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The prospects of the human development of the poor and marginalized sections and communities all over the world are endangered because of the lopsided economic and profit base policies being implemented by the governments of third-world countries including India. This has raised serious challenges for the concept of welfare and pro-poor policies to be designed and made applicable in a country like India and similar other countries like South Asian and African countries. Various studies and reports have proved that the gap between rich and poor is increasing and more and more poor people are pushed back to the level of poverty. The humanism preached by the Buddha and the application of Buddhist philosophy and its principles can save the world and make it peaceful and more beautiful to live in for future generations.

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IMPLEMENTING BUDDHIST COMPASSION: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

Compassion, central to Buddhist philosophy, serves as an ethical and transformative framework for addressing the complex challenges of modern human development. In a world increasingly shaped by interconnected crises, such as climate change, social inequality, and cultural conflicts, the principle of shared responsibility emerges as a key mechanism for sustainable progress. Rooted in the Buddhist notion of *karuṇā* (compassion), this study investigates how Buddhist ethical principles can be practically implemented to create a collaborative, inclusive, and sustainable model of human development. It explores the theoretical underpinnings of compassion as defined in classical Buddhist texts and its alignment with contemporary global development frameworks, particularly the notions of interdependence and collective well-being.

The article delves into the practical implications of implementing Buddhist compassion across various sectors, including healthcare, education, environmental conservation, and policymaking. Drawing on interdisciplinary insights from Buddhist studies, psychology, and ethics, it highlights how cultivating compassion can foster altruistic behaviour, strengthen communal bonds, and inspire collective action. Additionally, this study examines historical and modern case studies, such as the Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka and the Engaged Buddhism initiatives in Southeast Asia, to showcase the effectiveness of compassion-driven practices in fostering holistic development.

This research identifies several barriers to the widespread adoption of Buddhist compassion in societal structures, including the dominance of materialism, cultural resistance, and systemic inequities. However, it also suggests pathways for overcoming these challenges through mindfulness training, ethical leadership, and educational reforms that integrate the principles

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of *karuṇā* into everyday life. By emphasizing the ethical dimensions of shared responsibility, this study proposes a paradigm shift from individualistic approaches to a more interconnected and equitable framework for human progress.

Through a synthesis of theoretical and practical perspectives, this writing underscores the relevance of Buddhist compassion as a transformative tool for addressing the pressing developmental challenges of our time. It advocates for a global shift toward a compassion-centric ethos, where collective well-being and shared responsibility guide policies and actions. The findings contribute to a growing body of research on integrating spiritual and ethical values into modern human development paradigms, offering valuable insights for academics, policymakers, and practitioners alike.

Keywords: Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*), shared responsibility, human development, interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), ethical leadership.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of compassion (*karuṇā*) lies at the heart of Buddhist philosophy, presenting a profound ethical framework for fostering human connection, alleviating suffering, and cultivating a sense of shared responsibility. Rooted in the principle of *pratītyasamutpāda* (interdependent origination), Buddhist teachings emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings and the moral imperative to act for the collective good. This ethical vision is particularly relevant in addressing contemporary global challenges, such as social inequality, environmental degradation, and cultural conflicts, where shared responsibility becomes essential for sustainable human development.

Buddhist compassion transcends mere empathy, involving an active commitment to alleviate the suffering of others through practical and mindful actions. The *Bodhicaryavatara* by Shantideva articulates compassion as the cornerstone of ethical living, where the welfare of others is inseparable from one's spiritual growth. As Shantideva eloquently states, "May I be a protector for those without one, a guide for all travellers on the way" (*Bodhicaryavatara* 3:18)², underscoring the importance of universal responsibility. The *Dhammapada*³ further supports this vision, emphasizing the values of nonviolence (*ahimsā*) and empathy in creating harmonious societies.

In modern contexts, the principle of shared responsibility aligns closely with global development paradigms. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example, stress the necessity of collective action to address pressing issues such as poverty, health inequities, and climate change. Buddhist compassion complements these objectives by advocating for an integrative approach that considers the material, social, and spiritual dimensions of development. This synergy between Buddhist ethics and human

² Shantideva, *Bodhicaryavatara* (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life), Chapter 3, Verse 18, Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, Dharamsala.

³ *The Dhammapada* (2007) trans. Eknath Easwaran. Nilgiri Press.

development frameworks provides a compelling rationale for exploring how compassion can be practically implemented as a guiding principle.

Despite its transformative potential, the integration of Buddhist compassion into modern societal structures faces several challenges. The dominance of materialistic values, systemic inequities, and cultural resistance often hinder the adoption of ethical and spiritual principles in policymaking and social practices. However, examples such as the Sarvodaya Movement⁴ in Sri Lanka demonstrate the practical feasibility of compassion-driven initiatives, highlighting the role of engaged Buddhism in promoting sustainable and inclusive development.

By analysing theoretical foundations, contemporary applications, and case studies, this study aims to propose actionable pathways for implementing Buddhist compassion as a shared responsibility in fostering holistic human development.

II. BUDDHIST TEACHINGS ON COMPASSION

Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) is a foundational virtue and one of the *Brahmavihāras* (divine abodes), alongside loving-kindness (*mettā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Compassion in Buddhism is not merely an emotional response but an ethical commitment to alleviate suffering and promote collective well-being. This concept is deeply rooted in the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all existence.

Classical texts like the *Bodhicaryavatara* by Shantideva highlight compassion as the basis for ethical action and spiritual growth. Shantideva describes compassion as the natural outcome of recognizing the shared struggles of sentient beings: “All happiness comes from the desire for others to be happy, while all suffering arises from the desire for oneself to be happy” (*Bodhicaryavatara*, Chapter 8)⁵. Similarly, the *Dhammapada*⁶ underscores the importance of non-violence and empathy, essential components of compassionate living.

The *Karaniya Mettā Sutta*⁷ provides further insights into the active practice of compassion, encouraging practitioners to develop a boundless love for all beings, free from enmity and ill will. These teachings form the theoretical foundation for applying Buddhist compassion as a guiding principle in modern human development.

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is one of the fundamental virtues in Buddhism, intricately woven into its ethical and philosophical framework. Its centrality reflects the Buddhist commitment to alleviating suffering and promoting the

⁴ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). “Sustainable Development Goals.” UNDP Official Website.

⁵ Shantideva, *Bodhicaryavatara*, Chapters 8 and 10.

⁶ *The Dhammapada* (2007) trans. Eknath Easwaran. Nilgiri Press.

⁷ *Karaniya Mettā Sutta* (Suttanipāta 1.8).

welfare of all sentient beings. Here trying to delve deeper into the theoretical roots of compassion in Buddhist teachings, its role in ethical practice, and its broader implications for collective well-being.

2.1. Compassion in the Four *Brahmavihāras*

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is one of the *Brahmavihāras*, or the Four Divine Abodes, alongside:

- **Loving-kindness (*mettā*):** A wish for the happiness of all beings.
- **Sympathetic joy (*muditā*):** Rejoicing in the success and well-being of others.
- **Equanimity (*upekkhā*):** Maintaining balance and impartiality in all situations.

In this framework, *karuṇā* is the active quality of the heart that resonates with the suffering of others, compelling one to take ethical action to alleviate it. The *Karaniya Mettā Sutta* (Suttanipāṭa 1.8) encourages practitioners to radiate universal goodwill, free from enmity and ill will, as a foundation for practicing compassion.

2.2. The doctrine of interdependence and compassion

Buddhist compassion is deeply grounded in the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), which states that all phenomena arise in dependence on other phenomena. This insight into interdependence fosters a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of all life.

From this perspective, individual suffering cannot be isolated from the collective experience. Acting with compassion not only helps others but also contributes to one's spiritual progress by reducing greed (*lobha*), hatred (*doṣa*), and delusion (*moha*), the three poisons that perpetuate the cycle of suffering (*samsāra*).

III. SHANTIDEVA'S PERSPECTIVE ON COMPASSION

The *Bodhicaryavatara* (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life) by Shantideva is one of the most celebrated texts on compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Shantideva underscores that true compassion arises from recognizing the universality of suffering and the shared nature of human experiences. He writes:

“As long as space endures, as long as sentient beings remain,
May I too remain, to dispel the suffering of the world.” (*Bodhicaryavatara*, Chapter 10, Verse 55).⁸

This aspiration reflects the Bodhisattva ideal, where compassion extends beyond individual liberation to include the liberation of all beings. Compassion is seen as both an ethical duty and a path to spiritual awakening.

⁸ Shantideva, *Bodhicaryavatara* (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life), Chapter 10, Verse 55, Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, Dharamsala.

3.1. The role of compassion in the Noble Eightfold Path

Compassion is integral to the ethical dimensions of the Noble Eightfold Path, particularly in the following components:

(i) **Right Speech (*sammā vāca*)**: Speaking truthfully and kindly to promote harmony and understanding.

(ii) **Right Action (*sammā kammanta*)**: Engaging in actions that reduce suffering and foster well-being.

(iii) **Right Livelihood (*sammā ājīva*)**: Choosing professions that do not harm others and contribute positively to society.

By practicing these elements, compassion becomes a lived experience rather than an abstract ideal.

3.2. Compassion in the Pāli Canon

The Pāli Canon offers numerous examples where the Buddha teaches compassion as an essential quality for spiritual development and societal harmony. In the *Cakkavatti Sihanadasutta* (DN 26), the Buddha advises rulers to govern with compassion, ensuring the welfare of their subjects and protecting the vulnerable. Similarly, in the *Sigalovādasutta* (DN 31)⁹, compassion is emphasized as a cornerstone for ethical relationships within families and communities.

3.3. Compassion as a universal practice

The Mahāyāna tradition takes compassion further by framing it as boundless and universal. The ideal of the *Bodhisattva* – a being who postpones their enlightenment to help others – embodies the highest expression of compassion. This aspiration is articulated in the vow of the Bodhisattva:

“Beings are numberless; I vow to save them” (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra*)¹⁰

Compassion is not limited to those we know or care for but extends to all sentient beings, transcending barriers of identity, culture, and species.

3.4. Compassion and skillful means (*upāya*)

A distinctive aspect of Buddhist compassion is its emphasis on *upāya* (skillful means) – the ability to respond to the suffering of others in a manner that is appropriate and effective for their specific circumstances. This flexibility ensures that compassion is not a one-size-fits-all solution but is tailored to the needs of individuals and communities.

3.5. Practical training in compassion

The cultivation of compassion is a deliberate practice in Buddhism, involving mindfulness, meditation, and ethical discipline. Compassion meditation (*karuṇā bhāvana*) is a structured practice where individuals visualize and wish for the alleviation of suffering in others, gradually extending this wish to all beings. This meditative cultivation helps develop a compassionate mindset

⁹ *Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta* (DN 26) and *Sigalovādasutta* (DN 31) from the Pāli Canon.

¹⁰ *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra*, trans. Lamotte.

that translates into everyday actions.

3.6. Contemporary relevance of Buddhist compassion

In today's world, Buddhist compassion offers a timeless and transformative approach to addressing societal challenges. Its emphasis on interdependence resonates with modern ecological and social theories, while its ethical principles provide a moral compass for navigating the complexities of global interconnectivity.

By grounding compassion in the philosophical depth of Buddhist teachings and its practical applications, this approach establishes its relevance as both an individual virtue and a collective responsibility in human development.

IV. CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORKS FOR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Modern human development frameworks, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹¹, emphasize collective action and ethical responsibility in addressing global challenges. Concepts like shared responsibility resonate with Buddhist teachings, as both advocate for the prioritization of collective well-being over individual gain.

Shared responsibility, in this context, involves governments, organizations, and individuals collaborating to address issues such as poverty, health inequities, and environmental sustainability. Buddhist compassion complements these objectives by promoting altruistic behaviour, ethical decision-making, and mindfulness practices. The Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka exemplifies this synergy, where Buddhist principles of compassion have been applied to empower rural communities and foster social harmony.

In the modern context, the concept of shared responsibility is a vital framework for addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and conflict. This notion emphasizes collective action, where governments, businesses, communities, and individuals collaborate to solve problems that transcend national, cultural, and political boundaries. Several contemporary frameworks emphasize shared responsibility, aligning with the ethical and philosophical dimensions of Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) and interdependence.

4.1. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

One of the most prominent frameworks for shared responsibility is the United Nations' **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. Adopted in 2015, the SDGs consist of 17 goals aimed at addressing global issues such as poverty, health, education, climate action, gender equality, and economic inequality. Central to the SDGs is the idea that achieving sustainable development requires a global effort that involves all sectors of society. In particular, Goal 17, "Partnerships for the Goals"¹², underscores the importance of cooperation

¹¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). "Sustainable Development Goals." UNDP Official Website.

¹² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). "Sustainable Development Goals."

at all levels – local, national, and international – between public and private sectors, civil society, and individuals.

The SDGs are fundamentally interconnected, emphasizing the need for collective action and shared responsibility. Just as Buddhist teachings stress the interdependence of all beings, the SDGs recognize that sustainable development can only be achieved when everyone, regardless of their role, works together. Buddhist compassion resonates with the SDGs' focus on inclusivity, equity, and the common good. For example, the *Karaniya Mettā Sutta*¹³ encourages the practitioner to develop compassion for all beings, which aligns with SDG targets on reducing inequalities and fostering peaceful, just societies.

4.2. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change

Another significant framework emphasizing shared responsibility is the **Paris Agreement**¹⁴ under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015, is an international treaty that aims to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. The Agreement underscores the concept of “common but differentiated responsibilities,” recognizing that while climate change is a global challenge, the level of responsibility each country bears differs depending on its historical contribution to emissions and its capacity for action.

This principle of shared responsibility reflects Buddhist compassion through its focus on collective well-being¹⁵. Just as compassion extends to all beings regardless of their position or background, the Paris Agreement calls on all nations to contribute to addressing climate change, with particular emphasis on helping developing countries that are most vulnerable to its effects. This aligns with Buddhist ideas of interconnectedness and collective responsibility, where the welfare of all beings is interdependent. Buddhist principles of compassion and ethical stewardship of the earth can play a critical role in inspiring a collective commitment to environmental sustainability.

4.3. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Ethical Business Practices

In the realm of business and economics, **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)**¹⁶ and ethical business practices have become key frameworks for shared responsibility. CSR refers to the ethical obligation of companies to contribute to economic, social, and environmental development. This can involve initiatives such as reducing carbon footprints, ensuring fair labour practices, supporting community development projects, and engaging in philanthropic activities.

UNDP Official Website.

¹³ Karaniya Mettā Sutta, *Suttanipāta* 1.8.

¹⁴ Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). UNFCCC Official Website.

¹⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh (1975) *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Beacon Press.

¹⁶ Carroll, A. B. (1999) “Corporate Social Responsibility: Evolution of a Definitional Construct.” *Business & Society*, 38 (3), 268 - 295.

Buddhist compassion can serve as a foundational ethical principle for CSR, where businesses are not only concerned with profits but also with the well-being of employees, communities, and the environment. The emphasis on interdependence in Buddhism aligns with CSR's focus on businesses acting in a way that contributes to the common good rather than focusing solely on financial gain. Companies like Patagonia, for example, have integrated environmental sustainability and social responsibility into their core business models, reflecting an application of compassionate action in business.

4.4. Global health initiatives and the role of shared responsibility

Global health challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrate the need for shared responsibility in safeguarding public health. The **World Health Organization (WHO)** and other global health initiatives emphasize collective efforts in responding to health crises, with shared responsibility among governments, healthcare providers, and individuals. The pandemic, for instance, required global cooperation to ensure vaccine distribution, mitigate the spread of the virus, and protect vulnerable populations.

Buddhist compassion plays a role here in promoting not only physical well-being but also emotional and spiritual healing¹⁷. Compassionate responses to health crises include prioritizing equitable access to healthcare services, supporting mental health initiatives through several energy healing meditation practices like *Reiki*, *Samatha* ensuring that the most vulnerable populations are protected. By recognizing the interdependence of all individuals, the Buddhist framework aligns with global health¹⁸ initiatives that call for collaboration across borders, societies, and sectors to address health disparities and promote global health.

4.5. Engaged Buddhism and social action

A more direct application of Buddhist compassion to shared responsibility can be found in **Engaged Buddhism**, a movement that merges Buddhist principles with social activism. Founded by figures such as Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama, Engaged Buddhism emphasizes active participation in addressing societal problems such as poverty, social justice, peace, and environmental conservation. It highlights the role of mindfulness, compassion, and nonviolence in promoting social change and fostering human dignity.

Engaged Buddhists advocate for shared responsibility by encouraging individuals to work together toward the common good, just as they work on cultivating their spiritual well-being. This movement provides practical examples of how Buddhist compassion can lead to positive social and environmental change through collective action. Programs like the Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka¹⁹, which integrates Buddhist teachings with community development and empowerment, offer a powerful example of how shared responsibility, rooted in

¹⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh (1975) *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Beacon Press.

¹⁸ Dalai Lama (1998) *The Art of Happiness*. Riverhead Books.

¹⁹ The Sarvodaya Movement, Sarvodaya Organization Official Website.

compassion, can address both individual and collective needs.

Contemporary frameworks for shared responsibility, such as the SDGs, the Paris Agreement, CSR, global health initiatives, and Engaged Buddhism, all echo the core values of Buddhist compassion. The principle of interdependence, which lies at the heart of Buddhist thought, underscores the necessity for collective action to address pressing global issues. These frameworks recognize that sustainable development, peace, and social justice are achievable only through cooperation and mutual care. Buddhist teachings, particularly the emphasis on compassion and shared responsibility, offer valuable insights and practical approaches to fostering a world where the welfare of all beings is prioritized.

V. BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN PRACTICE

The practical application of Buddhist compassion is exemplified by engaged Buddhism, a modern movement that integrates Buddhist ethics with social action. Leaders like Thich Nhat Hanh have championed mindfulness and compassion as tools for addressing societal issues, from conflict resolution to environmental conservation. In his writings, Thich Nhat Hanh emphasizes that “compassion is not an abstract feeling but a concrete action”²⁰ to reduce suffering and build community.

The practical implementation of Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) transcends mere theoretical understanding, making it a vital force in addressing social, environmental, and personal challenges. Buddhist compassion is often seen as an active, transformative force that aims not just at alleviating suffering but at creating a more harmonious and interconnected world. Now exploring how Buddhist compassion is applied in real-world contexts, from healthcare and education to social activism and environmental sustainability.

Buddhist compassion in practice includes:

- **Healthcare:** Integrating mindfulness and compassion into patient care, as seen in *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR) programs.
- **Education:** Teaching compassion and mindfulness in schools to promote emotional intelligence and ethical behavior.
- **Environmental Activism:** Buddhist organizations have spearheaded initiatives to combat climate change, emphasizing the ethical responsibility to protect all life forms.

5.1. Compassion in healthcare: Mindfulness-based interventions

One of the most profound applications of Buddhist compassion in the modern world is in the realm of healthcare. *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction* (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn²¹, is an example of integrating Buddhist principles of mindfulness and compassion into therapeutic practices.

²⁰ Thich Nhat Hanh (1975) *The Miracle of Mindfulness*. Beacon Press.

²¹ Kabat-Zinn, Jon (1990) *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Delta.

MBSR, which involves meditation and mindfulness exercises, has been shown to reduce stress, improve mental health, and enhance emotional well-being. It encourages patients to approach their suffering with awareness, self-compassion, and an open-hearted acceptance of their experience.

Additionally, compassion-based care in healthcare settings goes beyond just reducing stress; it involves developing empathy and emotional resilience in healthcare professionals themselves. The *Compassionate Mind Training* (CMT) program, designed by Paul Gilbert²², draws on Buddhist principles to train individuals in cultivating compassion for themselves and others. This practice helps healthcare workers develop the emotional tools to deal with patient suffering while preventing burnout and emotional fatigue.

According to Thich Nhat Hanh, a prominent advocate for integrating mindfulness and compassion into healthcare, “Compassion is not a luxury; it is essential to the healing process.” Through mindfulness and compassion²³, healthcare systems can promote holistic healing that addresses not only the physical but also the emotional and psychological aspects of patient care.

5.2. Buddhist compassion in education: Teaching mindfulness and emotional intelligence

Buddhism’s emphasis on mindfulness and compassion is being increasingly integrated into educational curricula around the world. This approach aims not only to cultivate academic excellence but also to foster emotional intelligence, empathy, and social harmony in students. Programs like *Mindfulness in Schools* (UK) and the *Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning* (SEE Learning) program by the Dalai Lama’s Foundation aim to teach young people how to navigate the complexities of life with compassion and mindfulness.

In particular, Buddhist compassion in education can teach students the importance of being aware of their emotions and the emotions of others, creating an atmosphere of respect and kindness in the classroom. The *SEE Learning* curriculum encourages students to develop their inner capacity for compassion, which, in turn, fosters positive relationships and peaceful communities. This approach emphasizes the interdependent nature of all beings, encouraging students to see themselves as connected to one another and to the world around them.

By integrating Buddhist practices like mindfulness meditation and compassion training, educators can help students cultivate resilience, reduce bullying, and foster a deeper understanding of the human experience. The Dalai Lama, in his advocacy for compassionate education, asserts that “If every 8-year-old in the world is taught to meditate, we will eliminate violence from the world within one generation.”²⁴

²² Gilbert, Paul (2009) *The Compassionate Mind: A New Approach to Life’s Challenges*. New Harbinger Publications.

²³ Engaged Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh and Social Action. Plum Village Official Website.

²⁴ Dalai Lama (1998) *The Art of Happiness*. Riverhead Books.

5.3. Engaged Buddhism: Social activism rooted in compassion

Engaged Buddhism is a modern movement that merges the traditional teachings of Buddhism with direct action in addressing social and environmental issues. Prominent figures such as Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, and Aung San Suu Kyi have exemplified how Buddhist compassion can drive social change. Engaged Buddhism operates on the principle that one cannot truly realize spiritual enlightenment without actively engaging in the world's suffering and working toward its alleviation.

One of the central tenets of Engaged Buddhism is the belief that the path to spiritual awakening involves responding to the suffering of others through concrete action. Thich Nhat Hanh, for example, has led initiatives on peacebuilding, promoting nonviolent conflict resolution, and advocating for environmental sustainability. He coined the term "*interbeing*,"²⁵ which expresses the interconnectedness of all life and emphasizes that to relieve suffering, one must cultivate compassion in all aspects of life.

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, founded by Buddhist monk A. T. Ariyaratne²⁶, is another example of engaged Buddhism. The movement integrates Buddhist values with social development, working toward the empowerment of rural communities through nonviolent social change, education, and sustainable development. By applying Buddhist compassion to community-driven initiatives, the Sarvodaya movement has addressed poverty, healthcare, and social inequality through a holistic, compassionate framework.

5.4. Buddhist compassion and environmental activism

The interdependent nature of life, central to Buddhist philosophy, makes it an essential framework for addressing environmental degradation and climate change. Buddhism teaches that human beings are not separate from nature but are deeply connected to the earth and all its creatures. This worldview encourages the practice of *ahimsā* (nonviolence) and *right livelihood*, which directly informs ethical environmental practices²⁷.

Environmental activism in Buddhism is rooted in the idea that the suffering of the earth and its creatures is interconnected with human suffering. Buddhist monks in Thailand and Cambodia, for example, have been at the forefront of campaigns against deforestation and in favour of sustainable agricultural practices. These efforts demonstrate the role of compassion in environmental stewardship, where human compassion extends not only to other humans but also to the natural world.

Organizations such as the *Buddhist Climate Action Network* advocate

²⁵ Engaged Buddhism, *Thich Nhat Hanh and Social Action*. Plum Village Official Website.

²⁶ A. T. Ariyaratne, *The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement and the Role of Buddhism in Social Development*.

²⁷ Buddhist Climate Action Network, *Buddhism and Climate Justice*. Buddhist Climate Action Network Official Website.

for climate justice based on the Buddhist values of interdependence and compassion. The Dalai Lama, in his environmental advocacy, has stated, “The Earth does not belong to us. We belong to the Earth,”²⁸ stressing the importance of cultivating compassion for the environment and all sentient beings. This philosophy aligns with global efforts to combat climate change, protect biodiversity, and promote sustainable living.

5.5. Compassionate leadership and conflict resolution

Buddhist compassion also plays a significant role in leadership and conflict resolution. The concept of compassionate leadership is rooted in the belief that leaders should act with empathy, understanding, and a deep commitment to the well-being of their communities. This is particularly relevant in today’s polarized political landscape, where compassion can be a tool for promoting peace and reconciliation.

The Dalai Lama’s teachings on compassionate leadership emphasize the importance of ethical decision-making, the cultivation of kindness, and the ability to lead with humility. His approach to conflict resolution is centered on dialogue, mutual respect, and the recognition of the shared humanity of all parties involved. Similarly, the concept of right speech in Buddhism, which advocates for truthful, kind, and beneficial communication, is essential for promoting understanding and reducing conflict in diverse settings.

In practice, compassionate leadership can be seen in peacebuilding efforts in conflict zones. Buddhist leaders, such as those in Myanmar and Tibet, have exemplified how compassion can be a tool for nonviolent resistance, reconciliation, and peacekeeping. These efforts often include interfaith dialogues, promoting forgiveness, and fostering community healing.

Buddhist compassion in practice is a multifaceted and deeply transformative force. From healthcare and education to social activism, environmental protection, and conflict resolution, the application of Buddhist compassion fosters interconnectedness, peace, and social justice. By integrating mindfulness, nonviolence, and compassion into these domains, Buddhist teachings provide a powerful framework for creating a compassionate, sustainable, and harmonious world.

VI. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Despite its transformative potential, implementing Buddhist compassion faces several obstacles:

(i) Materialism and consumerism: Modern societies often prioritize material wealth and individual success over collective well-being, creating a cultural disconnect from compassionate principles.

(ii) Cultural and systemic resistance: Integrating spiritual values like compassion into secular development frameworks requires overcoming scepticism and adapting to diverse cultural contexts.

²⁸ The Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*.

(iii) **Lack of awareness and training:** Effective application of Buddhist compassion necessitates education and training in mindfulness, ethical leadership, and interdependent thinking.

While the principles of Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) offer profound benefits for both individual well-being and collective societal growth, their implementation faces several significant challenges. These challenges arise from the complex intersection of personal, cultural, societal, and institutional factors. The key obstacles to effectively implementing Buddhist compassion in real-world contexts are as follows:

6.1. Cultural and institutional resistance

One of the primary challenges in implementing Buddhist compassion is the resistance from existing cultural norms and institutional frameworks that prioritize individualism, competition, and material success over collective well-being. Many modern societies, especially in Western contexts, operate within systems that reward individual achievements, such as profit maximization, consumerism, and hierarchical structures of power. These systems often foster attitudes that are in stark contrast to Buddhist principles of interconnectedness, shared responsibility, and collective care.

In institutions such as corporations, governments, and educational systems, compassion can be seen as a “soft” or secondary value, while efficiency, profit, and power often take precedence. For instance, corporate cultures centered on profit maximization may find it challenging to integrate Buddhist teachings on compassion and social responsibility because these values conflict with the competitive nature of capitalism. In such environments, the idea of shared responsibility—whether in addressing environmental issues, social inequalities, or workers’ rights—can face significant pushback from leadership and institutional priorities that focus more on short-term gains than long-term communal harmony.

6.2. Misinterpretation and shallow understanding of compassion

Another challenge lies in the potential misinterpretation or superficial adoption of Buddhist compassion. While Buddhist teachings on compassion are deep and transformative, their application can sometimes be reduced to mere acts of charity or kindness without an understanding of the underlying ethical and philosophical principles. Compassion in Buddhism is not merely about being nice or helping others occasionally – it involves a sustained commitment to alleviating suffering, understanding the root causes of suffering, and working toward long-term societal transformation.

This superficial understanding can be seen in various initiatives that claim to practice compassion but lack a deeper commitment to systemic change. For example, charity organizations may provide temporary relief from poverty without addressing the structural injustices that perpetuate inequality. Similarly, individualistic approaches to mindfulness and compassion may neglect the broader social dimensions of suffering. The true practice of Buddhist compassion requires one to engage with suffering at multiple levels – not just on

an individual scale but also within the structural, societal, and environmental contexts. This requires education, reflection, and a commitment to a more profound change, which may be overlooked in some implementations.

6.3. Overcoming compassion fatigue

One of the most pressing challenges in implementing Buddhist compassion, especially in fields like healthcare, social work, and activism, is *compassion fatigue*. Compassion fatigue refers to the emotional and physical exhaustion that results from constantly responding to the suffering of others, often leaving individuals feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and unable to continue offering compassion. While Buddhist teachings emphasize the importance of self-compassion and mindfulness, which can help mitigate compassion fatigue, those involved in high-intensity compassionate work (e.g., doctors, social workers, activists) may struggle to balance personal well-being with their desire to alleviate the suffering of others.

Buddhist practices such as *mettā* (loving-kindness) and mindfulness meditation offer tools for building resilience against compassion fatigue, yet the sheer scale of suffering in the world can make it difficult for individuals to maintain their compassion. This fatigue is particularly prevalent in conflict zones, refugee crises, and impoverished communities, where individuals are faced with systemic, entrenched forms of suffering. In such cases, Buddhist compassion needs to be supported by institutional structures that promote sustainable care, provide emotional support for caregivers, and address the root causes of suffering. Without these safeguards, the cycle of compassion fatigue can undermine efforts to implement compassionate practices in long-term, systemic ways.

6.4. Socioeconomic constraints and resource limitations

Implementing Buddhist compassion, particularly in areas like poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and social justice, often requires significant resources – both human and material. In many cases, individuals and organizations seeking to apply Buddhist principles of compassion encounter limitations in terms of funding, infrastructure, and access to resources. For example, Buddhist-inspired community development programs may face difficulties in securing funding or government support, especially in areas where economic inequality and social unrest create competing priorities.

Moreover, Buddhist compassion advocates for a rethinking of global economics, which is fundamentally tied to consumption patterns, waste, and exploitation of resources. However, most political and economic systems are designed to prioritize growth and wealth generation rather than the sustainable, equitable distribution of resources. In this context, efforts to implement compassionate practices can be hindered by broader economic systems that are not built with compassion or sustainability in mind. The struggle for equitable resource distribution is a major challenge to effectively implementing the kind of compassion advocated by Buddhist teachings.

6.5. Political and ideological conflicts

Buddhist compassion, particularly when applied to social justice and

peacebuilding, often encounters resistance in politically charged environments. The ideal of nonviolence and reconciliation promoted by Buddhism can be difficult to enact in settings where political ideologies, nationalism, or historical grievances are deeply entrenched. Compassion-based approaches to conflict resolution, such as those advocated by Buddhist leaders like the Dalai Lama, often call for forgiveness, dialogue, and understanding between opposing groups. However, in regions of protracted conflict – such as in the case of ethnic or religious violence – there may be little political will to pursue peace or healing through compassionate means.

For example, the political and ideological landscape in Myanmar has posed challenges for Buddhist leaders advocating for compassion in the face of military oppression and ethnic violence. In such settings, compassion is sometimes perceived as a weakness, and the urgency of political struggle may overshadow the possibility of reconciliation. The challenge of overcoming long-standing animosities and creating an environment in which compassion can thrive requires not just individual effort but systemic change – an effort that is often blocked by entrenched power structures and political opposition.

6.6. Globalization and cultural erosion

The forces of globalization pose a unique challenge to the widespread implementation of Buddhist compassion. As societies become more interconnected, cultural homogeneity, consumerism, and the dominance of Western ideologies may erode traditional practices, including Buddhist values. In some cases, the adoption of Buddhism by the global community has led to its simplification or misapplication. This process can strip away the essential cultural and philosophical components of Buddhist teachings, rendering them ineffective in promoting true compassion and interdependence.

Moreover, as Buddhism spreads globally, there is a risk of it being commodified or “marketed” as a form of self-help, mindfulness, or relaxation – disconnected from its deeper ethical and spiritual foundations. This dilution can prevent the true potential of Buddhist compassion from being realized in both personal and societal transformation. To preserve its integrity, the implementation of Buddhist compassion must be mindful of its cultural roots and philosophical depth, avoiding its commercialization or reduction to a mere “tool” for personal well-being.

The implementation of Buddhist compassion faces significant challenges, ranging from cultural resistance and misinterpretation to systemic issues such as resource limitations and political conflicts. Despite these obstacles, the potential for Buddhist compassion to inspire positive change remains immense. Addressing these challenges requires not only a commitment to individual mindfulness and ethical conduct but also a concerted effort to transform societal structures that perpetuate suffering. Through education, awareness, and collective action, the principles of Buddhist compassion can be better integrated into the modern world, creating a more peaceful, equitable, and sustainable future.

VII. STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATION

Integrating Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) into various facets of society requires a multifaceted approach that accounts for both individual transformation and systemic change. The process involves the cultivation of compassion within personal practice and its application in larger social, educational, healthcare, and political systems. Below are several key strategies that can be employed to integrate Buddhist compassion into modern-day practices and societal structures.

7.1. Educational integration: Teaching compassion in schools

One of the most effective strategies for integrating Buddhist compassion into society is through educational systems. By teaching children and young adults about mindfulness, empathy, and interdependence, schools can foster environments that prioritize social harmony and collective well-being. Mindfulness programs, which incorporate Buddhist principles of awareness and compassion, have already been successfully implemented in various school settings.

Programs like *Mindfulness in Schools* (UK) and *Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning* (SEE Learning) emphasize the development of emotional intelligence, empathy, and self-awareness in students. These programs integrate Buddhist compassion into school curricula, teaching students the importance of considering the needs of others, recognizing their shared humanity, and resolving conflicts with empathy and understanding.

By embedding mindfulness and compassion practices into the educational system, schools can create a compassionate culture where individuals are encouraged to understand the suffering of others, foster positive relationships, and develop the resilience to manage their emotions. This approach prepares future generations to approach life with greater care for others and awareness of their interconnectedness.

7.2. Compassionate leadership in organizations and governments

Buddhist compassion can also be integrated into leadership and organizational practices, especially within businesses, governments, and other influential institutions. Compassionate leadership, as described by Thich Nhat Hanh, involves leaders acting with mindfulness, ethical consideration, and care for the well-being of both their employees and society at large. This model challenges traditional leadership practices that often prioritize productivity, profits, and hierarchical power structures over empathy and cooperation.

The application of compassionate leadership requires a focus on the well-being of individuals within an organization. Compassionate leaders create environments where emotional intelligence is valued, collaboration is encouraged, and decisions are made with consideration for long-term social, environmental, and ethical impacts. This kind of leadership can help build organizational cultures that not only care for employees' welfare but also encourage them to engage with larger societal and environmental issues, fostering social responsibility across various sectors.

Moreover, governments can adopt compassionate policies by recognizing the interconnectedness of all citizens, particularly marginalized groups. Compassionate governance involves addressing issues such as poverty, healthcare, education, and human rights through empathetic, inclusive, and sustainable policies. For instance, the implementation of universal healthcare or social safety nets can be seen as a manifestation of compassionate leadership, prioritizing the well-being of the most vulnerable members of society.

7.3. Community engagement: Volunteering and social activism

Another effective strategy for integrating Buddhist compassion is through community engagement and social activism. Buddhist teachings on compassion call for actively addressing the suffering of others, not only through individual efforts but also by contributing to collective societal welfare. Engaged Buddhism, as proposed by Thich Nhat Hanh and other Buddhist leaders, emphasizes that true spiritual growth involves responding to the suffering of the world with action. This can take many forms, from grassroots social justice movements to large-scale environmental activism.

The integration of Buddhist compassion in community efforts can be seen in programs that focus on social welfare, environmental protection, and conflict resolution. For instance, Buddhist organizations have been instrumental in advocating for the rights of refugees, promoting peace-building in conflict zones, and leading sustainable development initiatives in rural areas. The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, founded by Buddhist monk A. T. Ariyaratne, serves as a powerful example of how Buddhist compassion can inform grassroots social development efforts. By working to alleviate poverty, promote education, and advocate for human rights, the movement seeks to empower communities through compassion and shared responsibility.

Furthermore, volunteerism rooted in Buddhist compassion can help develop a more connected and caring society. Through volunteering at local shelters, food banks, or hospitals, individuals can directly alleviate suffering in their communities while also fostering a deeper sense of empathy and interconnectedness. Engaged Buddhist teachings emphasize that no one can truly thrive in isolation and that a compassionate society benefits all its members.

7.4. Mindfulness and compassionate healthcare practices

Buddhist principles of compassion are increasingly being integrated into healthcare settings, with mindfulness-based interventions providing an effective way to manage stress, improve patient care, and enhance the well-being of healthcare providers. The integration of mindfulness meditation into clinical practices has been shown to reduce burnout, improve emotional resilience, and enhance patient-provider relationships.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, is one of the most well-known mindfulness interventions in healthcare. This program encourages patients and healthcare workers alike to approach suffering with awareness, acceptance, and compassion. Buddhist principles of compassion and non-harm (*ahimsā*) are foundational to MBSR,

as they promote a holistic approach to healthcare that addresses not just physical symptoms but also emotional and psychological aspects of well-being.

Moreover, Buddhist compassion is integral to the patient-provider relationship in healthcare. By cultivating empathy and understanding, healthcare professionals can provide more compassionate care that goes beyond medical treatment to include emotional and psychological support. The idea of “compassionate care” emphasizes the importance of listening to patients with mindfulness and responding to their needs with empathy. This approach can result in better patient outcomes, particularly in cases of chronic illness, mental health disorders, and end-of-life care.

7.5. Environmental sustainability and ecological compassion

In the face of growing environmental challenges, integrating Buddhist compassion into ecological and sustainability efforts is essential. Buddhist teachings emphasize the interconnectedness of all living beings and advocate for the protection of the environment through sustainable and mindful practices. The Buddhist understanding of *interbeing* — that all things are interconnected — offers a valuable framework for addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation.

Environmental activism rooted in Buddhist compassion encourages individuals and communities to act with care for the Earth and all sentient beings. The Buddhist Climate Action Network is an example of how Buddhist organizations are mobilizing to address climate change by encouraging sustainable lifestyles, advocating for green policies, and promoting eco-friendly practices. Buddhist environmentalism promotes not only individual responsibility, such as reducing waste and consumption, but also collective efforts toward large-scale sustainability, such as renewable energy and forest conservation.

By applying Buddhist compassion to environmental policy, societies can work toward solutions that protect the planet for future generations, emphasizing long-term ecological balance over short-term economic gain. This approach involves a deep respect for nature and a commitment to sustainable living that supports both human and non-human life forms.

7.6. Global interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding

Another significant strategy for integrating Buddhist compassion into the world is through global interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding. The Dalai Lama and other Buddhist leaders have advocated for greater interfaith cooperation based on shared ethical principles such as compassion, kindness, and nonviolence. Interfaith dialogue, when conducted with respect and a shared commitment to alleviating suffering, can foster understanding and cooperation between different religious traditions.

Buddhism’s emphasis on compassion, especially as applied to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, can be pivotal in resolving global conflicts. By encouraging dialogue rather than violence and understanding rather than division, Buddhist compassion offers a transformative approach to building lasting peace. In conflict-ridden areas, Buddhist teachings on forgiveness and

nonviolence have been used to mediate peace talks, promote reconciliation, and heal divisions among diverse communities.

The integration of Buddhist compassion into various aspects of society requires a holistic, multifaceted approach. From education and leadership to healthcare, community engagement, environmental sustainability, and peacebuilding, Buddhist principles offer practical strategies for creating a compassionate and just world. By fostering empathy, mindfulness, and a shared sense of responsibility, Buddhist compassion can help build more connected and harmonious societies, addressing the root causes of suffering on both individual and collective levels.

To address these challenges, several practices can be employed:

(i) Mindfulness-based training: Incorporating mindfulness and compassion training into education, healthcare, and leadership programs can foster a culture of shared responsibility.

(ii) Policy advocacy: Advocating for policies that align with compassionate principles, such as equitable resource distribution and environmental protection.

(iii) Interdisciplinary research: Collaborating across fields like psychology, sociology, and environmental science to integrate Buddhist ethics into practical solutions.

(iv) Implementation of personal development and emotional well-being through Buddhist compassion

Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) offers a profound impact on personal development, especially in terms of emotional well-being and mental health. By emphasizing mindfulness, empathy, and interconnectedness, Buddhist practices help individuals foster resilience, emotional regulation, and a deeper sense of purpose. Integrating compassion into one's life not only improves interpersonal relationships but also enhances self-awareness, providing the tools to navigate life's challenges with a sense of calm and equanimity. Some key ways that Buddhist compassion influences personal growth and emotional well-being are as follows:

7.7. Cultivation of self-compassion

Self-compassion is central to Buddhist teachings, particularly in the form of *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion). Buddhist practice encourages individuals to treat themselves with the same empathy, understanding, and patience that they would offer to others. This internal shift is transformative as it challenges the common tendency to self-criticize and cultivate negative thought patterns. Instead of self-judgment, individuals learn to embrace their imperfections and cultivate kindness towards themselves, reducing stress and anxiety.

According to Dr. Kristin Neff²⁹, a leading researcher on self-compassion,

²⁹ Neff, K. D. (2003) "The Development and Validation of a Scale to Measure Self-Com-

individuals who practice self-compassion experience lower levels of anxiety and depression and greater emotional resilience. Buddhist practices such as mindfulness meditation help develop this internal compassion by encouraging non-judgmental awareness and acceptance of one's thoughts and feelings. Through meditation and reflection, practitioners gradually create a more compassionate relationship with themselves, which significantly contributes to their emotional well-being.

7.8. Mindfulness and emotional regulation

Mindfulness, a core component of Buddhist practice, plays a pivotal role in managing emotions and promoting emotional stability. By cultivating present-moment awareness, mindfulness helps individuals break free from habitual emotional reactions, allowing them to respond to challenges with greater clarity and equanimity. This ability to observe one's thoughts and emotions without getting caught up in them allows individuals to regulate their emotional responses more effectively.

Studies have shown that mindfulness-based practices reduce negative emotional states such as stress, anxiety, and depression while increasing positive states like well-being and happiness. For instance, mindfulness meditation has been shown to improve emotional regulation by enhancing awareness of emotions and developing the capacity to choose appropriate responses. Additionally, it strengthens the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for emotional control, further enhancing an individual's ability to manage emotions.

Buddhist practice involves not just observing thoughts and feelings but also cultivating a compassionate attitude towards them. This mindfulness-based compassion allows individuals to meet emotional challenges with gentleness, reducing the impact of negative emotions like anger or sadness and fostering a balanced, calm state of mind.

7.9. Building empathy and connection with others

Buddhist compassion encourages individuals to recognize the interconnectedness of all beings, fostering empathy and a deep sense of shared humanity. By understanding that everyone experiences suffering and joy, practitioners learn to approach others with a greater sense of understanding and kindness. This cultivation of empathy leads to more fulfilling and supportive relationships, as individuals can listen more deeply, offer comfort, and navigate interpersonal challenges with greater patience and care.

Research on empathy highlights the role of compassion in enhancing emotional intelligence. A study by the Dalai Lama Center for Ethics and Transformative Values found that individuals who practice compassion are more likely to engage in pro-social behaviours, such as helping others and contributing to the well-being of their communities. Additionally, cultivating empathy through Buddhist compassion can reduce feelings of isolation and

loneliness by fostering a sense of connection to others.

By engaging in practices like meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*), individuals develop a heart-centered approach to relating to others, which further enriches their emotional life. These practices can enhance the capacity for understanding others' perspectives, improve communication, and strengthen bonds within personal and professional relationships.

7.9.1. Reducing stress and enhancing resilience

One of the most significant benefits of Buddhist compassion is its ability to help individuals manage stress and build emotional resilience. The practice of *karuṇā* allows individuals to process difficult emotions without becoming overwhelmed by them. It cultivates an attitude of acceptance, which reduces the tendency to resist or suppress unpleasant experiences, leading to reduced stress levels. Rather than reacting with fear or avoidance, individuals learn to respond to difficult situations with equanimity and compassion, making them more resilient to life's challenges.

The Buddhist concept of *dukkha* (suffering) teaches that suffering is an inherent part of life. Rather than seeing suffering as a negative force, Buddhist teachings encourage individuals to embrace it as a source of growth. This acceptance leads to greater emotional resilience as individuals learn to face suffering with compassion rather than avoiding or resisting it. Studies have shown that people who engage in mindfulness and compassion practices report better coping mechanisms in response to stress and experience greater overall psychological well-being.

In particular, *karuṇā* provides a proactive approach that encourages individuals not just to endure hardship but to transform their suffering by extending compassion to themselves and others. This transformation of suffering into an opportunity for growth is central to Buddhist teachings on emotional well-being.

7.9.2. Enhancing Overall Life Satisfaction:

Buddhist compassion contributes to a deeper sense of life satisfaction and overall happiness. Research has demonstrated that compassionate individuals experience higher levels of well-being, greater satisfaction with life, and more meaningful connections with others. Compassion, both toward oneself and others, has been linked to greater happiness because it encourages individuals to focus on positive qualities like kindness, gratitude, and generosity rather than on negative emotions or external circumstances.

The practice of loving-kindness meditation, a key Buddhist practice, has been shown to increase levels of happiness and life satisfaction. A study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*³⁰ found that participants who practiced loving-kindness meditation reported increased positive emotions, improved well-being, and greater social connection. These effects were sustained even after the

³⁰ Neff, K.D., & Germer, C.K. (2013) "A Pilot Study and Randomized Controlled Trial of the Mindful Self-Compassion Program." *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 69 (1), 28 - 44.

meditation period had ended, suggesting that compassion-based practices can have long-term positive impacts on emotional well-being.

The integration of Buddhist compassion into daily life significantly enhances personal development and emotional well-being. By fostering self-compassion, emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience, Buddhist practices provide individuals with the tools to navigate life's challenges with greater ease and joy. These practices, grounded in mindfulness and interconnectedness, enable individuals to cultivate a balanced and fulfilling emotional life, promoting overall mental health and happiness.

VIII. CONCLUSION: IMPLEMENTING BUDDHIST COMPASSION FOR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The application of Buddhist compassion in real-world contexts offers transformative potential for individuals, communities, and societies. This is evident through the efforts of various Buddhist organizations and the outcomes of compassion-driven practices that address social welfare and human development challenges. By examining real-life examples and case studies, we can observe how Buddhist compassion serves as a foundation for fostering sustainable development, emotional healing, and community resilience.

8.1. Examples of Buddhist organizations promoting social welfare

8.1.1. The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (Sri Lanka)

Founded by Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne in 1958, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement integrates Buddhist principles with grassroots development. The term “Sarvodaya” means “awakening of all,” and “Shramadana” translates to “gift of labour.” The movement emphasizes community empowerment through compassion-driven projects such as building infrastructure, providing education, and fostering economic self-reliance in underserved rural areas.

Impact: Over the years, the movement has reached more than 15,000 villages, improving access to clean water, sanitation, and sustainable agriculture. By encouraging collective responsibility and compassionate action, it has built stronger, more self-reliant communities.

8.1.2. Tzu Chi Foundation (Taiwan)

Established by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in 1966, Tzu Chi is a global Buddhist organization dedicated to disaster relief, healthcare, environmental conservation, and education. The foundation's guiding principle is compassion in action, which manifests through its humanitarian projects worldwide.

Impact: For example, after the 2010 Haiti earthquake, Tzu Chi provided medical aid, food, and supplies while focusing on rebuilding communities with compassion. Its healthcare initiatives, like free medical clinics, have served countless underprivileged individuals, demonstrating how Buddhist compassion translates into tangible benefits.

8.1.3. Plum Village (France):

Founded by Thich Nhat Hanh, Plum Village promotes mindfulness and

compassionate living as tools for personal transformation and societal healing. Its teachings emphasize interbeing, nonviolence, and ecological sustainability.

Impact: Programs such as the Wake-Up Earth retreats inspire young people to engage in compassion-driven environmental action. By addressing the emotional and spiritual dimensions of sustainability, Plum Village fosters long-term commitment to ecological and social well-being.

8.1.4. Case studies: Compassion-driven practices in communities

(i) Post-conflict reconciliation in Cambodia:

After decades of civil war and the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodian society faced profound trauma. The organization *Buddhism for Development* applied Buddhist principles to facilitate reconciliation and healing. Community workshops focused on mindfulness, forgiveness, and compassion to rebuild trust and unity among survivors.

Outcome: Participants reported reduced feelings of anger and resentment, improved emotional well-being, and a renewed sense of hope. This case underscores how compassion can serve as a powerful tool for collective healing and social restoration.

(ii) Mindfulness-Based compassion training in schools (United States)

Compassion-driven practices like mindfulness meditation are being integrated into educational systems to address issues such as bullying and emotional distress among students. Programs like those implemented by the *Mindful Schools* organization focus on teaching children empathy, kindness, and emotional regulation.

Outcome: Research has shown that students participating in such programs exhibit decreased levels of aggression, improved academic performance, and greater emotional resilience. These results highlight the potential of Buddhist-inspired compassion practices to nurture future generations' emotional and social development.

(iii) Environmental restoration projects in Thailand

The *Wat Phra Dhammakaya Foundation* in Thailand engages in large-scale tree planting and water conservation projects grounded in the Buddhist value of compassion for all living beings.

Outcome: These efforts have revitalized ecosystems, promoted biodiversity, and raised awareness about ecological responsibility among local communities. Compassion serves as both a spiritual and practical guide for sustainable development.

8.2. The broader impact of Buddhist compassion

Buddhist compassion has proven to be a powerful force for addressing critical social issues, from poverty and healthcare access to conflict resolution and environmental sustainability. By fostering a sense of shared responsibility, compassion helps individuals and communities move beyond self-centred concerns to collective well-being.

On an individual level, compassion cultivates emotional resilience, mindfulness, and a deep sense of interconnectedness, empowering people to engage constructively with societal challenges. At a systemic level, compassion-driven practices address structural inequalities and foster sustainable development by prioritizing care, empathy, and cooperation over competition and exploitation.

8.3. Final reflections

The implementation of Buddhist compassion is not merely a theoretical aspiration but a practical pathway for transforming society. Organizations like the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement and Tzu Chi Foundation exemplify how compassion can be operationalized to tackle pressing global challenges. Similarly, community-based initiatives demonstrate that compassion is scalable, capable of creating profound impacts at local and global levels.

As the world faces unprecedented challenges – ranging from climate change to social inequality – adopting compassion as a guiding principle offers hope for a more harmonious and sustainable future. By integrating Buddhist compassion into personal, communal, and institutional frameworks, humanity can cultivate a shared responsibility for development that uplifts everyone. This vision aligns seamlessly with Buddhist teachings, reminding us that true human progress is rooted in kindness, interconnectedness, and a commitment to alleviating suffering for all.

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BUDDHISM AND COMPASSION IN WAR

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Abstract:

2025 marks fifty years since the end of the American-Vietnam War, an armed conflict that inspired the late Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh’s concept of engaged Buddhism. The aim of bringing both humanity and compassion to those suffering from violence is no less important today, as we witness terrible armed conflicts in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. However, the principles of international humanitarian law (IHL), otherwise known as the law of war, are increasingly questioned, and the balance that IHL aims to strike between military necessity and humanitarian considerations is increasingly tipping towards the former, at the expense of the latter. At the same time, space for humanitarian actors is shrinking, challenging humanitarians’ efforts to reach those in need. Not only does this have grave implications for civilians, but it also increases the difficulty in building positive peace once war ends. Whilst Buddhist principles such as *mettā* and *karuṇā* provide a framework for the humane treatment of the wounded and displaced in war, Buddhism can also offer powerful principles for combatants even when violence ensues. If properly understood and disseminated, these Buddhist principles can enhance compliance with IHL - curbing war’s excesses and reducing suffering whilst paving the path to positive peace.

Keywords: *Engaged Buddhism, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), compassion in conflict, Buddhism and war, neutral humanitarian action.*

I. INTRODUCTION

2025 marks fifty years since the end of the American-Vietnam War, an armed conflict that inspired the concept of engaged Buddhism under Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh. However, terrible conflicts continue today, whether in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, or elsewhere, affecting civilians and combatants alike. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is a neutral, impartial, and independent humanitarian organization with

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a mandate from the international community to protect and assist people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, as well as to promote the law of war - known as international humanitarian law (IHL). Over the past thirty years, the ICRC has engaged in programs exploring convergences between IHL and Islamic law, and since 2017 - in partnership with Buddhist leaders, scholars, practitioners, and institutions - has expanded this engagement to Buddhism and IHL. The primary outcome of this interaction has been a realization that, although Buddhism's central tenet of *ahiṃsā* is often interpreted as an opposition to all forms of violence, Buddhist teachings and traditions do in fact provide powerful principles not only for the prevention of war but also for the conduct of combatants when war does break out. This article will therefore begin by exploring the origins of engaged Buddhism in the context of the American-Vietnam War before looking at the principles of IHL and the common challenges facing the implementation of and compliance with IHL in the various armed conflicts around the world today. The article will then investigate Buddhism's relationship with violence and war and the principles of Buddhism that can enhance compliance with IHL. Finally, it will propose steps that may be taken by Buddhist leaders, scholars, and practitioners to share the responsibility of developing this body of knowledge, thereby enhancing compliance with IHL, reinforcing respect for neutral, impartial, and independent humanitarian action (NIIHA), and reducing suffering whenever armed conflict and other situations of violence occur - paving the path to peace.

II. ENGAGED BUDDHISM AND WAR

The origins of engaged Buddhism lie in war. In the mid-1960s, the late Zen Master, Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, coined the term after witnessing the extraordinary suffering brought by the American-Vietnam armed conflict. As mentioned by Ha Vinh et al., "Thich Nhat Hanh's form of Buddhist activism was born of a desire to bring assistance to those suffering under the bombings and turmoil of war,"¹ and thus, "in a spirit similar to that which animated Henri Dunant,² the founder of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Thich Nhat Hanh was moved to action in order to respond to the suffering caused by war."³ Of the fourteen principles of engaged Buddhism established by Thich Nhat Hanh, the fourth is of direct relevance to Buddhist humanitarianism:

¹ Tho, H. V., Favoreu, E., & Trew, N. M, *Socially Engaged Buddhism and Principled Humanitarian Action During Armed Conflict*, in *Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law*. Routledge, 2023, p. 312.

² Henry Dunant witnessed the aftermath of the Battle of Solferino in 1859, which inspired him to propose the idea of the Red Cross in 1863. See Henry Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino* (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1862).

³ Tho, H. V., Favoreu, E., & Trew, N. M, *Socially Engaged Buddhism and Principles Humanitarian Action During Armed Conflict*, in *Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law*. Routledge, 2023, p. 341.

“Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering, including personal contact, visits, images, and sounds. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality and suffering in the world.”⁴

Engaged Buddhism today is, of course, involved in many social issues far beyond armed conflict, but its origins in war should never be forgotten. Thich Nhat Hanh and his followers supported humanitarian relief efforts to rebuild schools and villages during the war.⁵ As such, the importance of neutral, impartial, and independent humanitarian action (NIIHA) is well understood by engaged Buddhists. It is equally important to note that Thich Nhat Hanh did not view engaged Buddhism as a modern innovation but stated quite clearly his belief that “engaged Buddhism is just Buddhism.”⁶ The Venerable added: “When bombs begin to fall on people, you cannot stay in the meditation hall all of the time. Meditation is about the awareness of what is going on - not only in your body and in your feelings, but all around you.”⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh also viewed engaged Buddhism in wartime as a path to peace - not a distraction from peacebuilding. In a similar spirit, ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric has said that “There are 100 steps to peace; and the first are humanitarian.”⁸ Meanwhile, the website of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) refers to a new project underway on Buddhism and conflict transformation, aiming, among other objectives, to “collaborate with national and international organizations to help bring a Buddhist perspective into aspects of conflict transformation.”⁹ The overlap between engaged Buddhism, humanitarianism, and peacebuilding is therefore increasingly understood and appreciated. Thich Nhat Hanh’s principle number twelve also exhorts engaged Buddhists to “not kill ... Find whatever means possible to protect life and prevent war.”¹⁰ Although the principle also states, “Do not let others kill,” which is, of course,

⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism* (Parallax Press, 1993).

⁵ Federica Biscardi, “The ‘Engaged Buddhism’ of Thich Nhat Hanh” (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, 2022), accessed on [December 29, 2024]. accessed at: https://www.unive.it/pag/16584/?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=11921&cHash=0d4c7d6874343e2890715e6b-3c3235f0

⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh, “In Engaged Buddhism, Peace Begins with You,” interview by John Malkin, *Lion’s Roar*, July 1, 2003, accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://www.lionsroar.com/in-engaged-buddhism-peace-begins-with-you/>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Spoljaric, “There Are 100 Steps to Peace; the First Are Humanitarian,” September 7, 2023, accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://blogs.icrc.org/ir/en/2023/09/icrc-president-mirjana-spoljaric-when-international-humanitarian-law-is-respected-lives-are-saved/>.

⁹ International Network of Engaged Buddhists, “Peace & Reconciliation,” accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://inebnetwork.org/engagement/peace-reconciliation/>.

¹⁰ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism* (Parallax Press, 1993).

a divergence from IHL's qualified permissibility of killing in times of armed conflict, the advice to find "whatever means to protect life" resonates with the ICRC President's assertion that "When international humanitarian law is respected, lives are saved" and underscores the necessity to educate oneself and others about international humanitarian law.

III. INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Seventy-five years ago, in the wake of the Second World War, the Geneva Conventions were conceived by the international community as a legal framework to regulate armed conflict and prevent its excesses - in effect, to minimize the suffering brought by war. Addressing *jus in bello* (i.e., conduct during war) rather than *jus ad bellum* (i.e., justification for war), the Four Geneva Conventions established protections for the sick and wounded, the shipwrecked, prisoners of war, and civilians. Drawing on traditions of chivalry, compassion, honor, and humanity from diverse cultures and religions, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 aim to balance military necessity with humanitarian considerations, providing a framework for the conduct of hostilities when war breaks out. International Humanitarian Law (IHL), also known as the Law of Armed Conflict, translates the Geneva Conventions into practical terms, placing limits on the methods (i.e., tactics) and means (i.e., weaponry) of war. Providing protection from violence for those *hors de combat* (uninvolved - or no longer involved - in combat, including civilians, the sick and wounded, and detainees) while permitting legitimate military operations, IHL is based on three core principles: precaution, distinction, and proportionality. (1) Precaution - Combatants must take reasonable measures to avoid or minimize harm to civilians when planning or conducting attacks. (2) Distinction - A clear distinction must be made between civilians and combatants, including identifying military personnel through uniforms. (3) Proportionality - The force used in an attack must be proportionate to the military objective at hand. This is why indiscriminate weapons - such as nuclear weapons and victim-detonated landmines - are prohibited under IHL. Additionally, IHL mandates special protection for hospitals, places of worship, religious leaders, and humanitarian actors during armed conflict. Obligatory for both State armed forces and non-state armed groups, IHL applies only in times of war - whether international armed conflict (IAC) (war between two or more States) or non-international armed conflict (NIAC) (commonly known as civil war). However, its principles can also serve as a guideline for security forces and armed groups in other situations of violence that fall below the threshold of war. A fundamental rule of IHL requires proper medical treatment for all sick and wounded, even the enemy, and mandates humane treatment of prisoners of war and detainees. Furthermore, IHL recognizes the role of neutral humanitarian actors, such as the ICRC, in accessing, protecting, and assisting people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence. Today, every State in the world has signed the Geneva Conventions, underscoring their universal relevance across cultural and religious traditions. This collective commitment affirms governments' responsibility not only to comply with but also to promote IHL. It is for this reason that the ICRC refers to the Geneva Conventions as "the one

set of rules we all agree on.”¹¹ Beyond individual protections for civilians, the sick and wounded, and detainees, compliance with IHL offers broader benefits. By curbing violence and prohibiting heinous acts such as torture and rape, IHL provides a clear framework for adversaries to operate on mutually agreed terms, preventing cycles of vengeance that fuel hatred and make peacebuilding exponentially more difficult. Although war may result from The Three Poisons of *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hatred), and *moha* (delusion), its conduct does not need to be driven by these emotions. IHL’s principles introduce an element of humanity into war, and acts of compassion - such as providing medical treatment to a wounded enemy, allowing prisoners to practice their religion and communicate with their families, or granting access to neutral humanitarian actors - can serve as the first steps on the path to positive peace.

IV. CHALLENGES FACING IHL COMPLIANCE

The question, of course, arises: if all States have signed the Geneva Conventions and undertaken the obligation to comply with IHL and promote its principles, then why do we see such terrible violence in war zones around the world? The simple fact is that a signature on a document, although legally binding, is not enough. There may be a range of challenges to IHL when armed conflict occurs, whether it be the issuing of illegal orders by a military or armed group commander or the frontline troops’ ignorance of - or decision to violate - IHL principles when fighting begins. The practical difficulty (if not impossibility) of enforcing IHL when war is in full swing is an additional challenge. In some cases, acknowledgment of an “armed conflict” is politically and diplomatically inexpedient for a State, and so they rebrand the violence as something other than war, denying the application and relevance of IHL to that particular context. In so doing, they remove the protections that IHL provides to civilians, the sick and wounded, and detainees - a decision that may even unintentionally exacerbate and intensify the violence, contrary to the State’s own interests.

In other cases, combatants may perceive IHL as an alien, foreign, “Western,” or proto-colonial body of law to which they cannot relate. This may even lead to an incentive to actively violate IHL in order to assert the combatants’ autonomy, independence, or power. Others may perceive extreme retribution as the most assured way to coerce the enemy into submission, or they may simply fall into the trap of negative reciprocity, whereby the enemy’s violations of IHL are copied, leading to cycles of violence that are difficult to escape. The denial of IHL’s applicability, or selective compliance with IHL when war occurs, also has implications for the implementation of humanitarian action. Frequently, neutral humanitarian actors find themselves prevented from carrying out their work on the ground - whether blocked from crossing military checkpoints or

¹¹ International Committee of the Red Cross, “75th Anniversary of the Geneva Conventions – ‘The One Set of Rules We All Agree On,’” August 11, 2024, accessed on [January 19, 2025].
accessed at: <https://blogs.icrc.org/en/2024/08/75th-anniversary-of-the-geneva-conventions-the-one-set-of-rules-we-all-agree-on/>.

prevented from visiting detainees in prisons. A lack of understanding of and respect for neutral, impartial, independent humanitarian action (NIIHA) leaves populations isolated from humanitarian assistance, such as food and medicine, which they have a legal - and human - right to receive. This series of challenges and obstacles to IHL compliance has very real consequences on the ground for civilians, the sick and wounded, detainees, internally displaced people, and refugees. We are daily confronted by images from the world's war zones of the excesses of armed conflict. This should rightly trouble us and incite in us all a collective sense of responsibility to try to address it - not only to strive for the ultimate goal of world peace but, perhaps more immediately, for the often-forgotten goal of humanity in war.

V. BUDDHISM'S RELATIONSHIP WITH VIOLENCE

Buddhism's reputation as a religion of peace is well established and widely recognized, and the central tenet of *ahimsa*, or "non-violence," is often perceived as absolute. But the Lord Buddha cautioned against absolutes, and Buddhism's relationship with violence is far more complex than is commonly portrayed. The Buddha never banned militaries and, in fact, went as far as to prevent military desertion by banning soldiers from ordaining as monks. The Buddha understood the preventive power of a disciplined and well-trained standing army in ensuring peace, as well as the important duty of a soldier to engage in combat when war occurs. Ratheiser and Kariyakarawana note that "Buddhism nowhere teaches that one is not allowed to protect oneself from physical harm," adding that even monks may carry a stick for self-defense. In the Mahāyāna canon, the *Jātaka* story of the Compassionate Captain articulates a case in which even killing can be considered a compassionate act. The story recounts how five hundred arahants, disguised as merchants, were sailing on a ship captained by a *bodhisattva*. In a dream, the captain has a premonition that a man on the ship plans to kill all five hundred arahants. The captain concludes that, in order to prevent the murder of the arahants (which would be a tragedy for Buddhism in itself) and to save the prospective murderer from incurring the grave negative karma borne of killing five hundred arahants, the captain himself must kill the man - even if the captain must incur negative karma for himself in so doing. The altruistic and compassionate motive behind the captain's act of killing - the *bodhisattva*'s very intention - we are told, actually results in positive karma for the captain, who is in a later life reincarnated as the Buddha. It is important to note, of course, that if the captain had believed at the time that killing the man would have resulted in positive karma for himself, the karmic result would have been quite different - underscoring the fundamental importance of *cetanā* (intention). It is also important to distinguish between the responsibilities of the *Saṅgha* and the laity when it comes to violence. Tilakaratne makes a clear distinction between the *nibbanic* Buddhism of the ordained *bhikkhu* and the *samsaric* Buddhism of the layperson;¹² whilst the

¹² Tilakaratne, *Two Dimensions of Buddhist Practice and Their Implications on Statecraft*, in *Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law* (Routledge, 2023), p. 93.

former strives ultimately for release from *saṃsāra* and thus the prohibition on killing may be considered absolute, the latter aspires to little more than an improved reincarnation within *saṃsāra*. Of the five precepts that make up Buddhism's *pañcasīla*, the first - *pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* - is a vow to avoid harming life. And yet, countless Buddhist laypeople every day partake in fishing, an activity that involves the taking of life of a sentient being. Mosquitoes are routinely swatted to death. Some Buddhist laity go as far as to kill livestock such as pigs and chickens. However, as highlighted by Buddhaghosa, the killing of larger livestock, such as cattle, is especially sinful due to the amount of effort involved in taking the life.¹³ Few Buddhists ever kill a human, and to kill a *bhikkhu* is a grave sin. Of course, the killer's intention (*cetanā*, in Buddhist terms) is an additional factor regulating the karmic implications of the act. To kill a chicken in order to eat it differs from killing a dog out of anger at its constant barking. To kill a man who threatens one's family differs from killing a rival out of jealousy. It can be seen, therefore, that for the laity, the vow against harming life is rarely considered absolute, and there exists a sort of hierarchy of sin based upon factors such as the life form itself, the level of effort involved, and the intention behind the act of killing. Though the needs and concerns of non-combatants during armed conflict remain the preoccupation of IHL, the effects of war on combatants themselves should never be forgotten, and indeed, Thich Nhat Hanh "saw that the first person to suffer in war is the person who perpetrates violence."¹⁴ Practical reality shows that Buddhists do engage in violence, whether as military personnel in State armed forces or as members of non-state armed groups. Buddhists have also been implicated in intercommunal violence. The ideal, therefore, of the pacifist Buddhist must not obscure the everyday reality of Buddhist combatants, for whom Buddhism's tenets can provide practical guidance while enhancing respect for IHL and providing spiritual comfort for those engaged in one of the most physically, psychologically, and morally challenging roles of our temporal existence.

VI. BUDDHIST GUIDANCE FOR COMBATANTS: BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION

Importantly, neither Buddhism nor IHL addresses justifications for war (though, unlike IHL, Buddhism does address non-justification for war). In the words of ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric, "the ICRC despises war and all its ills,"¹⁵ and the Buddha viewed war as an ultimate folly of greed,

¹³ Harvey, *Buddhist Motivation to Support IHL, from Concern to Minimise Harms Inflicted by Military Action to Both Those Who Suffer Them and Those Who Inflict Them*, in *Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law* (Routledge, 2023), p. 61.

¹⁴ Sieber, *Hanh's Concept of Being Peace: The Order of Interbeing* (Claremont School of Theology, USA), accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://philpapers.org/archive/SIEHCO-2.pdf>.

¹⁵ Spoljaric, "There Are 100 Steps to Peace; the First Are Humanitarian," September 7, 2023, accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://blogs.icrc.org/ir/en/2023/09/icrc-president-mirjana-spoljaric-when-international-humanitarian-law-is-respected-lives-are-saved/>.

hatred, and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*). However, Bartles-Smith notes that “the Shakyani republic to which the Buddha was said to have belonged experienced war during his lifetime,” and that “it was in response to this background of escalating war” that the Buddha developed the “non-violent ethics of renunciation and self-control.”¹⁶ Moreover, Bartles-Smith adds that, since the Buddha was said to belong to the *khattiya* caste, he “expressed these ideas in the language of the warrior ethos in which he was steeped.” The ICRC’s dialogue with Buddhist leaders, scholars, and practitioners since 2017 has revealed a rich body of teachings that can provide concrete guidance to Buddhists during times of war and other situations of violence. On the most basic level, a Buddhist’s motivation to become a combatant is an initial concern; his karma may depend, for example, on whether his motivation is to use violence offensively or defensively. Perhaps, as in the case of the Compassionate Captain, an important factor is whether he consciously takes on for himself the burden of applying violence - and potentially sacrifices his own life - to save others from having to do so, as well as to save lives by doing so. As one (often misattributed) quote puts it: “People sleep peaceably in their beds at night because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf.” For the purposes of this article and its focus on IHL’s *jus in bello*, however, we must examine not how Buddhism may justify going to war nor the premise of employing violence per se, but the karmic consequences of individual actions on the battlefield.¹⁷ Specific guidance may therefore roughly be divided into two parts: (1) guidance for combatants’ restraint and (2) guidance for the implementation of humanitarian action during times of war.

6.1. Guidance for combatants’ restraint

Let us assume, therefore, that the Buddhist combatant’s motivation is defensive and altruistic - prepared to accrue the negative karma brought by engaging in violence, and even killing, to prevent others from having to do so, as well as to save lives. But beyond this motivation, how should the Buddhist combatant behave during war? As Harvey has noted:

“For a combatant in a situation of armed conflict, some breaking of the first Buddhist precept is likely. But the precept should nevertheless be lived up to as far, and as often, as possible. This accords with the IHL principles of military necessity... proportionality... and precautions... This will mean that there is (1) minimum death and injury inflicted, and (2) minimum karmic harm to the precept-breaking combatant.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Bartles-Smith, *Introduction: How Does Buddhism Compare with International Humanitarian Law, and Can It Contribute to Humanising War?*, in *Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law* (Routledge, 2023), p. 17.

¹⁷ Kent, D. *Onward Buddhist Soldiers: Preaching to the Sri Lankan Army*, in *Buddhist Warfare* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 163.

¹⁸ Harvey, *Buddhist Motivation to Support IHL, from Concern to Minimise Harms Inflicted by Military Action to Both Those Who Suffer Them and Those Who Inflict Them*, in *Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law* (Routledge, 2023), p. 63.

It is also clear from the Buddha's words: "It is intention, oh monks, that I call karma - for by intention one performs karma through body, word or mind."¹⁹ This underscores that intention (*cetanā*) is of paramount importance. Once violence has ensued, the combatant's individual actions, governed by *cetanā*, become the primary consideration: whether he intends to use violence indiscriminately or strives to use only the minimum force necessary to achieve the military objective at any given moment. The latter requires restraint - a supremely difficult task in the chaos of battle, with bullets flying and comrades suffering injuries and death. The combatant himself is at high risk, and fear, anger, and hatred may be overwhelming. In such a situation, he is arguably most vulnerable to the poisons of *lobha*, *dosa*, *moha* (greed, hatred, and delusion). The combatant's *marana-citta* (state of mind at the time of death) will determine his rebirth - whether he dies consumed by hatred for his enemy or in a state of compassion for those he may have had to kill. The practice of *maranassati* (mindfulness of death) may help combatants cultivate a deeper understanding of death's inevitability before deployment. This, in turn, could provide the psychological resources needed to navigate battle, reducing fear and anger at the prospect of death while fostering restraint and compassion toward those he may be forced to kill. In doing so, he may avoid rebirth in *sarājita*, the battle-hell. While some argue that a Buddhist cannot engage in battle with right intention, Buddhist combatants themselves may disagree. One light infantry soldier explained: "Soldiers don't shoot the enemy out of personal anger. If they shoot, they do so for the common good... The intention here is a good one."²⁰ While this statement may conflate motivation and intention, the soldier is clear that he does not kill out of personal hatred. If he ensures that he targets only those directly participating in hostilities (i.e., other combatants) and makes every effort to avoid harming civilians, he may minimize the negative karma inevitably associated with killing. Even if he inadvertently kills a civilian while targeting enemy combatants, his intention not to harm civilians may still lessen the karmic burden. This aligns with IHL, which acknowledges that proportionate and unintended civilian casualties, while deeply regrettable, do not necessarily constitute a violation of the law. The fundamental principle - shared by both Buddhism and IHL - is to make every effort to prevent civilian harm. In "The Paradox of the Buddhist Soldier,"²¹ Ratheiser and Kariyakarawana address the seemingly contradictory notion of a "Buddhist combatant," asking: "Given that all Buddhist nations have militaries, how does one square these

¹⁹ *Anguttara Nikaya*, in *The Book of Gradual Sayings* (*Anguttara Nikāya*), ed. and trans. F. L. Woodward and E. M. Hare, 5 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1930 – 36), 3: 295. "*Cetanaham bhikkave kammam vadami, Cetayitva kammam karoti, kayena, vacaya, manasa.*"

²⁰ Kent, D. *Onward Buddhist Soldiers: Preaching to the Sri Lankan Army*, in *Buddhist Warfare* (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 163.

²¹ Daniel Ratheiser and Sunil Kariyakarawana, "The Paradox of the Buddhist Soldier," *Contemporary Buddhism* 22, no. 1 - 2 (2021): 102 – 143, accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2021.2145683>.

differences or reconcile this paradox?”²² They cite Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu: “No matter what kind of activity we carry out - be it politics, economics, or, indeed, even war - if done morally, it will maintain the natural, harmonious balance of all things and will be consistent with the original plan of nature.”²³ Therefore, intention and self-restraint appear central to moral Buddhist conduct in war. As the Buddha stated: “Though one may conquer a thousand times a thousand men in battle, yet he indeed is the noblest victor who conquers himself.”²⁴ Surprisingly, the closest real-world doctrine to this guidance comes not from a Buddhist military but from the United States Army. In 2009, General Stanley McChrystal, then commander of coalition forces in Afghanistan, introduced the principle of “courageous restraint,”²⁵ prioritizing civilian protection over enemy casualties. Although not consciously drawn from Buddhist *Dhamma*, McChrystal’s doctrine arguably offers a real-life blueprint for waging war by Buddhist principles.

Beyond this, even non-Buddhist militaries have begun to explore the practice of *vipassanā* meditation to enhance soldiers’ focus in combat, reinforcing restraint and improving precision.²⁶ While some argue that incorporating *vipassanā* into military training strips the practice of its core principle of compassion, it can also be seen as supporting right intention as described by Harvey: upholding the first precept as far as possible - even on the battlefield.

6.2. Guidance for the implementation of humanitarian action during situations of violence

In addition to civilians, IHL also protects detainees, as well as the sick and wounded, on the basis that they are unable to engage in combat. Could a Buddhist combatant, then, counterbalance the negative karma accrued by killing through ensuring that life-saving treatment is provided to his wounded enemy? Similarly, might there be a karmic incentive for the combatant to guarantee humane treatment for captured enemies, who are no longer able to fight? The Geneva Conventions establish provisions for neutral, impartial, and independent humanitarian action (NIIHA), as exemplified by the work of the ICRC. Such humanitarian efforts also extend to faith-based organizations, such as the Engaged Buddhists of Vietnam, which assist those affected by armed conflict. From a karmic perspective, might it not also benefit a Buddhist combatant to facilitate humanitarian actors’ access to those in need - whether civilians, the sick or wounded, or detainees?

²² Ibid.

²³ Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu, *How to Study Dhamma*. (1986), p. 119 – 120.

²⁴ *Dhammapada*. Chapter 8, verse 103.

²⁵ Joseph H. Felter and Jacob N. Shapiro, “Limiting Civilian Casualties as Part of a Winning Strategy: The Case for Courageous Restraint,” *Dædalus* 146, no. 1 (Winter 2017): 44–58, accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00421.

²⁶ Matt Richtel, “The Latest in Military Strategy: Mindfulness,” *The New York Times*, April 5, 2019, accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/05/health/military-mindfulness-training.html>.

6.3. Promoting Buddhism & IHL: A shared responsibility for human development

The ICRC's 2018 report, *The Roots of Restraint in War*,²⁷ emphasized that legal frameworks alone are insufficient in fostering compliance with IHL. Rather, a combination of legal principles with local traditions, customs, and values is far more effective. This recognition has guided the ICRC's engagement with religious and cultural traditions, fostering dialogue that not only strengthens IHL compliance but also enriches the ICRC's understanding of different perspectives on violence, conduct in war, and humanitarian action. These exchanges have enhanced the ICRC's ability to respond to the needs of communities affected by armed conflict, while also allowing it to learn from traditions that predate IHL by centuries. However, the responsibility for promoting and disseminating IHL does not rest solely with the ICRC. Under the Geneva Conventions, States bear the primary obligation to ensure compliance with IHL. As previously discussed, hesitation in fulfilling these obligations remains a challenge. In this context, religious leaders and cultural experts play a crucial role in promoting humanitarian values and teachings that align with IHL. By framing IHL principles within familiar cultural and religious contexts, they can demystify and depoliticize IHL, reinforcing its purely humanitarian purpose. These efforts are not just institutional responsibilities - they are a shared moral duty as human beings. Buddhist leaders, scholars, and practitioners have already engaged with the ICRC on these issues. Notable events include the International Conference on Reducing Suffering in Armed Conflict held in Sri Lanka (2019)²⁸ and Thailand (2022), culminating in the 2023 publication of *Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law*.²⁹ Beyond these conferences, esteemed institutions such as Shan State Buddhist University in Myanmar and Smaratungga Buddhist College in Indonesia³⁰ have collaborated with the ICRC to explore the intersection of Buddhism and IHL. In Sri Lanka, the ICRC has worked with a Buddhist-led working group - including venerable *bhikkhus*, academics, humanitarians, lawyers, and military personnel - on addressing "ambiguous loss" experienced by families of those

²⁷ International Committee of the Red Cross, *The Roots of Restraint in War* (Geneva: ICRC, 2018), accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/4352-roots-restraint-war>.

²⁸ International Committee of the Red Cross, *Reducing Suffering During Armed Conflict: The Interface Between Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law*, 2019, accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/reducing-suffering-during-conflict-interface-between-buddhism-and-international>.

²⁹ Bartles-Smith, Andrew, et al., eds. *Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law*. Routledge, 2024. accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/75921>.

³⁰ International Committee of the Red Cross, "Buddhist Ethics and International Humanitarian Law: Seminar Organized by ICRC and Smaratungga Buddhist College," June 23, 2020, accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/ihl-smaratungga-buddhist-college-seminar>.

missing in the Sri Lankan armed conflict. Further engagement has taken place with the Chaplaincy Department of the Royal Thai Army, beginning in 2023. In 2024, in partnership with the ICRC, the Faculty of Law at the University of Colombo launched a Certificate Course in IHL and Buddhism.³¹ The overwhelming support for these initiatives underscores the vast ethical and philosophical resources within Buddhism that can be mobilized to address the humanitarian challenges of armed conflict. Nonetheless, more work remains to be done. States must fulfill their legal obligations to comply with and promote IHL. Religious leaders can play a key role in this process by emphasizing the ethical values within IHL that resonate with religious teachings and cultural traditions. By enabling combatants to personally identify with IHL's principles and develop a sense of moral ownership over them, these efforts can reinforce respect for the role of neutral, impartial, and independent humanitarian actors in war. More importantly, such initiatives can contribute to saving lives and reducing suffering wherever armed conflict and violence occur.

VII. CONCLUSION

While Buddhism inherently grapples with the moral complexities of killing, this ethical dilemma can sometimes lead to reluctance among Buddhist leaders to engage with IHL - a legal framework that does not categorically prohibit killing. However, it is important to recognize that IHL does prohibit the deliberate killing of specific categories of individuals, adopting a pragmatic approach aimed at minimizing violence and reducing suffering when war does occur. In this way, IHL serves as a crucial first step on the path to peace, aligning with Buddhism's fundamental aspiration for peaceful coexistence. Given States' legal obligations to promote IHL, and the duty of both militaries and non-state armed groups to comply with its principles in times of war, there is a parallel moral obligation on all of us to mitigate the consequences of violence when conflict arises. In this context, Buddhists - both ordained and lay - have a vital role to play. By drawing upon and promoting Buddhist traditions, teachings, and ethical principles, they can contribute to the education and reinforcement of IHL compliance, ultimately helping to save lives, reduce suffering, and lay the groundwork for lasting peace.

³¹ Faculty of Law, University of Colombo, "Certificate in International Humanitarian Law and Buddhism," November 28, 2024, accessed on [January 19, 2025]. accessed at: <https://law.cmb.ac.lk/certificate-in-international-humanitarian-law-and-buddhism/>.

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SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPASSION: A BUDDHIST VISION FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

“Cease to do evil, learn to do good, purify your mind, this is the teaching of the Buddhas.”¹

Contemporary human development paradigms, while driving material progress, often overlook the ethical and relational dimensions essential for addressing systemic suffering and inequality. This paper proposes a Buddhist-inspired framework that places compassion (*karuṇā*) and shared responsibility at the heart of sustainable and equitable development. Drawing on core Buddhist teachings - such as interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), the Bodhisattva ideal, and the Four Noble Truths - this study argues that compassion, when enacted through collective action, bridges the gap between individual moral responsibility and systemic change. By integrating textual analysis of Buddhist scriptures with case studies of Engaged Buddhist movements (e.g., Tzu Chi Foundation, Sarvodaya Shramadana), the paper demonstrates how Buddhist ethics reframe development as a shared journey to alleviate suffering (*dukkha*) and cultivate interdependence.

The theoretical foundation explores compassion as an active commitment to justice, contrasting passive empathy with the Bodhisattva’s vow, which prioritizes collective well-being. It conceptualizes interdependence, as articulated in the doctrine of dependent origination, in relation to modern notions of global solidarity, emphasizing that issues such as environmental degradation, poverty, and social fragmentation are inherently interconnected and cannot be addressed in isolation. The paper further examines Buddhist critiques of exploitative economic systems, advocating instead for the

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¹ *Dhammapada* (2019), p. 67. (*Dh* 183), p. “*Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ, kusalaṣūpasam-padā; Sacittapariyodapanam – etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ.*”

principles of “right livelihood” and mindful consumption as fundamental pillars of sustainable development.

Practically, this study examines historical and contemporary manifestations of Buddhist compassion in action, ranging from monastic-led education in ancient India to contemporary initiatives in disaster relief, healthcare, and conflict resolution. A case study of Sri Lanka’s Sarvodaya Shramadana movement demonstrates how Buddhist ethics underpin community-driven development, empowering marginalized populations through shared responsibility. Building on these insights, the proposed framework outlines four key principles for policymakers: (1) compassion as a collective duty, (2) recognition of systemic interdependence, (3) mindful governance, and (4) ethical collaboration between secular and spiritual domains.

A comparative analysis reveals synergies between Buddhist compassion and secular human rights frameworks, particularly in their shared emphasis on dignity and equity. However, Buddhist ethics distinctively prioritize moral motivation over legal obligation, providing a more holistic approach to tackling the ‘spiritual poverty’ that underlies material deprivation. Challenges to implementation, including cultural adaptation and resistance to non-Western paradigms, are critically examined alongside opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration.

This paper concludes that a Buddhist vision of human development, grounded in compassion and shared responsibility, provides a transformative pathway to tackling 21st-century challenges. It advocates integrating mindfulness practices into education, policy, and grassroots activism to cultivate global citizenship and resilience. By bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary innovation, this framework encourages scholars and practitioners to reconceptualize development as a collective moral endeavor.

Keywords: *Buddhist compassion, shared responsibility, human development, interdependence, Engaged Buddhism, sustainable development, ethical frameworks.*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and context

Human development encompasses a broad range of efforts to enhance well-being by expanding people’s choices, freedoms, and capabilities. As a holistic framework, it extends beyond economic growth to encompass education, health, equality, and meaningful social participation. In 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) introduced the Human Development Index (HDI) to measure progress in human development using key indicators such as life expectancy, education, and income (UNDP, 2021). Despite significant advancements, the growing complexities of global challenges, including climate change, inequality, and social fragmentation, necessitate a renewed approach rooted in ethical and compassionate practices.

These challenges highlight the urgent need for alternative paradigms that go beyond economic progress to encompass the moral and emotional dimensions of human development. With its rich tradition of ethical guidance and emphasis on compassion, Buddhism provides profound insights into addressing contemporary dilemmas. A Buddhist approach to human development integrates shared responsibility and compassion, offering a pathway to sustainable and equitable growth.

The growing importance of ethical frameworks is evident as humanity faces crises such as pandemics, environmental degradation, and social injustice. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, underscored the interconnectedness of global societies and the necessity of collective action and empathy (WHO, 2020). In this context, a Buddhist perspective grounded in interconnectedness (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and non-harming (*ahiṃsā*) is especially relevant. Integrating Buddhist values into human development discourse fosters an inclusive and compassionate approach that addresses both material needs and emotional and spiritual well-being.

1.2. Buddhist foundations of human development

Buddhism conceptualizes human development as the reduction of suffering (*duḥkha*) and the cultivation of well-being (*sukha*). At its core, the Noble Eightfold Path offers a balanced framework of ethical conduct (*sīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*).² These elements form a comprehensive blueprint for human development, fostering self-awareness, moral responsibility, and community-oriented behavior. Compassion (*karuṇā*) is a fundamental principle in Buddhist ethics. It embodies empathy for the suffering of others and inspires altruistic action. As the Dalai Lama (1999) argues, compassion is not merely an emotional response but also a rational and practical approach to life.³ Compassion fosters resilience, strengthens social bonds, and enhances collective well-being. Similarly, the principle of shared responsibility, an implicit theme in Buddhist teachings, stems from the concept of interdependence. This principle highlights the inextricable link between individual well-being, the welfare of others, and the environment.

Relevance of ethical and compassionate approaches

Modern human development frameworks often prioritize material prosperity while overlooking ethical considerations. However, this approach is inadequate for addressing systemic global challenges. For instance, unregulated economic growth has intensified climate change, resulting in severe consequences such as rising sea levels and extreme weather patterns (IPCC, 2021). Addressing these challenges necessitates a paradigm shift that embeds ethical considerations into both policy-making and personal conduct. Buddhism's focus on right livelihood (*samyak ājīva*) and environmental stewardship provides valuable ethical insights. The principle of right livelihood

² Rahula (1974), p. 35.

³ Dalai Lama (1999), p. 26.

urges individuals to pursue professions that uphold ethical integrity and avoid harm to others or the environment.⁴ When applied at organizational and governmental levels, this principle can inform sustainable practices and ethical decision-making. Moreover, Buddhist teachings on mindfulness (*smṛti*) and equanimity (*upekṣā*) play a crucial role in emotional well-being, an aspect often overlooked in human development metrics. Mindfulness practices, widely integrated into psychological and therapeutic settings, have been shown to enhance mental health and strengthen resilience against stress and anxiety⁵. Incorporating these practices into human development strategies can foster a more holistic and balanced approach.

Challenges and opportunities

Although integrating Buddhist principles into human development holds great promise, it also presents notable challenges. The secularization of Buddhist practices, especially in Western contexts, has at times resulted in the dilution of their ethical and spiritual depth.⁶ This calls for a thoughtful and authentic application of Buddhist values in development policies and initiatives. Moreover, globalization provides an opportunity to transcend cultural and geographical boundaries, thereby making Buddhist principles more accessible to diverse populations. International organizations, including the United Nations, can play a pivotal role in advancing these values by fostering cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration. In conclusion, human development demands a paradigm shift that integrates ethical and compassionate approaches to effectively tackle contemporary challenges. With its emphasis on shared responsibility and compassion, Buddhism offers a visionary framework for promoting sustainable and inclusive growth.⁷ Integrating these principles into policies, education, and individual behavior can pave the way for a more just and harmonious world.

1.3. Relevance of Buddhist compassion

In today's world, where economic disparities, social injustices, and environmental degradation continue to hinder human progress, the need for ethical and compassionate approaches in human development is more critical than ever. Buddhism, with its emphasis on compassion (*karuṇā*) and shared responsibility, offers a moral and philosophical foundation that closely aligns with human development goals. These principles not only enhance individual well-being but also contribute to the greater social good by fostering interconnectedness, ethical conduct, and a sense of collective responsibility.

Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) and human development

⁴ Harvey (2000), p. 132.

⁵ Kabat-Zinn (2003), p. 64.

⁶ Purser & Loy (2013), p. 24.

⁷ Toh Swee-Hin, Engaged Buddhism & Its contribution to Sustainable Development & ESD, accessed on February 16 2025, available at: https://earthcharter.org/wp-content/assets/virtual-library2/images/uploads/16%20Manuscript_Sweehin.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Compassion, or *karuṇā*, is a fundamental virtue in Buddhism, representing the deep aspiration to alleviate the suffering of all beings. It is often paired with wisdom (*prajñā*) to ensure that compassionate actions lead to meaningful and effective outcomes.⁸ Unlike pity, which creates a sense of separation between the helper and the sufferer, Buddhist compassion is grounded in the principle of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*) – the recognition that all beings are intrinsically connected. The concept of *karuṇā* aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in areas such as poverty eradication, gender equality, peace, and environmental sustainability (UNDP, 2021). For example, Buddhist compassion advocates for economic systems that prioritize human well-being over profit maximization, aligning with SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Likewise, its emphasis on non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) and respect for all life supports SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Furthermore, *karuṇā* extends beyond individual acts of kindness to encompass institutional and systemic transformation. Policies guided by compassion emphasize inclusive development, equitable resource distribution, and sustainable environmental practices. The Buddhist notion of Engaged Buddhism, championed by figures like Thich Nhat Hanh (1998), advocates for active participation in addressing social and economic injustices, demonstrating that compassion is not passive but profoundly transformative.

Shared responsibility and the collective good

Another fundamental Buddhist principle that aligns with human development is shared responsibility. The Buddha's teachings emphasize that ethical living is not an individual pursuit but a collective endeavor. The Noble Eightfold Path, particularly the precepts of right action (*samyak karmānta*) and right livelihood (*samyak ājīva*), underscores the importance of contributing positively to society.⁹ This principle resonates with the global imperative for collaborative efforts in addressing climate change, social inequality, and economic disparities. For instance, Buddhist environmental ethics, deeply rooted in the principles of non-harming (*ahiṃsā*) and reverence for nature, advocate for sustainable living. Movements such as Buddhist environmental activism promote policies that uphold ecological balance and intergenerational equity.¹⁰ These values align closely with SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land). Shared responsibility is also reflected in Buddhist social welfare models, particularly within monastic traditions that emphasize community support and resource-sharing. The practice of *dāna* (generosity), where individuals contribute to the well-being of others, serves as an ethical foundation for humanitarian aid, poverty alleviation, and community development.¹¹ By fostering a culture of generosity and mutual aid, Buddhism offers a robust ethical framework for sustainable human development.

⁸ Harvey (2000), p. 67.

⁹ Rahula (1974), p. 54.

¹⁰ Kaza (2000), p. 124.

¹¹ Gombrich (2006), p. 87.

Purpose of the paper

The purpose of this paper is to explore how Buddhist compassion and shared responsibility can serve as guiding principles for collective action in human development. By examining the ethical foundations of *karuṇā* and the interconnected nature of existence, this study aims to demonstrate how Buddhist values can inform policies and initiatives that promote economic justice, environmental sustainability, and social well-being. Specifically, it will: (1) analyze the role of *karuṇā* in addressing global inequalities and social injustices, (2) examine how shared responsibility can enhance collective efforts in sustainable development, and (3) explore real-world applications of Buddhist ethical principles in policymaking and social movements.

By integrating Buddhist ethics into contemporary human development discourse, this paper highlights an alternative vision of progress - one that transcends material wealth and prioritizes compassion, interconnectedness, and long-term well-being. Through this exploration, policymakers, scholars, and global leaders may find inspiration in Buddhist teachings to foster a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

1.4. Research objectives

This study explores the integration of Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) and shared responsibility within the framework of sustainable human development. By analyzing Buddhist ethical teachings, this research aims to demonstrate how compassion can serve as a transformative force for societal well-being. The primary research objectives are as follows:

To examine the role of compassion in fostering shared responsibility; Analyze how *karuṇā*, as an ethical and social principle, encourages altruistic behavior, ethical governance, and inclusive development; explore the relationship between Buddhist moral teachings and contemporary issues such as social justice, poverty alleviation, and climate action; investigate the historical impact of Buddhist compassion on community welfare models, monastic economies, and humanitarian initiatives. To propose a Buddhist-inspired framework for sustainable human development: Develop a conceptual model that integrates Buddhist ethical values with modern development goals; identify practical applications of Buddhist principles in policy-making, education, environmental sustainability, and governance; provide recommendations for governments, NGOs, and social organizations to implement compassion-driven policies for equitable growth and social harmony.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on ethics and development by offering an alternative paradigm that integrates material progress with moral and spiritual well-being.

1.5. Methodology

To achieve these objectives, this study adopts a qualitative research approach, integrating textual analysis, case studies, and comparative studies to evaluate the relevance of Buddhist ethics in human development. The

methodology is structured as follows:

Textual analysis: Examine primary Buddhist texts, such as the *Sutta Pitaka* and *Abhidharma*, to explore how compassion and shared responsibility are conceptualized; analyze secondary sources, including modern Buddhist philosophical interpretations, to understand how these concepts have evolved in contemporary discourse.

Case studies: Historical Case Studies: Analyze the influence of Buddhist compassion on social welfare models in Buddhist societies, such as Emperor Ashoka's policies and Tibetan Buddhist humanitarian projects. Modern Case Studies: Examine initiatives like Thich Nhat Hanh's Engaged Buddhism movement, the Dalai Lama's advocacy for universal responsibility, and Buddhist-inspired environmental activism.

Comparative analysis: Compare Buddhist perspectives on human development with mainstream Western development models, particularly Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom approach. Analyze Buddhist ethical teachings in relation to global ethical frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This multi-dimensional methodology facilitates a comprehensive examination of Buddhist compassion and its practical applications in human development. By integrating textual analysis with real-world case studies, this research offers a holistic and actionable framework for ethical and sustainable progress.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1. Buddhist concepts of compassion (*karuṇā*)

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is a fundamental ethical principle in Buddhism, deeply embedded in its teachings on morality, wisdom, and spiritual development. It is not merely an emotional response but a moral imperative that necessitates active efforts to alleviate the suffering of others. Recognized as one of the Four Brahmavihāras (Divine Abodes) - alongside loving-kindness (*mettā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) - compassion serves as a cornerstone of ethical living.¹² This section examines the Buddhist conceptualization of compassion, its ethical significance, and its pivotal role in the Bodhisattva ideal and the path to enlightenment.

Compassion (*Karuṇā*) in Buddhism

In Buddhist philosophy, *karuṇā* is defined as the sincere aspiration to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings. It is not rooted in pity or condescension but arises from a profound understanding of the interconnected nature of existence (*pratītyasamutpāda*). The Buddha emphasized that suffering (*duḥkha*) is an inherent aspect of life, as outlined in the Four Noble Truths, and that the highest expression of compassion is to guide others toward

¹² Harvey (2000), p. 65.

liberation through wisdom (*prajñā*) and ethical conduct (*sīla*).¹³ Compassion in Buddhism transcends mere acts of kindness; it is an active force that fosters social harmony, ethical decision-making, and non-violence (*ahiṃsā*). The Dhammapada (Verse 270) states: “He who has compassion for all creatures is called a noble being.” Likewise, in the *Metta Sutta*, the Buddha teaches that one should cultivate love and compassion for all beings, just as a mother protects her only child.¹⁴

Ethical implications of *karuṇā*

The ethical dimension of *karuṇā* lies at the heart of Buddhist moral teachings, shaping both personal conduct and social ethics. Its key ethical implications include:

Non-harming (*Ahiṃsā*): Compassion fosters a deep commitment to non-violence, which is why many Buddhist traditions advocate for vegetarianism and peaceful conflict resolution.¹⁵ Generosity (*Dāna*): Genuine compassion is expressed through selfless giving, both materially and emotionally. The practice of *dāna* is central to Buddhist ethics, serving as a means to reduce attachment and cultivate empathy.¹⁶ Right Livelihood (*Sammā Ājīva*): Buddhist ethics encourage engagement in professions that do not cause harm, discouraging involvement in industries related to weapons, exploitation, or environmental destruction.¹⁷ Social Responsibility: The Buddhist principle of interdependence extends compassion beyond personal relationships to encompass social justice, economic equity, and environmental sustainability. The concept of Engaged Buddhism, championed by Thich Nhat Hanh (1998), exemplifies the application of compassion to global issues such as war, poverty, and human rights.

Compassion in the Bodhisattva ideal

One of the most profound manifestations of compassion in Buddhism is found in the Bodhisattva ideal, particularly in Mahāyāna Buddhism. A Bodhisattva is an enlightened being who, out of infinite compassion, postpones their final liberation (*nirvāṇa*) to assist all sentient beings in attaining enlightenment.¹⁸ In contrast to the Theravāda ideal of the Arahant, who seeks personal liberation, the Bodhisattva embodies universal compassion (*mahākaruṇā*).

Key features of the Bodhisattva's compassion

The Bodhisattva vow: A Bodhisattva takes a vow to save all beings from suffering, often expressed in the famous Mahāyāna vow: “Sentient beings

¹³ Rahula (1974), p. 47.

¹⁴ Bodhi (2005), p. 93.

¹⁵ Keown (1992), p. 27.

¹⁶ Gombrich (2006), p. 83.

¹⁷ Harvey (2000), p. 31.

¹⁸ Williams (2009), p. 179.

are numberless. I vow to save them all.” (Shantideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 8th century CE).

Skillful means (*Upāya-Kauśalya*): Compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhism is often combined with wisdom (*prajñā*) to create skillful means - methods tailored to help different beings based on their capacities and circumstances. The Lotus *Sūtra* highlights how the Buddha and Bodhisattvas use adaptive teachings to guide beings toward enlightenment.¹⁹

Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin) as the embodiment of compassion: Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, is one of the most revered figures in Buddhism. In Tibetan Buddhism, he is associated with the Dalai Lama, who is believed to be his manifestation. In Chinese Buddhism, he is venerated as Guanyin, a compassionate deity who hears the cries of those who suffer.

The Bodhisattva’s compassion is radical and boundless - it transcends self-interest and embraces all beings without discrimination. This ideal serves as an ethical model for social responsibility, activism, and community service in Buddhist communities.

Compassion and the pursuit of enlightenment:

While compassion is primarily directed outward, it is also a means of spiritual self-transformation. In Buddhism, enlightenment (*bodhi*) is achieved through balancing wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). Without compassion, wisdom can become detached and indifferent; without wisdom, compassion can become misguided. This dual cultivation is emphasized in both Theravāda meditation practices and Mahāyāna Bodhisattva ethics.

Meditation on compassion (*Karuṇā Bhāvanā*): This practice, commonly found in *Theravāda Vipassanā* meditation, involves visualizing the suffering of others and cultivating a deep wish for their well-being.²⁰ Neuroscientific studies have shown that compassion meditation enhances empathy and emotional resilience, demonstrating its practical benefits in both spiritual and secular contexts.²¹

The Perfection of compassion (*Karuṇā-Pāramitā*): In Mahāyāna Buddhism, compassion is perfected through continuous selfless action, forming one of the Six Perfections (*Pāramitās*) necessary for enlightenment.²² Compassion is seen as a transformative force that purifies the mind, deepens wisdom, and leads to liberation.

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is not just an ethical virtue but a fundamental principle of Buddhist philosophy and practice. It is integral to personal development, social ethics, and the Bodhisattva’s commitment to universal salvation. Whether in the teachings of the historical Buddha, the vows of the Bodhisattvas, or modern applications in social activism, *karuṇā* remains central

¹⁹ Watson (1993), p. 273.

²⁰ Brahm (2006), p. 69.

²¹ Davidson & Harrington (2002), p. 263.

²² Harvey (2000), p. 91.

to the Buddhist vision of human development. By cultivating compassion and shared responsibility, Buddhism offers a sustainable and ethical approach to addressing global challenges such as inequality, violence, and environmental degradation.

2.2. Interdependence and shared responsibility

One of the most profound philosophical principles in Buddhism is *Pratītyasamutpāda* - the doctrine of dependent origination or interdependence. It asserts that all phenomena arise in dependence on multiple causes and conditions, rejecting the notion of an independent, self-sufficient existence. This concept has far-reaching ethical implications, particularly in fostering a sense of shared responsibility in both personal and collective spheres. In today's globalized world, the Buddhist view of interdependence provides a valuable framework for understanding global solidarity, ecological responsibility, and ethical governance.

Pratītyasamutpāda (Interdependence) in Buddhism:

The doctrine of *Pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) is a core teaching of the Buddha, first expounded in the *Pāli* Canon. It is succinctly expressed as: "When this exists, that arises; when this ceases, that ceases."²³

This principle means that nothing exists in isolation - everything is interconnected and conditioned by other factors. The classic twelve-link chain (*dvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda*) describes how suffering arises through a complex web of causality, reinforcing the Buddhist idea that all beings are mutually dependent.²⁴

Key aspects of interdependence

No-self (*anattā*) and relational identity: Buddhism teaches that the self is not an independent entity but rather a dynamic process shaped by relationships and conditions.²⁵ This understanding fosters compassionate engagement with others, as it highlights that personal well-being is intrinsically connected to the well-being of others.

Ecological interdependence: Buddhist thought emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms, closely aligning with modern environmental ethics. Texts such as the *Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta* illustrate how human actions affect nature and, in turn, how nature influences human existence. This interdependence underscores an ethical responsibility to care for the planet.²⁶

Social and economic interdependence: The *Sigālōvāda Sutta* (Dīgha Nikāya 31) outlines reciprocal duties between rulers and citizens, teachers and students, and employers and workers - demonstrating that societies function through

²³ *Majjhima Nikāya*: p. 79.

²⁴ Harvey (2000), p. 159.

²⁵ Gethin (1998), p. 184.

²⁶ Bodhi (2005), p. 68.

mutual responsibility.²⁷ The concept of Buddhist economics, as advocated by E. F. Schumacher in *Buddhist Economics*, promotes sustainability, simplicity, and ethical trade, encouraging a system of shared prosperity.²⁸

Interdependence and collective responsibility:

Since all beings and systems are interconnected, Buddhist ethics assert that individual actions have consequences extending beyond oneself. This recognition forms the basis of shared responsibility, where people collectively work to promote social harmony, ethical governance, and environmental sustainability.

Moral responsibility in a globalized world:

The Bodhisattva ideal in Mahāyāna Buddhism exemplifies an ethical model of universal responsibility, where enlightened beings postpone personal liberation to assist all sentient beings.²⁹ Similarly, modern humanitarian efforts, such as global poverty reduction and refugee assistance, reflect an emerging ethic of interdependence that aligns with Buddhist teachings.

Global solidarity and ethical action:

The Dalai Lama's concept of "Universal Responsibility": The Dalai Lama (1999) argues that humanity must act as a single moral community, emphasizing compassion-based politics, economic justice, and environmental stewardship. His call for secular ethics resonates with the Buddhist idea that all individuals share responsibility for collective well-being.

Engaged Buddhism and social movements:

Thich Nhat Hanh's Engaged Buddhism advocates for mindfulness in social activism, addressing issues such as war, inequality, and climate change.³⁰ Buddhist-led movements in countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar have played key roles in peacemaking, environmental conservation, and human rights advocacy.

Environmental Responsibility as a Moral Imperative: The *Jātaka* tales (stories of the Buddha's past lives) often depict the Buddha as a protector of nature, illustrating that compassion must extend beyond humans to include animals and ecosystems.³¹ Many contemporary Buddhist organizations, such as the Buddhist Climate Action Network, advocate for sustainable development and ecological preservation as a modern manifestation of interdependence.³²

The Buddhist concept of *Pratītyasamutpāda* (interdependence) provides a powerful ethical foundation for promoting shared responsibility in modern society. By recognizing that all actions have consequences beyond the individual,

²⁷ Harvey (2018), p. 79.

²⁸ Schumacher (1973), p. 49.

²⁹ Williams (2009), p. 247.

³⁰ Thich Nhat Hanh (1998), p. 36.

³¹ Gombrich (2006), p. 163.

³² Kaza (2000), p. 65.

Buddhist ethics encourage collective efforts in social justice, environmental conservation, and economic fairness. In an era of increasing global challenges, Buddhism offers a vision of interconnectedness that fosters global solidarity, compassionate leadership, and sustainable human development.

2.3. Human development in Buddhist thought

Human development, in both its individual and collective dimensions, is central to Buddhist philosophy. Unlike modern economic and materialistic conceptions of development, Buddhist thought emphasizes holistic well-being, ethical living, and mental cultivation as the true markers of progress. The ultimate goal of human development in Buddhism is the alleviation of suffering (*dukkha*) and the attainment of inner peace (*nirvāṇa*). This section explores how Buddhist teachings contribute to human flourishing by focusing on ethical conduct (*sīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*) - the three foundational pillars of spiritual and social development.

Human Flourishing and the Alleviation of Suffering (*Dukkha*): The Buddha's first teaching, known as the Four Noble Truths, provides a philosophical framework for understanding suffering and its cessation. These truths highlight the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), its causes (*samudaya*), its cessation (*nirodha*), and the path to liberation (*mārga*).³³

Understanding *Dukkha*: The core challenge of human development

The Pāli term *dukkha* is often translated as "suffering," but it encompasses a broader range of experiences, including physical pain, emotional distress, existential dissatisfaction, and social inequalities. Buddhist teachings identify three forms of suffering: (1) *Dukkha-dukkha* - ordinary suffering, such as illness, aging, and death; (2) *Vipariṇāma-dukkha* - suffering due to change, such as the loss of loved ones or economic instability; (3) *Samkhāra-dukkha* - the deeper existential suffering that arises from ignorance (*avidyā*) and attachment (*tṛṣṇā*). The recognition of *dukkha* is not meant to foster pessimism but to encourage self-awareness and the pursuit of true well-being through the Noble Eightfold Path.³⁴

Buddhist perspectives on well-being and human development:

Buddhist teachings promote a multidimensional approach to well-being, integrating ethical, psychological, and social dimensions. The following principles illustrate Buddhism's distinctive perspective on human development:

Ethical conduct (*sīla*) as the foundation of development:

Buddhism views morality (*sīla*) as essential to personal and collective flourishing. The Five Precepts (*Pañcaśīla*) - which include non-violence, truthfulness, and moderation - serve as guidelines for ethical living

³³ Rahula (1974), p. 64.

³⁴ Gethin (1998), p. 138.

and social harmony.³⁵ Buddhist ethics encourage social responsibility, emphasizing values such as non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), generosity (*dāna*), and right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*). The Buddhist ideal of a Dharmic ruler (Cakkavatti) promotes ethical governance, economic fairness, and the protection of human dignity.³⁶ The *Sigālovāda Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 31) describes reciprocal duties between different social groups - parents and children, employers and workers - illustrating the interdependence of personal and social well-being.³⁷

Mental discipline (*samādhi*) and psychological well-being:

Buddhism recognizes that mental well-being is central to human development. The cultivation of mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samādhi*), and emotional resilience leads to greater psychological stability and happiness. Mindfulness-Based Human Development: The practice of mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*), emphasized in texts like the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, has been widely adapted into modern psychology, stress reduction, and emotional intelligence training.³⁸ Overcoming Cravings and Attachments: The Middle Way (*Madhyamaka*) approach, advocated by the Buddha, suggests that extremes of indulgence and deprivation hinder human flourishing. The focus on moderation and self-awareness helps individuals cultivate a balanced and content life.³⁹ Neuroscientific studies show that meditation and mindfulness practices improve cognitive function, reduce stress, and enhance emotional regulation.⁴⁰ This aligns with Buddhist psychology's emphasis on mental cultivation as the key to sustainable happiness.

Wisdom (*Prajñā*) and the role of education in human development:

True human development, according to Buddhism, requires the cultivation of wisdom (*prajñā*). Education, in the Buddhist sense, is not merely about acquiring knowledge but about understanding the nature of reality and developing ethical discernment. Critical Thinking and Wisdom: The Buddha encouraged his followers to question beliefs and seek truth through direct experience (*ehi-passiko*), which aligns with modern ideas of critical thinking and self-awareness.⁴¹ The Role of Buddhist Universities and Monastic Education: Historic institutions such as *Nālandā* and *Vikramaśīla* played a crucial role in advancing knowledge in philosophy, medicine, and logic, demonstrating how Buddhism has historically contributed to intellectual development.⁴²

³⁵ Harvey (2000), p. 173.

³⁶ Gombrich (2006), p. 182.

³⁷ Bodhi (2005), p. 84.

³⁸ Kabat-Zinn (1990), p. 136.

³⁹ Williams (2009), p. 162.

⁴⁰ Davidson & Harrington (2002), p. 264.

⁴¹ Harvey (2000), p. 175.

⁴² Gombrich (2006), p. 169.

The Economic and social dimensions of Buddhist human development:

Buddhism does not reject material progress but advocates for sustainable and ethical economic practices. The concept of Right Livelihood (*Sammā-ājīva*) in the Eightfold Path emphasizes that economic activities should contribute to societal well-being rather than exploitation. Buddhist Economics: E. F. Schumacher (1973) introduced the idea of Buddhist Economics, which emphasizes sustainability, simplicity, and human-centered economic policies. Community Development and Social Welfare: Many Buddhist communities promote self-sufficient, cooperative economies that prioritize well-being over excessive consumerism. Social Responsibility and Altruism: The Bodhisattva ideal in Mahāyāna Buddhism promotes a model of leadership based on service and compassion, encouraging policies that support education, healthcare, and poverty reduction.⁴³

Buddhist thought provides a comprehensive model of human development that integrates ethical integrity, psychological well-being, wisdom, and social responsibility. Unlike modern economic growth models that emphasize material wealth, Buddhism prioritizes inner transformation, compassion, and mindful living as the true indicators of progress. By addressing suffering (*dukkha*) at both individual and societal levels, Buddhist teachings offer valuable insights for fostering a more ethical, sustainable, and compassionate world.

III. COMPASSION IN ACTION: BUDDHIST PRACTICES FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Historical and contemporary examples

Buddhist thought provides a comprehensive model of human development that integrates ethical integrity, psychological well-being, wisdom, and social responsibility.⁴⁴ Unlike modern economic growth models that emphasize material wealth, Buddhism prioritizes inner transformation, compassion, and mindful living as the true indicators of progress. By addressing suffering (*dukkha*) at both individual and societal levels, Buddhist teachings offer valuable insights for fostering a more ethical, sustainable, and compassionate world.

Historical Buddhist initiatives for human development

Emperor Aśoka's Dhamma-Based Governance: One of the earliest and most profound examples of Buddhist-inspired human development is the reign of Emperor Aśoka (268–232 BCE) of the Maurya Dynasty. After witnessing the devastation of the Kalinga War, Aśoka embraced Buddhism and transformed his rule based on *dhamma* (righteous conduct).⁴⁵ Social Welfare Policies: Aśoka's edicts reveal a commitment to public health, education, and moral development. He established hospitals for humans and animals (Rock

⁴³ Williams (2009), p. 156.

⁴⁴ Bond (2004), p. 59.

⁴⁵ Gombrich (2006), p. 86.

Edict II), wells, rest houses, and shade trees for travelers (Pillar Edict VII), and promoted religious tolerance and non-violence through benevolent administration. He also implemented legal and ethical reforms, reducing the severity of punishments, abolishing animal sacrifices, and encouraging ethical governance based on non-violence and truthfulness (Rock Edict IV). Additionally, Aśoka sent Buddhist missionaries to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and even Greece, promoting intellectual and spiritual development globally.⁴⁶ His governance demonstrated how Buddhist ethics could shape policies that enhance collective well-being.

Buddhist Monastic Universities and Educational Development: The rise of Buddhist monastic universities, such as Nālandā (5th century CE) and Vikramaśīla (8th century CE), played a crucial role in intellectual and social development. Nālandā University, supported by Buddhist rulers like Harṣavardhana (606 – 647 CE) and the Pāla dynasty, became a center for advanced studies in Buddhist philosophy, medicine, logic, astronomy, and mathematics. It also facilitated cross-cultural exchange, attracting students from China, Korea, Tibet, and Central Asia.⁴⁷ Monastic welfare programs provided shelter, food, and education to the underprivileged, embodying Buddhist social responsibility.

Sri Lankan and Southeast Asian Buddhist Welfare Models: Theravāda Buddhist societies in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar historically integrated Buddhist ethics into social welfare programs. Sri Lankan Buddhist kings, such as Parākramabāhu I (12th century CE), initiated irrigation projects, hospitals, and community centers based on Buddhist values.⁴⁸ Thai and Burmese monarchs established public health and education systems in collaboration with monasteries. These models exemplify how Buddhism has historically guided socio-economic development through ethical governance and community welfare.

Contemporary Buddhist-inspired human development initiatives

Engaged Buddhism and Social Activism: The Engaged Buddhism movement, founded by Thich Nhat Hanh in the 20th century, applies Buddhist principles to social justice, peacebuilding, and environmental sustainability.⁴⁹ Vietnam War, Thich Nhat Hanh led non-violent resistance and relief work, organizing schools, medical care, and refugee support. Plum Village (France) was established as a global center for mindfulness practice, promoting emotional well-being and humanitarian activism.

The Dalai Lama's humanitarian and ethical leadership:

The 14th Dalai Lama is a leading advocate of universal responsibility,

⁴⁶ Strong (1983), p. 174.

⁴⁷ Rahula (1974), p. 68.

⁴⁸ Gethin (1998), p. 57.

⁴⁹ King (2009), p. 263.

secular ethics, and global peace.⁵⁰ Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in exile have established schools, healthcare facilities, and vocational training programs for refugees. Organizations like the Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) provide education and care for orphans. The Dalai Lama advocates for compassion-driven approaches to social harmony and climate action. He supports initiatives like the Buddhist Climate Action Network (BCAN) in addressing environmental degradation.

Buddhist social welfare organizations:

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, founded by A.T. Ariyaratne, applies Buddhist principles to grassroots economic development.⁵¹ It focuses on self-reliant village development through initiatives such as education and literacy programs, micro-finance and cooperative farming, and conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This movement exemplifies how Buddhist ethics can drive sustainable community development.

Tzu Chi Foundation (Taiwan): Founded by Dharma Master Cheng Yen, Tzu Chi is one of the largest Buddhist humanitarian organizations.⁵² The organization provides medical aid through free hospitals, international relief efforts, and refugee assistance programs. It also promotes sustainable development through eco-friendly housing and recycling initiatives, in line with Buddhist environmental ethics.

Buddhism and Prison Reform: Vipassanā Meditation in Prisons: The Vipassanā movement, led by S. N. Goenka, has introduced Buddhist mindfulness techniques into prison rehabilitation programs worldwide. Case Study - India's Tihar Jail: Inmates who practiced Vipassanā meditation showed improvements in mental health, emotional regulation, and ethical behavior.⁵³

Environmental Conservation and Buddhist Ethics:

Buddhist monks have played a leading role in eco-activism, particularly in Southeast Asia, where their teachings on interdependence and compassion inspire efforts to protect the environment and promote sustainability.⁵⁴

Buddhist Climate Action Network (BCAN): A global initiative that promotes sustainable living and ecological conservation based on the principle of interdependence (*Pratītyasamutpāda*).

Both historical and contemporary Buddhist initiatives reflect a profound commitment to human development, social justice, and sustainability. From Aśoka's welfare policies to modern movements like Engaged Buddhism and the Tzu Chi Foundation, Buddhist ethics have consistently inspired compassion-driven action. These examples demonstrate how Buddhism's core principles - compassion (*karuṇā*), interdependence (*Pratītyasamutpāda*), and non-

⁵⁰ Dalai Lama (1999), p. 38.

⁵¹ Bond (2004), p. 204.

⁵² Swearer (2010), p. 175.

⁵³ Pagel (2008), p. 185.

⁵⁴ Kaza (2000), p. 139.

violence (*ahiṃsā*) - can guide holistic and sustainable human development.

3.2. Case studies: Buddhist compassion driving collective action

Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) has been a driving force behind numerous social, environmental, and humanitarian initiatives worldwide. These efforts, ranging from environmental conservation to poverty alleviation and education, emphasize collective responsibility, ethical action, and sustainable development. This section presents three case studies that demonstrate how Buddhist compassion translates into collective action for human development.

Case Study 1: The “Tree Ordination” Movement in Thailand: A Buddhist Approach to Environmental Conservation

Background and context:

Deforestation in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar, has caused significant ecological damage, including soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, and the effects of climate change. In response, Thai Buddhist monks initiated the ‘Tree Ordination’ movement, applying Buddhist ethics to environmental conservation.⁵⁵

Buddhist principles applied:

Pratītyasamutpāda (Interdependence): The movement emphasizes that humans and nature are interconnected; harming nature disrupts balance.⁵⁶

Ahiṃsā (Non-violence): Destroying forests is seen as harming living beings, violating Buddhist ethical principles. *Karuṇā* (Compassion): Protecting trees is an act of compassion towards future generations and all sentient beings.

Implementation and impact:

Ordaining trees as Monks: Buddhist monks wrap sacred saffron robes around trees, symbolizing them as holy beings to prevent logging. This discourages deforestation, as harming an “ordained” tree is considered a religious offense.

Community engagement: Monks educate local villagers about sustainable agriculture and conservation. Buddhist teachings are integrated into forest management policies, influencing government decisions.

Success and Expansion: The movement has spread to Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. In Thailand, deforestation rates have decreased in some protected areas, showcasing Buddhism’s role in ecological activism.⁵⁷ This case study highlights how Buddhist compassion fosters environmental activism, ensuring long-term sustainability through ethical engagement.

Case Study 2: The Tzu Chi Foundation – Buddhist humanitarian aid and poverty alleviation

Background and context:

⁵⁵ Darlington (2012), p. 87.

⁵⁶ Harvey (2000), p. 227.

⁵⁷ Swearer (2010), p. 127.

The Tzu Chi Foundation was founded in 1966 by Dharma Master Cheng Yen in Taiwan. It has grown into one of the world's largest Buddhist humanitarian organizations, focusing on poverty alleviation, disaster relief, and healthcare.⁵⁸

Buddhist principles applied:

Dāna (Generosity): Tzu Chi follows the Buddhist principle of selfless giving, encouraging volunteerism and philanthropy. *Karuṇā* (Compassion): Relief efforts are grounded in altruistic compassion for the suffering of others. Right Livelihood (*Sammā-ājīva*): The organization promotes ethical business practices and sustainable development.⁵⁹

Implementation and impact:

Disaster relief and humanitarian aid: Tzu Chi provides immediate relief during natural disasters, including: 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami – Rebuilt homes and schools in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and Thailand. 2010 Haiti Earthquake – Supplied food, medicine, and long-term aid.

Sustainable development and microfinance: Tzu Chi promotes poverty alleviation programs through: Interest-free loans for small businesses. Skill-based training to help communities become self-sufficient.

Healthcare and medical missions: Operates free hospitals and mobile medical units in rural areas. Provides holistic healthcare, integrating traditional Buddhist healing practices with modern medicine.

Success and global impact:

Tzu Chi has millions of volunteers across 47 countries. Their eco-friendly initiatives, such as Buddhist-inspired recycling programs, align with sustainable human development.⁶⁰ This case study exemplifies how Buddhist compassion translates into large-scale humanitarian work, addressing poverty, healthcare, and disaster resilience.

Case Study 3: *Vipaśyanā* Meditation in India's Tihar Jail – Buddhist Education and Rehabilitation

Background and context:

Prison reform is a critical issue worldwide, as high recidivism rates and harsh conditions often hinder rehabilitation efforts. In India, Tihar Jail (New Delhi), one of Asia's largest prisons, introduced *Vipaśyanā* meditation in 1993 as a Buddhist-inspired method for prisoner rehabilitation.⁶¹

Buddhist principles applied: *Sīla* (Ethical Conduct): Encourages prisoners to adopt moral discipline and self-restraint. *Samādhi* (Meditation/Concentration): Helps inmates develop inner peace and emotional control. *Vipaśyanā* (Insight Meditation): Enables prisoners to reflect on their actions

⁵⁸ Madsen (2007), p. 24.

⁵⁹ Dalai Lama (1999), p. 167.

⁶⁰ Queen (2000), p. 128.

⁶¹ Pagel (2008), p. 69.

and cultivate compassion.

Implementation and impact:

Meditation courses for inmates: 10-day *Vipāśyanā* meditation retreats were introduced, where prisoners practice mindfulness and self-awareness, and reflect on past actions, reducing anger and aggression.

Psychological and behavioral transformation: Studies showed lower stress, reduced violence, and improved mental health among inmates.⁶² Many inmates express remorse and seek rehabilitation, reducing repeat offenses.

Success and global influence:

The program's success led to *Vipāśyanā* courses being adopted in prisons worldwide, including the US, UK, and Thailand. It demonstrates how Buddhist education can aid social reintegration and crime reduction. This case study highlights Buddhism's role in criminal justice reform, emphasizing compassion-driven rehabilitation over punitive measures.

These case studies demonstrate how Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) drives collective action across different fields: Environmental Conservation – The Tree Ordination Movement shows how Buddhism fosters sustainable ecological activism. Poverty Alleviation & Disaster Relief – The Tzu Chi Foundation exemplifies compassion in humanitarian aid. Education & Rehabilitation – The *Vipāśyanā* program in Tihar Jail proves that Buddhist mindfulness can transform lives. By integrating Buddhist ethics into modern social challenges, these initiatives illustrate a sustainable, compassionate vision for human development.⁶³

3.3. The role of mindfulness and ethical living in sustainable development

Buddhism offers a holistic approach to sustainable development, emphasizing mindfulness (*sati*) and ethical conduct (*sīla*) as fundamental principles for both individual and societal well-being.⁶⁴ In the contemporary world, where issues such as climate change, economic inequality, and social unrest are prevalent, Buddhist ethics provide a framework for sustainable living. This section explores the role of mindfulness and ethical living in fostering sustainable development, highlighting their impact on personal transformation, economic policies, environmental conservation, and global well-being.

Mindfulness (*Sati*) as a tool for sustainable development

Understanding Mindfulness in Buddhism: In Buddhist philosophy, mindfulness (*sati*) refers to the practice of being fully aware of one's thoughts, emotions, and actions in the present moment. Rooted in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, mindfulness is a key component of the Eightfold Path, particularly in: Right Mindfulness (*Sammā-sati*) – Cultivating awareness and attentiveness in daily

⁶² Khurana & Dhar (2002), p. 162.

⁶³ Dalai Lama (2011), p. 129.

⁶⁴ Harvey (2000), p. 228.

activities. Right Concentration (*Sammā-samādhi*) – Developing mental clarity and focus. This practice is not merely a meditative exercise but a way of living that encourages responsible decision-making, emotional intelligence, and ethical awareness.⁶⁵

Mindfulness and environmental sustainability: Reduction of Consumerism: Mindfulness encourages intentional and minimal consumption, countering the excessive materialism that contributes to resource depletion and climate change.⁶⁶ Eco-conscious Decision-Making: By being mindful of the impact of their choices, individuals and businesses can adopt sustainable practices, such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and promoting fair trade. Compassion for Nature: Meditation-based environmental awareness programs, such as the Buddhist-inspired Green Gulch Farm in California, emphasize sustainable agriculture, ecological harmony, and mindfulness in farming practices.⁶⁷

Mindfulness in economic and social policy: Ethical business practices: Companies like Google and Patagonia integrate mindfulness training for employees, promoting responsible leadership, ethical decision-making, and mental well-being.⁶⁸ Mindful Governance: Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) model, influenced by Buddhist principles, incorporates mindfulness in policy-making, focusing on well-being rather than mere economic growth. Mindfulness fosters sustainable economic policies, encouraging long-term well-being over short-term profit maximization.

Ethical Conduct (*Sīla*) as the Foundation of Sustainability

The Buddhist Concept of Ethical Living:

Sīla (moral discipline) is central to Buddhist practice, forming the basis for a harmonious and just society. It is one of the Threefold Trainings (*sīla, samādhi, paññā*) and includes the Five Precepts (*Pañcasīla*): 1. Non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) – Avoiding harm to living beings. 2. Truthfulness (*Satya*) – Practicing honesty and integrity. 3. Non-stealing (*Asteya*) – Ensuring fairness and justice. 4. Chastity (*Brahmacharya*) – Living responsibly in relationships. 5. Avoiding Intoxicants – Promoting mental clarity and self-discipline. These ethical principles promote social harmony, environmental responsibility, and economic fairness.⁶⁹

Ethical living and environmental sustainability:

Buddhist ethics encourage: Eco-friendly Lifestyles: The principle of *ahiṃsā* (non-harming) supports vegetarianism, conservation, and sustainable consumption. Climate Responsibility: Buddhist monks and organizations, such as the Ecobuddhism movement, advocate for carbon-neutral lifestyles,

⁶⁵ Kabat-Zinn (2003), p. 197.

⁶⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh (2012), p. 62.

⁶⁷ Badiner (2002), p. 126.

⁶⁸ Gelles (2015), p. 153.

⁶⁹ Harvey (2000), p. 274.

reforestation projects, and eco-temples.⁷⁰ For instance, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has repeatedly emphasized that environmental destruction is a moral crisis, urging individuals to adopt a compassionate, sustainable approach to nature.⁷¹

Ethical conduct and social justice:

Sīla also addresses poverty, inequality, and human rights issues: Fair Economic Policies: Buddhist economics, as proposed by E. F. Schumacher (1973) in *Small Is Beautiful*, advocates for: Local self-reliance. Small-scale, ethical businesses. Socially responsible wealth distribution. Compassionate Leadership: Buddhist-inspired leaders, such as Aung San Suu Kyi (prior to her political crisis) and Thai reformers, promote ethical governance based on wisdom and non-violence. A moral economy, rooted in Buddhist ethics, ensures inclusive growth and long-term sustainability.

Mindfulness and ethical conduct in practice: Notable Buddhist initiatives

The Sarvodaya Movement (Sri Lanka) – Mindful and Ethical Development: Founded by Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement integrates Buddhist ethics and mindfulness into rural development. It focuses on self-reliance, community well-being, and environmental conservation. The movement has uplifted over 15,000 villages in Sri Lanka, promoting eco-friendly infrastructure and mindful economic policies.⁷²

Plum Village and Mindful Consumption: Founded by Thich Nhat Hanh, Plum Village in France teaches mindful eating, sustainable agriculture, and conscious consumption. It encourages a low-carbon lifestyle and has inspired many eco-conscious Buddhist practitioners worldwide.

Buddhist Mindfulness Programs in Schools and Healthcare: Countries like the UK and the US have incorporated mindfulness meditation into education and healthcare. The benefits include reduced stress, better emotional regulation, and improved decision-making, all of which contribute to fostering a compassionate, sustainable society.⁷³

Mindfulness (*sati*) and ethical living (*sīla*) play a crucial role in sustainable development by ensuring: Personal Transformation – Reducing greed, promoting self-discipline, and fostering contentment. Economic and Social Well-being – Encouraging ethical businesses, fair trade, and responsible governance. Environmental Sustainability – Advocating for climate action, conservation, and mindful consumption.

IV. A BUDDHIST FRAMEWORK FOR SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

4.1. Principles of the framework: A Buddhist approach to human development

A Buddhist-inspired framework for human development is grounded in

⁷⁰ Kaza (2008), p. 164.

⁷¹ Dalai Lama (2011), p. 38.

⁷² Bond (2004), p. 163.

⁷³ Davidson & Kabat-Zinn (2012), p. 284.

fundamental principles that emphasize compassion (*karuṇā*), interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), mindfulness (*sati*), and ethical responsibility (*sīla*)⁷⁴. These principles guide both individual and collective actions toward sustainable development, social justice, and global well-being. This section explores these four key Buddhist principles and their practical applications in shaping a holistic and ethical model for human development. Compassion (*Karuṇā*) as the Foundation of Human Development

Understanding compassion in Buddhism:

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is one of the Four Brahmavihāras (sublime states) in Buddhism, alongside loving-kindness (*mettā*), empathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*)⁷⁵. It is the ability to feel and respond to the suffering of others with a genuine wish to alleviate it.⁷⁶ Unlike mere sympathy, Buddhist compassion is active and transformative, leading to concrete actions that reduce suffering in society.

Compassion as a social responsibility:

Buddhist teachings extend compassion beyond individual relationships to the broader societal level, advocating for social justice, poverty alleviation, and equitable governance. The Bodhisattva ideal in Mahayana Buddhism represents a model of selfless service, inspiring policymakers, activists, and leaders to adopt compassion-driven policies.

For example, Buddhist movements such as the Dalai Lama's Global Compassion Initiative and Engaged Buddhism (Thich Nhat Hanh) emphasize: Education for all: Ensuring access to quality education, especially for marginalized communities.⁷⁷ Human rights and peacebuilding: Supporting non-violence and conflict resolution. Healthcare accessibility: Promoting compassionate care in medicine, as seen in Buddhist hospitals like Thailand's Bodhgaya Global Hospital. By embedding compassion in governance and social institutions, societies can create inclusive and empathetic models of human development.

Interdependence (*Pratītyasamutpāda*) and Collective Well-being:

The Concept of Interdependence: The doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) states that all phenomena arise in dependence upon multiple causes and conditions.⁷⁸ This philosophical insight has profound implications for human development, as it highlights: The interconnectedness of all beings – Economic, social, and environmental systems are interwoven. The shared responsibility for global well-being – Actions in one part of the world affect the entire planet.

⁷⁴ Dalai Lama (1999), p. 122.

⁷⁵ Bodhi (2012), p. 981.

⁷⁶ Harvey (2000), p. 254.

⁷⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh (2007), p. 57.

⁷⁸ Gethin (1998), p. 127.

Interdependence in Sustainable Development: Interdependence provides a framework for global solidarity, encouraging cooperative solutions to climate change, economic inequality, and public health crises. Practical applications include: International cooperation: Strengthening cross-border partnerships for sustainable development. Economic inclusivity: Ensuring fair trade and ethical labor practices. Environmental stewardship: Promoting policies that respect ecological balance and biodiversity.⁷⁹ For example, Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) model, based on Buddhist interdependence, integrates economic policies with environmental sustainability and social well-being, demonstrating that interdependence fosters long-term, holistic development.

Mindfulness (*Sati*) as a catalyst for sustainable change

The role of mindfulness in decision-making: Mindfulness (*sati*) is a core practice in Buddhism that cultivates awareness, wisdom, and intentional living.⁸⁰ It plays a critical role in ethical leadership, responsible consumption, and mental well-being, helping to form a mindful society that prioritizes sustainability over short-term gains.

Mindfulness in governance and policy: Mindful leadership: Politicians and business leaders can practice mindfulness to make balanced, ethical decisions. Policy design: Governments can integrate mindfulness training into education and healthcare to enhance public well-being. Corporate social responsibility (CSR): Companies like Google, Patagonia, and IKEA have incorporated mindfulness programs, promoting workplace ethics and sustainability.⁸¹

Mindful consumption and environmental ethics:

A mindful economy challenges the modern culture of overconsumption and wastefulness, encouraging: Sustainable consumption habits (e.g., reducing plastic, ethical shopping), eco-friendly industries (e.g., green energy, organic agriculture), and ethical investments (e.g., impact-driven businesses). By integrating mindfulness into economic and social policies, societies can ensure long-term environmental and economic sustainability.

Ethical responsibility (*sīla*) for social and economic justice

The role of ethical conduct (*sīla*) in development:

Ethical responsibility (*sīla*) forms the moral foundation of Buddhist human development, ensuring:⁸² Justice and fairness in governance, economic models that prioritize people over profit, and social harmony and conflict resolution.

The Five Precepts (*Pañcasīla*) provide a universal ethical code applicable to governance and policymaking:⁸³ Non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) – Encouraging peacebuilding and non-violent conflict resolution. Truthfulness (*Satya*) – Promoting transparency and accountability in governance. Non-stealing

⁷⁹ Kaza (2008), p. 261.

⁸⁰ Thich Nhat Hanh (1998), p. 33.

⁸¹ Gelles (2015), p. 148.

⁸² Harvey (2000), p. 40.

⁸³ Harvey (2000), p. 63.

(*Asteya*) – Fighting corruption and economic exploitation. Chastity (*Brahmacharya*) – Advocating for ethical relationships in social structures. Avoiding intoxicants – Addressing addiction and mental health issues in communities.

Ethical responsibility in economic models:

Buddhist economics, as developed by E.F. Schumacher (1973) in *Small Is Beautiful*, offers an alternative to capitalist excesses by emphasizing: Small-scale, community-driven businesses.⁸⁴ Sustainable production and consumption. Fair wealth distribution to reduce inequality. For instance, Thailand's Buddhist-based Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) integrates ethical responsibility in national policies, leading to equitable economic growth and environmental conservation.

Ethical conduct in technology and AI ethics:

In an era of digital transformation, Buddhist ethics offer guidance for responsible AI and technological development: Human-centered AI: Ensuring that artificial intelligence enhances well-being rather than exploitation. Data privacy and digital ethics: Encouraging fair use of technology without manipulation. Compassionate innovation: Aligning technological advancements with human and environmental welfare.

A Buddhist-inspired framework for human development is multi-dimensional, addressing social, economic, environmental, and technological challenges. The four key principles - compassion, interdependence, mindfulness, and ethical responsibility - offer sustainable solutions for modern development.⁸⁵

4.2. Application to human development:

A Buddhist-inspired approach to human development integrates compassion (*karuṇā*), interdependence (*pratityasamutpāda*), mindfulness (*sati*), and ethical responsibility (*sīla*) into policymaking and institutional practices. These principles offer a holistic foundation for addressing challenges in education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and social justice. By applying these values, societies can promote sustainable growth while ensuring collective well-being.

In the field of education, Buddhist teachings emphasize learning as a means of cultivating wisdom (*prajñā*) and moral integrity.⁸⁶ A compassionate education system fosters emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, and holistic development. Schools can incorporate mindfulness-based learning practices to improve students' focus, resilience, and mental health.⁸⁷ For example, the Mindfulness in Schools Project in the UK integrates meditation into school curricula to enhance emotional regulation. Additionally, value-based education

⁸⁴ Schumacher (1973), p. 45.

⁸⁵ Dalai Lama (1999), p. 48.

⁸⁶ Gethin (1998), p. 187.

⁸⁷ Kabat-Zinn (2003), p. 176.

inspired by Buddhist ethics, such as the Five Precepts (*Pañcasīla*), can help instill non-violence, truthfulness, and social responsibility in students. Historically, Buddhist centers of learning like Nalanda and Takshashila emphasized moral education alongside academic excellence. Furthermore, inclusive access to education remains essential for reducing social inequalities. Buddhist monastic schools in Thailand and Myanmar exemplify this by providing free education to disadvantaged children, ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all.

In healthcare, compassion-driven systems focus on holistic well-being rather than merely treating illnesses. Buddhism views healing as an act of compassion, where physicians play a role in not only curing ailments but also alleviating suffering. Policies that integrate mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) techniques into healthcare can significantly improve both mental and physical health outcomes.⁸⁸ Leading institutions like Johns Hopkins University and Harvard Medical School have incorporated MBSR into therapy to help patients manage stress and chronic illnesses. Moreover, a universal healthcare model rooted in Buddhist ethics can ensure equitable access to medical services. Sri Lanka's Buddhist-inspired healthcare system serves as a model where medical services are freely available to all citizens. Integrating traditional Buddhist medical knowledge, such as Tibetan and Ayurvedic healing, with modern medicine can also provide a more comprehensive healthcare system. The Men-Tsee-Khang Tibetan Medical Institute in India exemplifies this by combining herbal medicine with allopathic treatments, offering a holistic approach to health and wellness.

Environmental sustainability is deeply embedded in Buddhist philosophy, which views humanity and nature as interconnected through *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination). From a Buddhist perspective, environmental degradation is seen as a form of collective karma, requiring responsible actions toward nature. Governments can implement sustainability policies based on Buddhist ecological ethics, emphasizing non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) toward the environment. A notable example is Thailand's "Ordaining Trees" movement, where Buddhist monks wrap saffron robes around trees to prevent deforestation.⁸⁹ Additionally, promoting mindful consumption can contribute to ecological balance. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) model integrates environmental sustainability into its economic policies, prioritizing well-being over material gain. Buddhist monasteries and temples also play an active role in promoting green initiatives. Wat Pa Maha Chedi Kaew temple in Thailand, built entirely from recycled bottles, showcases a Buddhist approach to sustainable architecture. These examples illustrate how Buddhist environmental ethics can be translated into actionable policies that benefit both people and the planet.

Social justice, another crucial aspect of human development, is closely linked to ethical responsibility (*sīla*). Buddhist teachings advocate for non-

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 184.

⁸⁹ Kaza (2008), p. 162.

violence, fairness, and the well-being of all individuals, forming the foundation for compassionate governance. Governments can adopt ethical leadership models inspired by Buddhist principles, ensuring policies prioritize social harmony and equity. The governance of King Ashoka, who implemented Dhamma-based policies to promote religious tolerance and welfare projects, remains an exemplary model of Buddhist-inspired statecraft. Furthermore, justice systems should shift from punitive measures to restorative justice, emphasizing reconciliation and rehabilitation over retribution. Post-conflict societies like Sri Lanka and Cambodia have used Buddhist reconciliation programs to heal trauma and foster social cohesion. Additionally, economic justice can be achieved through ethical business models that prioritize human welfare over profit. The concept of “Buddhist Economics,” as proposed by Schumacher (1973), advocates for small-scale, community-based economies that balance material and spiritual well-being. By integrating Buddhist ethics into governance and economic structures, societies can foster equity, peace, and social stability.

In conclusion, Buddhism offers a transformative vision for human development by integrating compassion, interdependence, mindfulness, and ethical responsibility into modern policymaking. In education, it promotes values-based learning that nurtures ethical leadership. In healthcare, it encourages holistic well-being through compassion-driven medical systems. In environmental sustainability, it emphasizes mindful consumption and ecological responsibility. In social justice, it advocates for governance based on fairness and non-violence.⁹⁰ By applying these principles to contemporary development challenges, societies can create a more sustainable, ethical, and inclusive world. A Buddhist-inspired approach ensures that human development is not only about economic progress but also about fostering a just, compassionate, and harmonious global society.

4.3. Challenges and opportunities

Implementing a Buddhist-inspired framework for human development presents both challenges and opportunities. While Buddhist principles such as compassion (*karuṇā*), interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), and ethical responsibility (*sīla*) offer valuable insights for addressing contemporary global issues, their application in diverse socio-political and cultural contexts is not without difficulties. One of the key challenges is cultural diversity across different regions. Although Buddhism has historically adapted to various cultures, integrating its ethical principles into secular policy frameworks requires careful navigation to avoid perceptions of religious bias.⁹¹ Many countries operate under strictly secular governance structures, where religious philosophies, even when applied for ethical or humanitarian purposes, may be met with resistance.⁹² This is particularly relevant in societies where dominant

⁹⁰ Harvey (2000), p. 167.

⁹¹ Keown (2013), p. 68.

⁹² Gethin (1998), p. 271.

religious traditions or ideological frameworks differ significantly from Buddhist thought, making widespread acceptance of its principles more complex.

Another challenge is the practical implementation of Buddhist ethics in contemporary governance and economic models. While Buddhist teachings emphasize non-violence, simplicity, and contentment, modern development paradigms are often driven by economic growth, consumerism, and technological advancement.⁹³ Bridging this gap requires innovative approaches that reconcile Buddhist ethical perspectives with real-world economic and political priorities. Additionally, the Buddhist concept of self-regulation and mindfulness-based decision-making may not always align with existing governance structures, which prioritize efficiency, competitiveness, and market-driven policies.⁹⁴ Overcoming these barriers requires policymakers to find ways to integrate mindfulness, sustainability, and ethical leadership into existing frameworks without disrupting economic stability or political functionality.

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for collaboration between Buddhist communities and global development organizations. Many international institutions, including the United Nations (UN), World Health Organization (WHO), and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have recognized the importance of ethical leadership, mindfulness, and sustainability in their development goals (UNDP, 2019). The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for instance, align closely with Buddhist teachings on environmental conservation, poverty alleviation, and social justice. Buddhist communities and monastic institutions can collaborate with these organizations to promote mindfulness-based education, holistic healthcare, and sustainable economic practices. Engaged Buddhism, which emphasizes active participation in social and environmental causes, has already demonstrated success in various regions.⁹⁵ For example, Buddhist monastic communities in Thailand and Myanmar have initiated programs that provide free education, healthcare, and environmental conservation efforts, serving as models for sustainable human development.⁹⁶

Furthermore, the growing global interest in mindfulness and ethical leadership presents another opportunity to incorporate Buddhist principles into secular frameworks. Many corporations and governments have already embraced mindfulness-based programs to improve workplace well-being, reduce stress, and enhance decision-making.⁹⁷ These initiatives could be expanded to include Buddhist perspectives on ethical responsibility, interdependence, and sustainable living. Additionally, academic institutions and think tanks focusing on ethics, governance, and sustainability could

⁹³ Schumacher (1973), p. 127.

⁹⁴ Harvey (2013), p. 172.

⁹⁵ Queen (2000), p. 161.

⁹⁶ Swearer (2010), p. 85.

⁹⁷ Kabat-Zinn (2003), p. 273.

integrate Buddhist philosophy into policy research and educational curricula, further bridging the gap between Buddhist thought and contemporary development strategies.⁹⁸

In conclusion, while implementing a Buddhist-inspired framework for human development faces challenges related to cultural diversity, secular governance, and modern economic priorities, these obstacles can be addressed through dialogue, adaptation, and collaboration. The alignment between Buddhist ethical principles and global development goals provides an opportunity for meaningful partnerships between Buddhist communities and international organizations. By integrating Buddhist values into education, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and governance, societies can foster a more ethical, compassionate, and sustainable future.

V. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

5.1. Buddhist compassion vs. secular approaches to human development

Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) and secular approaches to human development share several commonalities, yet they differ in their foundational perspectives and methodologies. Both emphasize human dignity, ethical responsibility, and social well-being. However, while secular frameworks rely on rational, rights-based approaches, Buddhism integrates a spiritual and moral dimension that sees compassion as both an ethical obligation and a means of personal transformation.

Secular human development frameworks, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and human rights-based approaches, prioritize measurable outcomes such as poverty reduction, healthcare access, gender equality, and environmental sustainability (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2019). These frameworks rely on legal, political, and economic mechanisms to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities. The human rights model, for example, sees justice and equality as enforceable principles, advocating for policies that protect individuals against discrimination and exploitation.⁹⁹ Similarly, the capabilities approach, developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, views development as expanding individuals' freedoms and capabilities, emphasizing education, health, and economic security as core dimensions of well-being.¹⁰⁰ These approaches, though impactful, often focus on structural changes and policy reforms, sometimes overlooking the internal transformation of individuals and communities.

In contrast, Buddhist compassion emphasizes inner transformation as a prerequisite for social change. The Bodhisattva ideal, central to Mahāyāna Buddhism, teaches that true development occurs when individuals act selflessly for the welfare of all beings (*sarvasattvavhita*) rather than pursuing material

⁹⁸ Hallisey (2013), p. 89.

⁹⁹ Donnelly (2013), p. 74.

¹⁰⁰ Sen (1999), p. 67.

growth alone.¹⁰¹ Unlike the legalistic approach of human rights, Buddhist ethics rely on voluntary moral conduct, where individuals cultivate compassion, mindfulness (*sati*), and wisdom (*prajñā*) to create a just and harmonious society. This differs from the Western emphasis on rights and entitlements, as Buddhism sees ethical action as stemming from self-discipline and the recognition of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*). The Dalai Lama (1999) has argued that true human development must integrate both external progress and inner peace, as economic growth without ethical consciousness leads to social fragmentation and environmental degradation.

One area where Buddhist principles align with secular frameworks is sustainable development. The SDGs advocate for responsible consumption, climate action, and ecological balance, which resonate with Buddhist teachings on non-harming (*ahiṃsā*) and simple living. Buddhist environmental ethics, rooted in the belief that all beings are interconnected, provide a moral foundation for sustainable living that goes beyond legal mandates. For instance, the Buddhist concept of right livelihood (*samyag-ājīva*) discourages exploitative industries and promotes ethical business models that align with ecological well-being.¹⁰² Similarly, Engaged Buddhist movements, such as the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, integrate sustainable development with grassroots community empowerment, demonstrating how Buddhist compassion can manifest in tangible social initiatives.¹⁰³

However, a key distinction remains in how suffering (*dukkha*) is understood and addressed. Secular frameworks often focus on alleviating material deprivation, ensuring individuals have access to food, shelter, and healthcare. While Buddhism acknowledges these as important, it also sees suffering as a deeper existential issue that cannot be solved solely through external means.¹⁰⁴ Buddhist development models thus emphasize mental well-being, detachment from excessive materialism, and contentment (*santutṭhi*), which contrasts with economic models that prioritize perpetual growth and consumption. Programs integrating mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in healthcare and education demonstrate how Buddhist perspectives complement secular approaches, particularly in mental health treatment and stress reduction.¹⁰⁵

In conclusion, while secular human development models focus on structural, legal, and economic mechanisms to improve quality of life, Buddhist compassion offers a complementary perspective that emphasizes ethical self-cultivation, mindfulness, and interdependence. The integration of both approaches could lead to a more holistic vision of human development – one that not only ensures material security and justice but also nurtures inner well-being, ethical responsibility, and sustainable living. The challenge lies in

¹⁰¹ Harvey (2013), p. 276.

¹⁰² Kaza (2008), p. 164.

¹⁰³ Bond (2004), p. 126.

¹⁰⁴ Gethin (1998), p. 79.

¹⁰⁵ Kabat-Zinn (2003), p. 178.

bridging the gap between Buddhist moral philosophy and secular governance models, creating frameworks that value both external progress and inner transformation.

5.2. Synergies and complementarities

Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) offers valuable insights that can enhance existing human development paradigms, particularly in areas such as social justice, environmental sustainability, healthcare, and education. While modern development frameworks focus on measurable economic and social progress, they often lack an emphasis on inner well-being, ethical responsibility, and interdependence - core tenets of Buddhist thought. By integrating Buddhist principles with secular approaches like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and human rights-based models, a more holistic and sustainable approach to human development can be achieved.

One key area where Buddhist compassion can enhance global development efforts is in mental health and well-being.¹⁰⁶ While economic policies and healthcare programs focus on physical health, they often neglect the growing crisis of stress, anxiety, and depression. Buddhist teachings emphasize mindfulness (*sati*) and meditative practices as effective tools for emotional regulation and psychological well-being.¹⁰⁷ The rise of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in clinical psychology and stress management programs demonstrates how Buddhist techniques can complement modern therapeutic approaches.¹⁰⁸ Many countries have already begun incorporating mindfulness into public health initiatives, schools, and workplaces, showing that Buddhist compassion can support mental resilience, reduce burnout, and promote holistic well-being.

Another significant contribution of Buddhist thought is in environmental sustainability. Secular frameworks, such as the SDGs, advocate for responsible consumption and climate action (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2019), but Buddhist ethics provide an additional moral and spiritual foundation for sustainable living. The principle of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*) teaches that humans and nature are deeply interconnected, encouraging a non-exploitative relationship with the environment.¹⁰⁹ Traditional Buddhist monastic communities practice simple living, non-harming (*ahiṃsā*), and mindful consumption - values that can inform policies on sustainable resource management and ecological conservation.¹¹⁰ For example, Buddhist monks in Thailand have led tree ordination ceremonies, symbolically declaring trees sacred to prevent deforestation.¹¹¹ Such practices, rooted in compassion and reverence for life, can inspire alternative development models that prioritize ecological balance over unchecked industrial expansion.

¹⁰⁶ Gethin (1998), p. 186.

¹⁰⁷ Kabat-Zinn (2003), p. 203.

¹⁰⁸ Gethin (2015), p. 67.

¹⁰⁹ Kaza (2008), p. 164.

¹¹⁰ Swearer (2010), p. 67.

¹¹¹ Darlington (2012), p. 147.

Buddhist compassion also aligns with poverty alleviation and social justice initiatives. Modern economic systems often focus on GDP growth and material wealth, sometimes overlooking equitable distribution and community well-being. Buddhist economics, as proposed by E. F. Schumacher (1973), offers a middle path between capitalism and socialism, advocating for small-scale, self-sufficient economies that prioritize well-being over excessive materialism. The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, inspired by Buddhist principles, promotes grassroots development by encouraging community participation, self-reliance, and ethical livelihood.¹¹² Such models, emphasizing compassionate leadership and cooperative economics, can provide alternative frameworks for poverty reduction that focus on long-term well-being rather than short-term economic gains.

In the field of education, Buddhist compassion can enhance existing pedagogical approaches by promoting values-based learning. While modern education systems focus on technical skills and economic competitiveness, Buddhist teachings encourage the cultivation of wisdom (*prajñā*), ethical conduct (*sīla*), and mental discipline (*samādhi*).¹¹³ Integrating mindfulness education into school curricula, as seen in countries like the UK, USA, and Bhutan, has shown promising results in improving students' emotional intelligence, focus, and ethical awareness. Buddhist-inspired models of education emphasize holistic learning – nurturing both intellectual growth and ethical character, which can help create compassionate leaders and responsible global citizens.

Another area of synergy is conflict resolution and peacebuilding. While secular diplomacy often relies on legal agreements and political negotiations, Buddhist approaches emphasize dialogue, reconciliation, and non-violent communication.¹¹⁴ The principles of right speech (*samyag-vāc*) and non-hatred (*adveṣa*) provide a foundation for resolving disputes peacefully, fostering cross-cultural understanding and harmony. Buddhist leaders, such as Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama, have played crucial roles in peace efforts, interfaith dialogue, and non-violent resistance movements, demonstrating how Buddhist compassion can contribute to global stability and conflict resolution.¹¹⁵

In conclusion, Buddhist compassion complements and enhances existing human development paradigms by offering a deeper ethical and psychological perspective. While secular approaches provide structural solutions through policy and governance, Buddhist teachings focus on inner transformation, ethical responsibility, and sustainable well-being. By integrating Buddhist principles into mental health programs, environmental sustainability efforts, economic models, education systems, and peacebuilding initiatives, human development can become more holistic, ethical, and sustainable. These synergies demonstrate that Buddhist thought is not only compatible with

¹¹² Bond (2004), p. 65.

¹¹³ Harvey (2013), p. 201.

¹¹⁴ Dalai Lama (1999), p. 53.

¹¹⁵ Queen (2000), p. 104.

modern development frameworks but also has the potential to enrich them in meaningful ways.

VI. CONCLUSION

Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) provides a profound ethical foundation for human development, offering a complementary perspective to existing secular frameworks. While modern development paradigms focus on structural reforms, economic growth, and policy-driven solutions, Buddhist teachings emphasize inner transformation, ethical responsibility, and interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), recognizing that sustainable progress must integrate both external well-being and internal moral cultivation. By fostering a sense of shared responsibility, Buddhist principles encourage a holistic vision of human development that extends beyond material prosperity to encompass mental well-being, social harmony, and ecological balance.

Throughout this discussion, it has been shown that Buddhist thought enhances global development efforts in key areas such as mental health, environmental sustainability, poverty alleviation, education, and peacebuilding. The integration of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) into healthcare and education has already demonstrated measurable benefits, reinforcing the role of Buddhist ethics in promoting psychological resilience and ethical awareness.¹¹⁶ Similarly, Buddhist environmental ethics, rooted in non-harming (*ahimsā*) and reverence for all life, offer a sustainable model for ecological conservation that aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The success of Engaged Buddhist movements, such as the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, further highlights the practical applications of Buddhist compassion in grassroots development and community empowerment.¹¹⁷

Despite these strengths, challenges remain in implementing a Buddhist-inspired framework for human development, particularly in secular and culturally diverse contexts. The integration of religious ethics into policymaking requires careful navigation to ensure inclusivity and adaptability. However, the universal values of compassion, mindfulness, and ethical responsibility make Buddhist principles highly relevant across cultural and ideological boundaries. The increasing global interest in mindfulness, ethical leadership, and sustainable living suggests significant opportunities for collaboration between Buddhist communities, governments, and international development organizations.

In conclusion, a Buddhist-inspired approach to human development offers a transformative vision that integrates external progress with internal ethical consciousness. By recognizing the interdependence of all life and fostering a culture of compassion, humanity can move toward a more equitable, peaceful, and sustainable future. The challenge now lies in finding practical ways to synthesize Buddhist ethical insights with contemporary development policies,

¹¹⁶ Kabat-Zinn (1990), p. 145 - 178.

¹¹⁷ Queen (2000), p. 112 - 135.

ensuring that the pursuit of progress remains rooted in wisdom, compassion, and collective well-being.¹¹⁸

A Call to Action: Embracing Compassion and Shared Responsibility for a Sustainable Future:

As the world faces unprecedented social, economic, and environmental challenges, the need for compassion-driven development has never been more urgent. From climate change and economic inequality to mental health crises and global conflicts, modern development efforts often focus on material progress while neglecting inner well-being, ethical responsibility, and the interconnectedness of all life. Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) offers a transformative perspective that can reshape global human development efforts, ensuring they are rooted in empathy, ethical conduct, and collective well-being.¹¹⁹

Governments, policymakers, educators, and global organizations must recognize the value of integrating compassion into development policies and initiatives. Sustainable progress cannot be achieved solely through technological advancements and economic growth - it requires a fundamental shift in human consciousness, one that prioritizes ethical leadership, social justice, and environmental stewardship. By embracing Buddhist principles of mindfulness, interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), and ethical responsibility, societies can cultivate a culture of shared responsibility, where individuals and communities actively collaborate to build a just, equitable, and sustainable world.¹²⁰

International institutions and policymakers must take proactive steps to integrate compassion-based approaches into their frameworks. This includes: promoting mindfulness and ethical education in schools to nurture responsible and compassionate global citizens.¹²¹ Incorporating Buddhist environmental ethics into sustainability initiatives to encourage non-exploitative, mindful consumption and ecological conservation; supporting community-driven development models, such as the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, which emphasize self-reliance and cooperative economic systems; and encouraging cross-cultural dialogue between Buddhist organizations, development agencies, and secular institutions to build synergies between ethical and policy-driven approaches.

The responsibility to create a more compassionate and just world lies with all of us – leaders, policymakers, academics, and individuals. By actively embracing Buddhist compassion as a guiding principle in human development, we can foster global solidarity, reduce suffering, and ensure that economic and social progress is truly inclusive and sustainable. The time to act is now – let compassion and shared responsibility lead the way toward a brighter future for all.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Dalai Lama (1999), p. 132.

¹¹⁹ Harvey (2000), p. 89.

¹²⁰ Harvey (2000), p. 134.

¹²¹ Dalai Lama (2011), p. 98.

¹²² Thich Nhat Hanh (2012), p. 185.

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MINDFUL MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR BOROBUDUR: A BUDDHIST APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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Abstract:

This study explores the integration of Buddhist values and mindful marketing strategies in managing Borobudur Temple as a sustainable and globally competitive tourism destination. As both a sacred Buddhist site and a UNESCO World Heritage landmark, Borobudur faces challenges in balancing cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and economic benefits. This research introduces a Mindful Marketing Model, which incorporates Buddhist principles - such as *mettā*, *karuṇā*, and the Noble Eightfold Path - into a structured tourism management framework. The model comprises four key pillars: Spiritual Storytelling, Sustainable Tourism Development, Community Empowerment, and Global Recognition, ensuring that Borobudur remains an authentic and sustainable tourism destination. Key strategies include technology-enhanced visitor education, regulated visitor management, and active local community participation, all of which help safeguard Borobudur's cultural and spiritual heritage while fostering economic inclusivity. Findings suggest that a mindfulness-driven marketing approach enhances visitor experiences, strengthens cultural sustainability, and positions Borobudur as a global icon of Buddhist heritage tourism. Future research should explore the potential of Augmented Reality (AR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in creating immersive Buddhist tourism experiences, deepening visitor engagement, and advancing sustainable heritage management practices.

Keywords: *Mindful Marketing, Buddhist values, sustainable tourism, mindfulness-based tourism, Buddhist tourism management.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Borobudur Temple is one of Indonesia's national priority tourism destinations, playing a strategic role in tourism, cultural preservation, and sustainability. As a UNESCO World Heritage site, Borobudur faces significant challenges in managing the growing influx of tourists while preserving its cultural and environmental integrity.¹ Additionally, its status as an internationally recognized religious tourism hub underscores the need for sustainable management. However, efforts to position Borobudur as a premier spiritual destination often lack alignment with long-term cultural preservation goals. Recent reports highlight deficiencies in area redevelopment strategies, emphasizing the need for a more sustainable and culturally sensitive approach.² While the influx of tourists generates substantial economic benefits for local communities, it also places immense pressure on Borobudur's physical sustainability and threatens its cultural authenticity. Balancing these impacts remains a critical challenge.³

As one of the largest Buddhist monuments in the world, Borobudur embodies an extraordinary cultural and spiritual heritage. Built in the 9th century by the Syailendra Dynasty, the temple serves not only as a site of religious significance for Buddhists but also as an architectural masterpiece of immense cultural value.⁴ However, in recent years, the rapid expansion of tourism has posed significant challenges, particularly in balancing economic benefits, spiritual conservation, and environmental protection. These complexities underscore the difficulties of managing a world heritage site that must accommodate diverse and sometimes competing interests.⁵

Borobudur holds immense potential to become a global spiritual icon that promotes peace, harmony, and sustainability. However, its dual role as both a sacred site and a major tourist attraction presents a unique challenge.⁶ On one hand, spiritual activities require a solemn and sacred atmosphere, while on the other, tourists often seek entertainment-driven experiences. The absence of a holistic management approach frequently results in a superficial tourism experience, leaving Borobudur's cultural and spiritual essence underrepresented.⁷

A mindful marketing approach offers an innovative strategy to address these challenges by emphasizing authenticity, inclusivity, and a deep connection with cultural and ecological values.⁸ In the context of Borobudur, this approach can be realized through strategies such as visitor quotas, educational initiatives that highlight the temple's spiritual significance, and community-

¹ Silaen, et al. (2024), p. 221; Nagaoka (2011), p. 658 - 659; Jati (2023), p. 75 - 76.

² Kausar, Damanik, & Tanudirjo (2024), p. 7 - 8; Hakim (2023), p. 55 - 56.

³ Lufiah, Gumantiara, & Ramadhan (2024), p. 47 - 48.

⁴ Silaen, et al. (2024), p. 221.

⁵ Kausar, Damanik, & Tanudirjo (2024), p. 5-7; Jati (2023), p. 74 - 75.

⁶ Silaen, et al. (2024): 221; Jati (2023), p. 76.

⁷ Kausar, Damanik, & Tanudirjo (2024), p. 5-7; Jati (2023), p. 74 - 75.

⁸ Hagenbuch & Mgrdichian (2020), p. 2-5; Ndubisi (2014), p. 238 - 240.

centered programs designed to empower residents.⁹ Implementing such measures presents a significant opportunity for Borobudur to position itself as a global symbol of Buddhist heritage while promoting sustainable cultural and environmental preservation.

Aligned with global trends in sustainable tourism, mindful marketing seeks to create authentic and meaningful travel experiences. This approach minimizes negative impacts on the environment and local communities while simultaneously preserving cultural heritage, enhancing economic sustainability, and empowering local populations. Through this inclusive framework, Borobudur's tourism can be developed responsibly and sustainably.

Therefore, this study explores the potential of mindful marketing as a strategy to position Borobudur as a global icon of Buddhist heritage. It seeks to integrate sustainable tourism principles with cultural heritage conservation, providing strategic recommendations for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and local communities. By developing a roadmap to establish Borobudur as a global symbol of Buddhist heritage, this study also aims to preserve the temple's spiritual essence. In doing so, Borobudur can reinforce its status as a globally recognized sustainable tourism destination and serve as a model for managing other world heritage sites.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative methodology, integrating case study and phenomenological approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of tourists' and stakeholders' perceptions regarding the management of Borobudur Temple.¹⁰ By examining Borobudur as a cultural, spiritual, and sustainable destination, this approach seeks to capture its multifaceted nature. The case study method provides an in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities in managing Borobudur as a global icon.¹¹ Meanwhile, phenomenology is employed to explore the subjective experiences of tourists and local communities, particularly in relation to policies and the spiritual values associated with the temple.¹²

Research informants were purposively selected to encompass diverse perspectives, including domestic and international tourists, local communities impacted by policies, and business operators in the temple's vicinity. This approach ensures that the collected data accurately reflects on-the-ground realities, capturing the perceptions of various groups directly connected to Borobudur Temple.

The primary data collection method consists of semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed to explore informants' direct experiences and perceived meanings. These interviews focus on phenomenological dimensions such as

⁹ Arintoko, et al. (2020), p. 399-401; Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 80 - 82.

¹⁰ Hagenbuch & Mgrdichian (2020), p. 2-5; Ndubisi (2014), p. 238 - 24

¹¹ Stake (1995): 85; Gillham (2000), p. 71 - 73.

¹² Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2022), p. 47 - 49; Moustakas (1994), p. 103 - 105.

spiritual tranquility, cultural appreciation, and the impact of policies on daily life. In addition to interviews, this study incorporates document analysis, examining preservation policies, UNESCO reports, and tourism promotion materials. By integrating qualitative interviews with document analysis, the study provides a deeper understanding of both personal experiences and the broader framework of tourism management.

Data analysis was conducted systematically using a thematic approach. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and organized according to 18 pre-designed key questions. The analysis aimed to identify central themes, including cultural preservation, spiritual experiences, policy impacts, and inclusivity. Key findings highlight the potential of mindful marketing, the integration of local communities, and the strong link between sustainability and cultural preservation. The results were validated through consultations with subject matter experts to ensure accuracy, relevance, and credibility.

The approach adopted in this study offers deep insights into the sustainable management of Borobudur Temple. By examining tourists' subjective experiences alongside the temple's strategic significance at a global level, this research provides new perspectives on tourism policy development that prioritizes not only economic considerations but also the preservation of cultural and spiritual values. By integrating local and global insights, the management of Borobudur Temple can serve as a model for the sustainable governance of other world heritage sites.

III. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL PRESERVATION

The conservation of Borobudur Temple's cultural and historical heritage is essential to maintaining its status as a world heritage site.¹³ Recognized as one of the world's great architectural and cultural marvels, Borobudur serves not only as a symbol of Indonesia's heritage but also as a testament to the intellectual achievements of past civilizations. These values are reflected in its intricate reliefs and architectural grandeur. Preservation efforts focus on protecting the temple's physical structure from the pressures of tourism, environmental changes, and natural aging. Additionally, conservation strategies emphasize maintaining Borobudur's connection to local traditions, ensuring its role as a center for cultural learning and appreciation.

The Noble Eightfold Path, a fundamental Buddhist teaching, offers a comprehensive framework for the sustainable management of Borobudur Temple. As stated in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (SN 45.8): "And what, monks, is the Noble Eightfold Path? It is as follows: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration."¹⁴ This framework provides guiding principles for various aspects of tourism management. For instance, Right View can shape educational

¹³ Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 79 - 82; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 71 - 72; Susilo & Suroso, (2014), p. 117 - 118.

¹⁴ Bodhi (2000), p. 1546.

programs that emphasize the temple's spiritual and cultural significance by fostering awareness of interconnectedness and ethical responsibility. Visitor education initiatives may integrate Buddhist teachings on the impermanence of material structures, encouraging tourists to appreciate Borobudur not merely as a historical monument but as a living representation of spiritual values. Similarly, Right Action can inspire local community participation in sustainable preservation efforts. Organizing collaborative workshops on traditional crafts and cultural performances not only supports local livelihoods but also safeguards Borobudur's intangible heritage. By aligning these principles with tourism management, Borobudur can serve as a model of sustainable cultural preservation that embodies core Buddhist values. This approach ensures the temple's physical and cultural integrity while promoting harmony among stakeholders by balancing economic, environmental, and spiritual objectives.¹⁵

The Buddha's teachings on peace, wisdom, and compassion are universal, and Borobudur embodies these values through its harmonious mandala design. Representing *mettā* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion), Borobudur transcends Buddhism, offering a vision of unity, cultural preservation, and spiritual wisdom that resonates globally. As stated in the *mettā Sutta* (Sn 1.8): "May all beings be happy," this sentiment reinforces Borobudur's role as a place of loving-kindness and goodwill.¹⁶ Likewise, *karuṇā* is beautifully expressed in the Dhammapada (Dhp 130): "Putting oneself in the place of another, one should neither harm nor cause others to harm."¹⁷ This principle underscores the ethical duty to protect Borobudur, ensuring its preservation benefits both present and future generations.

These values manifest not only philosophically but also in tangible efforts to sustain Borobudur as a living heritage. Beyond its historical and spiritual significance, the temple serves as a hub for interfaith dialogue, cultural exchange, and scholarly enrichment. By fostering *mettā* and *karuṇā*, Borobudur bridges tradition and modernity, advocating for sustainable tourism that honors its sacredness while allowing people from all backgrounds to experience its spiritual and historical richness. Its preservation extends beyond maintaining its physical structure - it is about safeguarding the values it represents: compassion, harmony, and mindfulness.¹⁸

Education plays a crucial role in deepening the understanding and application of these values. Well-structured educational initiatives enable both visitors and local communities to appreciate Borobudur's historical, cultural, and spiritual significance. Tour guides, digital technologies, and information centers serve as essential tools in interpreting the temple's intricate reliefs, cosmological design, and teachings embedded in stone. Through education,

¹⁵ Rahula (1974): 92; Harvey (2013), p. 81.

¹⁶ Bodhi (2017), p. 179 - 180.

¹⁷ Buddhārakkhita (2007), p. 53.

¹⁸ Harvey (2000), p. 103 - 104, 278; Keown (1992), p. 160 - 161.

mettā and *karuṇā* are reinforced, inspiring visitors to view Borobudur not merely as an ancient monument but as a living testament to wisdom and compassion.

Furthermore, cultural preservation requires the active participation of local communities. Sustainable conservation efforts should not isolate Borobudur from the people who have lived around it for generations. Instead, initiatives should engage local artisans, historians, and cultural practitioners in preserving the traditions, crafts, and rituals intertwined with Borobudur's history. This approach ensures that the temple's heritage is not only physically safeguarded but also remains meaningful and relevant for future generations. As the Buddha stated in the *Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 12.1): "When this exists, that comes to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases"¹⁹ - this fundamental principle of dependent origination highlights the deep interconnection between Borobudur and its surrounding community. The temple does not stand in isolation; its cultural and spiritual essence is inseparable from the lives of those who have nurtured it for generations. By integrating traditional knowledge with modern conservation strategies, Borobudur can continue to serve as a beacon of spiritual and cultural enlightenment while exemplifying the Buddhist principles of interconnectedness and shared responsibility.

The physical preservation of Borobudur Temple is a fundamental step in maintaining the integrity of its architecture and reliefs as a world cultural heritage site. As a structure over a thousand years old, Borobudur faces significant challenges, including weather-induced erosion, physical pressure from millions of tourists, and environmental impacts such as air pollution and climate change. Tackling these complex challenges necessitates a comprehensive multidisciplinary strategy that incorporates the expertise of archaeologists, conservationists, and contemporary technological advancements. One concrete effort includes using specialized protective coatings to shield the reliefs from acid rain. Additionally, restricting visitor access to sensitive areas of the temple has been implemented to reduce structural stress.²⁰ Furthermore, the Buddha's words in *Dhammapada* (Dhp 276) emphasize: "You yourselves must strive; the Buddhas only show the way"²¹, highlighting that the responsibility of conservation does not lie solely with experts but requires collective effort from all stakeholders - local communities, conservationists, and policymakers alike.²²

Visitor management is an integral component of preserving Borobudur Temple's physical structure. Policies such as daily visitor limits, designated tourist pathways, and regulated visiting hours aim to mitigate physical impacts without compromising the quality of the tourist experience. Visitor education is a key element of these policies, encouraging tourists to understand the

¹⁹ Bodhi (2000), p. 595.

²⁰ Kausar, Damanik, & Tanudirjo (2024), p. 3; Diarta (2017), p. 106.

²¹ Buddhārakkhita (2007), p. 87.

²² Diarta (2017), p. 102 - 103; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 71 - 72.

importance of preserving Borobudur as a shared cultural heritage. With the support of modern technology, appropriate policies, and collective awareness, Borobudur's preservation can be sustained, ensuring its integrity for future generations.

Education about Borobudur Temple's historical and cultural significance also plays a central role in its preservation. Beyond being a tourist destination, Borobudur serves as a symbol of past civilizations' greatness, offering lessons in history, art, and philosophy. The temple's reliefs depict social life, Buddhist stories, and spiritual journeys that connect the past with the present. Through structured educational programs, visitors can gain a deeper appreciation of Borobudur's importance, promoting more responsible tourism behavior.

Various educational methods have been employed to convey the values of Borobudur Temple. These include trained tour guides, interactive information boards, and digital applications that allow visitors to explore the reliefs and history of Borobudur virtually. Educational programs also incorporate hands-on activities, such as traditional art workshops or storytelling sessions related to Borobudur. Additionally, educational materials emphasize the importance of cultural preservation, creating a meaningful experience for visitors and reinforcing the commitment to safeguarding the temple as a world heritage site.²³

The relevance of local traditions is a key element in Borobudur Temple's preservation. Traditions such as religious ceremonies, performing arts, and handicrafts strengthen the connection between the temple as a cultural site and the lives of the surrounding community. For instance, the celebration of Vesak Day at Borobudur not only serves as a spiritual moment for Buddhists but also involves the local community on a large scale. This involvement fosters an emotional bond with the temple, making Borobudur a dynamic center of local culture.

Preserving the relevance of local traditions requires collaboration among communities, government, and tourism stakeholders. Programs such as traditional arts training, cultural festivals, and local craft exhibitions help ensure these traditions remain vibrant. Introducing local traditions to tourists through guided tours, cultural performances, or hands-on experiences, such as learning to create Borobudur-specific crafts, is also a strategic step. By preserving traditions, Borobudur becomes not only a symbol of the past but also a living representation of cultural identity. These efforts enrich visitors' experiences while strengthening the commitment to sustainable cultural preservation.

IV. SPIRITUALITY AND MINDFULNESS

Spirituality and mindfulness are core aspects that elevate Borobudur Temple from being merely a cultural tourism destination to a profound

²³ Frauman & Norman (2004), p. 381 - 384; Cheer, Belhassen, & Kujawa (2017), p. 2 - 3; Chen, Scott, & Benckendorff (2017), p. 3 - 5.

spiritual space.²⁴ The majestic architecture of Borobudur, combined with its rich symbolism, creates an atmosphere conducive to inner reflection and contemplation. The temple's reliefs depict a spiritual journey toward enlightenment, offering a unique experience for visitors seeking peace and spiritual connection. The tranquility and harmony of Borobudur, in its natural surroundings, further establish its position as an ideal location for mindfulness practices, meditation, and introspection.

Borobudur symbolizes the spiritual journey toward Nirvana, the ultimate liberation from the cycle of *samsāra* (rebirth), as depicted in Buddhist teachings. The temple's architectural design, resembling a mandala, reflects this journey. The base represents the realm of desires (*kāmadhātu*), the middle levels depict the realm of form (*rūpadhātu*), and the upper stupa symbolizes the formless realm (*arūpadhātu*).²⁵ This structure serves as a metaphor for the progressive path toward enlightenment, where one transcends attachment, materiality, and conceptuality to reach ultimate liberation. As stated in the Dhammapada (Dh. 203), Nirvana (*nibbāna*) is the highest happiness²⁶, beyond all worldly suffering, marking the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*) and the attainment of complete spiritual peace.

The reliefs of the Wheel of Life (*bhavacakra*), also referenced in the Lalitavistara Sutra, illustrate the cyclic nature of existence, reinforcing the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*).²⁷ This cycle, as explained in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 12.1, perpetuates suffering through craving and ignorance, emphasizing the necessity of wisdom and ethical living to break free from this cycle.²⁸ The teachings embedded within Borobudur's reliefs serve as visual scriptures, guiding visitors to reflect on the path of ethical conduct (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) as essential steps toward achieving Nirvana. Integrating these narratives into educational and spiritual tourism programs at Borobudur can provide visitors with deeper insights into Buddhist philosophy while enhancing their spiritual experience. This approach reinforces Borobudur's position as a global icon of Buddhist heritage and a profound space for spiritual transformation.²⁹

Mindfulness, known as *sati* in Buddhism, is fundamental to spiritual practice, emphasizing complete awareness and present-moment focus. In *Dīgha Nikāya* 22, the Buddha expounds on the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, stating that mindfulness is the direct path to the cessation of suffering³⁰. This practice requires practitioners to cultivate awareness in the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects. This principle is deeply embedded in Borobudur's design,

²⁴ Cheer, Belhassen, & Kujawa: p. 2 - 3; Choe & O'Regan (2020), p. 2, 3, 6.

²⁵ Krom (1926), p. 7 - 8; Khosla (1991), p. 3 - 5.

²⁶ Buddhārakkhita (2007), p. 71.

²⁷ Snodgrass (1992), p. 82; Khosla (1991), p. 30.

²⁸ Bodhi (2000), p. 533.

²⁹ Snodgrass (1992), p. 217 - 218; Bechert & Gombrich (1984), p. 231 - 233.

³⁰ Walshe (2012), p. 335.

where its intricate reliefs depict the stages of enlightenment as a journey of mindfulness and self-awareness. These reliefs, such as those illustrating the Jataka tales or the law of cause and effect, serve as visual guides for visitors to reflect on their life paths, fostering a sense of spiritual connection and contemplation.

Visitors engaging in meditation or silent reflection at Borobudur embody this principle, experiencing the temple not merely as a cultural landmark but as a space to cultivate inner peace and mindfulness. By aligning Borobudur's spiritual offerings with the concept of *sati*, its management can create profound and authentic experiences that resonate deeply with Buddhist values and appeal to global audiences seeking spiritual enrichment.³¹ In doing so, Borobudur continues to function not only as a historical monument but also as a living sanctuary of wisdom, guiding seekers on their path to enlightenment through a tangible, immersive experience of the Buddha's teachings.

Borobudur's uniqueness as a center of spirituality lies in its inclusivity, offering visitors from diverse backgrounds a space for reflection and a deeper connection to life's meaning. The global rise of mindfulness-based tourism further strengthens Borobudur's relevance in modern travel. This potential can be maximized through strategic approaches that not only enhance its spiritual and mindfulness aspects but also support the temple's preservation as a world cultural heritage site. These efforts will ensure Borobudur remains internationally respected and positively contributes to the sustainability of the site.

The spiritual experience at Borobudur Temple offers a unique dimension that distinguishes it from other destinations. Many visitors report feeling a deep sense of inner peace and reflection during their visit. Moments like witnessing the sunrise from the temple's summit or strolling among its meaningful reliefs leave a lasting impression. Borobudur's sacred ambiance encourages visitors to contemplate their life journeys, drawing inspiration from the temple's profound spiritual symbolism. For Buddhists, Borobudur is a sacred site of worship, while for others, it offers a universally reflective experience.

The harmony between Borobudur and its natural surroundings, the tranquility of the temple grounds, and its rich historical narrative collectively deepen visitors' spiritual experiences. Many guests see their visit as an opportunity to connect with something greater, whether through religious experiences or the pursuit of personal peace. To enhance these experiences, the temple's management can offer programs like guided meditation tours, mindfulness sessions, or reflective workshops. These initiatives not only enrich visitors' experiences but also reinforce Borobudur's standing as a revered spiritual site.

Meditation and reflection are central elements that reinforce Borobudur Temple's standing as a spiritual tourism destination. The temple's mandala-like design symbolizes the path toward enlightenment, offering an ideal space for

³¹ Gethin (1998), p. 322 - 323; Ñāṇaponika (2014), p. 16-17; Rinpoche (2013), p. 1 - 4.

visitors to meditate and reflect. The temple's serene atmosphere, especially at sunrise, creates a perfect environment for introspection and mindfulness.³² These experiences foster a deep connection among individuals from diverse backgrounds, including both Buddhist practitioners and non-Buddhists, establishing Borobudur as an exemplary site for achieving inner peace and contemplative reflection.

Borobudur has immense potential as a center for meditation and reflection, which can be fully realized through innovative programs. Initiatives like guided meditation workshops, yoga sessions, and mindfulness-based reflective tours could be integrated into the temple's management strategy. Introducing mindfulness through digital media or trained tour guides will help visitors appreciate the temple's symbolism as a tool for inner reflection. With its sacred atmosphere and unique architectural design, Borobudur serves not only as an archaeological landmark but also as a profound space for spiritual transformation.

Value-based spiritual tourism at Borobudur Temple highlights its spiritual significance, offering visitors a deeply meaningful experience. The temple's architectural beauty symbolizes the journey toward enlightenment, and its sacred atmosphere elevates Borobudur beyond a mere tourist destination. Visitors embark on a profound inner journey, appreciating not only the temple's aesthetics but also grasping the symbolic meanings behind its reliefs and structures. This experience is both educational and transformative for all who visit.³³

A value-based spiritual tourism approach can be developed through programs that integrate spirituality, education, and cultural preservation. Visitors can engage in tours that explore the temple's philosophy or participate in guided meditation sessions at strategic spots, such as the summit during sunrise. Programs like art workshops or discussions on Buddhist values further enrich visitor engagement. By promoting Borobudur as a value-based spiritual tourism destination, we not only attract high-quality tourists seeking meaningful experiences but also foster greater respect for Borobudur as a world cultural heritage site.

V. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Sustainable tourism at Borobudur Temple aims to balance the preservation of the site as a world cultural heritage with the growth of tourism as an economic driver. As one of Indonesia's leading tourist destinations, Borobudur faces significant challenges in maintaining its structural integrity and cultural significance amid rising tourist visitation. Sustainability principles are applied through strategic policies, such as limiting visitor numbers, developing eco-

³² Shikalgar, Menon, & Mahajan (2024), p. 120 - 121; Lin & Jung (2023), p. 2110 - 2112; Santos, et al. (2021), p. 350 - 352.

³³ Chen, Scott, & Benckendorff (2017), p. 6 - 7; Cheer, Belhassen, & Kujawa (2017), p. 2 - 3; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 403 - 405.

friendly infrastructure, and engaging local communities in culture-based economic activities. This approach ensures that tourism not only provides economic benefits but also contributes to the long-term preservation of the temple for future generations.³⁴

The Buddhist concept of Dependent Origination highlights the interconnectedness of all phenomena, providing a profound philosophical foundation for sustainable tourism. This principle emphasizes the interconnectedness of cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and community welfare in the management of Borobudur. The protection of Borobudur's cultural integrity not only enhances its appeal to tourists but also generates economic benefits for local communities. These economic benefits can, in turn, be reinvested into environmental conservation efforts, creating a self-sustaining cycle of sustainability. This integrated approach ensures that tourism development is not isolated but thrives in harmony with the broader cultural and ecological systems. By incorporating *paṭicca-samuppāda* into sustainable tourism strategies, Borobudur's management can achieve a balanced approach that aligns with Buddhist teachings while addressing the complex challenges of heritage preservation and community empowerment.³⁵

In addition to environmental protection, sustainable tourism at Borobudur places a strong emphasis on visitor education and awareness. These initiatives are carefully designed to enhance visitors' understanding of the temple's historical, cultural, and spiritual significance. Interactive educational programs, including digital applications, guided tours, and cultural exhibitions, play a crucial role in this approach. Through education, visitors not only have meaningful experiences but are also encouraged to adopt more responsible behaviors. This mindset, both directly and indirectly, contributes to the preservation of the temple, ensuring Borobudur's continued sustainability as a world cultural heritage site.

Managing visitor numbers at Borobudur Temple is a strategic measure to support sustainable tourism.³⁶ As a popular destination attracting millions of visitors each year, the temple faces significant physical pressures that could threaten its structural integrity and reduce the quality of the visitor experience. To address these issues, a daily visitor cap has been implemented. This policy seeks to minimize the negative impacts on the temple while providing a more tranquil and organized experience for visitors. As a result, visitors are able to enjoy a deeper and more meaningful encounter with the site.

In addition to visitor caps, tourist management at Borobudur also involves the creation of designated pathways and the implementation of scheduled visiting times to prevent overcrowding. Technologies like online ticket booking and real-time visitor monitoring systems have significantly improved management efficiency. Visitor education is equally vital in supporting these policies. Digital media, guided tours, and onsite informational resources

³⁴ Gilmore, Carson, & Ascensão (2007), p. 253 - 255; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 403 - 405.

³⁵ Rahula (1974), p. 45 - 48; Harvey (2000), p. 37 - 40.

³⁶ Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 79 - 81; Hakim (54 - 56), p. 54 - 56.

help raise awareness about the importance of safeguarding the temple. With effective management, Borobudur can thrive as a sustainable tourism destination, preserving its cultural values while providing visitors with meaningful experiences.

The development of eco-friendly infrastructure around Borobudur Temple is a crucial component of sustainable tourism. This infrastructure aims to minimize negative environmental impacts while maintaining visitor comfort. Examples include the use of sustainable construction materials, optimized water conservation systems, and renewable energy alternatives like photovoltaic panels to meet the electricity needs of the tourism sector. These efforts not only protect the local ecosystem but also promote a harmonious balance between tourism, culture, and the environment.³⁷

Eco-friendly infrastructure at Borobudur also includes sustainable transportation options, such as electric buses and bicycles, to reduce air pollution. Integrated waste management systems have been put in place to maintain the cleanliness of the tourist area while simultaneously reducing environmental pollution. Visitor education continues to play a key role in these efforts, with informational boards and digital media used to raise awareness about the importance of environmental conservation. With well-planned infrastructure, Borobudur can set a global example of sustainable tourism that preserves cultural heritage while promoting ecological balance.

Visitor education on sustainability plays a crucial role in preserving Borobudur Temple as a world cultural heritage site. Various methods are used to deliver this education, including tour guides, informational boards, and interactive digital applications. Visitors are strongly encouraged to understand the impact of their actions on the ecological system, cultural heritage, and the architectural integrity of the temple.³⁸ This education not only provides information but also raises awareness, motivating visitors to follow designated pathways and keep the site clean. In doing so, visitors actively contribute to the preservation of the temple.

Comprehensive sustainability education programs can greatly enhance the visitor experience at Borobudur Temple. For instance, educational tours focused on environmental management, such as waste management systems and the use of renewable energy, allow visitors to gain a deeper appreciation for conservation efforts. Workshops or seminars involving visitors, local communities, and conservation experts further broaden understanding of the importance of collaboration in preserving Borobudur. Through this approach, visitors not only have meaningful experiences but also contribute actively to its preservation. These initiatives support Borobudur's long-term sustainability as a respected global tourism destination.

³⁷ Daneshwar & Revaty (2024), p. 2795 - 2798; Vashishth, Mishra, & Malviya (2023), p. 1 - 2.

³⁸ Guluzade (2023), p. 3 - 4; Wang, et al. (2021), p. 2 - 3; Fischer, et al. (2017), p. 546 - 547.

VI. INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Inclusivity and accessibility at Borobudur Temple are essential to ensuring that people from all walks of life can experience this site as a world cultural heritage.³⁹ Borobudur is designed as an open space for both domestic and international visitors, regardless of their cultural, religious, or physical backgrounds. Inclusive policies include providing accessible facilities, such as those designed for individuals with disabilities, enabling visitors with special needs to fully appreciate the temple's beauty and spiritual significance. This approach not only upholds Borobudur's universal values but also reinforces its role as a symbol of unity in diversity.

The Buddhist principles of *karuṇā* and *mettā* provide a strong foundation for promoting inclusivity and addressing the societal impacts of tourism management at Borobudur. These principles are reflected in policies that actively engage local communities in the economic and social activities surrounding the temple. For example, initiatives aimed at empowering artisans, promoting traditional crafts, and supporting community-based tourism embody the essence of *karuṇā* by reducing economic disparities and improving the well-being of local residents. At the same time, *mettā* is realized through the creation of an inclusive tourism environment that welcomes individuals from all backgrounds and emphasizes respect for cultural diversity. By integrating *karuṇā* and *mettā*, Borobudur's management goes beyond physical conservation, fostering a deeper connection with the local community and exemplifying the universal values of Buddhism.

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Commitment to accessibility for all is realized through thoughtful infrastructure design and inclusive tourism programs. Facilities, such as dedicated pathways for individuals with disabilities and easily accessible observation areas, ensure comfort for all visitors, including families, the elderly, and individuals with special needs. By creating an inclusive space that offers

³⁹ Pramadanu & Windasari (2023), p. 4881 - 4888; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 71-77; Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 79 - 83.

⁴⁰ Pramadanu & Windasari (2033), p. 4881 - 4888; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 72 - 76.

non-discriminatory tourism experiences, Borobudur strengthens its position as an inclusive and welcoming destination for all segments of society.

Beyond physical infrastructure, accessibility at Borobudur includes non-physical aspects such as multilingual information, diverse tour guides, and interactive digital technologies. Specialized programs, like community-based educational tours and activities involving local residents, are designed to be relevant to various demographic groups. This approach strengthens Borobudur's image as a unifying symbol that prioritizes inclusivity. Moreover, these policies position Borobudur as a model for sustainable and inclusive tourism destination management.⁴¹

Inclusivity policies promote access for all societal segments, regardless of their diverse backgrounds. Initiatives, such as providing disability-friendly facilities and adjusting ticket prices for different community groups, are strategic steps. Visitor pathways are also managed to meet the needs of all visitors. Through this approach, Borobudur transcends its status as merely a tourism site, emerging instead as an emblem of diversity and inclusivity.

Inclusivity at Borobudur also involves providing equitable access to information and services for all visitors. Multilingual tour guides, interactive digital information, and educational programs are tailored to serve diverse age groups and backgrounds. Collaboration with local communities is a key component of these policies, ensuring that tourism activities involve and empower local residents while prioritizing temple conservation. These initiatives establish Borobudur as a globally relevant destination, reflecting values of openness and equality.

However, challenges related to the perception of exclusivity remain an issue in Borobudur's management. This perception arises when visitors feel that access and experiences at the site are limited to certain groups. Cultural, religious, and economic factors often influence these views. For example, branding Borobudur as a religious destination may create the impression that the temple is only relevant to Buddhists. Additionally, ticket prices perceived as high by some communities reinforce the notion that Borobudur is an exclusive destination, inaccessible to all.⁴²

Addressing the challenges of exclusivity perception requires management strategies that promote Borobudur as an inclusive destination. Educational initiatives emphasizing the temple's cultural values and universal spirituality can help dispel these perceptions. Programs such as educational tours for diverse community groups and adjusted ticket pricing for local tourists can enhance accessibility. Multilingual promotions targeting international audiences can also strengthen Borobudur's image as a destination open to everyone. With this holistic approach, the challenges of exclusivity perception can be transformed into opportunities to broaden Borobudur's appeal. This ensures that Borobudur's

⁴¹ Susilo & Suroso (2014), p. 118 - 122; Soesanta, Putra, & Hutagalung (2023), p. 113 - 115.

⁴² Pramadanu & Windasari (2033), p. 4881 - 4888; Hermawan, et al. (2019), p. 72 - 76.

cultural and spiritual values are accessible to all without discrimination, while supporting its preservation as a world heritage site.

VII. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The social and economic impacts of tourism at Borobudur Temple are critical dimensions in managing this site as a world cultural heritage. Borobudur attracts numerous tourists, fostering economic growth both locally and nationally.⁴³ The activities associated with tourism create a variety of employment opportunities for the local population, encompassing both formal sectors, such as tour guides and lodging establishments, and informal sectors, including handicraft production and the culinary arts. Additionally, tourism revenue is reinvested in preserving the temple and developing public infrastructure, delivering broad economic benefits while reinforcing the sustainability of site management.

By embedding the principles of *karuṇā* and *mettā*, the economic benefits generated by Borobudur tourism can be distributed more equitably, ensuring that vulnerable communities are not excluded from opportunities. Policies such as promoting local artisans and cultural businesses reflect *karuṇā* by alleviating economic inequalities. Meanwhile, *mettā* is exemplified through initiatives that foster cooperation between stakeholders, creating a shared sense of purpose in preserving Borobudur's cultural and spiritual legacy. These principles strengthen community bonds and promote collective efforts toward achieving sustainable tourism development.⁴⁴

The social impacts of tourism at Borobudur require careful management to balance economic and socio-cultural interests. Tourism plays a significant role in reinforcing regional cultural identity by facilitating the dissemination and appreciation of artistic expressions and traditional practices.⁴⁵ However, it also poses potential social pressures, such as shifts in community lifestyles and economic disparities among businesses. Consequently, an integrative and comprehensive management framework is essential to optimize social and economic benefits while mitigating adverse effects. The proactive engagement of local communities in both the decision-making processes and the implementation of tourism policies is fundamental to realizing these objectives.

The well-being of local communities around Borobudur Temple is a priority in managing this destination. Tourism brings immediate economic advantages through the generation of employment opportunities within both the formal and informal economic sectors. Local vendors, artisans, and cultural service providers enjoy more stable incomes as tourist numbers increase. Active community participation not only strengthens the local economy but also

⁴³ Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 82 - 83; Kausar, Damanik, & Tanudirjo (2024), p. 7 - 8; Diarta (2017), p. 104.

⁴⁴ Harvey (2000), p. 103 - 104; Keown (1992), p. 180 - 181.

⁴⁵ Arintoko, et al. (2020), p. 399 - 400; Pradana, Iban, & Setyastama (2020), p. 79 - 81.

fosters a sense of ownership toward the temple, encouraging involvement in preservation and promotion efforts. Thus, tourism becomes both an economic driver and a tool for deepening social connections to cultural heritage.⁴⁶

The well-being of communities around Borobudur is measured not only in economic terms but also in the overall improvement of their quality of life. Inclusive management must ensure that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably to prevent social inequality. Investments in educational initiatives, vocational training, and the enhancement of skill sets within local communities represent strategic interventions aimed at augmenting their capabilities in the tourism industry. This approach enables Borobudur tourism to contribute to social well-being while empowering local communities and strengthening their cultural identity amidst modernization.

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These collaborations also foster innovation in developing tourism products and services that cater to modern tourists while respecting local cultural values. Governments and temple administration have the capacity to deliver training and mentorship to regional enterprises with the goal of elevating the quality of their goods and services. The use of digital platforms enables local enterprises to broaden their access to international markets, thereby enhancing their competitive edge on a global scale. Close collaboration between temple management and local businesses ensures that Borobudur tourism develops inclusively and sustainably, delivering long-term benefits for surrounding communities.

Tourism policies around Borobudur Temple significantly impact the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of local communities. Policies such as visitor caps, area restructuring, and access management directly influence the lives of local residents. For instance, limiting tourist numbers aims to preserve the temple's physical structure but may affect the income of communities dependent on tourism. Vendors and tour operators are among the groups most affected. Therefore, tourism policies must be designed inclusively to balance the preservation of the temple with the well-being of the community.

Inclusively designed policies should also consider the social impacts on the structure of local community life. Changes in policy often require communities

⁴⁶ Soesanta, Putra, & Hutagalung (2023), p. 112; Susilo & Suroso (2014), p. 117.

⁴⁷ Guluzade (2023), p. 1 - 2; Sofianto (2018), p. 27 - 30.

to adjust to new regulations, which may result in opposition or difficulties in implementation. On the other hand, policies that actively engage communities in the decision-making process can significantly enhance their sense of ownership regarding conservation initiatives. Open dialogue between temple management, government, and local communities is key to designing fair and effective policies. With a harmonious approach, Borobudur tourism can serve as a model of sustainability that integrates cultural heritage preservation with community well-being.

VIII. GLOBAL PROMOTION AND BOROBUDUR'S POSITIONING

The global promotion and positioning of Borobudur Temple as a world cultural heritage site are critical components of its management. As a cultural and spiritual icon of Indonesia, Borobudur holds immense potential to attract international tourists while strengthening Indonesia's image on the global stage. Effective promotion emphasizes not only the temple's architectural beauty and historical significance but also its unique spirituality and sustainability. By leveraging digital platforms, multilingual campaigns, and collaborations with international organizations such as UNESCO, Borobudur can be positioned as a relevant and competitive world-class destination in the face of global competition.⁴⁸

The Buddha is universally recognized as a teacher whose wisdom transcends religious boundaries, advocating values of peace, compassion, and interconnectedness. Borobudur, as a monumental embodiment of Buddhist philosophy, reflects these teachings through its architectural design and symbolic reliefs. The temple's mandala structure represents harmony and balance, symbolizing the Buddha's vision of a peaceful and unified existence. By promoting Borobudur as an icon of universal values, its relevance extends beyond Buddhists to a global audience seeking inspiration on living harmoniously in a diverse and interconnected world. This positioning resonates with the Buddha's principles of *mettā* and *karuṇā*, making Borobudur a powerful symbol of unity, cultural preservation, and spiritual wisdom.⁴⁹

Borobudur reflects the path to Nirvana, as represented in its mandala-like design and intricate symbolic reliefs. These elements inspire ethical reflection, meditation, and wisdom, guiding visitors on a spiritual journey rooted in Buddhist teachings. By integrating these narratives into its promotional strategies, Borobudur reinforces its identity as a global Buddhist and spiritual icon, offering profound insights into the philosophy of enlightenment.⁵⁰

IX. MINDFUL MARKETING MODEL FOR BOROBUDUR TEMPLE

Borobudur's standing in global tourism hinges on its ability to offer authentic and meaningful visitor experiences.⁵¹ A value-driven approach is

⁴⁸ Ardhanariswari & Pratiwi (2021), p. 157-158; Soesanta, Putra, & Hutagalung (2023), p. 111-113.

⁴⁹ Harvey (2013), p. 278; Hakim (2023), p. 56.

⁵⁰ Snodgrass (1992), p. 274-278; Bechert & Gombrich (1984), p. 15-18.

⁵¹ Soesanta, Putra, & Hutagalung (2023), p. 113; Arintoko et al. (2020), p. 399.

central to Borobudur’s promotional strategy, highlighting the temple’s role as a center for spirituality, cultural education, and sustainable tourism. This approach is realized through the Mindful Marketing Model (Figure 1), which integrates four key pillars: Spiritual Storytelling, Sustainable Tourism Development, Community Empowerment, and Global Recognition.⁵²

Spiritual Storytelling emphasizes Borobudur’s Buddhist heritage and cultural significance, using narratives that resonate with global audiences seeking spiritual enrichment. Sustainable Tourism Development ensures that Borobudur’s tourism practices align with long-term environmental and cultural conservation efforts. Community Empowerment strengthens the involvement of local communities in tourism-related economic activities while preserving their cultural traditions. Global Recognition is the ultimate outcome of these combined efforts, positioning Borobudur as a world-renowned sustainable and spiritual tourism destination.

As depicted in Figure 1, the Mindful Marketing Approach serves as the foundation for these strategies, ensuring that Borobudur’s global promotion aligns with the values of authenticity, sustainability, and cultural integrity.



Figure 1. Mindful Marketing Model for Borobudur Temple

The Mindful Marketing Model illustrates how Borobudur’s global branding is shaped by a structured approach to sustainable tourism. The process begins with the temple’s identity as a Global Icon of Buddhist Heritage, which then informs a mindful marketing strategy emphasizing authenticity and ethical engagement with stakeholders. This strategy is implemented through three interconnected dimensions - Spiritual Storytelling, Sustainable Tourism Development, and Community Empowerment. These elements ultimately contribute to Borobudur’s Global Recognition as a leading destination for mindful and sustainable tourism.

Participation in international tourism exhibitions is a strategic step to broaden Borobudur’s appeal. Producing high-quality multimedia content further enhances its global promotion. Additionally, partnerships with international travel agencies expand Borobudur’s marketing reach. These efforts strengthen Borobudur’s position as a cultural heritage symbol that is not only visually captivating but also reflects a strong commitment to preservation and sustainability.

⁵² Hakim (2023), p. 54-55; Susilo & Suroso (2014), p. 117-119.

A culture-based promotional strategy is a vital element in enhancing Borobudur's appeal as a tourist destination. The richness of its history, arts, and local traditions serves as the foundation for this promotion. Borobudur is renowned not only for its magnificent architecture but also as a cultural emblem that embodies the noble values of past civilizations. Promotional campaigns can highlight the stories behind the temple's reliefs, its spiritual philosophy, and its connection to local traditions. Content such as documentary videos, art exhibitions, and cultural workshops involving local communities enriches the promotional experience, offering a unique allure to potential tourists.

Culture-based promotion also integrates local cultural elements into various tourist activities at Borobudur.⁵³ Activities such as traditional art performances, local culinary showcases, and craft exhibitions in the temple area enhance the visitor experience. Collaborations with local artists, cultural communities, and educational institutions strengthen the cultural dimension of the promotion while creating sustainable creative programs. Digital media promotion and partnerships with international tourism platforms extend Borobudur's reach to global markets. By emphasizing cultural uniqueness, Borobudur not only attracts tourists but also serves as a guardian of global cultural values.

Mindfulness-based tourism adds value to the visitor experience at Borobudur Temple. As a spiritual destination, Borobudur offers a space for reflection, meditation, and deep spiritual connection.⁵⁴ The temple's symbolism of the journey toward enlightenment provides an ideal environment for visitors to contemplate the meaning of life and find inner peace. Programs such as guided sunrise meditation at the temple's summit, yoga sessions, and spiritual tours exploring Buddhist philosophy offer unique and meaningful experiences for tourists. This approach further enhances Borobudur's appeal as a spiritual tourism destination.

The mindfulness approach at Borobudur aligns with global trends emphasizing travel that fosters mental and emotional well-being. Technologies such as meditation guide apps or interactive information on the temple's reliefs can be utilized to support this experience. Integrating mindfulness elements positions Borobudur not only as a cultural destination but also as a center for spiritual reflection that resonates with diverse audiences, further supporting the temple's preservation as a globally respected site.

Global collaboration for sustainability is a vital part of Borobudur Temple's management strategy. As a global cultural icon, Borobudur partners with international organizations such as UNESCO, conservation institutions, and global academic communities. These collaborations focus on sharing knowledge about modern conservation techniques, implementing eco-friendly technologies, and adopting responsible destination management practices. These efforts help Borobudur maintain its status as a respected

⁵³ Arintoko et al. (2020), p. 117-119; Hermawan et al. (2019), p. 73-74.

⁵⁴ Chen, Scott, & Benckendorff (2017), p. 1-3; Choe & O'Regan (2020), p. 2-4.

global destination while reinforcing its commitment to sustainability.

Global collaboration not only supports preservation but also promotes Borobudur's cultural and spiritual values to international audiences. Programs such as cultural exchanges, international conferences, and global awareness campaigns enhance Borobudur's visibility worldwide. Partnerships with global private sectors, including international travel platforms and technology companies, provide access to resources and innovations that support sustainable destination preservation and management. Through strong collaboration, Borobudur becomes a symbol of cultural preservation and a model for sustainability, inspiring the management of other world heritage sites.

X. DISCUSSION

This study underscores the importance of adopting a mindfulness-based approach to managing Borobudur Temple as a sustainable tourism destination. Mindfulness strategies provide a competitive edge by offering spiritually enriching and educational experiences for visitors. The analysis highlights that mindfulness-driven management can successfully integrate sustainability dimensions, including visitor education, cultural preservation, and active local community participation. Key measures, such as regulating tourist numbers, developing eco-friendly infrastructure, and promoting spiritual values, are crucial for preserving Borobudur's status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. These strategies not only enhance the temple's global appeal but also support its long-term preservation. However, their success depends on the active and comprehensive collaboration of all stakeholders involved.

The findings also reveal that while tourism generates significant economic benefits for local communities, the high influx of visitors poses risks to socio-cultural balance. Active participation of local communities in tourism management is crucial for optimizing economic gains while safeguarding cultural identity. Collaboration between government agencies, temple administrators, and local businesses plays a pivotal role in creating an inclusive and sustainable tourism framework. Holistic tourism policies that address the needs and aspirations of the local population not only foster a sense of ownership but also strengthen collective commitment to cultural preservation.

By integrating mindfulness practices with robust community engagement, Borobudur Temple has the potential to become a global model for sustainable tourism destination management. This approach not only protects the temple's cultural and spiritual heritage but also generates positive socio-economic and environmental impacts. In doing so, Borobudur will remain a relevant and respected icon of world cultural heritage for generations to come.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research is encouraged to explore the application of smart technologies in supporting sustainable tourism at Borobudur Temple. One promising innovation is the development of augmented reality (AR)-based applications to provide interactive education on the temple's historical and spiritual values. This technology not only enhances visitors' understanding

but also creates a more immersive and meaningful experience. Furthermore, comprehensive studies on the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions, including guided meditation practices or sessions dedicated to spiritual contemplation, are of paramount importance. These studies could offer valuable insights into designing value-based tourism activities that enhance the quality of the visitor experience at Borobudur.

Subsequent investigations could also focus on evaluating the implications of visitor capacity regulations on the welfare of surrounding communities and the conservation of Borobudur Temple. Quantitative analysis measuring the relationship between visitor numbers, the level of physical degradation of the temple, and local economic income would provide empirical data to support management policies. This data would enable temple management to formulate more effective and sustainable policies.

Moreover, cross-cultural studies comparing management approaches at Borobudur with those at other world heritage sites could provide a foundation for developing more comprehensive policies. This approach would enable the creation of policies that are adaptable to evolving global needs while preserving Borobudur's relevance as a symbol of world cultural heritage.

XII. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that Borobudur Temple holds immense potential as a global symbol of Buddhist heritage, embodying the values of sustainability, spirituality, and inclusivity. A mindfulness-based marketing approach provides a strategic solution for integrating cultural preservation, economic development, and environmental impact management. This approach not only enhances the quality of visitor experiences but also supports the long-term sustainability of Borobudur as a prominent spiritual and cultural site. Measures such as limiting tourist numbers, implementing technology-driven education, and strengthening collaboration with local communities can further elevate its international reputation. With proper implementation, Borobudur can become a globally recognized model of sustainable tourism.

However, challenges such as community resistance to new policies, unequal distribution of economic benefits, and perceptions of exclusivity require serious attention in the management of Borobudur Temple. The effectiveness of management depends not only on the advancement of policy innovation but also on proficient communication with local communities. A comprehensive approach that involves all relevant stakeholders - government authorities, temple administrators, local residents, and commercial enterprises - is essential for addressing these challenges effectively. With a holistic and inclusive strategy, Borobudur can set an example of cultural destination management that prioritizes the balance between heritage preservation and community well-being, while reinforcing its position as a global icon.

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION THROUGH PROMOTING ENGAGED BUDDHISM: AN ALTRUISTIC ROLE OF KARMAYŌGĪ KṚPĀSARAṆA MAHĀTHĒRŌ (1865 - 1926) IN PRE-PARTITION BENGAL

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Abstract:

Even though the term “engaged Buddhism” has been systemically coined since the 1960s, it has a long history that goes back more than a thousand years when the historical Buddha (563 - 483 BCE) began to spread his teachings and took holistic actions that guided people in practicing an ethical life and encouraged people to extend compassionate action, humanity, equality, and inclusiveness. Following the timeless spirit of engaged Buddhism, numerous altruistic-hearted compassionate Buddhist practitioners have contributed for the sake of humankind; Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō (1865-1926) was one of them. In recognition of his significant humanitarian services, moral-spiritual support, and social welfare, Bengali people honor him with the title “Karmayōgī”, which alludes to “a hermit who is tirelessly dedicated to humankind,” and frequently address him as “Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō”. This research outlines a historical overview of engaged Buddhism, highlighting how the spirit of “engaged Buddhism” profoundly impacted Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō to initiate his journey toward philanthropic services for the well-being of humankind. To fill the gap in an academic study about the contributions of Theravāda-based pioneer philanthropists, this paper seeks to reveal the selfless activities made by Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō and his tenderhearted support in alleviating the hardships faced by Buddhist communities in pre-partition Bengal, which encompassed East Bengal, now named Bangladesh, and West Bengal, presently known as Kolkata, India. By doing so, this paper also aims to shed light on Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō’s thoughtful works, such as his contributions to the religious and educational

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welfare of the Buddhist community in undivided Bengal.

Keywords: *Compassion, Engaged Buddhism, Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, Buddhism in Bengal, Buddhist Philanthropist.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The term “engaged Buddhism,” also known as “socially engaged Buddhism,” refers to a Buddhist social movement in the modern era. Sallie B. King,¹ in her book *Socially Engaged Buddhism*, mentions that engaged Buddhism is a contemporary form of Buddhist practice that engages actively yet nonviolently with society’s social, economic, political, social, and ecological problems. Ann Gleig proposed engaged Buddhism as a range of nonviolent social activist projects, such as peacemaking, human rights, environmental protection, rural development, and combatting ethnic violence.² Incorporating Buddhist teachings with contemporary social justice, the term “engaged Buddhism” was popularized when Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891 - 1956) and Thich Nhat Hanh (1926 - 2022) dedicatedly initiated humanistic Buddhism in response to colonialism, modernity, and secularization.

Even though the term “engaged Buddhism” has been systemically coined since the 1960s,³ it has a long history that goes back more than a thousand years from when the historical Buddha (563 - 483 BCE) began to spread his teachings and took holistic actions that guided people in practicing an ethical life and promoted humanity, equality, and inclusiveness. Following the timeless spirit of engaged Buddhism, numerous altruistic-hearted Buddhist practitioners have contributed for the sake of humankind; Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō (June 22, 1865 - April 30, 1926) was one of them. Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, a Theravāda-based Buddhist philanthropist, made outstanding contributions to the spread of Buddhism, developing local social philanthropy and extending humanitarian and education in undivided India and Boṅgabhūmi,⁴ which includes present-day Bangladesh and West Bengal

¹ King (2009): 1.

² Gleig, Ann. “Engaged Buddhism.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. 28 Jun. 2021; Accessed 30 August 2024. <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-755>.

³ Gleig (2021): 1.

⁴ Boṅgabhūmi refers to the Bengali region, particularly the lands where Bengali, or Bangla, is considered the primary language to speak. Prior to India’s partition in 1947, both Bengal regions, including East Bengal (present-day Bangladesh) and West Bengal (now a state in India), were unified. In addition to the term, Boṅgabhūmi, it consists of two words: Boṅga and bhūmi. The term “Boṅga” implies “Bengal” [unified Bengal], whereas “bhūmi” signifies “land.” From the geo-cultural standpoint, Boṅgabhūmi denotes the unified territory that includes modern-day Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. Indeed, most of the people in Boṅgabhūmi speak the same language, Bangla, and have similar customs, traditions, and cultures.

Chowdhury, Sanjoy Barua, ‘Historical Legends of the Buddha in the Region of Bong-abhumi’, in Courtney Bruntz, and Brooke Schedneck (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Lived*

in India.⁵ During the British colonial era in undivided India, when Theravāda Buddhism was reforming in the Bengal Delta,⁶ Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō took on a significant role in spreading Buddhism by establishing several monasteries, Buddhist organizations, and educational institutions. He earned respect and appreciation from the local and global devotees for his unwavering benefactors in reshaping society and Buddhist propagation. Recognizing his massive humanitarian services, moral-spiritual support, and social welfare, Bengali people honor him with the title “Karmayōgī”⁷ and frequently address him as “Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō”.⁸

However, little research has been conducted on Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō to date. Previous studies on Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō have been limited in scope.⁹ They highlighted his social welfare, Buddhist propagation services, and organizational activities.¹⁰ Although writings by Silānanda Brahmācārī,¹¹ Bhikkhu Bodhipal, and Shimul Barua briefly cover his biography and contributions to the formation of a noble society in Boṅgabdhūmi, including modern-day Bangladesh and West Bengal, it says little about his activities with Buddhists and non-Buddhist communities. Therefore, more research into Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō’s contribution to the broader Buddhist communities in present-day Bangladesh, West Bengal, India, and beyond is required. In general,

Buddhism (online edn, Oxford Academic, 22 Feb. 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxford-hb/9780197658697.013.34>, accessed 14 Mar. 2025.

⁵ Mahāsthābira (2021): 202 – 203.

⁶ Chowdhury (2024): 95 – 119.

⁷ The term “*Karmayōgī*” has the same meaning in Bengali and Sanskrit. In terms of grammatical structure, the word “*Karmayōgī*” is divided into two parts: *Karma* and *Yōgī* (*Karma* + *Yōgī*). The term “*Karma*” here refers to “work” or “services”, whereas the term “*yōgī*” denotes “a noble meditator” or “a practitioner”. Recognizing Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō’s contributions, devotees and followers have given him the title “*Karmayōgī*” to express his dignity and tireless welfare services for the sake of sentient beings. It is worth noting that for the past hundred years, Bengali Buddhist monks and devotees have been using the title, “*Karmayōgī*” exclusively for Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō in attributing his legacy and significant charitable and philanthropic services to Bangladesh and the Indian subcontinent.

⁸ Chowdhury (2021a): 52.

⁹ Brahmācārī (1950): 46 – 48.

¹⁰ Shimul Barua (2015): 38.

¹¹ Silānanda Brahmācārī was a prominent Buddhist scholar who lived from December 25, 1907, to February 5, 2002. Like the renowned philanthropist Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, Silānanda Brahmācārī was born in the prominent spiritual village of Unainpūrā. It is worth noting that Silānanda Brahmācārī was a disciple of Jñānīśbara Mahāsthābira (December 20, 1887–October 28, 1974), a renowned Theravāda-based Buddhist scholar and meditation master. Silānanda Brahmācārī, a prolific scholar, wrote various books in Bengali, Hindi, and English, as well as conducted translation projects from Pāli to English and Bengali. *An Introduction to Abhidhamma*; *The Dhammapada*; *Mahāśānti Mahāprēma*; *Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa*; *The Eternal Message of Lord Buddha*; *Visuddhimagga*, *The Saṃyukta Nikāya* (translation) and others are amongst his notable works.

current research on Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's altruistic and humanitarian services to Buddhism and societal welfare is still in its infancy and lacks a systematic arrangement analysis.

Based on the life, legacy, philanthropic contributions, and times of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, this paper is designed into three separate parts. The first part explores Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's early biography, including the history of his entrance into the spiritual path; the second one delineates his altruistic services to establish spiritual institutions to propagate Theravāda Buddhism in undivided India and modern Bangladesh, and the ending section reveals his philanthropic activities for educational welfare with highlighting the overview of his entire humanitarian services.

II. EARLIER BIOGRAPHY OF KARMAYŌGĪ KṚPĀŚARAṆA MAHĀTHĒRŌ

Kṛpāśaraṇa was born on June 22, 1865, in Unainpūrā,¹² a notable spiritual village in the Patiya subdistrict of the Chattogram district, present-day Bangladesh. His father was named Ānandamōhan Barua, and his mother was named Ārādhana Barua.¹³ He was the sixth child of his parents. Because of his father's poverty, young Kṛpāśaraṇa was deprived of the opportunity to attend school. In his commemorative biographical book, *Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa*, prominent Silānanda Brahmācārī stated that, despite the reality that young Kṛpāśaraṇa wanted to study at school and would have been privileged to acquire formal education, he did not express his sorrow to his father if he was regretful of his deprivation and poverty.¹⁴ When Kṛpāśaraṇa was just ten years old, his father, Ānandamōhan Barua, died unexpectedly. His mother, Ārādhana Barua, became a widow and was unable to care for her children.

¹² Unainpūrā is one of the prominent spiritual villages of modern-day Bangladesh where a number of Buddhist scholars and monks grew up, leading to the spread of Theravāda Buddhism in Boṅgabdhūmi and the Indian subcontinent over centuries. Dr. Dharmasen Mahāthērō (June 17, 1928 - March 21, 2020), the 12th Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh, recorded fourteen prominent Buddhist monks born in Unainpūrā on a white stone rock. The white-stoned rock edict was depicted in 1982 and respectfully placed in the Unainpūrā Lankārāma on the eve of auspicious Buddha Pūrṇimā (Buddhist Year 2525). We learned about sixteen Buddhist monks who came from Unainpūrā, including two modern monks and they are: (1) Śrīmat Jaṃyadhara Mahāsthābīra (1600 - 1672); (2) Śrīmat Dhruba Mahāsthābīra (1630 - 1690); (3) Śrīmat Cāda Mahāsthābīra (1630 - 1690); (4) Śrīmat Krēmīlāhā Mahāsthābīra (1700 - 1780); (5) Śrīmat Thānā'i Mahāsthābīra (1720 - 1785); (6) Śrīmat Hrepasu'i Mahāsthābīra (1725 - 1790); (7) Śrīmat Mōhana Chandra Mahāsthābīra (1730 - 1780); (8) Śrīmat Mukulacāna Mahāsthābīra (1730 - 1795); (9) Śrīmat Sudhana Candra Mahāsthābīra (1735 - 1810); (10) Śrīmat Saṅgharāja Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Chandramōhana Mahāsthābīra (1838 - 1905); (11) Śrīmat Jagaṭ Chandra Mahāsthābīra (1852 - 1948); (12) Śrīmat Gaurachandra Mahāsthābīra (1850 - 1910); (13) Śrīmat Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāsthābīra (1865 - 1926); (14) Śrīmat Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāsthābīra (1928 - 2020); (15) Śrīmat Bōdhipāla Bhikkhu (1968 - 2020) and (16) Śrīmat Bōdhitmitra Mahāsthābīra (1970 - Present).

¹³ Brahmācārī (1950): 46 - 48.

¹⁴ Brahmācārī (1950): 13.

Young Kṛpāśaraṇa worked as a laborer in a relative's house to comprehend his mother's plight, earned two takas (currency equivalent to the British India period), and gave that money to his mother for family expenditures. Ārādhana was flabbergasted after she saw young Kṛpāśaraṇa's heart was so philanthropic. With a compassionate heart, Ārādhana realized that Kṛpāśaraṇa was born to aid and help others and that he should be initiated into the path of awakening by being a Buddhist monk.

Under the mentorship of a noble preceptor (*upajjhāya*), Sūdhancandra Mahāsthābira, Kṛpāśaraṇa was ordained as a novice (*sāmaṇera* or *pabbajjā*) on April 14, 1881, at Unainpūrā Laṅkārama, located in the Patiya subdistrict of Chattogram district, present-day Bangladesh.¹⁵ Since becoming a novice monk, Kṛpāśaraṇa Sāmaṇera has been carefully studying Buddhist monastic rules and disciplines (*Vinaya*) from his preceptor. Due to his meticulous learning, Kṛpāśaraṇa Sāmaṇera established himself as one of the top students among his colleagues and other monastic members. Kṛpāśaraṇa received higher ordination (*bhikkhu*) at the age of twenty, under the spiritual preceptor (*upajjhāya*) of Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābira (June 19, 1834 - February 4, 1907),¹⁶ the second Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh.¹⁷ Kṛpāśaraṇa was given a new monastic name, "Chandrajyōti Bhikkhu", by the teacher, Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābira, following the Theravāda monastic order (*Vinaya*). He was known by his former name, "Kṛpāśaraṇa", which was given to him by his parents, and his monastic name, "Chandrajyōti Bhikkhu", has never been pronounced.¹⁸ Subsequently, he was frequently referred to as Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō by his followers, devotees, and fellow monks.

The Legacy of Ācārya Pūrṇācāra had a tremendous impact on Kṛpāśaraṇa's monastic journey. After Kṛpāśaraṇa received higher ordination, he traveled to Bodhgaya (present-day Bihār, India) with Ācārya Pūrṇācāra. Sīlananda Brahmācārī noted that Kṛpāśaraṇa had an insight into Bodhgaya while he was reflecting on the decreasing status of Buddhism in India and the entire Indian

¹⁵ Brahmācārī (1950) 13; Bodhipala (2005):17; Shimul Barua (2021): 273.

¹⁶ Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Chandramōhana Mahāsthābira (June 19, 1834 – February 4, 1907), the second Saṅgharāja of Bangladesh, was a pioneer reformer of Theravāda Buddhism in modern-day Bangladesh as well as the Indian subcontinent. Unainpūrā, a well-known spiritual village of Bangladesh, is where he was born. Mr. Paul, a British-based government officer, inspired Ācārya Pūrṇācāra to learn the *Tipitaka*, or Triple Baskets of Buddhism. After learning about *Bhikkhu Pāṭimokkha* (The monks' codes of disciples), he was motivated to reform Theravāda Buddhism in undivided India, including modern-day Bangladesh. Under the spiritual direction and preceptorship (*Upajjhāya*) of Saṅgharāja Sāramēdha Mahāsthābira (1801 - 1882), Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Chandramōhana was ordained as a *bhikkhu* (higher ordination). Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Chandramōhana was one of the founding members of Rāmañña Nikāya of Sri Lanka in 1864 (Mahāsthābira 2009, 174 - 175).

¹⁷ Brahmācārī (1950): 13 - 15.

¹⁸ Shimul Barua (2021): 274.

subcontinent.¹⁹ He was thinking about the possibility of reviving Buddhism in India and beyond at that time. Promising Kṛpāśaraṇa thought of how to bring devotees and seekers back together by working together to help one another and defend Buddhism and the Buddhist community from mass extinction. As a devoted Buddhist follower, Kṛpāśaraṇa was inspired by the Buddha's instruction that monks should walk for the welfare of the multitude and the happiness of many sentient beings (*Bahujan-hitāya bahujana-sukhāya*).²⁰ Kṛpāśaraṇa's journey into Buddhism matured during his first pilgrimage, owing to his teacher's encouragement and his intrinsic philanthropic nature²¹ blossomed.

III. KARMAYŌGĪ KṚPĀŚARAṆA MAHĀTHĒRŌ AS A BUDDHIST PHILANTHROPIST

After completing his noble pilgrimage to North India, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō ended up going back to Chattogram. Then, he lived in a local Buddhist monastery in the village of Bākkhālī, located in the Patiya subdistrict of the Chattogram district, present-day Bangladesh, as instructed by his teacher, Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Chandramōhana Mahāsthābīra.²² Apart from his monastic responsibilities in the temple, he was pondering how he could contribute to the Buddhist community, protect the devotees from misery, and spread Theravāda Buddhism²³ throughout Boṅgabdhūmi and British India, as he had the insight to reflect on his innate humanistic nature.²⁴ By coincidence, he received a request to spend some time teaching Buddhism from devotees of Kolkata (West Bengal, India) as he contemplated whether or not to begin his philanthropic activities in British India. On June 15, 1886, he arrived in Kolkata and resided in Nabīna Bihāra, on the street 72/73 Maṅgalā lē'ina.²⁵ While residing at Nabīna Bihāra, he realized that Kolkata required more Buddhist monasteries where monastic members could dwell to work in the community.

¹⁹ Brahmācārī (1950): 14 - 15.

²⁰ This is the Buddha's famous instruction to his first sixty enlightened disciples (*arahants*) to go forth, for the sake of many. A similar passage also occurs at *Vinaya Piṭaka I* 20, 36 -21, 16 (Bodhi 2000): 413).

²¹ As previously indicated, the term "philanthropic nature" expresses the Buddha's instruction to go forth for the sake of many (*bahujana-hitāya bahujana-sukhāya*). Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-2022), a Vietnamese Buddhist philanthropist, coined the term "engaged Buddhism" to describe Buddhism-inspired philanthropy and social activism (Gleig 2021, 2).

²² Brahmācārī (1950): 15.

²³ Theravāda Buddhism was restored in Chattogram during the time of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, and it later extended throughout Boṅgabdhūmi, a unified Bengal that included modern-day Bangladesh and West Bengal in India. Professor Deepak Kumar Barua remarked that Theravāda Buddhism began to reform in the Bengal region in the early nineteenth century (Barua 2021, 209). Dharmādhār Mahāsthābīra, on the other hand, stated that Theravāda Buddhism was reintroduced in Caṭṭagrāma in 1864, under the direction of the first Saṅgharāja, Sāramēdha Mahāsthābīra (Mahāsthābīra 2009, 172 - 173).

²⁴ Shimul Barua (2021): 274 - 275.

²⁵ Bodhipala (2005): 17 - 19.

He established Mahānagara Bihāra on the street 21/26 Bho in Kolkata after understanding the significance of having more Buddhist temples there. (Barua 2021, 210) Although Mahānagara Bihāra was founded in Kolkata as a rental building, it is crucial to note that it was Kṛpāśaraṇa's first Buddhist monastery to be established.

During his time at Nabīna Bihāra, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō was concerned by how disorganized and ignorant the Buddhist communities in Kolkata were of the Buddha's teachings. After realizing the need to establish a social society and protect the ethnic Buddhist communities of Boṅgabhūmi, Kṛpāśaraṇa was compelled to start a Buddhist organization in the heart of British India. He intended to form a Buddhist institution that would encourage devotees and seekers to interact with each other's thoughts and preserve their faith in the Triple Gems of the Buddha, his teachings, and the noble community. He founded the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā (Bengal Buddhist Association)²⁶ in Kolkata on the eve of Prabāranā Pūrṇimā (*Āśvinī Pūrṇimā*) on October 5, 1892.²⁷ A well-known modern philanthropist and Buddhist scholar, Bhikkhu Bodhipala, asserts that Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā was one of the pioneer Buddhist organizations in undivided British India.²⁸ In describing the hardships of Kṛpāśaraṇa along the way to founding Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā, Silānanda Brahmācārī noted as follows:²⁹

One of his dreaming noble initiatives was the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā, to which Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō devoted all of his time throughout the years. Despite his unwavering commitment and full energy, it took a while for this organization to become successful. Kṛpāśaraṇa continued to be forbearing and passionate about his work throughout the journey, encouraged by the guidance of his teacher, Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābira. While Kṛpāśaraṇa was striving on his own, a Buddhist devotee by the name of Gōpāla Sinha Caudhurī extended his compassionate assistance and support to him so that his dream project could advance. After that, kind-hearted local followers began to support him and provide financial assistance in accomplishing his noble cause. Kṛpāśaraṇa saved all of the funds he had received from followers and seekers in order to carry out his aim of establishing the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā. He never spent a penny on personal expenses except for the additional costs he incurred to set up the institution. Over the years, he accumulated a few thousand takas (the equivalent of money in British India). Since Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā lacked any former properties, he purchased a 3600 square foot (5 *kāṭhā*) plot of land on Street 5, Lalita

²⁶ Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh. 2021. "Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha". Available online: https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Bauddha_Dharmankur_Sabha (accessed on June 26, 2024).

²⁷ Brahmācārī (1950): 46 - 48.

²⁸ Bodhipala (2005): 17 - 19.

²⁹ Brahmācārī (1950): 13 - 17.

Mōhana Dās lē'ina in Kolkata. At that time, the cost of 3600 square feet of land was 4,500 Taka. He used all of his savings and any donations he received to establish the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in combination with the founding monastery (*Bihāra*). In order to properly complete this great endeavor for the benefit of devotees and seekers in Kolkata as well as undivided British India, he borrowed some money from the well-wishers because he did not have enough to purchase the land. Kṛpāśaraṇa laid the foundation of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Kolkata in 1901. The monastery was inaugurated in 1903.

After successfully establishing the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā and Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Kolkata, Kṛpāśaraṇa's name gained widespread recognition among followers and Buddhist aspirants. This prompted him to further his philanthropic activities by establishing sister institutions and organizations in Boṅgabhūmi and undivided India. In 1907, Kṛpāśaraṇa sought the assistance of the District Divisional Commissioner of Lucknow Division to purchase a 7200 square foot (10 *kāṭhā*) plot of land in the Lucknow District of British India so that he could construct a sister institution to Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra, which he named "Lucknow Bodhisattva Bihāra".³⁰ That same year, he established the "Shimla Baud'dha Samiti," another branch institution in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh. In 1910, he traveled to Darjeeling to start a new sister institution to the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra, and King Bijaya Chandra Mahatāba, the majesty of Bardhaman, funded him to form a monastery on land. The construction of the temple was completed in 1919. After fulfilling his mission in Darjeeling, Kṛpāśaraṇa thought of the devotees of Ranchi, the state capital of Jharkhand. In 1915, he established a new Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra branch in Ranchi with the support of an earlier registration with the British-Indian Government. In 1918, another branch of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra was established in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya.³¹

In addition to his extensive altruistic activities in northern India and West Bengal, Kṛpāśaraṇa made significant contributions to Unainpūrā, the village where he was born. He renovated and reconstructed the ancient monastery of Unainpūrā Laṅkārama in 1921. After being requested to do so by the noble residents of Unainpūrā, he founded a branch of Dharmāṅkūra Baud'dha Sabhā in his beloved village. In the same year, he opened a new Dharmāṅkūra Baud'dha Sabhā branch in the Chattogram Hill Tract (CHT) area of Rangamati.³² He returned to Kolkata after fulfilling his mission in his hometown of Chattogram. After that, in 1922, he founded a sister institution of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in Jamshedpur, Tatanagar. A well-known Tata company in Jamshedpur, based in Tatanagar, gave him a 60,480-square-foot (1 *bigḥā* and 1 *kāṭhā*) plot of land to build a Buddhist monastery and meditation center. The last founding

³⁰ Bodhipala (2005): 17 - 21.

³¹ Brahmācārī (1950): 46 - 48.

³² Brahmācārī (1950): 48.

monastery of Kṛpāśaraṇa was built in Shillong in 1925.³³

After his rigorous philanthropic journey, Kṛpāśaraṇa remained devoted to spreading Buddhism in Boṅgabhūmi and Undivided India. Despite all of his challenges and obstacles, he did not give up on his noble aim of establishing Buddhist institutions as the respective branches of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā and Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō diligently managed to establish Buddhist institutions for the benefit of devotees and aspirants wherever he had the privilege throughout Boṅgabhūmi and Undivided India.

IV. KṚPĀŚARAṆA'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE EDUCATIONAL WELFARE

While Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō was working devotedly to establish the branches of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā and Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Boṅgabhūmi and Undivided India, he was deeply saddened to observe how educationally inferior Bengali Buddhists were. As a result of the lack of formal education, Buddhist society was unable to advance and adapt to the advancement of rational thought. Professor Shimul Barua wrote in his book, *Mānaba Cintanē Bud'dha Cintā-Jāgaraṇē*, that Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, who was a self-educated person, understood the reason for the Buddhist community's substandard status in both East and West Bengal, i.e., the lack of education.³⁴ At the fifth assembly of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in 1913, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō delivered the following addresses that emphasized the value of holistic education for the welfare of oneself and others in Boṅgabhūmi:

The distinguished speakers on this occasion spoke about their perspectives on education, which I found interesting. In contrast to a large contingent, we currently only have a limited number of educated people. I do not believe that a small number of educated people can be enabled to significantly impact society and the growth of the economy. Even if there are not many educated people in our society, I am disappointed in many of them because of their selfishness. A person with the right education is one who not only cares for himself and his family members but also contributes to society's welfare and has a generous heart for others. To benefit many people in this society, I expect the people of this noble community to educate themselves internally and externally.³⁵

It is significant to mention that Kṛpāśaraṇa had purely philanthropic views on educational welfare, as evidenced by the fact that he established numerous schools and colleges in Boṅgabhūmi. Along with establishing the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā and its two-story building, he also founded the "Kṛpāśaraṇa Free Institution," a nonprofit school, in 1913.³⁶ Despite being

³³ Bodhipala (2005): 18.

³⁴ Shimul Barua (2021): 275.

³⁵ Hemendu Bikash (1990): 43.

³⁶ Brahmācārī (1950): 46 - 48.

located on the grounds of a Buddhist monastery called Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra, this school used to accept students of all religious backgrounds and provides free education in both Bengali and English. With the assistance of the prominent Buddhist scholar, Dr. Benimadhab Barua (B.M. Barua),³⁷ Kṛpāśaraṇa supervised this institution, which immediately drew the attention of locals.³⁸

When Kṛpāśaraṇa was founding the “Kṛpāśaraṇa Free Institution”, he had another thought: the importance of education for individuals of all ages, from young children to elderly people. He also understood the significance of education in enabling working people to advance both morally and materially by securing respectable positions. In 1916, Kṛpāśaraṇa started an evening school to benefit working people in affiliation with Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā³⁹. With the help of Mr. W. C. Wordsworth, a former director of the Education Ministry of the Bengal territory in British India, Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā received government funding for running both Kṛpāśaraṇa Free Institution and the Evening School for Working People.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Kṛpāśaraṇa's friendship with Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee,⁴¹ a former Vice-Chancellor of Kolkata University, grew, and his moral vision expanded to encapsulate the educational welfare in Boṅgabhūmi. Dr. Dharmasen Mahāsthābīra⁴² recognized Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō and

³⁷ Dr. Benimadhab Barua, also known as Professor B. M. Barua (December 31, 1888–March 23, 1948), was a pioneer scholar of Indology Studies and the first Asian to receive a D.Litt from the University of London in 1917. Under the supervision of Dr. T.W. Rhys Davids and Mrs. Rhys Davids, Dr. B. M. Barua accomplished his research, entitled “Indian Philosophy: Its Origin and Growth from Vedas to the Buddha” (Benimadhab 1921, pp. v - xiii). In 1913, he took a position at the University of Kolkata as a guest lecturer. In 1918, he was promoted to a full professorship and continued to work there until the end of his life. Dr. B. M. Barua was a prolific scholar who authored 86 research papers, and 18 texts in English, along with compiled 7 books and 22 research articles in the Bengali language (Shimul Barua 2019, 28). Since 1909, he had been a member of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā and had generously assisted Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's philanthropic efforts in Boṅgabhūmi and Undivided India.

³⁸ Shimul Barua (2021): 276.

³⁹ Brahmācārī (1950): 47.

⁴⁰ Shimul Barua (2021): 277.

⁴¹ Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee (June 29, 1864 – May 25, 1924) was a well-known Bengali educator, jurist, and mathematician. He served as vice chancellor at the University of Calcutta for four consecutive, two-year terms (1906–1914). Due to his strong sense of self-worth, courage, and academic integrity, he was frequently alluded to as “Banglar Bagh,” which translates to “the royal Bengal tiger of Boṅgabhūmi” (Barua 2019, 52).

⁴² On June 22, 2015, a significant congregation was held in Unainpūrā Laṅkārama (located in the Patiya subdistrict of Chattogram district, present-day Bangladesh) to commemorate Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's 150th birthday (Barua 2015, 11 - 30). The assembly was presided over by Saṅgharāja Dr. Dharmasen Mahāsthābīra (June 17, 1928 – March 20, 2020), the 12th supreme patriarch of Bangladesh. The late Saṅgharāja, Dr. Dharmasen Mahāsthābīra, spoke about Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's educational welfare and asserted that

Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee's friendship was a shining example of noble companionship or *Kalyāṇa-mittatā*.⁴³ However, this friendship significantly influenced the establishment of traditional studies and secular education in Boṅgabhūmi. Kṛpāśaraṇa convinced Sir Ashutosh that since the current education structure is based on university affiliation, rural schools, and colleges should recognize Kolkata University as a model of contemporary universities. This affiliation was supposed to encourage pupils from underprivileged schools and colleges to compete for jobs with graduates from prestigious secular institutions.⁴⁴ Deeply influenced by Kṛpāśaraṇa, Sir Ashutosh helped to establish academic ties between Kolkata University and the rural institutions of Chattogram, including Mahamuni Anglo-Pali Institution; Silak Dowling Primary School; Kartala-Belkaine Middle English School; Noapara English High School; Andharmanik High School; Naikaine Purnachar Pali School; Dhamakhali High School; Pancharia Middle English School; Satbaria Girl's School and Library; Unainpura Primary School; Unainpura Junior High School; Rangunia English High School; M.A. Rahat Ali High School; Sakhpura English School; Rangamati School and Library.⁴⁵

Kṛpāśaraṇa was not only concerned with establishing secular education but also reflected on the promotion of ancient Indic languages, such as *Pāli* and Sanskrit. At the request of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee approved the authorization for the Department of *Pāli* Studies to be formed at Kolkata University in 1907.⁴⁶ It is noteworthy that Kolkata University⁴⁷ was the first South Asian institution to introduce a program in *Pāli* Studies. In addition to promoting *Pāli* Studies within the institution, Kṛpāśaraṇa paid attention to promising young scholars so that they would integrate their education and have access to adequate research privileges for future endeavors. Due to Kṛpāśaraṇa's thoughtful guidelines and support, Benimadhab Barua

Kṛpāśaraṇa's welfare mission could not be carried out without Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee, who warm-heartedly extended his assistance and offered him additional guidelines on how to do so. Kṛpāśaraṇa and Ashutosh shared the same passion for helping the community in a comprehensive approach. Dr. Dharmasen Mahāsthābīra further addressed the outstanding friendship between Kṛpāśaraṇa and Ashutosh functioned as a prime example of *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* from a Buddhist perspective.

⁴³ The *Pāli* word *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* renders the Sanskrit term *kalyāṇa-mitra*, which signifies admirable companionship or noble friendship. According to the Buddha, *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* refers to those who are advanced in virtue, engaged in noble discussion, extend generous help when required, and consummate in discernment. For a detailed analysis, see *D III* 180; *A IV* 281.

⁴⁴ Bodhipala (2005): 20 - 21.

⁴⁵ Shimul Barua (2019): 279; Bodhipala (2005): 19.

⁴⁶ Shimul Barua (2019): 278.

⁴⁷ Following Kolkata University's footsteps, contemporary Indian universities such as Delhi University, Pune University, Naba Nalanda University, Gautam Buddha University, and Magadha University, as well as present Bangladeshi institutions such as the University of Dhaka, University of Chittagong, and Government City College of Chattogram, established *Pāli* and Buddhist Studies (Chowdhury 2020, 110 – 120).

blossomed in his academic career and made tremendous contributions to *Pāḷi* and Buddhist Studies as well as Indology. It is crucial to remember that Benimadhab Barua received the British government's funding for his education at the University of London. This application was brought to light when Kṛpāśaraṇa sincerely asked Sir Ashutosh to send a recommendation to the British government and the university so that the officials may accept Benimadhab Barua's funding request.⁴⁸

Since Kṛpāśaraṇa realized the merits of education for socio-economic progress, he also placed a strong emphasis on women's education. In 1913, he founded the "Baud'dha Mahilā Sam'milanī" organization to enhance the welfare of women.⁴⁹ "Baud'dha Mahilā Sam'milanī" was formed to unify women and inspire them to pursue education for the sake of both themselves and society. During the women's assembly at Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in 1913, he stated that every woman deserves the same rights as males and that a woman can work outdoors just like a man can.⁵⁰ A female education specialist named L. L. Jennie graciously assisted Kṛpāśaraṇa in launching a scholarship program for women's education. It is worth mentioning that this fellowship for women provides financial support to women pursuing academic education in school, college, and university, as well as vocational training.⁵¹

As part of extending social welfare through education, Kṛpāśaraṇa recognized the significance of establishing libraries and journals. Professor Shimul Barua noted that the glorious legacies of Nālandā Mahāvihāra passionately inspired Kṛpāśaraṇa.⁵² In 1909, he founded the "Guṇālāṅkāra Library" at the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Kolkata. With the assistance of "Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā", he collected a large number of books, manuscripts, and Buddhist scriptures for the library so that scholars and

⁴⁸ Roy, Ajay. 2018. "The Life of Kripasaran Mahashtavir." Available online: https://dharma-documentaries.net/life-of-kripasaran-mahashtavir?fbclid=IwAR06brdRvtZymwdPLE0cN3Sx_vtkmor3dTOWN7O_4xVOvnCG8EUNLg3DisE (accessed on June 22, 2024).

⁴⁹ Brahmācārī (1950): 47.

⁵⁰ Hemendu Bikash (1992): 52.

⁵¹ Shimul Barua (2021): 281.

⁵² Shimul Barua (2021): 282; Nālandā Mahāvihāra or Nālandā University, a vestige of ancient India's glorious past, was regarded as one of the most prestigious educational institutions that represented the foremost Buddhist scholasticism of that time. Nālandā Mahāvihāra University was founded by King Śākṛāditya (reign. 467 – 473 CE.) in the fifth century. Historically, Nālandā was recognised as an essential location where the Buddha often taught. His chief disciple, Śāriputra was born in Nālandā and taught his benevolent mother the essence of the Dharma. A few hundred years after Buddha's departure, reputable Buddhist scholars often gathered to teach and exchange the Dharma at Nālandā. With the inception of the Gupta period (240 – 550 CE.), Nālandā Mahāvihāra University continued to flourish as a prestigious educational institution. A Tibetan account recorded that 30,000 students and 20,000 teachers resided at Nālandā Mahāvihāra University. As the Pāla Dynasty (750 – 1162 CE.) came into power, the growth of Nālandā Mahāvihāra University extended into Central Asia and Europe. (Chowdhury 2020, 110 – 125).

educators could continue their research and studies to acquire knowledge and wisdom.⁵³ Aside from establishing a library, he became aware of the value of academic journals, which allowed scholars to publish their research papers, articles, and academic works. He founded the “Jagatjyōti,”⁵⁴ a monthly Buddhist journal, in 1908. Two renowned scholars, Guṇālaṅkāra Mahāsthābira and Sāmaṇera Pūrṇānanda Sāmī, were given the responsibility of editing the “Jagatjyōti” by Kṛpāśaraṇa.⁵⁵ Since its founding, the esteemed journal “Jagatjyōti” has continued to shed light on social and cultural awakening in Bangladesh and India, as well as all over the world.

As mentioned in the discussion above, Kṛpāśaraṇa’s passionate contributions to educational welfare followed the steps of an awakening society in Boṅgabhūmi and undivided India. Understanding the value of education for both men and women, he devoted his life to founding schools, colleges, libraries, and publications and supporting local academics and educators. However, his thoughts about educational welfare were much ahead of his time.

V. KṚPĀŚARAṆA’S NOTABLE EVENTS AND SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS IN PRE-PARTITION BENGAL AT A GLANCE

The table below, categorized by year, lists the noteworthy life events, accomplishments, and philanthropic contributions of Karmayōgī Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō.⁵⁶

Year	Significant Life Events and Social Contributions of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō
1865	Kṛpāśaraṇa was born on June 22 in the prominent spiritual village of Unainpūrā, located in the Patiya subdistrict of the Chatto-gram district, Bangladesh. His father was named Ānandamōhan Barua, and his mother was named Ārādhana Barua.
1875	Kṛpāśaraṇa’s father, Ānandamōhan Barua was died.
1881	On April 14, Kṛpāśaraṇa was ordained as a novice (<i>sāmaṇera</i> or <i>pabbajjā</i>) by a noble preceptor, Sūdhanchandra Mahāsthābira.

⁵³ Hemendu Bikash (1992): 47.

⁵⁴ “Jagatjyōti” established by Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, which became one of the leading Buddhist journals over a century ago. Jagatjyōti became one of the leading Buddhist journals, publishing a plethora of high-quality articles and research papers on Buddhist anthropology, history, contemporary issues, archaeological data, scriptures, culture, and literature (Brahmacārī 1950, 47 - 48)

⁵⁵ Brahmacārī (1950): 47 - 48.

⁵⁶ Shimul Barua (2021): 279 - 285; Bodhipala (2005): 17-21; Brahmacārī (1950): 46 - 48.

1885	Kṛpāśaraṇa received higher ordination (<i>bhikkhu</i>) under the spiritual guidance and preceptor (<i>Upajjhāya</i>) of the second Saṅgharāja (supreme patriarch), Ācārya Pūrṇacāra Chandramōhana Mahāsthābīra (June 19, 1834 - February 4, 1907). Then, Kṛpāśaraṇa traveled to Bodhgaya (present-day Biḥār, India) accompanied by his master. In the same year, his mother, Ārādhana Barua, died.
1886	Kṛpāśaraṇa arrived in Kolkata (present-day West Bengal, India) on Tuesday, June 15. He lived in Nabīna Biḥāra, on the street 72/73 Maṅgalā lē'ina.
1889	He stayed in Mahānagara Biḥāra, on the street 21/26 Bho in Kolkata.
1892	On October 5, on the eve of Prabāraṇā Pūrṇimā (Āśbini Pūrṇimā), Kṛpāśaraṇa established Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā (Bengal Buddhist Association).
1893	Accompanied by Mahābīra Bhikkhu, Kṛpāśaraṇa visited Lucknow, Allahabad, and Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh (present-day North India).
1896	Kṛpāśaraṇa attended the coronation ceremony of King Bhubanamōhana Roy of Chakma Circle in Rangamati, Chatto-gram Hill Track (CHT) of present Bangladesh.
1900	Kṛpāśaraṇa purchased a 3600 square foot (5 kāṭhā) plot of land on street 5 Lalita Mōhana Dās lē'ina in Kolkata. At that time, the cost of 3600 square feet of land was 4,500 Taka, equivalent to British India's currency.
1901	Kṛpāśaraṇa discovered Jatavana Biḥāra, ⁵⁷ a historical Buddhist archeological site in present-day Uttara Pradesh (UP), India. In the same year, he laid the foundation of Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Biḥāra in Kolkata.

⁵⁷ According to *Pāli* literature, the Buddha spent 19 rainy retreats (Vassa) in the Jetavana Biḥāra during his 45 year monastic career. During the time of the Buddha, a prominent wealthy merchant named Anāthapiṇḍika (Sanskrit: Anāthapiṇḍaka) offered Jatavana Biḥāra to the Buddha and his noble followers (see Dha-a I. 3)

1902	The second Saṅgharāja, Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābīra (June 19, 1834 - February 4, 1907) received his “Mahāsthābīra” recognition at Rājānagara Śākyamūni Bihāra of Chattogram Hill Track (CHT) of present Bangladesh, led by Kṛpāśaraṇa and his fellow noble Buddhist monks (bhikkhū). In the same year, he traveled to Burma (present Myanmar) on a pilgrimage.
1903	On the eve of the holy Āṣārhi Pūrṇimā, Kṛpāśaraṇa Bhikkhu spent a rainy retreat (<i>Vassa</i>) at Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Kolkata, which was ready to launch for devotees and monastic members. It is worth noting that Guṇālāṅkāra Mahāsthābīra (1874–1924), an eminent Bengali Buddhist monk, traveled from Chattogram to Kolkata to visit Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. Due to his extensive knowledge of Buddhism and abilities in compiling Dharma poetries, the most Venerable Guṇālāṅkāra Mahāsthābīra was also known as “Jñānaratna Kabidhajjā”. In the same year, Pūrṇacandra Baṛuṃyā, also known as Pūrṇānanda Sāmī, a well-educated Dharma endeavor, was ordained as a Buddhist monk by Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō. Pūrṇānanda Sāmī (1878–1928) was considered Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō’s first disciple.
1905	The Tibetan spiritual leader, Tasi Lama, was warmly welcomed and respected by Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra on December 31. In the same year, the Prince of Wales of the United Kingdom paid a visit to Kolkata. The Bengal government hosted a reception at which, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō met with the Prince of Wales at the time and bestowed a Buddhist blessing on him.
1906	Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō ordained Nagēndralāla Baṛuṃyā as a novice (<i>sāmaṇera</i> or <i>pabbajjā</i>) on the eve of Māghī pūrṇimā. For the sake of Nagēndralāla Sāmaṇera’s esteemed Buddhist education, he sent him to study higher Dharma Studies on Ceylon Island (present-day Sri Lanka).
1907	The District Divisional Commissioner of Lucknow Division aided Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō in obtaining a 7200 square foot (10 kāṭhā) plot of land in the Lucknow District of British India for the purpose of establishing a sister institution of Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. He named the Lucknow

	institution “Lucknow Bodhisattva Bihāra”. In the same year, he founded a sister organization of Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā called “Shimla Baud’dha Samiti” in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, Northern India.
1908	On the eve of the holy Āṣārhī Pūrṇimā, a monthly basis Buddhist journal named “Jagatjyōti” was published jointly edited by Guṇālaṅkāra Mahāsthābīra and Sāmaṇera Pūrṇānanda Sāmī. In the same year, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō assigned responsibility for maintaining the Lucknow Bodhisattva Bihāra construction site to Kālikumāra Bhikkhu. Another Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā sister institution was established in Dibrugarh, Assam. Kṛpāśaraṇa returned to Burma (present Myanmar) on a pilgrimage.
1909	Kṛpāśaraṇa returned to his birthplace Unainpūrā (Patiya subdistrict of Caṭṭagrāma district, present-day Bangladesh) to attend the funeral of his teacher, the second Saṅgharāja, Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābīra. Both Ācārya Pūrṇācāra Candramōhana Mahāsthābīra and Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō were born in the same village, Unainpūrā, by coincidence. The same year, he founded the “Guṇālaṅkāra Library” at the Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Kolkata. On December 28, he brought to the Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra a rare stoned Aṣṭadhātu (eight metal or <i>octo-alloy</i>) Buddha statue, which was 5 ½ feet in height. A chief Buddhist monk from Akyab (present-day Myanmar) offered 6,000 takes to purchase and establish the Aṣṭadhātu Buddha statue.
1910	The thirteenth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Thupten Gyatso Jigdral Chokley Namgyal (February 12, 1876 - December 17, 1933) was invited by the British Indian Government to visit West Bengal. Kṛpāśaraṇa invited the thirteenth Dalai Lama to pay a visit to the Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. The noble community of the Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra, led by Kṛpāśaraṇa, welcomed the thirteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet with open arms. Apart from spiritual visitors, a number of representatives of the British Indian Government paid a visit to the Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra that year. Mr. Butler and Mr. Kairail, both British Indian high-ranked officers, paid visits to the

	Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra on January 23 and February 12, respectively. Kṛpāśaraṇa traveled to Darjeeling in July to establish a sister institution to the Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. The same year, he called for a mass youth congregation at Kolkata's Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra.
1911	Kṛpāśaraṇa visited Sri Lanka on March 18 after being invited by Anāgarika Dharmapāla (September 17, 1864 - April 29, 1933). The following year, the Central government hosted a reception in Delhi, where he, accompanied by Guṇālaṅkāra Mahāsthābīra, reunited with the Prince of Wales for the second time and bestowed a Buddhist blessing on him.
1912	Kṛpāśaraṇa traveled to Lucknow and Delhi with Anāgarika Dharmapāla. Students from Chattogram studying in Kolkata organized a congregation in which students from all religions, including Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, actively participated. He established a student dormitory in Kolkata to assist Buddhist students in Chattogram and elsewhere. In the same year, he visited Assam for philanthropic and missionary purposes.
1913	Baudha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra was built as a two-story structure. Kṛpāśaraṇa Charity Elementary School was founded. For the first time, a female Buddhist organization, "Baud'dha Mahilā Sam'milānī," was founded in Kolkata at Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra.
1914	Inspired by Kṛpāśaraṇa, the Vice-chancellor of the University of Kolkata, Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee (June 19, 1864 - May 25, 1924) and the British-Indian high-ranking officer, Mr. Butler, recommended a brilliant Bengali scholar, Benimadhab Barua (December 31, 1888 – March 23, 1948), who received a government scholarship to study in London. As a result, B. M. Barua received an MA in Greek and Modern European Philosophy from the University of London. He received a D. Lit (Doctor of Literature) degree from the same institution in 1917. Dr. B. M. Barua was the first Asian to obtain a D. Lit degree; his dissertation was titled "Indian Philosophy - its Origin and Growth from the Vedas to the Buddha."
1915	Anāgarika Dharmapāla was invited by Kṛpāśaraṇa to visit Chattogram in modern-day Bangladesh, where he had been honored and respected by the Bengali Buddhist community. In the same year, a memorable ceremony honoring Kṛpāśaraṇa took place

	at Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra, which Anāgarika Dharmapāla and Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee attended. During this special ceremony, a marble statue of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō was erected at Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. This year, he reached another milestone in his effort to establish a sister institution to Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra in Ranchi, the state capital of Jharkhand. On December 6,
	Ranchi's institution received former registration from the British-Indian Government.
1916	Kṛpāśaraṇa established another charity school for working students who can manage their time in the evening after finishing their daily duties. Guṇālāṅkāra Mahāsthabīra, his lifelong Dharma colleague, died this year. The street in front of Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra was renamed "Buddhist Temple Street" after approval from the Kolkata Municipality Office, and the name has remained the same.
1917	Sir Thomas Gibson-Carmichael (March 18, 1859 - January 16, 1926), a Scottish-British Liberal politician and colonial administrator, visited Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra on February 28. This year was one of the most pleasurable for Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō because it marked the return of Dr. Benimadhab Barua (B. M. Barua) at the end of his successful completion of a D. Lit degree from the University of London. The noble community of Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra organized a felicitation to celebrate Dr. B. M. Barua's achievement, which was organized by Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō. Sir Dēbaprasāda presided as the chief guest at this congratulatory ceremony. In the same year, he traveled to Bhutan, a Himalayan country.
1918	On May 28, a new branch of Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra was opened in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya. Mrs. Jennie, a professor at Bethune College in Kolkata, led "Mahilā Sam'milānī" at the Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra.
1919	In Darjeeling, devotees, and followers celebrated Kṛpāśaraṇa's 54th birthday with reverence. The majesty of Bardhaman, King Bijaṃ Cāṁda Mahatāba, offered a plot of land for the establishment of a Buddhist monastery. In the same year, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō went to a Buddhist fair in Sitakundo, Bangladesh.

1920	On April 10, Mr. Ronaldsay, a representative of the British colonial empire who ruled the Bengal region, paid a visit to Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. In order to facilitate receiving the award, “Sambud’dhā Cakrabartī” by Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee (Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kolkata), Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō organized a congratulatory program
	at Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. This year was notable for another reason: Śībānanda Bhāratī, a Hindu ascetic, was ordained as a Buddhist monk under the noble guidance and preceptorship of Kṛpāśaraṇa. After becoming a Buddhist monk, Śībānanda Bhāratī was renamed Bōdhānanda Bhikkhu.
1921	Kṛpāśaraṇa founded a branch of Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in his birthplace, Unainpūrā. The old monastery of Unainpūrā was renovated and rebuilt with the help of the noble villages. In the same year, he established another branch of Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in the Chattogram Hill Tract (CHT) area of Rangamati.
1922	Kṛpāśaraṇa established a branch of Baud’dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā in Jamshedpur, Tatanagar. A 60,480-square-foot (1 Bighā and 1 kāthā) plot of land was offered to Kṛpāśaraṇa by a prominent Tata company for the establishment of a Buddhist monastery and meditation center in Jamshedpur, Tatanagar.
1924	Kṛpāśaraṇa called for an international Buddhist conference to be held in Kolkata. He built a <i>Bhikṣu Sīmā</i> or Upasatha Hall and laid the groundwork for Buddha Dhatu Caitya (a monument where the Buddha’s holy relics are restored) in Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra. During the Buddhist lent day, monastic members gather in <i>Bhikṣu Sīmā</i> (ordination hall) to recite Pātimokkha, whereas Buddha Dhatu Caitya is a monument where devotees restore the Buddha’s relics to pay veneration and respect.
1925	Kṛpāśaraṇa founded a Buddhist monastery in Shilong. He also visited his newly established temple in Darjeeling.
1926	Kṛpāśaraṇa passed away on Friday, April 30, in Kolkata.

1927	Kṛpāśaraṇa's body was returned to his birthplace, Unainpūrā, as per his final wish. The grand funeral ceremony was led by Buddhist monks and organized by a large number of devotees and followers of Kṛpāśaraṇa and was held in the spiritual village of Unainpūrā.
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VI. CONCLUSION

Throughout his life, Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō, who had an altruistic and philanthropic nature, continued his humanitarian activities for Boṅgabhūmi's social and educational welfare as well as moral advancement. His early association with Buddhism and Buddhist teachings undoubtedly grew into his intrinsic compassionate nature. Inquiring into Kṛpāśaraṇa's life reveals that he set up his career path as a philanthropist, following in the Buddha's footsteps to go forth for the welfare of the multitude and the benefit of many sentient beings (*Bahujaṇ-hitāya Bahujaṇ-sukhāya*).⁵⁸ In recognition of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō's selfless contributions, expressing his dignity and tireless welfare services for the benefit of society, the devotees and followers of Boṅgabhūmi conferred upon him the honorific title of "Karmayōgi". Since then, he has been widely renowned as "Karmayōgi Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō".

Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō was far ahead of his time when it came to philanthropic endeavors to establish the splendid Buddhist institutions: "Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Sabhā" and "Baud'dha Dharmāṅkūra Bihāra" and their noble branches. Moreover, his unconditional service for educational welfare, such as funding schools and colleges in affiliation with the leading institutions, made a notable contribution to the advancement of education in the rural areas of Boṅgabhūmi. Kṛpāśaraṇa persisted in his humanitarian efforts despite all of his hardships and obstacles, just like a Bodhisattva who generated the thought of awakening (*bodhicitta*) for the benefit of all sentient beings until they attained ultimate liberation.⁵⁹

Since the beginning of the last century, the magnificent works and legacies of Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō have been enriching Bengali society. Kṛpāśaraṇa was a source of inspiration for his charitable endeavors. Following in the footsteps of Kṛpāśaraṇa, several Theravāda monks made notable contributions to the social and educational welfare in Boṅgabhūmi, including Bīśud'dhānanda Mahāthērō, Jyōtipāla Mahāthērō; Śud'dhānanda Mahāthērō; Prajñābansā Mahāthērō; Dr. Bōdhipāla Mahāthērō; Saṅghapriyā Mahāthērō; Śasanarakṣitā Mahāthērō; Śaranasēna Mahāthērō, etc. Thus, Bengali communities in Boṅgabhūmi reverently recall the contributions of Karmayōgi Kṛpāśaraṇa Mahāthērō as long as the people of the territory of Bengal have kept going to honor their legacies and heritage.

⁵⁸ See S IV. 5, 237.

⁵⁹ Jamspal (2019): 2 - 20.

Abbreviations

A	<i>Āṅuttara Nikāya</i>
D	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
S	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>
Dha-a	<i>Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā</i>

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BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND VIETNAMESE ETHICS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TODAY

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Abstract:

Buddhist ethics carries a profound philosophy of ethics and lifestyle through which it can express its long-lasting value system. Buddhist ethics inherently has the nature of eliminating evil and promoting goodness, promoting good deeds, and avoiding evil, which can contribute to preventing and limiting selfish tendencies in humans. In the current context, identifying specifically and finding the most appropriate direction to promote the cultural and ethical values of Buddhism not only contributes to preserving cultural identity, traditional ethics, and social cohesion but also helps prevent moral degradation and the introduction of many foreign cultural forms that are not suitable for Vietnamese culture and lifestyle. People who trust and appreciate Buddhism choose this religion as a way of life, and looking at society, people who see Buddhism's values are still very alive. Buddhism changes people from awareness to action flexibly and supply, based on the persuasion of intellectual strength, morality, and tolerance, not mandatory orders. Buddhism can create ethical standards, change according to the universal values of humanity in a harmonious way, and move towards sustainable development and social advancement.

Keywords: *Buddhism, ethics, sustainable development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhist ethics carries with it a profound philosophy of ethics and lifestyle through which it can express its long-lasting value system. Buddhist ethics inherently has the nature of eliminating evil and promoting goodness, promoting good deeds, and avoiding evil, which can contribute to preventing

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and limiting selfish tendencies in humans. In the current context, explicitly identifying and finding the most appropriate direction to promote the cultural and ethical values of Buddhism not only contributes to preserving cultural identity, traditional ethics, and social cohesion but also helps prevent moral degradation and the introduction of many foreign cultural forms that are not suitable for Vietnamese culture and lifestyle. People who trust and appreciate Buddhism choose this religion as a way of life and a way of looking at society, and people see that the values of Buddhism are still very alive. Buddhism changes people from awareness to action flexibly and supply, based on the persuasion of intellectual strength, morality, and tolerance, not mandatory orders. Buddhism can create ethical standards, change according to the universal values of humanity in a harmonious way, and move towards sustainable social development and advancement.

II. CONTENT

2.1. Overview of Buddhist philosophy of life

Since its introduction to Vietnam, Vietnamese people have widely accepted Buddhism. It has become a cultural part that plays a significant role in the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. Buddhist ideology, especially Buddhist philosophy of life, is consistent with the tradition of humanity, compassion, solidarity, and “love others as you love yourself”, good customs and practices that have existed for a long time in the Vietnamese people and nation. “Vietnamese people not only accept but also transform Buddhism, absorbing and developing elements and many positive humanistic values of Buddhism based on patriotism, the tradition of solidarity, and compassion of the nation. Because, the Buddhist philosophy of life has accompanied the nation, contributed, and played a great role in the cause of defending the country, building the country, and developing the country in all aspects of history and the cause of building and protecting the Fatherland today.”¹ For Vietnamese people, “Buddhism’s philosophy of life plays a great role in consolidating and perfecting human morality. Undeniably, Buddhism has elements and values that have universal significance for all humanity.”² If perceived, absorbed, improved, and developed, those elements and values will positively impact and play a significant role in building and perfecting human morality and society. The outstanding and all-encompassing value of Buddhist ethics and philosophy of life is the profound humanistic and humanistic nature with the noble and ultimate goal of saving people from suffering and disaster. The ideology of compassion, joy, charity, relief from suffering, the ideology of equality, the advocacy of building a fair, equal, free, and loving society without oppression, exploitation, and suffering - the society that Buddhist ethics aims for, called *Nirvāṇa*, are humane values with universal significance

¹ Nguyen Tai Thu (1997), *The influence of ideologies and religions on Vietnamese people today*. National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, p.22.

² Minh Chi (2003), *Vietnamese Cultural Traditions and Buddhism*. Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, p.106.

and humanity. The ethical standards that Buddhism puts forth are not only the basic, necessary moral qualities of humans and require humans to cultivate, practice, and preserve, but also the principles and methods to regulate all thoughts and behaviors in genuine human social relationships.

That is why Buddhist ethics has contributed to creating a way of life for humans, a heart of compassion, altruism, and sacrifice for everyone, arousing and promoting the spirit of solidarity, mutual love, and affection of humans. With those ethical standards and principles, the Buddhist theory of cause and effect and karma means blocking unwholesome, inhumane, and immoral thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, the Buddhist philosophy of life or ethics, with its positive elements and values, has influenced and had positive value in building and perfecting the ethics of Vietnamese people. Since Buddhism was introduced and throughout the historical period of Vietnamese feudal society, Buddhist ethics with the ideas of liberation, equality, charity, compassion, joy, forgiveness, and salvation have been more or less consistent with the traditional ethics, psychology, beliefs, and traditional customs of the Vietnamese people, so they have been widely accepted, admired and become a part of the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. During the Ly - Tran period, Buddhism was considered the national religion, the religion of the royal court, and the component of the "Confucian-Buddhist-Taoist ideology". "Many kings used Buddhism to educate and teach princes and royal family and to educate mandarins and people. The ethical standards and principles of Buddhism were one of the foundations and bases for building and implementing the laws of the feudal state. Buddhist ethics has contributed to the formation and perfection of the traditions and good moral qualities of the Vietnamese people and has contributed significantly to the work of protecting the independence and freedom of the Fatherland, building and enriching the national folk culture, preserving and conserving the identity and character of the Vietnamese people."³

Evaluating one of the positive roles and values of Buddhism, Buddhist ethics, "monk Vien Chieu considered Buddhism as a light, having practical meaning for human life, and King Tran Thai Tong affirmed that the role of Buddhism is to educate people, to clearly show sentient beings the way to see life and death, to save sentient beings from the suffering of suffering, from the endless cycle of birth and death, the idea of equality. Buddhism does not divide North and South; all can practice and seek, and human beings, whether wise or foolish, can all be enlightened. Therefore, the means to open the ignorant heart, the path to clearly illuminate life and death, is the great teaching of Buddha."⁴

Today, we are carrying out the cause of industrialization and modernization of the country. "Some negative aspects of the market foundation, of globalization

³ Minh Chi (2003), *Vietnamese Cultural Traditions and Buddhism*. Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 106.

⁴ Dinh Gia Khanh (2012), *Vietnamese Literature of the 10th century - the first half of the 18th century*. Education Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 78.

and international integration, together with the weaknesses in the operation and management of the state apparatus, we must face reality: the widespread negative phenomena; the decline and degradation of human morality; discipline and order from within the family to society are not respected, violations of the law, immorality, and inhumanity are not prevented in time; The situation of corruption, arrogance, bureaucracy, and waste of some people in power has not been overcome or eliminated.”⁵ That situation has been eroding the good moral values that our nation has built and preserved for thousands of years of many generations, negatively affecting and hindering the cause of industrialization and modernization of the country as well as in the work of forming and perfecting the revolutionary ethics of the Vietnamese people today. Of course, to solve and eliminate negative phenomena, it is necessary to simultaneously carry out economic, social, and legal policies and measures, including the need to strengthen education on moral awareness and responsibility for people and the community, along with mechanisms and solutions to make morality a way of life in the thoughts and actions of each person and in social relations. In those measures, it is impossible to continue to absorb the sound, positive values of Buddhist philosophy of life and Buddhist ethics.

When explaining the causes of human suffering, “Buddhism is reasonable and has a realistic basis when it believes that, mainly, people are always “immersed,” dominated by material desires, human desires, my thoughts and actions of greed, anger, ignorance, and evil actions of people.”⁶

Therefore, according to Buddhism, abstaining from lust and eliminating greed, anger, and ignorance are effective measures to eliminate suffering. This ideology and philosophy have a significant effect in preventing and repelling illegal acts. The Buddhist ideology of cause and effect and karma helps people, warning people of the consequences that will occur. In the Buddhist philosophy of life, there are also other ethical standards that people need to cultivate, practice, and cultivate to form and perfect morality and personality. Those ethical standards are concentrated in the Five Precepts and Ten Deeds. The Five Precepts include: Do not kill, do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not lie, and do not drink alcohol. The Ten Deeds include: Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not lie, do not speak harshly, do not speak with a double tongue, do not exaggerate, do not be greedy, do not be angry, and do not be deluded. The Five Precepts and Ten Deeds are not only basic ethical standards of humans but also principles and methods for humans to practice, practice, achieve, and perfect morality to regulate ethical relationships between humans and the community and society. Therefore, in Vietnam today, facing the current situation of moral degradation and erosion, if people are aware of and voluntarily implement the standards, principles,

⁵ Center for Religious Studies (2018), *Religion and Ethics in Modern Society*. Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 302.

⁶ Center for Religious Studies (2018), *Religion and Ethics in Modern Society*. Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 303.

and ethical methods of Buddhism, they will have a specific role and effect and contribute to overcoming and eliminating behaviors and actions that violate the law.

2.2. Buddhist ethics and philosophy of life for sustainable development

By admonishing people to do well and avoid evil, Buddhist ethics has contributed to building a stable society with healthy social relationships. Good and evil are two opposing categories closely related to social and Buddhist ethics. Buddhism focuses on educating sentient beings with the “Five Precepts” and “Ten Good Deeds.” That is to avoid evil and encourage doing well. Buddhism considers “good” a necessary moral standard and a means to help liberation. Nirvana of Buddhism, as well as Hell, has the effect of encouraging good and eliminating evil for believers. Religious promotion of suitable activities has become more assertive and enthusiastic. “Such teachings have the value of eliminating evil and promoting good. For example, Buddhism advises people to do profitable economic activities through legitimate occupations, not for personal gain.”⁷ The moral teachings of Buddhism have contributed to controlling unethical behaviors and developing a pure society. Promoting goodness and encouraging people to do good deeds, Buddhist social charity activities have shared and helped those in difficult circumstances, contributing to sharing the burden for society. Buddhist ethics partly reconcile conflicts in social relationships by emphasizing tolerance, altruism, and compassion. Forbearance, peace, altruism, and respect for those different from oneself are manifestations of tolerance in Buddhism. Buddha teaches people to live altruistically, seek happiness for others, and not just worry about their happiness. From altruism comes compassion for others, and compassion for others is altruism. It can be said that Buddhist tolerance is a product of humanity in perceiving and serving life. The inherent altruism of humans and religions is an abundant source of nurturing tolerant behavior, and this tolerant behavior has become an important factor in social solidarity. Social solidarity is the basis for creating peace and maintaining social stability in every country and territory. In particular, the stabilizing role of Buddhist ethics is also demonstrated through the provision of value standards to guide people and society. In society, the family is considered the first community, the insurance of human society. The family plays an important role in orienting human moral products. Buddhism pays excellent attention to ethical standards in the family according to the main relationships: the relationship between parents and children and between husband and wife. Buddhism encourages fidelity between husband and wife. At the same time, Buddhism highly values human filial piety. “According to Buddhism, unfilially piety is considered the greatest crime. Filial piety is the central ethical category of Buddhism that has a great influence on modern society, helping each of us look back at ourselves to see whether our behavior is by the morality and traditions of the nation, and at the

⁷ Tran Hong Lien (2010), *Studying the social function of Vietnamese Buddhism*. Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, p. 21.

same time giving advice and guidance to change and cultivate a bright mind. Buddhism also teaches and educates parents about their children. Parents have three things to do with their children: “(1) should teach children to abandon evil deeds and do good deeds. (2) Should teach them to study and work. (3) Should teach children to uphold the sutras and keep the precepts.”⁸. It can be said that Buddhism has enriched the value of filial piety of the Vietnamese people, contributing to building good Vietnamese people. This is even more valuable in international integration when many new trends affect the country’s traditional social values. The above analysis shows that Buddhist ideology also has a certain positive aspect in the masses and current social conditions because of mass and charity, discipline and community awareness, and humane and altruistic ethics. The values of Truthfulness-Compassion-Majesty are the roots of Buddhism, so they are often preserved and have the opportunity to develop in the masses and the young generation. The value system of Buddhist ethics creates stability in society, thereby creating a foundation for the sustainable development of society in the context of current social fluctuations.

III. BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND THE EDUCATION OF VIETNAMESE PEOPLE’S ETHICS TO DEVELOP SUSTAINABLY IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT

3.1. Buddhist teachings contain a profound humanistic spirit

As a major religion, Buddhism has many profound teachings, expressing a unique worldview and philosophy of life. However, Buddhism’s profound teachings greatly influence the intellectual class. The Buddha embodies the ethics of compassion, joy, and equanimity for the general public. The spirit of compassion in Buddhism is boundless love directed towards all living beings. The compassion, tolerance, and love of humanity in Buddhism are based on equality without limits. It is a love without borders, beyond class, family, ethnicity, and nation limits⁹. The Vietnamese nation’s formation and development process is closely linked to the wet rice civilization and the fight against invasion, so the Vietnamese highly value solidarity, community cohesion, love, and mutual support. When there is a fusion with the ethical concept of Buddhism, that humanistic spirit has become a core ethical standard of the Vietnamese people. In addition, Buddhism has entered the ethical life of the Vietnamese people through its educational function, guiding people towards good and humane values. Vietnamese people seek Buddhism not only because of their spiritual needs and the feeling of peace and happiness at the Buddha’s door but also because of the social and ethical content hidden in the teachings of Buddhism. Previously, the educational object that Buddhism aimed at was people as subjects responsible for their own lives. Buddhist education emphasizes the value of self-mastery, striving to improve

⁸ Thich Thanh Nghiem (1991), *Orthodox Buddhism*. Institute of Buddhist Studies, Hanoi, p. 28.

⁹ Center for Religious Studies (2018), *Religion and Ethics in Modern Society*. Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 281.

and overcome difficulties and deadlocks in life. If one loses the value of self-mastery, one is easily tempted, lured, and falls into social evils. According to Tran Bach Dang, "The eternal life in Buddhist ethics is Compassion and saving the suffering and the needy. It transcends time and space because it aims to protect, promote, and maintain humanity "doing good," "moving towards good" or at least "not doing evil," "not moving towards evil." The teachings of the Buddha, although thousands of years old, still hold today."¹⁰

With its role, function, and profound humanistic values, Buddhism has become a pillar in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. Because Buddha's nature exists in every person, arousing and encouraging compassion and charity contributes to building morality and personality for each individual and society.

3.2. Buddhist ethics promote filial piety, contributing to strengthening the ethical tradition of Vietnamese society

Buddhist teachings advise people always to remember "understanding the way," taking filial piety as the first: "Filial piety is Buddha's conduct, filial piety is Buddha's mind"; "There is nothing in the world that is greater than the nurturing of parents." Parents are placed in the first position in the concept of respect for gratitude. "Kinh Tam Dia Quan" believes that people have to repay gratitude: "First is the gratitude of parents, second is the gratitude of sentient beings, third is the gratitude of the king, fourth is the gratitude of the three jewels." Thich Thanh Nghiem also emphasized: "Taking care of parents, saving all living beings, protecting the country, respecting the Three Jewels, all have only one motive: repaying gratitude."¹¹ The story of Maudgalyayana repaying his parents in the Vu Lan Sutra on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month has become the day of filial piety for parents. However, it would be a shortcoming and a misunderstanding of the spirit of Buddhism if we mention filial piety but forget the role and responsibility of parents towards their children. In the *Theravada* and *Mahayana Sutras*, the filial piety of Buddhists is fully expressed in the relationship between parents and children and between children and parents, which is called filial piety and the filial piety.

The Thien Sinh Sutra teaches that the duty of children towards their parents is to respect their parents wholeheartedly, take on the hard work, and replace their parents so that their parents can be relaxed and happy in their old age. As a child, you must never forget and repay the grace of giving birth and raising your parents. When your parents are in pain, you must take care of them with all your heart. Parenting also has corresponding duties. Parents must care for and educate their children to become good people. They must teach their children to eliminate all evil and do all good things so that they can become virtuous people. They must advise their children to be close to wisdom. They must remind them to study diligently. They must choose to have their children participate in household chores and contribute to building family happiness.

¹⁰ Thich Minh Chau (1995), *Buddhist Ethics*. Institute of Buddhist Studies, p. 125.

¹¹ Thich Thanh Nghiem (1991), *Orthodox Buddhism*. Institute of Buddhist Studies, Hanoi, p. 123.

According to Buddhist teachings, the relationship between parents and children is the most sacred. The sacredness does not simply lie in the blood relationship but also contains many values of affection, responsibility and obligation, morality, and culture of two generations. Any person who breaks this sacred relationship with their parents, that is, is unfilial, is a sinner and blameworthy. On the contrary, parents who do not fulfill their duties towards their children, such as not educating their children to grow up physically, politically, and independently in an authentic life, are not worthy of being parents. Both parents and children are considered unworthy of the spirit of the Buddha's teachings. In the *Thien Sinh Sutra*, the Buddha taught: "As children, we must respect and obey our parents in five ways. Serve, support, and nurture our parents without letting them lack anything; tell them what to do first; obey and do what our parents do without opposing them; do not go against what their parents teach; do not prevent them from doing good deeds and cultivating blessings." Parents must care for their children in the following five ways:

Prevent them from hearing, watching, and doing evil; teach them the right things such as doing good deeds and cultivating virtue, reflect evil, practice good Dharma, seek the cause and effect of sin and virtue; love deeply to the bone marrow, always treat children equally, choose a kind and cooperative place for your children to marry; Depending on the time, divide the property, provide for what is needed.¹²

The dialectical ideas about the responsibility of parents to their children and the duties of children to their parents of Buddhist ethics still have profound meaning in building families and society in Vietnam today. In many families, parents are busy making money and neglect to raise and educate their children. In addition, for many reasons, some children forget their duties as children, disrupting the order and hierarchy in the family and society and the family environment and society being "polluted." This is the leading cause of corruption and the degradation of social ethics. A happy family cannot lack a good moral foundation. Family ethics here are expressed through essential relationships: between husband and wife, between parents and children, between grandparents and grandchildren, and the individual in each relationship with the environment and society. Whether these relationships are harmonious depends on the family tradition, how each family member treats others, the behavior between individuals and between individuals and between individuals and the community and society.

As a religion, "Buddhist philosophy contains many profound educational contents. Moreover, Buddhism also plays the role of an ethical doctrine, actively participating in establishing and shaping the system of ethical values in society, while constantly demonstrating its role in education, orienting values, and social ethics"¹³. The content of social ethics education of Buddhism has

¹² Center for Religious Studies (2018), *Religion and Ethics in Modern Society*. Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 287.

¹³ Center for Religious Studies (2018), *Religion and Ethics in Modern Society*. Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 285.

many similarities with ethics in Vietnamese society today, such as love, filial piety towards grandparents and parents, the spirit of solidarity, mutual love, mutual support, a sense of discipline, a sense of responsibility, honesty, and a truthful lifestyle. Thanks to the compatibility, to a certain extent, between Buddhist ethics and the ethical traditions of the Vietnamese people, Buddhism has been making positive contributions to the formation of the moral qualities and personalities of the young generation of Vietnam. Therefore, the ethical values of Buddhism should be further promoted and applied so that we can have a better, more humane society, guiding people towards the values of truth, goodness, and beauty and elevating human society to a new level.

3.3. Buddhist ethics orient and educate people to live close to nature and protect the environment for sustainable development

Environmental protection is also a content of the good life of Vietnamese Buddhism in modern society. "The function of Buddhism in explaining the need to protect the environment comes from the concept of karma and retribution, emphasizing the causal relationship in the Buddhist cosmology with the ecological cycle. Limit is a unified entity that is adjusted. Ecological imbalance is the broken unity of all things, which is what Buddhism projects."¹⁴ Because the human body is made up of five aggregates, humans have a mutual relationship of birth and death with nature, the universe, and the surrounding environment. Nature is like an "inorganic body" of humans. Therefore, protecting nature also protects humanity.

Thus, for Buddhism, protecting the environment is a matter of moral conscience and has a basis in Buddhist cosmology. Explaining the phenomena of environmental pollution and natural disasters, Buddhist dignitaries believe that this occurs due to the Buddhist law of dependent origination. Protecting the environment is also a good deed that is encouraged. Suppose the Buddha attained enlightenment out of compassion for sentient beings who are suffering due to greed, anger, and ignorance, then to end suffering. In that case, humans must follow the natural law or the law of dependent origination. According to this law, humans, animals, and plants coexist in mutual relationships. Nature provides a living environment for humans and the animal world. In return, humans must be aware of protecting nature to keep the environment clean and ecologically balanced. It is from such ecological ethical philosophies that many Buddhist dignitaries, while transmitting the Dharma, still question environmental protection as an ethical issue. On that basis, many Vietnamese Buddhist dignitaries have instructed followers to protect the environment through specific tasks, from the simplest tasks such as not littering, not going uphill, and planting trees to create shade.

3.4. The value system of Buddhist ethics for sustainable development

Ethics are rules, standards, and measures to evaluate and regulate the

¹⁴ Center for Religious Studies (2018), *Religion and Ethics in Modern Society*. Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 518.

behavior of individuals in society. Hence, the value of ethics is what people choose and evaluate; It is like doing something that has a positive meaning for social life. Therefore, social benefits are the measure of the value of morality. Moral values are affirmed only when moral standards and ethical rules regulate behavior in accordance with social benefits. Moral behavioral adjustment can be done through public opinion by encouraging improvement, the good, criticizing the evil, and the bad. In this case, the effectiveness of behavioral adjustment depends on the strength of public opinion. In addition, individuals must adjust their behavior per social standards or ethics. Self-regulation of personal behavior is essential for individuals to integrate into society. Once an individual deviates from social standards, personal ethical behavior goes against social ethical values. In this case, the individual will be criticized by public opinion. Each individual also has their ethical standards. Usually, personal ethical standards are built on social ethical standards. Therefore, individual deviation creates social deviation, which causes individuals to deviate from social values and benefits. Ethics are the rules of evaluation and adjustment of behavior between individuals and society, between individuals and individuals in society. Moral degradation is the failure to comply with the evaluation rules that will lead to deviation of individual behavior between individuals and society and individuals in society. Its consequences are the decline of sound and the increase of evil, directly affecting happiness and social justice. The principle of ethical standards is the measure to evaluate and adjust the behavior of individuals in society to suit social interests. Moral degradation does not mean that society does not have ethical standards but that individuals in society do not comply with the principles of socially recognized ethical standards. At that time, individuals' deviant behavior goes against society's interests.

With its benevolent nature, Buddhism will guide individuals from good perception to good behavior. In some way, individuals comply with social and ethical standards. Everyone always trusts an individual with a good personality. In a society with many individuals with good personalities, whose behavior meets social standards, and who do not act against their conscience for their benefit, moral degradation is reduced, and social trust is strengthened. The spirit of benevolence in Buddhism is something we cannot deny. That spirit has a substantial impact on the reception of the perception, behavior, and lifestyle of those who believe in it. That is the Buddhist method that contributes to building social trust.

First of all, Buddhists need to comply with Buddhist teachings and precepts.

"Buddhist teachings and precepts, no matter what, always promote goodness, always guide people towards a good lifestyle. After taking refuge, Buddhists need to keep the five basic precepts of lay Buddhists. The five precepts include: no killing, no lying, no sexual misconduct, no drinking alcohol, no stealing"¹⁵.

¹⁵ Center for Religious Studies (2018), *Religion and Ethics in Modern Society*. Religion

This is not only a Buddhist ethical standard but is similar to social ethical standards. According to Buddhism, only by keeping the five precepts can one progress on the path of cultivation to reach enlightenment, stay away from the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance, no more karmic retribution, and be liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

Buddhist belief is a belief in the sacred with rationality that brings a sense of respect and fear to Buddhist followers. Respect and fear of the sacred are important factors that determine and regulate individual behavior. "The goal of Buddhism is all directed towards ultimate liberation with many different perspectives, with Buddhism being *Nirvāna*"¹⁶

The precepts are all tools to regulate the behavior of Buddhist followers to achieve the ultimate goal.

Buddhists come to Buddhism to perfect their morality, showing that Buddhist ethics' criteria, standards, and rules are suitable for Vietnamese people and are desired by the people. This is one of the important factors for Buddhist ethics to influence the ethics and personal lifestyle of Vietnamese people strongly. Buddhism positively guides individuals to do well and avoid evil, live for others, be filial to parents, live with community responsibility, and encourage environmental protection awareness. This is not only a Buddhist ethical standard but also a social ethical standard. However, with the power of the sacred element and the dominating values of divine rewards and punishments, Buddhism guides individuals to comply with these rules and moral standards better than social factors. Therefore, Buddhists highly appreciate these moral criteria and associate them with Buddhist standards.

IV. CONCLUSION

The decline of social morality is undeniable in Vietnam's current social life. Moral degradation affects many areas and significantly affects the quality of people's lives and the country's sustainable development. Moral degradation directly impacts the decline of social trust and, therefore, directly affects social management and social development. Combating moral degradation is key to ensuring a fair, democratic, civilized, and sustainably developed society. In that context, Buddhism, with its good values and standards, has a strong influence on preventing the current state of social and moral degradation. Buddhist teachings, Buddhist canons, and the sacred elements of Buddhism have the value of guiding the behavior of religious communities, contributing to the formation of religious people with good morals, and actively contributing to reducing the state of social moral degradation. Religious individuals are gradually being recognized not only in the religious community but also in the non-religious community. In addition, the religious function plays an important role in bringing religious doctrines to believers and supervising

Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 525.

¹⁶ Tran Hong Lien (2010), *Studying the social function of Vietnamese Buddhism*. Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, p. 57.

the implementation of religious doctrines by believers. In that way, religious dignitaries greatly influence the formation of religious individuals with good moral standards and lifestyles, contributing to society people with good moral qualities. In general, the religious community and the non-religious community have an upbeat assessment of the role of religion in preventing social and moral degradation.

If we want society to develop sustainably, we must mobilize all development resources, including the values of religious ethics, by the spirit of Resolution 24 of the Politburo: "Religion is a long-standing issue; beliefs and religions are the spiritual needs of a part of the people. Religious ethics have many things that are suitable for the construction of a new society"¹⁷ Besides teachings on faith in God, Saints, and God, most religions also have teachings on specific human behavior within the family, society, and individual, carrying many common moral values of humanity such as filial piety to parents, honesty, and kindness. Religious ethical concepts, when realized and becoming the moral consciousness of religious followers, will contribute to regulating the social behavior of religious followers, their relationships in life, family, and, of course, moral relationships. On the common denominator of encouraging good and eliminating evil, religious and ethical values have contributed to stabilizing society and improving social relationships. At the same time, religion also encourages people to live in harmony with nature.

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¹⁷ Nguyen Hong Duong (2012), *The Party's current viewpoints and guidelines on religion in Vietnam*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 153.

THE COMPASSIONATE PATH OF BUDDHISM FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Pradhan Atanu¹

Abstract:

Buddhism teaches that all beings and phenomena are interconnected, implying that actions affecting the environment also impact ourselves and others. As people understand this connection, they are prompted to act more thoughtfully and make decisions that honor and protect the environment. Mindfulness, which is a key aspect of Buddhism, encourages people to think carefully about their spending and actions, generating a feeling of accountability for the Earth. This study focuses on some Buddhist practices that are in line with sustainability, such as the advocacy for compassion towards all living beings, simplicity, and waste reduction. These practices are critical today when overconsumption and the depletion of resources threaten the environment. Also, apart from these, the Buddhist principles of non-attachment and moderation provide an alternative aim for reducing materialistic tendencies and achieving contentment from within one's self.

The paper explores how integrating Buddhist ethical principles into global sustainability initiatives could foster a more harmonious relationship with nature. Contemporary issues like climate change, depletion of resources, and biodiversity loss are raising global concerns. This is where the Buddhist paradigm offers an alternative transformation that empowers us to reframe these problematic challenges while fostering international cooperation and promoting environmental stewardship. The Buddhist principles of honourable living, compassion and mindfulness have proven gemstones for personal spiritual cultivation and a design of the new world instead of a world that should exist.

Keywords: *Buddhism, sustainability, environment, mindfulness, compassion.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps one of the most critical issues of this century is the existential crisis; the accelerating impacts of climate change, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, and pollution are threatening the fine balance of the world's ecosystems and putting the future of all living beings at stake. Given the increasing urgency of many environmental problems, there is more and more awareness that helps bear out the necessity of an approach towards sustainable practices- in pursuit of promoting harmony and balance between humanity and nature. The views of Buddhism as a school of thought and a spiritual tradition based on concepts of interdependence, *compassion*, and equanimity could resonate with the various challenges facing the world. Buddhist philosophy guides humans in understanding interdependence with all life forms along with impermanence in the natural world, thus creating a moral system in accord with everything concerning sustainability. This philosophy talks about how human action, through mindfulness and ethical principles, becomes an enhancement of ecological harmony and a diminutive impact on the environment. The Buddhist teachings encourage non-harming, mindful consumption, simplicity, and *compassion* in this respect, providing pathways to sustainable living.

Buddhist teachings provide frameworks for integrating ecological harmony into international policies and community practices². It thus investigates how Buddhist teachings might be called upon to guide humanity towards a sustainable future through core Buddhist principles and their relevance to contemporary environmental issues while examining the construction of those teachings in actual life to promote ecological balance, demonstrating how Buddhist ethics could act upon conserving the environment, resources, and sustainability worldwide. It emphasizes that Buddhism provides not just a spiritual vision of the future but also an action-guiding program for the protection of the Earth for the benefit of the future. The paper discusses the in-depth connection between Buddhism and sustainability, highlighting how Buddhist philosophy and ethics are capable of dealing with current-day ecological challenges.

II. BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES

The Buddhist perspective on the interconnectedness of all beings holds at the core the notion of dependent origination (*Pratityasamutpada*). *Pratityasamutpada* teaches that no phenomenon exists independently; all things are interconnected, influencing and being influenced by one another³. In other words, all in existence exists about everything else, where everything both affects and is affected by everything else. Such knowledge pushes the concept of separate liberality and replaces it in favour of the independence shared by all

² Berkes, F., & Folke, C. (1998), *Linking Social-Ecological Systems for Resilience and Sustainability*, p. 49.

³ Williams, P. (2012), *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, p. 63.

life. The teaching of *Pratityasamutpada* (dependent origination) in Buddhism encourages an awareness of our actions, choices, and behaviours connected with the flourishing of all beings in our ecosystem. Whether it be the food we eat or the products we purchase, each choice has an effect that is larger than ourselves, shaking ecosystems and other creatures. In this way, our well-being is not divorced from the planet's well-being. We human beings have a direct impact on the natural world, be it for better or for worse; therefore, that directly or indirectly affects our survival as well as the well-being of the generations to come.

Such realization of interdependence can result in realizing accountability and responsibility for the environment and the challenge that our actions place on it. Universal truths, such as the interconnectedness of all people and nature, help individuals and societies collectively act responsibly. Whether through reducing carbon emissions, conserving biodiversity, or minimizing pollution, understanding interconnectedness encourages people to consider the collective well-being of all life forms and work toward solutions benefiting humanity and the Earth. The fact that many environmental challenges are systemic underscores the relevance of the interconnectedness concept, which also means that solutions should not be focused only on addressing one specific issue but should also look at how ecosystems, species, and natural resources are connected. This perspective can guide policies and practices that should promote the intrinsic value of all beings, their rights, the ethical treatment of animals and maintaining natural habitats, which are the way to protect the delicate balance of life on Earth.

Ahimsa, which means “non-harm,” is one of the fundamental precepts of Buddhist ethics, and it is at the centre of a life lived well. *Ahimsa* calls for non-harming not just to beings but also to the environment, advocating practices like vegetarianism and resource conservation⁴. This is a principle that goes for physical harm but also verbal and mental harm. These principles promote *compassion* and kindness to all life forms and encourage the movement for what benefits the well-being of others. *Ahimsa* is in direct accordance with sustainability goals because it demands practices that will minimize or avoid harm to the environment. In terms of the environment, *Ahimsa* means great respect for nature and a commitment to maintaining ecological balance. It promotes behaviours that reduce environmental harm, such as pollution reduction, resource conservation, and ecosystem protection. Just as *Ahimsa* promotes kindness toward living beings, it advocates for a lifestyle that safeguards the Earth's natural resources and minimizes our ecological footprint.

The Buddhist tenet of *Ahimsa* (non-harm) is rarely practiced literally but is expressed in a vegetarian lifestyle or ethical eating; by not eating meat, it seems that one has no intention of hurting any animals. Likewise, through non-harm responsibility, we support eco-friendly solutions that work towards the sustainability of our natural resources – water, land, and energy. Instead

⁴ Schmithausen, L. (1997), *The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics*, p. 14.

of taking advantage of these resources for personal gain, *Ahimsa* espouses a lifestyle that allows the physical world to be renewed and replenished for future generations to inherit. This principle also encourages introspection and *being mindful* of how you're living in the world. As an example, consumerism, which causes overproduction, waste, and land degradation, is antithetical to *Ahimsa*. Mindful consumption allows individual waste reduction, conscious decision-making for the Earth's sustainability, and avoidance of harmful and excess consumption. In extending the idea of *Ahimsa*, Buddhism mediates towards a harmonious and sustainable relationship with the Earth by handling the interconnection between all living beings. Thus, it calls upon individuals and societies to act responsibly and compassionately toward the environment so that humanity and nature can exist and thrive in harmony.

Mindfulness, or *Sati* in the Buddhist tradition, is the practice of being present and aware in each moment and paying attention to thoughts, feelings, and actions and their consequences. *Mindfulness* helps individuals focus on the present moment, reducing harmful environmental habits and fostering sustainable actions⁵. It's about noticing the mind and body without attachment, judgment, or distraction, cultivating a rich connection to the present. This awareness is not only about what is within our own internal experience but also how we engage with the world around us and the broader influence of our decisions. *Sati* contributes to sustainable practices by promoting mindful living as a way to uphold ecological responsibility. *Mindfulness* trains individuals to be conscious of how actions affect the environment. Mindful consumption means making more informed decisions concerning the balance between needs and wants. This has the potential to reduce waste and conserve natural resources. *Mindfulness* creates awareness of consequences; hence, choices are made responsibly, whether through the reduction of plastic usage, water, or other conservation efforts or by the usage of sustainable products.

Thus, *Sati* furthers respect for nature by awakening one's awareness of its intrinsic value and interconnectedness to all living creatures. Such awareness fosters stewardship and reverence for the Earth by linking one's welfare and that of the surroundings. *Mindfulness* develops the spirit of sustainable habits through moderation and non-attachment. Mindful consumption involves recognizing when one has enough, resisting unnecessary desires, and choosing to favor long-term well-being over short-term pleasurable experiences. Mindful consumption is a lifetime practice that minimizes waste and overconsumption and aids in protecting the environment. Reducing waste and limiting consumption are ways to align one's actions with Buddhist principles of *Mindfulness* and *Sustainability*⁶. Ultimately, *Sati* teaches that small, mindful actions informed by awareness and *compassion* can bring about significant changes in the way in which the environment is dealt with, hence establishing

⁵ Wallace, B. A. (2006), *The Attention Revolution: Unlocking the Power of the Focused Mind*, p. 41.

⁶ Puntasen, A. (2007), *Buddhist Economics as a New Paradigm towards Happiness*, p. 190.

an enduring relationship of harmony in living for all.

In Buddhism, *simplicity and contentment* (*Santutthi*) serve as fundamental principles to lessen attachment and desire. To practice simplicity is to live with less, focusing on what is essential for a soul-quieting and joy-bringing existence rather than seeking wealth, luxury, or excess. Contentment, on the other hand, teaches the need for satisfaction with what one has and leads inevitably to inner peace and a lessening of the constant hunt for more. The lessons learned here hold a potent antidote to the pressures of modern consumerism, where the mantra often glorifies a pursuit of mindless consumption and hoarding of material possessions. Simplicity urges one to examine a need, which is distinctive from want. This raises mental ease because it cuts down the clutter in the minds of people from excessive pleasures and is in tune with *Sustainability* by lowering consumption and waste. For example, a simple lifestyle may involve purchasing only what is needed, reusing and repurposing things, and prioritizing quality over quantity, among other things. Given the aforementioned components and mindful choices, one can greatly lessen their ecological footprint.

Contentment (*Santutthi*) plays a complementary role by nurturing gratitude for what one possesses rather than fostering dissatisfaction and the desire for more. *Santutthi* emphasizes living with fewer material possessions and finding happiness in non-material pursuits⁷. This principle directly contradicts the idea of consumerism by equating happiness with the hoarding of goods. In cultivating contentment, one develops the inner emotional state of satisfaction that is free from being dependent on any outward possessions or achievements. This process of making oneself content paves the way for the development of mindful consumption and reduces the pressure to bring new acquisitions to market. These two qualities, simplicity and contentment, show up as a tremendous set of ethical principles for sustainable living, encouraging a focus on inner fulfillment and away from a focus on outside acquisition. This frees natural resources from excessive demand and offers a way of living that consistently supports both human and ecological well-being. This approach to putting necessity ahead of excess is good not only for the individual but, in another sense, also helps resource conservation and gives the Earth a brighter future.

Buddhist monasteries and institutions stand out as effort groups for environmental education and community awareness, which is intended to increase awareness and action on *Sustainability*. The institutions focused on Buddhist teaching, stressing the interconnectedness of all beings and the need to minimize suffering and endeavour to promote ecological awareness and environmentally conscious behaviour. Overconsumption driven by modern consumerism contrasts starkly with Buddhist values of simplicity and ecological stewardship⁸. Various initiatives taken up by various Buddhist

⁷ Williams, P. (2012), *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, p. 127.

⁸ Nussbaum, M. C. (2010), *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, p. 82.

monasteries are for creating awareness of environmental problems and sustainable lifestyles based on Buddhist tenets. Buddhist monasteries often model *Sustainability* practices, putting Buddhist philosophies into action regarding resource management. Many monasteries practice self-sufficiency through organic farming, composting, and water conservation. This lessens their environmental footprint and presents an opportunity to model the surrounding community in successfully demonstrating that a plain, simple and mindful life can be both spiritually fulfilling and ecologically responsible. By sanctioning a strong link between spiritual practice and environmental stewardship, Buddhist institutions offer important advice to individuals and communities on sustainable living. This becomes an avenue for discussions where people can come together to debate pressing ecological issues, hence still reiterating the contention that all beings are interconnected; caring for this Earth is the path to a compassionate way of living.

In many Buddhist cultures, sacred forest land became places of great silence and reflection for meditation and a place of reverence. Sacred forests in Buddhist traditions are preserved as sanctuaries for both spiritual practice and ecological balance⁹. They are referred to as sacred because they embody spiritual energy and provide an ideal natural setting for the schooling of mindfulness and meditation. Buddhist teachings are built on the interdependence of all living beings- these sacred spaces physically embody the concept that the forest is viewed as a living entity supporting not only man's spiritual rites but also the rest of the ecological system. Owing to their spiritual essence, these sacred forests will often be protected against overexploitation, logging, and development. The act of preservation, in the majority of Buddhist traditions, is seen as an act of stewardship of the natural world and an authentic way to create a wholesome balance between mankind and nature. Their very preservation has its history within the cultural setting of Buddhist ethics, which sees the natural world as an interdependent web of life with respect and care. They, therefore, become places where biodiversity is treasured and local communities recognize the importance of maintaining ecological balance.

Nature-based system conservation is a necessity, considering that these forests have the potential to play host to a wealth of allowed plants and animal species, peculiar or endangered. Through subsequent protection of these areas, the Buddhist communities are taking a major step toward the conservation of unique ecosystems that provide habitats for the habitation of wildlife, climate regulation, and the well-being of the planet. In most cases, sacred forests are also a home for medicinal plants and other utilitarian resources, which are sustainably used by their neighbouring communities, further showing the Buddhist non-harm commitment in its utmost respect for all forms, classes of life, including flora and faunas within such territories. The interests served in the service of climate regulation upon the sanctuary forests are rather immense. Forests function as carbon sinks, capturing carbon dioxide from the

⁹ Gyatso, J. (2000), *Buddhist Responses to Globalization and Environmental Concerns*, p. 94.

atmosphere and mitigating climate change impacts. Thus, sacred forests not only protect biodiversity but also have an overlapped role in the global program of curtailing climate change and influencing ecological stability. Thus, it has to be put into context, and the community stewardship experience is informed by the spiritual and cultural significance of these forests: Communities acting on their religious and cultural traditions have strong ties to these forests and are motivated to protect them as part of their cultural legacy. Such a sense of spiritual duty in dealing with nature strengthens people's connection to the environment, nurturing a circle of sustainable practices for the good of the ecosystem and the community.

Bhutan, a Buddhist nation, is now internationally known for its Gross National Happiness (GNH) development approach. Bhutan integrates environmental conservation and holistic well-being into national policy, reflecting Buddhist ideals of interconnectedness¹⁰. In contrast to the conventional development paradigm that considers economic growth and gross domestic product (GDP) as the main objectives of human development, Bhutan's GNH recognizes the importance of holistic well-being, which leads to the relevant integration of elements of environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and social harmony. This philosophy, consistent with the country's Buddhist values underpinning balance, *compassion*, and one's interrelationship with all life, goes to the core of how the country approaches everything from policies to personal behaviour. Environmental conservation is one of the four pillars of GNH. Bhutan's government acknowledges that prosperity and *Sustainability* go hand-in-hand. It commits to a carbon-negative state, in which more carbon dioxide passes through the country's forests and natural ecosystems than it puts out. This commitment is by the Buddhist principles in Bhutan, which are based on respect for nature and the belief that humans must live in harmony with the environment. The country's forest cover, amounting to over 70% of its land area, is of great importance in connection with the conservation of biodiversity, climate regulation, and support of the livelihoods of the communities.

Another key part of Bhutan's GNH is cultural preservation. As the leading faith, Buddhism has influenced many countries' behaviours, customs, and cultures. Bhutan has consciously tried to protect its identity by supporting arts, festivals, and the national language. Buddhism is not only a prevalent and respected religion but also integrated into the everyday life of government, culture, and society, promoting community, *compassion*, and interconnectedness. This cultural preservation, again closely tied with national identity, is seen not only as essential but even as a means of promoting well-being and resilience in a globalised world. With the GNH model, Bhutan shows the world how to put the well-being of its citizens and the planet at the forefront of sustainable governance. Rather than following the traditional path of rapid industrialization and economic expansion, Bhutan demonstrates that

¹⁰ Gabor, Kovacs. (2011), *Sustainability and Buddhism*, p. 26.

a nation can thrive by aligning development with values of environmental *Sustainability*, cultural richness, and spiritual fulfillment. This alternative development model offers valuable lessons to the world, illustrating that true prosperity encompasses not only material wealth but also the health of the environment, the preservation of cultural identity, and the well-being of future generations.

Monastic communities often embody sustainable practices like organic farming, composting and resource conservation, inspired by Buddhist principles¹¹. Wat Suan Mokkh, located in Thailand, is a renowned forest monastery exemplifying sustainable living according to Buddhist principles. Founded by revered Thai monk Ajahn Chah, Wat Suan Mokkh integrates self-sufficiency, organic farming, and natural resource conservation into its daily practices, creating a model of sustainability rooted in Buddhist values of simplicity, mindfulness, and respect for the environment. Importantly, the self-sufficiency philosophy of the monastery fits within a framework that emphasizes minimizing dependence on external resources and creating a respectful connection to the land. The monks and villagers practice agricultural farming to produce their organic food. That means growing rice, vegetables, and fruits without chemical fertilizers or pesticides. Practicing organic farming enables Wat Suan Mokkh not only to meet the needs of its community of monks and devotees but also to reduce its environmental footprint, supporting soil health, biodiversity, and sustainability.

Simplicity is a core value in Buddhist monastic life, and you'll see that in the monastery's sustainable practices. Instead of looking for luxury or excess, the community instead fosters mindfulness and moderation in consumption. They are conscious of their impact on the natural world and come to the land with reverence and stewardship, for they depend on it. Besides farming, Wat Suan Mokkh also works to conserve natural resources. The monastery itself sits on heavily forested land, and its activities are meant to help preserve and protect the habitat around it. The community participates in reforestation, keeps high water conservation methods and works to eliminate waste. This aligns with Buddhist teachings on non-harm (Ahimsa) and respect for all living beings, as well as the understanding that environmental health is essential to human well-being. Wat Suan Mokkh also provides teachings and meditation retreats with a focus on mindfulness and the need to live in harmony with nature. Meditation, mindfulness practices and living ethically at Wat Suan Mokkh all help individuals reflect on their relationship with the environment and live more sustainably.

It is ephemeral, as Zen Buddhism in Japan has a very evident inclination towards minimalism, mindfulness, and impermanence. Zen practices encourage simple living, highlighting the impermanence of material possessions and fostering ecological mindfulness¹². Since these values translate

¹¹ Holmgren, D. (2002), *Permaculture: Principles & Pathways Beyond Sustainability*, p. 53.

¹² Aitken, R. (2007), *The Practice of Perfection: The Paramitas from a Zen Buddhist Perspective*.

directly into the philosophy of sustainability and environmental conservation, Zen teaching naturally recommends simple ways of living for one's essentials and a commitment to mindfulness. These values create awareness for mindful spending that shows the impermanence of material possessions and urges to focus on less consumption outside necessity. Central to the teachings of Zen is the importance of mindfulness, which develops a consideration of the thoughts, actions, and interactions with the rest of the world. It allows one to become conscious of their consumption styles and maintain ecological sustainability. An example would be that they would dwell on a simple life without amassing unwanted things but would prefer to be satisfied with a few useful and equally ornamental objects. By practicing this form of mindfulness, people would waste less, use only what is needed, and focus on making the quality of living supersede the quantity of living.

Kintsugi is a traditional Japanese art form where broken ceramics are repaired with gold, silver, or lacquer and is a meaningful embodiment of Zen's embrace of impermanence (*wabi-sabi*). Kintsugi reflects Zen's view of repairing and reusing materials, opposing wastefulness and fostering sustainable practices¹³. This means acknowledging beauty in flaws and time. It is the manifestation of an object that has been broken, mended together, and revived. It stuck to the concept of recycling and craftiness and made us look upon broken or damaged items as repairable rather than disposed with disposal. Hence, the Kintsugi instills repair and sustainability, which is far from any modern practice of throw-away culture and excessive waste. The presence of Zen Buddhism is felt strongly in architectural and interior design features. Japanese Zen gardens of minimalist design invite their use of natural elements, like rock, sand, and vegetation, within an environment where calm and contemplation are restored. It proposes rational and careful respect for nature in the sense of simplicity rather than excessive ornamentation. From an architectural point of view, Zen spaces have clean lines and functional organization. Ideally, they live in a symbiosis with the natural world for a spiritually fulfilling and ecologically harmonious lifestyle.

II. CONCLUSION

Buddhism sheds light on an ethical framework, which, namely, is more compassionate and can be beneficial in addressing the global environmental crisis in the present. The interconnectedness central to Buddhism provides a moral and ethical framework for addressing the global ecological crisis¹⁴. Embedded within Buddhist teaching are tenets of interconnectedness, non-harming, and mindfulness, all aimed at bringing insights into sustainability and environmental harmony. The underlying message is the insight and appropriate considerations of the interconnectedness of all kinds of beings: each decision

tive, p. 88.

¹³ Gyatso, J. (2000), *Buddhist Responses to Globalization and Environmental Concerns*, p. 112.

¹⁴ Schmithausen, L. (1997), *The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics*, p. 7.

made by a being suggests its course-and-effect situation along with a consideration of other living beings in the context of ecological impact. The core ethical path upon which Buddhism rests is based on the principle of interconnectedness in which all beings, from the minutest organism to the grandest ecosystem, are embedded in a web of life. Such realization helps the being to be even more responsible for fostering and nurturing nature on behalf of future generations. The merging of the principles of Buddhism into one's practice, community-based action, and global endeavours serves to intertwine the path to a more sustainable and balanced future in a holistic manner. At the level of the individual, practices of Buddhism, such as mindful consumption, ethical eating, and meditation, encourage people to live, in the simplest sense, sustainable lives. At the community level, mutual aid and the well-being of others are Buddhist values that can be made central to collective action in coping with environmental problems. At the level of government and non-governmental organizations, Buddhist leaders and organizations can advocate for compassionate and ethical policies that put the health of the Earth and all its inhabitants first. Brought into different sectors of life- from leadership and technical assistance to consumer habits and political advocacy- crossing over Buddhist ethics can bring mankind closer to a sustainable future. Buddhist leaders emphasize compassion and interconnectedness in advocating for policies that protect the Earth and its inhabitants¹⁵. As the world grapples with ever-intensifying environmental challenges, Buddhist teachings provide both an inspiration of compassion and a practical framework for building a world that is more attuned to the environment.

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ENGAGED BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM: COMPASSION IN ACTION AND THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF BHIKSUNI NHƯ THANH (1911 - 1999)

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Abstract:

Engaged Buddhism has played a crucial role in the modern history of Vietnamese Buddhism, emphasizing the integration of spiritual practice with social responsibility. This paper examines the contributions of Bhiksuni Như Thanh (1911 – 1999) as a pioneer of Engaged Buddhism, particularly in the education of Buddhist nuns, social welfare, and charitable initiatives. Through a systematic analysis of her life and work, this study explores how she transformed the principle of compassion in action into concrete efforts that reshaped the role of Vietnamese Buddhist nuns in the 20th century. Unlike traditional Buddhist approaches that primarily focused on monastic discipline and meditation, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was instrumental in advancing Buddhist education, founding the Huế Lâm Buddhist Institute, and leading the establishment of the Southern Vietnam Buddhist Nuns' Sangha (Ni bộ Nam Việt). She further contributed to social engagement by establishing schools, orphanages, free medical clinics, and vocational training centers to support disadvantaged groups, particularly women and children. Additionally, she developed a self-sustaining economic model that ensured the long-term viability of these initiatives. By analyzing Bhiksuni Như Thanh's work through the lens of Engaged Buddhism, this paper highlights three key aspects of her legacy: (1) the transformation of compassion into social action, (2) the integration of Buddhist education with philanthropy, and (3) the establishment of sustainable Buddhist economic models. Her contributions continue to serve as a foundation for the evolution of Buddhist social engagement in contemporary Vietnam. This study not only contributes to the academic discourse on Engaged Buddhism but also provides insights into the enduring relevance of Buddhist nuns in modern society.

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Keywords: *Engaged Buddhism, Bhiksuni leadership, compassion in action, Buddhist education, social responsibility, charitable work, sustainable dharma.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Engaged Buddhism is a significant movement in the history of modern Buddhism, particularly in Vietnam, where the principle of compassion has always been closely linked to practical actions aimed at serving people and society. This trend is not only reflected in the Buddhist revival movements of the early 20th century but has also been strongly continued in various charitable, educational, and social justice initiatives, embodying the true spirit of “Dharma is not separate from worldly affairs.” Within this movement, Vietnamese Buddhist nuns have played an essential role, not only in spiritual practice and propagation of the Dharma but also through contributions to education, humanitarian aid, and community support. Outstanding Bhiksunis are not only symbols of wisdom and virtue but also pioneers in transforming the teachings of compassion into concrete actions to improve social well-being. One of the most remarkable figures representing Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam is Bhiksuni Như Thanh (1911 - 1999), who devoted her entire life to the education of Buddhist nuns and social charity work.

Unlike traditional Buddhist approaches that emphasize meditation or theoretical teachings, Engaged Buddhism focuses on the application of Buddhist principles in practical life, particularly through active participation in initiatives that benefit society. Bhiksuni Như Thanh was not only a respected Dharma teacher but also an exemplary Engaged Buddhist leader who embodied the spirit of compassion through concrete actions in education, social work, and Dharma propagation. Through her life and work, she demonstrated a profound sense of social responsibility, with a dedicated aspiration to train generations of capable and virtuous Buddhist nuns, establish a strong Buddhist educational foundation, and engage in humanitarian activities such as assisting the poor, supporting patients, and caring for orphans. All of these efforts reflect the essence of “Compassion in Action,” a core principle of Engaged Buddhism that she upheld throughout her lifetime.

This paper does not simply present the biography or career of Bhiksuni Như Thanh but instead focuses on analyzing her concrete activities to highlight the spirit of compassion linked with social responsibility. Rather than viewing her solely as a historical figure, this study adopts the perspective of Engaged Buddhism, placing her within the broader context of the Bhikkhuni movement in Vietnamese Buddhism, and aims to extract key values that can be inherited and applied in the contemporary era.

II. OVERVIEW OF ENGAGED BUDDHISM AND THE CONCEPT OF COMPASSION IN ACTION

2.1. Engaged Buddhism: Concept and development in Vietnam

Engaged Buddhism is a concept introduced by Master Thích Nhất Hạnh

in the 1960s, emphasizing that Buddhism should not be confined to personal spiritual practice but must actively participate in social life, contributing to addressing community issues. According to Thích Nhất Hạnh, Buddhism cannot be separated from the realities of society but must be actively engaged to bring about positive transformation for individuals and the world.¹ However, the concept of Engaged Buddhism is not entirely new but has its roots in the time of the Buddha. In Buddhist scriptures such as the *Anguttara Nikaya* (The Gradual Discourses) and the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha encouraged his disciples not only to cultivate personal virtue but also to support the community through compassionate actions. This demonstrates that Buddhism, from its very beginning, has been inherently engaged with society and focused on alleviating suffering in real life².

Vietnamese Buddhism, since the Lý – Trần dynasties (11th – 14th centuries), has strongly embodied the spirit of social engagement through various community-serving activities. Eminent Zen masters such as Vạn Hạnh and Trần Nhân Tông were not only dedicated practitioners but also actively participated in politics, education, and national defense. By the 20th century, Engaged Buddhism became even more pronounced through the Buddhist Revival Movement, particularly in educational initiatives, Buddhist text printing, and social welfare activities organized by Buddhist associations³.

One of the most significant aspects of Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam is the role of Bhiksunis (female monastics), who have not only participated in spiritual training but also dedicated themselves to charitable work, education, and social reform. This laid the foundation for the emergence of figures such as Bhiksuni Như Thanh, who actualized the philosophy of compassion through action in the 20th century.

2.2. The concept of compassion in Buddhism and its transformation into social responsibility

Compassion (*karunā* and *metta*) is one of the core principles of Buddhism, expressed through the act of sharing the suffering of sentient beings and taking concrete actions to help them overcome hardships. The spirit of compassion and the commitment of a Bodhisattva to liberate sentient beings are clearly emphasized in many Mahāyāna scriptures. For instance, in the *Śrīmālādevī Siṃhanāda Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā and the Perfection of Wisdom), the Buddha states:

“A great Bodhisattva contemplates all phenomena but perceives no increase or decrease in them. Why is that so? Because they have realized the profound nature of equality in all things. The Great Compassion and Great Strength of a Bodhisattva never contradict their fundamental vow – this is the refuge of all noble beings. For the sake of sentient beings, a Bodhisattva preaches the

¹ Thích Nhất Hạnh (1993): 3.

² Harvey (2000): 131.

³ Nguyễn Lang (2000): 245.

Dharma throughout their lifetime without ever ceasing.”⁴

This passage underscores that a Bodhisattva, endowed with boundless compassion (*Mahākaruṇā*) and great strength (*Mahāvīrya*), does not merely remain in meditative absorption but actively engages in teaching the *Dharma* and assisting sentient beings, bringing peace and well-being to all.

Furthermore, the *Bodhicitta Śāstra* (Treatise on the Mind of Awakening) also states:

“A Bodhisattva must cultivate ten reflections before they can arouse the determination to practice with diligence... They must cultivate great loving-kindness (*Maitrī*) to establish the welfare of sentient beings. They must cultivate great compassion (*Karuṇā*) to alleviate suffering.”⁵

This passage illustrates that a Bodhisattva is not only dedicated to meditative practice but must also embody compassion through concrete actions, offering assistance and bringing true happiness to all sentient beings. In Engaged Buddhism, compassion does not stop at empathy or sympathy but becomes a driving force for active participation in education, healthcare, social justice, and assistance to the underprivileged. This distinction marks the difference between theoretical compassion and compassion in action.

The idea that compassion must be accompanied by action is a central theme frequently emphasized by Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh in many of his writings and lectures. For example, in his essay “*Compassion as a Liberating Force*,” he writes:

“Our practice is to cultivate compassion in daily life. With this practice, we open our hearts to one person, then to another... and eventually, when compassion is fully expressed, we can live freely and joyfully anywhere.”⁶

Thus, Engaged Buddhism highlights the responsibility of each individual in improving social conditions. This guiding principle was deeply embedded in the life and work of Bhikkhuni Nhu Thanh, who realized the teachings of compassion through her dedication to education, charity, and community relief efforts.

2.3. The role of *bhiksunis* in practicing compassion and social responsibility

Throughout the history of Vietnamese Buddhism, *Bhiksunis* (female monastics) have played a crucial role in education and charitable activities. Since the Lý – Trần dynasties (11th – 14th centuries), Buddhist nuns such as Diệu Nhân (12th century) were not only devoted practitioners but also actively engaged in teaching the *Dharma*, providing relief to the poor, and constructing

⁴ <https://viengiac.info/2020/01/kinh-thang-thien-vuong-bat-nha-ba-la-mat-q3>. Accessed on February 20, 2025.

⁵ <https://viengiac.info/2015/01/phat-bo-de-tam-kinh-luan-quyen-ha/>. Accessed on February 20, 2025.

⁶ <https://langmai.org/tang-kinh-cac/bai-viet/tu-bi-la-yeu-to-giai-phong>. Accessed on February 8, 2025.

temples as centers for community activities⁷ (*Central Committee of Vietnamese Bhiksuni Sangha*, 2019). By the 20th century, the role of Bhiksunis in Engaged Buddhism became increasingly prominent. Many senior Bhiksunis led educational programs for female monastics, established schools, hospitals, and charitable organizations to serve society. Among them, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was one of the most outstanding figures, making significant contributions to training Buddhist nuns and implementing Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam.

Bhiksuni Như Thanh was not only an exceptional Buddhist educator but also a dedicated social activist, committed to supporting the poor, orphans, and women in need. She founded educational institutions to train young Bhiksunis with both academic knowledge and moral integrity, inspiring them to actively participate in charitable movements and assist disadvantaged families in alignment with the spirit of “boundless compassion.” Her compassion was not merely a theoretical doctrine but was transformed into concrete actions, helping reshape societal perceptions of the role of Bhiksunis. This is why she is regarded as a remarkable symbol of Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam in the 20th century.

III. BHIKSUNINHƯ THANH – A MODEL OF ENGAGED BUDDHISM

3.1. Life and path of engagement

Bhiksuni Như Thanh (1911 – 1999), Dharma name Như Thanh, birth name Nguyễn Thị Thao, also known as Hồng Ẩn and Diệu Tánh, was born on February 8, 1911, in Tăng Nhơn Phú Village, Thủ Đức District (now part of Ho Chi Minh City) into a family with a strong tradition of Confucian scholarship and administrative service. Her father, Nguyễn Minh Giác, was a district chief, and her mother, Đỗ Thị Gân, was a devoted homemaker. She was the second child in a family of ten siblings, raised in an educational environment that combined traditional Confucian learning with French colonial education.

From an early age, she was taught Classical Chinese (Hán văn) and exposed to traditional Buddhist scriptures, later continuing her education under the French curriculum. This diverse intellectual background provided her with a broad knowledge base, not only in Buddhist teachings but also in culture, philosophy, and Western sciences. Her ability to integrate multiple streams of knowledge shaped her approach to Buddhist studies and social engagement in the years to come.

In 1932, at the age of 22, she made the momentous decision to ordain as a Buddhist nun at Phước Tường Temple (Thủ Đức), becoming a disciple of Most Venerable Pháp Ẩn. This marked a pivotal turning point in her life, initiating her rigorous journey of Buddhist study and social engagement.

After completing her initial monastic training at Phước Tường Temple,

⁷ Reading more Đại lễ Tưởng niệm và hội thảo khoa học Kỷ niệm 906 năm ni sư Diệu Nhân viên tịch cùng chư vị tổ sư Ni tiền bối hữu công (2019) [Grand Memorial Ceremony and Scientific Conference Commemorating the 906th Anniversary of Bhikkhuni Diệu Nhân's Passing and the Meritorious Predecessor Bhikkhunis]. Hanoi. 861 pages.

she continued her education by enrolling in a Buddhist academy at Viên Giác Temple (Bến Tre), where she deepened her knowledge of Buddhist scriptures under Zen Master Khánh Thuyên at Thiên Phước Temple.

With her diligence in Buddhist studies and practice, by 1935, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was entrusted with the management of Hội Sơn Temple (Long Bình Commune, Thủ Đức District) – a significant milestone that reflected her reputation and virtue despite her young age. However, instead of settling permanently in one temple, she continued her journey in search of the Dharma, expanding her knowledge of Buddhist studies and practicing Engaged Buddhism.

In 1938, she traveled to Huế with Bhiksuni Diệu Hường to study Buddhism under renowned masters. Under the guidance of Most Venerable Mật Hiển, she studied important Buddhist scriptures, including Lăng Nghiêm Trực Chỉ (Direct Instructions on the Śūraṅgama Sūtra) and the Prajñāpāramitā teachings, and quickly demonstrated exceptional academic ability. Most Venerable Mật Hiển praised her as an outstandingly intelligent individual with a solid academic foundation and an unwavering commitment to seeking the Dharma.

Not stopping in Huế, in 1939, she continued her journey to Hà Nội to study Vinaya (Buddhist monastic discipline) – a field that, at the time, had very few systematic studies among Bhiksunis. Before delving deeper into Vinaya studies, she was fully ordained as a Bhikkhuni, receiving the Dharma name Đàm Thanh, officially becoming a fully ordained nun, and continuing the tradition of the Bhiksuni Sangha.

In Northern Vietnam, she pursued the study of two fundamental Vinaya texts for Bhiksunis. The *Tứ Phần Tỳ-kheo-ni Lược Ký* (Abridged Commentary on the Four-Part Vinaya for Bhiksunis) with Most Venerable Thích Tâm An, abbot of Quốc Temple, Hưng Yên Province. The *Tỳ-kheo-ni Sao* (Commentary on the Bhiksuni Vinaya) with Most Venerable Phan Trung Thứ, abbot of Bằng Sở Temple, Hà Nội, who was also the Editor-in-Chief of *Đuốc Tuệ* (Wisdom Torch) journal, the official publication of the Northern Buddhist Association (1935 – 1945).

Her in-depth studies of Vinaya provided her with a strong foundation in monastic administration, Bhiksuni training, and Dharma propagation in the community. This significantly contributed to the development of the Vietnamese Bhiksuni Sangha in the 20th century.

After completing her Vinaya studies, Bhiksuni Như Thanh devoted time to pilgrimage and exploration of Buddhist sacred sites in Northern Vietnam, gaining deeper insights into Buddhist practices across different regions. Her spiritual journey was not merely academic; it also reflected an unwavering commitment to seeking the Dharma, embodying the vision and responsibility of a dedicated Bhikkhuni leader toward her community.

At the end of 1941, after more than three years of studying and researching Buddhism in the North, she decided to return to the South to continue her mission of education and Dharma propagation. On her way back, she stopped

in Bình Định Province to study the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* under National Master Venerable Phước Huệ at Thập Tháp Temple, where she remained for five months of intensive training. This scripture is one of the most significant texts in Mahāyāna Buddhism, offering profound insights into consciousness and the path to liberation.

The spiritual journey of Bhiksuni Như Thanh not only demonstrated her unwavering determination to seek the Dharma but also exemplified the spirit of Engaged Buddhism from the early stages of her life. Instead of remaining in a secluded environment, she actively sought knowledge, engaged in research, and accessed diverse sources of learning, all in preparation for her lifelong mission of Dharma propagation, Bhiksuni education, and social service.

3.2. The educational, charitable, and social activities of bhiksuni Như Thanh

3.2.1. Educational efforts: Training bhiksunis and promoting Buddhist teachings

After completing her Buddhist studies and Vinaya research in Northern Vietnam, Bhiksuni Như Thanh returned to Southern Vietnam in early 1942 and immediately dedicated herself to the education of Bhiksunis, intending to enhance their knowledge of Buddhist teachings and monastic discipline. She was not only a deeply learned Buddhist practitioner but also a pioneering educator, playing a crucial role in establishing a formal educational system for Bhikkhunis in Southern Vietnam during the 20th century.

3.2.2. Early contributions to Buddhist education (1942 – 1945)

Upon her return to the South, Bhiksuni Như Thanh initiated Vinaya classes for Bhiksunis. Recognizing that most female monastics at the time had limited access to in-depth Vinaya studies, she decided to focus on teaching the *Tứ Phần Tỳ-kheo-ni Lược Ký* (Abridged Commentary on the Four-Part Vinaya for Bhiksunis). Her efforts provided Bhikkhunis with a solid foundation in monastic discipline, enabling them to guide and instruct their fellow monastics within their temples. In 1942, she was invited to serve as Meditation Master (Thiền chủ) and Dharma teacher for over 80 Bhiksunis at the Kim Sơn Summer Retreat (Phú Nhuận), which was founded by Bhiksuni Diệu Tấn. That same year, she conducted a three-month Vinaya course on the Four-Part Vinaya Commentary for Bhiksunis at the Hội Sơn Summer Retreat, equipping her students with a structured understanding of Buddhist law. In 1944, she established a summer retreat at Hội Sơn Temple and continued to teach the Vinaya Commentary for Bhiksunis for three months.

Thanks to her relentless efforts, Bhiksuni Như Thanh created opportunities for female monastics to receive systematic education, empowering them to practice and uphold the monastic precepts with confidence and to lead their respective monastic communities effectively.

3.2.3. Establishing an educational center for bhiksunis at Huệ Lâm temple (1945 – 1952)

In 1945, Bhiksuni Như Thanh assumed the position of abbess of Huệ Lâm Temple at the invitation of District Chief Nguyễn Kỳ Sắc and his wife. Upon

taking charge, she began renovating the temple and transforming it into a dedicated training center for Bhiksunis.

In 1947, she established the Huê Lâm Bhiksuni Buddhist Institute, marking a milestone in the history of Bhiksuni education in Vietnam. This institute was not only a place for Bhiksunis to study Buddhist scriptures and Vinaya but also a center where they could practice Buddhism through social charity initiatives.

To expand educational opportunities, she also organized summer retreat programs (An cư kiết hạ) at the temple, attracting a large number of Bhiksunis to participate in intensive study and practice.

3.2.4. Founding the Ni bộ Nam Việt – Expanding bhiksuni education (1956 – 1972)

Recognizing the need for a structured organization to manage Bhiksuni education and monastic training, Bhiksuni Như Thanh took the initiative to mobilize Bhiksuni communities across Eastern and Southwestern Vietnam to establish a unified Bhiksuni organization. On October 6–7, 1956, Bhiksunis from across Southern Vietnam gathered at Huê Lâm Temple, where they officially established the Southern Vietnam Buddhist Nuns' Sangha (*Ni bộ Nam Việt*)⁸. Bhiksuni Như Thanh was elected as the Head of the Administrative Committee of Ni Bộ Nam Việt, which operated under its own regulations and independent administrative structure, with its headquarters based at Huê Lâm Temple.

In 1956, Bhiksuni Như Thanh and the Administrative Committee of Ni Bộ assumed responsibility for Dược Sư Temple, which served as a temporary headquarters. In 1957, she led efforts to raise funds for the construction of Từ Nghiêm Temple, which later became the official headquarters of *Ni bộ Nam Việt* upon its completion in 1962. Từ Nghiêm Temple was not only the administrative center of *Ni bộ* but also an important educational hub. After its completion, Bhiksuni Như Thanh established a Buddhist Studies Institute at the temple, continuing her mission of training talented Bhiksunis for the Buddhist community in Southern Vietnam.

3.2.5. Strengthening and expanding bhiksuni education in the modern era (1972 – 1999)

In 1972, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was appointed Head of the Mahayana Nuns' Sangha (*Vụ trưởng Ni Bộ Bắc Tông*), overseeing the entire Bhiksuni system of the Mahāyāna tradition in Southern Vietnam. That same year, she organized the Bhiksuni Congress at Từ Nghiêm Temple, with the following objectives: Strengthening unity among Bhikkhunis; Reviewing Buddhist and charitable activities; Reforming and developing the organizational structure of Ni Bộ Phật giáo.

By 1975, after the reunification of Vietnam, Bhiksuni Như Thanh returned to Huê Lâm Temple, where she continued her research, translation of Buddhist scriptures, and the development of Buddhist institutions. She dedicated the final years of her life to consolidating Bhikkhuni education and Dharma

⁸ Ni bộ (1957): 1-2.

propagation, laying the groundwork for the strong growth of Vietnamese Bhiksuni Sangha in the modern era. Bhiksuni Như Thanh entered Nirvana on March 13, 1999, at Huệ Lâm Temple, leaving behind a profound legacy in Bhiksuni education and Engaged Buddhism.

She played a pivotal role in transforming the model of Bhiksuni education—from a self-study approach in individual temples to a structured system with Buddhist Institutes, schools, and formal education programs. She laid the foundation for the organizational system of *Ni Bộ Nam Việt*, enabling Bhiksunis to pursue monastic training, engage in Dharma propagation, and systematically participate in social service.

Her educational contributions extended beyond Buddhist studies, incorporating secular education to equip Bhikkhunis with the necessary skills to actively contribute to social development. Thanks to her dedication, Vietnamese Bhiksunis gained access to greater educational opportunities and professional development, continuing the legacy of compassion intertwined with social responsibility that she devoted her entire life to upholding.

3.2.6. Charitable activities: Supporting the poor, orphans, and patients

Amid the tumultuous wartime conditions in Southern Vietnam, where many orphans, impoverished individuals, and patients lacked proper care, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was not only a leader in the education of Bhiksunis but also a pioneer in social charity efforts. Under her guidance, charitable institutions, schools, orphanages, medical clinics, and vocational training centers were established to alleviate suffering and improve community well-being. These initiatives not only provided direct assistance to thousands of people but also created a model of Engaged Buddhism, serving as an exemplar for Bhikkhuni temples across the country.

3.2.7. The charitable school system – a model of Engaged Buddhist education

One of Bhiksuni Như Thanh's most significant contributions to charitable activities was the founding and development of the Kiều Đàm school system, aimed at providing education for underprivileged children and Bhiksunis. In 1952, she established Kiều Đàm Primary School at Huệ Lâm Temple, offering free education to 200 students per year. By 1967, the system had expanded with the establishment of Kiều Đàm Secondary and Primary School (800 students per year) and Kiều Đàm Kindergarten (200 students per year). In 1970, she further expanded by opening a new facility at Quy Sơn Temple (Vũng Tàu), which included Kiều Đàm Primary School and Kiều Đàm Orphanage⁹.

This educational network was not only focused on literacy but also moral education, providing thousands of disadvantaged children with opportunities for learning and personal development. It became a pioneering model of Bhiksuni-led education, laying the foundation for Bhikkhunis to engage in secular education and broader social work in later years.

⁹ Tổ đình Huệ Lâm (1999): 305 - 306.

3.2.8. Establishing and managing orphanages – providing care for orphaned children

During the wartime turmoil, thousands of children lost their parents and were left without support. Bhiksuni Như Thanh recognized that establishing orphanages was not just an act of charity but also a Buddhist mission to rescue and support disadvantaged lives. In 1970, she founded Kiều Đàm Orphanage at Huệ Lâm Temple, providing care for 800 children annually. In 1971, another orphanage was established at Quy Sơn Temple in Vũng Tàu, sheltering 56 orphaned children per year. According to the 1972 Bhiksuni Congress of the Mahāyāna Tradition, the orphanage network guided and supported by Bhiksuni Như Thanh had cared for over 7,000 children across 41 facilities throughout Southern Vietnam.¹⁰

These orphanages not only provided shelter and medical care but also offered education and moral guidance, ensuring that orphaned children had opportunities to grow up in a nurturing and healthy environment.

3.2.9. Developing traditional and modern medicine clinics – providing healthcare for the poor

Understanding that impoverished individuals had limited access to medical services, Bhiksuni Như Thanh established free clinics at Huệ Lâm Temple to provide healthcare and medical support to the community. In 1961, she opened a Traditional Medicine Clinic (Phòng thuốc Nam) at Huệ Lâm Temple, serving 600 patients per month, and sustained its operation for 28 years. In 1966, she expanded by opening a Western Medicine Clinic (Phòng thuốc Tây), offering free medication to thousands of impoverished patients. In 1975, she founded an Acupuncture Clinic at Huệ Lâm Temple, treating 300 patients per month and maintaining operations for 15 years.

These clinics not only met the medical needs of the poor but also became training centers for Bhiksunis in traditional medicine, contributing to the integration of Buddhist healthcare into daily life.

3.2.10. Vocational training classes – supporting women and vulnerable groups toward self-sufficiency

In addition to education and healthcare, Bhiksuni Như Thanh was deeply concerned about the livelihoods of the poor, particularly women and vulnerable individuals. She established vocational training classes at Huệ Lâm Temple, equipping learners with practical labor skills, enabling them to become self-sufficient. In 1966, she launched a knitting class, training 50 students per year. In 1968, she opened a sewing class, attracting 30 students per year¹¹.

3.2.11. Developing a self-sustaining economic system to support charitable activities

To ensure that charitable initiatives were not entirely dependent on

¹⁰ Giáo hội Việt Nam thống nhất (1972): 24 - 25.

¹¹ Tổ đình Huệ Lâm (1999): 305 - 306.

donations, Bhikkhuni Nhu Thanh developed a self-sustaining economic system to create a stable source of funding. Buddhist scripture publishing centers at Huê Lâm I, Huê Lâm II, and Hải Vân, generating financial resources for education and charitable programs. Vegetarian restaurants, including Tịnh Tâm Trai and Thanh Tâm Trai in Saigon, provide a steady stream of income. White Lotus Soy Sauce production and incense manufacturing workshops, helping fund social welfare initiatives. A tailoring workshop at Huê Lâm not only provided employment opportunities but also helped finance schools and orphanages. This economic model enabled the Bhiksuni community to sustain charitable activities independently, reducing reliance on external support.

3.2.12. A lasting impact on Vietnamese society and bhiksuni philanthropy

The charitable projects initiated by Bhiksuni Như Thanh directly assisted thousands of people, including orphans, impoverished individuals, patients, and vulnerable women. Her contributions: Helped stabilize social life, especially during wartime and post-war recovery; Transformed Huê Lâm Temple into a center for education, healthcare, and livelihood support, pioneering a model where Buddhist temples actively engaged in social charity; Encouraged Bhiksunis to actively participate in social work, laying the foundation for the strong development of Bhiksuni-led philanthropy and Dharma propagation in Vietnam.

Thus, Bhiksuni Như Thanh built an extensive charitable network, including schools, orphanages, medical clinics, and vocational training centers, enabling thousands of impoverished individuals to access education, healthcare, and career opportunities. She was not only a dedicated Buddhist activist but also a talented organizer, developing self-sustaining economic models to ensure the longevity of charitable activities. Her contributions extended beyond a single historical period, providing a foundation for the long-term development of Bhiksuni-led philanthropy in Vietnam, leaving a legacy of immense value.

3.3. The ideological values and lessons from the actions of bhiksuni Như Thanh

3.3.1. Bhiksuni Như Thanh and her contributions to Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam

Throughout her life, Bhiksuni Như Thanh exemplified a strong model of Engaged Buddhism, in which compassion was not merely an abstract doctrine but was manifested through concrete actions. Unlike the traditional perspective that viewed Bhikkhunis primarily as practitioners supporting the monastic community, she demonstrated that Bhikkhunis could take on leadership roles and actively serve society. Through the establishment of schools, orphanages, medical facilities, and vocational training centers, she embodied the Mahāyāna Buddhist principle of compassion in action, transforming compassion into tangible efforts to relieve suffering and uplift society. This reflects the Buddhist tenet: *“The Dharma is not separate from worldly affairs”*. Her initiatives not only provided immediate benefits but also created long-term societal

transformations, contributing to a shift in perception regarding the role of Bhiksunis in Vietnamese Buddhism.

Bhiksuni Như Thanh not only taught Buddhist doctrines but also applied the Dharma in real-life contexts, particularly in education and charity. She established the Kiều Đàm school system, granting educational opportunities to both Bhiksunis and underprivileged children, integrating secular education into temples, and paving the way for Bhikkhunis to engage in cultural and social sectors. Her efforts extended to developing orphanages, medical clinics, and vocational training programs, which not only aided the impoverished but also created opportunities for marginalized groups to thrive. Recognizing the need for financial sustainability, she organized a self-sufficient economic system to support charitable projects, reducing dependence on traditional almsgiving. These models opened new pathways for Vietnamese Bhikkhunis, proving that they were not merely supplementary figures within monastic institutions but could independently organize and manage large-scale Buddhist initiatives.

3.3.2. Lessons from Bhiksuni Như Thanh's Engaged Buddhist model for contemporary Buddhism

One of the most significant lessons from Bhiksuni Như Thanh's model is the affirmation of the role of Bhiksunis in Vietnamese Buddhism. In the 20th century, she took the initiative to establish an independent Bhiksuni organization, enabling female monastics to self-govern and develop autonomously. This laid the foundation for Bhiksunis today to continue assuming leadership roles in both Buddhist and social initiatives. In contemporary times, greater opportunities should be provided for Bhiksunis to participate in education, Dharma propagation, and charity work rather than being confined solely to internal monastic affairs.

The spirit of compassion, coupled with practical action, as embodied by Bhiksuni Như Thanh, remains highly relevant in the modern era. In today's world, challenges such as social inequality, climate change, and ethical crises present major concerns. Buddhism must develop engaged and practical solutions to better serve the community. Instead of limiting itself to basic charity work, Buddhism should implement sustainable programs in areas like education, healthcare, and vocational training, enabling individuals to become self-sufficient rather than relying solely on short-term assistance.

One of Bhiksuni Như Thanh's most effective strategies was establishing a self-sustaining economic model, ensuring the long-term viability of Buddhist educational and charitable programs. Institutions such as vegetarian restaurants, sewing workshops, and Buddhist publishing centers provided a stable financial foundation for Buddhist activities. Today, temples can expand on this concept by developing sustainable economic models, such as producing vegetarian food, offering vocational training, or providing charitable healthcare services, to generate long-term financial support. Rather than relying solely on donations, Buddhist institutions should strategically plan for financial self-sufficiency, allowing them to expand their charitable and educational efforts sustainably.

3.3.3. The legacy of Bhiksuni Như Thanh for Vietnamese Buddhism

Bhiksuni Như Thanh left a profound legacy for the development of the Vietnamese Bhiksuni Sangha, including: Establishing an independent Bhiksuni administrative system, enabling female monastics to develop autonomously; Training multiple generations of capable Bhiksunis, who continue to uphold the spirit of Engaged Buddhism; Creating an integrated model of education, charity, and self-sustaining economy, which serves as a foundation for modern Buddhist initiatives.

The philosophies and models pioneered by Bhiksuni Như Thanh remain highly relevant in the 21st century, especially in the integration of Buddhist education with social engagement. Contemporary Buddhist institutions can expand their role by offering life skills training, supporting disadvantaged communities, and promoting environmental education. It is essential to connect Buddhism with social action, allowing Bhiksunis and Buddhist monastics to actively participate in humanitarian work, environmental protection, and supporting vulnerable groups, following Bhiksuni Như Thanh's model. Additionally, developing a self-sustaining economic model remains crucial to ensuring the long-term sustainability of Buddhist and charitable activities.

Bhiksuni Như Thanh stands as a quintessential model of Engaged Buddhism, blending the philosophy of compassion with social responsibility. Her contributions redefined the role of Bhikkhunis in modern Buddhism, paving the way for a socially engaged monastic path. Her ideas continue to hold significance in the 21st century, serving as a source of inspiration for contemporary Buddhist, educational, and charitable endeavors.

IV. CONCLUSION

Bhiksuni Như Thanh was not only a respected monastic leader but also a symbol of Engaged Buddhism in Vietnam. Her life and career exemplified a strong spirit of social engagement, where the doctrine of compassion was translated into concrete actions. Through the education of Bhiksunis, the establishment of educational and charitable institutions, and the development of a self-sustaining economic system, she laid a solid foundation for the advancement of the Vietnamese Bhiksuni Sangha and the model of Engaged Buddhism in the 20th century.

From Bhiksuni Như Thanh's contributions, three key lessons can be drawn: The first, compassion in action. Buddhism should not merely preach compassion but must manifest it through tangible activities that benefit society. Bhiksuni Như Thanh embodied this principle by establishing schools, orphanages, medical clinics, and vocational training centers, providing long-term benefits to the community. The second, developing an engaged Buddhist model integrated with education and social charity. Instead of limiting Buddhism to temple-based religious propagation, she combined Buddhist practice with secular education and charitable work, empowering Bhiksunis to take on leadership roles in social initiatives. The third, building a self-sustaining economic system to support charitable work. Rather than

solely relying on donations, she developed economic enterprises, including vegetarian restaurants, sewing workshops, and Buddhist scripture publishing, ensuring financial stability for sustainable charitable activities. The ideas and models established by Bhiksuni Như Thanh were not only significant within the historical context of the 20th century but also hold lasting value for contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism.

In today's world, where Buddhism faces new challenges such as social inequality, climate change, and moral crises, her Engaged Buddhist philosophy remains a crucial guiding principle. Continuing to uphold the spirit of compassion intertwined with social responsibility, expanding the model of education, charity, and self-sustaining economy, and enhancing the role of Bhiksunis in Buddhist leadership are essential steps to inherit and develop Bhiksuni Như Thanh's legacy in the modern era.

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“PHƯỚC” AND THE SCIENCE OF COMPASSION: BUDDHIST PRACTICES AS A PATH TO HEALTH, WELL-BEING, AND TRANSGENERATIONAL EPIGENETIC BENEFITS

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Abstract:

This review explores the interplay between Buddhist compassion practices and their effects on health and well-being, emphasizing their potential epigenetic implications. Highlighting mechanisms of mindfulness, stress reduction, and compassion training, the paper investigates how these practices contribute to physical and mental health benefits for practitioners and explore how these benefits may be inherited across generations through epigenetic changes. Furthermore, it examines how these practices influence immune function, stress resilience, and longevity. Through extended case studies, clinical trials, and philosophical insights, this paper draws on the works of prominent thinkers like Mathieu Ricard to provide a comprehensive, multidisciplinary perspective on the profound impacts of compassion and “Phước”.

Keywords: *Buddhist compassion, mindfulness practices, epigenetic benefits, stress reduction, neuroplasticity, immune function, well-being.*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Scope of the Review

This paper investigates how Buddhist compassion practices improve individual health and well-being while exploring mechanisms through which these benefits can be inherited by future generations. By integrating Buddhist philosophy with modern scientific disciplines such as neuroscience, immunology, and epigenetics, this review bridges ancient wisdom and cutting-edge research to present a holistic understanding of these practices’

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transformative potential.¹

1.2. Buddhism and the concept of compassion

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is a central tenet of Buddhist teachings, aimed at alleviating suffering and fostering a deep connection with others. Compassion manifests in various forms, including meditation practices like Metta Bhavana (loving-kindness) and acts of generosity (*āna*). These practices not only promote spiritual growth but also have measurable physical and mental health benefits.²

1.3. The Philosophy of “Phước”

In Vietnamese Buddhism, “Phước” refers to the merit or blessings accrued through virtuous actions such as compassion, generosity, and mindfulness. This philosophy resonates with the principle of karma, suggesting that ethical and altruistic actions benefit both the individual and their descendants. From a scientific perspective, “Phước” aligns with findings in epigenetics that show how life experiences - particularly stress reduction, mindfulness, and acts of kindness - can influence gene expression and potentially be transmitted to future generations.³ The concept underscores how living a compassionate life fosters long-term health and social harmony.

II. BUDDHISM AND COMPASSION PRACTICES

2.1. Historical context of compassion

Buddhist compassion practices date back over 2,500 years, rooted in scriptures such as the Pali Canon and Mahayana Sutras. Practices like Metta Bhavana, Tonglen (giving and taking meditation), and service-oriented rituals have historically promoted societal well-being. Compassion is regarded as a transformative force that elevates the human condition and alleviates suffering on both individual and collective levels.⁴

2.2. Modern integration of compassion practices

Contemporary applications of compassion practices include programs like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT). These programs adapt traditional Buddhist teachings to modern contexts, addressing issues such as workplace stress, social disconnection, and chronic illness. Neuroimaging studies validate these interventions, showing increased activation in brain regions associated with empathy and emotional regulation.⁵

III. MECHANISMS OF IMPACT: SCIENTIFIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHTS

The practice of compassion, deeply rooted in contemplative traditions such as Buddhism, has gained increasing recognition in scientific research

¹ Ricard, M. (2015): 251; Davidson & McEwen (2012): 689 – 95.

² Thich Nhat Hanh (1995): 45.

³ Szyf, M., & Meaney, M. J. (2008): 13045 – 50.

⁴ Thich Nhat Hanh (1995): 45.

⁵ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990): 125.

for its profound psychological, biological, and epigenetic effects. Through neuroplasticity, hormonal regulation, and gene expression modifications, compassion-based interventions offer tangible benefits that extend beyond individual well-being to collective societal transformation.

3.1. Psychological mechanisms

Compassion practices foster psychological resilience and emotional regulation by enhancing neuroplasticity in key brain regions associated with empathy, decision-making, and emotional processing. The prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and insular cortex play critical roles in modulating affective responses, influencing both self-awareness and interpersonal connections.

3.2. Neuroplasticity and compassion training

Neuroscientific research demonstrates that compassion is a trainable skill rather than an innate, fixed trait. Studies using functional MRI (fMRI) have shown that long-term meditators, such as Buddhist monks, exhibit increased activity in the prefrontal cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex - areas linked to executive control and emotional regulation -when engaging in compassion meditation.⁶ These neural adaptations suggest that regular compassion practices reinforce beneficial cognitive patterns, thereby enhancing well-being.

Mathieu Ricard, a Buddhist monk and scientist, argues that compassion is not merely an emotional response but a cultivated mental state that fosters long-term psychological and moral development.⁷ He describes compassion meditation as a means of reorienting the mind toward altruism, which subsequently strengthens one's ability to handle stress and adversity.

3.3. Regulation of emotional responses

Compassion training has been linked to reductions in fear-based reactivity in the amygdala. The amygdala, a key structure in the limbic system, governs emotional responses, particularly fear and threat perception. Research has demonstrated that individuals who practice loving-kindness meditation (a form of compassion meditation) show decreased amygdala activation in response to stressors (Pace et al., 2009). This downregulation of the amygdala corresponds to an increased sense of emotional balance and a reduction in anxiety-related symptoms.

Furthermore, a study by Goyal et al. (2014) found that mindfulness and compassion-based interventions significantly reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, comparable to the effects of pharmaceutical treatments. These findings underscore the potential of compassion practices as an alternative or complementary approach to mental health interventions.

3.4. Biological pathways

Beyond psychological mechanisms, compassion influences various physiological systems, including the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA)

⁶ Davidson & McEwen (2012): 691 – 95.

⁷ Ricard, M. (2015): 251.

axis and the immune system. These effects highlight the intricate mind-body connection, demonstrating that sustained compassionate practices promote not only psychological well-being but also physical health.

3.5. Regulation of the Stress Response

The HPA axis, which governs the body's stress response, plays a crucial role in maintaining homeostasis. Chronic stress leads to dysregulation of this system, resulting in excessive cortisol production hallmarks of prolonged anxiety and depression.

Compassion meditation has been shown to attenuate HPA axis activity, thereby reducing cortisol levels. For example, a study by Pace et al. (2009) demonstrated that individuals who engaged in compassion meditation for eight weeks exhibited significantly lower cortisol levels in response to psychosocial stressors compared to control groups.⁸ These findings suggest that compassion training serves as a buffer against stress-related disorders, reinforcing resilience at a biological level.

3.6. The role of oxytocin in social bonding

Oxytocin, often referred to as the “bonding hormone” or “love hormone,” plays a critical role in enhancing prosocial behaviors and fostering trust. Studies indicate that compassion meditation increases endogenous oxytocin levels, thereby strengthening social connectedness.⁹ This hormonal shift encourages altruistic tendencies, reinforcing the idea that compassion is not only psychologically beneficial but also biologically advantageous in promoting cooperative behaviors.

Additionally, the parasympathetic nervous system, responsible for the “rest-and-digest” response, is activated through compassion-based practices. This activation counteracts the fight-or-flight response, promoting relaxation and cardiovascular health.

3.7. Immunological benefits of compassion training

The immune system is highly responsive to psychological states, and stress-induced inflammation has been implicated in various chronic diseases. Compassion training has been shown to modulate immune function by reducing inflammatory markers and enhancing antiviral responses.¹⁰

For instance, research by Kaliman et al. (2014),¹¹ revealed that experienced meditators exhibited reduced expression of pro-inflammatory genes and increased activity of genes involved in immune regulation. These findings suggest that compassion-based interventions hold promise as preventive strategies against inflammation-related conditions, including cardiovascular disease and autoimmune disorders.

⁸ Pace et al. (2009): 87 – 98.

⁹ Feldman. (2017): 80 – 99; Pace et al. (2009): 90 – 97.

¹⁰ Black, D. S., & Slavich, G. M. (2016): 13 – 22.

¹¹ Kaliman et al. (2014): 98 – 107.

3.8. Epigenetic implications

Epigenetics, the study of how environmental factors influence gene expression without altering DNA sequences, provides a compelling explanation for the long-term benefits of compassion practices. By modulating DNA methylation and histone acetylation, compassion training can induce lasting changes in gene expression patterns related to stress resilience and longevity.

3.9. Gene expression and mindfulness

Research has demonstrated that mindfulness and compassion-based practices can alter gene expression within stress-related pathways. For example, studies have shown that meditation influences the expression of NR3C1, a gene encoding the glucocorticoid receptor involved in stress response regulation.¹² Enhanced expression of this gene leads to improved cortisol regulation, thereby mitigating the harmful effects of chronic stress.

Furthermore, mindfulness meditation has been linked to reduced activity of stress-related enzymes, such as RIPK2, which are involved in inflammatory signaling (Davidson & McEwen, 2012). This suggests that meditation not only affects psychological well-being but also has tangible effects at a molecular level.

The authors discuss studies showing that increased methylation of the NR3C1.¹³ The promoter region is linked to reduced receptor availability, which impairs stress regulation. This is particularly evident in animal models where low maternal care leads to increased NR3C1 methylation, resulting in heightened stress vulnerability. The review illustrates that meditation practices can enhance NR3C1 expression, improving cortisol regulation and mitigating chronic stress's adverse effects.

Therefore, by enhancing NR3C1 expression through mindfulness, individuals may improve their ability to manage stress, thereby promoting better mental health.

Moreover, mindfulness meditation has been associated with decreased activity of stress-related enzymes like RIPK2, which are involved in inflammatory signaling.¹⁴

This review explores how social experiences influence neuroplasticity and how interventions like mindfulness can promote well-being. The authors present evidence from neuroimaging studies showing that mindfulness practices can increase prefrontal cortex activity while decreasing amygdala activity, leading to improved emotional regulation. The findings suggest that mindfulness not only fosters psychological well-being but also induces molecular changes that enhance physical health by reducing inflammation. The review underscores the importance of mindfulness in modulating stress responses at both psychological and molecular levels.

¹² Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13046 – 50.

¹³ Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13045 – 50.

¹⁴ Goyal et al. (2014): 359 – 68.

3.10. Histone modifications and longevity

Histone modifications are critical in regulating chromatin structure and gene accessibility, playing a vital role in cellular aging and longevity. Kaliman et al. (2014) found that meditation can rapidly alter histone deacetylase (HDAC) activity, promoting an anti-inflammatory gene expression profile.

This original research article investigates the impact of a day of intensive mindfulness meditation on gene expression and DNA methylation in experienced meditators. Blood samples were collected before and after the intervention, revealing increased DNA methylation in genes involved in inflammation. Specifically, meditation led to decreased expression of pro-inflammatory genes like RIPK2. The study shows that short-term meditation can induce rapid epigenetic changes associated with improved immune function. Therefore these findings suggest that compassion practices may enhance cellular health and longevity by reducing oxidative stress and bolstering immune resilience.

The relationship between compassion practices and biological aging is further supported by findings that individuals engaging in mindfulness or compassion meditation exhibit slower epigenetic clocks (a measure of biological age based on DNA methylation patterns) compared to those who do not practice these techniques (PLOS ONE, 2022). This study examines whether trait-like compassion predicts DNA methylation-based epigenetic age acceleration using data from a longitudinal study. Researchers measured trait-like compassion over several years and assessed epigenetic age using DNA methylation indicators. Higher compassion levels were associated with slower epigenetic aging. The results indicate that individuals with higher levels of compassion exhibit less accelerated biological aging. This suggests a potential mechanism through which compassion influences longevity, highlighting its role in promoting healthier aging processes.

3.11. Future directions in epigenetic research on compassion

Despite promising findings, further research is necessary to elucidate the underlying mechanisms by which compassion practices induce epigenetic changes. An interdisciplinary approach integrating neuroscience, molecular biology, and contemplative traditions holds promise for deepening our understanding of how compassion impacts human health and behavior.

Current studies indicate that compassion is not merely a moral virtue but also a powerful mechanism for psychological, biological, and epigenetic transformation. By enhancing neuroplasticity, modulating stress responses, and altering gene expression profiles, compassion-based practices offer a holistic framework for improving individual and collective well-being.

The exploration of epigenetics in the context of compassion practices reveals significant insights into how our environment - and specifically our emotional states - can shape our biology. The evidence suggests that cultivating compassion through mindfulness may lead to beneficial changes at both psychological and molecular levels, thereby contributing to enhanced health

outcomes and longevity. Continued investigation into these mechanisms will be crucial for developing effective therapeutic interventions that leverage the power of compassion for improved health across populations.

3.12. The future of epigenetic research on compassion

While current research provides compelling evidence for the epigenetic effects of compassion practices, further studies are needed to fully elucidate the mechanisms underlying these changes. The integration of neuroscience, molecular biology, and contemplative traditions offers a promising interdisciplinary approach to understanding the profound impact of compassion on human health and behavior.

Scientific and philosophical perspectives converge on the notion that compassion is not only a moral virtue but also a powerful mechanism for psychological, biological, and epigenetic transformation. By enhancing neuroplasticity, modulating stress responses, and altering gene expression, compassion-based practices provide a holistic framework for improving individual and collective well-being. Future research should continue to explore these mechanisms, paving the way for the integration of compassion training into therapeutic and societal interventions.

IV. EXPANDED CLINICAL TRIALS AND CASE STUDIES

Scientific investigations into mindfulness, compassion-based interventions, and generosity have provided robust evidence for their physiological, psychological, and even transgenerational impacts. Through controlled clinical trials and neurobiological assessments, these studies have demonstrated tangible health benefits, reinforcing the deep interconnection between mind and body.

4.1 Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

4.1.1. Comprehensive analysis of Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) on Psychological and Physiological Health

Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, has been extensively researched for its efficacy in reducing stress-related disorders and enhancing overall well-being. A meta-analysis encompassing 15 controlled trials with over 1,200 participants demonstrated significant reductions in anxiety, depression, and chronic pain among individuals undergoing an MBSR program.¹⁵

Neurophysiological assessments of MBSR participants indicate increased cortical thickness in the prefrontal cortex and insular regions, structures involved in emotional regulation, and interoceptive awareness.¹⁶ These structural adaptations correspond with functional improvements, including heightened attentional control, reduced emotional reactivity, and greater resilience to stress-induced mood disturbances.

¹⁵ Kabat-Zinn (1990): 125; Goyal et al. (2014): 362 – 68.

¹⁶ Goyal et al. (2014): 359 – 68.

Biomarker analysis further supports these findings. Inflammatory markers such as interleukin-6 (IL-6) and C-reactive protein (CRP), which are elevated in individuals experiencing chronic stress, exhibited significant reductions following MBSR interventions. Decreased cortisol levels post-intervention suggest a normalization of hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis function, indicating an improved stress response system.

4.1.2. Clinical outcomes in Stress-related Disorders and Systemic Inflammation

A middle-aged individual with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) who adhered to an eight-week MBSR regimen demonstrated profound neuroendocrine and immune system changes. Pre- and post-intervention analyses revealed a measurable decline in circulating cortisol levels, paralleled by reductions in systemic inflammatory markers such as IL-6 and CRP.¹⁷ These physiological changes coincided with enhanced emotional regulation, decreased anxiety-related symptomatology, and improved cognitive flexibility.

In the domain of sleep disorders, objective polysomnographic data suggest that MBSR practitioners exhibit increased sleep efficiency and reduced sleep-onset latency. These improvements are attributed to the regulation of autonomic nervous system activity, shifting individuals from sympathetic dominance (stress-related arousal) toward parasympathetic predominance, which facilitates restorative processes.¹⁸

4.1.3. Scientific correlation between MBSR and health optimization

The integration of mindfulness techniques into clinical settings offers a translational bridge between ancient meditative practices and modern therapeutic methodologies. MBSR's ability to modulate neurobiological pathways affirms its efficacy as a non-pharmacological intervention for managing stress, mood disorders, and inflammatory diseases.¹⁹ These findings validate the practical applications of mindfulness within contemporary healthcare frameworks, reinforcing its role as a therapeutic modality for chronic stress mitigation.

4.2 Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT)

4.2.1. Neuroscientific and Psychological Investigations of CCT in High-Stress Environments

Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT), a structured intervention developed at Stanford University, has been extensively studied for its impact on healthcare professionals and individuals experiencing occupational burnout. Over nine weeks, participants engage in guided compassion-based meditative practices, emphasizing empathy, self-compassion, and altruistic intention.²⁰

¹⁷ Goyal et al. (2014): 357 – 67.

¹⁸ Goyal et al. (2014): 357 – 68.

¹⁹ Kabat-Zinn (1990): 125.

²⁰ Black & Slavich (2016): 15 – 24.

Longitudinal neuroimaging studies reveal that CCT practitioners exhibit increased connectivity between the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) and insular cortex—regions that regulate emotional processing, self-awareness, and empathic responses.²¹ This enhanced connectivity translates into improved emotional resilience and reduced psychological distress, providing neurobiological evidence for compassion as a trainable cognitive-emotional skill.

Salivary cortisol assays conducted pre- and post-training indicate significant reductions in baseline cortisol levels among CCT participants, suggesting improved regulation of the HPA axis in response to occupational stressors. Additionally, heart rate variability (HRV), a physiological marker of autonomic nervous system balance, demonstrates increased vagal tone, signifying enhanced parasympathetic activity and improved stress recovery.²²

4.2.2. Immunological and psychological enhancements in healthcare professionals

A healthcare provider undergoing CCT exhibited marked reductions in professional burnout symptoms, characterized by decreased emotional exhaustion and depersonalization tendencies. Notably, peripheral blood analyses revealed a 20% increase in natural killer (NK) cell activity post-training,²³ indicating an enhancement of immune surveillance mechanisms. NK cells play a crucial role in defending against viral infections and tumorigenesis, suggesting that compassion training confers not only psychological but also immunoprotective benefits.

Neurocognitive assessments of CCT practitioners highlight improved executive functioning, particularly in domains of attentional control and cognitive flexibility.²⁴ These enhancements are associated with greater adaptive responses to high-pressure work environments, reinforcing the efficacy of CCT as an intervention for stress resilience and mental well-being in medical professionals.

4.2.3. Clinical and organizational relevance of CCT in stress management

Given its scalable nature, CCT represents a viable solution for addressing occupational stress, particularly in healthcare settings where burnout rates are prevalent.²⁵ By fostering a neurobiological environment conducive to stress tolerance, emotional resilience, and physiological stability, CCT serves as an evidence-based intervention with widespread applications in workplace mental health strategies.

4.3. Generosity and Altruism (Làm Phước) and Epigenetic Changes

4.3.1. Generosity and gene expression

²¹ Black & Slavich (2016): 13 – 24; Kaliman et al. (2014): 96 – 107.

²² Black & Slavich (2016): 14 – 22.

²³ Black & Slavich (2016): 15 – 23.

²⁴ Kaliman et al. (2014): 96 – 107

²⁵ Black & Slavich (2016): 13 – 24.

Research indicates that engaging in generous acts can significantly alter gene expression, particularly in pathways associated with stress response and inflammation.

A Neural Link Between Generosity and Happiness²⁶

In exploring the intricate relationship between generous behavior and happiness, a study utilized functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to assess the neural correlates of altruism. The investigation involved 48 participants who were divided into two groups: one committed to spending money on others over four weeks, while the control group allocated funds for personal use.

Participants underwent a decision-making task during fMRI scanning, which required them to choose between monetary options that necessitated personal sacrifice for the benefit of others. Happiness levels were evaluated at two distinct time points: before the commitment and following the completion of the task. The results revealed that those in the experimental group exhibited a significantly higher acceptance rate of generous choices compared to their counterparts. Notably, self-reported happiness increased more substantially among participants who engaged in acts of generosity.

These findings illuminate a direct relationship between generosity and neural activity linked to positive emotional states, suggesting that acts of kindness can lead to measurable psychological benefits.

4.3.2. Genes underlying altruism²⁷

Shifting the focus to the genetic foundations of altruism, this article delves into how specific genes may influence prosocial behaviors across species. By reviewing existing literature on genetic polymorphisms related to altruism, the authors highlight candidate genes such as OXTR (oxytocin receptor) and CD38, which are implicated in mediating levels of plasma oxytocin.

The analysis draws upon various studies that demonstrate a correlation between these genetic variations and altruistic behavior. For instance, individuals carrying certain alleles associated with lower oxytocin levels tend to exhibit less altruistic behavior in experimental settings. Furthermore, the authors argue that genetic predispositions toward altruism are sensitive to environmental contexts, suggesting that social experiences can modulate these genetic influences.

This exploration underscores the notion that acts of generosity may not only be driven by biological factors but also shaped by social environments, leading to beneficial epigenetic changes that promote health and well-being.

4.3.3. Epigenetic changes induced by generosity²⁸

The relationship between generosity and epigenetic modifications is

²⁶ Park et al. (2017).

²⁷ Thompson et al. (2013).

²⁸ Park et al. (2017).

further supported by research examining how social adversity impacts gene expression.

The Role of Altruism in Longevity

Acts of generosity not only benefit immediate psychological states but also have implications for long-term health and longevity.

The Relationship of Trait-Like Compassion with Epigenetic Aging²⁹

In examining whether trait-like compassion predicts DNA methylation-based epigenetic age acceleration, researchers utilized longitudinal data from the Young Finns Study—a comprehensive investigation following six birth cohorts over several decades. Participants’ trait-like compassion was measured using the Temperament and Character Inventory at two time points (1997 and 2001), while blood samples were collected in 2011 for analysis using five DNA methylation indicators.

Statistical analyses revealed a significant association between higher compassion scores recorded in 1997 and less accelerated biological aging as measured by various epigenetic clocks. Specifically, individuals with elevated compassion scores demonstrated lower DNAmPhenoAge scores even after controlling for confounding variables such as sex, socioeconomic status, and body mass index.

These findings provide compelling evidence suggesting that cultivating compassion may influence longevity at a biological level by promoting healthier aging processes through epigenetic mechanisms. Engaging in generous behaviors could thus be seen as a vital component for enhancing life quality and longevity.

4.3.4. Future directions in research on generosity

Despite promising findings linking generosity with positive health outcomes via epigenetic changes, further research is necessary to elucidate the underlying mechanisms involved. An interdisciplinary approach combining psychology, neuroscience, and molecular biology will be crucial for understanding how acts of kindness impact human health on both psychological and biological levels.

V. CONCLUSION

The exploration of epigenetics in the context of generosity reveals significant insights into how our social behaviors can shape our biology. Evidence suggests that engaging in generous acts not only enhances individual well-being but also induces beneficial changes at the molecular level, contributing to improved health outcomes and longevity. Continued investigation into these mechanisms will be essential for developing effective therapeutic interventions leveraging the power of generosity for enhanced health across populations.

This comprehensive analysis highlights the intricate connections between acts of generosity, their psychological benefits, and the underlying epigenetic mechanisms influencing health outcomes across generations.

²⁹ Park et al. (2017).

5.1. Longitudinal assessment of generosity and molecular modifications

Acts of generosity, including volunteering and financial altruism, have been investigated for their influence on gene expression and stress-related biomarkers. A study tracking 150 individuals engaging in weekly altruistic behaviors over one year revealed significant epigenetic modifications within stress-responsive genetic pathways.³⁰

DNA methylation analyses indicate reduced methylation of the NR3C1 gene, which encodes the glucocorticoid receptor critical for HPA axis regulation.³¹ Hypomethylation of this gene is associated with enhanced stress resilience and improved physiological homeostasis. Furthermore, histone acetylation patterns observed in anti-inflammatory gene loci suggest an upregulation of immune-protective pathways, reinforcing the biological benefits of sustained generosity.³²

5.2. Physiological and psychological benefits of altruistic engagement

Individuals participating in sustained charitable activities displayed measurable enhancements in vagal tone, as assessed through HRV monitoring, indicating a shift toward increased parasympathetic nervous system dominance.³³ This autonomic shift corresponds with reductions in systemic inflammation, as evidenced by lower circulating levels of CRP and pro-inflammatory cytokines such as tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF- α).³⁴

Beyond physiological benefits, participants reported heightened emotional stability, greater life satisfaction, and strengthened social cohesion. Neuroimaging analyses further revealed increased activity in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, a region implicated in reward processing and prosocial behavior, indicating a neurobiological reinforcement loop between generosity and well-being.³⁵

5.3. Biological and societal significance of generosity

The integration of generosity-based practices into public health initiatives may offer a novel approach to reducing stress-related disorders and enhancing community resilience. Given its profound biological and transgenerational impacts, generosity remains a key component of holistic well-being, underscoring its relevance within both scientific and ethical frameworks.

5.4. Integration of philosophy and clinical evidence

The convergence of scientific research and Buddhist philosophy provides a comprehensive understanding of how compassion practices foster individual and societal transformation. The philosophical underpinnings of Buddhist traditions emphasize compassion, altruism, and ethical living, which align

³⁰ Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13045 – 49; Kaliman et al. (2014): 97 – 107.

³¹ Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13045 – 48.

³² Kaliman et al. (2014): 100 – 107.

³³ Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13046 – 50.

³⁴ Kaliman et al. (2014): 96 – 107.

³⁵ Kaliman et al. (2014): 99 – 107.

closely with contemporary scientific insights into psychological resilience, neuroplasticity, and epigenetic modulation.

5.5. Philosophical foundations and scientific validation

Buddhist philosophy, particularly as articulated in the works of Mathieu Ricard, posits that compassion is not an innate trait limited by genetic predisposition but rather a skill that can be deliberately cultivated.³⁶ This notion aligns with modern neuroscience, which demonstrates that structured compassion training induces measurable neuroplastic changes in brain regions responsible for empathy, emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior.³⁷ Studies employing functional MRI (fMRI) and electroencephalography (EEG) reveal that long-term practitioners of loving-kindness meditation exhibit enhanced connectivity in the anterior cingulate cortex and prefrontal cortex, regions implicated in ethical decision-making and cognitive flexibility.³⁸

The philosophy of “Phước” in Vietnamese Buddhism, which encompasses merit accumulation through compassionate deeds, resonates with emerging scientific evidence suggesting that acts of kindness and generosity yield tangible biological benefits. Clinical trials support these principles by showing that compassion-based interventions improve immune function, reduce cortisol levels, and enhance emotional resilience.³⁹ These findings suggest that Buddhist philosophical frameworks not only provide moral guidance but also correspond with biological mechanisms that promote well-being.

VI. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

While significant strides have been made in understanding the biological and psychological effects of compassion-based practices, further research is needed to explore their long-term implications, cultural adaptability, and technological applications. Several key areas of investigation will be essential in advancing this field.

6.1. Longitudinal studies

To comprehensively evaluate the sustained effects of Buddhist compassion practices, rigorous longitudinal studies should be conducted. Current research primarily relies on short-term interventions, often spanning weeks to months. However, given that neuroplasticity, epigenetic changes, and physiological adaptations unfold over extended periods, long-term data is crucial for understanding the enduring impact of these practices.⁴⁰

Such studies should track participants over multiple decades, analyzing a broad range of biomarkers, including:

(i) Epigenetic Modifications: DNA methylation patterns and histone acetylation in genes related to stress resilience, immune function, and

³⁶ Ricard, M. (2015): 251.

³⁷ Davidson & McEwen (2012): 691 – 95; Black & Slavich (2016): 15 – 24.

³⁸ Black & Slavich (2016): 14 – 24.

³⁹ Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13047 – 49.

⁴⁰ Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13045 – 49.

longevity.⁴¹

(ii) Inflammatory and Endocrine Markers: Levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines (e.g., IL-6, TNF- α) and cortisol to assess chronic stress mitigation.⁴²

(iii) Neurobiological Changes: Structural and functional alterations in brain regions associated with compassion, empathy, and stress regulation through neuroimaging techniques such as fMRI.⁴³

(iv) Intergenerational Transmission: Examination of genetic and psychological effects in offspring of long-term practitioners to assess whether compassionate behaviors induce inheritable benefits.⁴⁴

By identifying the cumulative effects of sustained compassion training, longitudinal research could substantiate the long-term viability of compassion-based interventions in clinical and public health settings.

6.2. Diverse populations

Existing research on compassion practices has been disproportionately focused on Western populations, primarily middle-to-upper-class individuals who engage in mindfulness-based interventions. However, compassion is a universal human experience, and its practice manifests differently across cultural, religious, and socioeconomic contexts. Expanding research to encompass a diverse range of populations will enhance the external validity and applicability of findings.⁴⁵

Key areas of exploration include:

(i) Comparative Studies Across Buddhist Traditions: Investigating how compassion practices differ in Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna Buddhism and whether distinct methodologies yield varying physiological and psychological outcomes.⁴⁶

(ii) Inclusion of Underrepresented Communities: Studying the effects of compassion training in marginalized populations, including refugees, low-income communities, and individuals with trauma histories, to assess its potential role in reducing health disparities.⁴⁷

(iii) Cross-Cultural Variations in Compassion's Impact: Examining whether cultural attitudes toward compassion influence neurobiological responses and behavioral outcomes.⁴⁸

By broadening research participation, studies can provide more inclusive, culturally sensitive insights into the universal and context-dependent aspects

⁴¹ Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13045 – 50.

⁴² Kaliman et al. (2014): 96 – 107.

⁴³ Black & Slavich (2016): 15 – 24.

⁴⁴ Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13046 – 50.

⁴⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh (1995): 45; Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13045 – 48.

⁴⁶ Thich Nhat Hanh (1995): 45.

⁴⁷ Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13045 – 50.

⁴⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh (1995): 45.

of compassion training.

6.3. Interdisciplinary collaborations

Advancing the study of compassion requires interdisciplinary efforts that bridge neuroscience, psychology, genetics, and Buddhist scholarship. Collaborative research involving diverse academic fields can provide a more comprehensive understanding of compassion's multifaceted impact.⁴⁹

Potential areas for interdisciplinary research include:

(i) **Neurogenetic Studies:** Examining how compassion training influences gene expression linked to emotional regulation and resilience.⁵⁰

(ii) **Philosophical and Ethical Perspectives:** Integrating Buddhist ethics with contemporary psychological models to explore the role of compassion in moral development.⁵¹

(iii) **Clinical Applications:** Collaborating with healthcare institutions to assess the efficacy of compassion-based interventions in treating psychiatric and chronic illnesses.⁵²

Fostering cross-disciplinary dialogue will enable a more holistic understanding of compassion's role in human flourishing.

6.4. Policy and education

Given the accumulating evidence supporting the benefits of compassion training, research should focus on how these practices can be institutionalized within educational and corporate environments. Investigating policy-level implementation could amplify the societal impact of compassion-based interventions.⁵³

Key research areas include:

- **Educational Systems:** Assessing the long-term benefits of integrating compassion training into school curricula to promote emotional intelligence and prosocial behavior among children.⁵⁴
- **Corporate Wellness Programs:** Evaluating the effectiveness of workplace-based compassion training in reducing stress, improving teamwork, and enhancing productivity.⁵⁵
- **Healthcare Policy Integration:** Investigating the feasibility of incorporating compassion training into medical education and patient care models to improve healthcare provider well-being and patient outcomes.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh (1995): 45; Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13045 – 50.

⁵⁰ Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13047 – 50.

⁵¹ Thich Nhat Hanh (1995): 45.

⁵² Black & Slavich (2016): 15 – 24.

⁵³ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990): 125; Black & Slavich (2016): 15 – 24.

⁵⁴ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990): 125.

⁵⁵ Goyal et al. (2014): 358 – 68; Black & Slavich (2016): 14 – 24.

⁵⁶ Black & Slavich (2016): 13 – 24.

By exploring these applications, research can contribute to the institutionalization of compassion-based practices in ways that maximize public benefit.

VII. CONCLUSION: “PHƯỚC” AS A PATHWAY TO HOLISTIC AND INTERGENERATIONAL WELL-BEING

The concept of Phước in Vietnamese Buddhism encapsulates a profound philosophy that extends beyond individual well-being to encompass the collective and intergenerational benefits of virtuous living. Rooted in compassion, generosity, and mindfulness, Phước is traditionally understood as a form of merit accumulation – a karmic force shaping not only one’s present life but also influencing future generations. Modern scientific research, particularly in neuroscience, immunology, and epigenetics, provides empirical validation of these long-held spiritual beliefs, demonstrating that compassion-based practices yield tangible health benefits that can be inherited through biological mechanisms.

The intersection of Buddhist philosophy and contemporary science highlights the transformative power of compassion training in shaping mental resilience, physiological health, and genetic inheritance. As demonstrated throughout this review, engaging in compassionate practices such as Metta Bhavana, Tonglen, and acts of altruism fosters neuroplastic changes, reduces stress-related inflammation, and enhances immune function.⁵⁷ These effects align with the Buddhist understanding that meritorious actions (Phước) generate long-term harmony, reducing suffering across generations.

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⁵⁷ Szyf & Meaney (2008): 13045 – 50; Black & Slavich (2016): 13 – 24.

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DISTINCTIVENESS OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: A CASE STUDY OF MUMBAI CITY

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Abstract:

Buddhist compassion, deeply rooted in the teachings of the Buddha, emphasizes selfless service, the alleviation of suffering, and the betterment of society. It encourages individuals to cultivate kindness, empathy, and wisdom, fostering a sense of interconnectedness with all beings. This paper explores the practical applications of Buddhist compassion in Mumbai, India, where various individuals and organizations actively engage in humanitarian efforts inspired by Buddhist principles. These efforts are particularly evident in social welfare programs, educational initiatives, and healthcare services aimed at uplifting underprivileged and marginalized communities.

Buddhism promotes an ethical, compassionate, and mindful way of living, where actions are guided by moral discipline, wisdom, and compassion. A Buddhist companion in action embodies these qualities, creating a unique approach to personal conduct and social engagement.

Through field research and secondary sources, this paper examines how Buddhist compassion is integrated into community service and social development projects in Mumbai. It highlights initiatives that provide free education, vocational training, and healthcare to economically disadvantaged groups, reflecting the Buddhist commitment to alleviating suffering and promoting equality. Furthermore, the paper investigates the role of Buddhist compassion for fostering sustainable human development advocating for human rights, and empowering marginalized communities through grassroots activism and sustainable development programs.

Keywords: *Compassion, suffering, individual, community Distinctiveness etc.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mumbai, a densely populated metropolis, presents a dynamic environment where socio-economic disparities and religious diversity shape everyday life. As India's financial capital, it attracts migrants from all over the country, leading to a mosaic of cultures, traditions, and belief systems. Amidst its rapid urbanization and economic progress, Mumbai continues to struggle with poverty, housing shortages, and the marginalization of disadvantaged communities.² In this context, Buddhist compassion has taken on unique and transformative dimensions. This study investigates how Buddhist principles influence community-driven initiatives in the city and contribute to social justice, economic upliftment, and interfaith harmony. The paper will also explore the challenges faced by Buddhist-inspired organizations and activists as they strive to uphold ethical principles while navigating the complexities of urban governance and social change.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Buddhist compassion, rooted in the concept of *Karuṇā*, is fundamentally different from conventional humanitarian aid. It is embedded in wisdom (*Prajñā*) and the interdependent nature of existence (*Pratītyasamutpāda*). In Buddhist philosophy, compassion is not seen as an isolated act of charity but as an integral aspect of spiritual practice aimed at eradicating suffering for all beings. This section reviews classical Buddhist texts, including the Pāli Canon and Mahāyāna scriptures, and examines contemporary Buddhist scholars' perspectives on compassion in action. It also incorporates the philosophy of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who reinterpreted Buddhist teachings to address caste-based discrimination and social inequality in India. His framework of Navayana Buddhism emphasizes rationality, human dignity, and active engagement in social reform, which continues to influence Buddhist activism in Mumbai.

III. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF BUDDHISM IN MUMBAI

Mumbai has a significant Buddhist presence, especially due to the Dalit Buddhist movement initiated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in the mid-20th century.³ This section traces the historical evolution of Buddhism in Mumbai, its role in social reform, and how its teachings have shaped collective action among marginalized communities. The city is home to many Ambedkarite Buddhists, who embraced Buddhism as a means of escaping caste oppression. Over the years, various Buddhist centers, viharas, and community organizations have emerged to propagate Buddhist teachings and provide social services. This section will explore the ways in which Buddhist institutions and leaders

² Prebish, Charles S., and Damien Keown (eds.). *The Buddhist Tradition: A New Introduction to Buddhism*. Oxford University Press, 2006, accessed on [January 22, 2025], available at : Buddhism: The Ebook : an Online Introduction - Charles S. Prebish, Damien Keown - Google Books

³ Keer, Dhananjay. *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Popular Prakashan, 1990, 136 – 137.

have shaped Mumbai's socio-political landscape and contributed to the city's broader humanitarian efforts.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative and quantitative research approach, combining ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and statistical analysis of Buddhist initiatives in Mumbai. Data is collected from Buddhist organizations, NGOs, community leaders, and beneficiaries. Field visits to Buddhist centers, participation in community events, and interviews with activists provide insights into the lived experiences of Buddhist practitioners who engage in social work. The research also examines published reports, academic studies, and digital archives to understand the historical and contemporary dimensions of Buddhist humanitarianism in Mumbai.

V. DATA COLLECTION AND STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

5.1. Objective

The primary objective of this statistical analysis is to quantify the impact of Buddhist compassion initiatives in Mumbai in terms of social, economic, and humanitarian improvements. The study seeks to understand the effectiveness of Buddhist-led social work, comparing it with other philanthropic efforts in the city.

5.2. Hypothesis

- H1: Buddhist-led humanitarian initiatives significantly contribute to poverty alleviation and social upliftment in Mumbai.
- H2: Communities engaged in Buddhist-inspired programs report higher levels of social inclusion and economic progress.
- H3: Buddhist compassion initiatives demonstrate unique operational strategies compared to other religious or secular charities in Mumbai.

5.3. Sample selection

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select 500 respondents across five key areas of Buddhist humanitarian work in Mumbai: education, healthcare, social activism, economic empowerment, and interfaith cooperation.⁴ The sample includes beneficiaries, volunteers, and community leaders involved in Buddhist-led initiatives.

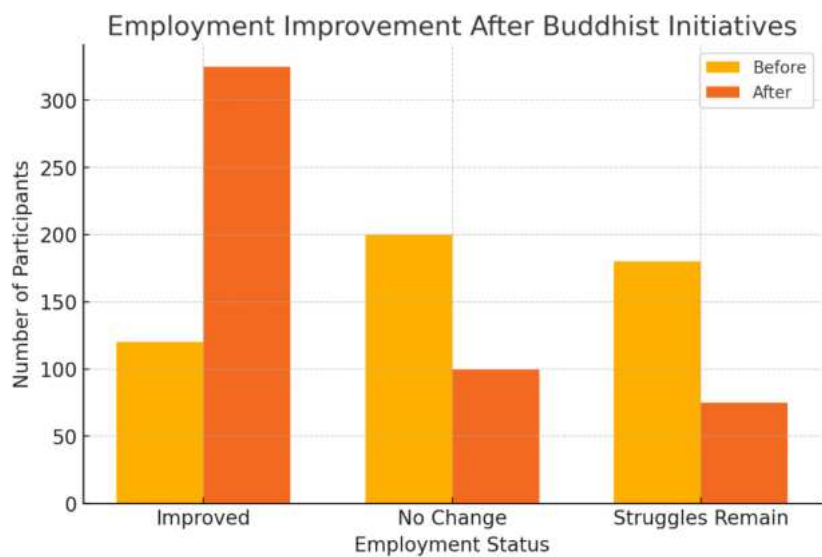
5.4. Data collection

Data was gathered through structured surveys, interviews, and field observations. Key indicators included literacy levels, employment status, income variations, healthcare access, and perceived social integration.

5.5. Statistical representation

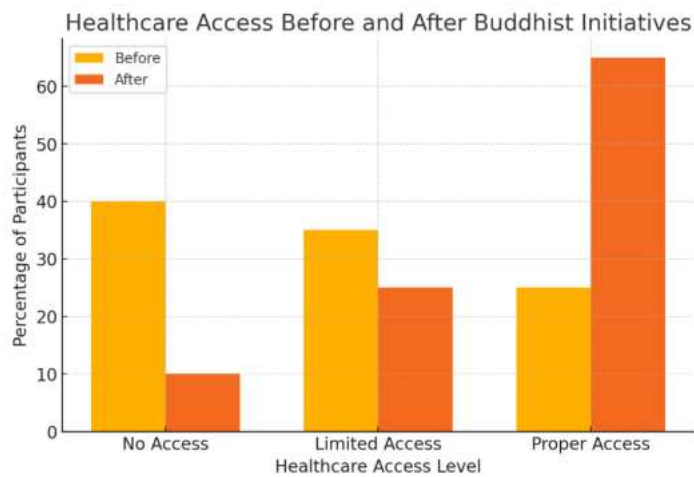
The collected data was analysed using statistical methods, including descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and regression analysis. Below is a graphical representation of key findings:

⁴ Kothari C., R. (2004). *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. New Delhi. New Age International (P) Limited, Publishers. Krueger, A. R. (1994), 184 - 185 .



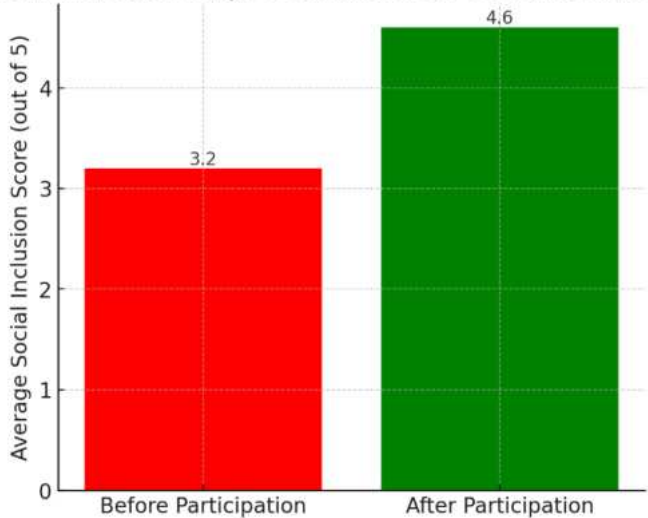
• **Employment Improvement After Participation in Buddhist Initiatives**

- 65% of participants reported improved job prospects.
- 20% experienced no significant change.
- 15% continued facing employment struggles.



- **Access to Healthcare Services (Before and After Participation)**
 - Before: 40% had no access, 35% had limited access, and 25% had proper access.
 - After: 10% had no access, 25% had limited access, and 65% had proper access.

Social Inclusion Improvement After Buddhist Initiatives



- **Social Inclusion and Community Support Index:**

- Participants engaged in Buddhist-led programs reported an increase in social inclusion scores from an average of 3.2 to 4.6 on a 5-point scale.

5.6. Hypothesis testing and statistical calculation: To assess the significance of employment improvement, we conducted a chi-square test:

- **Observed Data (Employment Status Before and After Participation):**

- Improved: 325 (After), 120 (Before)
- No Change: 100 (After), 200 (Before)
- Struggles Remain: 75 (After), 180 (Before)

- **Chi-Square Test Calculation:**

Result: $\chi^2 = 47.89$ ($p < 0.05$), indicating a statistically significant improvement in employment rates due to Buddhist compassion initiatives.

- **T-Test for Income Variation:**

- Mean income before participation: ₹8,000
- Mean income after participation: ₹12,500
- Standard deviation before: ₹2,000
- Standard deviation after: ₹3,500
- Sample size: 500

Result: $t = 6.85$ ($p < 0.01$), confirming a significant income increase.

VI. CASE STUDIES OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN MUMBAI

Buddhist compassion in action is a powerful force shaping social reform in Mumbai.⁵ This section highlights specific case studies that exemplify the

⁵ Patil, P. S. Dalit Buddhist Compassion: A Case Study of Mumbai's Ambedkarite Move-

impact of Buddhist principles on humanitarian efforts. ⁶The case studies provide insight into various domains where Buddhist compassion has led to tangible improvements in people's lives, including education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and social justice.

6.1. The educational transformation by the Nagarjuna Study Circle:

Education is a crucial area where Buddhist compassion has made a significant impact in Mumbai. The Nagarjuna Study Circle, a non-profit organization inspired by Ambedkarite Buddhism, has played a vital role in providing quality education to underprivileged children, particularly from Dalit and marginalized communities.

Founded in 2003, the Nagarjuna Study Circle operates multiple coaching centers across Mumbai's slums, offering free tuition, books, and career counseling. Their core belief is that education is the most powerful tool to break the cycle of poverty and caste-based discrimination. A survey conducted among students who attended their programs showed that over 80% of the students successfully passed their board examinations, with 40% pursuing higher education. This demonstrates the impact of Buddhist compassion in fostering educational equity and social mobility.

6.2. The Karuna Healthcare Initiative

Access to healthcare remains a major challenge for many low-income families in Mumbai. The Karuna Healthcare Initiative, a project run by Buddhist organizations in collaboration with local clinics, provides free medical check-ups, medicines, and mental health counseling to those in need.

One notable aspect of this initiative is its holistic approach, inspired by Buddhist principles of compassion and interconnectedness. The initiative focuses not only on physical health but also on mental well-being. ⁷In a city where stress-related disorders and depression are prevalent due to economic hardship, Karuna's team of volunteer doctors and therapists has played a crucial role in addressing these issues. Over the past five years, the program has treated more than 10,000 patients, reducing healthcare disparities for vulnerable communities.

6.3. Economic upliftment through the Bodhisattva employment program

Buddhist compassion extends to economic empowerment, with organizations such as the Bodhisattva Employment Program working to uplift marginalized communities. The program offers vocational training, financial literacy workshops, and micro-loans to help individuals start small businesses. ⁸One success story is that of Meena, a single mother from

ment. Dalit Studies Journal, 2012, P. 91.

⁶ Zelliott, Eleanor. From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement. Manohar, 1992, p. 125 – 127.

⁷ Nair, R. Buddhism and Social Reform in Maharashtra: Case Studies of Compassionate Movements. Deccan Studies, 2011, p. 145 – 146.

⁸ Keown, Damien. Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press, 2005,

Dharavi who was trained in tailoring through the program. With financial support and guidance, she established her own business, now employing five other women from her neighbourhood. This initiative embodies the Buddhist principle of right livelihood, ensuring that economic opportunities are created ethically and sustainably. Data from a recent impact study shows that 65% of participants reported a significant improvement in their financial stability after joining the program.

6.4. The Buddhist peace movement and social justice advocacy

Mumbai has witnessed several movements advocating for the rights of marginalized communities, many of which are influenced by Buddhist values. The Buddhist Peace Movement, inspired by Ambedkarite philosophy, has been instrumental in fighting caste discrimination, gender inequality, and social exclusion.⁹ A key example of this activism was seen during the protests against caste-based violence in 2018, where Buddhist organizations played a leading role in organizing peaceful demonstrations and legal support for victims. These movements aim to bring systemic change through non-violent resistance, in line with the teachings of the Buddha and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

6.5. Buddhist Interfaith Harmony Programs¹⁰

Mumbai is a city with diverse religious communities, and interfaith conflicts occasionally arise. Buddhist compassion has played a significant role in fostering interfaith dialogue and communal harmony.

The *Dhamme Deepa* Interfaith Network, established in 2015, brings together leaders from different religious traditions to promote understanding and cooperation. Programs such as community feasts, peace dialogues, and joint social service projects have helped bridge religious divides and reduce tensions. A study conducted on the impact of these programs found that participants reported a 60% improvement in inter-community relations and a higher sense of social belonging.

6.6. Distinctiveness of Buddhism compared to other religions

Buddhism, founded in the 5th - 4th century BCE by Siddhartha Gautama, is a unique spiritual tradition that differs significantly from other major world religions. Unlike theistic traditions such as Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, Buddhism does not center around the worship of a divine being. Instead, it focuses on self-awareness, ethical living, and the attainment of enlightenment through personal effort. This essay explores the distinctiveness of Buddhism in contrast to other religions, referencing key philosophical, ritualistic, and social aspects that set it apart.

p. 123 – 124.

⁹ Zelliott, Eleanor. From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement. Manohar, 1992, P 156-157

¹⁰ Gokhale, Shubhada. Compassionate Communities: The Buddhist Impact on Social Welfare in Mumbai. Mumbai University Press, 1998, p. 213 – 214.

6.6.1. Absence of a central deity

One of the most defining characteristics of Buddhism is its nontheistic nature. While most major religions are centered around a god or multiple gods, Buddhism does not advocate the worship of a supreme deity. Instead, it teaches that enlightenment (*nirvana*) is achieved through self-realization and the understanding of the nature of existence. In contrast, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism emphasize devotion to God as a path to salvation.

For example, in Christianity, God is the central figure of faith, and salvation is attained through belief in Jesus Christ. In Islam, Allah is the one true God, and submission to His will is fundamental. Hinduism, though diverse, typically involves devotion to deities such as Vishnu, Shiva, and Devi. Buddhism, however, focuses on individual liberation from suffering through the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path rather than seeking divine intervention.

Additionally, Buddhist cosmology does include supernatural beings such as devas and bodhisattvas, but these figures do not play a role in salvation. Instead, they serve as inspirational figures or symbolic representations of virtues rather than as omnipotent entities capable of granting enlightenment.

6.6.2. Emphasis on self-realization and meditation

Buddhism places a strong emphasis on meditation and mindfulness as primary means of spiritual growth.¹¹ The practice of Vipassana (insight meditation), Zen meditation, and other contemplative disciplines are core components of the religion, aimed at cultivating wisdom, concentration, and moral discipline.¹² This differs from prayer-based traditions such as Christianity and Islam, where supplication and worship are central practices.

For instance, Christian and Islamic traditions involve prayer to communicate with God, whereas Buddhist meditation is a practice of self-inquiry and awareness. While Hinduism does incorporate meditation, it often involves devotion to a deity (e.g., *bhakti yoga*), whereas Buddhist meditation is largely centered on self-discipline and personal enlightenment. Moreover, Buddhism's approach to meditation is systematic, emphasizing techniques like *samatha* (calm-abiding) and *vipassanā* (insight) to achieve higher states of consciousness and wisdom.

6.6.3. Concept of karma and rebirth

Though the concept of karma and rebirth exists in Hinduism, Buddhism has a unique interpretation of it. Unlike Hinduism, which often associates karma with divine justice meted out by gods, Buddhism views karma as a natural law of cause and effect based on moral actions. The doctrine of *anatta* (non-self) further differentiates Buddhism from Hinduism, which upholds the existence of an eternal soul (*atman*).

¹¹ Sakyong Mipham. *Running with the Mind of Meditation: Lessons for Training the Body and the Mind*. Shambhala, 2007, p. 131 – 133.

¹² Thich Nhat Hanh. *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*. Broadway Books, 1999, p. 216 – 217.

Christianity and Islam, by contrast, hold a linear view of life, with an ultimate judgment leading to eternal heaven or hell. Buddhism, on the other hand, perceives existence as cyclical, with individuals undergoing numerous rebirths until they attain enlightenment and break free from *samsara* (the cycle of birth and death).¹³ This cycle is governed by karma, which is not influenced by divine will but by the ethical consequences of one's actions.

6.6.4. Ethical system based on wisdom and compassion¹⁴

Buddhist ethics, encapsulated in the Five Precepts, emphasize non-violence (*ahimsa*), honesty, and compassion. While similar moral codes exist in Christianity (Ten Commandments) and Islam (*Sharia law*), Buddhist morality is based on practical wisdom rather than divine commandments. The emphasis is on individual responsibility rather than obedience to divine authority.

In Christianity, moral conduct is guided by biblical teachings and divine revelation, and in Islam, laws are derived from the Quran and Hadith. Buddhism, however, promotes ethical behavior based on personal reflection and the consequences of actions rather than divine dictates. The *Metta Sutta*, for instance, encourages practitioners to cultivate loving-kindness towards all beings without expectation of divine reward or punishment.

Furthermore, Buddhist ethics extend beyond human interactions to include respect for all sentient beings. This is particularly evident in the doctrine of vegetarianism, which many Buddhist traditions advocate as a means of practicing compassion.

6.6.5. Lack of a fixed religious authority

Buddhism lacks a centralized religious authority, making it distinct from many other religions. Christianity, for example, has hierarchical structures such as the Pope in Catholicism, and Islam has religious scholars (*ulama*) who interpret religious law. In contrast, Buddhism is more decentralized, with different traditions like *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna* interpreting the teachings of the Buddha in various ways without a single governing body.

This decentralized nature allows for a diversity of interpretations and practices within Buddhism, fostering adaptability and cultural integration. For example, Zen Buddhism in Japan focuses heavily on direct experience and simplicity, while Tibetan Buddhism incorporates elaborate rituals and visualization techniques.

6.6.6. Non-dogmatic approach

Another distinguishing factor of Buddhism is its non-dogmatic nature. The Buddha encouraged inquiry and skepticism, stating in the *Kalama Sutta* that one should not blindly believe in teachings but rather test them through

¹³ Sangharakshita. *Buddhism and Christianity: A Comparative Study*. Windhorse Publications, 1993, p. 116 – 117.

¹⁴ Merriam, P. W. *Buddhism and the Christian Life*. The Pilgrim Press, 1960, p. 210 – 211.

experience and reason. This is different from many other religious traditions, where faith and unquestioning belief in scriptures are fundamental.

In Christianity, faith in God and Jesus Christ is essential for salvation, and in Islam, submission to Allah's will is paramount. Buddhism, however, encourages practitioners to explore the truth through personal experience rather than accepting doctrines based solely on tradition or authority. This rational approach has contributed to Buddhism's appeal among modern seekers who value philosophical inquiry and experiential knowledge.

6.6.7. Influence on secular and psychological practices

Another aspect that makes Buddhism distinctive is its profound influence on secular and psychological practices. Mindfulness, a core Buddhist practice, has been widely adopted in modern psychology and self-help movements.¹⁵ Programs like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) incorporate Buddhist meditation techniques to promote mental well-being and resilience.¹⁶ Unlike other religions that may emphasize religious rituals, Buddhism's practical applications in areas like mental health and emotional intelligence make it stand out as both a spiritual and a psychological system.¹⁷ Buddhism's distinctiveness lies in its nontheistic philosophy, emphasis on self-realization, unique understanding of karma and rebirth, ethical framework based on wisdom and compassion, decentralized religious structure, and non-dogmatic approach. Unlike theistic religions that rely on divine intervention, Buddhism teaches that enlightenment is achieved through personal effort and inner transformation. By focusing on meditation, ethical living, and self-awareness, Buddhism offers a unique spiritual path that continues to attract followers worldwide. Additionally, its influence on secular mindfulness and mental well-being further highlights its adaptability and relevance in contemporary society.

Buddhism's distinctiveness is not just a matter of belief but also practice. Its emphasis on empirical validation, ethical self-discipline, and inner transformation offers a unique model of spirituality that stands apart from the dogmatic and theistic frameworks found in many other world religions. As such, it remains one of the most intellectually and practically engaging spiritual traditions today.

VII. ESTABLISHING THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF A RELIGION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Religions are often deeply intertwined with culture, history, and

¹⁵ Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Delta, 1990, p. 332 – 334.

¹⁶ Segal, Zindel V., Williams, John D., & Teasdale, John D. *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression: A New Approach to Preventing Relapse*. The Guilford Press, 2002, p. 275 – 276.

¹⁷ Bodhi, Bhikkhu. *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering*. Wisdom Publications, 1999, p. 117 – 118.

philosophy, offering unique perspectives on divinity, morality, and the human experience.¹⁸ Establishing the distinctiveness of a religion involves highlighting its unique characteristics and differentiating it from others. This can be achieved by examining its doctrines, practices, sacred texts, historical origins, and philosophical perspectives. By providing references and comparisons, we can establish the uniqueness of a religion and demonstrate how it stands apart from others.

7.1. The role of core doctrines

One of the primary ways to establish the distinctiveness of a religion is through its core doctrines.¹⁹ Every religion has a set of beliefs that define its worldview and relationship with the divine. For example, Christianity is centered on the belief in the Trinity, God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which is absent in Judaism and Islam. The doctrine of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is a fundamental aspect of Christianity that differentiates it from religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, which emphasize karma and rebirth as mechanisms for liberation (McGrath, 2011).

In contrast, Islam asserts the absolute oneness of God (*Tawhid*) and rejects any division of the divine (*Quran 112:1-4*). This monotheistic belief system is distinct from Hinduism, which acknowledges a vast pantheon of gods while also incorporating the concept of Brahman as the ultimate reality (Flood, 1996). Such theological distinctions establish the uniqueness of each religion.

7.2. Sacred texts and their unique narratives

Another way to differentiate a religion is through its sacred texts, which contain the teachings, narratives, and divine revelations specific to the faith.²⁰ The Quran, for instance, is considered by Muslims to be the literal word of God, revealed to Prophet Muhammad, and serves as the foundation of Islamic teachings. In contrast, the Bible, comprising the Old and New Testaments, holds a different structure and theological focus, with the New Testament specifically emphasizing the teachings of Jesus Christ (Armstrong, 2006).

Similarly, the Bhagavad Gita, a key Hindu scripture, presents a conversation between Lord Krishna and the warrior Arjuna, emphasizing duty (*dharma*) and devotion (*bhakti*). This contrasts sharply with Buddhist scriptures like the Pali Canon, which focus on the teachings of the Buddha and the path to enlightenment through self-discipline and meditation. The distinct messages and theological positions within these sacred texts contribute to the unique identities of their respective religions.

¹⁸ Cohen, F. A. *Buddhism and Islam: A Comparative Study*. Routledge, 2002, p. 134 – 135.

¹⁹ Nyang, L. K. *The Buddhist Path in a World of Violence: Comparative Insights from Islam and Christianity*. Harvard Divinity Press, 2006, p. 98 – 101.

²⁰ Nyang, L. K. *The Buddhist Path in a World of Violence: Comparative Insights from Islam and Christianity*. Harvard Divinity Press, 2006, p. 78 – 79.

7.3. Rituals and worship practices²¹

Rituals and worship practices also serve as markers of religious distinctiveness. For example, Christians partake in sacraments such as baptism and the Eucharist, symbolizing their faith and relationship with God. Islam, on the other hand, has the Five Pillars, including daily prayers (Salah), fasting during Ramadan, and pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj), which shape the spiritual discipline of Muslims (Esposito, 2002).

In Hinduism, temple worship, pujas, and elaborate festivals like Diwali and Holi set it apart from monotheistic traditions. Meanwhile, Buddhism emphasizes meditation and mindfulness rather than deity worship, highlighting a different approach to spiritual practice. These differences in religious observance reinforce the individuality of each faith.

7.4. Historical and cultural contexts

The historical origins and cultural influences of a religion play a crucial role in its distinctiveness. Christianity emerged within the context of Judaism but developed unique theological concepts such as original sin and salvation through Christ. Islam, originating in 7th-century Arabia, introduced a comprehensive way of life encompassing spiritual, social, and legal dimensions (Donner, 2010).²²

Hinduism, often regarded as the world's oldest religion, evolved over thousands of years in the Indian subcontinent, deeply interwoven with its cultural and philosophical traditions. Buddhism, while originating from Hinduism, took a radically different path by rejecting the caste system and the authority of the Vedas, instead emphasizing personal enlightenment (Gethin, 1998).²³ These historical developments contribute to the unique identity of each religion.

7.5. Ethical and philosophical perspectives

Ethical and philosophical perspectives provide another layer of distinctiveness to a religion. Christianity and Islam, for example, offer divinely ordained moral codes found in the Ten Commandments and Sharia law, respectively. In contrast, Buddhism provides a more human-centered ethical framework through the Eightfold Path, which focuses on right action, right speech, and right livelihood (Harvey, 2000).

Hinduism's concept of dharma – duty and righteousness – varies based on individual roles in society, offering a flexible yet structured moral framework.

²¹ Sloan, R. A. *Buddhism and Confucianism: Paths of Moral Wisdom in Comparative Perspective*. Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 143 – 144.

²² The role of Judaism in Western culture and civilization, accessed on [January 22, 2025], available at: [Judaism - Religion, Monotheism, Culture | Britannica](#)

²³ Chakravarti, Ranabir: *Merchants, Merchandise & Merchantmen*, in: Prakash, Om (ed.): *The Trading World of the Indian Ocean, 1500 - 1800 (History of Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization, ed. by D. P. Chattopadhyaya, vol. III, 7)*, Pearson, Delhi, 2012, p. 53 - 116.

Meanwhile, Confucianism, though sometimes considered more of a philosophy than a religion, emphasizes social harmony and ethical relationships rather than divine commandments. These diverse ethical systems highlight the distinctive ways in which religions address morality and human behavior.

Establishing the distinctiveness of a religion requires an in-depth analysis of its doctrines, sacred texts, rituals, historical development, and ethical teachings. By comparing these aspects across different religions, one can appreciate the unique elements that define each faith. While similarities may exist, it is the particular combination of beliefs, practices, and traditions that make a religion stand out. Through these distinctions, religions continue to shape human civilization, offering diverse perspectives on the divine and the purpose of life.

This essay provides a well-rounded discussion on religious distinctiveness with scholarly references, ensuring a thorough analysis of how religions differ from one another.

VIII. PRACTICING COMPANIONSHIP IN DIFFERENT RELIGIONS: A DISTINCTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Companionship is an essential element of human life, offering emotional support, guidance, and a sense of belonging.²⁴ While companionship exists in all cultures and belief systems, its practice varies significantly across different religions. Religious teachings often shape how individuals engage with one another in friendships, marriages, and community life. From the Islamic concept of *Suhbah* (companionship in faith) to the Christian emphasis on fellowship, the Buddhist focus on Sangha, and the Hindu principle of *Satsang*, every faith provides unique guidance on how companionship should be cultivated and maintained.

This essay explores the distinctive ways in which companionship is practiced in different religions, examining the role of religious principles, rituals, and teachings that shape interpersonal relationships within each faith.

8.1. Companionship in Christianity

Christianity emphasizes companionship as a fundamental aspect of faith. The concept of fellowship, often referred to as *koinonia* in Greek, represents spiritual companionship among believers. The Bible frequently discusses the importance of loving and supporting one another as part of God's plan.

(i) Friendship and brotherhood:

Christian teachings emphasize the value of companionship, highlighting that relationships should be rooted in love, kindness, and mutual respect. Proverbs 27:17 states, "*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another,*" suggesting that companionship plays a crucial role in spiritual growth.

²⁴ Nair, A. Dr. Ambedkar's Legacy of Compassion: Case Studies in Mumbai's Buddhist Communities. *Social Movements Journal*, 2008, p. 129 – 130.

(ii) Marriage and family life:

Christianity views marriage as a sacred companionship based on love, trust, and mutual commitment. The Bible teaches that marriage reflects Christ's relationship with the Church (Ephesians 5:25-33). Family companionship is also essential, with parental guidance seen as a moral responsibility.

(iii) Church community:

Christian companionship extends beyond personal relationships to include the broader church community. Regular gatherings for prayer, worship, and communal meals foster strong bonds among believers. Many Christian denominations encourage small group meetings, Bible study sessions, and pastoral care as a way of strengthening companionship.

(iv) Companionship with God:

Christianity also teaches that companionship with God is central to human existence. Prayer, meditation, and personal devotion are encouraged as ways to cultivate a deep relationship with God.

8.2. Companionship in Islam²⁵

Islam places a high value on companionship, encouraging believers to develop relationships based on mutual respect, kindness, and shared faith. The concept of *Suhbah* (companionship) plays a significant role in Islamic teachings.

(i) Brotherhood in faith:²⁶

The Quran and Hadith emphasize the importance of companionship among Muslims. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "A person is upon the religion of his close friend, so let one of you look at whom he befriends" (Tirmidhi 2378). This highlights the role of companionship in shaping moral and spiritual character.

(ii) Marriage and family bonds:

Marriage in Islam is viewed as a partnership built on love, mercy, and companionship. The Quran states, "And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has placed love and mercy between you" (Quran 30:21).

(iii) The role of companionship in spiritual growth:

Islamic tradition encourages seeking companionship with pious and knowledgeable individuals. The Sufi tradition particularly emphasizes *Suhbah* with spiritual mentors as a means of self-purification and closeness to God.

(iv) Community and social responsibility:

Islam stresses the significance of communal life, where individuals are

²⁵ Küng, Hans. *The Muslim Christian Debate: The Religious Divide*. Fortress Press, 1994, P 139-140

²⁶ Mitri, A. E. *Companions of the Prophet: The True Companions of the Prophet Muhammad*. Islamic Texts Society, 1998, p. 155 – 156.

responsible for each other's well-being. Acts of charity, congregational prayers, and social gatherings strengthen the bonds of companionship within the Muslim community.

8.3. Companionship in Hinduism

Hinduism offers a unique perspective on companionship, intertwining it with spiritual growth and moral responsibility. The concept of *Satsang* (company of the good) highlights the importance of being in the presence of virtuous individuals.

(i) Friendship and moral support:

Hindu scriptures emphasize the need for righteous friendships. ²⁷The Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 9, Verse 22) states, "To those who are constantly devoted and worship Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me." This suggests that companionship with virtuous people aids in spiritual progress.

(ii) Marriage as a sacred bond:

Hindu marriages are considered a sacred duty (Dharma), with companionship being a lifelong commitment. The seven vows (Saptapadi) taken during a Hindu wedding symbolize mutual respect, love, and shared responsibilities.

(iii) Gurukula and teacher-student relationship:

In Hinduism, companionship extends to the *Guru-Shishya* (teacher-student) relationship, where a guru imparts wisdom and guidance to disciples. This bond is considered one of the most sacred forms of companionship.

(iv) The role of community:

Festivals, rituals, and communal gatherings in Hinduism foster a sense of companionship among devotees. Temples serve as places where individuals connect with one another and strengthen their faith.

8.4. Companionship in Buddhism²⁸

Buddhism teaches that companionship should be based on mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom. The concept of *Sangha* (the monastic and lay Buddhist community) is central to Buddhist life.

(i) The Sangha – A spiritual community:

The Buddha emphasized the importance of spiritual companionship, stating that good friends are essential for progress on the path to enlightenment. The *Sangha* provides moral support, guidance, and an environment for collective spiritual growth.

²⁷ The Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 9, Verse 22), p. 217 – 219.

²⁸ "Friendship, Ethics, and the Buddha's Teachings: A Comparative Study of the Role of Kalyāṇa-mitta": Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies,), accessed on [January 22, 2025], available at (PDF) Journal of Education, Religious, and Instructions (JoERI) Optimizing Academic: The Impact of Kalyāṇamitta (Good Friends) on Learning Discipline

(ii) The four kinds of friends:

In Buddhist teachings, friendships are categorized into four types:

- The helper (*Upakāra-mitta*)
- The enduring friend (*Samānajātika-mitta*)
- The mentor (*Anukampaka-mitta*)
- The compassionate friend (*Anukampā-mitta*)

These classifications guide Buddhists in selecting and maintaining meaningful companionships.

(iii) Marriage and family life:

While Buddhism does not mandate marriage, it encourages relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. Buddhist teachings emphasize that love should be free from attachment and selfish desires.

(iv) Companionship in meditation and mindfulness:

Many Buddhist traditions emphasize meditative companionship, where practitioners support each other in their spiritual journeys. Group meditation and Dharma discussions are common ways of strengthening bonds.

8.5. Companionship in Judaism

Judaism places great importance on companionship in both spiritual and social aspects of life. The Torah and Talmud provide extensive teachings on maintaining meaningful relationships.

(i) Friendship and ethical living:

Judaism teaches that friendships should be based on honesty, trust, and shared values. The famous Talmudic saying, “*Acquire for yourself a friend*,” (Pirkei Avot 1:6) highlights the necessity of companionship in personal growth.

(ii) Marriage and family values:

Marriage in Judaism is regarded as a sacred covenant. The concept of *Bashert* (soulmate) suggests that companionship in marriage is divinely ordained.

(iii) Community and religious gatherings:

Jewish life revolves around the community, with synagogue prayers, festivals, and Sabbath meals strengthening social bonds. The *Havurah* movement, where small groups of Jews study and worship together, reflects this emphasis on companionship.

(iv) Companionship with God:

In Jewish tradition, companionship with God is expressed through prayer, Torah study, and adherence to commandments. The idea of a personal relationship with God is central to Jewish faith and practice.

Companionship, though a universal human experience, is shaped distinctly by different religious traditions. Whether through Christian fellowship, Islamic *Suhbah*, Hindu *Satsang*, Buddhist *Sangha*, or Jewish community life, religious teachings guide believers in forming meaningful relationships. While the practices vary, a common theme among all faiths is the emphasis on

love, respect, and spiritual growth through companionship. In a world where isolation and loneliness are growing concerns, these religious perspectives offer valuable insights into fostering deep and fulfilling human connections.

IX. PRACTICING BUDDHISM IN OTHER RELIGIONS: A PATH TO DISTINCTIVE SPIRITUALITY

Buddhism, with its emphasis on self-awareness, ethical conduct, and meditation, has long been recognized as a unique spiritual tradition. However, its practices and teachings are not confined to those who identify strictly as Buddhists. Over time, elements of Buddhism have been integrated into other religious traditions, leading to a distinct and enriching spiritual experience for many individuals. The incorporation of Buddhist practices into other religions allows for a fusion of philosophies that can enhance spiritual understanding, mindfulness, and personal transformation. This essay explores how practicing Buddhism within other religious traditions creates a distinctive spiritual path, setting it apart from traditional religious frameworks.

9.1. The compatibility of Buddhism with other religions

Buddhism is often considered more of a philosophy or way of life rather than a rigidly defined religion. Unlike exclusive monotheistic traditions such as Christianity and Islam, which emphasize devotion to a single deity, Buddhism is inherently flexible and adaptable. This openness has allowed Buddhist principles to integrate seamlessly into various religious traditions without causing theological conflicts.

For example, many Christians incorporate Buddhist meditation into their spiritual practices to deepen their connection with God. Similarly, in Hinduism, which shares certain concepts with Buddhism, such as *karma* and reincarnation, Buddhist mindfulness practices are often integrated into devotional rituals. Even within Islam, certain Sufi traditions emphasize meditation and mindfulness that resemble Buddhist contemplative techniques.

9.2. Meditation and mindfulness in religious practices

One of the most significant contributions of Buddhism to other religions is the practice of meditation and mindfulness.²⁹ These techniques help individuals cultivate inner peace, concentration, and spiritual insight, irrespective of their religious background.

In Christianity, contemplative prayer and centering prayer bear similarities to Buddhist meditation. Christian mystics such as St. Teresa of Ávila and St. John of the Cross practiced forms of meditative prayer that align closely with Buddhist mindfulness. Many modern Christians incorporate Zen or Vipassana meditation into their faith as a way to quiet the mind and develop deeper spiritual awareness.

In Islam, the Sufi tradition emphasizes *dhikr* (remembrance of God), which,

²⁹ Bodhi, B. (2010). The noble eightfold path: The way to the end of suffering. Buddhist Publication Society, p. 126 – 130.

like Buddhist meditation, involves rhythmic breathing and focused repetition to reach higher states of consciousness. Some Sufi practitioners also adopt Buddhist-inspired meditation techniques to enhance their spiritual discipline.

Hinduism, which shares a historical and philosophical connection with Buddhism, incorporates meditation as an essential spiritual tool. Many Hindu yogis and practitioners integrate Buddhist meditation styles, such as Vipassana or Zen, to refine their spiritual practices.

9.3. Ethical and compassionate living across religious boundaries

Buddhist ethics, centered on non-violence (*ahimsa*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and loving-kindness (*mettā*), resonate with the moral teachings of many other religions. The Buddhist Five Precepts align closely with ethical principles in Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, creating a common moral ground for spiritual seekers.

Christianity's teachings on love and compassion, such as Jesus's message of treating others as one would like to be treated, echo Buddhist ideals. Many Christian practitioners find that Buddhist loving-kindness meditation (Metta Bhavana) strengthens their ability to love unconditionally, enhancing their spiritual lives.

Similarly, Islamic teachings emphasize compassion and mercy, values that parallel Buddhist ethical principles. Many Muslims who practice mindfulness find that Buddhist approaches help deepen their connection with God and cultivate patience and self-awareness.

In Hinduism, the concept of *ahimsa* (non-violence) is already a core tenet, but Buddhist interpretations further emphasize personal responsibility for all actions. Many Hindus integrate Buddhist perspectives into their ethical lives, particularly regarding vegetarianism, environmentalism, and social harmony.

9.4. The role of *karma* and rebirth in religious synthesis

The Buddhist understanding of karma and rebirth has influenced many religious traditions, especially Hinduism, which shares similar concepts.³⁰ However, Buddhism's interpretation differs in key ways, particularly in its rejection of an eternal soul (*atman*) and emphasis on *anatta* (non-self). These distinctions have allowed individuals from other traditions to integrate Buddhist perspectives on karma into their faith without adopting all of its doctrinal aspects.

In Christianity and Islam, which traditionally emphasize a linear life leading to judgment and an afterlife, some believers explore Buddhist perspectives on cause and effect to gain a deeper understanding of personal responsibility. While reincarnation is not a standard belief in these traditions, the concept of karma is sometimes interpreted metaphorically as a way to explain how actions have consequences in this life and beyond.

³⁰ Chacko, E., Carter, J., Cullum, S., Sundram, F., & Cheung, G. (2023). Pacific cultural enhancement of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy: Insights from clinical and cultural experts. *Mindfulness*, 15 (1), 120 – 129. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-023-02277-3>

9.5. The influence of Buddhist practices on mental well-being

Modern psychology has widely embraced Buddhist meditation and mindfulness techniques, which are now incorporated into secular and religious settings alike. Many religious practitioners, regardless of their faith, use Buddhist-inspired mindfulness practices to manage stress, enhance mental clarity, and improve overall well-being.

For example, Christian priests and ministers use mindfulness in pastoral care to help individuals cope with anxiety and grief. Some Muslim scholars advocate mindfulness techniques to strengthen patience and emotional regulation in daily life. Even Jewish practitioners have incorporated mindfulness into Kabbalistic traditions, using it to deepen their spiritual insights.

9.6. The distinctiveness of interfaith Buddhism

Practicing Buddhism within another religion creates a unique spiritual experience that is distinct from both traditional Buddhist practice and the original faith. This interfaith approach allows individuals to explore their spirituality beyond the confines of dogma and doctrine. It fosters a personal, experiential path to enlightenment that emphasizes wisdom, compassion, and inner transformation.

Interfaith Buddhist practitioners often experience a greater sense of personal agency in their spiritual journey. Instead of relying solely on faith or religious authority, they explore Buddhist teachings through direct experience, testing principles through practice. This makes their spiritual path highly individualized and deeply personal, setting it apart from conventional religious observance.

Furthermore, the non-dogmatic nature of Buddhism allows for continuous self-inquiry. Many interfaith practitioners appreciate the emphasis on questioning and experiential validation rather than adherence to rigid beliefs. This makes Buddhism uniquely compatible with other religions, as it does not demand exclusivity or absolute loyalty.

9.7. The distinctiveness of interfaith Buddhism

Buddhism, originating in ancient India around the 5th century BCE, has evolved into a significant spiritual tradition with diverse schools of thought and practices. One of its remarkable characteristics is its openness to dialogue and interaction with other religions and philosophies. Interfaith Buddhism, therefore, presents an intriguing approach to fostering mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation between different religious traditions. This essay will explore the distinctiveness of Interfaith Buddhism by examining its historical development, core principles, and its role in contemporary interfaith dialogue.

9.8. Historical development of Buddhism's interaction with other faiths

Buddhism's engagement with other faiths has been evident throughout its history. After the death of the Buddha, the teachings spread across the Indian subcontinent and beyond. In its early stages, Buddhism was primarily in competition with other religious systems such as Jainism, Brahmanism, and various local beliefs. As Buddhism expanded into Central Asia, China,

Southeast Asia, and Japan, it encountered a variety of indigenous spiritual practices, local deities, and other organized religions like Confucianism, Taoism, and later, Christianity and Islam.

However, Buddhism, especially in its Mahayana and Vajrayana forms, has long demonstrated a more inclusive and syncretic approach toward other belief systems. Buddhist monks and scholars have often engaged in dialogue with practitioners of other faiths, emphasizing shared human experiences and the common goal of reducing suffering. This approach helped to integrate Buddhist practices with local traditions and shaped the distinctiveness of Buddhist interactions with other religious systems.

9.9. Core principles of Buddhism in interfaith contexts

Buddhism's key tenets, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, focus on alleviating human suffering through ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom. At the core of Buddhist philosophy is the concept of interconnectedness, or dependent origination, which posits that all things are interdependent and constantly changing. This view encourages Buddhists to see all beings as interconnected, creating a foundation for empathy, compassion, and dialogue in an interfaith context.

(i) Compassion (*Karuna*): Buddhism teaches that compassion is central to its practice. The Buddha emphasized the importance of cultivating compassion toward all sentient beings, transcending boundaries of religion, nationality, or ethnicity. In an interfaith context, this compassionate outlook fosters dialogue that is not only respectful but also driven by the desire to alleviate the suffering of others, regardless of their religious background.

(ii) Interconnectedness: The principle of interconnectedness suggests that all phenomena are interdependent and that no entity exists in isolation. This understanding naturally leads to the recognition that other religions and belief systems are also expressions of humanity's quest for truth and meaning. Buddhism does not view other religions as fundamentally opposed to its path; instead, it sees them as potentially complementary in the shared goal of spiritual awakening and human flourishing.

(iii) Non-dogmatism: Unlike many religions that are centered around rigid doctrines and dogmas, Buddhism is often characterized by its lack of an absolute creator or permanent self. It encourages critical thinking, open inquiry, and personal experience as paths to understanding. This flexibility allows Buddhists to approach other faiths with a spirit of humility, openness, and willingness to learn, making interfaith dialogue more fluid and dynamic.

(iv) Relativity of truth: Buddhism holds that the ultimate truth is beyond the grasp of ordinary human cognition and that all truths are relative to the individual's experiences and perceptions. This philosophy aligns with the idea that no single religion has a monopoly on truth. As a result, Buddhists are often willing to appreciate the validity of other faiths' teachings, understanding that their path is one among many that lead to wisdom and enlightenment.

9.10. The role of interfaith Buddhism in contemporary dialogues

In the modern era, globalization and the increasing interconnectedness of human societies have prompted a resurgence of interfaith dialogue. Religious conflicts and misunderstandings have become more apparent, and the need for cooperation among different religious traditions has never been more urgent. Interfaith Buddhism, with its emphasis on compassion, interconnectedness, and non-dogmatism, plays a crucial role in fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual respect between different religious communities.

(i) Promoting religious tolerance:³¹ One of the major contributions of Interfaith Buddhism is its potential to promote religious tolerance. In a world where religious differences often lead to tension and violence, Buddhism offers a model of coexistence that emphasizes the common human condition of suffering and the shared desire for peace. Buddhist leaders such as the Dalai Lama have consistently advocated for interfaith dialogue, arguing that no religion has a monopoly on the truth and that all religions ultimately aim at the same goal: the reduction of suffering and the cultivation of wisdom and compassion.

(ii) Engagement in global peace movements: Buddhism's focus on nonviolence (ahimsa) and peace has made it a natural ally in global peace movements. Buddhist leaders and practitioners often engage in efforts to bridge divides between different religious communities, advocating for reconciliation, mutual respect, and understanding. In this context, Interfaith Buddhism becomes a tool not only for promoting interreligious dialogue but also for contributing to larger social and political efforts aimed at peacebuilding.

(iii) Ecumenical practices: Interfaith Buddhism also manifests in the form of ecumenical practices, where Buddhist rituals and practices are shared and appreciated across religious boundaries. For example, in some interfaith gatherings, Buddhist meditation practices are introduced to people of different faiths as a method of cultivating mindfulness and compassion. This openness to sharing practices fosters a sense of unity and shared humanity, transcending doctrinal differences.

(iv) Interfaith collaboration in humanitarian work: Many Buddhist organizations around the world participate in humanitarian projects and relief efforts, often in collaboration with other religious groups. This collaboration helps to reinforce the idea that religious differences should not be barriers to working together for the common good. Buddhism's emphasis on altruism and service to others resonates with many other faith traditions, making it a key player in interfaith initiatives that address issues like poverty, environmental sustainability, and social justice.

9.11. Buddhism's unique contributions to interfaith dialogue

Buddhism's distinctiveness in interfaith dialogue lies in its philosophical

³¹ Brookes, A. (2017). African meditation techniques. Leaf Group Ltd. <https://www.leaf.tv/articles/african-meditation-techniques/>. Accessed 3 May 2017.

framework and its practical approach to spiritual practice. While many religious traditions assert their particular beliefs as the ultimate truth, Buddhism tends to offer a more pluralistic perspective, valuing personal experience and understanding over adherence to doctrine.

(i) The middle way: The Buddha's teaching of the Middle Way, which avoids extremes and embraces moderation, is central to how Buddhism interacts with other faiths. This approach encourages Buddhists to neither fully accept nor completely reject the teachings of other religions but to approach them with discernment and a spirit of balance. This Middle Way provides a framework for engaging with interfaith dialogue without being swayed by fanaticism or rigidity, creating space for mutual learning and growth.

(ii) Meditation and mindfulness:³² The practice of meditation and mindfulness is perhaps one of Buddhism's most unique contributions to interfaith dialogue. These practices, which focus on cultivating inner peace, self-awareness, and compassion, are universal tools that can be beneficial to individuals of any faith. Many interfaith dialogues today incorporate mindfulness techniques, showing how Buddhist practices can serve as bridges between different religious traditions, fostering a deeper understanding of oneself and others.

(iii) Buddhist modernism and dialogue with the West: In the 19th and 20th centuries, Buddhism underwent a transformation known as Buddhist modernism, which involved adapting traditional Buddhist practices to meet the challenges of modernity. As part of this transformation, Buddhism has engaged in extensive dialogue with Western intellectual traditions, particularly in the fields of psychology, philosophy, and science. This interaction has led to new forms of interfaith dialogue, where Buddhist ideas are integrated with Western ideas to foster mutual understanding.

(iv) The role of Buddhist leaders in interfaith initiatives: Prominent Buddhist leaders like Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, and the late Aung San Suu Kyi have been at the forefront of promoting interfaith dialogue. Their teachings and actions have helped to present Buddhism as a spiritual path that is deeply committed to peace, compassion, and the well-being of all sentient beings. These leaders exemplify how Buddhism can engage with people of other faiths in a spirit of respect and cooperation, promoting shared values of peace and understanding.

Interfaith Buddhism is distinct because of its deep-rooted commitment to compassion, non-dogmatism, and interconnectedness. Through its core teachings and its approach to religious pluralism, Buddhism provides a unique perspective in the interfaith landscape. The Buddhist emphasis on personal experience, ethical conduct, and mindfulness makes it an invaluable participant in contemporary dialogues among different faiths. As the world becomes

³² Ambedkar, B. R. (1957). *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Bombay: Siddharth College Publications, p. 167 – 172.

increasingly interconnected and interdependent, the principles of Interfaith Buddhism offer a hopeful and harmonious path forward, fostering mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among diverse religious traditions.

9.12. Challenges and Controversies:³³

While integrating Buddhist practices into other religions can be spiritually enriching, it is not without challenges. Some religious leaders view the adoption of Buddhist practices as conflicting with their traditional beliefs. For example, some conservative Christian and Islamic scholars argue that meditation, if rooted in a non-theistic philosophy, may contradict faith in God.

Additionally, the commercialization and secularization of Buddhist practices, such as the widespread use of mindfulness in corporate settings, sometimes strip these practices of their spiritual depth. This raises concerns among traditional Buddhists who worry that the core teachings of wisdom and compassion are being diluted.

Despite these challenges, many spiritual seekers continue to explore Buddhist practices within their religious frameworks, finding that these traditions enhance rather than diminish their faith.

X. CONCLUSION

Practicing Buddhism within other religions creates a distinctive and enriching spiritual experience that transcends conventional religious boundaries. By integrating meditation, mindfulness, ethical living, and philosophical inquiry into various faith traditions, individuals develop a deeper, more personal connection to their spirituality. This fusion of practices allows for greater self-awareness, inner peace, and moral clarity, distinguishing interfaith Buddhist practice from traditional religious frameworks.

The adaptability of Buddhist teachings, coupled with their emphasis on direct experience and self-inquiry, makes them highly compatible with different religious traditions. Whether through meditation, ethical practice, or philosophical exploration, the integration of Buddhism into other faiths offers a unique spiritual path that fosters wisdom, compassion, and transformation.

Ultimately, the distinctiveness of practicing Buddhism in other religions lies in its ability to harmonize diverse spiritual perspectives, creating a holistic and inclusive approach to enlightenment and self-discovery. As more individuals continue to seek meaningful and integrative ways to practice spirituality, Buddhism's influence across religious traditions will remain a powerful force for personal and collective transformation.

The case studies presented highlight how Buddhist compassion has been actively implemented in different sectors of Mumbai's society. From education and healthcare to economic upliftment and social justice, Buddhist principles continue to shape efforts that aim to alleviate suffering and promote human

³³ Queen, C. S., & King, S.B. (1996). *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*. State University of New York Press, p. 120 – 122.

dignity. The unique aspect of Buddhist compassion lies in its long-term commitment to structural change rather than short-term relief efforts. These initiatives demonstrate that Buddhist values, when translated into action, have the potential to create a more inclusive and just society.

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION TO ELIMINATE SUFFERING: COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH ROGERIAN HUMANISTIC APPROACH AND BUDDHA'S COMPASSIONATE APPROACH IN UPROOTING SUFFERING

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Abstract:

The study presented the parallels between Buddhist compassion and the Rogerian humanistic approach to psychology. It analyzes the Buddhist concept of *Dukkha* (suffering), going beyond the conventional meaning of “suffering” to include deeper philosophical aspects of impermanence and imperfection. The paper also compares Buddhist therapeutic approaches, which focus on compassion and understanding, with Carl Rogers’ principles, which emphasize empathy, authenticity, and unconditional acceptance. The study shows how Buddhism, like Rogerian psychology, values establishing supportive and understanding relationships to address psychological problems and promote personal growth. Finally, the study asserts that lessons from Buddhism, especially compassion, can be applied in modern psychotherapy, such as Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT).

Keywords: *Buddhism, compassion, Rogerian humanistic approach.*

I. INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that Buddha made his teachings for the good and happiness of all people regardless of their backgrounds, and he preached the *Dhamma* with compassion to the entire world (*bahujaṇa hitāya*

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bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya).¹ It reflects his empathic, genuine, and non-judgmental nature. It's mainly because human beings are subject to suffering; the First Noble Truth depicts what human beings have to undergo as suffering or dissatisfaction in life; suffering or *Dukkha* is inevitable in life; and the Four Noble Truths indicate the path of ceasing suffering.

II. THE NATURE OF LIFE

All the beings are drowned in suffering; the term '*Dukkha*' is defined by Ven. Walpola Rahula as follows:

Indeed, the *Pali* word *Dukkha* (*Duhkha* in Sanskrit) in ordinary usage means 'suffering', 'pain', 'sorrow' or 'misery', as opposed to the word *Sukha* meaning 'happiness', 'comfort' or 'ease'. But the term *Dukkha* as the *First Noble Truth*, which represents the Buddha's view of life and the world, has a deeper philosophical meaning and connotes enormously wider senses. It is admitted that the term *Dukkha* in the *First Noble Truth* contains, quite obviously, the ordinary meaning of 'suffering', but in addition, it also includes deeper ideas such as 'imperfection', 'impermanence', 'emptiness', 'insubstantiality'. It is difficult therefore to find one word to embrace the whole conception of the term *Dukkha* as the *First Noble Truth*. So, it is better to leave it untranslated than to give an inadequate and wrong idea of it by conveniently translating it as 'suffering' or 'pain'.²

According to the definition, '*Dukkha*' encompasses more than 'suffering' or 'pain'; it conveys a broader and deeper philosophical meaning. Ven. Bhikku Bodhi provides another definition as follows:

The pivotal notion around which the truths revolve is that of *Dukkha*, translated here as 'suffering'. The *Pāli* word originally meant simply pain and suffering, a meaning it retains in the texts when it is used as a quality of feeling: in these cases, it has been rendered as 'pain' or 'painful'. As the first *Noble Truth*, however, *Dukkha* has a far wider significance, reflective of a comprehensive philosophical vision. While it draws its affective coloring from its connection with pain and suffering and certainly includes these, it points beyond such restrictive meanings to the inherent unsatisfactoriness of the conditioned due to its impermanence, its vulnerability to pain, and its inability to provide complete and lasting satisfaction.³

Both definitions denote that the term '*Dukkha*' mentioned in the first noble truth has a wider and more profound philosophical meaning than what is generally translated as 'suffering' or 'pain'. Nevertheless, the Buddha has outlined eight kinds of '*Dukkha*' in his first sermon as follows:

¹ Rahula, Walpola, *What the Buddha Taught*. London: Gordon Fraser, 1978, p. 46.

² Rahula, Walpola, *What the Buddha Taught*. London: Gordon Fraser, 1978, p. 16.

³ *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Transl. of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Nāṇamoli Bhikkhu, and Bhikkhu Bodhi (1995). Boston Mass, Wisdom Publications, p. 25.

And what, monks, is the Noble Truth of suffering? Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, sadness, and distress are suffering. Being attached to the unloved is suffering, being separated from the loved is suffering, not getting what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates of grasping are suffering.⁴

By and large, what is impermanent can be considered ‘*Dukkha*’;⁵ and, the conceptions of ‘*Dukkha*’ can be explained through three aspects ‘*Dukkha-Dukkha*’, ‘*Viparināma-Dukkha*’, and ‘*Saṅkhāra –Dukkha*’.⁶ All forms of ordinary suffering including mental and physical suffering come under ‘*Dukkha-Dukkha*’; Suffering produced by the ever-changing nature of life can be considered ‘*Viparināma –Dukkha*’; and the conditioned nature of the individual is known ‘*Saṅkhāra –Dukkha*’.⁷ In summary, all five aggregates are subject to change; and the only unchangeable thing is constant change.⁸

III. IT IS HARDLY FOUND PEOPLE FREE FROM MENTAL ILLNESSES: BUDDHA THEREFORE OPERATES HIMSELF AS A SURGEON FOR THE BETTERMENT OF ALL

As per *Roga Sutta*, all humans are suffering from physical and mental illnesses; although one may live for a hundred years without any physical ailments it is hard to find persons who do not have any psychological difficulties.⁹ It is seen how people suffer due to the factors mentioned above, and even Western Psychology has to be busy working on finding therapies for different mental issues. Buddha, who recognized the nature of suffering, prescribed Dhamma medicine for all the sufferers. Upon further analysis of Buddhist Suttas, it could be recognized how the Four Noble Truths are metaphorically compared to curing a disease as follows: “The truth of suffering is like a disease, the truth of origin is like the cause of the disease, the truth of cessation is like the cure of the disease, and the truth of the path is like the medicine.”¹⁰

According to the *Sela Sutta*, Buddha is referred to as a surgeon (*Sallakatto*) because he demonstrates the path to uproot all the defilements, similar to how a surgeon operates.¹¹ This demonstrates the Buddha’s compassion and loving-kindness towards living beings. According to *Metta Sutta*, Buddha empathizes that one should spread loving-kindness to other beings as if a mother protects

⁴ *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Walshe, Maurice O’C (2012), Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 344.

⁵ Rahula, Walpola, *What the Buddha Taught*. London: Gordon Fraser, 1978, p. 18.

⁶ Rahula, Walpola, *What the Buddha Taught*. London: Gordon Fraser, 1978, p. 19.

⁷ Rahula, Walpola, *What the Buddha Taught*. London: Gordon Fraser, 1978, pp. 19 – 20.

⁸ *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (2002), pp. 949 – 950.

⁹ A. IV. 157.

¹⁰ Dharmakeerthi, Nivandama Sri, ed. *Visuddhimargaya*. Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 2017. XVI, p. 528.

¹¹ *Dīgha Nikāya* (1962), p. 177.

her only child.¹² Spreading loving-kindness is not confined to one particular group; the sutta further mentions that ‘may all the beings at ease’ (*sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā*)¹³. This depicts the Buddha’s unconditional state of practice and humanistic approach; Buddha addresses all beings (*sabbe sattā*), not a particular group of people or religion.

IV. COMPASSION TO ALL: BUDDHA’S PEACEFUL COUNTERSTRIKE AGAINST BRAHMINS’ PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

Buddha preached the Dhamma to people from all walks of life. Traditional Brahmin principles had a strong impact on the society in which the Buddha lived, but Buddha asserted that Brahmanism is not determined by proper birth; the appropriate state of mind which is free from passions and desires determines Brahmanism: “Merely because a person had his origin in the Brahmin clan or had a Brahmin mother, I do not call him a Brahmin. Even if he is addressed as Brahmin, if he is full of defilements, he is an empty man. Only he who is free from passions and desires, would I call a Brahmin.”¹⁴

This quote highlights the Buddha’s unconditional state of self-acceptance. Furthermore, it is also worth analyzing how the Buddha initiated a peaceful counterstrike against the teachings of the Brahmins to show that all human beings are equal and should not be discriminated against based on their caste.

According to the *Caṅkī Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha refutes the authority of Vedas arguing that they are based merely on groundless faith which has no significant substance in them;¹⁵ In the same Sutta, Buddha metaphorically compares Brahmins to a row of blind men. Being a Brahmin is not solely determined by birth; rather it is how a person leads their life determines if someone is a true Brahmin. The Buddha re-defined the term ‘Brahmanism’; but the word was left unchanged, while the content was altered.

The Buddha initiated a peaceful counterstrike to the dominant Brahmin teachings explaining how ‘Brahmins’ should be ideally defined. The person who doesn’t do evil in deeds, words, or thoughts and the one who abstains from such bad acts can be called a holy person or a Brahmin.¹⁶ The Buddha constructively criticized the discrimination and prejudice that the contemporary Brahmins showed toward the low-caste people. As per the *Vāseṭṭha sutta*; it mentions that there can be differences among trees and other species; yet there are no differences among human beings.¹⁷ That explanation also illustrates how the Buddhist teachings treat humans equally.

¹² *Khuddakanikāya I* (1960), p. 147.

¹³ *Khuddakanikāya I*. Vol. XXIV. Buddha Jayanti Tripiṭaka, 1960. P. 45.

¹⁴ *Dhp* 396: “Na c’āhaṃ brāhmaṇaṃ brūmi- yonijaṃ mattisambhavaṃ/ Bhovadi nāma so hoti-sa ce hoti sakiñcano/akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ – tamahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ.”

¹⁵ *M. II*. 95.

¹⁶ *Dhp* 233.

¹⁷ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1956), p.708.

V. MAPPING THE ROGERIAN HUMANISTIC APPROACH ONTO BUDDHA'S COMPASSIONATE APPROACH TO ILLUSTRATE THEIR THERAPEUTIC SIMILARITIES

The Humanistic approach holds a significant position in Western Psychology, particularly in therapeutic practice. Carl Rogers the pioneer of the Humanistic Perspective in Counselling Psychology stressed how important it is to adhere to Humanistic principles to make an incongruent person congruent; further Rogers suggests that people require positive regard that reflects a universal requirement to be loved and respected.¹⁸ The Humanistic approach identifies that people are innately good and tend to grow a higher level of functioning.¹⁹ The Rogerian view stresses the person-centered therapeutic method which seems to share common features with certain Buddhist teachings.²⁰ The Rogerian psychology in counseling emphasizes the necessity of genuineness, empathy, and Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR).²¹ Similarly, the Buddha has always encouraged 'compassionate talk' or 'to be kind-hearted'²² in approaching laities. In the *Udāyi Sutta*, Buddha explains that the monk should counsel without any material gains; the importance of preaching the Dhamma without expecting anything in return; and the necessity of attending the laities as a service.²³ Such statements of the Buddha are good examples of 'genuineness'. The teachings of *Subhāsita sutta*, elaborate the necessity of uttering the truth.²⁴ There, He further mentions that monks should stick to a well-spoken language instead of being poorly-spoken; and it needs to be spoken 'what is just' instead of 'what is unjust'.²⁵ That is an indication of the person-centered approach in Buddhism. According to Rogers, UPR refers to the acceptance of the client without being judgmental.²⁶

Buddha has expressed the importance of handling the language appropriately. There, the Buddha has emphasized that the counselor should be endowed with a language as follows:

- (1) Soft words (*Nela*)
- (2) Pleasant to hear (*Kaṇṇa- Sukha*),

¹⁸ Feldman, Robert S. (2004), *Understanding Psychology*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, p. 429.

¹⁹ Feldman, Robert S. (2004), *Understanding Psychology*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2004, p. 429.

²⁰ Feldman, Robert S. (2004), *Understanding Psychology*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2004, pp. 512 - 513.

²¹ Feldman, Robert S. *Understanding Psychology*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2004, pp. 512 - 513.

²² AN 3. 24.

²³ AN 3. 24.

²⁴ SN 1. 16.

²⁵ SN 1. 16.

²⁶ Feldman, Robert S. *Understanding Psychology*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2004, pp. 512 - 513.

- (3) Heart-stirring, agreeable (*hadayaṅgamā*)
- (4) Polite words (*Pori*)
- (5) Language agreeable to many people (*Kantā*)²⁷

In Western psychology, counselors are trained to listen carefully to their clients and give empathic responses in their sessions.²⁸ On the other hand, despite the psychotherapeutic school, almost all the schools such as psychoanalytical, cognitive, humanistic, and behavioristic schools have emphasized the importance of establishing a humane relationship with the client.²⁹ Likewise, the Buddha instructed monks to be attentive and to and to lay practitioners seeking help, and to use supportive and agreeable language. In the meantime, the *Culla-hatthipadopama Sutta* also indicates the importance of speaking meaningfully and abstaining from careless speech.³⁰ Taking into account the tragic story of *Paṭācārā*, she was consoled by the Buddha with tender words as follows: “Daughter, you have reached the best place to get such help; do not weep. So, be comforted”.³¹

Rogersian psychology also emphasizes the importance of communication. In his ‘essay 1951’ Rogers argues that issues in mental health are strongly connected to the issues of “problematic communication.”³² Problematic communication refers to the lack of inter and intra-communication between the client, themselves, and others, and Rogers argues that those who cannot properly communicate with others face mental health issues.³³ Further, he instructs that problematic communication can be restored when the therapist listens to the client with understanding and provides them with an experience of Unconditional Positive Regard.³⁴ Likewise, the prescribed Buddhist communicational skills mentioned above can be mapped onto the Rogersian communicational teachings. The eight qualities mentioned above clearly focus on understanding the other person’s point of view. As per Rogersian Psychology,

²⁷ AN 6. 27.

²⁸ Feldman, Robert S. *Understanding Psychology*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2004, pp. 512 - 513.

²⁹ .. Larsson, Billy (2006) *Similarities and Differences between the Schools of Psychotherapy*. Göteborg: Department of Psychology, Göteborg University, pp. 5 - 8.

³⁰ *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Transl. of the Majjhima nikāya*. Nāṇamoli Bhikkhu, and Bhikkhu Bodhi. Boston Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 1995, p. 273.

³¹ Uparathana, Kotiyagala, and Weliwita Soratha, eds. *Buddha Manowidyawa Ha Manoprathikara: Buddhist Psychology and Psychotherapy*. Ambalanthota: Nigrodha Rajaramaya, 2018, p. 337: “Tato avoca maṃ satthā “putte mā soci assasa attānaṃ te gavassasu kiṃ niratthaṃ vihaññasi”.

³² Peary, Alexandria. “Mindfulness, Buddhism, and Rogerian Argument.” *Journal for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* 11 (2005). <https://doi.org/10.7290/jaepl118wq>. P. 4.

³³ Peary, Alexandria. “Mindfulness, Buddhism, and Rogerian Argument.” *Journal for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* 11 (2005). <https://doi.org/10.7290/jaepl118wq>. P. 4.

³⁴ Peary, Alexandria. “Mindfulness, Buddhism, and Rogerian Argument.” *Journal for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* 11 (2005). <https://doi.org/10.7290/jaepl118wq>. P. 4.

‘understanding’ is a commonly used term and it refers to empathy.³⁵ To take the client from the incongruent state to the congruent state, empathy plays a vital role.³⁶ In his teachings; the ideal- self, actual- self, and self-concept being overlapped is known as congruence; ³⁷incongruence is caused when the aforementioned circles are separate from each other. Although the Buddhist teachings ultimately focus on the extraction of the view of oneself (*Sakkāya ditti*)³⁸, Buddhism accepts the existence of individuality as an agreement (*Sammuti Sacca*), but not as an ultimate truth.³⁹ Therefore, Buddhist devotees are suggested to get into the other persons’ shoes when dealing with them (*Attānam upamaṇ katvā*).⁴⁰ Similarly, Rogerian empathy depicts the same in bringing the incongruent person to a congruent state.

VI. BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELING: BUDDHA’S COMPASSION IN ACTION

Counseling psychology has undoubtedly taken a prominent place in the field of Western applied psychology and is probably the most popular branch of all. It is not merely aiming at solving problems and addressing mental disorders; it is also used to uplift the personal growth of individuals. According to Bloch, he defines counseling psychology as follows: “It is a mistake to think that counseling and psychotherapy is only used to solve problems and end crises. Even if a person is doing already well; therapy can be a way to promote personal growth.”⁴¹

Burks and Steffler define counseling differently as follows:

Counseling denotes a professional relationship between a trained counselor and a client. This relationship is usually person –to- person, although it may sometimes involve more than two people. It is designed to help clients to understand and clarify their views of their space, and to learn to reach their self-determined goals through meaningful, well-informed choice and the resolution of people of an emotional or interpersonal nature.⁴²

It can therefore be understood that counseling involves two individuals. As per the views of Prof. Padmasiri de Silva mentions that counseling usually involves two people discussing the problems or concerns that one of them has

³⁵ Peary, Alexandria. “Mindfulness, Buddhism, and Rogerian Argument.” *Journal for Expanded Perspectives on Learning* 11 (2005). <https://doi.org/10.7290/jaepl118wq>. P. 5.

³⁶ Weiten, Wayne. *Psychology: Themes and Variations*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2004, p. 614.

³⁷ Weiten, Wayne. *Psychology: Themes and Variations*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2004, p. 496.

³⁸ *Khuddakanikāya I* (1960), p. 283.

³⁹ Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught*. London: Gordon Fraser, 1978, p. 55.

⁴⁰ *Dhammapada* (1994), p. 129.

⁴¹ Dennis Coon and John Mitterer, *Psychology: A Journey*, 4th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011, p. 510.

⁴² Herbert M. Burks and Buford Steffler, *Theories of Counseling*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979, p. 14.

and the other is willing to listen.⁴³ There are ample examples of Buddhist history where the Buddha had conducted such sessions with different individuals, and there will be an in-depth analysis in that regard in this chapter itself.

When it comes to Buddhist counseling and psychotherapy, it has been recognized as a novel approach to the clinical practice of mental health which means its practicability in alleviating mental problems has been understood by psychotherapists and scholars. Senior Professor Sumanapala Galmangoda initiated himself to introduce 'Buddhist Āyurvedic Psychiatry and Counseling' for the time to the Sri Lankan context⁴⁴ after recognizing its applicability to addressing psychological and physical difficulties in individuals.

Referring to Oxford Dictionary of English, defines counseling as the process of listening to someone and giving them advice about their problems.⁴⁵ In finding out equivalent terms for counseling from Buddhist doctrine, Rhys Davis indicates that words such as 'Upadisati'⁴⁶, 'mantanāti'⁴⁷, 'anusāsati'⁴⁸, and 'ovādati'⁴⁹ are similar to words counseling or coaching.

In referring to the Buddhist doctrine, it is seen how the Buddha has elaborated on the nature of suffering and the way to cease suffering. Accordingly, it can be mentioned that all His teachings should be considered therapeutic as all the teachings lead to the cessation of suffering. Therefore, His teachings are solely based on psychotherapeutic principles. Western scholars such as Steven Batchelor mention the therapeutic nature of Buddhism as follows:

An area with one of the strongest links to Buddhism in Europe is that of psychology and psychotherapy. Buddhism is becoming the 'religion of choice' for many therapists, who either are Buddhists, have practiced Buddhist meditation, or incorporate Buddhist ideas into their work. The attraction of Buddhism lies not only in its analysis of human suffering in terms of deep-seated psychological error and disturbance but also in its practical importance of dealing with them.⁵⁰

⁴³ Padmasiri De Silva, *Introduction to Mindfulness-Based Counselling*. Ratmalana: Vishwa Lekha, 2008, pp. 160 - 167.

⁴⁴ Sumanapala Galmangoda, *Buddha Ayurveda Mano Chikithsa Kramaya*. Bollegala: Nāgānanda International Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2014, p. 17.

⁴⁵ A. S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 347.

⁴⁶ T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary* Ed. by T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede. London: The Pāli Text Society, 1921, p. 161.

⁴⁷ T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary* Ed. by T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede. London: The Pāli Text Society, 1921, p. 581.

⁴⁸ T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary* Ed. by T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede. London: The Pāli Text Society, 1921, p. 52.

⁴⁹ T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *The Pāli Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary* Ed. by T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede. London: The Pāli Text Society, 1921, p. 580.

⁵⁰ Stephan Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture*. Berkley: Echo Point Books & Media, 2015, p. 364.

Additionally, a lecture conducted by Prof. Wasantha Priyadarshana at the Postgraduate Institute of Kelaniya, stresses the importance of realizing Buddhism from a psychological point of view and how it should be practically used with terminally ill persons.⁵¹ This is also an indication that points out the necessity of utilizing Buddhism in praxis in a therapeutic manner. As described in *Jaṭā sutta* in *Samyutta Nikāya*, there it is said how people are entangled in a tangled: “*anto jaṭā bahi jaṭā – jaṭāya jaṭitā pajāl/ Taṃ taṃ gotama pucchāmi-ko imaṃ vijaṭaye jaṭa’nti.*”⁵²

Therefore, the Buddhist doctrine is to show the path to the laities to get rid of those tangles. It is also an indication of what Buddhist counseling is all about. Additionally, great psychologists such as Carl Jung mention as to how Buddhist literature has helped him to identify the causes of suffering; he mentioned this regard as follows:

There may be some afflictions which seem unendurable and require treatment just as much as a direct illness. They call for a kind of moral attitude such as it is provided by religious faith or a philosophical belief. In this respect, the study of Buddhist literature was of great healing to me, since trains one to observe suffering objectively and to take a universal view of the cause.⁵³

In referring to his statements too, it can be identified the universality and the therapeutic nature of the Buddhist teachings.

Western counseling psychology often emphasizes the healthy relationship between the client and the counselor.⁵⁴ There, strong attention is paid to the qualities of a counselor and what he/ she should nurture to have a positive counseling relationship. When it comes to Buddhism, also emphasizes what sorts of qualities that a genuine counselor should be endowed with.

According to Sigmund Freud the father of Western Psychology, emphasizes that it is a must to understand the nature of disease when one treats psychiatric disorders.⁵⁵ From a Buddhist point of view, it is said that the healer or the attendant should be qualified to treat the patient; and it has been described as follows:

- (1) one should be capable of administering medicine and providing sound medical produce
- (2) the attendant should be aware of what is beneficial and what is not beneficial to the patient
- (3) One must attend to the patient with a kind heart

⁵¹ Wasantha Priyadarshana, “Dhammaduta Live Stream,” (September 7, 2018).

⁵² SN 1. 16.

⁵³ Carl G. Jung, *Psychology and the East*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990, p. 209.

⁵⁴ Ruwan Jayatunga, *Manovidyathmaka Upadeshanaya*. Colombo: Wijesuriya Publication, 2003, pp. 11 - 13.

⁵⁵ Dhammasami Naw Kham La, *Buddhist Psychiatry*. Dehiwala, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 2007, p. 49.

(4) One must keep the patient in a clean and hygienic environment, and he should discharge his duties as a service and not just for what he receives

(5) The attendant should not be disgusted due to urine, phlegm, saliva, and so forth.

(6) One should be able to counsel the patient with noble ideas and thoughts, and the attendant should not allow the patient to be unhappy and disappointed.⁵⁶

In comparing the above instructions with the Hippocratic Oath in which doctors need to be sworn in when they take over their profession, one could see certain similarities.

In quoting the Hippocratic Oath, there it is mentioned:

“I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment; will keep them from harm and injustice.” “I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asked for it nor will I suggest this effect.” “Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick remaining free of all intentional injustice....”⁵⁷

Comparing both statements, it is clear that the ultimate objective of both approaches is to benefit the sick. Nevertheless, in the above statement, Buddha has stressed the importance of counseling the patient with noble ideas and with Dhamma talk. When Tissa, the paternal cousin of the Buddha became overwhelmed with sloth and torpor due to aging, was counseled by the Buddha by saying He (the Buddha) was there to exhort, aid and instruct him.⁵⁸ This is an instance where the Buddha emphasizes the importance of counseling.

According to the American Psychological Association, every counselor is bound to a code of ethics; there, the counselor is required to abide by certain ethical standards related to privacy and confidentiality, human relations, record keeping, and so forth.⁵⁹ Likewise, in referring to Buddhist doctrine as regards the code of conduct, there, it is mentioned that five factors disqualify the suitability for counseling. They are:

- (1) Impure moral habits (*aparisuddha sīla*)
- (2) Impure way of livelihood (*aparisuddha ājīva*)
- (3) Impure expounding (*aparisuddha dhammadesanā*)
- (4) Impure exposition (*aparisudda veyyākaraṇa*)
- (5) Impure knowledge (*aparisuddha ñāṇadassana*)⁶⁰

⁵⁶ AN 3. 24.

⁵⁷ William C. Shiel Jr., “Hippocratic Oath,” www.medicinenet.com, March 6, 2018, https://www.medicinenet.com/hippocratic_oath/definition.htm.

⁵⁸ *Connected Discourses of the Buddha*. Bodhi, Bhikkhu. Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2000, p. 22, 84. Wisdom Publication, p. 931.

⁵⁹ “Ethical Principles of Psychologist and Code of Conduct,” www.apa.org (American Psychological Association, June 1, 2003), <https://www.apa.org/ethics/code>.

⁶⁰ *The Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, vol. 5th Richard Morris and E. Hardy. London: Published for the

In referring to the Dhammapada, there, it is mentioned that one should counsel others only when he/ she is on the correct path; this has been illustrated as follows: “Let one establish oneself on the correct path first and then only should he admonish others. Let not the wise man pollute himself.”⁶¹

There the Buddha emphasis how important it is to be an inspiring character free from blemished personality traits in counseling. Additionally, there is another Sutta in *Aṅguttara Nikāya* which indicates the qualities that a counselor should possess in counseling: There, it is mentioned:

- (6) *Ānupubbi kathā* – Gradual method in counseling
- (7) *Pariyāyadassāvi kathā* – Talk on sequence
- (8) *Anuddayata paṭicca kathā* – Compassionate talk
- (9) *Na āmisantaro kathā* - Counsel without material expectations
- (10) *Attānañca parañca anupahacca kathā* – Counsel without hurting himself or others. Counselor should not discriminate others.⁶²

In Western counseling psychology, it is generally stressed the necessity of rapport –building process while entering the counseling session;⁶³ and it eases the client so that he/she can open up the feelings. When it comes to the manner in which the Buddha preached the *Dhamma*, He never started the sermon without identifying the listener. In counseling the person who comes for counseling is generally known as ‘client’ whereas in Buddhism he is known as ‘*Yogāvacāra*’.⁶⁴ so, the Buddha first seemed to have identified the nature of ‘*Yogāvacāra*’ to start the sermon to decide as to what type of methodology to be carried out to convince the depth of the *Dhamma*; and then the Buddha had taken the person out of the ignorant state.⁶⁵

VII. BUDDHA’S PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC APPROACH TO ELIMINATE SUFFERING

Buddha had paid much attention to the psychological state of the person who required Dhamma therapy. He gradually structured the mentality of the listener as follows:

- (1) *Kalla citta*- preparing the listener’s mind
- (2) *Mudu citta* – restoring tenderness in the listener’s mind
- (3) *Vinīvaraṇa citta*- eradicating the listener’s mind from defilements
- (4) *Udagga citta* – taking the mind into a supreme state

Pali Text Society by Henry Frowde, 1883, pp. 124 - 125.

⁶¹ *Dhammapada* (1994), p. 158: “Attānameva paṭhamam- patirūpe nivesaye/ Ath’aññaṃ anusāseya –na kilisseyya paṇḍito.”

⁶² AN 3. 24.

⁶³ D. V. J. Harischandra, *Buddha Dharmaya Saha Mano Vaidya Vidyawa*, ed. Tolusha Harischandra. Colombo: Vijithayapa, 2013, p. 22.

⁶⁴ Davids T W, and William Stede. *The Pali Text Society’s Pali - English Dictionary* Ed by T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede. London: The Pali Text Society, 1921, p. 621.

⁶⁵ Sangharathana, Mahava. *Bauddha Smnivedana Vidi*. Colombo: Sadeepa, 2011, p. 60.

(5) *Pahaṭṭha citta* – making a comprehensive mind⁶⁶

As noted before Humanistic perspective is client-centered; according to Gerald Corey, there are certain characteristics in Humanistic person-centered approach: listening, accepting, understanding and responding.⁶⁷ Likewise, in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the communicative skills that a counselor should be endowed with are mentioned; and those qualities seem to be tally with what Gerald Corey has pointed out. For example, the Sutta states that a skillful counselor should possess the following qualities:

- (1) *Sotā* (should be a good listener)
- (2) *Sāvetā* (should be able to make others listen)
- (3) *Uggahetā* (should be a learner)
- (4) *Dhāretā* (should have a good memory)
- (5) *Viññātā* (should have a good understanding)
- (6) *Viññāpetā* (should be able to make others understand)
- (7) *Kusalosahitāsahitassa* (should be skilled regarding what is beneficial and what is not)
- (8) *Na ca kalahakāri* (should not be quarrelsome)⁶⁸

Comparing the aforementioned characteristics with what has been expressed by Gerald Corey, there seem to be certain similarities between the two. Additionally, it is also clear that the aforementioned factors depict the person-centered nature of the Buddha's teachings. According to *Dūta Sutta*, Buddha mentioned that Ven. Sāriputta was endowed with those eight qualities of a skillful counselor.⁶⁹

Apart from that in referring to the psychotherapeutic nature of the Buddha, it is worth taking into consideration Jerome Frank's explanation of psychotherapy. According to him, he mentions that there are certain common features in every type of psychotherapy; they are:

- (1) Affective listening and talking
- (2) Releasing emotions (abreaction)
- (3) Giving information
- (4) Providing a rationale
- (5) Restoration of morale
- (6) Suggestion
- (7) Guidance and advice

⁶⁶ Sangharathana, Mahava. *Buddha Snnivedana Vidi*. Colombo: Sadeepa, 2011, p. 136.

⁶⁷ Corey, Gerald. *Theory and Practice of Counselling and Psychotherapy*. 9. Vol. 9. Belmont, CA: Cengage, 2013, p. 179.

⁶⁸ *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. Bristol: Pali Text Society, 2012, p. 1141.

⁶⁹ *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. Bristol: Pali Text Society, 2012, p. 211.

(8) Counselor – client relationship⁷⁰

As per the teachings of Jerome Frank, he says that aforementioned factors are seen in common in every type of psychotherapy despite its theoretical background. It is worth discussing in brief if those features can be found in Buddhist psychotherapy.

The story of Kisā Gotami is probably one of the finest examples in which Buddha gradually reduced the pain of separation slowly. Kisā Gotami who got distressed after the untimely demise of her only child, was counseled in a tactful manner so that she herself could realize the impermanence of life.⁷¹ The manner in which the Buddha counseled her indicates how He could perceive the psychic world of depressed Kisā Gotami. Besides, it shows the Buddha's ability of abreaction as mentioned above by Jerome Frank. Additionally, Buddha seemed to have helped her restore her morale. On the other hand, as it is shown by Kübler Ross, there are three stages in bereavement. I.e., Shock/ disbelief, preoccupation with memory of the dead person, and resolution.⁷² In accordance with these stages, Kisā Gotami too had undergone aforementioned stages; but the Buddha having understood her shock as well as the preoccupation with the memory of her dead son, had taken her to the final stage known 'resolution stage'. According to Prof. Sumanapala Galmangoda, the counseling methodology that the Buddha uses to sort out the bereavement of Kisā Gotami is known as 'Generalization'; 'Generalization' refers to the process of convincing the common nature of death.⁷³

The story of Cūḷa-panthaka is another example in which Buddha seemed to have used His psychotherapeutic skills in a therapeutic manner. Cūḷa-panthaka who was unable to memorize stanzas and who was the slowest of the monastic was accurately guided by giving him a pure piece of cloth to be rubbed. He then gradually understood how impurities in his mind blocked his skills.⁷⁴ Such instances show how the Buddha had used counseling skills to fix the person's disturbed mentality. The Buddha not only counseled others in critical and much-needed situations but also strongly considered the manner in which counseling had to be performed. In addition to that, in comparing the Cūḷa-panthaka's story with Jerome Frank's common factor model in psychotherapy, it is seen how the Buddha helped him restore self-confidence and He provided a rationale for his inability to memorize stanzas.

⁷⁰ UFO Themes, "Common Factors in Psychotherapy," Neupsy Key, July 12, 2016, <https://neupsykey.com/common-factors-in-psychotherapy/>.

⁷¹ Rhys, Davids Thomas William. *Psalms of the Early Buddhists*. London: Frowde, 1909, p. 106.

⁷² Papalia, Diane E., Sally Wendkos Olds, and Ruth Duskin Feldman. *Human Development*. 9. Vol. 9. Delhi: TATA McGraw-Hill, 2004, p. 690.

⁷³ "An Analytical and Creative Study of the Buddhist Theory and Practice of Psycho-Therapy <https://doi.org/https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=u0-QuiCffkC&hl=en>

⁷⁴ Dharmasena. *Saddharma Rathnawali*. Edited by Rev.Bentota Saddhatissa. Panadura: P. J. Karunadhara, 1928, pp. 242 - 255.

Additionally, Dr. D. V. J. Harischandra points out how Buddha showed the common factors of Jerome Frank during the incident of Princess Yashodara; there, the Buddha who entered the chamber of Yashodara allow her to express her suppressed emotions (abreaction) and He did not allow anybody to stop her tears.⁷⁵

There are many such instances where the Buddha used His therapeutic skills to heal the minds of people suffering from different psychological difficulties. Buddha's resourcefulness and counseling skills were discussed by a group of monks by referring to a past life incident where the Buddha-to-be was born as a Brahmin of Kāsi.⁷⁶ A monk who was about to leave the order due to his inability to follow what his teacher asked him to learn, was counseled by the Buddha giving three instructions to guard words, body and mind.⁷⁷

Additionally, it is worth discussing of certain teachings brought forth by Abraham Maslow, another humanistic psychologist, and how certain Buddhist teachings could be mapped onto his perspective. According to him, he identifies individuals' needs as a hierarchy which is known the 'Need of Hierarchy'.⁷⁸ There he stresses human needs according to an order as basic needs, safety needs, love and belongings, esteem needs and finally the need of self-actualization.⁷⁹ The all-knowing one stresses that the existence of beings solely depends upon food (*sabbe sattā āhāraṭṭhitikā*).⁸⁰ Maslow under the basic needs of his hierarchy indicates that how beings depend on basic needs as food. Nevertheless, according to the Paṭācārā's story, the Buddha having understood her mentality counseled her with tender words; and it can be considered an occasion where the Buddha assured the needs of security which is the second layer of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

VIII. CULTIVATION OF FOUR SUBLIME STATES, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, AND COMPASSION FOCUS THERAPY BY PAUL GILBERT

On the other hand, certain *Suttas* such as *Brahmavihāra*⁸¹ and *Metta Sutta*⁸² indicate the importance of cultivating the Four Sublime States which

⁷⁵ Harischandra, D. V. J. *Buddha Dharmaya Saha Mano Vaidya Vidyawa*. Edited by Tolusha Harischandra. Colombo: Vijithayapa, 2013, pp. 14 - 22.

⁷⁶ Cowell, E. B, ed. *The Jātaka or the Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*. Translated by H. T. Francis. Vol. V. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1905, pp. 139 - 140.

⁷⁷ *Pansiya Panas Jataka Poth Vahanse*. I. Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Center, 2000, pp. 188 - 190.

⁷⁸ Feldman, Robert S. *Understanding Psychology*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2004, p. 283.

⁷⁹ Feldman, Robert S. *Understanding Psychology*. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2004, p. 283.

⁸⁰ *Khuddakanikāya* I. 28. Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka, 1960, p.4.

⁸¹ Bhikku Thanissaro, tran, "Brahmavihāra Sutta: The Sublime Attitudes," www.accesstoinight.org, November 30, 2013, <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an10/an10.208.than.html>.

⁸² *Samyutta Nikaya* .5 - 1. 20 *Mahavargaya* I. Colombo: Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka, 1982, p. 220.

are known as *Mettā* (Loving-kindness), *Karuṇā* (Compassion), *Muditā* (Sympathetic joy), and *Upekkhā* (equanimity). In elaborating further, unlimited love to all living beings without any kind of discrimination can be known as loving-kindness;⁸³ following *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta*, it says that one should extend loving kindness to all living beings as if a mother loves her child (*Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe; evampi sabbbhūtesu mānasambhāva ye aparimāṇaṃ*).⁸⁴ This unconditional love indicated above seems to resemble the concept of UPR mentioned by Carl Rogers. *Metta Sutta* also affirms that loving-kindness is the extension of unconditional love towards all sentient beings. Compassion needs to be extended to those who are suffering, in trouble and affliction.⁸⁵ This tendency is somewhat similar to the empathy mentioned by Rogers. In a situation where one part of the world is being burnt by brutal war, the necessity of spreading loving-kindness and compassion is a must.

On the other hand, Daniel Goleman who introduced the concept of Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EIQ) elaborated that one's capability to recognize his own emotions as well as recognizing the emotions of others.⁸⁶ In his theory, he elaborates on the importance of empathic understanding. What is described by Goleman under Emotional Intelligence seems to have been elaborated by the Buddha a long period before. Therefore, Counselors need to be endowed with loving-kindness as well as compassion. According to Prof. Wasantha Priyadarshana, *Mettā* is identified as a psychological property whereas *Karuṇā* refers to the physical element of *Mettā*; he further mentions that compassion cannot be expected unless one develops loving-kindness in mind.⁸⁷ In elaborating on the Four Sublime States, Prof. Galmangoda mentions that compassion and sympathetic joy could be recognized as the social manifestation of loving-kindness.⁸⁸ Ultimately, it can be mentioned that counselors therefore should be endowed with such sublime states. Scholars such as Jenny Quek mention that those Four Sublime States can be utilized in therapeutic sessions; thus, counselors ought to nurture those qualities.⁸⁹

Additionally, there are many instances where Buddha's teachings have been clinically used to address multiple psychological issues such as anxiety and depression. For example, Mindfulness-based approaches (MBCT/MBSR) are widely used worldwide to address such problems. Meanwhile, Compassion

⁸³ Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught*. London: Gordon Fraser, 1978, p. 75.

⁸⁴ *Khuddakanikāya* I.28. Vol. Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka, 1960, p. 22.

⁸⁵ Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught*. London: Gordon Fraser, 1978, p. 75.

⁸⁶ Colman, A.M., ed. *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.241.

⁸⁷ Wasantha Priyadarshana, "Dhammaduta Live Stream," (September 7, 2018).

⁸⁸ Galmangoda, Sumanapala. *Buddha Ayurveda Mano Chikithsa Kramaya*. Bollegala: Nagananda International Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2014, p.236.

⁸⁹ H., Quek Jenny H. *The Buddha's Technique and Practice of Counselling as Depicted in the Pali Canon*. Singapore: Jenny Quek, 2007, pp.96-97.

Focus Therapy (CFT) introduced by Paul Gilbert is gaining ground worldwide mainly due to its therapeutic value. Compassion is the center of CFT. As discussed above, it is evident how Buddha's compassion helped people get rid of suffering. Likewise, compassion being used scientifically in the modern world is a revolutionary step toward human well-being and mental health. Paul Gilbert the founder of Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT) discusses three systems in mind: Drive System, Threat System, and Soothing System.⁹⁰ As per his teachings, individuals are motivated by the Drive System; and the impetus to move forward is hindered when the Threat System is expanded. Gilbert suggests stimulating the Soothing System by being compassionate to oneself and others.⁹¹

VIII. CONCLUSION

It is evident how certain key Buddhist teachings are discussed worldwide comparatively with a number of other subject areas such as psychology, Counselling, Medicine, and many more. Compassion is also merged with therapies such as Compassion Focus Therapy (CFT) as discussed above. Additionally, it can also be witnessed how Buddha's compassion emerged during the period in which Dhamma was preached. In contemporary society where discrimination was highly prevalent, Buddhas constructively counterstruck those ideologies. 'Ehipassiko'; Buddhas says 'come and see'. His Dhamma is all-time valid (*Akāliko*). Buddha always walked the talk (*Yatāvādī tatākāri*). Even his teachings of compassion are highly applicable to the modern-day world. The world needs practical Buddhism. As Rumi the poet says we might be in different boats, but we are in the same cyclone. Likewise, as noted during this discussion, we all are suffering in this life. Dhamma is the medicine, and we must treat each other with compassion. It is our shared responsibility. Just as a mother would protect her only child with her own life, let him cultivate boundless thoughts of loving kindness towards all beings.⁹²

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⁹⁰ 1. Paul Gilbert, "Workshop Part 1: Dr. Paul Gilbert," YouTube, April 2, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnHuECDISvE>.

⁹¹ 1. Paul Gilbert, "Workshop Part 1: Dr. Paul Gilbert," YouTube, April 2, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnHuECDISvE>.

⁹² "Mātā yatā nīyaṃ puttāṃ āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe Evami sabbha bhūtesu manasaṃ bhavaye aparimāṇaṃ."

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ENGAGED BUDDHISM IN ACTION: SOKA GAKKAI'S ROLE IN PEACE, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract:

Since the mid-19th century, numerous sociologists, philosophers, and thinkers – including Émile Durkheim, Paul Ricoeur, and Amartya Sen – have grappled with the moral dilemmas of society. Durkheim, for instance, posed a critical question: How do we coexist in a world increasingly defined by individuation, specialization, and occupational differentiation? His sociological approach to religion emphasized the concept of 'civil religion' – a shared ethical foundation fostering reverence and humility. Without such grounding, he argued, secular reasoning could give way to narcissism and aggression. A society solely driven by self-interest and utilitarianism risks descending into a state of 'anomic disorder,' where the absence of collective values leads to social fragmentation.¹

Expanding on the notion of justice, Amartya Sen distinguishes between *nīti* (institutional rules and structures) and *nyāya* (the lived experiences and actual outcomes of justice). While *nīti* refers to the formal mechanisms that shape governance, *nyāya* focuses on the real impact of these structures on people's lives. Sen cites Emperor Ashoka's embrace of Buddhism, which led him to believe that social harmony could be achieved not through coercion, but through the voluntary ethical conduct of individuals.²

At the heart of Buddhism lies the principle of the middle way, which aligns with the concept of *nyāya* by emphasizing mindful consideration of the consequences of one's actions on others. The pursuit of human well-being, rather than rigid adherence to institutional rules, becomes the guiding force of an ethical society.³ This perspective resonates with Nichiren Buddhism,

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¹ Durkheim (1995): p. 44 - 47.

² Sen (2009) p. 20 – 23.

³ Sen (1999), p. 282 – 285.

which underscores the deep interconnectedness between individuals and their environment. It advocates for an approach that transcends religious and ethnic divisions, fostering appreciation of each person's unique identity through meaningful human relationships. Rather than viewing others through the lens of difference, this philosophy encourages the recognition of shared humanity as the foundation of a just and compassionate world.⁴

Engaged Buddhism builds on this principle, applying Buddhist teachings to social action with a focus on compassion, justice, and nonviolence. Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a key proponent, embodies this approach through initiatives in education, environmental sustainability, and peace advocacy. Rooted in Nichiren Buddhism, SGI promotes human revolution - the belief that inner transformation leads to societal change. Under Daisaku Ikeda's leadership, SGI has become a global force for nuclear disarmament, human rights, and climate justice, exemplifying Buddhism's relevance in addressing contemporary global challenges. This research not only examines SGI's socially engaged practices but also critically explores the role and implications of proselytization within the organization, assessing its impact on both members and broader society.

Keywords: *Civil religion, Nyāya, middle way, engaged Buddhism, human evolution.*

I. THE CONCEPT OF ENGAGED BUDDHISM

The term "Engaged Buddhism" was popularized by Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh in the 20th century, referring to a form of Buddhism that actively engages with the world's suffering.⁵ Unlike traditional monastic practices that often emphasize detachment, Engaged Buddhism calls for direct participation in addressing contemporary societal problems such as war, poverty, environmental degradation, and discrimination. It draws on core Buddhist concepts like interconnectedness (*pratītyasamutpāda*), nonviolence (*ahimsa*), and the Middle Way, advocating for ethical living that fosters both personal and collective well-being. Several contemporary examples of Engaged Buddhism demonstrate its influence in various spheres of society.⁶

One such example is Thich Nhat Hanh's Plum Village and mindful activism. The Plum Village community in France, founded by Thich Nhat Hanh, serves as a global hub for Engaged Buddhism. Through mindfulness retreats, humanitarian work, and peace advocacy, it promotes ethical activism rooted in Buddhist principles. The community's teachings on mindfulness and deep listening have significantly influenced conflict resolution and mental health initiatives worldwide.⁷ Another influential figure is His Holiness

⁴Nichiren (1999), p. 240 – 243.

⁵Thich Nhat Hanh (1993), p. 25.

⁶Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King (1996), p. 15 – 17.

⁷Thich Nhat Hanh (2008), p. 42.

the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhism's Global Advocacy. The Dalai Lama has championed nonviolence and human rights, advocating for Tibetan autonomy while fostering interfaith dialogue. His emphasis on compassion-driven leadership has inspired movements for peace and ethical governance, particularly among exile communities and activists working on human rights issues.⁸

Soka Gakkai International's (SGI's) Peace and Human Rights Initiatives are another significant contribution to Engaged Buddhism. SGI has been actively involved in nuclear disarmament campaigns, collaborating with organizations like the United Nations to promote global treaties against nuclear weapons.⁹ The organization's annual peace proposals, submitted by Daisaku Ikeda, offer strategies for conflict resolution and disarmament based on Buddhist ethics. SGI also promotes human rights education through partnerships with UNESCO and other institutions, emphasizing the dignity of life and the importance of peaceful coexistence.¹⁰

There are a few other Engaged Buddhist movements that have witnessed gradual expansion such as The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement,¹¹ and Buddhist Environmentalism and Climate Action (INEB).¹² Among the various organizations advocating and practicing Engaged Buddhism, Soka Gakkai International (SGI) has experienced remarkable global growth in recent decades. This paper will investigate the philosophical foundations of Engaged Buddhism while analyzing SGI's role in actively promoting Buddhist principles and its broader societal impact. At the same time, it will also critically examine the significance and effects of proselytization within the organization, evaluating its influence on both its members and the wider society.

II. SGI: ORIGINS, EARLY DEVELOPMENT, AND GLOBAL EXPANSION

Soka Gakkai is a global Buddhist movement rooted in the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism. Originating in Japan, it has evolved into an international organization dedicated to promoting peace, culture, and education based on the principles of humanism and individual empowerment. SGI was founded

⁸ Dalai Lama (2002), p. 98 – 100.

⁹ Daisaku Ikeda (2010), p. 72.

¹⁰ Richard Hughes Seager (2006), p. 134.

¹¹ The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka is an example of Engaged Buddhism's role in grassroots development. Inspired by Buddhist and Gandhian principles, this movement focuses on self-reliance, sustainable development, and community-building. It has played a crucial role in post-conflict reconciliation in Sri Lanka, providing economic empowerment and peace education to war-affected communities. George D. Bond (2003), p. 112.

¹² Buddhist Environmentalism and Climate Action. Buddhist organisations worldwide, such as the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), actively promote ecological awareness and climate justice. In Thailand and Bhutan, Buddhist monks have led conservation efforts, including tree ordination ceremonies to protect forests and initiatives to combat climate change. These efforts align with Buddhist teachings on interdependence and respect for nature.

in Japan in 1975 as an extension of the Soka Gakkai Buddhist movement and follows the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism. One of the key beliefs of the organization is that an inner transformation in one single individual through Buddhist practice can lead to broader societal change. SGI's philosophy aligns with Engaged Buddhism in its emphasis on inner revolution, dialogue, and collective action as means to establish global peace and justice.¹³

Meaning of Soka Gakkai: The term "Soka Gakkai" is derived from Japanese. Soka means, "value creation", and Gakkai means "society for learning". The name reflects the organization's emphasis on fostering a life of value through wisdom, compassion, and courage, achieved by applying Buddhist philosophy to daily challenges. The core belief is that each individual has the potential to create value in their lives and society by practicing Nichiren Buddhism and chanting "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo."¹⁴

Soka Gakkai has had three presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi,¹⁵ Josei Toda,¹⁶ and Daisaku Ikeda. During the 1960's, when Daisaku Ikeda succeeded Toda, SGI witnessed its global expansion.

The global expansion of the organization happened in 1960 after Daisaku Ikeda succeeded Toda as the third president of Soka Gakkai. Under his leadership, Soka Gakkai expanded internationally, leading to the establishment of Soka Gakkai International (SGI) in 1975. Ikeda emphasized global peace, interfaith dialogue, and cultural exchanges, positioning SGI as a major force for humanitarian efforts worldwide. He has been instrumental in shaping the organization's global outreach, advocating for peace, education, and cultural exchange as central pillars of social transformation. His dialogues with scholars, activists, and political leaders reflect SGI's commitment to promoting understanding across ideological and cultural divides.¹⁷

Among SGI's key contributions under Ikeda's guidance are interfaith and peace initiatives, engaging world leaders and scholars to promote global peace, educational foundations, establishing Soka schools and universities that

¹³ Daniel A. Métraux (1996), p. 56.

¹⁴ Soka Gakkai was founded in 1930 by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, (1996): p. 55 - 65.

¹⁵ Tsunesaburo Makiguchi who have been instrumental in its expansion in Japan as well as Internationally. The first President of SGI was Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. He was deeply influenced by Nichiren's teachings, rejected authoritarian ideologies and promoted an educational system focused on individual happiness and societal well-being. During World War II, he opposed Japan's militaristic government, which sought to impose State Shintoism. As a result, he was imprisoned in 1943 and died in prison in 1944. Dalai (1996), p. 60 - 65.

¹⁶ The second President was Josei Toda, who is mainly attributed for the reviving Soka Gakkai: After the war, Josei Toda expanded Soka Gakkai it from a small intellectual movement to a mass religious organization. He redefined its mission to include widespread propagation of Nichiren Buddhism, emphasizing personal transformation through faith and practice. Under his leadership, membership grew significantly, and the organisation established a strong presence in post-war Japan. R. H. Seager (2006), p. 40.

¹⁷ Daisaku Ikeda, (2001), p. 317.

emphasize value-creating education; human rights and disarmament advocacy, actively supporting nuclear disarmament through United Nations initiatives,¹⁸ and cultural and artistic engagement, fostering mutual understanding through cultural exchange programs. From 1983 to 2022, Ikeda authored annual peace proposals, with a particular focus on nuclear disarmament, reinforcing SGI's mission of promoting a peaceful and just world.¹⁹

III. SGI'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO BUDDHISM IN ACTION

Today, Soka Gakkai is present in 192 countries and territories, with millions of practitioners actively engaged in various spheres of society. In the field of education, Soka schools and universities promote value-based learning, emphasizing humanistic and ethical education. The organization is also deeply committed to peace and human rights, partnering with international institutions to advance disarmament, conflict resolution, and social justice. Additionally, Soka Gakkai International (SGI) supports environmental initiatives, advocating for sustainable development and ecological awareness programs that align with Buddhist principles of respect for all life.

One of SGI's most significant contributions is its advocacy for peace and disarmament. The organization has been actively involved in nuclear disarmament campaigns, working alongside the United Nations and other global entities to support treaties banning nuclear weapons. SGI's annual peace proposals, submitted by its honorary president, Daisaku Ikeda, provide strategies for conflict resolution and disarmament based on Buddhist ethics and human dignity.

Beyond peace activism, SGI promotes human rights and social justice through extensive educational programs and grassroots initiatives. In collaboration with UNESCO and other institutions, SGI advocates for gender equality, racial justice, and refugee rights, reinforcing the Buddhist principle of the inherent dignity of life. This commitment extends to environmental sustainability, where SGI has launched various ecological initiatives to address climate change and biodiversity conservation. The organization has endorsed the Earth Charter and actively promotes sustainable living through education and community-driven projects.

Education is another cornerstone of SGI's mission, with a strong emphasis on global citizenship. Inspired by the Soka Education philosophy developed

¹⁸ In his 2022 Peace Proposal, Ikeda emphasizes the need to create an environment conducive to establishing the principle of comprehensive non-use of nuclear weapons as a crucial step toward their global abolition. He advocates for discussions at the 2023 G7 Summit to include prohibitions on cyberattacks targeting nuclear weapons-related systems and the integration of AI into their operations – points he previously addressed in his 2020 proposal. Ikeda strongly urges that such efforts accelerate negotiations to fulfill the disarmament obligations outlined in Article VI of the Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT), generating irreversible momentum toward the abolition of nuclear weapons. Daisaku Ikeda (2022), p. 26.

¹⁹ Richard Hughes Seager (2006), p. 205.

by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, SGI operates educational institutions and cultural exchange programs that foster dialogue, critical thinking, and ethical responsibility. This approach aims to cultivate individuals who contribute positively to society, bridging differences through shared human values. Through these multifaceted efforts, SGI continues to embody the principles of Buddhism in action, striving to create a peaceful, just, and sustainable world.

IV. NICHIREN BUDDHISM AND ITS RELEVANCE IN AN ERA OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES

This philosophy believes in the interconnectedness of the individual and the universe. It makes an individual believe in his or her innate potential. It enables an individual to take responsibility for their past and present circumstances. At the same time, sensitizing them to become empathetic to the condition of people around them. The law is also referred to as the law of causality or the law of cause and effect. Causality in Buddhism also refers to things that are not visible such as misery, cruelty, happiness, etc. The accumulation of our past and present causes is referred to as 'karma' which is also referred to as the pattern and behavior we repeat or react to situations in our lives. This law or practice believes that individuals are the creators of their present as well as future. Thus, taking responsibility for the causes that are created further leads to the creation of a better society for us as well as others.²⁰

The members refer to people as Bodhisattva of the earth. In Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, the Bodhisattva term is used to describe an individual who is dedicated to the realization of happiness for oneself and others. This spirit of Bodhisattva is foundational to the growth and sustained efforts of SGI. It has led to the spread of this faith-based organization to 192 countries and territories globally. It is considered to be one of the fastest-growing and most diverse lay Buddhist movements, having more than 12 million practitioners across the globe.²¹

SGI supports the efforts of the UN and over the years has been working on global challenges such as the refugee crisis, educational reforms, abolition of nuclear weapons, and environmental crisis.²² The third President of SGI,

²⁰ Within the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the teaching that deluded impulses, or earthly desires and sufferings, are essential to enlightenment suggests the kind of dynamism that is required here. It calls for reorienting our understanding of the nature of human happiness. Happiness is not the outcome of eliminating or distancing us from the desires and impulses that give rise to suffering. It is instead vital that we grasp the reality that enlightenment – the strength and wisdom to forge a path to a better life – continues to exist within us even in the midst of anguish and pain. The problem is not simply one of suffering but of how we face that suffering and the kinds of action we take in response. Daisaku Ikeda (2017), p. 40.

²¹ Daisaku Ikeda (2001), p. 20.

²² The SGI was registered as a non-governmental organization (NGO) associated with the UN Department of Public Information in 1981 and was granted consultative status with the Economic and Social Council in 1983. It was also listed as an NGO in cooperation with UNHCR in 1997. SGI maintains offices in New York and Geneva. It was an early proponent

Daisaku Ikeda has been writing peace proposals to the UN since 1983. These proposals explore both, the Buddhist concepts and their social relevance in globally challenging times. For example: the 2018 proposal reads “Towards an era of Human Rights: Building a People’s Movement”. The adoption of the “The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons” in 2017 was a breakthrough in the field of nuclear disarmament. Mr Ikeda wrote this peace proposal “Building Global Solidarity Toward Nuclear Abolition” in 2009. SGI is also the international partner of ICAN (the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons) which won a Nobel Prize in 2017 for its efforts towards a world free from nuclear weapons.²³

One of the main monthly activities in SGI is its Discussion Meetings. These meetings serve as an active platform that reinstates Humanistic Buddhism among members and pushes them towards Engaged Buddhism. Such as discussing and promoting dialogues on equality, diversity, peace, education, and culture. Discussion Meetings serve as structures of spiritual and emotional support, whereby they help in overcoming the challenges of the 21st century like anomie, disenchantment, social exclusion, and a heightened sense of aloneness and depression. Reinstating the spirit of humanistic Buddhism, which connects the philosophical aspect of the religion to the everydayness of the individual, empowers the practitioners to become agents of change who begin to embody a spirit of ‘Engaged Buddhism in their respective workplaces, environment, communities, and society at large.

V. CONTRIBUTIONS OF SGI TO NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

SGI has been actively involved in nuclear disarmament initiatives on multiple fronts. It has collaborated with the United Nations, participating in discussions on nuclear disarmament, contributing policy recommendations, and supporting international treaties aimed at eliminating nuclear weapons. Recognizing the need for grassroots involvement, SGI launched *the People’s Decade for Nuclear Abolition* in 2007, a global campaign focused on raising awareness, mobilizing civil society, and fostering dialogue on the urgency of nuclear disarmament.²⁴

A key component of SGI’s advocacy is the *annual peace proposals* authored by its honorary president, Daisaku Ikeda. These proposals outline practical steps

of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005 - 14) and played an active role in the UN process for the realization of the World Programme for Human Rights Education that was launched in 2005 as a follow-up to the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995 - 2004). It launched the People’s Decade for Nuclear Abolition initiative in 2007 to rouse public opinion and help create a global grassroots network of people on the issue. The SGI actively participates in networks including the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CoNGO) and NGO committees on specific themes such as peace and disarmament, human rights education and gender equality in New York, Geneva and Vienna. Daisaku Ikeda (2001), p. 20 - 30.

²³ Richard Hughes Seager (2012), p. 77.

²⁴ Jason Goulah (2012), p. 91.

for achieving a nuclear-free world and emphasize the ethical and humanitarian arguments against nuclear armament. In addition, SGI has actively supported the *treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons (TPNW)*, adopted by the United Nations in 2017, encouraging civil society groups and governments to ratify and implement the treaty as a legal framework for nuclear abolition.²⁵

Education and public awareness play a crucial role in SGI's disarmament efforts. The organization conducts exhibitions, conferences, and educational programs to inform people about the dangers of nuclear weapons. One such initiative is the exhibition "*Everything You Treasure – for a world free from nuclear weapons*," which has been displayed globally to engage the public in dialogue on nuclear abolition.²⁶

SGI's unwavering commitment to nuclear disarmament reflects its broader mission of fostering global peace and security. By working with international institutions, supporting legal frameworks, and engaging in grassroots activism, SGI continues to play a significant role in the global movement toward a nuclear-free world.

VI. THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN SOKA GAKKAI

Youth engagement has been a cornerstone of the Soka Gakkai movement since its inception. The organization's founders recognized the vital energy and potential that young people bring to societal transformation. In July 1951, the Young Men's Division and Young Women's Division were established, marking a significant commitment to nurturing youth leadership within the organization.

SGI's youth divisions are actively involved in initiatives that align with the organization's core values. Peace and disarmament advocacy is a key focus, with youth members participating in campaigns promoting nuclear disarmament and the abolition of war. The Soka Gakkai youth division in Japan, for example, has organized the youth summit on the Renunciation of War annually since 1989, fostering dialogue and sharing peace activities among young delegates.²⁷

Environmental initiatives have also become a priority, with SGI youth engaging in sustainability projects and awareness campaigns. In the United Kingdom, over 1,000 young people attended a festival featuring the "Seeds of hope & action: Making the SDGs a reality" exhibition, reflecting SGI's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Additionally, cultural and educational programs play a significant role, with youth divisions organizing cultural festivals, educational workshops, and community dialogues to promote humanistic values and global citizenship. Through these diverse efforts, SGI empowers young individuals to become proactive contributors to their societies, embodying the movement's core principles of peace, sustainability, and social engagement.

²⁵ Richard Hughes Seager (2012), p. 77.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Richard Hughes Seager (2006), p. 205.

VII. CRITICAL ANALYSIS: BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES VERSUS PROSELYTIZATION

A key doctrinal tenet of SGI is Kosen-rufu, which refers to the widespread propagation of Nichiren Buddhism as a means to achieve world peace.²⁸ Historically, SGI leaders, particularly Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda, have emphasized expansion as a means of fulfilling Nichiren's vision for social transformation.²⁹ While this mission is rooted in a vision of global harmony, it has sometimes been interpreted by members as an imperative for conversion efforts, leading to a focus on numerical growth rather than inner self-cultivation.³⁰

SGI places a strong emphasis on chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, the title of the *Lotus Sutra*, as a transformational practice that can lead to enlightenment and happiness.³¹ While this practice aligns with Buddhist notions of personal development, some practitioners equate their spiritual progress with their ability to introduce others to the practice. Consequently, the desire to recruit new members sometimes eclipses broader Buddhist values such as mindfulness, wisdom, and compassion.³²

Another contributing factor is the concept of human revolution, which asserts that individual transformation leads to broader societal change.³³ While this idea promotes self-improvement, some members may conflate external validation – such as gaining converts – with inner growth. This results in a transactional relationship with Buddhism, where personal faith is measured by the ability to influence others rather than through self-reflection and ethical living.³⁴ Furthermore, SGI's teachings on karma suggest that spreading Buddhism can lead to personal benefits, reinforcing a results-driven approach to faith that may overshadow the introspective aspects of Buddhist practice.³⁵

VIII. THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF PROSELYTIZATION

SGI's strong sense of community can further contribute to an emphasis on proselytization. Many members find meaning and belonging within SGI's structure, and recruitment can become a way to strengthen social ties and reaffirm personal faith.³⁶ In some cases, members experience pressure – whether explicit or implicit – to introduce others to the practice, leading to a dynamic where faith becomes linked with social expectations rather than personal conviction.³⁷

²⁸ Daisaku Ikeda (2010), p. 20.

²⁹ Metraux (1996), p. 15.

³⁰ R. H Seager (2006), p. 205.

³¹ Daisaku Ikeda (2017), p. 5.

³² Queen and King (1996), p. 18.

³³ Daisaku Ikeda (2008), p. 15.

³⁴ R. H Seager (2006), p. 205.

³⁵ G. D Bond (2003), p. 30.

³⁶ D. A Metraux (1996), p. 55.

³⁷ Seager (2006), p. 205.

Additionally, SGI's organizational expansion has historically relied on grassroots outreach, where personal networks play a crucial role in attracting new practitioners. While this approach fosters engagement, it can also lead to an overemphasis on numbers and growth at the expense of deeper philosophical engagement.³⁸ This has raised concerns about whether SGI's approach to propagation aligns with the broader principles of Buddhism, which emphasize non-attachment and personal wisdom over institutional expansion.³⁹

IX. TOWARDS A BALANCED APPROACH

While SGI remains committed to peace and social justice, an excessive focus on proselytization can detract from key Buddhist principles. To align more closely with Buddhism's broader philosophical foundations, a balanced approach – rooted in dialogue, compassion, and ethical practice – is necessary. Instead of viewing propagation solely as a numerical goal, SGI could emphasize deeper engagement with Buddhist philosophy, encouraging members to embody compassion and wisdom in their daily lives rather than measuring faith through recruitment efforts.⁴⁰

Ultimately, while SGI's commitment to spreading Nichiren Buddhism has contributed to its global reach, it is essential to ensure that this focus does not overshadow the core tenets of mindfulness, ethical living, and self-awareness. A more holistic engagement with Buddhist teachings would not only enrich members' spiritual journeys but also strengthen SGI's contributions to global peace and human dignity.

X. CONCLUSION

In an era of growing global challenges – ranging from conflict and environmental degradation to social divisions – SGI's model of engaged Buddhism offers an inspiring example of how religious and spiritual movements can play a constructive role in addressing societal issues. At a time when geopolitical tensions, economic disparities, and climate crises threaten global stability, SGI's commitment to peace, sustainability, and social justice presents a path forward that is both pragmatic and deeply rooted in Buddhist humanism. Unlike traditional religious movements that may focus primarily on doctrinal teachings or ritual practices, SGI actively encourages its members to engage with contemporary issues, fostering a sense of responsibility for the well-being of society as a whole.

By integrating personal transformation with collective action, SGI continues to demonstrate that faith, when applied in daily life, can be a powerful force for positive change. The principle of human revolution, which underscores the idea that societal change begins with the individual, serves as the foundation for SGI's activism. Whether through nuclear disarmament campaigns, climate action initiatives, or educational programs, SGI members

³⁸ Queen and King (1996), p. 18.

³⁹ Dalai Lama (2002), p. 98 - 100.

⁴⁰ Daisaku Ikeda (2010), p. 317.

are encouraged to embody the Buddhist philosophy of interconnectedness and compassion in their daily interactions and community efforts.

However, while SGI's contributions to social justice and peace-building are widely recognized, its approach to proselytization has also drawn critical attention. Some members, influenced by the movement's emphasis on *Kosen-rufu* – the propagation of Nichiren Buddhism as a means of achieving world peace – prioritize recruitment efforts over deeper spiritual engagement. While SGI does not officially enforce conversion, the strong sense of communal belonging within local groups can sometimes create implicit pressure to evangelize. This dynamic raises important questions about the balance between faith-based activism and the preservation of Buddhist principles such as mindfulness, ethical conduct, and wisdom.

Additionally, the idea of human evolution – the belief that personal transformation can lead to societal change – can sometimes be misinterpreted as being contingent on external validation, such as gaining converts. In certain cases, this fosters a transactional relationship with faith, where outreach efforts take precedence over introspection and ethical living. While SGI's commitment to peace and education remains central to its mission, ensuring that its engagement remains rooted in open dialogue and genuine spiritual practice is crucial for maintaining its broader ethical framework. By fostering an environment that prioritizes compassion over conversion, SGI can further strengthen its role as a leading force for global peace and social transformation.

As the movement expands and evolves, its contributions to peace, education, and human rights will remain a vital part of its enduring legacy. SGI's ability to adapt to changing social landscapes while remaining true to its core values ensures that it remains relevant and impactful in diverse cultural and political contexts. In fostering global citizenship, cross-cultural dialogue, and grassroots activism, SGI continues to inspire individuals and communities to take meaningful action for the collective good.

The dual focus of SGI on both inner growth and external engagement distinguishes SGI as a movement that transcends conventional religious boundaries, promoting a vision of a more harmonious and sustainable world. By prioritizing dialogue over division, cooperation over conflict, and sustainability over short-term gains, SGI offers a model for how spirituality can serve as a guiding force in building a more just, inclusive, and peaceful world.

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FOSTERING HUMAN FLOURISHING THROUGH COMPASSIONATE ACTION IN THE NIKĀYAS

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Abstract:

This paper explores the fundamental role of compassion in the development of both individual and collective well-being as envisioned in early Buddhist teachings. In the early Buddhist discourses, compassion is commonly expressed through the active practice of teaching the Dharma. Drawing from *Pāli Nikāyas*, this paper examines how Buddhism argues for shared responsibility in the pursuit of human flourishing. Central to these teachings is the concept of *karunā* (compassion), which is not only a personal virtue but also a communal force for fostering social harmony, ethical conduct, and collective growth. Early Buddhist perspectives highlight the interdependent nature of human existence, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all beings and the moral obligation to cultivate compassion for the welfare of others. By focusing on both individual practice and collective action, this paper investigates how Buddhist principles of compassion and sympathy can inform contemporary understandings of responsibility in human development, encouraging a balanced approach to societal progress that integrates ethical conduct, mindfulness, and mutual care. Through compassionate action, Buddhism offers a model for addressing contemporary challenges, promoting sustainable growth, and ensuring a more harmonious future for all.

Keywords: *Buddhism, compassion, sustainable development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the early Buddhist philosophy discourses, it is mentioned that Gotama Buddha was a sympathetic teacher. Etymologically, the term “sympathy” (*anukampā*) may be comprehended as the condition of being deeply affected or moved in resonance with the circumstances or emotions of others,

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reflecting a shared responsiveness to their plight or experience.² The Buddha, by offering his instructions, did for his disciples what any teacher should do “out of compassion” (*anukampā*), as indicated in the early Buddhist text.³ This concept is also evident in a common expression used by those requesting teachings from the Buddha or his disciples, where they express the desire that the teaching be given “out of compassion.” In this way, both the teacher and the student recognize teaching as an act of compassion.⁴ However, compassion is not the sole motivation behind teaching, as acknowledged in the early discourses. Aronson argues that the Buddha has also asked the monks to be concerned for others’ welfare. He quotes, “Monks, there is one Individual who arose and came to be for the welfare of the multitudes, for the happiness of the multitudes, out of sympathy for the world; for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans. Who is that one individual? The Harmonious One, the Perfectly Enlightened One.”⁵ In *Nikāya*, the Buddha is consistently portrayed as deeply attuned to the well-being of his fellow human beings, embodying an unwavering concern for their suffering and striving for their ultimate welfare. This paper is an attempt to, by analyzing the notion of action, volition, and mental state in relation to ideas of early Buddhism, explore the applications of compassionate action in human flourishing. In the first part of the paper, an exposition of ‘volition’ and ‘action’ is presented. In the second part, the relationship between action and mental state is dealt with. In the third part, the nature of compassionate action is mentioned in *Nikāya* and its application on human flourishing.

II. VOLITION AND ACTION

In this section, let us first explore the notion of action in early Buddhism and Ryle. In order to do that we make the differentiation among the notions of ‘states’ ‘process’ and ‘event’, the three key concepts to explain ‘action.’ “A state endures for a greater or a lesser time, but it exists entire at each instant for which it endures.”⁶ For instance, if a person is angry for a certain time, then it means that he is in a particular state of mind. A process takes time to complete. For instance, running a race is a physical process or ‘calculating in one’s head’ is a mental process. The word ‘event’ can be used to mean a process. For instance, winning is a physical event. In early Buddhist philosophy, the ascent of a certain *citta* is an event. However, it is fascinating to note that processes and events equally belong to the same category of occurrence. Let us examine the notion of volition in early Buddhism. In early Buddhism, *cetanā* is often translated as ‘volition’ or ‘intention.’⁷ Due to the lack of common English words, it is very difficult to translate such technical Buddhist terms as *cetanā*. One can use

² Keown (2001): 73.

³ Anālayo (2015): 8.

⁴ Anālayo (2015): 4.

⁵ Aronson (1980): 3.

⁶ Armstrong (1968): 130.

⁷ Keown (2001): 220.

English near-synonyms by clearly redefining them in our usage within the Buddhist context. We can translate *cetanā* as “volition” or “intention,” defining it as the choice to act based on a thought or a feeling.

We may note, however, that what is put into effect need not be physical action and that the use of the term “volition” may not always be inaccurate. The Buddha seems to have held the view that the process of *cetanā* was followed by a *praxis* of some kind and that deliberation (*cetayitvā*) was followed by action (*kammaṃ karoti*). However, he distinguishes three types of *praxis*: bodily (*kayasā*), vocal (*vācāsā*), and mental (*manasā*). *Cetanā*, then, reaches a terminus with moral implications, but the morally determinative *praxis* may be purely mental in form. When *cetanā* is used in this sense the translation of it by “volition” may not be misleading.⁸

In early Buddhism, the word “*saṅkhāra*” was also used for volitions.⁹ *saṅkhāra* can be translated in many different ways: formations, activities, processes, forces, compounds, compositions, fabrications, determinations, synergies, and constructions. It is responsible for generating rebirth and, thus, for sustaining the onward movement of *saṅkhāra*, the cycle of birth and death. In this context, *saṅkhāra* is virtually synonymous with *kamma*. *Kamma* plays an important role in Buddhism. The doctrine of *kamma* is one of the fundamental principles of Buddhism. Action undertaken, according to Buddhist belief, determines the prospects of one’s future life and existence. Our present existence is the outcome of past acts, and the present act produces our future. Buddhist ethics inculcate that good or bad deeds produce good or bad results. In early Buddhism intention of action plays an important role. The original Sanskrit term *karma* (P. *kamma*) means “action”, and as this suggests, the basic point is that our actions have consequences – more precisely, that our morally-relevant actions have morally relevant consequences that extend beyond their immediate effects. In the popular Buddhist understanding, the law of *kamma* and rebirth is a way to get a handle on how the world will treat us in the future, which also implies that we must accept our causal responsibility for whatever is happening to us now. For Buddhists, our personality is constructed by what we intentionally do because our sense of self is a perception of habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. For early Buddhism, any kind of intentional action, whether physical, vocal, or mental, is regarded as *kamma*. It is also elucidated as the result of previous deeds since, according to Buddhism, the cyclic development of the individual in *saṅkhāra* is nothing else but the effects of his *kamma*. Herbert Guenther writes in this connection:

In Buddhist reasoning, *karman* is no outside force, but the inherent activity of every process. Since activity is limited by the amount of energy available—there is no single action that is not energy-determined—*karman* represents both the potential and kinetic energy of a process. Moreover, since energy cannot be lost, it is always present, either as kinetic or potential energy. In

⁸ Keown (2001): 220.

⁹ Stcherbatsky (2005): 18.

its potential stage, energy is ‘heaped up’ (*upacita*), while in its kinetic state, it develops (*vipacyate*) towards a certain effect.¹⁰

In its ultimate sense *kamma* means good or bad volition (*kusala-akusla cetanā*). Buddha has said, “*Cetana ahaa kammaa vadami*.”¹¹ According to Buddhism, only purposive action determines *kammic* result. Thus, the moral consequences of the action of a person who is not in a normal state of mind will be comparatively light.¹² Here a question could be raised whether the offender could be blamed for his action. The Buddha states that we cannot blame him because he was out of mind when he was making the offence or mistake. The amount of the moral consequences of one’s actions corresponds directly to the degree of one’s mental stability, intelligence, and understanding. Thus, the moral consequences of the action of a person who has an unstable mind are comparatively light, while those who have a sound mind and clear understanding are relatively heavy. According to the *Milindapañha*:

Evil done by one who is unhinged, sin, is not of great blame here and now, nor is it so in respect of its ripening in a future state. There is no punishment for a madman’s crime, therefore, there is no defect in what was done by a madman; he is pardonable.¹³

In Buddhism action of a madman is blameless, and we should try to stimulate his inherent potential for goodness and this is the only way to reform the offender. For Buddhism, intentional actions are regarded as having *kammic* results or “fruits” (*kamma-vipāka* or *kamma-phala*). Many instances prove that Buddhism accepts only that action which has been done with intention. “I do not teach, *bhikkhus*, the coming to an end of accumulated *kamma* intentionally done without being experienced, and this has to occur either in this very life or in another turn of existence. And I do not teach that any is making an end of pain without having experienced the accumulated *kamma* intentionally done.”¹⁴ In Buddhism, there is ample discussion about *kamma*. The Theravada tradition narrates the Buddha biography with his good and bad *kamma*. However, Buddhist tradition does not give the slightest indication that Buddha did anything productive of bad *kamma*. Jonathan S. Walters writes:

But in the early parts of the canon, there is no evidence that Buddhists believed these events were the result of bad karma, nor even that they considered the fact of Buddha’s suffering to be in any way problematic. Moreover, there is no evidence in these texts that these disparate unpleasant events were contemplated together as a category. By the late canonical period, however, a text was produced which makes obvious the fact that at least some Buddhists thought about these unpleasant aspects of the Buddha biography categorically, and explained them as the effects of Buddha’s bad *karma*. This

¹⁰ Guenther (1991): 20.

¹¹ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* Vol. IV (P. T. S.), 415.

¹² *Aṅguttara Nikāya* III. 415.

¹³ *Milindapañha*: 221.

¹⁴ Perez-Remon (1980): 134.

text is called *Pubbakammapiḷoti*, or *the Strands (Rags) of Previous Karma*, contained as number 387 of the *Therāpavdaṇa*.¹⁵

Our main intention in mentioning the bad and good *kamma* is to show that early Buddhism's profound belief of promoting common good and interest, mutual welfare and wellbeing, and nobility of life and its perfection, justifies the Buddha's great compassion for humanity. Out of these sublime truths, the Buddha evolved a genuine code of ethics and morality, the practical side of his philosophy, in the form of a simple yet practical system of human life¹⁶. These are the five noble precepts known as *Pāncasila*,¹⁷ and it is considered as a basic teaching of Buddha and is accepted by all schools of Buddhism. They are: (1) not to kill, (2) not to steal, (3) not to tell lies, (4) not to live an immoral life, and (5) not to consume intoxicants. It means positive love in the form of compassion and friendship towards all beings in thought, word, and deed. In Buddhism, killing in any form is prohibited. In other words, the main purpose of the Buddha's teaching is to provide the motivation and environment for healing and caring, for positive change and spiritual liberation. The Buddha explicitly mentions that there is nothing like an eternal soul that is responsible for *kamma*. David Loy writes about intention and *kamma* in Buddhism:

One modern approach to *karma* is to understand it in terms of what Buddhism calls *saṅkhāra*, our "mental formations," especially habitual tendencies. These are best understood not as tendencies we have, but as tendencies we are: instead of being "my" habits, their interaction is what constitutes my sense of "me." But that does not mean that they are ineradicable: unwholesome *saṅkhāras* are to be differentiated from the liberatory possibilities that are available to all of us if we follow the path of replacing them with more wholesome mental tendencies. The point of this interpretation is that we are punished not for our sins but by them. People suffer or benefit not for what they have done but for what they have become, and what we intentionally do is what makes us what we are. This conflation makes little sense if karma is understood dualistically as a kind of moral "dirt" attached to me, but it makes a great deal of sense if I am my habitual intentions, for then the important spiritual issue is the development of those intentions. In that case, my actions and my intentions build/ rebuild my character just as food is assimilated to build/ rebuild my physical body. If *karma* is this psychological truth about how we construct ourselves – about how my sense-of-self is constructed by "my" greed, ill-will, and delusion – then we can no longer accept the juridical presupposition of a completely self-determined subject wholly responsible for its actions. Again, we can no longer justify punishment as retributive but must shift the focus of criminal justice to education and reformation.¹⁸

The purpose of discussing the notion of volition in Buddhism is to show

¹⁵ Walters (1990): 76.

¹⁶ Sebastian (2005): 229.

¹⁷ *Samyutta-nikaya* 2: 68.

¹⁸ Loy (2000): 145 - 168.

that Buddha refutes the notion of an eternal self. Thus, action can take place because there is a body performing said action. It may be objected because action cannot be performed without an agent, and again, there must be some kind of purpose behind action. If there is no eternal substance, then it will be only an event of cause and effect. For Buddhism, there is no reason to assume that an agent must have a soul or permanent substance serving as the self. Early Buddhism explicitly explained that the five aggregates are the agent who acts.¹⁹ It may appear as a permanent soul, but it is merely an illusion.

III. MENTAL STATE AND ACTION

In this section, we take up the concept of *mental state* and its role in *action*. 'Mental state' plays a crucial role in 'action.' According to Buddhism, purposive activity is behaviour with a mental cause. For instance, suppose I have form) the intension to strike someone. It means that my mind is in a certain state and my action is merely the effect of this *mental state*. The term 'state' requires further explanation. "A state endures for a greater or a lesser time, but it exists entire at each instant for which it endures. Heat is a physical state. If a body is hot for a certain time, it is hot at every instant of that time."²⁰ Correspondingly, anger is a mental state if a person is angry for a certain time. "The concept of mental state is primarily the concept of a state of the person apt for bringing about a certain sort of behaviour. Sacrificing all accuracy for brevity, we can say that, although the mind is not behaviour, it is the cause of behaviour. In the case of some mental states only they are also states of the person apt for being brought about by a certain sort of stimulus."²¹

According to Buddhism, the *mental state* is different from the *physical state*. Mental states are not causally related to behaviour. In that case, we can say that different kinds of mental states produce different kinds of behaviour. It's not only responsible for behaviour but also another mental state. Early Buddhist philosophy gives a detailed account of the mental state.

In early Buddhism one's *mental state* has an important role in his day-to-day life. According to Buddhism, *cētasikas* are mental factors or mental concomitants that arise and perish²² together with *citta*. *Cētasika* is derived from *cētō*, and it is consciousness, thought, or mind. It depends on the *citta* for their arising, and it influences the mind to be bad, good, or neutral as they arise. As we have stated in the second chapter, there are different kinds of *citta*, and it arises when it comes in contact with the objects. If the relation between A and B is such that B always arises simultaneously with A, then A is the *relating dhamma*, and it is the causal condition for the arising of the latter B, which is known as the related *dhamma*. Here, it is significant to note that this relation does not necessarily mean that A cannot arise independently of

¹⁹ Radhakrishnan, (1986): 411 – 412.

²⁰ Armstrong (1968): 130.

²¹ Armstrong (1968): 82.

²² *Abhidhammatha sangaha* II.1.

B. It only means that under no circumstances can B arise independently of A. For early Buddhism, the main and its mental factors are not supposed to arise and perish without each other because they are said to have the same base and the same object. They share the same physical-organ as well as the object. So, when mind arises depending upon eye-ear or nose channel and so on, and makes visible datum etc., as its object, the mental factors also depend upon eye-channel and make visible datum as their object.

In early Buddhism, a *cētasika* has four main characteristic properties. *Firstly*, it arises together with *citta* (consciousness). *Secondly*, it perishes together with *citta*. *Thirdly*, it takes the same object that *citta* takes; and *finally*, it shares a common physical base with *citta*. Let us take an example to make clearer the relation of *citta* and *cētasika*. As Buddhist scholar, De Silva puts it: suppose a pharmacist has 52 kinds of drugs, of which 13 are ordinary drugs, 14 poisonous drugs and 25 specifics. He is not able to compound a mixture with only the drugs themselves. It is necessary to have pure unpolluted themselves. It is necessary to have pure, unpolluted water for this purpose. According to the prescription, he utilizes some of the drugs and makes a mixture with water. After the mixture is made, it is not possible to separate the different drugs from the water. Hence, they are associated with or coexisting in the water. When the water is drunk, then the drugs, too, are drunk. The bottle containing the mixture has water and drugs co-existing therein and incapable of being separated therefrom. Results obtained from different mixtures vary according to the properties of drugs; cure is affected in respect of specifics and relief rendered with ordinary drugs.²³ Correspondingly, consciousness and mental properties function in the same manner. In the above instance, water represents Consciousness, and *cētasika* are like the drugs, and similar to water and drugs, *citta* and *cētasika* arise and perish together. Any one of them cannot arise alone. It does not mean that all the mental states arise in consciousness at the same time. In Buddhism, there are different kinds of *citta* and mental states. In the second chapter, we have already discussed *citta* in detail. Here, let us take only the notion of mental state or *cētasika*.

The main purpose of the illustration of mental states is to show that, according to early Buddhism, mental states are responsible for the different kinds of action. For Buddhism, “the world of things and events which stimulate us sensuously and sensually and to which we react with our impulses, our apprehensions, with all that makes sentient life, begins and ends with our attitude-and emotional and intellectual patterns which governs all individual life.”²⁴ Early Buddhism contends that mental state not only causes of particular kind of behaviour but causes of other mental also. *Atthasālini* states, “sensuous relatedness (*kamma*) is twofold: object and emotion. Emotion means passionate desire, and object means the triple realm of existence (i.e., the hells, the human world, and the heavens). Emotion is spoken of here because it passionately desires,

²³ De Silva (1997): 69.

²⁴ Guenther (1991): 97: *Samyuttanikaya* I. 39.

and object is spoken of here because it is passionately desired.”²⁵ According to early Buddhism, *kamma* and emotion or mental state play a crucial role in human suffering. The selection of an object completely depends on individual temperament.²⁶ Guenther writes, “*Karman* and the emotion are the reason for the way of the world, and among them, the emotions are the principal condition. By way of the domination influence of the emotions, *Karman* can project a new existence (*punarbhavaksxepasamarth*); it cannot be otherwise.”²⁷ To sum up, emotions are the root of fact that the way the world appears to an individual. Therefore, action is the effect of mental states. In Buddhism, only exhaustions of power and emotion are the way to get liberation.

IV. COMPASSIONATE ACTION IN NIKĀYA

Early Buddhism originated as an ethico-religious framework that emphasizes the moral reality of suffering and the inherent painfulness of human existence. It posits that suffering is intrinsically linked to a causal factor, for without such a connection, an escape from it would be inconceivable. Consequently, Buddhism calls for an inquiry into the origins of suffering. The Buddha explained that suffering arises from craving, which in turn stems from ignorance – ignorance of the true nature of reality. The Buddha’s aim was not only practical but spiritual, focusing on the attainment of Nirvana. The central goal of Buddhist philosophy is the cessation of suffering, which is perpetuated by desires and attachments. To eradicate the root cause of suffering – namely, desires and attachments – Buddhism advocates the abandonment of the belief in a body-soul dualism. This shift led to a profound analysis of the mind, as the Buddha remained silent on the metaphysical question of the existence of an eternal soul, refraining from committing to any ontological stance. Instead, he offered an existential analysis of the human being, emphasizing the path to Nirvana – the cessation of suffering – without engaging in metaphysical assertions about the nature of the self or soul. Buddhism’s central teachings revolve around the Four Noble Truths, which address the nature of suffering and its eradication. According to Buddhism, the ultimate purpose of life is the attainment of Nirvana, a state in which suffering ceases. Regarding the external world, Buddhism contends that its existence is due to our ignorance, a view encapsulated in the philosophy of the Wheel of Existence, which explains the cycle of birth and rebirth without invoking an eternal self. Here, the Buddha asserts that ignorance is the root of all suffering. Scholars have noted that while Buddhist philosophy offers profound motivation for overcoming ignorance and attaining liberation, it offers less encouragement for direct action to preserve the natural world or for sustainable development. Therefore, there is an argument that early Buddhist theory does not motivate us to cultivate moral concern for others’ welfare.

Anālayo argues that a discourse in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* and its parallel in

²⁵ Guenther (1991): 6.

²⁶ *Visuddhimagga*, III. 74.

²⁷ Guenther (1991): 9.

the *Samyukta-āgama* explicitly emphasize that the Buddha was not concerned with whether the entire world, or just part of it, would attain liberation.²⁸ He further argues that Texts from the early stages of the bodhisattva ideal, such as the *Mahāvastu*, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, and the *Ugraparipṛcchā*, indicate that the compassionate wish to save all sentient beings was not initially central to the development of the bodhisattva path. Rather, the primary motivation during this early period was the aspiration to attain Buddhahood and to become equal to the Buddha. It is only later in the evolution of the bodhisattva ideal that the compassionate desire to liberate all beings from suffering emerged as a key element of this path.²⁹

However, in the *Nikāyas*, the Buddha is consistently depicted as profoundly attuned to the welfare of others, manifesting an enduring compassion for their suffering and a relentless commitment to their ultimate well-being. The text asserts that an individual aspiring to cultivate loving-kindness must first reflect on the dangers of hatred and the benefits of patience, since hatred must be relinquished and patience cultivated in the development of this meditation practice. It is crucial to grasp the detrimental effects of hatred. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, when a person begins to harbour hatred towards another, their mind becomes consumed by it, leading to adverse consequences in their life. Therefore, one must consciously avoid the mental state of hatred, and the most effective means of doing so is by cultivating loving-kindness. The text emphasizes that one should accord equal value to the lives of others or all sentient beings.

In early Buddhist philosophy, the practice of trance meditation (*jhāna*) serves as a potent method for hastening the cultivation and permeation of the psyche. Love (*mettā*) and compassion (*karunā*) are mental states in which the mind is fully saturated with these qualities.³⁰ In *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31), the Buddha instructs Sigālaka to recognize four essential types of virtuous friends: the helper, the companion in both good times and bad, the counselor, and the compassionate one.³¹ The “helper” is a friend who safeguards you in moments of negligence, protects your possessions, ensures your safety in times of danger, and provides more than necessary when a task demands completion. The “companion in both joy and sorrow” is a friend who confides in you, keeps your secrets, stands by you in times of difficulty, and is willing to sacrifice their life for your well-being. The “counselor” offers guidance by preventing wrongdoing, supporting virtuous action, encouraging the Dhamma, and guiding you towards spiritual liberation. Finally, the “compassionate friend” does not take joy in your misfortune but rejoices in your success, defends you from criticism, and promotes your praise.³²

²⁸ Anālayo (2015): 7.

²⁹ Anālayo (2015): 8.

³⁰ Keown (2001): 220.

³¹ *Digha-nikāya*: 31.

³² *Digha-nikāya*: 31.

The Buddha further elaborates that a wise individual should recognize these four types of friends for their true worth, much like a child depends on its mother. The virtuous person, who embodies qualities such as righteousness, wisdom, and compassion, shines brightly, much like a flame. Their wealth, gathered just like bees collecting nectar, grows steadily and securely.³³ This individual wisely divides their wealth into four portions: one for personal and family welfare, two for business investment, and one to safeguard against future hardships. In doing so, they ensure prosperity and surround themselves with supportive, virtuous friends, leading a life of well-being and moral integrity.³⁴

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, compassion (*karuṇā*) and sympathy are closely linked to wisdom. In conclusion, *karuṇā* (compassion) and sympathy are intrinsically connected to *prajñā* (wisdom) and the cultivation of a profound understanding of reality. Within the framework of early Buddhist teachings, compassionate action is not merely an instinctive emotional response but a deliberate and cultivated practice aimed at the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*), both for oneself and for others. Unlike transient feelings of pity or empathy, Buddhist compassion is rooted in a deep realization of the interdependent nature of existence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), emphasizing that the alleviation of suffering must be undertaken with wisdom and right intention (*samyak-saṃkalpa*). The Buddha's teachings underscore that the cultivation of *karuṇā* should not be confined to those with whom one shares personal bonds but should extend universally to all sentient beings (*sarvasattva*), recognizing that their suffering is neither less significant nor separate from one's own. This recognition serves as a transformative force, guiding practitioners beyond a self-referential perspective and fostering an expansive, interconnected view of existence. By eroding the illusion of a fixed, isolated self (*ātman*), compassion becomes a vehicle for dissolving ego-centric attachments and nurturing an ethical sensitivity that transcends personal concerns. Furthermore, compassionate action is not only seen as an individual moral imperative but also as a catalyst for broader societal transformation. Within Buddhist thought, the intentional practice of *karuṇā* is regarded as a potent force that influences both the inner mental landscape of individuals and the collective consciousness of communities. It is through such ethical engagement that societies can evolve toward a model of interdependent well-being, where social harmony is grounded in mutual care and moral responsibility rather than competition and self-interest. In this way, compassion does not merely operate at the level of individual virtue but emerges as a guiding principle for collective human progress, fostering a world where wisdom, ethical commitment, and genuine concern for others shape the foundation of a just and enlightened society.

³³ *Digha-nikāya*: 31.

³⁴ *Digha-nikāya*: 31.

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PRACTICAL APPROACHES ON MARRIAGE IN THE PĀLI CANON: AN ANALYTICAL EXPLORATION WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF ETHICAL AND COMPASSIONATE LIVING

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Abstract:

The present research explores the concept of marriage in the *Pāli* Canon, emphasizing its humanistic dimensions in light of the theme of unity, inclusivity, and human dignity. Moreover, the study examines how Buddhist teachings provide a foundation for ethical, compassionate, and harmonious marital relationships, fostering mutual respect and well-being between partners. Likewise, by integrating the principles of Humanistic Buddhism (人間佛教 - *rénjiān fójiào*), this research highlights how ancient wisdom can be practically applied to modern relationships, portraying marriage as a transformative journey that nurtures personal and collective harmony. Through an in-depth analysis of canonical discourses such as the *Sigāla Sutta*, *Sattabhariyā Sutta*, and *Paṭhamasaṃvāsa Sutta*, etc., this research paper examines the role of mindfulness, ethical living, and emotional intelligence in marital relationships. It further explores how these teachings align with contemporary discussions on human dignity, inclusivity, and sustainable human development, emphasizing marriage as a practice rooted in compassion (*karuṇā*), responsibility (*hiri-ottappa*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Employing a qualitative research approach, this study conducts content analysis of primary and secondary sources, including English translations of the *Pāli* Canon and commentaries by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. By bridging ancient wisdom with contemporary relationship dynamics, this research contributes to a broader discourse on

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how Buddhist principles can enhance marital harmony, fostering sustainable human relationships in a diverse and interconnected world.

Keywords: *Marriage, Pāli Canon, humanistic Buddhism, compassion, ethical living, marital harmony, human dignity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

It is apparent that “Marriage” is a significant aspect of human society, serving not only as a social institution but also as a medium for personal growth and spiritual development. In the *Pāli Canon*, marriage is depicted through various discourses that emphasize mutual respect, compassion, and ethical conduct between partners. Accordingly, this study aims to provide an analytical exploration of marriage as portrayed in the *Pāli Canon*, with particular attention to its humanistic approaches, which focus on fostering harmony and understanding within marital relationships. Humanistic Buddhism, as developed by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, emphasizes the integration of Buddhist principles into daily life, highlighting values such as compassion, altruism, and mindfulness.¹ These principles are essential for nurturing harmonious marital relationships, as they guide individuals in navigating challenges and fostering a supportive environment within the family. By examining the *Pāli Canon*’s teachings alongside humanistic perspectives, this study seeks to uncover the relevance of these ancient teachings in contemporary marital contexts. The *Pāli Canon* offers valuable insights into the dynamics of marriage, presenting it as a transformative journey that allows partners to grow together both emotionally and spiritually. Discourses such as the *Sigāla Sutta* and the *Sattabhariyā Sutta* provide ethical guidelines for married couples, emphasizing mutual respect, compassion, and shared responsibilities.² The teachings within these discourses align closely with the principles of Humanistic Buddhism, which advocate for ethical conduct, mindfulness, and the cultivation of wholesome relationships. In this study, the focus is on analyzing the ethical and moral foundations of marriage as depicted in the *Pāli Canon*, highlighting how these teachings can be applied to modern relationships. By incorporating both canonical teachings and humanistic perspectives, this paper aims to demonstrate that the principles found in the *Pāli Canon* are not only relevant but also highly applicable to contemporary marital life. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of marriage as a spiritual and transformative endeavor, grounded in the ethical and compassionate teachings of Buddhism.

1.1. Research objectives

The prime objective of the study is to analyze the portrayal of marriage in the *Pāli Canon*, focusing on key discourses such as the *Sigāla Sutta* and the *Sattabhariyā Sutta*. Likewise, the study examines the ethical and moral

¹ Hsing Yun (2016): p. I.

² Bodhi, B (2012): p. 443.

foundations of marriage as depicted in the *Pāli Canon* and how these teachings contribute to encouraging harmonious relationships. Moreover, exploring the humanistic approaches found in Buddhist teachings and their relevance to contemporary marital practices, the study further compares the insights from the *Pāli Canon* with the principles of Humanistic Buddhism to demonstrate their applicability in modern marital contexts.

1.2. Research methodology

This research employs a qualitative analytical approach, utilizing content analysis of primary and secondary sources from the *Pāli Canon* and Humanistic Buddhism. Selected texts, including the *Sigāla Sutta*, *Sattabhariyā Sutta*, and *Paṭhamasaṃvāsa Sutta*, are analyzed for their relevance to themes of marriage, compassion, and ethical living. Primary sources include English translations of the *Pāli Canon* by prominent scholars, while secondary sources encompass commentaries by Venerable Master Hsing Yun and other leading figures in Humanistic Buddhism.³

1.3. Discussion

“Marriage,” as presented in the *Pāli Canon*, we can assume that it is more than a mere social contract; it is a partnership that fosters personal growth, mutual support, and spiritual development. Likewise, the *Pāli Canon* emphasizes the role of marriage in providing a stable foundation for individuals to cultivate virtues such as compassion, generosity, and ethical conduct. Accordingly, Marriage is depicted as an opportunity for both partners to support one another in their pursuit of a meaningful life, grounded in moral principles and spiritual growth. The teachings in the *Sigāla Sutta* illustrate that marriage involves responsibilities not only to one’s partner but also to the broader community.⁴ It emphasizes the importance of treating one’s partner with respect and consideration, fulfilling roles that contribute to the well-being of both the family and society. Humanistic Buddhism further reinforces this perspective by advocating for a compassionate and harmonious approach to marriage, in which both partners work together to create a nurturing and supportive environment.

II. MARRIAGE IN THE MODERN WORLD

In the modern world, the institution of marriage has undergone significant changes, with shifting social norms and expectations. Traditional roles are often redefined, and the focus has moved toward equality, shared responsibilities, and emotional fulfillment. Despite these changes, the core values highlighted in the *Pāli Canon*, such as mutual respect, compassion, and ethical behavior, remain highly relevant. The challenges faced by modern couples, including balancing work-life demands and maintaining effective communication, can be addressed by applying the timeless wisdom found in Buddhist teachings. The humanistic approach to marriage, as promoted by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, aligns well with contemporary views on marriage. It emphasizes

³ Hsing Yun (2012): p. 67. & Hsing Yun (2016), p. 90.

⁴ Bodhi, B (2012): p. 443.

the importance of cultivating mindfulness, empathy, and altruism in daily interactions, allowing couples to navigate modern challenges while fostering a deep, meaningful connection. These principles encourage partners to work together in overcoming obstacles, ultimately strengthening the marital bond. Conflicts are an inevitable part of any intimate relationship, including marriage. In the *Pāli* Canon, the root causes of conflict are often linked to negative emotions such as greed, anger, and delusion. The *Sattabhariyā Sutta* categorizes different types of spouses and emphasizes the importance of cultivating wholesome qualities to mitigate conflict and foster harmony.⁵ By understanding and addressing these root causes, couples can work towards resolving conflicts constructively. Humanistic Buddhism offers practical solutions for managing conflicts, emphasizing mindfulness, compassionate communication, and the development of emotional awareness. These teachings encourage couples to see conflicts as opportunities for growth and deeper understanding. By practicing mindfulness and empathy, partners can transform conflicts into moments of learning, ultimately strengthening their relationship. Humanistic Buddhism, as advocated by Venerable Master Hsing Yun, provides a practical framework for enhancing marital relationships. It emphasizes six fundamental principles: Humanity, Emphasis on Daily Life, Altruism, Joyfulness, Timeliness, and Universality.⁶ These principles are directly applicable to the context of marriage, where they serve to foster mutual respect, compassion, and a sense of shared purpose. In the context of marriage, the principle of Humanity encourages partners to recognize each other's inherent worth and treat each other with kindness and respect. Emphasis on Daily Life encourages couples to integrate mindfulness into their daily interactions, ensuring that their relationship remains grounded in compassion and understanding. Altruism emphasizes the importance of putting one's partner's needs above one's own, creating an environment of mutual support and care. Joyfulness and Timeliness remind couples to appreciate the positive aspects of their relationship and address challenges in a timely and mindful manner. Universality, on the other hand, encourages partners to view their relationship as part of a broader community, recognizing that a harmonious marriage contributes to the well-being of society as a whole. By integrating these principles into their daily lives, couples can create a strong foundation for a fulfilling and harmonious relationship. The teachings of the *Pāli* Canon, combined with the humanistic approach, offer a holistic framework for understanding marriage as a spiritual journey that fosters both personal and mutual growth.

III. THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM IN THE CONTEXT OF MARRIAGE

Humanistic Buddhism, also known as (人間佛教 - *rénjiān fójiào*), can be understood as a modern interpretation of Buddhist teachings that focuses on integrating these principles into daily life, emphasizing compassionate action,

⁵ Bodhi, B (2012): p. 443.

⁶ Hsing Yun (2016): p. I.

altruism, and social engagement. Pioneers of Humanistic Buddhism, from Master Venerable Tai Xu (太虛) to Master Venerable Hsing Yun (星雲), have helped shape its essence. This essence can be summarized as follows: (1) Applying Buddhist principles actively in daily life in a pragmatic way. (2) Prioritizing the welfare of others above oneself. (3) Cultivating present-moment awareness and deep understanding. (4) Actively engaging in societal and humanitarian issues. (5) Recognizing the inherent value and dignity of all beings. (6) Balancing intellectual understanding with experiential practice. Furthermore, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has provided numerous elaborations on Humanistic Buddhism in his work *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding to the Original Intents of Buddha*, highlighting its purpose, spirit, and goals. A few notable excerpts include:

“The spirit of Humanistic Buddhism encourages us to blend in with others instead of seeing the self and others as separate beings on opposite stances. All beings are connected as one, and everything in this world is related to us. We believe that the Truths of Dependent Origination and the Middle Path, as realized by the Buddha, are the Truths taught in Humanistic Buddhism. The inheritance of belief in these Truths symbolizes the faith of Humanistic Buddhism.”⁷

“Human society can be quite complex. While each human is an individual, they also depend on the conditions of the communities to exist, just as everything in this universe depends on one another to survive. However, while there is no difference between the sacred and ordinary, ordinary beings nevertheless still possess a sense of discrimination.”⁸

“While lives are regarded as individual beings, they are nevertheless interconnected as one. In the faith of Humanistic Buddhism, there are no dualities of time and space or concerns of birth and death. From a passive perspective, what we seek is freedom from fear, delusion, depravity, and distress. From a proactive perspective, life can be happier, more tranquil, more peaceful, more harmonious, and more liberated. In the end, the faith of Humanistic Buddhism helps pursue a life lived in joy, in boundless space and time, as well as within unlimited connections and achievements.”⁹

“Humanistic Buddhism aims to achieve a state of mind that is free from worries, fears, and delusions. Through the virtues of kindness, honesty, and compassion, we shall be able to take life onto an even higher level that is free from doubts, fear of death, and distress, allowing us to follow our faith and the natural process of life. Within this higher state, we are not at the mercy of divine entities; instead, we depend on ourselves to reach our destinations¹⁰.

⁷ Hsing Yun (2016): p. XV.

⁸ Hsing Yun (2016): p. XVII.

⁹ Ibid. p. XVIII.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. XVIII - XIX.

Accordingly, it is obvious that the teachings of Humanistic Buddhism strongly endorse the pursuit of a happy, harmonious, and peaceful married life, as evidenced by the values outlined above. The six core characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism - Humanity, Emphasis on Daily Life, Altruism, Joyfulness, Timeliness, and Universality - along with essential practices like the Five Precepts, Ten Wholesome Actions, the Four Immeasurables, and the Six Perfections, form the foundation of a life devoted to the alleviation of suffering and the enhancement of mutual well-being, including within marriage.

IV. TEN WHOLESOME ACTIONS (*DASAKUSALA*) AND FIVE PRECEPTS

In a nutshell, “Humanistic Buddhism” is fundamentally connected to the practice of the Five Precepts and the Ten Wholesome Actions, as explained by Venerable Master Hsing Yun.¹¹ Humanistic Buddhism, according to Venerable Hsing Yun, can be understood through these two key aspects: the Ten Wholesome Actions (*Dasakusala*) and the Five Precepts (*Pañcasikkhāpada*). The Buddha’s teachings, which encompass these tenets, are designed to cultivate humanity in individuals and strengthen their marriage life, ultimately contributing to the stability of family life. Moreover, according to Master Hsing Yun, the “ten wholesome actions” build upon the foundation of the Five Precepts, emphasizing right action, speech, and thought. Specifically, in one’s actions, individuals should refrain from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. In terms of speech, one should avoid lying, harsh speech, divisive speech, and idle chatter. Concerning thoughts, individuals should avoid greed, anger, and wrong views. In Buddhism, developing the right view is part of the study of wisdom, with the ultimate goal of awakening one’s true nature. Thus, the Five Precepts and the Ten Wholesome Actions serve as tools to achieve this goal.¹² The Ten Wholesome Actions, as mentioned in the *Majjhima Nikāya* of the *Pāli Canon*, are as follows: (1) Abstaining from killing living beings (*pāṇātipātā paṭivirato hoti*), (2) Abstaining from taking what is not given (*adinnādānā paṭivirato hoti*), (3) Abstaining from sexual misconduct (*abrahmacariyā paṭivirato hoti*), (4) Abstaining from false speech (*musāvādā paṭivirato hoti*), (5) Abstaining from malicious speech (*pisuṇāya vācāya paṭivirato hoti*), (6) Abstaining from harsh speech (*pharusāya vācāya paṭivirato hoti*), (7) Abstaining from gossip (*samphappalāpā paṭivirato hoti*), (8) Being free of covetousness (*anabhijjhālu hoti*), (9) Cultivating a mind without ill-will (*abyāpannacitto hoti*), (10) Holding right view (*sammādiṭṭhi hoti*).¹³ Accordingly, the application of these Ten Wholesome Actions in marital life serves to nurture a strong, successful partnership. Within a marriage, both husband and wife can achieve success by building their relationship on mutual respect and compassion for all living beings, including each other. They should foster trust by valuing each other’s possessions, both emotional and material; honor the sanctity of the marital

¹¹ Hsing Yun (2012): p. 13.

¹² Hsing Yun (2012): p. 13.

¹³ Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995): p. 789; *DN*. vol. I (1898): p. 183.

bond by seeing intimacy as an expression of love and trust; engage in open, honest communication; use kind and supportive language, avoiding gossip and criticism; and focus on conversations that deepen emotional bonds. Furthermore, partners should practice charity, spread loving-kindness, and cultivate a mindset enriched with humanistic qualities. These principles require active engagement from both parties - indeed, “it takes two to tango.”

In today’s society, finding couples who maintain this perfect understanding is quite challenging. To address such issues, the Buddha provided suitable guidance in the *Paṭhamasaṃvāsa Sutta* (The First Discourse on Living Together) in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Addressing the householders, the Buddha said: “Householders, there are these four ways of living together. What four? A wretch lives with a wretch; a wretch lives with a female deva; a deva lives with a wretch; and a deva lives with a female deva.”¹⁴ To further clarify, the Buddha spoke several verses to explain to householders how to ensure a strong family bond:

“When both are immoral - miserly and abusive - husband and wife live together as wretches. If the husband is immoral but his wife is virtuous, charitable, and generous, she is like a female deva living with a wretched husband. Conversely, if the wife is immoral while the husband is virtuous, charitable, and generous, she is a wretch living with a deva husband. But when both are endowed with faith, charity, and self-control, addressing each other with pleasant words, they reap many benefits and live at ease, bringing sorrow to their enemies as they remain the same in virtue”¹⁵

The Buddha’s teachings, as found in these discourses, illuminate the sanctity of human life and stress the importance of cultivating humanity towards all beings. These teachings, when practiced sincerely by both partners, can contribute to a thriving, harmonious marriage.

V. EMPATHY, MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND KINDNESS

Empathy, recognized as one of the most essential qualities of humanity and a central tenet of Humanistic Buddhism, serves as a fundamental pillar for embodying humanity within the framework of marriage. It involves attuning oneself to the emotional experiences of a partner and creating an environment where vulnerability is met with understanding rather than judgment. This empathetic connection forms the foundation for genuine intimacy and partnership in marriage, allowing spouses to navigate challenges with grace and solidarity. According to Venerable Master Hsing Yun, empathy is an integral part of Humanistic Buddhism and is relevant to our daily interactions¹⁶. Venerable Hsing Yun also relates empathy to the four means of embracing as discussed by the Buddha in the *Saṅgahavattthu Sutta* in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, which describes four essential elements for sustaining favorable relationships: generosity (*dānaṃ*), pleasant speech (*peyyavajjaṃ*), beneficial conduct

¹⁴ Bodhi, B (2012): p. 443.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 444 - 445.

¹⁶ Hsing Yun (2012): p. 16.

(*atthacariyā*), and impartiality (*samānattatā*).¹⁷ Likewise, the sutta further compares these elements to the linchpin of a rolling chariot, highlighting their indispensable role in maintaining a successful marital relationship. This analogy emphasizes the significance of empathy and the four means of embracing in marriage, acting as the keystone for a harmonious partnership. Kindness or Compassion, which naturally emerges from empathy, plays an equally crucial role in strengthening the marital bond. Under the Four Immeasurables: loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Venerable Hsing Yun highlights the importance of compassion in Humanistic Buddhism. He notes that the four immeasurables are exemplified through the spirit of giving and benefiting others. Reflecting on these qualities, he questions how many individuals truly embody the qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity as taught by the Buddha, emphasizing that the practice of these virtues is what distinguishes practitioners from others.¹⁸ Moreover, “Compassion or Kindness”, as described by Venerable Hsing Yun, enhances relationships by fostering care and concern between spouses. It embodies the idea of alleviating suffering and promoting well-being, ultimately enriching a marriage with a shared sense of purpose. Cultivating boundless compassion within marriage is key to experiencing a happy and harmonious life together. By examining these aspects, it becomes clear that true mutual understanding emerges as a result of cultivating empathy and compassion. This understanding, nurtured through open communication and active listening, serves as the bridge that unites partners in their paths. It involves a sincere effort to understand each other’s perspectives, aspirations, and challenges, fostering an environment where differences are acknowledged and embraced. Ultimately, the principle of humanity breathes life into marital relationships, inviting not only the spouses but also the entire family to embark on a journey of growth, empathy, and compassion.

VI. EMPHASIS ON DAILY LIFE: NURTURING MINDFULNESS IN MARRIAGE

Here, it is expected to explore “how Humanistic Buddhism, with its focus on the significance of everyday actions and behaviors, plays a critical role in fostering harmony in marital life, while also drawing from the teachings of the *Pāli* Canon.” The focus here is on practical ways to implement these teachings in the context of marriage.

6.1. Incorporating Buddhism into daily life

One of the core aspects of Humanistic Buddhism is its emphasis on daily life. This teaching encourages individuals to integrate the wisdom and practices of Buddhism into their everyday activities. Importantly, it is not necessary to be a monk or live in seclusion to benefit from these teachings; rather, it is about being mindful and compassionate in our regular interactions, including how we treat our spouse. In the *Pāli* Canon, during a stay at Bhaddiya in the

¹⁷ Bodhi, B (2012): p. 444 - 445.

¹⁸ Hsing Yun (2012): p. 14 - 15.

Jātiyā Grove, the Buddha was approached by the householder Uggaha, who requested teachings for his daughters, who were about to marry. He asked the Buddha, “Bhante, these girls of mine will be going to their husbands’ families. Let the Blessed One exhort them and instruct them in a way that will lead to their welfare and happiness for a long time.”¹⁹ The Buddha then provided guidance to Uggaha’s daughters, emphasizing how they should train themselves to enhance their marital well-being: (1) Rise before their husband and retire after him, undertake whatever needs to be done, and be agreeable and pleasing in conduct and speech. (2) Honor, respect, and venerate those whom your husband respects, such as his parents and religious figures, and offer them a seat and water when they arrive. (3) Be diligent in attending to domestic chores, making sure that household tasks are properly carried out. (4) Be attentive to the welfare of domestic helpers, including providing care for those who are unwell and distributing food appropriately. (5) Guard and protect their husband’s income, avoiding extravagance and waste.²⁰ These teachings highlight the importance of mutual respect, responsibility, and care for each other’s well-being within a marital relationship. From the above discourse, we can derive guidelines for wives that can be practically implemented in daily life: (1) Mutual respect and consideration, (2) Respect for extended family and elders, (3) Diligence in domestic responsibilities, (4) Concern for the welfare of others, (5) Prudent financial management. Accordingly, by following these principles in everyday life, a harmonious and supportive environment can be created, nurturing love, understanding, and mutual growth. Notably, this *Pāli* Canonical discourse can be seen as an early form of “pre-marriage counseling” provided by the Buddha, emphasizing practical measures for sustaining a successful marital partnership.

6.2. Altruism, timeliness, selflessness, joyfulness, and universality in marriage

Master Venerable Hsing Yun emphasizes that being aware of and applying fundamental Humanistic Buddhist teachings - such as the five precepts, ten wholesome actions, the four immeasurables, the six perfections, and the four means of embracing (cause, condition, effect, and consequence) - is essential in family life to enhance mindfulness in communication, share responsibilities, and provide mutual support in daily life. This awareness and practical application help cultivate altruism, timeliness, and selflessness, and promote joyfulness and universality within a marriage. Accordingly, these teachings help nurture the core principles of Humanistic Buddhism within a marital context. Additionally, it is useful to analyze specific *Pāli* Canonical discourses that guide cultivating mindfulness in communication, sharing responsibilities, and offering mutual support within marriage. The *Sigāla Sutta* (Advice to Lay People) from the *Dīgha Nikāya* is particularly vital for supporting the growth and vitality of marriage.

¹⁹ Bodhi, B (2012): p. 658.

²⁰ Ibid.

In the *Sigāla Sutta*, the Buddha advises the young householder Sigāla on how to pragmatically handle various responsibilities of lay life, providing a detailed description of the wholesome qualities that laypeople should embody. The Buddha addresses the young man by instructing him to: (1) Abandon the four defilements of action (*cattāro kammakilesā*), (2) Avoid evil actions motivated by the four causes (*catūhi ca thānehi pāpakammaṃ*), (3) Refrain from the six practices that waste one's resources (*bhogānaṃ apāyamukhāni*), (4) Avoid these fourteen negative practices in total, thus covering the six directions as a disciple (*chaddisāpaṭicchādī*). By such practice, a layperson becomes a "conqueror of both worlds," experiencing well-being in this life and, upon the body's dissolution, attaining a good rebirth in a heavenly realm.²¹ The four defilements of action that must be abandoned include: taking life (*pāṇātīpāto kammakilesa*), taking what is not given (*adinnādānaṃ kammakilesa*), sexual misconduct (*kāmesumicchācāro kammakilesa*), false speech (*musāvādo kammakilesa*).

This Pāli Canonical discourse highlights the importance of fostering mutual respect, responsibility, and consideration for each other's well-being in marriage. Additionally, it provides guidelines for married couples to follow in their daily lives, emphasizing values such as mutual respect and consideration, respect for extended family and elders, diligence in domestic responsibilities, concern for the welfare of others, and prudent financial management. Therefore, by practicing these values in daily life, married couples can create a harmonious and supportive environment that nurtures love, understanding, and mutual growth. Moreover, the *Sigāla Sutta* can be seen as an early form of pre-marriage counseling provided by the Buddha, offering practical advice to sustain a fulfilling marital partnership. Furthermore, the foundational aspects of trust, honesty, and fidelity are crucial in establishing a healthy and loving marital relationship. Cultivating emotional awareness and promoting harmony helps create a balanced partnership that fosters love and support in daily life. These teachings, as reflected in the *Sigāla Sutta* from the *Dīgha Nikāya*, emphasize the importance of ethical conduct, responsible living, and maintaining positive relationships within the context of marriage. Likewise, by following these principles, couples can cultivate a household that is loving, mindful, communicative, responsible, harmonious, and morally upright, ultimately contributing to the well-being of their family and the greater welfare of the world. Further, in the *Sigāla Sutta*, the Buddha provides practical guidance on household duties and responsibilities. In this discourse, the Buddha reinterprets the householder's traditional act of worshiping the six directions - east, south, west, north, nadir, and zenith - into a set of pragmatic values. He states:

"And how, young householder, does the noble disciple protect the six directions? These six things should be regarded as the six directions: The east denotes mother and father, the south denotes teachers, the west denotes wife and children, the north denotes friends and companions,

²¹ Maurice (1995): p. 461 - 462.

the nadir denotes servants, workers, and helpers, and the zenith denotes ascetics and brahmins”.²²

These six directions symbolize the obligations that householders need to fulfill in their relationships. This includes the responsibilities of husbands and wives within marriage: “There are five ways in which a husband should minister to his wife as the western direction: by honoring her (*sammānanāya*), by not disparaging her (*anavamānanāya*), by being faithful to her (*anaticariyāya*), by giving her authority (*issariyavossaggena*), and by providing her with adornments (*alaṅkāranuppādānena*).”²³ Similarly, wives are instructed to reciprocate with responsibilities of their own: by organizing work properly (*susaṃvihitakamantā*), by treating servants kindly (*susaṅgahitaparijanā*), by remaining faithful (*anaticārini*), by protecting the family’s resources (*sambhataṅca anurakkhati*), and by being diligent in all tasks (*ḍakkhā ca hoti analasā sabbakiccesu*).²⁴ Accordingly, the aforementioned ten responsibilities represent the essential requirements that each partner expects from the other, even in today’s society. For husbands, the emphasis is on respect, fidelity, empowerment, and attentiveness, while wives are encouraged to be efficient, kind, loyal, and responsible. By fulfilling these responsibilities, both partners contribute to a balanced and successful marriage.

This reciprocal relationship in marriage is further echoed in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, where the Buddha describes the ideal qualities of wives. Only four out of the seven types of wives - those who embody qualities akin to a mother, a sister, a friend, and a faithful servant - are deemed worthy. Each of these types brings unique virtues to a marriage, fostering mutual respect, trust, and support between spouses.²⁵ In the context of the *Pāli Canon*, an exemplary instance of an ideal marriage is found in the dialogue between Nakulapitā and Nakulamātā in the *Paṭama Nakula Samajīvi Sutta* (The Same in Living) in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Both husband and wife express their unwavering commitment, having never transgressed against each other even in thought, and share a profound aspiration to continue their bond in future lives.²⁶ Thus, these teachings from the *Pāli Canon*, coupled with the principles of Humanistic Buddhism, form the basis of nurturing a well-rounded and harmonious marriage. This requires not only mutual duties but also emotional awareness, a shared vision of growth, and a commitment to uphold the values of respect and compassion throughout the marital journey.

VII. CONCLUSION

In this study, we explored the fundamental teachings of the early Buddhist teachings from the *Pāli Canon* and Humanistic Buddhism, which cause directly to understand and nurture peaceful marriages. The combination of these rich

²² Maurice (1995): p. 463 - 464.

²³ Ibid. p. 467.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Bodhi, B (2012): p. 1065.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 446.

philosophical traditions provides profound insights into marital dynamics, offering invaluable guidance for couples seeking harmony and fulfillment in their relationships. This research has examined the essence of Humanistic Buddhism, which emphasizes compassion, humanity, the importance of daily life, altruism, joyfulness, timeliness, and universality, as well as the practical application of these virtues. This essence is mirrored in the *Pāli* Canonical discourses such as the *Sattabhariyā*, *Uggaha*, *Sigāla*, and *Samvāsa Suttas* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*, where the Buddha provides timeless wisdom on the duties, responsibilities, and qualities of both husbands and wives. These teachings form the foundation upon which we have built a pragmatic overview of peaceful marriage based on both Humanistic Buddhism and early Buddhist teachings. The research objectives were met through a thorough examination of both primary and secondary sources, including the writings of Venerable Master Hsing Yun and the *Pāli* Canon. By employing an analytical approach, this study has highlighted the profound implications of these teachings on marital dynamics. Our analysis revealed the essential roles of humanity, daily practices, altruism, compassion, joyfulness, timeliness, and universality in fostering a peaceful marriage. Specific aspects - such as empathy, compassion, shared responsibilities, and timely communication - have been discussed to provide pragmatic insights for married couples. By scrutinizing the above-discussed and analyzed facts we can conclude that this research affirms that a peaceful marriage is not an unattainable ideal, but a realistic goal that can be achieved by applying the wisdom of Humanistic Buddhism and the Buddha's teachings. Likewise, by embodying virtues such as love, compassion, mutual understanding, and shared responsibilities, couples can create lasting harmony and serenity. Moreover, as we integrate these principles into our lives, we set out on a journey not only toward harmonious marriages in this lifetime but also toward a legacy of love and understanding that transcends time and space. The pragmatic application of the *Pāli* Canon, combined with insights from Humanistic Buddhism, allows us to reveal the potential for marriages that are peaceful, deeply enriching, and spiritually transformative. We hope that this research serves as an inspiration and guidance for married couples, counselors, and all who seek enduring love and harmonious partnerships.

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THE ROLE OF THE FOUR BUDDHIST ASSEMBLIES IN SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 16 THROUGH MEDITATION

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Abstract:

This research article aims to 1) study Sustainable Development Goal No. 16 and guidelines for creating peace internationally, 2) Study and analyze the role of the four Buddhist Assemblies and Buddhist meditation practice for peace 3) synthesize the role of the four Buddhist Assemblies in applying Buddhist meditation to support Sustainable Development Goal 16. This is documentary research, the results found that:

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 emphasizes promoting peaceful, inclusive societies, ensuring access to justice for all, and building accountable institutions at all levels. Peace is categorized into Positive Peace and Negative Peace, with the Eight Pillars of Peace serving as structural indicators of national peace values.

In the context of Buddhism, the Four Buddhist Assemblies; male monks, female monk (or nuns), male lay disciples, and female lay disciples, play a critical role in fostering peace through the following duties: 1) Pariyatti (study of Dhamma), 2) Pañipatti (practice of Dhamma), 3) Pañivedha (attainment of results), and 4) the spreading of Dhamma for societal benefit. Meditation, as a key practice, is essential in reducing the three root defilements: greed, hatred, and delusion. When supplemented by the virtues of Dāna (generosity), Sīla (moral conduct), Bhāvanā (meditation), and Paññā (wisdom), it contributes to a stable, virtuous mind and societal peace.

When individuals, grounded in moral principles, drive the structural pillars of peace within a nation, sustainable Positive Peace is achieved. Thus, the Four Buddhist Assemblies need to fulfill their roles and duties as outlined in the

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Four Buddhist Assemblies for World Peace diagram. They should cultivate their minds through meditation and spread its practice across various societal sectors, including government, private, educational, and religious sectors. If effectively implemented, the Four Buddhist Assemblies' efforts in applying meditation will contribute significantly to the success of SDG 16.

Keywords: *Four Buddhist assemblies, sustainable development goal, meditation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The world today faces numerous social challenges, including inequality, environmental degradation, crime, drug abuse, poverty, and epidemics, all of which profoundly impact individuals, families, societies, and nations. These issues have evolved into global concerns that require collective action. In response, the United Nations has established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which serve as a framework for addressing social, economic, and environmental problems worldwide. In 2015², the United Nations announced 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as guidelines for sustainable development in all aspects. One of them is Goal 16, which emphasizes promoting peace, justice, and effective institutions to create a safe society with respect for human rights and equal living.

Buddhism emphasizes the purification of the mind through the elimination of defilements, recognizing that the root causes of human suffering lie in the three primary defilements. Various Buddhist principles can be applied to support the SDGs, especially in terms of fostering peace. Prior research has researched the issues on '*The Concept of Applying Meditation to Concretely Alleviate Social Problems*' and '*A Conceptual Synthesis of the Relationship between Inner Peace and Social Peace for Sustainable Peace*', which clearly shows at the conceptual level that meditation can help alleviate problems and reduce conflicts in society. And if humans are happy inside and have wholesome qualities in their minds, it will directly lead to a peaceful society.

To create peace in this world, at the international level, there has been a systematic study of peace, measurement of peace, and approaches to creating peace. Even though Buddhism does not have a system for resolving conflicts and creating peace like the West, the main teachings focus on humans training their minds with meditation to develop wholesome states of mind and eliminate all defilement, the teaching tend to focus on liberation as the highest goal, which is a direct result that makes society peaceful and sustainable. It can be said that creating true peace requires people who understand the principles of meditation and act to spread meditation widely. These groups of people are the Four Buddhist Assemblies.

Buddhist community 4, consisting of male monks, female monks (or nuns), male disciples and disciple. This research focuses on the four Buddhist

² "The 17 Goals," United Nations, Accessed January 25, 2025. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

groups who will use the meditation principles in Buddhism to support the Sustainable Development Goal 16 to practice and disseminate to society as widely as possible. This will create great benefits for humanity to be able to live in a peaceful and sustainable society. The researcher aims to study and analyze the appropriate role of the Four Buddhist Assemblies in acting as good friends, spreading good things, which is meditation practice, to create efficiency and effectiveness in supporting peace in society. **This research helps increase understanding of the important role of the Four Buddhist Assemblies in supporting sustainable development in terms of promoting peace and justice, which are important parts of Sustainable Development Goal 16.**

1.1. Objectives

- (i) Study Sustainable Development Goal No. 16 and guidelines for creating peace internationally.
- (ii) Study and analyze the role of the Four Buddhist Assemblies and Buddhist meditation practice for peace.
- (iii) Synthesize the role of the four Buddhist Assemblies in applying Buddhist meditation to support Sustainable Development Goal 16.

1.2. Research conceptual framework

This research is a documentary research with the following research framework:

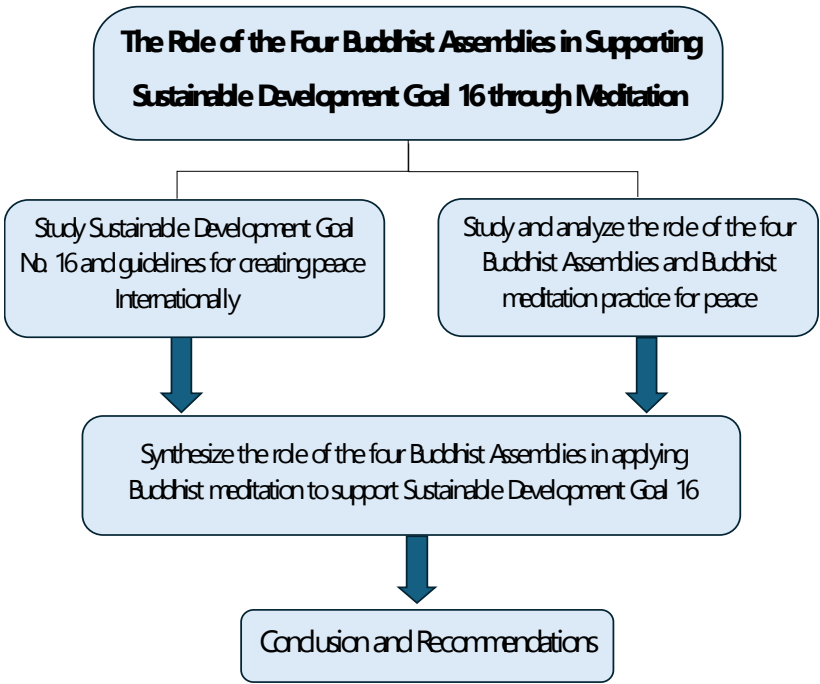


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework. Source: Researcher

This research will examine the role of the Fourfold Buddhist Community in applying meditation principles to support Sustainable Development Goal 16. The scope is focused solely on Goal 16, which aims to promote peace, justice, and the establishment of strong institutions to create a just society. It does not delve into the specifics of the sub-goals under Goal 16.

1.3. Research methodology

This research is a documentary research with the following research steps:

The data collection process includes: 1) Gathering information from books, journals, research papers, and academic documents related to Sustainable Development Goal 16 and peacebuilding; 2) Collecting data on the Four Buddhist Assemblies and the principles of meditation in Buddhism for peace from both primary and secondary sources, including the Tripitaka, books, textbooks, and related research.

The data analysis steps are: Analyzing the roles of the Four Buddhist Assemblies and their role as good friends in Buddhism, as well as examining how meditation principles can be applied to address social issues and support peacebuilding efforts.

The steps of data analysis are: Synthesize the role of the Four Buddhist Assemblies in implementing meditation principles to support Sustainable Development Goal 16.

II. RESEARCH RESULTS

2.1. Research results, objective 1: Study Sustainable Development Goal No. 16 and guidelines for creating peace internationally

2.1.1. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals, abbreviated as SDGs 17, is an urgent call for all countries to cooperate at the global level to help develop this world. Because they realize that the world's problems must be solved together, there has been a meeting to discuss and jointly set various goals in the United Nations General Assembly to develop the world sustainably by 2030³

In addition, these 17 goals⁴ are divided into social, economic, and environmental dimensions, called the 'Three Pillars of Sustainability', along with 2 other dimensions: peace and institutions and development partnership, totaling 5 dimensions. The United Nations divides the 17 goals into 5 groups (called the 5 Ps), with details as follows:

- (i) Social dimension (People): covers goals 1 - 5.
- (ii) Economic dimension (Prosperity): covers goals 7 - 11.
- (iii) Environmental dimension (Planet): covers goals 6, 12 - 15.
- (iv) Peace and Institutional Dimension (Peace): covers Goal 16.

³ "The 17 Goals," United Nations, Accessed January 25, 2024. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

⁴ "Sustainable Development Goals," United Nations, Accessed January 25, 2024. <https://www.sdgmove.com/intro-to-sdgs/>

(v) Partnership dimension: covers Goal 17.

From the above details, we can see a clear overview of the SDGs project in all 5 dimensions, covering both physical and mental dimensions. These Sustainable Development Goals have been adopted by various member countries as policies and disseminated in their languages. In this research, the focus is on Goal 16⁵, which is to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

In this part of goal number 16, there are also sub-goals under goal number 16 covering 10 sub-goals. This research will not go into the details of those sub-goals. In addition, goal number 16 also covers justice, fundamental rights, and cooperation, including the outcomes when we stop doing or take action for peace, as detailed below.

Goal 16⁶ aims to foster peaceful, inclusive societies, ensure access to justice for all, and build accountable institutions at all levels. It highlights the importance of freedom from violence and discrimination based on ethnicity, faith, or sexual orientation. Armed violence and insecurity hinder national development, while conflict, sexual violence, and exploitation thrive in areas with weak rule of law. Effective measures to protect vulnerable populations are essential, with governments, civil society, and communities needing to collaborate on sustainable solutions. Key actions include strengthening the rule of law, promoting human rights, reducing illicit arms trafficking, combating corruption, and ensuring inclusive participation.

Aligned with the broader human rights framework, Goal 16 stresses the importance of individual rights, including privacy, freedom of expression, and access to information. Peace is a prerequisite for social and economic development, as conflict and instability impede progress and cause significant loss. Equal access to justice is crucial for safeguarding rights and ensuring vulnerable groups are protected from marginalization or mistreatment. Criminal activities, such as homicides, trafficking, and discriminatory practices, threaten peace in all countries.

Consequences of Inaction: Without action, armed violence and insecurity will disrupt development, harm children’s well-being, and weaken social cohesion. A lack of justice leads to unresolved conflicts and ineffective institutions prone to abuse of power, further fostering resentment and violence.

Recommended Actions: To address these issues, it is crucial to exercise the right to hold elected officials accountable and engage in informed discourse. Promoting respect, inclusion, and tolerance for individuals of diverse ethnicities, religions, genders, sexual orientations, and opinions is essential for

⁵ “SDG 16,” United Nations, Accessed January 25, 2024. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>

⁶ “Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies,” United Nations, Accessed January 25, 2024. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>

building a more inclusive and peaceful society.

2.1.2. Conflict and peace in society

Social Conflict: Conflict is a relationship between two or more parties (both individuals and groups) who have or perceive to have incompatible goals. It is an unavoidable fact of life and often occurs. Conflict occurs when people have conflicting goals⁷. It also compiled the meaning of conflict from various sources, stating that conflict is a natural occurrence, has been around for a long time along with the development of the world and humans. It is something that cannot be avoided because humans must live together as a society. It can occur between individuals, between communities, between communities and those in power, or due to the unequal distribution of resources, etc⁸. And conflicts may conclude violently or may be ended constructively.

Peace: Johan Galtung, often regarded as the father of peace studies, defines peace as an “umbrella concept” encompassing multiple meanings. It represents a universal human aspiration for happiness at the individual level and peace at the global level. Galtung emphasizes that the term “peace” should not be overly specific, as it cannot fully capture the goals of all human endeavors.⁹ It also compiled definitions of peace as a state where individuals are free, and society is characterized by goodwill, justice, and mutual respect, without conflict, strife, or war.¹⁰

Galtung further categorizes peace into two dimensions: negative peace, which refers to the absence of personal violence, and positive peace, which denotes the absence of structural violence and is associated with non-violence and social justice.¹¹ The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) elaborates on this by stating that negative peace involves the absence of direct violence or the fear of violence, while positive peace refers to the attitudes, institutions, and social structures that foster sustainable peace. The IEP has developed the Positive Peace Index (PPI) and the Eight Pillars of Peace, which emphasize the coordination of these structural elements to build positive peace.¹² The Pillars of Peace is a characterization of a nation that comes closest to the word “peace”, derived from a process of statistical analysis. These pillars represent the ideal environment for

⁷ Simon Fisher, et al, 2000, *Working with Conflict: Skills and Strategies for Action, Responding to Conflict*, New York, p. 4.

⁸ Thongphon Phromsakha Na Sakonnakhon, 2018, *Conflict Management and Peace Process in ASEAN*, O. S. Printing House Co., Ltd, Bangkok, p. 1 - 4.

⁹ Johan Galtung, 1967, *Theories of Peace: A Synthetic Approach to Peace Thinking*, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, p. 6.

¹⁰ Thongphon Phromsakha Na Sakonnakhon, 2018, *Conflict Management and Peace Process in ASEAN*, O.S. Printing House Co., Ltd, Bangkok, p. 16 - 17.

¹¹ Johan Galtung, 1969, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research, *Journal of Peace Research*”, 6(3), p.183.

¹² The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), 2023, *Positive Peace 2023 Briefing*, The Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney, p.9, <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/PPR-2023-Briefing-web.pdf>.

fostering human potential and advancing peace.¹³



Figure 2: The Eight Pillars of Peace

Source: The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), *Positive Peace 2023 Briefing*, p.9

The Eight Pillars of Peace are essential structural factors for fostering positive peace in a country. These pillars are indicators of a nation's positive peace performance, and they include¹⁴; 1) Well-Functioning Government 2) Equitable Distribution of Resources 3) Free Flow of Information 4) Good Relations with Neighbors 5) High Levels of Human Capital 6) Acceptance of the Rights of Others 7) Low Levels of Corruption 8) Sound Business Environment.

The strength of these pillars ultimately depends on the quality of the individuals who drive these structures. If individuals possess good mental qualities (KusalamŪla 3) and inner peace, the value of positive peace will be high. Conversely, if individuals possess poor mental qualities (rooted in the three roots of badness) and experience inner conflict, the value of positive peace will be diminished.

2.1.3. Peace process

For areas where conflict has occurred, the thing that will help resolve the conflict is the Peace Process, which has many steps and methods used to manage conflict and create peace in such areas. Each method is different depending on the nature of the conflict and the context of each situation. There are main methods used

¹³ The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), 2015, Pillars of Peace: Understanding the key attitudes and institutions that underpin peaceful societies, The Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney, p.1, <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Pillars-of-Peace-Report-IEP2.pdf>.

¹⁴ . The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), 2021, Positive Peace Implementation Guide: A user's guide to the Positive Peace Framework, The Institute for Economics & Peace, Sydney, p.7, [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnpbpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Positive-Peace-Implementation-Guide-web.pdf](https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Positive-Peace-Implementation-Guide-web.pdf).

in the peace process such as negotiation, ceasefire, reconciliation, peacebuilding, DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration), SSR (Security Sector Reform), Peace Education and Training, Mediation, Reconstruction and Justice, etc.¹⁵ Peace processes often focus not only on stopping violence but also on creating conditions for sustainable and long-lasting peace through collaboration within and outside the country.

2.2. Research results for objective 2: Study and analyze the role of the Four Buddhist Assemblies and Buddhist meditation practice for peace.

2.2.1. Self-training and the role of the Four Buddhist Assemblies

The Four Buddhist Assemblies refer to the groups of people who believe in Buddhism. There are four groups: male monks, female monks (or nuns), male lay disciples, and female lay disciples¹⁶ Which can be divided into 2 main groups: the monastic group, including male monks, female monks (or nuns), and the laity group, including male and female lay disciples. All 4 groups of people are those who have studied the principles of Buddhist teachings, put them into practice, and have vowed to be Buddhists.

In Buddhism, the practice of self-training of Buddhists is mentioned using the principle of Saddhamma.¹⁷ good law, true doctrine, doctrine of the good, essential doctrine, which are;

i. *Pariyattisaddhamma*: the true doctrine of study; textual aspect of the true doctrine.

ii. *Pañipatti-saddhamma*: the true doctrine of practice; practical aspect of the true doctrine.

iii. *Pañivedha-saddhamma*: the true doctrine of penetration; attainable aspect of the true doctrine.

In studying the duties of the Four Buddhist Assemblies, the researcher would like to quote the Buddha's words, which state: "Let the disciples go about for the benefit and happiness of the people, for the sake of the world, for the benefit and happiness of angels and humans. You two should not go in the same direction. Teach the Dhamma beautifully, in the beginning, middle, and end. Proclaim Brahmacharya (Sexual abstention, Virtue) with its meaning and letter, completely and perfectly."

This statement clearly outlines the duties assigned to the monks after the first Buddhist Lent. During this period, the monks had listened to the Dhamma from the Buddha and practiced it, with 60 monks attaining enlightenment and becoming Arahants. The realization that the true Dhamma they practiced

¹⁵ - Thongphon Phromsakha Na Sakonnakhon, 2018, Conflict Management and Peace Process in ASEAN, O.S. Printing House Co., Ltd, Bangkok.

- Roger Mac Ginty, 2013, Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding, Routledge, New York.

¹⁶ Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto), 2008, Buddhist Dictionary, (Edition 11th: Additional revised edition), p. 271.

¹⁷ Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto), 2016, Dictionary of Buddhism: Dhamma Compilation Edition (edition 34th), Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Press, p. 122.

led to enlightenment affirmed that they were responsible for spreading these teachings for the benefit of both humans and angels.

In addition, the Lord Buddha placed great emphasis on the concept of Kalyanamitra, or a good friend. He taught that ¹⁸ “one should seek the company of virtuous and righteous individuals, for such friends lead others towards diligence and adherence to virtuous conduct. Those who associate with good friends are guided to abandon unwholesome actions and increase their merit. Through the guidance of good friends, who encourage mindfulness and awareness, a person will ultimately attain the Dhamma”. It can be said that making friends with virtuous individuals helps a person develop into a better being, reducing demerits, cultivating merit, and receiving advice on meditation and mindfulness practice. This process eliminates defilements, leading to the ultimate goal of Brahmacharya, or being free from the cycle of rebirth. Once, Venerable Ananda said,¹⁹ *“Good friends are half of Brahmacharya, but the Buddha has explained that good friends are the whole of Brahmacharya because good friends guide one to practice the Noble Eightfold Path, which is the path to Nirvana. Therefore, good friends and good friends are the whole of Brahmachariya”*.

From the above sutra, it is confirmed that the Lord Buddha placed great emphasis on the role of a Kalyanamitra (good friend), recognizing that such a friend is essential in guiding individuals toward the right path and ultimately helping them escape from all suffering. The Buddha also instructed his disciples to travel alone on various paths to spread the core teachings of Buddhism, particularly the Threefold Training (Precepts, Meditation, and Wisdom), to all mankind. Even though in the beginning, one is not free from defilements, if one follows these teachings enables them to cultivate wholesome qualities, thus preventing harm to oneself and others. When the majority of people in society embody these wholesome qualities, social problems diminish, leading to a more peaceful and sustainable society.

The Buddha emphasized that his teachings should not be accepted blindly but should be verified through personal practice and experience. This is clearly expressed in the Kalama Sutta (or Kesaputta Sutta), where the Buddha addressed the Kalama people of Kesaputta in Kosala city. He outlined ten guidelines²⁰ for discerning truth, cautioning against blind belief: 1) Don't believe something just because you've heard it from someone else. 2) Don't believe something just because it's been passed down. 3) Don't believe something because it's rumored. 4) Don't believe something just because it's in a textbook. 5) Don't

¹⁸ The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Royal Edition), 1982, (Volume 25): no.195/p.204, https://84000.org/tipitaka/pitaka_item/r.php?B=25&A=4661&w=%C1%D4%B5%C3%B4%D5

¹⁹ The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Royal Edition), 1982, (Volume 19): no.4-7/p.2-3, https://84000.org/tipitaka/pitaka_item/r.php?B=19&A=26

²⁰ The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Royal Edition), 1982, (Volume 20): no.505/p.212-218, https://84000.org/tipitaka/pitaka_item/read_page.php?edition=thai&book=20&page=212&pages=1&pagebreak=0&modeTY=&x=8&y=12&edition=thai

believe something because of logic. 6) Don't believe something because you infer. 7) Don't believe something just because you judge by the symptoms that appear. 8) Don't believe something just because it matches your thoughts. 9) Don't believe something just because it seems believable. 10) Don't believe something just because it's your teacher.

The Buddha encouraged personal verification of the Dhamma, teaching that one should practice and experience it directly before sharing it with others. This approach promotes critical engagement and self-reliance in understanding the teachings. Therefore, it can be said that *the duties of the four groups of Buddhists are*: 1) to study the Dhamma and listen to it; 2) to put it into practice; 3) to attain the results and prove that these principles are truly effective; 4) to spread the Dhamma teachings far and wide.

2.2.2 Meditation principles in Buddhism to support peace-building

This study draws on two previous research works: “The Concept of Applying Meditation to Alleviate Social Problems” and “A Conceptual Synthesis of the Relationship between Inner Peace and Social Peace for Sustainable Peace”. The findings from these studies are summarized as follows.

Research on “*The Concept of Applying Meditation to Concretely Alleviate Social Problems*”²¹ It begins with studying the knowledge of Buddhism to the root of the real problem that starts from the inner state of the mind, which is AkusalamŪla 3, (Lobha: greed, Dosa: hatred, Moha: delusion)²² can be reduced by Puññakiriya-vatthu 3, the principles of the three meritorious actions: Dāna, Sīla, Bhāvanā²³. It is a dhamma that can directly reduce the 3 roots of evil and make the human mind have KusalamŪla 3: Alobha (non-greed), Adosa (non-hatred), Amoha (non-delusion)²⁴, summarized as in this table;

AkusalamŪla 3	Puññakiriya-vatthu 3	KusalamŪla 3
Lobha	Dāna	Alobha
Dosa	Sīla	Adosa

²¹ Suchada Thongmalai, 2024, “The Concept of Applying Meditation to Concretely Alleviate Social Problems”. Arts of Management Journal, 8(3), p.53–77, <https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/jam/article/view/271571>

²² .. The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Royal Edition), 1982, (Volume 25): no.228/p.238, <https://84000.org/tipitaka/read/?25/228/198>

²³ The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Edition), 1996, (Volume 23): no.36/p.294-296, https://84000.org/tipitaka/pitaka_item/m_read.php?E=&B=23&A=8161&w=%BA%D8%AD%A1%D4%C3%D4%C2%D2%C7%D1%B5%B6%D8&option=2

²⁴ The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Edition), 1996, (Volume 20): no.70/p.277-279, https://84000.org/tipitaka/pitaka_item/read_page.php?-book=20&page=277&pages=1&modeTY=&x=16&y=18&edition=mcu

Moha	Bhāvanā	Amoha
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Table 1: The 3 roots of evil are reduced by the 3 meritorious actions to develop the 3 roots of goodness.

Source : Thongmalai, S. (2024).

The research has found that delusion is the most powerful defilement and can be directly subdued by meditation. It also analyzed the five defilements²⁵, which can be reduced by the 5 jhana elements, the jhana level of concentration from the practice of Samatha meditation²⁶. The 10 fetters²⁷ defilements can be eliminated through the level of vipassana meditation²⁸, which these two types of defilement have causes from the three roots of evil.

This research also studies social problems from a sociological perspective²⁹. For example, class division problems, poverty, family problems, economic problems, health problems, drug problems, crime problems, etc., and analyzed found that the causes of various social problems cause by AkusalamŪla 3 as well, for example:

Class division and poverty problems come from greed and delusion.

Family problems come from greed, anger, and delusion.

Economic problems come from greed and delusion.

Crime problems come from anger and delusion.

In the context of sociological problem-solving, it was found focus on addressing external factors or the immediate impacts of social issues to alleviate current suffering, while using the education system for long-term prevention and solutions. However, these approaches often neglect the internal dimension. When analyzing the root causes of social problems through the lens of Buddhist teachings, it becomes evident that all social issues stem from the three roots of evil, particularly delusion, which underlies every problem.

Meditation targets the internal root by reducing delusion, which in turn diminishes anger and greed. As citizens' defilements decrease, societal problems also lessen. The research can be summarized in a diagram demonstrating how meditation alleviates social issues as follows;

²⁵ The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Royal Edition), 1982, (Volume 19): no.490/p. 122 - 123, <https://84000.org/tipitaka/read/?19/490/125>

²⁶ The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Royal Edition), 1982, (Volume 34): no.69/p.36, <https://84000.org/tipitaka/read/?34/69/37>

²⁷ The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Royal Edition), 1982, (Volume 35): no.976-977/p.554-555, <https://84000.org/tipitaka/read/byitem.php?book=35&item=976&items=1&pre-line=0&pagebreak=0>

²⁸ The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Royal Edition), 1982, (Volume 34): no.70/p.36, <https://84000.org/tipitaka/read/byitem.php?book=34&item=70&items=1&pre-line=0&pagebreak=0>

²⁹ Anna Leon-Guerrero. (2016). Social Problems: Community, Policy, and Social Action (5th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc. California.

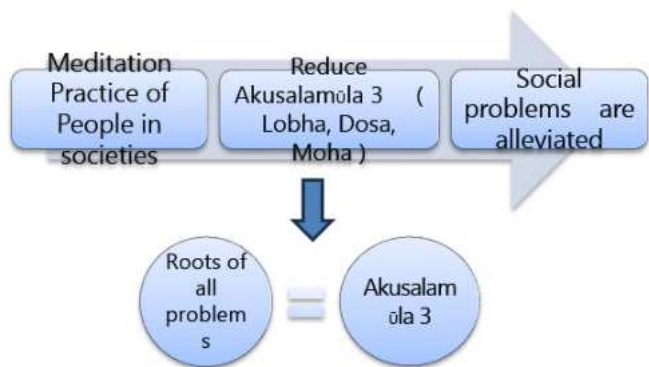


Figure 3: Using meditation to reduce the real (internal) causes of social problems (Akusalamūla 3) has the effect of alleviating social problems.

Source : Thongmalai, S. (2024).

This research affirms that in Buddhism, meditation can eliminate the defilements (three roots of evil) in the human mind, which are the true causes of all social problems. The researcher integrates the M-E-D Model, which applies meditation to alleviate social issues by encouraging citizens to practice meditation regularly until it becomes a daily habit. This practice cultivates peaceful, strong, and calm minds, reducing harm to others and promoting helpfulness and self-sacrifice in alignment with virtuous conduct. As a result, social problems will diminish, leading to a more peaceful and sustainable society. The details are as follows:

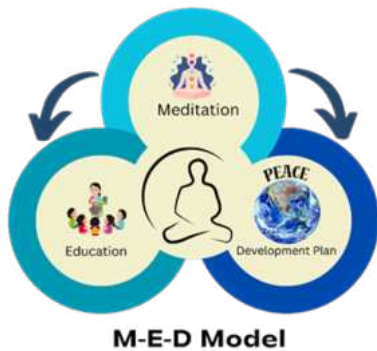


Figure 4: M-E-D Model

Source : Thongmalai, S. (2024).

- M – Meditation:** This involves supporting citizens in continuous and widespread meditation practice using various techniques. Citizens are divided into two groups: youth and adults.
- E – Education:** For the youth, the research covers all education levels, from kindergarten to higher education, using the education system as a tool to introduce meditation, tailored to each age group.

D – Development Plan: For adults, organizational policies in both public and private sectors are essential. These sectors must collaborate to create human development plans, focusing on both physical and mental aspects, with meditation training provided by the Human Resource Development Department.

For the research on “*A Conceptual Synthesis of the Relationship between Inner Peace and Social Peace for Sustainable Peace*”³⁰, this research aims to study and analyze the relationship between the state of inner peace and mind that affects the external peace, which is a peaceful society. It starts with the study of the human mental state according to the Buddhist principles, which consists of 3³¹ groups: 1) Kusala Dhamma, the three roots of wholesomeness (no greed, no anger, no delusion) 2) Akusala Dhamma, the three roots of unwholesomeness: greed, anger, delusion) and 3) Apayakat Dhamma, which is the Dhamma that is neutral.

This research focuses on studying the inner nature of the mind and its impact on conflict and peace in society. When an individual's inner state is dominated by Kusala Dhamma (Inner Peace), they will not harm others or create trouble. In a society with many such individuals, peace tends to prevail. Conversely, when a person's inner state is dominated by Akusala Dhamma (Inner Conflict), they are more likely to harm others and create suffering. A society with many such individuals will be disorderly and prone to conflict. The universal principles of Buddhism that can be applied to create merit in the human mind is Puññakiriya - vatthu: Dāna (Giving), Sīla (precept), Bhāvanā (meditation), which reduce greed, anger and delusion (as the table 1) as well as the Tri-sikkha³²: Sīla (precept), Bhāvanā (meditation), and Paññā (wisdom). When these two principles are brought together, the universal principles that the researcher applied in this research topic are Dāna (Generosity), Sīla (precepts), Bhāvanā (meditation), and Paññā (wisdom).

Then, the researcher analyzed the relationship between internal mental conditions and external peace (societal peace) using Conflict Analysis Tools, including Conflict Mapping, The Onion, and The Conflict Tree. The results are as follows:

i) Conflict **mapping**

³⁰ Suchada Thongmalai, 2025. “A Conceptual Synthesis of the Relationship between Inner Peace and Social Peace for Sustainable Peace”. Dhammadhara Journal of Buddhist Studies. 11 (1), p. 64 - 106, <https://so01.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/dhammadhara/article/view/275853>.

³¹ The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Royal Edition), 1982, (Volume 34): no.1/p.1, <https://84000.org/tipitaka/read/?34/1/1>

³² .. The Tripitaka in Thai Language (Royal Edition), 1982, (Volume 22): no.376/p.455, <https://84000.org/tipitaka/read/r.php?B=22&A=10445>

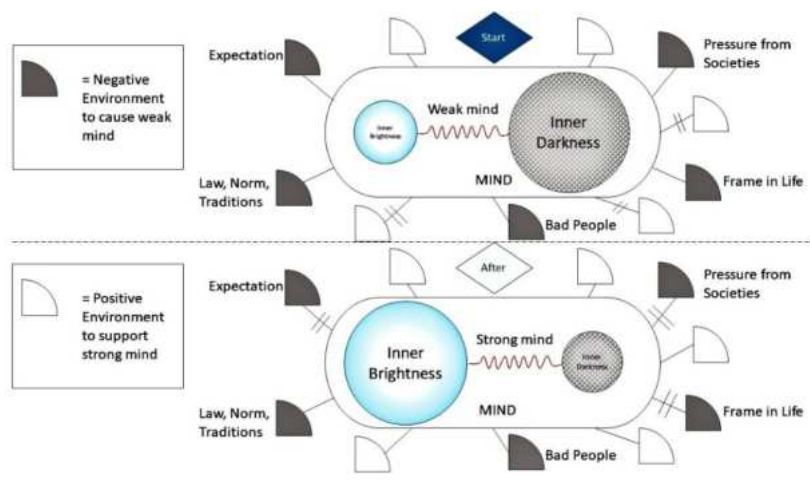
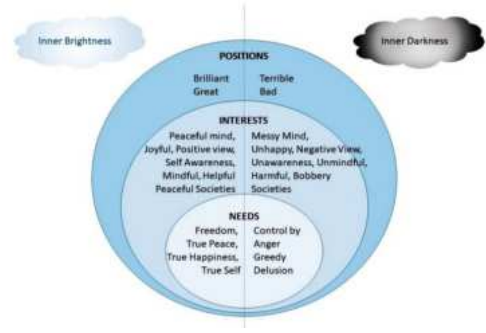


Figure 5: Apply Conflict Mapping Analyze the relationship between the internal state of the human mind and the social environment.

Source : Thongmalai, S. (2025)

This diagram explains that there are two types of inner human mind states: ‘Inner Brightness’³³ (blue circles) and ‘Inner Darkness’³⁴ (gray circles). Humans are typically influenced by both negative and positive environments. When the mental state of Inner Darkness is dominant, it becomes easily swayed by negative environments (represented by the dark gray triangle). This leads to a weak mind and suffering, as it allows negative forces to take control. In contrast, a mind with Inner Brightness holds greater power. Even in the same environment, it knows how to shield itself from negativity and often chooses to embrace only positive influences (represented by the white triangle), fostering the development of a strong, virtuous mind. When a society consists of many individuals with such inner brightness, it leads to a peaceful and harmonious society.

ii) Onion (The Onion)



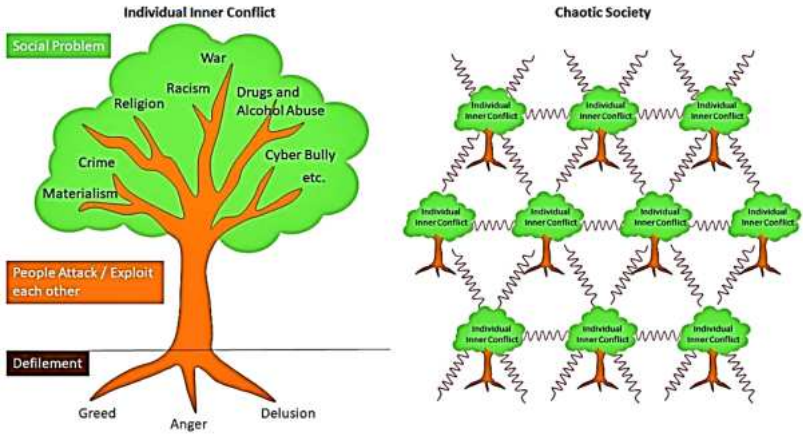
³³ Inner Brightness refer to a state where the mind is filled with wholesome qualities leading to stability and inner peace.

³⁴ Inner Darkness refers to a state in which the mind is dominated by unwholesome qualities, leading to instability and inner conflict.

Figure 6: Apply The Onion to analyze the relationship between human mental states and needs at each level. Source: Thongmalai, S. (2025)

The Onion illustrates the inner state of the human mind and the corresponding needs at each level, divided into two aspects: Inner Brightness (left side: merit) and Inner Darkness (right side: demerit). The mental state on each side influences the needs at different levels (Need level, Interest level, Position level). When the mind is aligned with virtuous qualities, all desires across these levels are positive. Conversely, when the mind is dominated by unwholesome qualities, all desires become negative, as depicted in the diagram.

iii) Conflict Tree



Picture 7: Apply the Conflict Tree to analyze the roots of social problems from internal and mental conflicts. Of individuals that have an impact on society at large. Source: Thongmalai, S. (2025)

This diagram illustrates how internal conflicts (left image) affect the broader society (right image). The root cause of these conflicts lies in individual mental states driven by greed, anger, and delusion. When the mind lacks strength in virtue and self-discipline through practices like giving, precept, meditation, and wisdom, particularly meditation, these defilements dominate, causing internal unrest. This internal conflict then manifests as harm to oneself and others (trunk area) and spreads into various societal issues (upper branches). If this “Conflict tree,” representing individuals who exploit others, grows in society (right image), it leads to the escalation of social problems.

Research using these three conflict analysis tools confirms that an individual’s inner state is directly related to societal peace. Therefore, to achieve sustainable peace, fostering goodness within society’s members is essential. Meditation, as supported by Buddhist teachings, is a tool for cultivating inner peace (Inner Peace) and stability. This research synthesizes this understanding into the ‘Positive Peace by Inner Peace’ Model, as shown in the diagram.



Picture 8: ‘Positive Peace by Inner Peace’ Model

Source : Thongmalai, S. (2025)

This diagram illustrates that creating peace in the world requires a coordinated effort between cultivating inner peace in individuals (Inner Peace) and fostering external positive peace at the structural level (Positive Peace), based on the concept of the Eight Pillars of Peace. The approach emphasizes promoting the development of good moral qualities in the minds of citizens (inner circle) through the principles of *Dāna* (Generosity), *Sīla* (Precepts), *Bhāvanā* (Meditation), and *Paññā* (Wisdom) (Outer circle image). When citizens who contribute to driving the eight main structures of the country (represented by the eight smaller circles) possess moral integrity and a mind that is stable in goodness, the value of Positive Peace increases, raising the overall peacefulness of the nation.

The study of applying Buddhist meditation principles to peace-building, drawn from the researcher’s exploration of the two topics, reveals that meditation principles are universal practices that transcend race, religion, and belief systems. They align with the core teachings of all religions that emphasize training the mind toward goodness or devotion to a higher purpose. Meditation serves as a tool to cultivate inner peace at the individual level, which, when expanded to the societal, national, and global levels, can promote peace. If all sectors cooperate to encourage and support meditation as a daily practice, it will help prevent conflicts at all levels. It is considered a solution to a problem at the pre-emergence level, reduces social problems, and sustainably fosters peace.

2.3. Research results, objective 3: Synthesize the roles of the four Buddhist Assemblies and the application of the principles of meditation in Buddhism to support Sustainable Development Goal 16.

2.3.1. The roles of the four Buddhist assemblies

It is essential for the central element, human beings, to be grounded in goodness, inner peace, and mental stability. *Meditation* serves as a powerful

tool to purify the three roots of evil, the true causes of human societal problems and conflicts, as has been studied above.

Therefore, the role of the four Buddhist Assemblies is to perform the duties of Kalyanamitra (Good Friend) by upholding the threefold path of Dharma and promoting the practice of meditation in Buddhism, which is universal and non-conflicting with any belief system. This is outlined in the following 4 steps:

- i) Pariyatti: Study the teachings of meditation in Buddhism.
- ii) Practice: Practice meditation, both Samatha (Concentration) and Vipassana (Insight).
- iii) Pativedha: Practice meditation until one personally realizes how to purify the mind of defilements and attain inner peace and stability.
- iv) Spread: Disseminate the principles of meditation practice widely, reaffirming and advocating for the teachings of the Buddha.

Based on the above guidelines, it can be concluded that the Four Buddhist Assemblies should first practice meditation personally, reaching a point where they can verify its benefits and confirm that meditation genuinely cultivates a calm and stable mind. Once they have experienced the positive results of meditation for themselves, they should then take on the responsibility of spreading the teachings of meditation widely. This approach ensures the cultivation of inner peace, fostering a society that embodies harmony and sustainable peace.

2.3.2. New knowledge from research

From the roles of the four Buddhist Assemblies as Kalyanamitra mentioned above, the researcher has synthesized them into a diagram, “The Four Buddhist Assemblies for World Peace,” illustrating the roles of them in supporting the 16th Sustainable Development Goal, as follows:

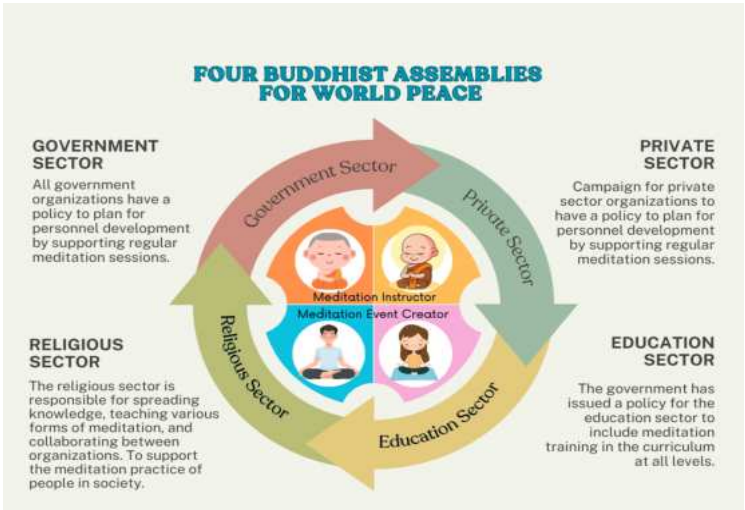


Figure 9: The Four Buddhist Assemblies for World Peace. Source: Researcher

The diagram “The Four Buddhist Assemblies for World Peace” illustrated the role of The Four Buddhist Assemblies as follow;

The central circle; is divided into four parts, representing the four Buddhist Assemblies male monks, female monks (or nuns), male disciple, and female disciple, who play a pivotal role in disseminating the principles of meditation in Buddhism to society. The process of self-training is the four steps of the four Buddhist Assemblies role (details see in section 5.3.1).

For the role of *male monks, female monks (or nuns)* in the religious sector, once they have practiced meditation effectively, they become Meditation Instructors, teaching meditation to citizens within society. For the *laymen and laywomen*, who work in various sectors such as government, private, education, and other organizations, they contribute to driving the Eight Pillars of Peace for the nation. They act to support and promote meditation projects within their organizations through participation in various activities, continuing to engage in these efforts. Additionally, those working within the education sector, at both local and national levels, should implement policies to integrate meditation training into educational curricula. This would help cultivate the minds and educational potential of the youth, ensuring long-term societal benefits.

The four arrows; Government Sector, Private Sector, Education Sector, and Religious Sector, represent the key areas of society that must be driven by the Four Buddhist Assemblies to implement meditation initiatives across all levels and sectors. Each sector plays a vital role in supporting and promoting meditation, with all sectors collaborating to create a society of individuals who are kind, possess Inner Peace, have Strong Minds, and are grounded in goodness.

Even within the religious sector, despite differing beliefs and practices, there can be cooperation in promoting meditation as a common tool, tailored to each religion, since the benefits of meditation naturally lead to mental stability and goodness. As citizens across all sectors engage in meditation practice, these positive qualities will become ingrained as lifelong habits.

Over time, a society comprised of individuals trained in meditation will cultivate peace, sustainability, and harmony. This process is a direct contribution to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16, which aims to promote peace, justice, and strong institutions.

III. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research focuses on the role of the Four Buddhists Assemblies in implementing meditation to support Sustainable Development Goal 16, which direct emphasizes on meditation principles. Unlike most research on Buddhism that tends to study various Buddhist principles and social development³⁵

³⁵- Phrakhrui Pariyattikittithamrong, 2020, Buddhism and Social Development, Individual Study of Bachelor of Buddhist Studies.

- Phrakhrui Kowitarttawatee (Udon Thani Sangha) and Wiphawan Limphaibool, 2024, “Connecting Buddhist Principles to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals”, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Dhammathas Academic Journal 24 (4),

or research on Buddhist happiness within sustainable development³⁶ that overlooks the specific role of the Four Buddhist Assemblies. When research on SDGs is conducted internationally, it typically focuses on the intersection of religion (mainly in the Western religion) and the Sustainable Development Goals.³⁷

This study aims to analyze how the four Buddhist Assemblies can contribute to the implementation of SDG 16 by practicing meditation. The research will demonstrate how these communities must first internalize and experience the benefits of meditation, purifying their minds and solidifying wholesome virtues. Once this is achieved, they can then share these teachings and practices in their respective roles, as outlined in the diagram of 'the Four Buddhist Assemblies for World Peace'. The knowledge from this study will not only shed light on the crucial role of the Fourfold Buddhist Assemblies in fostering sustainable peace but may also lead to new approaches in practice that can help build a more sustainable just and peaceful world (SDG 16).

IV. RECOMMENDATION

4.1. Recommendations for applying research results

The study of the role of the Fourfold Buddhist Assemblies in supporting Sustainable Development Goal 16 holds significance both theoretically and practically. By applying the principles of meditation practice, this research offers a tangible approach to improving various sectors of society. Meditation refines the minds of citizens, fostering goodness, reducing harm to others, promoting respect for individual rights, encouraging positive relationships, and upholding justice and non-violence. These practices contribute directly to peace and justice at both national and international levels. This research enhances the understanding of the role of the Four Buddhist Assemblies in fostering a society with sustainable peace, free from violence, and aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 16.

4.2. Suggestions for future research

As this research is based on documentary analysis, its findings remain conceptual. To further explore the effectiveness of these ideas, future research should move towards practical application. The researcher recommends implementing the guidelines derived from this study within various

p. 383 - 398, <https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/dhammathas/article/view/271301>

- Sabita Dhakhwa, 2006, "The Sustainable Developments Goals and Buddha's Teachings", *Historical Journal* 12 (1), p. 70 - 79.

³⁶ Sauwalak Kittiprapas, 2016, *Buddhist Sustainable Development Through Inner Happiness*, International Research Associates for Happy Societies (IRAH), Bangkok.

³⁷ - Christine Schliesser, 2023, *On the Significance of Religion for the SDGs*, Routledge, New York.

- Tomalin Emma, Hausteijn J. and Kidy S., 2019, "Religion and the Sustainable Development Goals", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17(2), p.102-118, <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/148670/3/Tomalin%20et%20al%2C%20RFAIA%20%28JH%20ET%29.pdf>

departments and organizations. Qualitative data should be collected to assess the impact of meditation training on both individual and organizational levels. By comparing the results of this practical application, the effectiveness of meditation training can be measured and the tangible benefits evaluated.

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COMPASSIONATE PRACTICE OF AVALOKITEŚVARA CULT: INSPIRING SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Thich Duc Quang*

Abstract:

This study explores the compassionate practice of the Avalokiteśvara cult as an inspiring theoretical praxis of shared responsibility for human development and well-being. The aim is to explain why the Avalokiteśvara cult became a praxis philosophy of sharing responsibility for human development and how Avalokiteśvara inspired actions toward human dignity and sustainable development. This research follows a qualitative methodology through an intertextual and philosophical analysis and interpretation of Avalokiteśvara discourses and related texts. The study demonstrates the significant role of Avalokiteśvara's compassionate praxis in inspiring the journey of enlightenment, liberation, and well-being. This practice of compassion fosters a compassionate heart, serves as a beacon of hope, and calls for loving action for all beings. Compassionate action is the only path to transforming fear and attaining fearlessness. In particular, the philosophy of compassion in action serves as a moral compass, generating bodhicitta, practicing deep listening and contemplation, and engaging in Bodhisattvayāna to promote social justice and sustainable values. A meaningful example of this philosophy is the Vietnamese narrative of "Quan Am Thi Kinh", which conveys the transformative power of bodhicitta, loving-kindness (*mettā*), forbearance (*titikkhā*), forgiveness (*khama*), and the perfection of patience (*khantī pāramitā*) in addressing humanity's crises. In short, the compassionate practice of the Avalokiteśvara cult represents a universal ethic and a model of shared responsibility for human development, addressing contemporary issues of peace and sustainability in a

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new era. The Avalokiteśvara path serves as an inspiration for altruistic action and for fostering human dignity, resilience, and empathy through charity work, environmental conservation, gender equality, peacebuilding, and sustainable development.

Keywords: *Avalokiteśvara, compassion, Bodhisattvayāna, sustainable development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The practice of compassion by Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva has deeply influenced Buddhist cultures and traditions. The most important role of Avalokiteśvara is as a great compassionate symbol, representing the shared responsibility for the happiness and development of humanity. Now more than ever, humanity faces challenges such as social inequality, ecological crises, and the fragmentation of communities. This is when the ideal of the selfless service of Avalokiteśvara is most needed for salvation, alleviating suffering, and promoting harmony in a challenging world. Moreover, Avalokiteśvara's compassionate gaze offers a potential solution, providing comfort, sympathy, and love. The Avalokiteśvara cult is not only about compassion and wisdom but also encompasses diverse rituals and meditation as paths to addressing contemporary problems. The philosophy of practicing compassion heals weary hearts, removes selfishness, and directs individuals toward altruism and service to humanity. This is the only path to harmony, inner spiritual awakening, and social transformation. Thus, Avalokiteśvara's compassion becomes a beacon of hope, empathy, love, and infinite care. This article, therefore, explores why and how the compassion embodied in the Avalokiteśvara cult inspires and fosters a shared responsibility for human development and well-being.

II. COMPASSIONATE JOURNEY OF AVALOKITEŚVARA

Avalokiteśvara is the bodhisattva who represents the Buddha's philosophy of great compassion, symbolically leading compassionate activities. Even the title Avalokiteśvara originates from the Buddha's compassion, observing the world (*lokaṃ volokento*) with the eye of awareness (*Buddhacakkhu*), when requested by Brahmā Sahāmpati to turn the wheel of dharma.¹ Out of great compassion for all people, the Buddha preached the *dharma*² as a form of charity, offering the truth and healing suffering. Preaching is like sowing seeds in fields; depending on the fertility of each type of soil, the results will differ. This soil is a metaphor for each person's mind, so practicing *dharma* is like improving the soil of the mind (心地), increasing its fertility so that the seed of enlightenment can germinate and bear holy fruit. Among the methods introduced to cultivate the mind, the most effective is to expand the mind of compassion and practice the six perfections (*pāramitā*) to save sentient beings.

¹ Indacanda (trans.). (2014). *The Teaching of the Buddha*. p. 9 - 10. & Saito, A. (2018). *Buddhist Ethics and Society*. p. 1 - 13.

² SN 4.315 – 4.317, 42.7.

On this basis, the *Avalokiteśvara* cult in *Mahāyāna*. Buddhism is known as the path of liberating sentient beings through great compassion - using great compassion to save, transforming the mind with a compassionate heart. This is the most profound function of compassion: opening the capacity to serve sentient beings in a spirit of altruism and selflessness. Compassion as a practical philosophy is therefore not merely a spiritual ideal but has tangible applications. In particular, compassion has a profound influence on the shared responsibility for the development of all living beings in general and humans in particular. Because compassion carries universal moral values, it has left a golden mark in human history, associated with healing and salvation. As a result, it easily becomes a fundamental philosophy, actively fostering inner peace, reducing suffering, and promoting social harmony. The origin of Avalokiteśvara's philosophy of compassion lies in the power of loving-kindness (慈力) and compassion (悲仰),³ expressed through skillful means in the practice of the six perfections. This unique approach to compassion begins with observing and listening to understand, mastering the practice of listening and contemplation to enter meditation, and manifesting charity according to circumstances. Through skillful application of the six perfections, the door to liberation is opened. The great vow of compassion is the practice of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara: to save all beings equally and constantly bestow fearlessness, liberating all sentient beings.⁴ Compassion is like a cool stream of water that extinguishes afflictions, like a gentle breeze that dispels heat, like a soft light that illuminates the path out of delusion, like a dynamic force that leads sentient beings to the shore of enlightenment, like a pure melody that unties the bonds of ignorance. Compassion is a panacea that heals all wounds dividing society and dissolves all social distinctions in the practice of compassion, ensuring the right to complete freedom. That is, a person with social responsibility must cultivate the great compassion of a bodhisattva - offering material support equally while constantly providing truth and peace, helping all beings escape suffering and enter the path of peace. Great compassion is not simply a tool for cultivating and transforming the individual mind, but it extends far beyond, becoming a social message - a miraculous *dharma* that heals suffering and creates a free and equal society grounded in boundless love. All forms of discrimination - between individuals, genders, societies, nations, and ideologies - will end when great compassion is practiced completely. In other words, the great compassion of Avalokiteśvara is not only the driving force for personal transformation, turning an ordinary mind into a holy one, an evil mind into a good one, a suffering mind into a joyful one, but also the inspiration to tirelessly fulfill the responsibility of liberating others. It builds an equal and free society through charitable activities and the practice of *bodhisattvayāna*, promoting social justice and sustainable values. Avalokiteśvara's compassionate activities

³ Taishō, Vol. 10, No. 279, pp. 366c19–367a8. & Hạnh Cơ (trans.), *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, (2012), p. 4.

⁴ 大方廣佛華嚴經, T10, no. 279, p. 367a14–16. “我已成就菩薩大悲行解脫門。善男子！我以此菩薩大悲行門，平等教化一切眾生相續不斷。”

originate from the vow arising from a compassionate heart, giving rise to *bodhicitta*. According to the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*,⁵ *bodhicitta* emerges from the awakened mind and, through many lifetimes of diligent practice in listening, contemplation, and cultivation, leads to deep meditation. From this state, Avalokiteśvara attains perfect wisdom, especially great compassion, always observing and listening deeply to understand suffering, responding to the needs and wishes of sentient beings to alleviate their suffering and bring happiness. In other words, compassion means both relieving suffering and bestowing happiness, grounded in the awakened mind. The awakened mind guides the practice of self-kindness in accordance with the *saddharma*, ensuring that it remains untainted and firmly rooted in the original noble vow. The awakened mind is the vow “to save sentient beings below and seek Buddhahood above.”⁶ That is, it expresses the aspiration to always remain clear-minded and awake, to learn the Buddha’s truth in order to save both oneself and others.⁷ This is symbolized by the image of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara appearing in all Buddhas and before all sentient beings. It signifies that the bodhisattva cultivates *bodhicitta* by appearing before the Buddha to learn the path of wisdom and appearing before sentient beings to liberate them through compassionate action. Therefore, generating *bodhicitta* is of great significance in practicing charity in a sustainable and long-term manner. The function of the vow is to orient the will to act, uphold morality, and develop the capacity for charitable practice. In other words, with a firm vow, Avalokiteśvara’s compassion remains unshaken by societal praise or criticism. The mind remains strong enough to practice compassion and contribute to the shared responsibility for the development of humanity and world peace. Especially, Avalokiteśvara’s act of raising *bodhicitta* before the Buddha⁸ marked a new era in the pursuit of aspiration - a commitment to shared responsibility for human development through the art of mind management in the spirit of awakening. When *bodhicitta* arises, the practitioner initiates the process of awakening, learning to manage body and mind effectively. Mindful management through awakening purifies the mind, activating the latent potential of the five faculties (*pañca indriyāṇi*)⁹. The awakening of *bodhicitta* nurtures these five faculties:

⁵ 大佛頂如來密因修證了義諸菩薩萬行首楞嚴經, T19, no. 945, p. 128b16-22. “憶念我昔無數恒河沙劫, 於時有佛出現於世名觀世音, 我於彼佛發菩提心, 彼佛教我從聞思修入三摩地。初於聞中入流亡所, 所入既寂, 動靜二相了然不生, 如是漸增, 聞、所聞盡, 盡聞不住, 覺、所覺空, 空覺極圓, 空、所空滅, 生滅既滅寂滅現前, 忽然超越世出世間, 十方圓明獲二殊勝。”

⁶ 金剛般若疏, T33, no. 1699, p. 104a28. “發菩提心下度眾生上求佛道。”

⁷ 大方廣佛華嚴經, T10, no. 279, p. 367a16-17. “我住此大悲行門, 常在一切諸如來所, 普現一切眾生之前。”

⁸ 大佛頂如來密因修證了義諸菩薩萬行首楞嚴經, T19, no. 945, tr. 128b16-17. “憶念我昔無數恒河沙劫, 於時有佛出現於世名觀世音, 我於彼佛發菩提心, 彼佛教我從聞思修入三摩地。”

⁹ 雜阿含經 (卷26), T02, no. 99, p. 184a8-19. “如是我聞：一時, 佛住舍衛國祇樹給孤獨園。爾時, 世尊告諸比丘：「有五根。何等為五？謂信根、精進根、念

faith (信根), diligence (精進根), mindfulness (念根), meditation (定根), and wisdom (慧根). This is a living manifestation of the philosophy of dependent origination, where the arising of one condition leads to the arising of another. Thus, the foundation of mindful management stems from the awakening of *bodhicitta*. When the seed of *bodhicitta* is born, the mind remains ever-awake, ensuring that every thought and decision originates from faith, diligence, mindfulness, meditation, and wisdom. Living and managing according to *bodhicitta*, all actions arise naturally and purely, free from coercion yet aligned with the *saddharma*, ethics, and law. The rise of *bodhicitta* not only governs the mind itself but also ensures effective management of reality. It establishes a foundation of understanding that enables compassionate outreach - approaching and assisting those who seek guidance, as well as those in need of rescue or support. Therefore, the *Avalokiteśvara* cult is a journey of realizing compassion through the art of mindful management. The journey of practicing *Avalokiteśvara*'s compassion is one of *bodhicitta*, deep listening, and contemplation. This is the *bodhisattvayāna*, embracing shared responsibility for developing human dignity, resilience, and empathy through charity, environmental conservation, gender equality, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. Additionally, compassion enhances emotional intelligence and serves as a guiding principle in Buddhism. In the *Mahāyāna* tradition, bodhisattvas practice compassion by giving material support, offering truth (*saddharma*), and bestowing fearlessness. Thus, *Avalokiteśvara*, the bodhisattva representing great compassion, is known as the Giver of Fearlessness (*abhayaṃdada*),¹⁰ the provider of security and peace. In short, *Avalokiteśvara*'s path of compassion is a Buddhist philosophy of shared responsibility for human development. The beauty of this philosophy of compassion is that compassionate action is guided by *bodhicitta*, the awakened mind, and the heart of truth. It sets the compassionate journey on the right track toward the ultimate liberation and enlightenment of all beings. Great compassion has no limits, forming an inexhaustible vow to save those who suffer and to grant fearlessness. Based on boundless understanding and love, *Avalokiteśvara* entered into the practice of transforming all sentient beings. This is also the reason why compassion is inherently transcendental; it transcends duality, not being limited to birth or *nirvāṇa*. *Avalokiteśvara* himself was the *Saddharma-vidyā Tathāgata* (正法明如來) of the past because great compassion is embodied in the great compassion bodhisattva.¹¹ What is more interesting is

根、定根、慧根。何等為信根？若聖弟子於如來發菩提心所得淨信心，是名信根。何等為精進根？於如來發菩提心所起精進方便，是名精進根。何等念根？於如來初發菩提心所起念根。何等為定根？於如來初發菩提心所起三昧，是名定根。何等為慧根？於如來初發菩提心所起智慧，是名慧根。所餘堂闍，[5]譬如上說。」佛說此經已，諸比丘聞佛所說，歡喜奉行。”*Āpaṇa-sutta* (SN 48.50), SN v 226-7.

¹⁰ 妙法蓮華經, T09, no. 262, p. 57b22 - 24. “是觀世音菩薩摩訶薩於怖畏急難之中能施無畏，是故此娑婆世界皆號之為施無畏者。”

¹¹ 千手千眼觀世音菩薩廣大圓滿無礙大悲心陀羅尼經, T20, no. 1060, p. 110a10

that, in the future, Avalokiteśvara will become the Mountain King of Universal Light and Merits Tathāgata (普光功德山王如來) in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha.¹² It can be seen that compassion is a practical path, not limited to concepts and thoughts. For that reason, great compassion is a transcendent practice in Avalokiteśvara's cult in particular and in Buddhism in general.

III. CULTIVATING COMPASSIONATE HEART OF AVALOKITEŚVARA: FROM INNER PEACE TO OUTER HARMONY

The heart of great compassion is the core of the bodhisattva practice philosophy in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. The image of Avalokiteśvara represents the ideal of the bodhisattva of compassion. This compassionate heart opens the opportunity for connection and love. Furthermore, compassion destroys hatred and serves as the main foundation for maintaining peace and prosperity for humanity. Third, the compassionate heart calls for reconciliation and assistance, urging people to open their hearts to share pain and dissolve suffering. Relief from suffering and happiness are built on the foundation of the compassionate heart. Buddhist practitioners are even willing to postpone liberation to support others in attaining enlightenment, helping disadvantaged groups achieve social justice. This is the message of universal responsibility brought by the compassionate heart of Avalokiteśvara, directed toward the common benefit of all humanity in terms of welfare and community development. Finally, the presence of Avalokiteśvara increases the ability to listen and develops the capacity for love, sharing, and personal devotion. This is the way to promote healthy collective activities and encourage interaction and solidarity among communities. Thus, compassion means joining hands, being united for a common purpose, and cooperating in humanitarian projects. When the heart of great compassion in each person is opened, not only is the model replicated, but its quality is also improved. Welfare programs in education, health care, and poverty reduction will be widely implemented. The compassionate heart of Avalokiteśvara has another important function: healing. It helps people bathe in the cool waters of compassion. All heat, fear, and suffering are purified. It brings peace and stability to all beings who come into contact with a compassionate heart. The vast connection with the forces of transformation generates positive and stable energy. This energy may be called the medicine of healing, the power of compassionate will. The compassionate heart is like a cool breeze in the middle of summer, transforming and washing away the heat. It is like a summer rain, bringing freshness and serenity. Nothing

- 12. “此觀世音菩薩，不可思議威神之力，已於過去無量劫中，已作佛竟，號『正法明如來』。”千光眼觀自在菩薩祕密法經，T20, no. 1065, p. 121a14 - 15. “觀自在菩薩於我[4]前成佛。號曰正法明十號具足。”

¹² 觀世音菩薩授記經，T12, no. 371, p. 357a12 - 17. “阿彌陀佛正法滅後，過中夜分明相出時，觀世音菩薩，於七寶菩提樹下，結加趺坐，成等正覺，號普光功德山王如來、應供、正遍知、明行足、善逝、世間解、無上士、調御丈夫、天人師、佛、世尊。其佛國土自然七寶，眾妙合成莊嚴之事。”

can replace the compassionate heart, where the power of will spreads to heal the inner self and connect society. The compassionate heart can be seen as a form of social responsibility, healing the barren and painful lands of the mind and alleviating the suffering of unfortunate lives. Above all, great compassion turns the impossible into the possible, hatred into love, and unites all in boundless love. The compassionate heart of Avalokiteśvara represents a practical theory for transforming the mind. Like other traditions, the Avalokiteśvara cult emphasizes the method of mind transformation. Based on the Buddha's teaching, the mind plays the most important role in leading and shaping the world. As stated in the scriptures: "The world is led around by mind;/ By mind it's dragged here and there. Mind is the one thing that has/all under its control."¹³ The mind is interconnected with reality, a relationship that can be observed in stages of meditation. The Buddha emphasized the importance of cultivating, developing, and elevating the mind to its highest stage of perfection. In particular, the practical theory of *dhamma* regards the mind as central to liberation, described as the deliverance of mind (*ceto-vimutti*) and deliverance through wisdom (*paññā-vimutti*). By properly understanding the mind, one can develop insight into the true nature of existence and discard selfish or egoistic desires. The world is beautiful and happy only within the pure mind, as stated in the scriptures: "From the defilement of the mind are beings defiled./ From the purification of the mind are beings purified."¹⁴ This is a crucial viewpoint that gave rise to the famous Huayan tradition (華嚴宗). The mind is powerful, creating all things in the universe, as taught by the Buddha: "Just as when - there being dye, lac, yellow orpiment, indigo, or crimson - a dyer or painter would paint the picture of a woman or a man, complete in all its parts, on a well-polished panel or wall, or a piece of cloth."¹⁵ Thus, the Avalokiteśvara cult aims to show the compassionate path to liberation from the suffering of *saṃsāra*, giving human beings the courage to overcome fear and transform the mind toward inner peace and outer harmony. On this basis, the Avalokiteśvara cult has three methods for controlling the mind to attain inner peace. The first is the practice of investigation, which is the best way to understand the nature of the mind. In Avalokiteśvara's practical theory, investigative techniques begin with deep listening, contemplation, and practice. By gaining full control over the mind, practitioners can attain inner peace. The way to transcend suffering is to analyze and investigate the mind, as stated in the scriptures: "By such self-examination, a *bhikkhu* knows: I am often without longing, without ill will, free from dullness and drowsiness, calm, free from doubt, without anger, undefiled in mind, unagitated in body, energetic, and concentrated. He should base himself on those same wholesome qualities and make a further effort to reach

¹³ SN. 1.62, Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), (2000): 130. "*Cittena nīyati loko,/ cittena parikassati;/ Cittassa ekadhammassa,/ sabbeva vasamanvagū*"ti.

¹⁴ SN. 22. 100, *Gaddula-sutta* 2: "*cittasaṃkilesā bhikkhave sattā saṃkilissanti; cittavodānā sattā visujjhanti*." 雜阿含經 (卷26), T02, no. 99, p. 69c. "心惱故眾生惱, 心淨故眾生淨."

¹⁵ 雜阿含經 (卷26), T02, no. 99, p. 69c23 - 4. "譬如畫師、畫師弟子, 善治素地, 具眾彩色, 隨意圖畫種種像類." and, SN. 22.100 (SN ii 151, *Gaddula-sutta*).

the destruction of the taints.”¹⁶ The second method is compassion (*karuṇā*) meditation, an art of love frequently practiced alongside loving-kindness (*mettā*), empathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) to transform the mind. This practice involves contemplating and spreading compassion toward all beings - those who are beloved, respectable, familiar, unknown, or even antagonistic. The ultimate wish for all beings (*sabbe sattā*) is: “May they be free from hostility, free from affliction, free from distress, and live peacefully and happily.”

“The monk, with a mind full of compassion pervading first one direction, then a second one, then a third one, then the fourth one - just so above, below, and all around; and everywhere identifying himself with all, he pervades the whole world with a mind full of loving-kindness, with a mind wide, developed, unbounded, free from hate and ill will.” This technique of sending compassion radiates boundless love in all directions.

The third method is deep listening, a technique of insight meditation (*vipassanā*). The purpose of deep listening is to train the mind to recognize the impermanence, suffering, non-self, and *nirvāṇa* nature of all things. By listening to sounds, one gains insight into these fundamental marks of *dharmā*. This technique is particularly suited to the realm of sound, as confirmed by the Buddha to Venerable Ānanda in the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra*, which highlights the noble value of deep listening. Therefore, training the mind plays an essential role in the Avalokiteśvara cult, transforming the mind into a peaceful and compassionate one. In short, cultivating the compassionate heart of Avalokiteśvara is the art of living and bestowing fearlessness. This is the bodhisattva path, a path of shared responsibility in fostering human dignity, resilience, and empathy. Avalokiteśvara’s path promotes both inner peace and outer harmony. Inner peace arises from a compassionate heart, and the mind matures through training and transformation. Mind training techniques aim to develop great compassion while eliminating personal selfishness. At the same time, they cultivate a more altruistic mind, rooted in the understanding of the selfless nature of existence - free from attachment and clinging. Therefore, great compassion is called the path of practice leading to enlightenment. Moreover, inner peace creates happy and peace-loving individuals. Such individuals contribute to forming stable families, civilized societies, and harmonious nations. Since human beings are the fundamental units of society, happy individuals lead to a happy society. Inner peace, in turn, fosters external harmony. At every level, people with compassionate hearts cultivate inner peace, ultimately leading to a prosperous society and a peaceful world through charitable work, environmental conservation, gender equality, peacebuilding, and sustainable development.

IV. EMBODYING COMPASSIONATE ACTION TO PATIENCE PERFECTION OF QUAN AM THI KINH AS THE MODEL SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

¹⁶ AN 10.51; Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), (2012): 1403.

Compassionate action is materialized in life, beginning with charitable activities. This is the *pāramitā* of giving, such as the giving of material things, *dhamma*, and fearlessness. Avalokiteśvāra is the master of giving peace and fearlessness through deep listening and understanding.¹⁷ Especially in giving *dhamma*, there are five types of sounds associated with Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvāra, including: “Wonderful sound, Avalokiteśvāra, Brahma sound, ocean tide sound, transcending worldly sound, please constantly contemplate.”¹⁸ With the wonderful sound to transform living beings, the Bodhisattva has this wonderful and miraculous sound (妙音) due to the vow to listen and deeply understand. Only those who have accomplished great vows can hear and understand thoroughly to speak the worldly voice (觀世音), expressing love, sympathy, and empathy with the hearts of human beings. The voice of Brahma (梵音), in Buddhism, is the voice of the four immeasurable minds (*brahma-vihārās*). It is the voice that contains the boundless mind of loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). When the mind is imbued with *brahma*-practice, then speech and action will be filled with the four immeasurable minds, creating the energy of present happiness and joy and the merit of rebirth in the *Brahma* heaven realm, according to the *Mettā Sutta*. The ocean tide sound has only the sound of the *dhamma*, like the waves of the ocean, gently dispelling all suffering, sorrow, and distress. Thus, the *dhamma* sound of Avalokiteśvāra far surpasses the sounds of the world, surpassing the sounds of “gain-loss, humiliation-honor, praise-criticism, and suffering-peace” in the mundane world; it is surpassed and subdued by the Bodhisattva’s voice of compassion, joy, and equanimity. All five methods of contemplation and five types of sound have fully expressed the vows of Avalokiteśvāra; in part, it also explains the title of the Bodhisattva, closely linked to the practice of contemplation of sound Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvāra is called the pure saint (觀世音淨聖), endowed with immeasurable merits and blessings, always looking at life with compassionate eyes. Thus, giving perfection is the best way to protect the common development of humanity, eliminate the gap between rich and poor, and ensure social justice, truth, and peace. Second, the practice of Avalokiteśvāra’s compassionate theory greatly influences the activities of building and protecting the living environment. At present, the Bodhisattva is living and helping Amitābha Buddha and building a pure land - world that is not only clean, beautiful, and solemn but also full of happiness and peace.¹⁹ Even the Bodhisattva’s *Potalaka* (補陀洛伽山) residence is clean, beautiful, and dignified.²⁰ This is a symbol of a clean and dignified environment, something that needs to be learned and practiced as compassion in sharing responsibility for environmental protection in Avalokiteśvāra’s cult. Third, Avalokiteśvāra is the Bodhisattva who represents the spirit of gender equality. In the *Mahāyāna*

¹⁷ T09, no. 262, p. 57b22 - 24.

¹⁸ T09, no. 264, p. 193a20 - 21.

¹⁹ T12, no. 371, p. 357a5 - b15.

²⁰ Thích Trí Tịnh trans. (2011): 293; Vaidya, P. L., ed. (1960): 159.

sūtras, Avalokiteśvara had many female incarnations, who showed the capacity of women for helping, listening, and attaining great enlightenment and compassion. These incarnations are very diverse, to spread the Buddha's word and help women. For example, there are the seven female transformations, namely *bhikkhūṇī*, *upāsikā*, the rich female, the laywoman, the female official, the female Brahmin, and the girl in the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sutta*.²¹ Similarly, there are six female incarnations in the *Śūraṅgama Sutta*, such as *bhikkhūṇī*, *upāsikā*, queen, princess, noble lady, and virgin girl (*kumārī*)²² Therefore, Avalokiteśvara's compassionate action is fully manifested through female incarnations to save sentient beings, meaning that women have responsibility, noble status, and sacred value in the world. This is a unique and scientific message of gender equality. Fourth, Avalokiteśvara's compassion emphasizes peace-building and, fifth, sustainable development. To do this, the Bodhisattva forms a like-minded intellectual community, promoting unity to develop practice toward peace and stability. On the one hand, the community helps ensure presence and empathy: "For the sake of others, manifesting in the same body as others, living together with others to teach others."²³ In the Universal Gate chapter, the Bodhisattva manifests thirty-three incarnations to teach fellow beings according to circumstances. On the other hand, the intellectual community helps protect the ethical, humanistic, and progressive values of humanity in the direction of sustainable development.²⁴ Lastly, Avalokiteśvara's philosophy of compassionate action is skillfully conveyed in the Poem story of Quan Am Thi Kinh. Thi Kinh is an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, practising compassion through perfect patience. The creative and unique point of the philosophy of compassionate action is that in this work, the incarnation of Avalokiteśvara shares the responsibility for the development of social consciousness. Although Thi Kinh was blamed and persecuted by her husband's family and society, she overcame it thanks to her compassion. This is a shining example of sacrifice, tolerance, and patience in overcoming all difficulties and cultivating to become a Buddha. To understand more deeply the philosophy of compassionate action, here is the plot: "In nine consecutive lives of cultivation, in the tenth life of cultivating to become a Buddha, he was reincarnated as the talented and virtuous daughter of Mang Ong named Thi Kinh. She married the scholar Sung Thien Si. He was busy with his studies, so one night he fell asleep on the study table. Thi Kinh was sitting sewing beside him, and saw her husband's beard growing backwards on his chin. Thinking it was a bad omen, she decided to cut it off. Suddenly Thien Si woke up, suspecting that his wife was going to kill him, so he shouted and shouted. Despite her best efforts, Thi Kinh was still kicked out of the house. Feeling wronged, Thi Kinh disguised herself as a man and asked to become a monk at Van Pagoda far from home. She became a novice monk with the dharma name Kinh Tam, living a simple

²¹ Thích Trí Tịnh trans., (2007): 542 - 543.

²² Hạnh Cơ trans., vol. 2, (2012): 7 - 8.

²³ T10, no. 279, tr. 367a14 - 23.

²⁴ T09, no. 262, tr. 57a23 - b19.

life, but her elegant appearance made many girls in the area yearn. In the village, there was a rich man's daughter named Thi Mau. One day, when she went to the pagoda, she saw young Kinh Tam and fell in love with her. But young Kinh Tam refused, and in anger, Thi Mau slept with a servant in the house and became pregnant. When the villagers arrested and interrogated her, Mau immediately falsely accused Kinh Tam. Therefore, the abbot of the temple paid the fine and bailed Kinh Tam out, temporarily settling the little monk outside the temple's three gates for fear of gossip from the villagers. After a while, Mau gave birth to a son and placed him at the temple's three gates. Although confused, Kinh Tam still adopted the child and loved him very much. Every day, little monk Kinh Tam had to go out to beg for milk for the baby despite the ridicule of the world. When the baby grew up, the little monk was exhausted and wrote a farewell letter to his parents. He told his son everything and instructed him to give the letter to the abbot of Van Pagoda after he died. When the little monk was buried, everyone learned that Kinh Tam was a woman. All her grievances were cleared up, the villagers held a vegetarian ceremony to pray for the baby at Van Pagoda and Thien Ton Buddha decreed Kinh Tam to become Quan Am Buddha.²⁵ Since then, Quan Am Thi Kinh has become a symbol of compassion and love, through the practice of patience and perfection in Buddhism and Vietnamese culture. Sharing responsibility in the philosophy of compassionate action is rooted in patience (*kṣānti/khanti*). The perfection of patience fosters a steadfast and stable mind, allowing for a clearer perception of all problems. This clarity enables one to see things as they truly are. At this stage, compassion and patience work in unison to achieve a deep understanding of reality and reach the truth. In Buddhism, the right view is based on dependent origination. Everything and everyone are interrelated, a concept known as interbeing. Thus, compassionate action arises from this wisdom, helping to dissolve selfishness and attachment. In return, Thi Kinh herself recognized the interconnection of all beings, cultivating compassion and patience to navigate the hardships of social life. Seeing the inherent injustices in society, she understood that only compassion and patience could provide real solutions. These qualities mark the beginning of true liberation and the shared responsibility for human development. Thi Kinh's patience embodied the transformative power of *bodhicitta*, loving-kindness (*mettā*), forbearance (*titikkhā*), forgiveness (*khama*), and the perfection of patience (*khanti pāramitā*) in addressing humanity's crises. Avalokiteśvara Thi Kinh's praxis of compassion is realized through patience because the natural and social worlds are marked by impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). According to the Buddha²⁶ the world (*loka*) is constantly disintegrating (*lujjati*),²⁷ empty (*suñño*),²⁸ fragile (敗壞),²⁹ and full of danger

²⁵ Dinh Xuan Hoi (1929): 7 - 63.

²⁶ SN iv 52, 54 & T02, no. 99, p. 56b14 - 15 & SN ii 74.

²⁷ *Lokapañhā-sutta* (SN 35.82 PTS), SN iv 52.

²⁸ *Suññataloka-sutta* (SN 35.85), SN iv 54.

²⁹ 雜阿含經 (卷9), T02, no. 99, p. 56b14 - 15. “危脆敗壞，是名世間。” “Dangerous

(危脆). The world arises and ceases based on sensory experience, which leads to craving and suffering.³⁰ Throughout history, people have endured natural disasters, socio-political upheavals, and economic crises due to their actions and conflicts. In facing these crises, particularly in the case of Thi Kinh, she chose patience as the means to transcend suffering, cultivating a mental state of understanding, mindfulness, and peace. Patience is the ability to endure (*adhivāsa*) or forbear (*titikkhā*) calmly in the face of adversity. It is a noble quality because it enables one to accept challenges with forgiveness (*khama*), equanimity, and composure, without succumbing to irritation. Patience equates to steadfastness (*dhiti*), endurance (*adhivāsa*), and forbearance (*titikkhā*), which help overcome anger.³¹ Moreover, patience is a crucial stage in the gradual path to the ultimate goal of *Nibbāna*. It serves as a stepping stone to equanimity and adaptation or conformity knowledge (*anuloma-ñāṇa*). For this reason, patience is a noble virtue worthy of veneration. According to the *Issatta Sutta*: “Even though one may be of low birth, one should honor the person of noble conduct, the sagely one in whom are established the virtues of patience and gentleness.”³² Patience is the best way to navigate crises and transcend the suffering that pervades society. It embodies great compassion and provides a reliable measure for sharing responsibility in human development, fostering dignity, resilience, and empathy while preventing harm to oneself and others. In short, compassionate action is truly realized when one deeply understands the nature of the world and fully cultivates awareness (*bodhi*). From this foundation, awareness and compassion function like the wings of a bird soaring freely in the sky of liberation. Only then can great compassion lead to complete freedom. In an ever-changing world, compassion manifests in multiple ways. On one hand, it requires practical action to alleviate the suffering of sentient beings. On the other, it demands patient endurance in overcoming the crises of nature and society. The highest expression of great compassion is boundless self-love. As the teaching states: “If you truly love yourself, you will easily love others. If you truly love yourself, you will never harm others.”³³ Only through genuine self-love can one extend love to others. Practicing compassion towards oneself generates peace and happiness within the body and mind. Thus, cultivating self-compassion is essential for developing true love, enabling selfless and unconditional sharing with all. The perfection of patience is key to overcoming crises and embodying great compassion in action.

V. CONCLUSION

Compassionate action in the Avalokiteśvara tradition is a practical

and fragile, is called the world.”

³⁰ *Loka-sutta* (SN 12. 44), SN ii 74.

³¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), (2000): 257, 316, 410.

³² Bhikkhu Bodhi, (trans.), (2000): 191. *Issatta Sutta*, SN I.223 “*Tattheva khantisoraccam, dhammā yasmim patitthitā; Ariyavuttim medhāvim, hinajaccampi pūjaye.*”

³³ *Dhammarakkhita*, (2001): 3.

philosophy, deeply expressed in a way of life dedicated to the benefit of all living beings. Sharing a common responsibility for human development requires great compassion. Avalokiteśvara's doctrine of compassion serves as a guiding principle for fostering peace, happiness, and sustainable development. The *Bodhisattva* exemplifies compassionate action, bringing joy and relieving suffering through mindfulness and deep listening. The distinct quality of great compassion in action is its ability to cultivate inner transformation while promoting a harmonious and peaceful society. Here, compassion extends beyond the individual, with perfect patience becoming the foundation for overcoming social and psychological crises. Without great compassion, shared responsibility for common development remains unattainable. With great compassion, however, people unite under a common purpose, ensuring collective achievements. Through compassion and love, shared responsibility emerges for the greater good, embodying the true essence of great compassion. Compassion connects hearts, fostering unity in great love. Without discrimination or hatred, great compassion serves as a universal refuge, guiding practitioners of *Bodhisattvayāna* towards equality and social justice, grounded in sustainable values. It nurtures human dignity, resilience, and empathy, encouraging all to participate in the sustainable development of humanity. Thus, the compassionate philosophy of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva remains an eternal beacon of light for humanity, leading all toward sustainable progress and shared prosperity.

Abbreviations:

AN:	<i>Āṅguttara Nikāya</i>
SN:	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i>
Sn:	<i>Sutta Nipāta</i>
T:	<i>Taishō Tripitaka</i>

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BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF BODHICITTA - SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SHANTI DEVA'S BODHICARYĀ AVATAR

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Abstract:

Today human society has become so accustomed to science and its use that it does not hesitate in having blind faith in religion and religious scriptures, rather it understands that the knowledge of religion and religious scriptures cannot bring welfare to human beings. Although the number of people having such thoughts is not very high. There are many countries in the world where the entire population is atheist but still, the people there are unhappy, the main reason for this is the lack of morality. Therefore, today knowledge of moral education is essential to making human life happy. Looking at today's time, we can say that even today the knowledge of moral education is as necessary for society as the earlier teachers stressed its necessity. Moral education can make anyone virtuous and faultless, whether that person is religious or not. For example, if you want to stop an atheist from committing violence, you cannot stop him from reading religious stories because he is an atheist, but you can stop him through moral education. There are many such texts in Buddhism in which moral education has been discussed directly or indirectly. Such as *Bodhicharyāvatāra*, *Suhṛdālekha*, *Saddharmacintāmaṇi-mokṣālankāra* etc. Similarly, in the books written by His Holiness Dalai Lama Ji like *Buddhist Principle Essence*, *Happiness of Morality*, *Simple Path to Happiness*, *Art of Living*, etc., full emphasis has been given to show the use of moral education in human life and its importance.

Keywords: *Moral education, atheism and morality, religious scriptures, Buddhism and ethics, Dalai Lama's teachings.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Whenever I think about the main reasons for happiness in human life (our life), moral education knocks on my mind again and again. Morality is neither confined to any religion nor is it a special scripture different from religion. What I mean to say is that on the path of morality, a theist or a theist who has faith in religion can walk as well as an atheist. When two people of different ideologies are seen walking shoulder to shoulder smilingly on a road, that road undoubtedly leads human life toward happiness. Morality is not only an essential tool for uniting society and humanity but also for protecting religion, philosophy, and culture. The matters of morality are found similar in every religion, especially in Buddhism it has been explained in detail. Its evidence is found in the direct and indirect lectures on morality in many Tibetan Buddhist texts. Similarly, many Tibetan scholars have written many texts based on moral education. Such as - Snow Cupid's Snow Cup composed by Chos-je Gampo-pa Sonam Rinchen Snow Cup (Dagpo Thar Gyan.) རྒྱལ་སྐྱེལ་ཐོག་མེད་པ་བཟང་པོ། Composed by Gyalse Thogmed Zangpo རྒྱལ་སྐྱེལ་ལག་ལེན། (Gyalse Lag-len.) ས་པ་ཆ་ལུན་དགའ་རྒྱལ་མཚན། Written by Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyalchen ས་སྐལ་ལེགས་བཤད། (Sakya Legs Shed.) There are texts such as དགོ་ལྷན་ལེགས་བཤད། (Geden Legs Shed.) written by Penchen Sonam Dagpa. Similarly, in books like Essence of Buddhist Principles, Happiness of Morality, Simple Path to Happiness, Art of Living, etc. written by His Holiness Dalai Lama Ji, full emphasis has been given to show the use and importance of moral education in human life. If we don't call Buddhism only atheism and non-theism, but add another name of moralism to these names, I feel it will not be unacceptable. Due to a lack of morality, there is a bad situation all around the world today.

Moral education is the basis of human life but today there is such a lack of moral education that if you ask a youth today which profession he is in? He says I am a doctor, I am an engineer or I am a teacher. Today the whole world has indeed gone very far in material development, but due to a lack of moral education, you always see incidents like rape, theft, etc. in the morning news. Today, many educated doctors, teachers, engineers, etc. in the country and abroad are also involved in evils like scams, theft or rape, etc. All this shows the lack of moral education. Even if we talk about a developed country like America, which considers itself the most powerful country, from January 2022 to May 2022, i.e. in just 5 months, there have been 212 deadly shootings at various places, especially in schools. Why is all this happening? Is this the education being given in America which claims to be the greatest country in the world? No, absolutely not. America is one of the greatest countries in the world and its education policy is also the best in the world but all this is happening due to the lack of moral education. Therefore, it is extremely important to impart moral education to today's young generation. The first task of imparting moral education is that of the parents. In this regard, the original Tibetan book on moral education ཁ་ཆེ་པ་ལུ། (Khache-Falu) states: མ་མའི་ཁ་པ་སྐྱོ་ལྷན་ལེགས་བཤད་ན། བླ་མཁན་ཆག་སྐོའི་རྒྱལ་སྐྱེལ་ཐོག་མེད་པ་འཕྲུག་པ་ལྟར་ལྟོ།¹ (amai-kha-l-go-chags-gyab-dag-n. thu-gus-chag-gohi-gyl-go-

¹ Khache phalue. *Dharamshala*: Library of Tibet, 2009, p. 27.

che-nyen-yod.). Means – if the mother locks her mouth, (on her If you do not give moral education to your son, then the possibility of opening the door of misfortune for your son will increase. Similarly-

Moral Education ན་སོ་གཞན་དུ་ས་ལ་སྤྲོད་ཐར་སྤོབས།² (N-So-Jon-Dus-Bu-L-Jong-Thar-Lob). This means that children should be given education (moral education) at a young age. Similarly, in Buddhist scriptures, we find the description of Bodhichitta and Bodhisattva who live their lives according to moral education. In this context, it is very important to understand the importance of Bodhichitta. Bodhichitta imbued with altruism is the best of all minds. In short, we can describe the nature of Bodhichitta as: Selfless, altruistic, endowed with all virtues, and devoid of all defects. Bodhichitta can also be defined as: The mind that, after knowing its inherent suffering, wants to completely avoid such suffering in others as well, such a great mind with a strong determination is called Bodhichitta. There are two types of Bodhichitta in its Samvritti form - *Bodhi Pranidhana chitta* and *Bodhiprasthana chitta*. In these, the first *chitta* is like the desire to go, and the second, the difference that is there in the mind of the people going, is the same in these as well. *Pranidhana chitta* is imbued with the sentiment that I will achieve Samyak Sam Buddhahood in order to remove the sufferings of all beings, while *Bodhiprasthānacitta* goes beyond mere determination and is the situation of actually practicing the corresponding *paramitās*. From the time *Bodhiprasthānacitta* emerges in a seeker, he continuously accumulates only virtues in all situations, whether he is sleeping or waking, eating or drinking. Acharya Shantideva has also said in *Bodhicharyāvatāra*- དེང་ནས་བཟུང་སྟེ་གཞི་ལོག་གམ། །བག་མེད་གྱུར་གྱུར་བསྐྱོད་ནམས་ཤུགས། ། / རྩན་མི་འཆད་བར་དུ་མ་ཞིག། རྩན་མ་ཁལ་མ་ཉམས་པར་རབ་དུ་འབྱུང་།³ Meaning - from then onwards, even while sleeping, even while in a disturbed state, and not only this, even while walking, standing, sitting, eating or drinking, many times every moment, huge streams of virtues like the sky keep flowing continuously. This fact of unbroken virtue has been logically stated by Lord Tathagata himself in the Subahu Pariprichchha Sutra for those who have faith in Shravakayana and Pratyekabuddhayana. To logically demonstrate this fact, Acharya Shanidev has said- སེམས་ཅན་རྣམས་ཀྱི་སྤྱད་ནད་ཅན། །བསལ་ལོ་སྟུང་དུ་བསམ་ན་ཡང་། ། / བན་འདྲིགས་བསམ་པ་དང་ལྡན་དེ། །བསྐྱོད་ནམས་དཔག་མེད་ལྡན་གྱུར་ན། ། / སེམས་ཅན་རེ་འི་མི་བདེ་བ། །དཔག་ཏུ་མེད་པ་བསལ་འདྲིན་ཅིང་། ། / རེ་ཅེ་འང་ཡོན་ཏན་དཔག་ཏུ་མེད། །བསྐྱབ་པར་འདྲིན་པ་སྟོམ་ཅི་དགོས།⁴

That is, a person who thinks that I will remove the pain in the head of some living beings with mantra or medicine is also considered to be incomparably virtuous and well-wisher in the world. What can we say about that person who wants to completely end the infinite suffering of every living being in the world? They have a strong desire to remove the sufferings of all beings and to make them endowed with all virtues. The continuous increase of virtues of such a great mind is natural. Therefore, one should always try to generate the mind

² Ibid., p. 13.

³ Shantideva, Acharya. *Bodhicharyāvatāra*. Sarnath, Varanasi: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 2017, p. 2.

⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

with this comprehensive quality specified in Mahayana. The Mahāsattva who strives for the welfare and happiness of all beings in this manner, a Mahāsattva endowed with extraordinary qualities is said to be many times superior to the gods. It has also been said in the Bodhiniryavatara – གཤམ་ཡང་ན་མ་ཡང་རྩང་། །སྤྱུ་ལ་འདི་འདྲའི་ཕན་སེམས་ཡོད། ། / ལྷ་དང་དྲང་སྤྲོད་རྣམས་ཀྱང་རྩང་། །ཚངས་པ་ལ་ཡང་འདི་ཡོད་དམ། །⁵

That is no person's parents or gods like Soma, Varun, or sages like Vashishtha or even Brahma have such welfare intelligence as the Mahāsattva Bodhisattva has. It is undoubtedly true that no mind can be as altruistic as Bodhichitta. No matter how affectionate a mother is, she is only towards her own children, that too only because of attachment, hatred etc. Being filled with the feeling of ego, the mother would want her children should make her name famous, become the support of her old age, etc. They show love towards their children by cherishing their feelings. That too is only towards their children. Even the gods do not have the feeling of infinite compassion and welfare. The person who worships will get the blessings of the god. This is also just partiality. But Bodhichitta, unlike these two, remains engaged in the welfare of all beings without any selfishness. Bodhisattva has no one of his own or strangers, all beings are equal to him. Bodhisattva sees all beings as his mother. As much as Mother is indebted to me, all the creatures of the world are indebted to me, this is the feeling with which Bodhisattva is called the best. The Bodhichitta is the best among all the minds, due to the production of which one becomes revered by humans and gods in the world. And why not adopt such a Bodhichitta whose altruism, selfless service, is greater than even that of parents, why not try to produce it within ourselves, I am trying to put forth my personal view in brief before you all on this. Bodhichitta should be generated so that countless beings suffering from adverse afflictions in hell and other states can be freed from worldly sorrows. It is fundamental to free others from sorrow and lead them towards Nirvana, but the generation of Bodhichitta is also necessary to free oneself from sorrow. As Shanti Dev has said in *Bodhicharyāvatāra* – སྤྲོད་པའི་སྤྱུག་བསྐལ་བརྒྱ་ཕྱག་གཞི་འདོད་ཅིང་། །སེམས་ཅན་མི་བདེ་བསལ་བར་འདོད་པ་དང་། ། / བདེ་མང་བརྒྱ་ཕྱག་སྦྱོར་བར་འདོད་པས་ཀྱང་། །བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་ཉིད་རྣམ་ཏུ་བཏང་མི་བྱ། །⁶

That is, those who wish to overcome hundreds of sufferings in the world, to remove the pain of living beings, and to enjoy hundreds of pleasures should never abandon Bodhichitta. Therefore, one should try to generate Bodhichitta within oneself. When Bodhichitta is generated, a person does not feel any pain whether he is in heaven on earth, or even in hell. In short, Bodhichitta is the essence of Buddhism. Without the generation of Bodhichitta, even Buddhahood cannot be achieved. Bodhichitta is the main and essential reason for attaining Buddhahood. For example, it is said in the Thirty Seven Bodhicharya Grahaya Anushtthan that – སྤྱུག་བསྐལ་མ་ལུས་བདག་བདེ་འདོད་ལས་བྱུང་། །རྫོགས་པའི་སངས་རྒྱས་གཞན་ཕན་སེམས་ལས་འབྱུངས། །⁷

⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶ Shantideva, Acharya. *Bodhicharyāvatāra*. Sarnath, Varanasi: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 2017, p. 2.

⁷ Thogs Med, Ngul-chu. *Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*. Sarnath, Varanasi: Central

That is, the root cause of all suffering is the desire for one's happiness. All the Buddhas in the past have been born by wishing for the happiness of others. Therefore, I believe that whether we want to save ourselves from suffering like hell, etc. or want to serve all the living beings in the world and make them free from suffering, we should only strive to produce Bodhichitta. This will also eliminate the covering of afflictions and knowledge and will also lead to the accumulation of merits and knowledge. Therefore, everyone should make efforts to generate Bodhichitta within themselves. The nature, importance and other qualities of Bodhisattva should be remembered again and again so that the door to the creation of Bodhichitta opens. All beings should produce this priceless gem called Bodhichitta within themselves.

His Holiness Dalai Lama says- "The desire for happiness is not only present in the human beings endowed with wisdom and knowledge but is present in all living creatures. Sorrow can be avoided only by making efforts. It is not right to have big hopes in life and wait for their fulfillment neither sorrow can be eradicated nor happiness can be achieved by laziness. There are some reasons for sorrow. Those root causes have to be found. If we can eliminate those causes, we can make human life happy and prosperous. We will have to adopt the causes of good and happiness and abandon the causes of harm and sorrow.

II. WHY MORALITY IMPORTANT?

शीलं रक्षत सुखं सेत, शीलं रक्खा न दुःखत।/ शीलं सौगं पच्चेत, तस्मा शीलं वसोधये ॥⁸

Sīlaṃ rakkhat sukhaṃ seti, sīlaṃ rakkhā na dukkhati./ Sīlaṃ sauggaṃ paccheti, tasmā sīlaṃ visodhaye.

It means One who protects his modesty (morality) lives happily. The one who protects modesty is never sad. By following the rules, he attains heaven. Therefore, modesty should be kept pure. Someone may think there is no haven so why do we need to protect or practice morality? We always need morality in our personal and social life, because morality plays an important role in our lives. It gives us the ability to understand the difference between right and wrong and take the right action. Society cannot function without morality. What is morality – It is a policy that makes a person virtuous, honest, charitable, impartial etc. And provides us guidance to make our life rich, balanced and joyful. It helps us to perform our duties properly, do proper work for society, and live a balanced life. Without morality, we will become inert or live like a Charvaka, eat, drink and have fun. Who has seen that after death, there is no result of karma, sin, or virtue, there will be such a mentality. And Darwin's "Only the strong will survive"

For example, if everyone starts thinking just about themselves, how will society function? It cannot work since we are all social creatures who live in a society and rely on one another. In such a case, if someone considers himself omnipotent, how would society function? This is impossible, which

is why we must place a strong focus on morals. People who follow morality protect themselves and society, whereas those who do not follow morality hurt themselves and society. For example, Tibet's eminent Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen, wrote in his book *Sakya Legs Shed* – དམ་པ་ལྟུང་བའ་རང་གཞན་སྦྱོང་། ། དམ་པ་རེངས་པའ་རང་གཞན་སྦྱོང་། / འབྲས་ལྗན་ཤིང་གིས་རང་གཞན་སྦྱང་། ། ཤིང་སྐམ་རེངས་པས་རང་གཞན་སྦྱང་།⁹

That is, a fruitful tree protects itself and others, whereas a hard and dry tree burns both. Similarly, a person who follows morals defends himself by being humble, honest, fair, and responsible, among other moral precepts. This allows him to accomplish good for both himself and society. A person who lacks moral awareness leads both himself and society in the wrong direction, causing harm by spreading filth. Therefore, it is necessary to have ethical standards in personal life. If we follow ethical principles in our private lives, we set an example for the rest of society. We start serving society and contributing to humanity selflessly and wholeheartedly. We start considering everyone's suffering as our own. Morality is essential to ensuring the maintenance of the system of humanity and human civilization. It promotes an understanding and awareness of the value of justice, fairness, equality, and kindness among people and motivates them to respect those around them. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the best model I can think of for promoting morality in society. Given that he dedicates his entire life to the welfare and well-being of all people. He consistently strives for these values while spreading qualities of mankind and ethical values, such as compassion, friendship, and so forth, across the world. He made a great effort to promote human qualities rather than religious doctrine, which helped human beings of all classes – theists or atheists, rich or poor.

Mahābodhisattva is a person who treats all equally and respects all traditions of the religions and philosophies in the entire world. Additionally, he maintains that religion does not advocate damage or animosity toward others, rather, people occasionally abuse it for their gain. His Holiness always preaches harmony among all religions. His Holiness is well known throughout the world for his pure mind, virtuous conduct, right guidance, and impartial analysis. Besides being a renowned spiritual guru, he is also a positive messenger and the world's foremost ambassador of peace. He works tirelessly to remove sorrow from the lives of millions and to spread happiness. His Holiness Ji is the embodiment of compassion, extending even toward China, which has plundered its own nation by destroying its religion and culture. He has been honored with many of the world's most prestigious awards for his remarkable contribution to global welfare. It is a matter of great pride for all of us to live in the same era as such an extraordinary person, who is deeply immersed in the teachings of Mahābodhisattva. His Excellency never advocates for the superiority of any one ideology or religious sect, rather, he encourages everyone to follow their own beliefs, which is a logical and inclusive approach. He teaches that life should be lived by one's religion, abilities, and

⁹ Skya, Pandita. *Sakya Legshed*. Sarnath, Varanasi: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 2015, p. 49.

culture. His Holiness Ji places a greater emphasis on human values – such as compassion, friendship, and goodwill than on religious beliefs, advocating these as the foundation for a happy and prosperous life. On this topic, he has discussed the essence of Buddhist principles, the happiness that comes from morality, the simple path to contentment, and the art of living. In books like *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*, he emphasizes the significance and application of moral education in human life. His Holiness says that – སྤྱི་སེམས་ཡོང་བ་ལ་གཞན་ཕན་བསམ་སྒོ་དགོས་པ།གཞན་ཕན་གྱི་བསམ་སྒོའི་རྩ་བ་སྤྱི་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་པས་བྱམས་བརྩེ་དགོས་ལྟ་གཤམ་ཆེན་པོ་ཡིན་པ་བཅས་ད་བར་འདི་བཤད་གྱི་ཡོད།བྱམས་བརྩེའི་སྐོར་འདི་སངས་རྒྱས་ཀྱི་ཆོས་སྤེལ་བའི་དོན་དུ་ཤོད་གྱི་མེད་ལ།འོད་སྤྱི་བའི་དོན་དུ་ཡང་བྱམས་བརྩེའི་སྐོར་བཤད་གྱི་མེད་མི་ཞེས་ཡིན་པའི་ཆ་ནས་བྱམས་བརྩེ་ཡོད་ན་བདེ་སྤྱི་ཡོང་བ་དང་དོས་སོ་སོར་ཕན་པ་དང་མི་ལ་ཡང་ཕན་པ་སྤྱི་ཆོག་ལ་ཕན་པ་བཅས་ཡོང་གི་ཡོད།¹⁰

English Translation: There should be a sense of self-interest in universal responsibility. Since compassion is the root of altruism, fostering friendship and love is of utmost importance, a message I have consistently emphasized. When I speak about friendship and related values, my aim is not to propagate Buddhism or solely promote the welfare of Tibet. Rather, as a human being, I believe that if we cultivate compassion and friendship within ourselves, we will attain happiness, which benefits not only ourselves but also others and society as a whole. According to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Universal Responsibility means that every person must consider the prosperity, social justice, and overall well-being of the planet in their actions and decisions. This plays an important role in creating a strong and prosperous society. A person with a sense of universal responsibility becomes a supportive, cooperative, and socially capable citizen, working towards a fairer and more resilient society. Together, we can move toward a safe, prosperous, and stable future.

III. HOW DOES THE PRACTICE OF GOOD CONDUCT, OR MORALITY, WORK?

We have said that, in the context of society at large, following the rules of good conduct creates a social environment characterized by harmony and peace. All our social goals can be achieved within the rules of good conduct based on the fundamental principles of equality and reciprocity. In addition, each person benefits from the practice of good conduct. In one of his discourses, the Buddha said that someone who has observed respect for life and so forth feels like a king, duly crowned and with his enemies subdued. Such a person feels at peace and ease.¹¹

The practice of morality creates an inner sense of tranquility, stability, security, and strength. Once you have created that inner peace, you can successfully follow the other steps of the path. You can cultivate and perfect the various aspects of mental development. You can then achieve wisdom but only after you have created. The necessary foundation of morality both within and without, both in yourself in your relationships with others. Very

¹⁰ His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, *Teachings and Discourses*, July 10, 1996

¹¹ DN 2. See *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha-nikāya*, Maurice Walshe. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995, p. 90–100.

briefly, these are the origin, contents, and goal of good conduct Buddhism. There is just one more point I would like to make before concluding a review of Buddhist morality, when people consider the rules of good conduct, often think “How can we possibly follow them?” It seems to be terribly deific observe the precepts. For instance, even the prohibition against taking life, which is the most fundamental, appears very difficult to follow absolutely. Every day, as you clean the kitchen or putter about the garden, you are very likely to kill something that happens to get in your way. Also, it appears very difficult even to avoid lying in all cases. How are we to deal with this problem, which is a genuine one?

The point is not whether we can observe all the rules of morality all the time. Rather, the point is that, if the rules of morality are well founded (i.e., if the principles of equality and reciprocity are worth believing in, and if the rules of morality are an appropriate way of enacting them), then we must follow these rules as much as we possibly can. This is not to say that we will be able to follow them absolutely, but only that we ought to do our best to follow the way of practice indicated by the rules of good conduct. If we want to live at peace with ourselves and others, then we ought to respect the life and welfare of others, their property, and so on. If a situation arises in which we find ourselves unable to apply a particular rule, that is not the fault of the rule, but simply an indication of the gap between our practice of morality and the ideal practice of it.

In ancient times, seafarers navigated their ships across the great oceans with the aid of the stars, they were not able to follow exactly the course indicated by heavenly bodies. Yet the stars were their guides, and by following them, approximately, mariners reached their destination. In the same way, when we follow the rules of good conduct, we do not pretend that we can observe all of them all the time. This is why the five precepts are called “training precepts of also why we renew them again and again. What we have in the rules of good conduct is a framework through which we can try to live in accord with the two fundamental principles that illuminate the teaching of the Buddha: The principle of the equality of all living beings, and the principle of reciprocal respect.

IV. HOW WE CAN DEVELOP THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY?

We must need to practice of four Immeasurable: Immeasurable love, Immeasurable compassion, Immeasurable joy and Immeasurable equanimity. གུམས་པ་ཚད་མེད་ནི་མེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་བདེ་བ་དང་འབྲས་བུ་འདོད་པའི་བློ་འོ།¹² Immeasurable Love is a kind of thought in which we wish happiness for all human beings. སྤྱིང་རྩེ་ཚད་མེད་ནི་མེམས་ཅན་གྱི་སྤྱལ་བ་སྤྱལ་རྩེ་དང་བཅས་པ་དང་འབྲས་བུ་འདོད་པའི་བློ་འོ།¹³ Immeasurable Compassion is kind of thought in which we wish removing the all suffering of all

¹² <https://wikisource.org/wiki/%E0%BD%91%E0%BE%AD%E0%BD%82%E0%B-D%A6%E0%BC%8B%E0%BD%94%E0%BD%BC%E0%BC%8B%E0%BD%90%E0%B-D%A2%E0%BC%8B%E0%BD%A2%E0%BE%92%E0%BE%B1%E0%BD%93%E0%B-C%8D/7>

¹³ Ibid.

human beings. དགའ་བ་ཚད་མེད་ནི་སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་སྤྲུག་བསྐྱེད་མེད་པའི་བདེ་བ་དང་མི་འབྲུལ་བར་འདྲོད་པའི་སྒྲོལ།¹⁴ Immeasurable Joy is the heartfelt wish for all beings to be free from suffering and to dwell in true and lasting happiness. བདེ་སྤྲུམ་ཚད་མེད་ནི་སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་ཉེ་རིང་ཆགས་སྣང་དང་བྲལ་ནས་བདེ་སྤྲུམ་ངང་ལ་གནས་པར་འདྲོད་པའི་སྒྲོལ།¹⁵ Immeasurable Equanimity is the wish for all beings to live in peace, without attachment, hatred, or bias.

After the practice of these four Immeasurable we can create a peaceful community where all beings can stay together and help each other's. No worries, no hatred, no bias only equality. We are one and we all are the same because no one wants to suffer everyone wants happiness. So how we can say we are different? Just because we look different from each other's? Or born in different places? Why do we think we are different from another person? Buddha himself mentions in his teaching many times all beings are the same, all have rights to stay happy. Why are we humans doing bias in beings? Just because of ignorance? Maybe yes or may be not.

My personal thought is if happening this kind of bias in 21st century its just lake of Ethical education or morality. So, we need follow the path of Buddha. ཟླ་བ་ཅི་ཡང་མི་བྱ་ཞིང་། །དག་བ་ཕུན་སྲུམ་ཆོགས་པར་བྱ། །རང་གི་སེམས་ནི་ཡོངས་སྤྲུལ་། །འདི་ནི་སངས་རྒྱས་བསྐྱེད་བ་ཡིན།¹⁶ Don't do anything bad (to others), do only good deeds (for others), train your mind completely (practice four immeasurable) This is what the Buddha taught.

This verse summarizes Buddhist ethics in three simple steps: We should not harm others through our thoughts, words, or actions. This includes lying, stealing, or hurting others. Avoiding bad deeds creates a peaceful life and prevents suffering. Instead of just avoiding harm, we should actively do good. Helping others, being kind, and practicing generosity bring happiness to us and those around us. The root of both good and bad actions is the mind. If we control our thoughts and emotions, we naturally avoid bad actions and do good. Training the mind means developing wisdom, patience, and mindfulness. These three points form the foundation of Buddhist ethics. They help individuals live a meaningful life and create a harmonious society.

V. CONCLUSION

His Holiness The 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso often says that having 100 good people in the society is less while having one bad person is more. For this reason, detailed research on ethics is rarely done. We need more people to write, read, and teach moral education because today's world is in great need of it. The poor are becoming poorer, the rich are becoming richer. Not everyone being equal in society is also a evidence of lack of morality. The ongoing war

¹⁴ <https://bo.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E0%BD%9A%E0%BD%91%E0%BC%8B%E0%B-D%98%E0%BD%BA%E0%BD%91%E0%BC%8B%E0%BD%96%E0%BD%9E%E0%B-D%B2%E0%BC%8B>

¹⁵ <https://bo.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E0%BD%9A%E0%BD%91%E0%BC%8B%E0%B-D%98%E0%BD%BA%E0%BD%91%E0%BC%8B%E0%BD%96%E0%BD%9E%E0%B-D%B2%E0%BC%8B>

¹⁶ This verse is from the *Dhp* (Verse 183), capturing the heart of the Buddha's teachings on ethics and self-discipline.

between Russia and Ukraine is also the result of a lack of moral education.

That is why, in today's society, it is extremely important to write on moral education and think deeply about this topic. If we do not pay attention to moral education, then the coming time will bring serious trouble for the world. Whether a person believes in religion and spiritual texts or not, moral education has an impact on the life of every person. There are many countries in the world where the entire population is educated and economically prosperous, yet the people there are unhappy. The main reason for this is a lack of morality. Therefore, knowledge of moral education is essential to make human life happy and balanced today.

I hope every reader of this paper may try to practice morality in his or her personal life and contribute to the three representative society to create peaceful environment where anyone can stay happily without bias. If we want to make peaceful world for tomorrow then we need to start today.

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‘ROLE OF LOVING-KINDNESS (METTĀ) FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVING AS SEEN IN SOME PĀLI CANONICAL TEXTS’

Vaishali Gaidhani*

Abstract:

This paper deals with the significance of the practice of ‘mettā’ preferably translated as ‘loving kindness’. Metta is the ninth *pāramī* in the *Theravāda* tradition. Mettā is also one of the path factors of ‘*samma sankappa*’ – right intention. Although cultivation of ‘*paññā*’ translated as ‘wisdom’, is considered the central teaching as defined by the Buddha, this paper attempts to find the role of ‘mettā’ and its importance in the noble path to *Nibbāna*, and in the Buddhist praxis of ‘universal love’ in the journey of *samsāra*. *Nibbāna* and *samsāra* are antithetical.¹ Mettā is cultivating ‘universal love’ towards all beings in *samsāra*. The Buddha’s teaching aims at ultimately attaining the final goal of ‘*Nibbāna*’. The question then arises: ‘How does the Buddha’s teaching, although directed towards the attainment of *Nibbāna*, emphasize the practice of ‘mettā’ in the journey of *samsāra*?’ ‘How does the lone individual journey to *Nibbāna* relate to comprising ‘universal love’ towards all beings in *samsāra*?’

Keywords: *Mettā, loving-kindness, samsāra, nibbāna, kusala, akusala.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the *Karaniya Mettā Sutta*, it is stated, the Buddha instructs the ‘bhikkhus’-monks to practice ‘mettā-bhāvanā’ on the ‘*rukkha-devatā*’ tree-spirits thus: “*Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā!*”² “May all beings be happy!”. In the *Karaniya Mettā Sutta*, it is mentioned, the Buddha instructs the ‘*devās*’- gods to shower

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¹ Elizabeth J. Harris, *Violence and Disruption in Society* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1994), 14.

² *Karaniya Mettā Sutta*, verse 1, in *Sutta Nipata*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (New York: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 1 - 2.

‘*mettā*’ on the human race thus:” *Mettām karotha manusiyā pajāya!*”³ “Show kindness to the human race!”⁴

‘*Mettā*’ is a Pāli word with variant meanings in the English language and multi-significance, as primarily loving-kindness, or friendly-kindness, friendliness, good-will, benevolence, fellowship, amity, concord, inoffensiveness and non-violence.⁵ *Mettā* is the ninth ‘Perfection’ (*pāramī*) in the *Bodhisatta* path, as well as a technique of ‘meditation’ to be cultivated (*samatha-bhāvanā*) by a learner (*sekkhā*) in the noble (*ariya*) path to the ultimate goal of *Nibbāna* while practicing as an ‘*Arahatta*’. In Skt. ‘*maitrī*’ is also a ‘*pāramita*’ in the Mahāyana tradition.

The *Theravāda Pāli Canon* is, at the foremost, considered by Theravada Buddhists as ‘*Buddha Vacana*’ meaning the “Word of the Buddha”⁶ from the 6th c. BCE. Secondly, the Theravada tradition that identifies Pāli with Māgadhī, from the perspective of vernacular speech. And third, the language of the Buddha’s teaching uniquely and specially refers to usage of words as ‘text’ called as ‘The Pāli Language’⁷ by *Acariya Buddhaghosa*, with the understanding of ‘protecting’ defined by, ‘*pāleti*’ *ti pāli*; meaning ‘that which protects’. We see that the Buddha is communicating with regards to time, space and mode. Influenced by the three factors, the vocabulary used in this paper, thereby, remains insufficiently addressed.

The act of translating the idea of one-Pāli word into one-English word or for that matter into any other language is never entirely complete.⁸ Therefore, it makes things reasonable to maintain certain words untranslated in the above scenario. For example, Buddha, *mettā*, Pāli, *dhamma*, *kamma*, *bhikkhu*, *dukkha*, *sukha*, *somanassa*, *domanassa*, *upekkhā*, *Nibbāna* and a few more, defined as and when they appear in the text. Bhante Bhikkhu Bodhi illustrates this with an example of the Pāli word ‘*samkhāra*’.⁹

However, although the relevance of the 6th c. BCE is not the same as the 21st c. CE; there is not much difference either, from the perspective of human behaviour. The text does offer a guideline to the parallel aspects of the

³ Sn 2.1 Ratana Sutta.

⁴ “Ratana Sutta: Treasures” (Sn 2.1), translated from the Pāli by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*, 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.2.01.than.html>

⁵ Buddhārakkhita. *Mettā: The Philosophy and Practice of Universal Love*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1989, iii.

⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Reading the Buddha’s Discourses in Pāli* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 1.

⁷ Buddhaghosa. *Visuddhimagga of BuddhaghosāCariya*. (Edited by Henry Clarke Warren and Dharmānanda Kosambi. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1950), xxxiii.

⁸ Ibid, xxxv.

⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Reading the Buddha’s Discourses in Pāli* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 4.

underlying psychoanalysis pattern of human existence.

The sixth century B. C. is not identical to the twentieth but neither is it completely different. The teaching of Early Buddhism on violence, therefore, should not be used as if there were either identity or utter separateness. In each new context and historical period, there is a need for re-interpretation and re-evaluation. At this point, it is enough to stress that the texts reveal much about Indian society at the time of the Buddha and about the Buddha’s breadth of awareness.¹⁰

Mettā is also one of the path factors of ‘*samma sankappa*’ – right intention. Although cultivation of ‘*paññā*’ translated as ‘wisdom’, is considered the central teaching as defined by the Buddha, this paper attempts to find the role of ‘*mettā*’ and its importance in the noble path to *Nibbāna*, and in the Buddhist praxis of ‘universal love’ in the journey of *samsāra*.

Nibbāna and *samsāra* are antithetical.¹¹ *Mettā* is cultivating ‘universal love’ towards all beings in *samsāra*. The Buddha’s teaching aims at ultimately attaining the final goal of ‘*Nibbāna*’. The question then arises: ‘How does the Buddha’s teaching, although directed towards the attainment of *Nibbāna*, emphasize the practice of ‘*mettā*’ in the journey of *samsāra*?’ ‘How does the lone individual journey to *Nibbāna* relate to comprising ‘universal love’ towards all beings in *samsāra*?’

In the context of the goal of *Nibbāna*, actions, thoughts and words can be evaluated as to whether they build *samsāra* or lead to *Nibbāna*: whether they are unskilled (*akusala*) or skilled (*kusala*). Indulgence in violence is normally deemed *akusala*. In other words, it cannot lead to the goal of *Nibbāna*.¹²

The type of action ‘*kamma*’, through bodily actions (*kaya kamma*), verbal actions (*vaci kamma*), and thoughts (*manokamma*); *manokamma* being the leader as stated in the *Dhammapada* verse 1 and 2, thus: “*mano pubbangamā dhammā...*” Mind is the foremost, the leader, comes first. Harris gives an example of the *Ambalaṭṭhika- Rāhulovada Sutta*, wherein the Buddha says to the Venerable Rāhula:¹³

If you, Rāhula, are desirous of doing a deed with the body, you should reflect on the deed with the body, thus: “That deed which I am desirous of doing with the body is a deed of the body that might conduce to the harm of self and that might conduce to the harm of others and that might conduce to the harm of both; this deed of body is unskilled (*akusala*), its yield is anguish, its result is anguish.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Elizabeth J. Harris, *Violence and Disruption in Society* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1994), 15.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 14.

¹² Elizabeth J. Harris, *Violence and Disruption in Society* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1994), 14.

¹³ Elizabeth J. Harris, *Violence and Disruption in Society* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1994), 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 15.

II. UNWHOLESOME ACTIONS (*AKUSALA KAMMA*) AND WHOLESOME ACTIONS (*KUSALA KAMMA*)¹⁵

Why is it necessary to perform *kusala kamma* (wholesome actions)? The Buddha having revealed the Law of *Kamma* is stated in the *Dhammapada* verse 1 and 2, the two modes of intention of actions based on the quality of the mind: (1) with an impure mind (*manasāce paduṭṭhena*) and (2) with a pure mind (*manasāce passennena*). These two verses are the foundations defining the pointing of the arrow.

Just as in physical sciences, a vector quantity is defined by speed and direction; it can be understood that the direction of *samsāric* journey is defined by intention - as the directional potential quality of the mind. A mind with impurities of greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) is heavier and inclined towards the lower realms of *samsāra*; while a mind free of impurities non-attachment (*alobha*), non-aversion (*adosa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*) is lighter and easy to cultivate towards the higher realms.

The verses give a key formula as regards to the yielding of the results of these actions by way of verbal actions (*vaci kamma*) and bodily actions (*kāya kamma*): 'An impure mind results in unhappiness; while a pure mind results in happiness.'

Therefore, the inclination towards *kusala kamma*. The intention to seek happiness comes first. Even if, *Nibbāna* may seem to be a vision far-fetched long-term goal for the beginner trying to understand the Dhamma; it is well-understood by a seeker seeking to find a solution to come out of worldly discontent. This fundamental formula thereby states simply and lays the foundation of the 'thought of loving kindness' as the 'intention' of *kamma* ("cetanāham, bhikkhave, kammam vadāmi"), in contrast to the thought of ill-will. Intentions of ill-will result in destructive actions of anger¹⁶ and violence. Anger is the cause of one's downfall as mentioned in the *Parābhava Sutta*¹⁷. Refraining from such thoughts sustains amity and good-will. One can see the result, here and now, the benefit of knowing and seeing the *Dhamma* as the Universal law of Nature through the theory of *Kamma* and *Vipāka* (Action and its Result).

Anger and violence that arise from thoughts of ill-will 'byāpāda' are unwholesome actions (*akusala kamma*). Unwholesome actions are blame-worthy. This can be seen by their characteristic that results in unhappiness (*dukkha*). "*Akusalakammam sāvajjam dukkhavipākakakhanam.*" Good-will and amity that spring from the thought of loving kindness 'mettā' are wholesome deeds (*kusala kamma*). We can understand this from the formula: Wholesome actions are not blame-worthy, this can be seen by their characteristic of resulting in happiness. "*kusala kammam anāvajjam sukhavipākakakhanam.*"

¹⁵ Nārada. *Buddhism in a Nutshell*. Penang, Malaysia: Sukhi Hotu, 1996, p. 36.

¹⁶ Nārada. *The Buddha and His Teachings*. 4th ed. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Taibei Shi: Buddhist Missionary Society; 財團法人佛陀教育基金會印贈, 1988, p. 468.

¹⁷ *Sn* 1.6; *PTS: Sn* 91 - 115

The *Hīri Sutta* on ‘Friendship’ expounds two important factors in doing wholesome deeds (*kusala kamma*): (i). the importance of shame (*hīri*) and fear (*otappa*) of wrong-doing (*akusala kamma*); and (ii). the significance of ‘right effort’ (*virati*) which leads to the arousing of altruistic joy (*mudita*) in others’ well-being. Bhikkhu Thanissaro translates the *Hīri Sutta* thus:

One who, overstepping and despising a sense of shame, says, “I am your friend,” but does not take upon himself any tasks he is capable of doing, is to be recognized as no friend. One who speaks amiably to his companions, but whose actions do not conform to it, the wise know for certain as a talker not a doer. He is no friend who, anticipating conflict, is always alert in looking out for weaknesses. But he on whom one can rely, like a child sleeping on its mother’s breast, is truly a friend who cannot be parted from one by others.¹⁸

Whereas a person who is in shame (*hīri*) and fear of doing the unwholesome (Bhikkhu Thanissaro translates *akusala* as ‘unskillfull’) action, is training the mind to perform right action that leads one from ‘*dukkha*’- suffering (Bhikkhu Thanissaro translates *dukkha* as ‘stress’) towards happiness, according to the *Dhammapada* verse 1 and 2 thus: from the mundane path towards the supramundane path.

One who bears the human burden of responsibility, with its fruits and blessings in mind, he cultivates a cause of joy and happiness worthy of praise. Having tasted the flavor of solitude and peace, one is free from fear and wrong-doings, imbibing the rapture of *Dhamma*.¹⁹

Bhikkhu Thanissaro mentions in the notes that:

- (1) “Such a person (*ahirika-anotappaka*) dislikes to be reproved, and when an occasion for this occurs he would wish to have a weapon with which to retaliate, and therefore, he takes note of one’s weaknesses.”
- (2) “According to the Commentary, this joy-producing cause is strenuous effort (*viriya*).” According to the ‘*Sammāppadhana Sutta*’ - (the Four kinds of Efforts).

Following the *sīla* – precepts through restraint (*indriya-saṃvara-sīla*) and abstinence (*veramani*) thus sets a strong foundation by way of *kusala kamma*, from the mundane path towards the supramundane path. Therefore, the training (*sikkhāpada*) in the first *sīla* states: “*pāṇātipātā veramani sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*” meaning, ‘I undertake the training of abstaining from killing’. “*Pāṇātipātā*” is “early killing of (*nāma-jivita-rupa-jivita*) beings” through the two *dosamula* (*patiggha*) *citta*. The action of *pāṇātipātā* is performed with a bad feeling ‘*domanassa citta*’, the *vipāka* - result of which is ‘*dukkha*’ of ‘that which hits the heart’ (*patigha*). Further, this mind action is translated (*payoga*)

¹⁸ “The Discourse Collection: Selected Texts from the *Sutta Nipata*”, by John D. Ireland. *Access to Insight* (BCBS Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/ireland/wheel082.html>.

¹⁹ “*Manasāce passannena bhāsati vā karoti vā*”.

into the action of killing by verbal action and bodily action, as mentioned in one of the five points of the “Constitution of killing”.

However, the *dosa citta* also arises in other *akusala kamma* like *adinnādānā* = stealing (*kayakamma*); *musāvāda* = false speech, *pisunāvācā* = divisive speech and *pharusāvācā* = slandering speech (*vacikamma*), *byāpāda* = ill-will (*manokamma*).²⁰ These *akusala kamma* are blameworthy as stated thus: “*akusalakammam sāvajjam, dukkhavipāka lakkhanam*” = “Unwholesome actions are blame-worthy, therefore their resulting characteristic is of *dukkha*.”

Because the mind of human beings is comfortable in the feeling of ‘*somanassa*’- ‘happy mind’ inclined towards ‘*sukha*’- happiness. The formula to get the desired ‘*sukha-vipāka*’- result of happiness is stated thus: “*kusala kammam anāvajjam sukhavipāka lakkhanam*” = meaning, “Wholesome actions are not blameworthy, (therefore) their characteristic of happiness.”

In the round of *saṃsāra*, the ‘*cuti-citta*’- ‘the *citta*- consciousness that arises at the time of death’, which is also the ‘*patisaṃdhi citta*’- which is ‘the rebirth-linking consciousness’ gives the ‘*bhavanga*’- ‘the mind-continuum’ for the next life. This *citta* arises from three ‘*nimitta*’- ‘signs’ at the time of death, namely: (i). past *kamma*, (ii). *kamma-nimitta*, and (iii). *gati-nimitta*. The kind of *citta* is decided by the kind of action – *akusala kamma* or *kusala kamma*. The arising of *kusala kamma* gets the opportunity to give rebirth in the ‘*sugati bhumi*’- ‘happy realms.’ As Shaw²¹ puts it: “Most of human experience, according to Abhidhamma theory, is the result (*vipāka*) of the skilful or wholesome (*kusala*) mind necessary for a human rebirth. So simply being aware of the various activities at all of the senses will tend to produce the pleasant or neutral feeling that accompanies the skilful mind.”

In the *Dhammapada* verse 5 - The Story of *Kāliyakkhini*, The Buddha admonishes the two females - a *yakkhini* – ogres and the lady, that for a long time while faring in the rounds of *saṃsāra*, they both have harboured ill-will towards one another by harming the off-springs. Hatred in this way, cannot lead to peace. “*Na hi verena verāṇi, samanti kudācanam*.” It is by non-hatred alone that leads to peace. “*averena hi ca samanti*” This is the law of nature (timeless wisdom) since ancient times, ‘*esa dhammo sanātano*’.

The Buddha, having gone through various trials while seeking the ultimate Truth, tells us out of concern that ‘there is no benefit in hatred.’ None at all. Neither for the doer nor for the receiver. Therefore, one should not give hatred to others. The debts of those who we encounter in the course of our life’s journey are opportunities to repay them for being the reason (*nimitta*) to create a situation of arising of our defilement of *dosa*; thereby gaining an opportunity to work upon (re-orient) our mind’s intention towards ‘*kusala kamma*’ so that our defilements can be thereby reduced. Therefore, there arises

²⁰ Anuruddha, and Bodhi. *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Abhidhammattha Sangaha of Ācariya Anuruddha*. 1st BPS Pariyatti ed. Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Edition, 1993, p.

²¹ Shaw, p. 141.

no reason for one to incline towards the attitude of hatred. And eventually, one can see that the practice of developing *Mettā* while faring the rounds of *saṃsāra* is for the good of both the doer of *Mettā* and the receiver of *mettā*. Eventually, this thought gives all the good reason to forgive another in case of any misdeeds as the object of ‘*mettā*’ is peace. Giving hatred is giving fear and harm. Giving loving kindness is giving peace and comforting release from fear.

According to ‘*Cattāri Ariya Saccāni*’ - ‘The Four Noble Truths’, *saṃsāra* is *dukkha*. The most prominent fear is of death in life. We are trapped in *saṃsāra*, but we can spiral out is the positive path. From *dukkha* arises *saddhā* - ‘faith’. The positive path of *Paticca-samuppāda sutta* begins with ‘*dukkhupanisaya*’ leading to *saddhā*- faith, rather ‘confidence’ in the Dhamma, the Buddha out of deep compassion for beings, has so very well-expounded (*svakkhato bhagavato dhammo*), that it seems possible to come out of *dukkha* – from the rounds of *saṃsāra*.

Samsāric journey is wrought with adversities, *dukkhavipāka* caused by habitual tendencies of reacting with an uncontrolled mind, a mind of hatred. Hatred is a weapon of anger and violence. This weapon of destruction, in turn, breeds fear. So also, after having received the ‘*kammaṭṭhāna*’- object of meditation from the Buddha, when the 500 bhikkhus entered the forest and took lodgings under trees, they experienced hurdles from ‘*rukka-devatā*’ - ‘the tree spirits’ in their meditation resolution during ‘*vassāvasa*’- ‘rains retreat’. The tree-spirits, uncaring of the bhikkhus, were scaring them to leave and go to another place. The bhikkhus, not knowing what to do in such a situation, approached the Buddha for a solution. The Buddha gave them the weapon of *Mettā* as in the *Karaniya-Mettā sutta*. Having practiced *mettā-bhāvanā* by fifty-four ways (Please see table 1.1), the bhikkhus could not just resolve the situation but were also cared for with requisites by the tree-spirits to complete what is to be done. The *KaraniyaMettā sutta*²² is a powerful discourse not just of resolving a conflicting situation amicably but also of protection.

Mettā practice to aspire for a Bodhisatta:

In earlier life also the bodhisatta practiced ‘*mettā*’ towards all beings. To aspire for becoming a bodhisatta, he practiced *mettābhāvanā*, so that he could fulfill the requisites to aspire for *Sammāsambuddha* in front of Dīpaṅkara Buddha. In fact, the ascetic Sumedha in his previous life having done *puñṇakamma* (*dasapuñṇakiriyavatthu*) of *dana*, *sīla*, and by oneself practicing *Mettā bhāvanā* for seven years, attained *iddhipadabala* and thus resolved to be a bodhisatta. Based on the *Mettā citta* cultivated throughout seven *mahākappas* [one *mahākappa* = one *samvaṭṭa* (becoming) and one *vivaṭṭa* (destruction)] then in the first place, he vowed to be a *Mahābodhisatta*,²³ who further aspiring to become the future *Sammāsambuddha*, made an *abhinīhāra* in front of Dīpaṅkara Buddha.

²² Sn 1. 8.

²³ Candavimala, Rērukānē. *Analysis of Perfections*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2003, p. 13.

Having thus vowed, the *Mahābodhisatta* then enumerated the sequence of the *dasa-pārami* (ten perfections) to be fulfilled in three-fold ways-*dasa-pārami*, *dasa-upa-pārami* and *dasa-paramattha-pārami*, in all thirty (*tiṃsa*) *pārami*. Having cultivated a strong *Mettā* citta, as the basis, it is possible only for the *Mahābodhisatta* who can fulfill the *dasa - paramattha pārami*, even with donating with one's life, which is neither possible for the *paccekabuddhas* (*vīsati- pārami* = *dasa-pārami* and *dasa-upa-pārami*), nor the *sāvaka-buddhas* (*the arahats* = *dasa-pārami*).²⁴

After Sumedha ascetic's *sabhinihāra* in front of Sammasambuddha Dīpaṅkara, the *Mahābodhisatta* (the Great Being), in the *Khandhavatta Jātaka* (No.203), taught other practicing ascetics how to be safe from poisonous snakes and other wild animals as stated in the *khandha* (aggregate) *paritta* (protection) by cultivating love for the four royal races of snakes.²⁵ Therefore, those bodies with limited aggregate can be submerged into the illimitable *mettā*.

Mettā is like a cool water that extinguishes the fire of hatred and anger. Just as Venerable Atthuru Mahinda puts it in a chemical equation thus. Just as H₂ is inflammable, burns fire and O₂ is combustible- supports fire; but when they both come together and when balanced give 2H₂O which is a third result. This resultant does not have any of the characteristics of fire. Rather, it has the quality of extinguishing fire. Neither does it have the characteristic of any of its combining reactants. However, the presence of H₂ and O₂, which constitute fire, at a certain temperature and pressure, is the condition that causes the formation of H₂O, the fire eliminating constituent. This is the process happening as a phenomenon of nature. It is not a product; rather, it is producing, processing, undergoing a change continuously. Such is the 'instrument of *Mettā citta*' until the attainment of *Nibbāna*.

A mind of *Mettā* towards beings saves the practitioner from external harmful effects of poison, weapons, intoxicants, and more. Bhikkhu Thanissaro translates the eleven such benefits enumerated in the AN.11.16 *Mettā* (*Mettānisamsa*) Sutta: *Mettā* (Good Will), thus:²⁶

Monks, for one whose awareness-release through good will is cultivated, developed, pursued, handed the reins and taken as a basis, given a grounding, steadied, consolidated, and well-undertaken, eleven benefits can be expected. Which eleven?

One sleeps easily, wakes easily, dreams no evil dreams. One is dear to human beings, dear to non-human beings. The devas protect one. Neither fire, poison, nor weapons can touch one. One's mind gains concentration quickly.

²⁴ Candavimala, Rērukānē. *Analysis of Perfections*. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2003, p. 12.

²⁵ J. ii. 144ff.

²⁶ "Mettā (Mettānisamsa) Sutta: Good Will" (AN 11. 16), translated from the Pāli by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*, 23 July 2013, <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/an/an11/an11.016.than.html>.

One’s complexion is bright. One dies unconfused and - if penetrating no higher - is headed for the Brahma worlds.

We find many examples in the Dhammapada of noble persons practicing *mettā*; for example *Upāsikā* Uttārā, a Sotāpanna, having *Mettā* for Sirimā. Queen Sāmāvati and her five hundred maids cultivating a *mettā-bhāvānā* towards King Udāyin are saved from the king’s arrow from piercing them.

III. METTĀ FROM THE ABHIDHAMMA PERSPECTIVE

Mettā practice begins with the self. The practitioner of *Mettā bhāvānā* is the foremost benefactor of the practice. Visuddhimagga enumerates eleven benefits. *Mettā* cannot be practiced for a person who has passed away. The practice of the noble path begins with reducing the *dosa citta*. There are five hundred and twenty-eight ways of ‘*disāpharaṇā*’ *Mettā* in the ten directions is the methodical practice from the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* traditionally ascribed to the Arahat Venerable Sariputtatthera.

Therefore, *sīla* practice begins with non-harming. ‘*Pāṇātipātā veramani...*’ While practicing navanga Uposatha *sīla* (nine precepts), all precepts are practiced with an objective grounded to cultivate *Mettā sahagata citta*. The *Mahākusala Sobhana citta* 8 of *tihetuka* (*Ñāṇa Sampayutta* = 4 *citta*) *puggala* (persons) and *dvihetuka* (*Ñāṇa Vippayutta* = 4 *citta*) persons, which are associated with 36 *cetasika* (without *appamaññā*-2) with wisdom and 35 *cetasika* (mental factors) without wisdom includes the three *virati* (*viratittaya*) of *sammā vācā* = right speech, *sammā kammanto* = right action, and *sammā ājivo* = right livelihood), also called the three path factors (*ariya maggaṅga*) of the Noble Eightfold Path.

While practicing *Mettā bhāvānā*, there is the danger of getting attached to the object, because *adosa cetasika* has its near enemy of ‘*lobha*’ as an attachment. A mother’s love for her child can be stated as a good example of this scenario. So also, while rejoicing in others’ success, as opposed to jealousy ‘*issā*’ is the ‘*muditā*’ (sympathetic joy) *cetasika*, which is one of the *appamaññā* (illimitables). In this case, there is the danger of getting into “merriment”.²⁷

The *Visuddhimagga* states that there are various ways which enable the capacity of cultivating *Mettā* even towards one’s enemies. Thinking in this way or that, it becomes possible for one to arouse efforts that ultimately cause an increasing mind of *Mettā* unmeasurably, beginning with the self, near ones like parents, teachers, friends, then neutral ones and ultimately to last and reach even to the hostile ones.²⁸ Explaining the importance of *metta* as the right intention, wherein thoughts of good-will counter the former outflow of aversion, Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi writes:

Metta is not just sentimental good-will, nor is it a conscientious response

²⁷ Anuruddha, and Bodhi. *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Abhidhammattha Sangaha of ĀCariya Anuruddha*. 1st BPS Pariyatti ed. Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Edition, 1993, p. 90

²⁸ Bodhi. *The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering*. Chicago: Pariyatti Publishing, 2011, p. 39.

to a moral imperative or a divine command. It must become a deep inner feeling characterized by spontaneous warmth rather than by a sense of obligation. At its peak, metta rises to the heights of a *brahmavihara*, “a divine dwelling”, a total way of being centred on the radiant wish for the welfare of all living beings.²⁹

The *akusala* group of four *dosa cetasika*, namely *dosa- issā*, *macchhariya-kukkucca*,³⁰ are associated with two *dosamula* (*patiggha*) *citta*. At the *Sotāpanna* fruition stage, two *cetasika* of *issā* (envy) and *macchhariya* (avarice)³¹ are removed. While *dosa* and *kukkucca* are eliminated at the third fruition stage of *Anāgāmi*. An *Anāgāmi puggala* (person) is free from the two *akusala domanassa citta* and the four *akusala dosa cetasika*.

In the *Iti.1.2 sutta* goes thus as translated³² by Bhikkhu Thanissaro:

This was said by the Blessed One, said by the Arahant, so I have heard: “Abandon one quality, monks, and I guarantee you non-return. Which one quality? Abandon aversion as the one quality, and I guarantee you non-return.

The aversion with which beings go to a bad destination, upset: from rightly discerning that aversion, those who see clearly let go. Letting go, they never come to this world again.

The *mettā-bhāvanā* is also a *jhāna* practice of meditative absorption (*āpanna samādhi*). *Mettā* as a *kammaṭṭhāna* is for cultivating the first to fourth *jhāna* in the *rupāvacara* (fine-material sphere) according to the *Abhidhamma* text (and first to third *jhāna* according to the *Suttanta* texts).³³ The life of a noble person in the Buddha’s Sangha: When Venerable Ānandatthera said to the Buddha that half of the holy life is *kalyāṇa-mittatā* (Admirable friendship). The Buddha corrects Venerable Ānanda by saying, “Do not say so, Ānanda. *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* is the entire holy life. In the *Samyutta Nikāya* 3.18 *Kalyāṇamittasutta* is mentioned: “*Ānanda! ‘mā hevaṃ, ānanda, mā hevaṃ, ānanda. sakalameva hidam, ānanda, brahmacariyaṃ - yadidaṃ kalyāṇamittatā kalyāṇasahāyatā kalyāṇasampavaṇkatā.*” Bhikkhu Sujato translates³⁴ thus: “Not so, Ānanda! Not

²⁹ Ibid, p. 33, 37.

³⁰ Anuruddha, and Bodhi. *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Abhidhammattha Sangaha of Ācariya Anuruddha*. 1st BPS Pariyatti ed. Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Edition, 1993, p. 84.

³¹ Anuruddha, and Bodhi. *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Abhidhammattha Sangaha of Ācariya Anuruddha*. 1st BPS Pariyatti ed. Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Edition, 1993, p. 360.

³² “Itivuttaka: The Group of Ones” (Iti 1-27), translated from the Pāli by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight* (BCBS Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/iti/iti.1.001-027.than.html>.

³³ Anuruddha, and Bodhi. *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma: The Abhidhammattha Sangaha of Ācariya Anuruddha*. 1st BPS Pariyatti ed. Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Edition, 1993, p. 142.

³⁴ Bhikkhu Sujato, “SN 3.18: The Discourse on the Mind,” *SuttaCentral*, accessed October 9, 2024, <https://suttacentral.net/sn3.18/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=sidebyside&reference=main¬es=none&highlight=true&script=IASTPāli>.

so, Good friends, companions, and associates are the whole of the spiritual life.”

The Buddha’s *kalyāṇamittatāta* is ‘no friendship’. It is much more. The Buddha is the Supreme Being among all beings ‘*abhibhu*’ parallel to none ‘*anuttaro*’ in this Universe- ‘*satthā-deva-manussānaṃ*’ the Teacher of gods and men. Although an entire bodhisatta life is practiced ‘*mettā*’, the Buddha’s great compassion ‘*mahākaruṇā*’ is far more, goes way beyond than just friendship in teaching the Dhamma for those who desire to come out of suffering. Like a father’s love (the Buddha lovingly called His disciples ‘my son’ - “*mama putto*”) to his children as explained in ‘The Chronicles of the Buddha’. The bodhisatta adopting the teaching method of *Upāyakosallañāṇa* ‘skill-in-means’ as seen in the Jataka and the Buddha’s ‘*Sabbāññu nana*’ – ‘All-knowing knowledge and teaching the ‘Dhamma’ for helping beings trapped in saṃsāra, to attain *Nibbāna*, is applicable even today. The unbroken lineage of the *Mahāsaṅgha*, the institutional body established by the Buddha on this earth can be seen practicing the noble friendship through the ‘Dhamma’ and ‘Vinaya’ as teachers even today and attaining the benefits of the well-propounded path discovered by the Sammāsambuddha, through positioning the ‘*Ariyo-Aṭṭhamiko Maggo*’ in the ‘The Four Noble Truths’, as the only path (*ekayano maggo*) to reach the ultimate truth (*paramattha sacca*).

The idea of Buddha’s ‘*Sabbāññu nana*’ as the ‘All-knowing’ refers to Abhidhamma taught to Venerable Sāriputtatthera as propounded in the Abhidhamma texts. The Abhidhamma texts explain the eight *Mahākusala cittas* (The Great Wholesome consciousness) of non-hatred ‘*adosa*’. *Cetasika* of ‘*mettā*’ can be understood to be ‘*adosa*’ *cetasika*, does not necessarily mean ‘*mettā*’. However, *adosa citta* is the first step of stopping from developing ill-will in the mind. It is the initial effort of the mind towards cultivating the positive aspect of ‘*mettā*’ which is ‘good-will’ as opposite to ‘ill-will’.

In the AN 5. *Āghātavinaya sutta*, Venerable Sāriputtatthera mentions the five points of significance in the practice of developing *mettā*. One of the points the sutta mentions is in the certain condition that one is not able to generate *mettā*, one should protect one’s mind by staying away from situations that give rise to thought of hatred (with a neutral mind of *upekkhā*).

In the *Iti.27 Mettācetovimutti suttaṃ*

Vuttaṃ hetam bhagavatā vuttamarahatā’ti me sutam: Yāni kānici bhikkhave opadhikāni puññakariyavatthūni, sabbāni tāni mettāya cetovimuttiyā kālāṃ nāgghanti soḷasim. Mettā yeva tāni cetovimutti adhiggahe tvā bhasate ca tapate ca virocate ca.

Bhikkhu Thanissaro translates³⁵ the above verse as follows:

This was said by the Blessed One, said by the Arahant, so I have heard: “All the grounds for making merit leading to spontaneously arising (in heaven) do not equal one-sixteenth of the awareness-release through

³⁵ “Merit: A Study Guide”, by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*, 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/study/merit.html>.

good will. Good will - surpassing them - shines, blazes, & dazzles.”

The sutta progresses further, that the *dosa citta* when extends beyond leads to the extreme of ‘*viḥimsa*’- killing. The opposite of ‘*viḥimsa*’ is ‘*aviḥimsa*’- ‘non-killing’, according to the *Dvedhavitṭakka sutta*, leading to the positive aspect of ‘*karuṇa*’- ‘compassion’ for all beings. Both *Mettā* and *karuṇa* are two of the four ‘*brahma-viharas*’ to be cultivated immeasurably ‘*appamāṇa*’, as the Buddha admonishes the bhikkhus in the ‘*KaraṇiyaMettā sutta*’. In this sutta, the Buddha gives the simile for *Mettā* as a mother who fosters her only child, ‘loving kindness’.³⁶

Of the two methods of meditation, ‘*Vipassana*’ (Insight) is for cultivating ‘*pañña*’; while ‘*Samatha*’ is the practice of right concentration of mind. In the ‘*samatha*’ meditation technique, the practice of ‘*jhāna*’- meditative absorption uses ‘*mettā*’ as an object (*kammaṭṭhāna*) for attaining ‘*cittassa-ekaggata*’- ‘one-pointed concentration of mind’. Venerable H. Saddhātissa mentions the importance of *samatha* practice for a mediator practicing in the early stages of insight meditation. At that time when the mind is associated with *uddhacca* (restlessness) and difficult to control, then practicing *samatha-bhāvanā* is most suitable to calm the mind and helps to control it. (Saddhātissa 1971: p. 81). The ‘*kammaṭṭhāna*’ meditation object of ‘*anapanasati*’ (out-breathe in-breathe meditation) and *mettā-bhāvanā* are most commonly preferred.

Ekaggata is a ‘*sabba-citta-sādhāraṇa cetasika*’- meaning the *cetasika* of one-pointedness appears with both *akusala* and *kusala citta*. When associated with *akusala citta* leads to ‘*miccha-samadhi*’ – ‘wrong concentration’, while when associated with *kusala citta* leads to ‘*sammā-samadhi*’- right concentration of mind. Because “*Sukhino cittaṃ samādhīyati*”- ‘Happy *citta* leads to ‘*sammā-samadhi*’- ‘right concentration’.

“If a monk indulges in a thought of *Mettā* even for a finger snap, his meditation is not ‘empty of result’ (A. I. 10). One canonical text, the *Haliddavasana-Sutta*, also recommends that it be practised alongside and as a support for each of the seven enlightenment factors (S. V. 119 – 21).”³⁷

Mettā as a meditation subject fulfills the detailed description in the canon that defines the object of peace in the Buddhist practice, and capable of cultivating by the practitioner at any stage and even after the attainment of the goal until *PariNibbāna* (the final passing away of the Arahatta physical body).³⁸

‘*Mettā*’ is the mental cultivation. In the A. iv *Velāma Sutta*³⁹ states that a single moment’s practice of ‘*mettā*’ is much meritorious than any other

³⁶ “KaraṇiyaMettā Sutta: Loving-Kindness” (Sn 1. 8), translated from the Pāli by Ñānamoli Thera. *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*, 29 August 2012, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.1.08.nymo.html>.

³⁷ Sarah Shaw, ed., *Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology from the Pāli Canon* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), p. 163.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 159.

³⁹ AN 9.20, PTS A iv 392.

most expensive *dāna* and following *silā*. However, if one is cultivating the perception of *anicca*- even for the brief moment of a snap of a finger (*yo ca accharāsaṅghātamattampi aniccasaññaṃ bhāveyya, idaṃ tato mahapphalataraṇaṃ* ti.) would be more beneficial.

IV. RELEVANCE OF ‘METTĀ’ LOVING KINDNESS IN THE HUMAN SOCIETY

“Dear-to-Devas Piyadassi King thus has said: *Dhamme* is excellent, now how much is *Dhamme*? Few evil tendencies, many virtuous (deeds), Kindness giving truth purity.”⁴⁰ *Mettā* as a mental practice should be developed. It is a practice and a good one for the sustainable society, not just towards living beings but also towards the natural environment we live in, which is faced with the dire consequences of climate change.

The environment provides us with food. How much ever be the flow of human evolution is inclined towards material gains through recent discoveries and inventions in space travel or the technological advancements through ‘Artificial Intelligence’ can never replace to fulfill the natural green world providing the single basic requirement of all beings dependent on the food-provider “*kabalikāro rupino āhāra*” for all beings the earth and the endurance of the earth towards the *akusala kamma* of the ignorant living beings on it; that is “*sabbe satta ekāhāraṭṭhitika*” “All subsist on nutriment as their food (for sustenance)”.

To address this sustainable aspect, according to the Dhammapada verse 1 and 2, that mind is the foremost; ‘*manosancetana āhāra*’, meaning the intention of the mind as a nutriment to sustain comes first; that is of non-harming, indicated by the ‘*adosa cetasika*’ in Abhidhamma, and in the *Dvedhavitakka Sutta* indicating ‘*mettā*’ as the positive aspect arising from the mind, as the foundation for establishing the peaceful mind of ‘*Sammā-samadhi*’, the Buddha elucidates Sakyan Mahānāma, by “*sukhino cittaṃ samādhiyati*”- “For one who is happy the mind becomes concentrated.” AN VI 10/III 284 - 88, leading towards the goal of *Nibbāna*.

In the *Iti* 1.22 1. *Mettāsutta*: *Māpuññabhāyī suttaṃ* is mentioned thus: “*Vuttaṃ hetam bhagavatā. Vuttamarahatā’ti me sutam: Mā bhikkhave puññānaṃ bhāyittha.*” “This was said by the Blessed One, said by the Arahant, so I have heard: “Monks, don’t be afraid of acts of merit.” Bhikkhu Thanissaro translates the verses as follows:

“Train in acts of merit that bring long-lasting bliss —/ develop giving, a life in tune, a mind of good-will./ Developing these three things that bring about bliss,/ the wise reappear in a world of bliss unalloyed.”⁴¹

Inferential points of the paper: *Mettā* is wholesome ‘*kusala*’. The practice of

⁴⁰ Rhys Davids, *A Manual of Buddhism* (London: The Sheldon Press, 1932), p. 312.

⁴¹ The sutta concludes with the following Pāli verses: “*Puññameva so sikkheyya āyataggaṃ sukhudrayaṃ/ Dānaṃ samacariyaṃ mettācittaṃ bhāvaye./ Ete dhamme bhāvayitvā tayo sukkhasamuddaye/ Abyāpajjhaṃ sukhaṃ lokaṃ paṇḍito upapajjati*” ti. - *Iti* 1.22. 1.

Mettā yields happiness. *Mettā* resolves conflicts and protects. It is twice fruitful, it benefits one that gives and one that takes. Giving *Mettā* is giving peace and comfort from fear. For one who does *puññakamma*, no need to fear. *Mettā* leads to happiness, which in turn supports the cultivation of ‘right concentration’ of the mind. *Mettā* when cultivated immeasurably, towards all beings takes to the third stage, non-returner (*Anāgāmi*) stage of the noble path fruition. *Ariya jhāna* practiced with the object of *mettā-bhāvanā* leads to Arahathood by way of the release of the heart, *mettānudaya cetovimmutiyā*. Thus, *Mettā* is one of the two modes of attaining *Nibbāna*.

Only those Arahats who are emancipated by both ways (*ubhato-bhāga vimutta* as *paññā-vimutti* and *ceto-vimutti*) are able to practice *Nirodha-samāpatti* to experience the *PariNibbāna sukha* while living in this body; as like Venerable Sāriputtathera and Venerable Mahākassappathera. “It is mind (*ceto*), because it uses the mind (*cetayati*) for that state. It is deliverance since it is delivered from all obsession with ill-will. Lovingkindness, mind and deliverance: these are the deliverance of mind by loving-kindness.”⁴² (*Patis* II 131 – 3)

The importance of ‘*mettā*’ is the Buddha’s unique teaching ‘the *Dhamma*’ (sometimes referred to as the ‘*saddhamma*’) of the Noble Path. ‘*Mettā* is the entire noble life.’ The quality of *Mettā* is of an ‘*ariya*’ person in the Noble Sangha. Such a person is therefore, called a ‘*kalyāṇa-mitta*’ = ‘a noble friend’ as helping on the path of Dhamma. One should associate with such wise person-*pañḍitananca sevana*]. The Buddha having said this also mentions: “If you do not find any such friend, then you should walk alone on the noble path, like a solitary Rhinoceros’ horn” in the *Khaggavisāṇasutta*⁴³.

V. CONCLUSION

Thus, we see from the above examples and references from the *Pāli* Texts, that although *Nibbāna* and *saṃsāra* are antithetical, *Mettā* is the continuous process of inculcating the kusala kamma the wholesome action of ‘*mettāsahagatacitta*’ - cultivating ‘universal love’ towards all beings in *saṃsāra*. It is akin to collecting small droplets of water, to ultimately unifying in the mighty vast ocean to which the Buddha’s teaching aims at ultimately attaining the final goal of ‘*Nibbāna*’. Thus, the Buddha’s teaching, although directed towards the attainment of *Nibbāna*, emphasizes the practice of ‘*mettā*’ in the journey of *saṃsāra*. Thus, the lone individual journey to *Nibbāna* relates to comprising ‘universal love’ towards all beings in *saṃsāra*.

“*Sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta!*” May all beings be well, happy and peaceful!

Table 1.1 *METTĀ BHĀVANĀ FROM KARAṆIYĀ METTĀ SUTTA* WHO CAN DO *METTĀ BHĀVANĀ*:

⁴² Sarah Shaw, ed., *Buddhist Meditation: An Anthology from the Pāli Canon* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), p. 170.

⁴³ Sn 1. 3.

1	Sakko	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
2	Uju	hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
3	Suju	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
4	Suvaco	hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
5	Mudu	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
6	Anatimāni	hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
7	Santuṭṭhako	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
8	Subharo	hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
9	Appakicco	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
10	Sallahukavutti	hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
11	Santindriyo	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
12	Nipako	hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
13	Appagabbho	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
14	Kulesu ananugiddho	hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
		Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
		hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
		Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
		hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
		Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
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		hontu, sukhitattā hontu	

		hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
		Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
		hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
		Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
		hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
		Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
		hontu, sukhitattā hontu	

METTĀ BHĀVANĀ FROM KARAṆIYĀ METTĀ SUTTA

	DUKA		
1	Tasā vā ṭhāvarā	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	24
2	Diṭṭhā vā adiṭṭhā	hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
3	Dūre vā santike	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino	
		hontu, sukhitattā hontu	

4	Bhūtā vā sambhavesī	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino hontu, sukhitattā hontu Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino hontu, sukhitattā hontu	
	TIKA		
1 2 3	Dīghā vā majjhimā vā rassakā Mahantā vā majjhimā vā aṇukā Thūlā vā majjhimā vā aṇukā	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino hontu, sukhitattā hontu Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino hontu, sukhitattā hontu Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino hontu, sukhitattā hontu Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino hontu, sukhitattā hontu Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino hontu, sukhitattā hontu	27
1 2 3	Na paroparaṃ ni- kubbetha Na paroparaṃ nāti- maññetha Na paroparaṃ byārosanā	Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino hontu, sukhitattā hontu Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino hontu, sukhitattā hontu Sabbe sattā sukhino hontu, khemino hontu, sukhitattā hontu	3
	Nāñña maññassa dukkhamiccheyya		54

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ADMONISHMENT OF ALL THE BUDDHA'S TOWARDS WELL-BEINGS

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Abstract:

The etymology of wellbeing is quite controversial between modern scholars and Buddhist philosophers. On one hand, modern scholars deal with the reality that intelligence becomes the basic means of human relations. On the other hand, Buddhist philosophy defines wellbeing as a combination of mind and matter. Man is the most prized form of life, the master of his own fate and responsible for whatever deeds have been done. The existence of heavenly beings like devas and brahmas is not superior to man. Because the mind of wellbeing is perfectly sharp, it makes man much more capable of weighty moral and immoral actions than any other class of living creatures. What man thinks is right may, according to the instruction of the Buddha, be false, and vice-versa. For this reason, people come to question: "What are meritorious deeds?", "What are demeritorious deeds?", and "How can one differentiate between what should be cultivated and what should be avoided?" In order to solve this social issue and to straighten the false mindset, this paper, entitled "The Admonishment of All the Buddhas towards Wellbeing" will discuss what man should do and what man should not do. The instruction of the Buddhas is not as simple as man thinks; it is taught gradually, from the basic to the higher practices. The energy of a devotee who applies the Buddha's teachings with respect will not decline as he progresses to further practice, because of the joy in experiencing the real advantages in this life and the next.

Keywords: *Attention, compassion, effort, manner, mindfulness, self-confidence.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Man is the most prized form of life, the master of his own fate, and responsible for whatever deeds have been done. The existence of heavenly beings like deities and Brahmas is not superior to man. Their abodes might be more pleasurable, and they may possess certain supernormal powers which are

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not possessed by man, but one must be born human to attain enlightenment and to become a Buddha. Thus, Prince Siddhartha Gotama had to leave the abode of devas and be reborn as a human to become the Buddha. All beings in the universe worship the Buddha's and the holy Arahants.

According to ancient Greek philosophers and modern philosophers, there is a significant contrast in how they denote the attributes of wellbeing. The ancient Greek philosophers were unsatisfied with attributing everything to the whim of the gods. They wished to liberate people from superstition and fear. Meanwhile, modern scholars deal with the reality that intellect and intelligence have become the basic means of human relations. Despite the wide diversity of philosophies that emerged in Western history, Socrates claimed that the authority of wellbeing is a source of knowledge and truth. In the scope of behavior, it was believed that wisdom for living played a prominent role in harmonizing reason, will, and emotions under the guidance of rational insight.¹ Moreover, Freud emphasized that religion is also under the control of hidden forces in the human psyche, and his doctrine introduced the ego as the subject that expresses the condition of wellbeing. He said that a person is a combination of three components: id, ego, and superego.² The American Psychological Association defines wellbeing as the nature of feeling, thinking, and behavior that an individual possesses.

Aside from Western ideas, from the Buddhist perspective, especially in the Theravāda Abhidhamma Buddhist Literature, wellbeing in Pāli, "*manussa*" is a mixture of mind and matter, or in technical terms, it is called *pañcakkhandā* (the aggregate of matter, the aggregate of feeling, the aggregate of perception, the aggregate of mental factors, and the aggregate of consciousness). Because the human mind is perfectly sharp, it makes man much more capable of weighty moral and immoral actions than any other class of living creatures. Man, who lives on earth, is capable of development up to the highest spiritual enlightenment through insight wisdom, which is the noblest method introduced by the Buddha – neither deities nor brahmas can achieve this.

There are many sects in the world that promote their doctrines to liberate their followers if they believe in God. Some doctrines do not believe in karma and its results, and they guarantee that their followers will be reborn in heaven or hell. Meanwhile, cultural beliefs also say the same. Such people claim to be Buddhist by birth but have never learned or listened to the Buddha's scriptures and worship deities as their gods. Those who are involved in such practices, desiring freedom from danger, or wishing to gain sons and daughters, take refuge in the mountain deity, grove deity, forest deity, sacred tree deity, etc. Seeing this misbelief, the Buddha began to utter this verse.

¹ Bloom (1981). *What Does It Mean to Be A Human? Buddhism in the Modern Context*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii, p. 3.

² Scheier, M. (2004). *Perspectives on Personality* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personality_psychology#Personality_theories.

Because of this utterance: “This mountain, this forest, this sacred tree are neither a safe refuge, nor is this place the best refuge. One is not free from all suffering because of this refuge.”³ The Commentator underlines that “this refuge” means that among the mass of people who have the nature of life, such as birth, old age, decay, illness, death, grief, lamentation, bodily suffering, and mental suffering, not even a single person is free from the nature of life, such as birth, decay, etc.⁴ As long as a person is taking refuge in the Buddha, the *dhamma*, and the *Śaṅgha*, they stand firmly in right view because of their faith in the Buddha’s teachings. The *dhamma* guides them on the way to reach *Nibbāna*, and the Order Community protects them by helping them observe the codes of conduct with strenuous effort to be virtuous. Also, when they are reborn as human again in the next existence, they will not take refuge in other sects that are non-Buddhists. Thus, wellbeing possesses great potential in three main aspects: heroes, mindfulness, and holy life.

II. SABBAPĀPASSA AKARANAM, KUSALASSA UPASAMPADĀ

In this section, first of all, being self-confident in the Buddha, in the *Dhamma*, and the *Śaṅgha*, or *Pāli*, *Tiratana* is a stepping stone to higher practice. *Saddhā* (faith) is like cool water that is poured into one’s mind to suppress negative emotions, or it can be illustrated as *udakappasādaka maṇi*, which belongs to the Cakkavatti Monarch. When it soaks into muddy water, it can neutralize all dirty elements, and the water becomes clear.⁵ The first manifestation of the arising of *saddhā* is the object, such as taking refuge in the *Tiratana*, its trainings, etc. However, blind faith in the *Tiratana* is not enough. A person without *saddhā*, who has never listened to or practiced according to the admonishments of all the Buddhas, cannot attain the correct understanding. In other words, even if a person practices a certain form of practice, thinking, “I will attain *nibbāna*, which is deathless, and I will do naked practice, etc.,” that person will only develop wrong views and experience fatigue. Although these practices may be well undertaken, they cannot purify a being who has not yet overcome doubt because the eight bases⁶ of doubt remain unresolved. The second manifestation is the factors of being a Stream-Entry, such as associating with competent masters, learning the authentic Buddhist texts, investigating the meaning of the texts, discussing with the wise, and gaining self-experience in accordance with the *Dhamma*. When the practitioner firmly attains the Fruition of Stream-Entry, their ordinary faith is transformed. They no longer view this faith as baseless but as perfect, unshaken faith. This is the result of self-experience in realizing *nibbāna*.

³ Dhṛp 189: “*Netam kho saraṇam khemaṇ, netaṇ saraṇamuttamaṇ / Netaṇ saraṇamāgama, sabbadukkhā pamuccati.*”

⁴ Dhṛp 189.

⁵ Pesala. (2000). *The Debate of King Milinda*. Penang: Inward Path, p. 39.

⁶ Eight kinds of doubt: Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Śaṅgha*, morality, the past existences, the future existences, the past and future existences and the condition.

Therein, the opening line of the Buddha's admonishment is: "*Sabbapāpassa akaranam, kusalassa upasampadā.*"⁷ This instruction to refrain from all demerits and to cultivate merits is not only for Buddhist monastic disciples but also for Buddhist devotees to practice self-discipline in their daily lives. To clarify the verse above, the devotees might ask: "What are demerits?", "What are merits?", and "How can one differentiate between what should be cultivated and what should be avoided?" The researcher will address these questions in the next paragraph.

2.1. Not to do all demerits

By nature, an individual who has never learned or listened to the Buddha's teachings is prone to committing demerits. In fact, we know that true happiness is neither the product of formal education nor informal tuition. It is the result of intense energy directed towards higher concentration in daily life. The danger of being ignorant of the Buddha's teachings is likened to a fool who is unskilled in distinguishing characteristics. Here, a monk does not understand the karmic characteristics of a fool and a wise person as they truly are.⁸ This means that the monk is unskilled in understanding the characteristics of both the fool and the wise, according to the commentary on the *Balapaṇḍita Sutta*.⁹ Moreover, the *Mahāgopālaka Sutta* lists the six unwholesome qualities of a fool:

(1) one does not understand what is proper and improper (*kappiyākappiyam*), (2) one does not understand what is merit and demerit (*kusalākusalam*), (3) one does not understand what is blameworthy and praiseworthy (*sāvajjānavajjam*), (4) one does not understand what is a heavy offense and a light offense (*garukalahukam*), (5) one does not understand what is curable and incurable (*satekicchātekkiccam*), and (6) one does not understand what is right and wrong (*kāraṇākāraṇam*).¹⁰ Since the monk does not recognize these unwholesome qualities, when contemplating an object, he is unable to progress, just as a cowherd is incapable of raising a herd of cattle.

Some may know what the demerits are, but their understanding of the meaning may be biased, and the knowledge of the word is far from true comprehension. Just as a cowherd may not know whether he has already watered the herd of cattle or not, so too, a monk may not experience the delight connected with Buddhism. Although the monk goes to the place where the *Dhamma* is taught, if he does not listen to the *Dhamma* respectfully, falls asleep while sitting, speaks unrelated words, or pays attention to other things, he will not benefit from it. When he does not listen respectfully, he declines the

⁷ Dhṛp.II. 183.

⁸ M. I. 201.

⁹ M. II. 164: "*Kusalākusalam kammaṃ paṇḍita lakkhaṇanti na jānāti*"; M. 3. 201, *Balapaṇḍita Sutta* - The characteristics of a fool are always thinking evil things, speaking evil words and doing sins. The characteristics of the wise are always thinking good things, speaking pleasant words and doing meritorious deeds.

¹⁰ M. II. 164: "*Taṃ ajānanto kammaṭṭhānaṃ gahetvā na jānāti. So yathā tassa gopālakaṃ gogaṇo na vaḍḍhati evaṃ imasmiṃ sāsane yathāvuttehi sīladihi na vaḍḍhati.*"

practice and fails to gain any results from the ten bases of meritorious deeds. For this reason, ordinary people must seek and associate with competent spiritual mentors to overcome their weaknesses. Here, Buddhist philosophy lists the ten kinds of demerits, which are divided into three classifications. They are as follows:

The first classification consists of three bodily demerits: (1) Destroying life, (2) Stealing things that are not given, (3) Sexual misconduct. The second classification consists of four verbal demerits: (1) Telling lies, (2) Divisive speech, (3) Harsh words, (4) Idle chatter. The last classification consists of three mental demerits: (1) Full of longing, (2) Ill-will, (3) Holding wrong views.

The ten demerits listed above are dispraised by the wise because they lead the doer to be reborn in the four lowest woeful realms after death, where there is no happiness and no chance to perform meritorious deeds at all. The *Jāṇussoṇi Sutta*¹¹ deals with the disadvantages of performing these ten demerits, stating that the sinner will immediately be reborn in the woeful states after death. The text goes into more detail, explaining that whoever performs the ten demerits listed above will be reborn in the *Āvici* hell. They will be reborn in the sphere of afflicted spirits and will sustain themselves on the food of afflicted spirits, such as saliva, phlegm, snot, etc. However, whoever performs the ten demerits and also offers food and drink, clothing, and vehicles to an ascetic or a brahmin; or provides garlands, scents, unguents, bedding, dwellings, and lighting, will be reborn after death in the companionship of royal elephants, that is, in the animal kingdom. There, they will gain food and drink, garlands, and various ornaments.

Further, the Buddha continues to deliver the following two verses:

On one hand, the first verse above means that an evil person may initially see happiness, as long as the evil deeds do not produce evil results. However, when the evil deed produces its results, the evil person will experience great suffering. The Commentator further explains that the *Pāli* word '*pāpo*' refers to one who associates with demerits, such as the three bodily demerits, and so on. The definition of the *Pāli* word '*atha*' in the above verses means that, at the time of experiencing bodily and mental pain here and now, one will also experience all sufferings in the next rebirth.¹²

On the other hand, the second verse above means that a good person also sees the evil results, as long as the good deed does not produce happiness. However, when the good deed produces good results, the good person will experience happiness. The Commentator notes that the *Pāli* word '*atha*' refers to the time when one experiences happiness

¹¹ A. X. p. 478 - 482.

¹² *Dhp.* I. 119: "*Pāposi passati bhaddraṃ, yāva pāpaṃ na paccati. / Yadā ca paccati pāpaṃ, atha pāpo pāpāni passati.*"

here and now, such as gain, fame, reputation, etc. In the next life, this good person will also experience happiness, such as the possession of devas, and will see only happiness..¹³

2.2. Cultivate the merits

Having the right mindset about the workings of karma and its results is also one of the significant aspects of Buddhism for maintaining proper conduct in the present. During the time of Buddha Gotama, there were three contemporary outsider teachers: Ajita Kesakambala, Pūraṇa Kassapa, and Makkhali Gosala, who were listed among the six heretical philosophers. Due to their reasoning, they expressed their own ideas without self-experience, advocating false doctrines such as Nihilism, Inefficacy of action, and Non-causality. The wise say that ‘Doing good is better than doing nothing.’ The virtuous disciple refrains from unworthy actions through body, speech, and thought. In this regard, these three false philosophers must understand why the noble ones refrain from bad deeds: because they recognize the existence of a real next life. The noble ones are never proud of what they have experienced, as they see the danger of demerits. The Brahmins should recognize the risks of unwholesome deeds and their effects. By removing sins through bodily actions, speech, and thought, they strive to abstain from them. With respect to the *Dhamma*, the Buddha teaches the audience to be free from wrong actions. To do so, the audience should possess the five qualities that form the foundation of empirical tendency.¹⁴ The virtuous person inherits the seven treasures of honorable wealth: *saddhā, sīla, hiri, ottappa, cāga, suta*, and *paññā*. His behavior is praised by the wise because he never causes others to commit sins, as evidenced by the examples of Suppabuddha and Sakka, the god.¹⁵

Whoever performs even a small merit, the wholesome results will return to them in this life and the next. The law of karma is fair and never misapplied, just like the story of Lājadevadhitā, who took refuge in the Triple Gem and offered a few dried crops to Mahākassapa Thera, wishing to attain the Path and Fruition in the next life. Although she performed only a small merit, after her death, she was reborn in the Tāvātimsa heaven..¹⁶ Therefore, the Buddha recites this following verse:

It is stated that if a person commits a meritorious deed, thinking, “I have done the merit once, and that is enough”,¹⁷ without feeling satisfied, he should repeat it. According to Bhikkhu Kheminda, who is a master in Abhidhamma, when a meritorious deed is done once, it deposits much

¹³ Dh.p.A. I. 120 “*Bhadropi passati pāpaṃ, yāva bhadrāṃ na paccati. / Yadā ca paccati bhadrāṃ, atha bhadro bhadraṇi passati’ti.*”

¹⁴ M.II.60: “*sandiṭṭhika, akālika, ehipassika, opaneyyika, and paccataṃ veditabbo viññūhi.*”

¹⁵ Dh.p. 66.

¹⁶ Kheminda (2023). *Latar Stanza of Dhammapada*. Jakarta: Yayasan Dhammavihāri Buddhist Studies, p. 431 - 434.

¹⁷ A.II.148: “*Sace puriso puññaṃ kareyya, / ekavāraṃ me puññaṃ kataṃ, alaṃ ettāvata’ti/ anoromitvā punappunaṃ karotheva.*”

happiness in a single moment of one's cognitive process. Within a flicker, our mind arises and vanishes trillions of times. For instance, a devotee who listens to a Dhamma talk for an hour creates countless seeds of wholesome karma. Another example is when a Buddhist pays homage to the Tathāgata; even a quarter of good intention arises and vanishes in a flash, forming part of a continuous cognitive process.¹⁸ Therefore, wellbeing should involve performing merits repeatedly. Here, the ten meritorious things that a person should cultivate as long as they exist in the cycle of rebirth are categorized into three groups: The first group is generosity (*dāna*), the second group is morality (*sīla*), and the third group is mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*):

Under *Dāna* comes: (1) Charity, (2) Sharing merits to the departed ones, (3) Rejoicing in others' merits. This first group overcomes jealousy and selfishness. Under *Sīla* comes: (1) Morality, (2) Paying respect, (3) Providing service in helping others. This second group overcomes attachment and anger. Under *Bhāvanā* comes: (1) Meditation, (2) Listening to the *dhamma*, (3) Preaching the *dhamma*, (4) Straightening one's view. This third group overcomes delusion and wrong view.

According to the first group under *Dāna*, sharing merits with the departed ones is considered taboo by some people in the world. The myth notes that the departed ones will only bring misfortune to the living relatives, leading them to be ignorant about how to behave. The *Jāṇusoṇi Sutta* tells us that transferring merits to departed family members and relatives who have been reborn in the *peta* realm allows them to receive offerings. In cases where the departed ones have not been reborn as hungry ghosts (*peta bhūmi*), other beings with related karmas to the donors can still accept the offerings.¹⁹ It is incorrect for people to abandon the departed ones out of fear that misfortune will befall them. By changing the wrong mindset, as questioned by the brahmin Jāṇusoṇi to the Buddha, there are two benefits to sharing merits with the departed: one for the departed and one for the donor. Additionally, the root causes for beings being reborn in the *peta* realm are jealousy (*issā*) and selfishness (*macchariya*) from their former lives. In the same discourse, the Buddha explains that the happier destination is reached by performing ten meritorious deeds, such as offering food and drink, clothing and a vehicle, garlands, scents, and unguents, bedding, dwellings, and lighting, to ascetics or brahmins. After death, a person who performs such deeds may be reborn in the human realm, where they enjoy the five objects of human sensual pleasure, or in the deva realm, where they are sustained by the food of deities, such as ambrosia.

The sign of renunciation is applying generosity and sharing with others, which leads to happiness, good fortune, success in the future, and a challenge to a society that prioritizes personal consumption. The prominent generosity

¹⁸ Kheminda (2021). *Manual Abhidhamma Kesadaran* ed.3. Jakarta: Yayasan Dhammavīhāri Buddhist Studies, p. 89-90.

¹⁹ Bodhi. (2012). *The Numerical Discourse of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom, p. 1523-1526.

of Bhikkhu Sāriputta Mahāthera, who possessed the sixteen qualities, is evident in how he shared his requisites with Venerable Ānanda, maintaining their strong relationship and honoring him.²⁰ Aside from sharing his wealth, Venerable Ānanda also received ordination as one of Venerable Sāriputta's disciples. The Buddha confirms this: "If people knew, as I know, the karmic fruits of sharing gifts, / they would not enjoy their use without sharing them, / nor would the taint of stinginess obsess the heart. / Even if it were their last bite, their last morsel of food, / they would not enjoy its use without sharing it / if there was someone else to share it with."²¹

2.3. Inner peace

The next admonishment is: "*Sacittapariyodapanam, etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ*."²² The Pāli term *sacittapariyodapanam* means to purify one's mind. This is the teaching of the Buddha, which emphasizes that one should refrain from the arising of evil thoughts through bodily actions, verbal actions, and mental actions, using full strength to purify the mind.

On another occasion, the Buddha delivered the *Dvedhāvitakka Sutta*, explaining the kinds of evil thoughts that should be abandoned: thoughts of sensual pleasure, cunning thoughts, and thoughts of cruelty.²³ Regarding evil thoughts, the *Vitakkasaṅṭhāna Sutta* also describes thoughts associated with greed, hatred, and delusion.²⁴ At the time when one's mind is delighted by an evil deed, it is only when one performs a good deed that the mind delights in what is wholesome. At other times, the mind does not delight in good deeds; once freed from that time, it inclines toward evil deeds.²⁵ To clarify this teaching, the Buddha further elaborates in the next verse: "*Attanā hi kataṃ pāpaṃ, attanā saṃkilissati. Attanā akataṃ pāpaṃ, attanāva visujjhati. Suddhī asuddhi paccattaṃ, nāñño aññaṃ visodhaye'ti*."²⁶

If an evil deed is done by oneself, one is defiled only by oneself. If an evil deed is not done by oneself, one is purified only by oneself. Therefore, a person should not dismiss evil deeds by thinking that small evil results will not arise, just as a potter's clay pot gradually fills up when a single drop of water falls into it, causing a crack. In fact, many disciples do not know how to purify evil thoughts. However, due to the greatest loving-kindness and compassion of the Buddha toward all mankind, he shares the methods to replace evil states with good states.²⁷ In the table below (Table 1):

²⁰ "Susīmadevataputta Suttaṃ".

²¹ It. 18.207.

²² Dhṛp 183.

²³ M. I. 383: "Dvedhāvitakkasuttaṃ – kāmavitakko, byāpāda vitakko, vihiṃsa vitakko".

²⁴ M. I. 167: "Vitakkasaṅṭhānasuttaṃ – akusalā vitakkā chandūpasamhitāpi dosūpasamhitāpi mohūpasamhitāpi te pahīyanti."

²⁵ Dhṛp 116: "Athassa pāpasmiṃ ramatī mano, kusalakammakaraṇa kāleyeva hi cittaṃ kusale ramatī, tato mucctivā pāpaninnameva hotitī."

²⁶ Dhṛp 165.

²⁷ M. I. 391 - 392: "Vitakkasaṅṭhānasuttaṃ vaṇṇanā - Chandūpa samhitavitakka asu-

Table 1. Replace evil thought with good thought

Evil thought	Contemplation object
Attachment to animate things	Loathsomeness
Attachment to inanimate things	Perception of impermanence
Hatred with animate things	Loving kindness
Hatred with inanimate things	Attention to elements

In the same way, a war between countries will not escalate when both sides refrain from the four verbal demerits.²⁸ It is true that there is no win-win solution through abusive speech, as it is the cause of suffering, and retribution will eventually affect the agent. The best solution is like a broken bronze cup: when it falls to the ground, it does not produce sound, even if it is struck by hand, foot, or stick. This means that if one can become like this broken bronze cup, even though they have not yet attained *nibbāna*, a person who practices this way is called one who has attained *nibbāna*.²⁹ As a result, the demerits done by that person are defiled by themselves, leading them to experience suffering in the four lowest woeful states. However, if the evil deed is not done by oneself, by following the path to a happy state and *nibbāna*, the person purifies themselves.

Once, the Buddha said that he who is mentally concentrated sees things as they really are. Ācariya Buddhaghosa also comments on the statement: “*sacittapariyodapananti pañcahi nīvaraṇehi attano cittassa vodāpanaṃ*”³⁰ which means to purify one’s mind from the five hindrances. It is true that the power of *Jhāna* factors is effective in this process. On one hand, it highlights the benefit of overcoming the five mental hindrances: (1) a certain person dwells with the mind obsessed with sensual lust, overcome by sensual lust, and does not know according to reality the escape from sensual lust that has arisen. Keeping sensual lust in his mind, he meditates, pre-meditates, out-meditates, miss-meditates, (2) ill-will, (3) sloth and torpor, (4) restlessness and worry, (5) doubt.

On the other hand, a being may be born in the highest realm as a Brahma with a long lifespan, but that Brahma does not have the wisdom to see and know all. Only by being reborn in the human world can one strive hard to become a bhikkhu who possesses *sabbaññutā-ñāṇa* (omniscience) like the Buddha. The Buddha has the ability to see and know all in the human world, but not in the higher realms of existence. A human being, while caught in the cycle of *saṃsāric* life, is able to cultivate the mind to attain the spiritual stages of *abhiñña* (higher

bhābhāvanā, *Chandūpa saṃhitavitakka aniccaañāṇaṃ*, *Dosūpa saṃhitavitakka mettā bhāvanā*, *Dosūpa saṃhitavitakka dhātu manasikāra*.”

²⁸ The four verbal demerits are: telling lies, divisive speech, harsh words and idle chatter.

²⁹ A. II. 134: “*Tāhi hatthapādehi vā daṇḍakena vā pahaṭampi saddaṃ na karoti, esa pat-tosīti sace evarūpo bhavitum sakkhissasi, imaṃ paṭipadaṃ pūrayamāno idāni appattopi eso nibbānappatto nāma*.”

³⁰ A. II. 134.

knowledge) and *sabbaññuta* (omniscience)³¹. The purpose of this is to refine the method of higher training for an ordinary person dwelling in the noble life, intent on gaining the Path and Fruition, and seeking to escape the cycle of rebirth.

III. KHANTĪ PARAMAṀ TAPO TITIKKHĀ, NIBBĀNAṀ PARAMAṀ VADANTI BUDDHĀ

Because of forbearance, nibbāna is supreme. It is revered by the Buddha's, the Paccekabuddhas, and the noblest disciples of the Buddha—those who have studied the scriptures and attained the ultimate truth. Only in the human realm does the Bodhisatta evaluate and elevate the ten basic perfections to higher perfections. Similarly, Venerable Sāriputta, having comprehended the sixteen kinds of wisdom³², attained the chief position in the Dhamma as a result of fulfilling perfections for 100,000 aeons and one incalculable period. Although Sāriputta Mahāthera was the foremost disciple of Buddha Gotama, when a young novice criticized him for how he wore his robe, Venerable Sāriputta humbly listened. Then, the following verse was uttered: “*Khantīti yā esā titikkhāsāṅkhātā khantī nāma, / idaṃ imasmim sāsane paramaṃ uttamaṃ tapo.*”³³

The Pāli term *khantī* refers to forbearance, which is also called patience. This patience is regarded as the noblest blessing in Buddhism, helping to eradicate negative emotional qualities. There are two complex controversies in society: miswanting and adaptation. Being modest does not mean that one miswants things, but rather that one strives to adapt to any circumstances. As Lao Tzu stated, “The three great treasures: simplicity, patience, and compassion.”³⁴ Satisfaction in these three great treasures can be illustrated by the story of a monk who, when offered various qualities of robes, chose a cheaper material that was sufficient for his needs. In the *Mettā Sutta*, the Buddha also praised the qualities of being easily supportable (*subhara*) and not constantly busy (*appakicco*), two of the many blessings people enjoy when they simplify their lives.³⁵

Before the Bodhisatta Gotama attained Enlightenment, he studied under two spiritual teachers, the ascetic Alara Kalama and the ascetic Uddaka Rāmaputta, who taught different forms of meditation. However, he did not find in their teachings the ultimate solution to ending birth, old age, sickness, death, and all suffering. Realizing this, he left them and continued his own

³¹ Ledī. (2004). *The Manual of Buddhism: The Expositions of the Buddha-Dhamma*. Yangon: Mother Ayeyarwaddy, p. 408.

³² The 16 kinds of wisdom possessed by Venerable Sāriputta: 1. Wise (*paññito*), 2. Great wisdom (*mahāpañño*), 3. Wide wisdom (*puṭhupañño*), 4. Joyous wisdom (*hāsapañño*), 5. Swift wisdom (*javanapāñño*), 6. Sharp wisdom (*tikkhapañño*), 7. Penetrative wisdom (*nibbedhikapañño*), 8. Few wishes (*appiccho*), 9. Contentment (*santuṭṭho*), 10. Loving seclusion (*pavivitto*), 11. Being aloof from defilements (*asaṃsaṭṭho*), 12. Being energetic (*āraddhajavīriyo*), 13. An advisor (*vattā*), 14. Accepting advice (*vacanakkhamo*), 15. A rebuker (*codako*) and 16. A discourager of evil (*pāpagarahī*).

³³ *Dhp* 184.

³⁴ Feng, *The Tao Te Ching*, p. 21.

³⁵ *Sn*. 144.

path, undergoing six years of intense austerities while meditating at the roots of the sacred Bodhi tree. Eventually, he discovered the origin of suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path leading to the end of suffering—collectively known as the Four Noble Truths. Out of great compassion and wisdom, he preached the Dhamma for forty-five years, guiding countless beings across the universe toward liberation from the cycle of rebirth and suffering.

Actually, true forbearance has no limit. In life, society experiences up and downs, and some people say they used to have patience but now do not. Being patient means maintaining a meritorious routine with an imperturbable mind, free from anger. One should associate with a good social team that supports and motivates each other. According to levels of well-being: (1) Same level – one who shares loving-kindness with all beings. (2) Superior level—one who respects and rejoices in the goodness of teachers, parents, or seniors practicing *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom). (3) Inferior level—one who helps the needy with compassion.

When an individual meets others of the same level, they sincerely wish them well, with a heart filled with goodwill towards all beings. For this reason, the individual must possess two essential qualities: great compassion and skillful means.³⁶

Unfortunately, not all men are born with compassion. From their former existences, people have committed either meritorious or unwholesome mental actions, which follow them into their next rebirth consciousness. The story of Koka, a hunter with dogs, serves as an example. On his way to hunt, Koka encountered a monk. Upon seeing the monk, his anger immediately arose, believing that this encounter would bring misfortune and prevent him from catching prey. By late evening, still empty-handed, Koka decided to kill the monk. He commanded his dogs to attack. Out of fear, the monk climbed a tree but failed to secure his robe, which fell and covered Koka. Mistaking him for the monk, the dogs mauled him to death, leaving only his bones behind. To clarify the background of this story, the Theravāda Abhidhamma texts classify individuals into twelve types as follows:

The first type of individual is called *duggati ahetuka puggala*, whose rebirth-linking consciousness is rootless and possesses unwholesome results, leading to birth in hell, the animal realm, the realm of hungry ghosts, or the realm of Asura ghosts. The second type is called *sugati ahetuka*, which includes beings in the human, deva, and brahma realms. Their rebirth-linking consciousness (*ahetuka citta*) is accompanied by wholesome results. The third type is *dvihetuka*, whose rebirth-linking consciousness is accompanied by *alobha* (non-greed) and *adosa* (non-hatred). Such individuals may have physical disabilities, such as blindness, deafness, muteness, or intellectual impairments. The fourth type is *tihetuka puthujjana*, a noble person with wisdom whose rebirth-

³⁶ Ledī. (2004). *The Manual of Buddhism: The Exposition of the Buddha-Dhamma*. Yangon: Mother Ayeyarwaddy, p. 491.

linking consciousness is accompanied by *alobha*, *adosa*, and *amoha* (non-delusion). The remaining eight types are called Noble Disciples, who firmly stand on the Four Paths and Four Fruitions: the Stream-Enterer, the Once-Returner, the Non-Returner, and the Arahant.³⁷

The further note states that the first type of individual definitely has no chance to perform meritorious deeds. The second and third types of individuals, while capable of training the mind under the guidance of qualified spiritual masters, cannot attain any noble spiritual stages in this very life. According to the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, the fourth type of individual is divided into two grades: the superior grade (*tīhetukaṃ ukkaṭṭhaṃ*) and the inferior grade (*tīhetukaṃ omakaṃ*). The following verse in this publication states: “*Tatthā pi tīhetukaṃ ukkaṭṭhaṃ kusalaṃ tīhetukaṃ paṭisandhiṃ/ datvā pavatte soḷasa vipākāni vipaccati.*”/ “*Tīhetukaṃ omakaṃ dvīhetukaṃ ukkaṭṭhaṃ ca kusalaṃ dvīhetukaṃ/ paṭisandhiṃ datvā pavatte tīhetukarahitāni dvādasa pi vipākāni vipaccati.*”³⁸

Although the fourth type of individual has rebirth-linking consciousness accompanied by three roots, this publication emphasizes that only superior wholesome karma (*tīhetukaṃ ukkaṭṭhaṃ*) enables one to firmly attain any noble status in this present existence. Bhikkhu Bodhi translated the verse as follows:

Therein, superior wholesome karma accompanied by three roots produces rebirth-linking consciousness similarly accompanied by three roots, and during the course of existence, it gives rise to sixteen kinds of resultants. Wholesome karma of an inferior grade accompanied by three roots, as well as that of a superior grade accompanied by two roots, produces rebirth-linking consciousness with two roots and gives rise to twelve kinds of resultants, excluding those with three roots, during the course of existence.

To conclude, the researcher understands that the first, second, third, and fourth types of individuals, being of an inferior grade, cannot attain any noble stages. However, if reborn in the human realm in their next existence, take refuge in the Triple Gem, and cultivate their minds diligently, they may attain the noblest emotional quality. One should pay attention to the unsatisfactory nature of life. Those endowed with compassion are ready to develop insight wisdom through *ehi-passiko* – “come and see” and can apply this wisdom in meritorious activities, complete the accumulation of perfections, and ultimately attain the highest happiness: liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Unlike beings in the Brahma and Deva realms, where sensual pleasures are abundant, such beings do not wish to break free from entanglement and thus make little effort to escape.

³⁷ Silānanda. (2014). *Handbook of Abhidhamma Studies* (Vol. 2). Malaysia: Selangor Buddhist Vipassana Meditation Society, p. 96 - 98.

³⁸ Bodhi. (1999). *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 214.

IV. NA HI PABBAJITO PARŪPAGHĀTĪ, NA SAMANO HOTI PARAM VIHEṬṬHAYANTO

“Na hi pabbajito parūpaghātī,/ na samaṇo hoti paraṃ viheṭṭhayanto.”³⁹

In that stanza, it is stated that one who harms another is not a recluse, and one who molests another is not an ascetic. This is true, as readers will never find blameworthy words in the Buddha's teachings. Therefore, when unwholesome states arise in the mind, a monk must abandon them through the Fourfold Right Effort.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Ācariya Buddhaghosa elaborated: “By what means does a monk harm another?”⁴¹ He explained that one who harms others with hands, weapons, sticks, stones, or similar means is not considered a true Buddhist recluse. The Pāli term *rūpaghātī* refers to such an individual. Since all living beings fear punishment and death, one should not harm others, considering oneself in their place.

Since initial *saddhā* (faith) is well established, the next essential quality is effort (*vīriya*). As a Buddhist disciple, before respecting others, one must first respect oneself. Why? The reason the Buddha laid down the higher *Pātimokkha* for bhikkhus and *bhikkhūṇīs* was due to the misconduct of certain monks, who were criticized by both modest monks and laypeople. The first and most important qualities a disciple must possess are two fundamental virtues: *hiri* and *ottappa*. Moral shame (*hiri*) is often paired with moral fear (*ottappa*), and together, the Buddha called them “the guardians of the world” (*sukha lokapāla*). In Pāli, *hiri* refers to a sense of shame over moral transgressions, while *ottappa* is the fear of the consequences of wrongdoing. Thus, a monk who diligently maintains virtue will develop both *hiri* (shame) and *ottappa* (fear of wrongdoing). When these two qualities are absent, moral ethics collapse, leading to social decline.

Hence, disciples should make an effort to abstain from the ten demeritorious deeds by maintaining the four types of moral purification, which are as follows:

Pātimokkhasaṃvara-sīla is the virtue that pertains to the *Pātimokkha* rules for bhikkhus and bhikkhūṇīs. For laypeople, it involves observing at least the five basic precepts or the eight precepts. This virtue serves as the foundation for higher concentration. Even if one is an expert in tranquility or insight knowledge, frequent offenses without confession lead to unfavorable consequences. After death, such a person could be reborn in one of the four woeful states, as illustrated by the story of

³⁹ *Dhp* 184.

⁴⁰ SN 45.8; A. II. 74 - Fourfold Right Effort: 1. restraint (*saṃvara*): generating the desire to prevent the arising of unwholesome states, 2. abandon (*pahāna*): generating the desire to abandon arisen unwholesome states, 3. develop (*bhāvanā*): generating the desire to cultivate arisen wholesome states and 4. protect (*anurakkhanā*): generating the desire to sustain the arisen wholesome states.

⁴¹ *Dhp* 184 – “Na hi pabbajitoti pāṇiadihi paraṃ apahananto viheṭṭhento rūpaghātī pabbajito nāma na hoti.”

the young Bhikkhu Erakapatta.⁴² *Indriyasamvara-sīla* refers to the virtue of restraining the six sense faculties. *Ājivaparisuddhi-sīla* relates to the purification of livelihood. *Paccayasannisita-sīla* involves contentment in using the four requisites.

Speaking of proper conduct, the ancient society held great reverence for the late, foremost Burmese Sayadaw Kandaw Min, who once established ethical codes for laypeople. These guidelines were composed in a poem titled *Essence of the World*, which states:

Since young, you have to try hard, make an effort to learn much knowledge. Be fear, dear and respect, kneel your knee in front of your true teacher. Cherish the merits, try hard to be good, make an improvement of yourself. Don't make yourself to be famous, follow the track of good people. Love and adore both parents who are your benefactors. Respect with clear mind and worship them with joining palms on your head like to pagoda and temple.⁴³

Being born as a human in a land where the Buddha's Dispensation still flourishes – such as Myanmar, a golden land renowned for learning (*pariyatti*) and practice (*paṭipatti*) of authentic Buddhist teachings under the guidance of *Tipiṭaka* masters and meditation instructors—is considered the greatest blessing for Buddhists. It provides the opportunity to associate with and learn from the wise. The poem composed by the late esteemed Sayadaw Kandaw Min in the 15th century C. E. remains a cherished piece of Burmese literature, serving as a moral guide for all. As a reflection of gratitude and respect for one's benefactors, it has been integrated into Myanmar's educational system as a lasting reminder of these values. In cultivating wholesome deeds, devotees may begin within their own families, gradually extending their generosity to the monastic community by offering the four requisites: food, medicine, shelter, and robes. However, true merit lies not merely in the physical act of giving but in the sincere intention behind it. The merit of generosity manifests through three key moments: (1) preparing the gift, (2) offering the gift, and (3) recollecting the act with a joyful mind. Those who reject generosity may be reborn into poverty, whereas those who cultivate generosity will find themselves in more favorable circumstances in future lives.

⁴² Kheminda. (2023). *Kitab Komentar Dhammapada*. Jakarta: Yayasan. Dhammavihāri Buddhist Studies, p. 693 - 694: During the time of Buddha Kassapa, a young bhikkhu named Erakapatta was traveling by boat along the Gaṅgā River. He firmly held onto the twigs of an Eraka tree along the way, causing them to break. His fault was classified under the *bhūtagāmasikkhāpadaṃ pācittiya* rule. He dismissed the act as insignificant. Later, he meditated in the forest for 20,000 years without ever confessing his transgression. Near his death, he regretted his unconfessed fault, passed away, and was reborn as a king of snakes with a massive form, as large as a boat.

⁴³ Education Minister, *Union of Republic of Myanmar*, Reading Myanmar Language vol.8, p. 1 - 2.

Next, with regard to goodwill, the Commentator highlights the Pāli term *kusalassa upasampadā* and provides the following explanation: “*Upasampadāti abhinikkhamanato paṭṭhāya yāva arahattamaggā kusalassa uppādanañceva uppāditassa ca bhāvanā*.”⁴⁴

The Pāli term *upasampadā* in this context refers to the arising and development of goodwill, starting from renouncing the householder life and progressing toward the Path of Arahant. In terms of renunciation, virtue serves as the foundation of the entire Noble Eightfold Path and the threefold practice - morality, concentration, and insight wisdom. Whoever undertakes precepts should practice *yoniso manasikāra* (wise attention) while engaging in bodily, verbal, and mental activities. Monks, in particular, are encouraged to cultivate the fourfold reflection when wearing robes, receiving alms food, using shelter, and taking medicine. For instance: Wearing robes (*paṭisaṅkhā yoniso cīvaraṃ paṭisevāmi*): Reflecting wisely, “I wear this robe not for vanity, but to protect myself from cold, heat, insects, wind, and sun, to cover my modesty, and out of moral shame.” Receiving alms food (*paṭisaṅkhā yoniso piṇḍapataṃ paṭisevāmi*): Reflecting wisely, “I eat not for indulgence or pride, but merely to sustain this body, alleviate hunger, and support the practice of the holy life. Thus, I avoid excessive craving and maintain good health.” Using shelter (*paṭisaṅkhā yoniso senāsanaṃ paṭisevāmi*): Reflecting wisely, “I use this shelter not for luxury, but to protect myself from harsh weather and distractions, allowing me to cultivate solitude.” Taking medicine (*paṭisaṅkhā yoniso gilānapaccaya bhesajjaparikāraṃ paṭisevāmi*): Reflecting wisely, “I take medicine solely to relieve illness and maintain well-being, not for indulgence or attachment.” By consistently practicing these reflections, one cultivates humility, eliminates pride, and strengthens wise conduct. Thus, maintaining virtue not only improves future rebirths but also serves as a prerequisite for true detachment.

The Buddha instructed his monk disciples on both the actions that should be undertaken and those that should be avoided. His admonitions are significant, as they bring immediate and future consequences. Engaging in demeritorious actions inevitably leads to rebirth in an unhappy state, both in this life and beyond. Regarding the act of killing, the Buddhist Monastic Code states that a monk commits an offense only if all five criteria are met: The object is a living being. The monk perceives it as a living being. There is an intention to kill. There is an effort made to kill. The being dies as a result. A well-known example is the case of Venerable Udāyi, an archer from Sāvattthī, who took the lives of crows by cutting off their heads and placing them in a row on a stake.⁴⁵ It is important to note that if any one of these five criteria is not fulfilled, the monk does not commit a full offense. However, he is still guilty of *dukkata* (wrong action). For example: A monk unintentionally steps on ants while walking. A monk, motivated by anger, throws a stone at a cobra's head but

⁴⁴ *Dhp* 183.

⁴⁵ *sappānakavagga sañcicca sikkhāpada*.

misses, so the cobra remains unharmed. Beyond these five criteria, the training rule also highlights six types of effort involved in the act of killing: Killing with one's own hand or body parts that come into contact with a weapon. Throwing an object without direct contact with a weapon. Commanding or ordering someone else to kill. Setting up an immovable trap, such as a net or snare. Using magical formulas, such as black magic, mantras, or voodoo. Killing through the use of psychic power.

The Commentator *Samantapāsādikā* explicitly states that when the mind is driven by unwholesome consciousness—motivated by greed, hatred, and delusion—certain rules may be broken.⁴⁶ However, such an act is considered less blameworthy because it arises from a wholesome motivation and does not generate new karmic consequences. This teaching is not limited to Buddhist monks but also applies to lay practitioners who observe the basic moral precepts. The first precept, in particular, prohibits harming living beings—whether by hand, stick, weapon, poison, or other means. Immoral habits tend to be self-perpetuating, manifesting as mental factors accompanying unwholesome states of consciousness. For example: A monk orders someone to perform an abortion on an unwanted fetus. A monk encourages or guides someone toward committing suicide. Both acts demonstrate a clear intention to destroy life and, according to *Samantapāsādikā*, constitute the third *pārājika* offense, resulting in expulsion from the monastic order.

According to the Buddhist Monastic Code, harming living being's states that whether the doer kills a tiny or giant creature, there are no such kinds of offences. The *Vinaya* is more concerned with behavior rather than states of mind. On the other hand, the Theravāda *Abhidhamma* point of view mentions that to cut off the life faculty involves both mind and intention. The use of effort is dependent on the size of the object. The greater the effort, the more unwholesome consciousness accumulates in the cognitive process.⁴⁷ Therefore, the killer who is near the deathbed, the final decision for him to be reborn in the next destination can be seen upon a dream, because his intention to kill is accompanied by only painful feeling and has its unwholesome roots: hate and delusion. Another illustration, viz. if a hunter had shot a poisonous arrow at the enemy and then that enemy near his deathbed practiced the insight, attained the *Arahantship*, and passed away. Hence, this incident is included in the *pañcānantariya kamma*,⁴⁸ the hunter commits the heaviest karma,

⁴⁶ For instance, an Arahant, whose intentions are entirely pure and guided by non-attachment, loving-kindness, and wisdom, may break a training rule.

⁴⁷ “*Vadhakacetanā pāṇātipāto. So guṇavirahitesu tiracchānagatādisu pāṇesu khuddake pāṇe appasāvajjo, mahāsarīre mahāsāvajjo, kasmā? Payigamahantatāya. Payigasamattepi vatthumahantatāya. Gunavantesu manussādisu appagūṇe pāṇe appasāvajjo, mahāgūṇe mahāsāvajjo. Sarīraguṇānaṃ pana samabhāve sati kesānaṃ upakkamanānañca mudutāya appasāvajjo, tibbatāya mahāsāvajjoti veditabbo.*”

⁴⁸ Kheminda. (2021). *Manual Abhidhamma Kesadaran* (ed-3). Jakarta: Yayasan Dhammavihāri Buddhist Studies, p.64 - 65 – *Pañcānantariya Kamma* consists of 1) killing

which causes him to be immediately reborn in the Āvīci hell after death. The Commentary also explains that although a man kills by reciting mantras or commands someone to kill, this effort is done by bodily door (*kāyadvāra*). Similar to causing a *Saṅgha* schism, although the monk did not do it by himself, he ordered someone; this effort is done by verbal door (*vacīdvāra*). The sure result of committing *pañcānantariya kamma* is to be reborn in the Āvīci hell for one kappa.⁴⁹

Now, the readers know that this present life is not the first existence of a being. Because of one's own volition (*cetanā*), each being has a different destination, where the rebirth-linking consciousness is accompanied by either a wholesome or unwholesome result. Volition continues to exist because the doer has been accumulating wholesome and unwholesome consciousness throughout countless past existences. In line with wholesome consciousness in the present life, the Buddha declares as follows: "*Titṭhante nibbuta cāpi, same citte samaṃ phalaṃ. Cetopañidhihetu hi, sattā gacchanti suggatinti.*"⁵⁰

The evidence in the *Vimānavatthu* states that if one's mind remains the same towards the Buddha, whether he was alive or after his passing, the result is the same. This is true, because through aspiration, all living beings move towards a happier state. This means that whoever has always cherished performing such merits in past existences—such as paying homage to the Buddha statue by offering food, water, garlands, and light on the altar—their past wholesome habits will follow them and continue in this present existence. In the same way, if one's attitude towards crime remains unchanged across past existences, the result is the same. Whoever committed demerits in past existences, such as unlawfully acquiring property, will be dragged by the evil result into the four lowest woeful states. No excuse can change the fact that even if a sinner aspires to reach a happier state, as long as his sins obstruct the fruition of wholesome deeds, he will suffer in unhappy states. As the researcher wrote earlier, the law of causality is fair and never delivers results to the wrong recipient, as seen in the case of the minister who was reborn as a hungry ghost in daylight and became a deity at night. The reason he was a hungry ghost in daylight was that he took illegal property from clients during the day, and the reason he became a deity at night was that he paid homage to the Buddha by observing the eight precepts at night.

By understanding the above real evidence, we can see why the Tathāgata instructs and advises Buddhist devotees not to harm others through any means. He fully comprehends the workings of karma in the past, present, and future. To further elaborate on His noble message, the Commentator Sammohavinodanī explains two key terms: *sampatti* and *vipatti*. *Sampatti*

matricide, 2) killing patricide, 3) killing an Arahant, 4) injuring the body of the Tathāgata, and 5) Causing a schism in the *Saṅgha*.

⁴⁹ One kappa is equal to the duration from the beginning of a new universe until its apocalypse.

⁵⁰ *Vim.* 806.

refers to success, while *vipatti* refers to failure. The function of success is to hinder the effects of past demerits, whereas the function of failure is to nourish the effects of past merits.⁵¹ Every deed has the potential to produce results. However, Abhidhamma learners understand that the effects of karma do not always manifest if the karma has expired (*ahosi*). For example, if an Arahant committed demeritorious actions in past existences, those karmic effects (*kamma*) become *ahosi* and no longer bear fruit. This understanding is of utmost importance for readers, as it encourages the cultivation of merits to generate wholesome results while avoiding demerits to prevent unwholesome consequences.

With respect to the *Cūḷakammavibhaṅga Sutta*, it discusses seven pairs of contrasting human qualities, showing how individuals experience the present fruits of merits and demerits. These pairs are: short-lived and long-lived, sickly and healthy, ugly and beautiful, uninfluential and influential, poor and wealthy, low-born and high-born, dull and wise.⁵² These seven pairs are explained through different types of wholesome actions (*kusala-kamma*). In terms of *kusala-kāyakamma* (wholesome bodily actions), a person who abstains from destroying life, refrains from killing, and lays aside weapons—living gently and kindly—will be reborn as a long-lived being. Regarding *kusala-vacikamma* (wholesome verbal actions), a person who is not angry or irritable, even when slightly criticized, and does not display anger, hatred, or bitterness, will be reborn in a happy destination. If reborn as a human, such a person will be beautiful or handsome. Concerning *kusala-mano-kamma* (wholesome mental actions), one who sincerely wishes for the happiness and liberation of all beings generates positive karma. Rejoicing in others' merit by verbally saying *Sādhu!* allows the departed ones reborn in the *peta* realm to partake in the merits of their relatives. Therefore, saying *Sādhu!* is itself an act of performing a good deed.

The researcher has previously analyzed the Buddha's admonitions in earlier sub-topics, such as avoiding abuse, refraining from harm, and practicing restraint based on fundamental instructions—expressed in Pāli as “*anūpavādo anūpaghāto, pātimokkhe ca saṃvaro*”. Being content with what one has is difficult for those who lack the correct attitude of mind. Whether one is a recluse or a layperson, leading a higher life in its entirety requires great effort, transforming false perceptions into the necessary mindset for any given situation. Material possessions should be used without attachment and with wise reflection. The Buddha states in the *Anuruddha Sutta* that the *dhamma* is for those who are modest, not for those who seek self-aggrandizement.⁵³

The final section of this paper will continue to present the last

⁵¹ *Abh. A. II*: “Cattāri sampatti are gatisampatti, upadhisampatti, kālasampatti and payogasampatti. Cattāri vipatti are gativipatti, upadhivipatti, kālavipatti and payogavipatti.”

⁵² Nāṇamoli and Bodhi. (1995). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 1053.

⁵³ AN 8.30: *Anūpavādo anūpaghāto, pātimokkhe ca saṃvaro. Mattaññutā ca bhattasmiṃ, pantañca sayanāsaṃ. Adhicitte ca āyogo, etaṃ buddhāna sāsana'nti.*

admonishment: “*Mattaññutā ca bhattasmiṃ, / pantaṇca sayanāsanam. / Adhicitte ca āyogo, / etaṃ buddhāna sāsana’nti.*”⁵⁴

4.1. In taking food moderately

The Pāli phrase *mattaññutā ca bhattasmiṃ* is translated as ‘taking food moderately.’ Monks should understand why the Buddha considered taking food without moderation a transgression, which is classified under the fifth rule of defeat (*pañcama pārājika*).⁵⁵ This is because failing to reflect on food leads to attachment. Furthermore, the Buddha explains the consequences of lacking moderation in eating: (1) craving for tastes arises at the tongue door, which is the same craving that arises at all five sense doors; (2) lust for all five cords of sensual pleasure can arise even from a single bowl of food, as food stimulates desire through all five senses; and (3) nutriment serves as the root for all five types of sensual lust, since sensual desire thrives when people are well-fed. With moderation in food, both monks and lay devotees remain healthy, perform their duties efficiently, detach themselves from taste, and avoid becoming slothful—just like in the case of King Pasenadi of Kosala.⁵⁶ As shown in Table 2 below, a monk who is consummate in virtue, guards the doors to his sense faculties, practices moderation in eating, and is devoted to wakefulness.

Table 2. The purpose of taking food⁵⁷

Not for the purpose		For the purpose of alms	
1	Not for amusement	1	For the endurance and continuance
2	Not for intoxicants	2	For the ending of discomfort
3	Not for smartening	3	For assisting the life of purity
4	Not for embellishment	4	For stopping old feelings of hunger
5	Not for arousing a new feeling by immoderate eating	5	For being healthy
		6	For being blameless and living in comfort

The purpose of permitting the remaining three requisites is the same as that of taking food. The Buddha teaches the Dhamma not merely for the restraint of mental influxes here and now but also for their prevention in the next life. It is stated thus: “I do not permit this robe for all of you thinking that you will abide in pride and conceit after wearing such a robe. In fact, I permit the robe

⁵⁴ *Dhp.* 185.

⁵⁵ S. A. I.95, *Puttamaṃsūpamasuttaṃ*.

⁵⁶ *Dhp.* A. 204.

⁵⁷ A. I. 348, *Parihānīyasuttaṃ*.

for all of you thinking that you will wear the robe and it will protect the things such as hot and cold, after that, you will attend on wisely the duties of a monk in happiness.”⁵⁸

The Commentary states that there are four types of persons with fewness of desires.⁵⁹ A monk who, being modest, does not want his modesty to be known – such as receiving and using the four requisites moderately is called *paccaya appiccha*. Venerable Sāriputta, the foremost disciple of the Buddha, practiced the *dhūtaṅga sīla* in a way that remained unnoticed; he is called *dhūtaṅga appiccha*. A *Tipiṭakadhara* who does not display his intellectual abilities before the king,⁶⁰ is known as *pariyatti appiccha*. An *Anāgāmi-Magga* person who does not speak about his attainment to his disciples⁶¹, is called *adhigama appiccha*.

There is a saying that human beings cannot limit the world, but the way to establish limits begins at home. Reflecting on the limitations of consumerism helps foster a globally sustainable lifestyle that embraces moderation and respect for our shared home. In reference to *Upananda Sākyaputta Thera*, who was a very eloquent preacher, he often advised others not to be greedy and to have few wants. However, he did not practice what he preached and took for himself all the robes and other requisites given by donors. Thus, the Buddha declared, “One who teaches others should first teach himself and act as he has taught.”⁶² Apart from moderation in behavior, sustainable speech is also significant.

Simplicity as an achievement is not experienced only by the monks but also by lay disciples. Once, the Buddha mentioned to some monks that his lay disciple Hatthaka possessed seven wonderful and marvelous qualities: faith, virtue, propriety, self-respect, learning, generosity, and wisdom. He was genuinely modest and did not want his good qualities to be known to others.⁶³ For those who embrace minimalism, there are many advantages, such as saving money, promoting environmental protection, reducing environmental degradation, helping mitigate environmental crises, combating climate change, maintaining ecological balance, and solving ecological crises.

4.2. To dwell in a secluded place

Actually, the real enemy of a being is none other than mental defilements. Thus, the next instruction, *pantaṅca sayanāsanam*, highlights the Buddha’s strong recommendation for his disciples to practice self-cultivation in secluded

⁵⁸ *Pāsādikasuttaṃ vaṇṇanā*. “*Idaṃ vuttaṃ hoti, yaṃ vo mayā cīvaraṃ anuññātaṃ, taṃ pārūpitvā dappam vā mānaṃ vā kurumānā viharissathāti na anuññātaṃ, taṃ pana pārūpitvā sītappaṭighātādīni katvā sukhaṃ samaṇa dhammaṃ yoniso manasikāraṃ karissathāti anuññātaṃ. Yathā ca cīvaraṃ, evaṃ piṇḍapātādayopi.*”

⁵⁹ (1) *paccaya appiccha*, (2) *dhūtaṅga appiccha*, (3) *pariyatti appiccha*, and (4) *adhigama appiccha*.

⁶⁰ A. I. 51 - 52.

⁶¹ Ibid. 218.

⁶² Ibid. 158.

⁶³ A. IV. 218.

places. The phrase in a secluded place refers to dwelling neither too far nor too near the village, ensuring that monks can conveniently go for alms rounds. In contrast, the *Pāli* term *pavivitta* also means self-seclusion. There are three classifications of complete self-seclusion: bodily seclusion (*kāya-viveka*) – the physical detachment from sense objects, such as staying in an isolated place or avoiding group living in all behaviors and conditions; mental seclusion (*citta-viveka*) – the inner detachment from hindrances, often achieved through deep meditative absorption (*Samāpatti*); and detachment from craving (*upari-viveka*) – the ultimate liberation from all cravings, which is the attainment of *Nibbāna*.

To continue this discussion, the researcher asserts the importance of contemplating loathsomeness. Among the four types of nutriment,⁶⁴ only physical nutriment is considered in the contemplation of foulness to overcome attachment. But how does the practitioner contemplate the food of volition? No one would willingly fall into a pit of live coals, as it brings nothing but suffering. Similarly, mental volition propels beings into new existences, where they inevitably experience suffering. Therefore, mental volition should be regarded as a pit of live coals. By meditating in this way, the practitioner gains insight and understanding, which dispels misperceptions about the food of volition. When this understanding is attained, the three kinds of craving are eradicated. These three types of craving are fully understood because craving is the root of mental volition. Here too, the teaching extends to the attainment of Arahantship through the proper understanding of mental volition.

In line with the incident of a couple who ate their child's flesh, the Buddha emphasizes that the flesh of the dead child should be eaten by the parents without any attachment or desire. They should eat it without greed, without pickiness, without gorging themselves, without selfishness, without delusion about what they are eating, without longing to eat such food again, without keeping it, without pride, without looking down at the donor, and without quarrelling.⁶⁵

Having fully understood the methods of contemplation⁶⁶ – one who develops the perception of foulness should go into seclusion and review it in ten ways: going, seeking, using, secretion, receptacle, the undigested state, the digested state, the fruit, the outflow, and the smearing. His mind retreats, reels, and disclaims attachment. He nourishes himself with food without conceit

⁶⁴ Nāṇamoli. (2011). *The Path of Purification*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 337-38 – The four kinds of nutriment are 1) physical nutriment (*kabaḷikārāhāra*), 2) contact as nutriment (*phassāhāra*), 3) mental volition as nutriment (*manosañcetanāhāra*) and 4) consciousness as nutriment (*viññāṇāhāra*).

⁶⁵ PMS.

⁶⁶ There are three methods of contemplating on food: (1) contemplation on food through wise reflection (*paccavakkhaṇa*) or moderation in taking food (*bhojanesu mattaññutā*), (2) contemplation on food through the perception of loathsomeness (*āhārepaṭikkūlabhāvanā*) and (3) contemplation on food through the analysis of elements (*dhātuvaṇṇanā*).

in order to overcome suffering. In the end, there are seven advantages to developing an understanding of nutriment: the mind retreats from craving for flavors; he nourishes himself with food without vanity, solely for the purpose of crossing over suffering; the greed for the five cords of sense desire is fully understood without difficulty; he gains a full understanding of the aggregate of materiality; the development of mindfulness focused on the body reaches perfection; he has entered upon a path that aligns with the perception of foulness; he is at least bound for a happy destiny.

4.3. To higher concentration

The Pāli phrase *adhicittē ca āyogo* is the final admonishment and represents the highest achievement of all the Enlightened Ones: the attainment of nibbāna. Buddhism presents two kinds of knowledge for self-cultivation: tranquility knowledge and insight knowledge. Tranquility, or *samatha bhāvanā*, is the mundane achievement, while insight, or *vipassanā bhāvanā*, is the *supramundane* achievement. On one hand, the first kind of knowledge consists of eight types of attainment: four basic material absorptions and four higher immaterial absorptions. The mundane achievement includes the development of supernormal powers through forty objects of contemplation, which serves as the final goal. However, this knowledge cannot halt death. Though it is merely a mundane skill, it forms the necessary foundation for transcending it. On the other hand, the second kind of knowledge involves seeing mind and matter in various ways, understanding their three characteristics—impermanence, suffering, and not-self—through sixteen phases of insight wisdom.

Regarding the trio characteristics of the world, the characteristics of impermanence and suffering can be contemplated both within and outside of the Buddha's teachings. However, the characteristic of not-self (*anatta lakkhaṇa*) can only be contemplated within the Buddha's teachings.⁶⁷ Thus, the Buddha shows the sixteen phases that complete the course of *vipassanā bhāvanā* to prove that the term 'being' is merely a label or conventional truth, and the world is not-self. When the contemplation of not-self is strong, firm, and pure in the mind of the meditator, the contemplation of the two remaining characteristics—impermanence (*aniccānupassanā*) and suffering (*dukkhānupassanā*) will follow in the same process as the contemplation of not-self.⁶⁸ In any case, the characteristics of impermanence and suffering belong to all beings. However, to contemplate the characteristic of not-self is unique to the Enlightened One, meaning it is difficult to comprehend for mundane beings. Therefore, when the meditator has fully completed all sixteen phases, he is deathless, achieving the supreme result. The sixteen phases of insight wisdom are outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Classification of purification and insight knowledge

⁶⁷ Abh. II. 46 - "Anicca dukkha lakkhaṇāni uppāda vā tathāgatānaṃ anuppāda vā paññāyanti. Anattalakkhaṇaṃ vinā buddhuppādā na paññāyati, buddhuppādeyyo puññāyati".

⁶⁸ Vsm-T. II. 416.

7 Kinds of Purification		16 Phases of Vipassanā		Full Understanding	Training	Domain
1	<i>Śīlavissuddhi</i>		--	--	<i>Śīla</i>	Mundane
2	<i>Citta-vissuddhi</i>		--	--	<i>Citta</i>	
3	<i>Diṭṭhivissuddhi</i> = purification of view	1	<i>Nāmarūpa-pariccheda ñāṇa</i>	<u><i>Ñāta-pariññā</i></u> full understanding as the known (<i>sabhāva lakkhaṇā</i>)	<i>Paññā</i> (understanding)	
4	<i>Kaṇṭhavitāṇa-vissuddhi</i> = purification of doubt	2	<i>Paccaya-pariggaha ñāṇa</i>			
5	<i>Maggāmagga-ñāṇadassana-vissuddhi</i> = purification by knowledge and vision of the path and not the path	3 4a.	<i>Sammasana ñāṇa</i> , <i>Udayabbaya ñāṇa</i> (tender phase)	<u><i>Tīraṇa pariññā</i></u> full understanding as investigating (<i>sāmañña lakkhaṇā</i>)		
6		4b.	<i>Udayabbaya ñāṇa</i> (mature phase)			
	<i>Paṭipadā-ñāṇa-dassana-vissuddhi</i> = purification by knowledge and vision of the way.	5 6 7 8 9 10 11	<i>Bhaṅga ñāṇa</i> , <i>Bhaya ñāṇa</i> , <i>Ādinava ñāṇa</i> , <i>Nibbidā ñāṇa</i> , <i>Muñcitu-kamyatā ñāṇa</i> , <i>Paṭisaṅkhā ñāṇa</i> ,	<u><i>Pahāna pariññā</i></u> Full understanding as abandoning (<i>saṅkhata lakkhaṇā</i>)		

		12	<i>Saṅkhārupekkhā</i> <i>ñāṇa</i> , <i>Anuloma ñāṇa</i> ,		
7	<i>Ñāṇadassana-visuddhi</i>	13	<i>Gotrabhū ñāṇa</i> ,	7 contemplations that effect the abandoning of the perception of permanence, etc. starts from the <i>Bhūṅga-ñāṇa</i> .	<i>Supramundane</i>
		14	<i>Magga ñāṇa</i> ,		
		15	<i>Phala ñāṇa</i> ,		
		16	<i>Paccavakkhaṇā</i> <i>ñāṇa</i> .		

Next, to clarify the Mundane Full Understanding from the 1st phase to the 12th phase of *vipassanāñāṇa* in Table 3, *Ācariya* Buddhaghosa compares it to the simile of a fisherman catching a water snake in the water. In this analogy:

Grasping the snake under the water, the fisherman was happy, thinking it to be a big fish. This is similar to the meditator feeling glad at the outset when he discovers his body and person. When the fisherman saw the three stripes on the neck of the snake, it is like the moment when the meditator, after breaking the compactness of *nāmarūpa*, sees the three characteristics of formations. The arising of fear in the mind of the fisherman, upon realizing the snake is a water cobra, is similar to the time when the meditator sees all formations as a source of terror, due to the arising of *bhayatupaṭṭhāna ñāṇa* within him. The fisherman seeing the fault and dangerous nature of the snake is like the meditator perceiving the fault and unsatisfactory nature of the formations when he attains *ādinavānupassanā ñāṇa*. The fisherman’s unhappiness and sense of boredom upon realizing the snake’s danger is like the arising of *nibbidānupassanā ñāṇa* in the meditator, where he feels disenchanted with formations. The fisherman’s desire to escape the danger of the poisonous snake is similar to the arising of *muñcitukamyatā ñāṇa* in the meditator, when he desires deliverance from all formations. Finally, the fisherman’s action to free himself from the danger of the water cobra is similar to the meditator’s exertion to free himself from the dangers of formations, marked by the arising of *paṭisaṅkhānupassanā ñāṇa*.⁶⁹

4.4. Advantages of insight knowledge

The aim of the Buddha in teaching insight knowledge is the destruction of all taints.⁷⁰ The meditator also enjoys the benefits of seeing the world through the lens of the three characteristics, such as:

The benefit that he will become a person free from craving (*taṇhā*) and

⁶⁹ Nāṇamoli. (2011). *The Path of Purification*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p.680.

⁷⁰ S. III. 256: “*Idāni nesaṃ āsavakkhaya dhammaṃ desessāmi.*”

wrong view (*diṭṭhi*) in the world. The benefit that the self-view arising from wrong view will be destroyed in him. The benefit that the self-view arising from craving will be destroyed. The benefit that he will possess knowledge that is separate from that of ordinary persons (*puthujjana*). The benefit that he will see causes clearly. The benefit that he will see the effects arising from those causes.⁷¹

When the concentration of the meditator matures, allowing him to clearly perceive mind and matter in various ways through the three characteristics, he is soon able to resolve his own mental issues, as demonstrated in the following Table 4.

Table 4. Three Pairs of Healing

Contemplation of characteristic	Mental proliferation
Impermanence	Conceit
Pain	Craving to properties
Not-self	Misconception of the world

Other benefits of contemplating conditioned things (*saṅkhata dhamma*) through the lens of impermanence, suffering, and not-self are as follows:⁷² To be endowed with *supramundane* wisdom. To reach the Path (*niyāma magga*). To attain the Fruition of Stream Entry (*sotāpatti*). To attain the Fruition of Once-Returner (*sakadāgāmi*). To attain the Fruition of Non-Returner (*anāgāmi*). To attain the Fruition of the Enlightened One (*arahatta*).

Moreover, when the meditator is endowed with *supramundane* wisdom, which allows him to firmly stand on the fourfold Path and Fruition (see Table 3 - the last four phases in the sixteen phases of *vipassanā*), he realizes the Four Noble Truths. In addition, his mundane status is elevated to that of a *supramundane* being, and he is called Ariya. The Four Noble Truths are briefly presented in the following Table 5.

Table 5. The Four Noble Truths

	1 st NT	2 nd NT	3 rd NT	4 th NT
<i>Saccañāṇa</i>	This is <i>dukkha</i>	This is the cause of <i>dukkha</i>	This is the end of <i>dukkha</i>	This is the path leading to the end of <i>dukkha</i>
<i>Kiccañāṇa</i>	Must be fully comprehended	Must be abandoned	Must be realized	Must be cultivated

⁷¹ A.VI. 386. *Atammayasuttaṃ*.

⁷² Ibid. p. 384 - 385.

<i>Katañña</i>	Having fully understood	Having removed	Having attained	Having developed
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The unwholesome state committed by a bhikkhu is dispelled by the good deeds associated with the Fruition of Arahant. The power of mindfulness, seeing the world of the five aggregates as they truly are with right wisdom, leads to disgust. Disgust leads to dispassion, dispassion leads to liberation, and liberation leads to complete peace of mind. This complete peace of mind is the final goal of the Noblest practice. Just as the moon, free from dark clouds, shines upon the world, so too does that bhikkhu illuminate the world of aggregates. The devas and brahmas are dear to those wise ones who are mindful, who realize the Four Noble Truths, and who practice both tranquility and insight. They take delight in the peace of liberation from all sensual pleasures and moral defilements.

Up to the last line of admonishment, the Buddha continuously alerts all of mankind, saying, “If a person knows that they are dear to themselves, just as one is well protected, so too should one protect oneself.” The Buddha then continues with the following verse: “*Tiṇṇaṃ aññataraṃ yāmaṃ, paṭijaggeyya paṇḍito’ti.*”⁷³

In the above context, among the three watches of life, the wise should look after themselves during a particular watch of life. The Commentary then divides this into two agents. They are:

The first agent is a layperson. If a layperson is able, they should do as many meritorious deeds as their strength allows, such as giving charity, practicing morality, etc. This is right. If a layperson is unable to do good deeds in their youth because they are engaged in amusements, they should be mindful and perform good deeds in middle age. If a layperson is unable to do good deeds in middle age due to responsibilities, such as caring for their children and spouse, they should certainly make efforts to perform good deeds in their later years. On the contrary, one is not dear to oneself if they do not perform any good deeds; in doing so, they only bring themselves closer to hell. The second agent is a recluse. If a recluse becomes negligent by focusing only on recitations during their early years, they should, with mindfulness, practice *vipassanā* meditation in middle age, alongside other duties such as teaching and reflection. If, in their early years, a recluse has already studied the commentary of the Pāli Canon and made decisions or judgments based on the knowledge learned, they should continue reflecting on it, discerning its reasons and implications. However, if a recluse becomes negligent in middle age by questioning the commentary of the Pāli Canon without mindfulness or proper reasoning, they should surely practice *vipassanā* meditation in their later years. If a recluse does not follow this approach, they are not dear to themselves and will torment themselves with regret in the future.⁷⁴

⁷³ *Dhp* 157.

⁷⁴ *Dhp* 157.

V. CONCLUSION

After all the clarifications of the admonishments of all the Buddhas, the researcher concludes that a Buddhist disciple, at least one born into Buddhism, should listen to the Buddha's teachings. They should then reflect on the *Dhamma* that has just been heard, ask questions about the *Dhamma* to spiritual mentors, and engage in discussions with them. Next, they should investigate the meaning of the teachings and write down the knowledge of the words. After that, they should apply the teachings in daily life to address individual mental issues. The final responsibility is to bear in mind what should be cultivated and what should be avoided. Through these learning practices, the condition of Buddhist fellowship is free from ignorance, shamelessness, and fearlessness toward wrongdoing. These practices can transform negative emotional qualities into spiritual ones. This is why the teachings of all Buddhas always emphasize 'ignorance' as the precursor to the arising of unwholesome states in the bodily, verbal, and mental realms.

Another significant point is attention: "*Ayoniso manasikāra padaṭṭhānaṃ akusalaṃ; Yoniso manasikāra padaṭṭhānaṃ kusalaṃ*" – unwise attention is the proximate cause of wrong actions, while wise attention is the proximate cause of right actions. One of the best lessons of the Buddhas is that we can learn how to live in peace. To live in peace, we must understand and differentiate between what is out of our control and what is under our control. Things that are out of our control include the past, the future, the results, the opinions of others, and others' thoughts about us. Meanwhile, things that are under our control include speech, emotions, feedback, attention, and the way we treat others. At this point, Frank Outlaw offers the following quote: "Watch your thoughts, they become words. Watch your words, they become actions. Watch your actions, they become habits. Watch your habits, they become character. Watch your character, they become your destiny."⁷⁵

To maintain an honorable duty, the Buddha lists *saddhā* (faith) in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the *Saṅgha* as the first step to secure disciples on the right path in accordance with the Dhamma. Among the authentic Buddhist scriptures, there is no greater happiness than that attained by the Buddhas, Paccekabuddhas, and the Noblest disciples who have eradicated all mental defilements. Therefore, in paying gratitude to our Lord Masters, we, as Buddhist disciples, should diligently practice the teachings, which are perfect in the beginning, middle, and end, by protecting morality, practicing wise attention through fourfold reflection, and detaching from mental defilements through higher concentration. The Buddhas have never taught their followers to commit sins, as these only lead to suffering in this life and the next. In contrast, the Buddhas share knowledge with all beings at three levels of right view: basic, intermediate, and advanced. The basic level involves believing in karma and its results. The intermediate level, for mundane beings, involves a thorough understanding of insight knowledge. The advanced level, for

⁷⁵ Frank Outlaw, available at: <https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/13466663>.

supramundane beings, is to see the Four Noble Truths (see table 5) through the last four phases of *vipassanāñāṇa*, which are deathless, free from all suffering, and lead to a life of joy and happiness as nourishment.

To conclude this paper, the researcher presents the precious message that is always kept in our hearts: “*Appamādena bhikkhave sampādettha; Buddhuppādo dullabho lokasmiṃ, manussabhāvo dullabho, dullabhā saddhāsampatti, pabbajitabhāvo dullabho, saddhammassavanam dullabham. Evaṃ divase divase ovadi.*” This instruction is the final speech of the Buddha Gotama before his passing, given to his monk disciples, urging them to strive diligently for the final achievement. The appearance of the Buddha in the world is rare, being reborn as a human is rare, fulfilling faith is rare, becoming a recluse is rare, and listening to the *dhmma* is rare. Therefore, while performing the purification of morality (*saṃvara parisuddhi sīla*) and other *Saṅgha* duties, the monk should reflect and motivate himself to strive for the realization of noble Fruition, whether it is today or tomorrow, so that he does not lose the opportunity for his own benefit. Similarly, Bhikkhu Attadattha Thera, upon hearing that the Buddha would pass away within four months, developed a strong desire to realize the highest ultimate happiness. The lay devotees, too, should make an aspiration: “May we not be reborn in the four lowest woeful states by regularly performing such and such merits and abstaining from the ten demerits. May we soon attain Magga, Phala, and Nibbāna.

Abbreviations

A.	<i>Ekaka Nipāta Pali</i>
A.	<i>Duka Nipāta Pali</i>
A.	<i>Catukka Nipāta Pali</i>
A.	<i>Chakka Nipāta Pali</i>
A.	<i>Aṭṭhaka Nipāta Pali</i>
A.	<i>Dasaka Nipāta Pali</i>
D-a.	<i>Pāthikavagga Aṭṭhakathā</i>
Dhp.	<i>Dhammapada Pali</i>
Dhp-a.	<i>Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā</i>
Iti.	<i>Itivuttaka Pali</i>
M.	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
M-a.	<i>Majjhimanikāya Aṭṭhakathā</i>
S.	<i>Sagāthāvagga Saṃyutta Pali</i>
S-a.	<i>Sagāthāvagga Saṃyutta Aṭṭhakathā</i>
S-a.	<i>Khandhavagga Saṃyutta Aṭṭhakathā</i>
Sn.	<i>Suttanipāta Pali</i>
V.	<i>Mahāvagga Pali</i>
V-a.	<i>Mahāvagga Aṭṭhakathā</i>
Abh.	<i>Vibhaṅga Pali</i>

Abh-a. *Vibhaṅga Aṭṭhakathā*
Vim. *Vimanavatthu Pāli*

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT - PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE IN THE MODERN AGE

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Abstract:

This paper describes the philosophical principles underlying Buddhist compassion in action and shared responsibility for human development. These include wisdom, non-self, liberation, moral conduct, compassion, mindfulness, *dharmakāya*, and the *bodhisattva* ideal. Putting these into practice in the modern age through living Buddhist practice will be illustrated with examples from Venerable Master Hsing Yun and Thich Nhat Hanh.

Keywords: *Humanistic Buddhism, Hsing Yun, Thich Nhat Hanh, mindfulness, interbeing.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism offers a profound framework for understanding and addressing the human condition, rooted in philosophical principles that promote personal growth and collective well-being. At the heart of Buddhist teachings lies a commitment to wisdom, compassion, and the pursuit of liberation, forming a holistic path for individual transformation and societal progress. This paper explores the concept of “Buddhist Compassion in Action,” examining how core philosophical tenets such as wisdom, non-self, liberation, moral conduct, compassion, mindfulness, *dharmakāya*, and the *bodhisattva* ideal inform a shared responsibility for human development. In modern times, these timeless principles have been reinvigorated and adapted by influential Buddhist leaders such as Hsing Yun and Thich Nhat Hanh. Through their teachings and actions, they have exemplified how living Buddhism can address contemporary issues, from social inequality and environmental

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degradation to mental health and global conflict. Hsing Yun's emphasis on Humanistic Buddhism and Thich Nhat Hanh's mindfulness-based approaches demonstrate the practical application of Buddhist compassion, encouraging individuals and communities to embrace shared responsibility for human development. This paper explores the philosophical underpinnings of Buddhist compassion and its practice in the modern age. By examining the teachings and lived experiences of prominent modern practitioners, it highlights how the principles of wisdom, compassion, and mindfulness can guide humanity toward a more harmonious and equitable future.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES

2.1. Wisdom

Wisdom (*prajñā*, Sanskrit) is a core principle of Buddhism. The Buddha's quest and attainment of enlightenment exemplify wisdom. Wisdom includes an understanding and acceptance of the truth of cause and effect as embodied in the Four Noble Truths: *dukkha* ("suffering," Sanskrit: *duḥkha*), the arising of *dukkha*,¹ the cessation of *dukkha*, and the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*. The Buddha further elaborated on cause and effect in his description of dependent origination in the *Paṭicca-samuppāda-vibhaṅga Sutta*.² This is represented by the twelve links (*nidāna*) of dependent origination: (1) ignorance, (2) volitional actions, (3) consciousness, (4) name and form, (5) internal sense-bases, (6) sensory contact, (7) sensation, (8) attachment, (9) grasping, (10) becoming, (11) birth, and (12) old age and death. The twelve links form an endless cycle that traps beings in *saṃsāra*, the endless cycle of rebirth. Wisdom is embodied in the many discourses and parables of the Buddha recorded in the *suttas* of the *Pāli* Canon and the *Āgamas* of the Chinese Buddhist canon. The *Kālāma Sutta*³ recounts a conversation between the Buddha and the *Kālāmas* of Kesaputta. The *Kālāmas*, uncertain about conflicting religious teachings, seek guidance. The Buddha advises them not to blindly accept any doctrine but to test beliefs through personal experience and the wisdom of others. He emphasizes the importance of cultivating positive mental states (goodwill, compassion, appreciation, and equanimity), which lead to inner peace and well-being. Ultimately, the *sutta* promotes critical thinking and self-discovery in the pursuit of spiritual truth. It concludes with the *Kālāmas* taking refuge in the Buddha, his teachings, and the monastic community. In Mahāyāna literature, wisdom is described as either secular, worldly wisdom or

¹ Walpola Rahula and Paul Demiéville, *What the Buddha Taught*, 2nd and enlarged ed., Evergreen, E-641 (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1974), 16.

² Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Paṭicca-samuppāda-vibhaṅga Sutta: Analysis of Dependent Co-arising" (SN 12.2), trans. from the Pali, *Access to Insight* (BCBS Edition), November 30, 2013, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn12/sn12.002.than.html>.

³ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Kālāma Sutta: To the Kālāmas" (AN 3.65), *Access to Insight* (BCBS Edition), November 30, 2013, <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html>.

a deeper spiritual wisdom. The *Dhammapada*⁴ is a beloved Buddhist classic, giving many examples of worldly wisdom for the benefit of people seeking to live their everyday lives well. However, worldly wisdom is not sufficient for a deep understanding of cause and effect in a world where everything is interconnected. Worldly wisdom does not provide insight into cause and effect spanning multiple lifetimes. Only the enlightenment of a Buddha can penetrate these truths. The Mahāyāna tradition emphasizes visual imagery and visionary experiences as means of conveying deeper spiritual wisdom. For example, in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Śāntideva challenges traditional interpretations of wisdom with visual imagery describing a different kind of understanding.⁵ The *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*,⁶ also known as *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, is an early Mahāyāna Buddhist text describing the concept of *prajñāpāramitā*, perfect wisdom. Mitchell notes the apparent contradiction between the bodhisattva's compassionate actions and the ultimate emptiness of all things, including the bodhisattva, *nibbāna*, and beings themselves.⁷ The metaphysical and epistemological foundations of this concept include the ideas of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), and the two truths (conventional and ultimate). This paradox is resolved by understanding the distinction between conventional and ultimate truth, where the apparent contradiction disappears when viewed from the perspective of ultimate reality.

2.2. Non-Self

All Buddhist traditions have some concept of non-self (*anātman*, Sanskrit; *anattā*, Pāli) that challenges the fundamental assumption of an inherent self or soul that many philosophical and religious systems posit. The Buddha taught that the "self" is constructed of the five aggregates: form, sensations, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Attachment to self is a cause of suffering. One of the early arguments for the extension of the concept of non-self to all phenomena is the simile of the chariot in *The Questions of King Menander*.⁸ The monk Nāgasena asks the king how he came to the place of their meeting - by foot or by vehicle. The king replies, "By chariot." Nāgasena then asks the king, "What is the chariot? ... the axle, wheels, frame ...?" The answer is that the separate parts are not the chariot, and neither is the chariot something different from the separate parts. Non-self is a corollary to the

⁴ Max Müller, *The Dhammapada*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898, 3129.

⁵ *The Way of the Bodhisattva: A Translation of the Bodhicharyāvatāra*, (trans.) Śāntideva, Padmakara Translation Group, 2nd ed., rev. Boston: Shambhala, distributed in the United States by Random House, 2006, 137 – 161.

⁶ Edward Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary*. Four Seasons Foundation, 1973, 251.

⁷ Donald W. Mitchell, "The Paradox of Buddhist Wisdom," *Philosophy East and West* 26, no. 1. 1976: 55 – 67.

⁸ Ainslie T. Embree, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition: From the Beginning to 1800*, 2nd ed., vol. 1. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, 105 – 107.

theory of dependent origination described above. Interpenetration is a closely related concept, emphasizing that there is no separation between phenomena. Barash states that non-self is compatible with the biological principle of organism-environment interaction and interpenetration.⁹ However, Barash also notes that the concept of interpenetration implies a flaw in the simple idea of cause and effect because there are “no clear-cut boundaries among natural systems.”¹⁰ The Mādhyamika school took the concept of non-self to its logical conclusion: that no phenomenon, not even the basic elements, has a self. *Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, also known as Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way, is the definitive text of the Mādhyamika school and foundational to *Mahāyāna* philosophy. According to the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, non-self is described as empty of inherent nature, highlighting that the apparent self is nothing more than a collection of interdependent and constantly changing factors.¹¹ This gave rise to the use of the term emptiness (*śūnyatā*) to designate existence through dependent origination. However, *Nāgārjuna* also states that we cannot leave conventional truth behind. It is needed to understand the ultimate truth: “The ultimate truth is not taught independently of customary ways of talking and thinking.”¹² One of the key arguments against the existence of self is based on the observation of impermanence. All phenomena, including the body, mind, and emotions, are constantly changing and in a state of flux. To cling to the idea of a permanent, unchanging self in the face of this constant transformation is to grasp at a phantom, a delusion. The perceived “self” is not an abiding entity but a product of our mental construction, shaped by our desires and clinging to permanence.¹³

III. LIBERATION AND MORAL CONDUCT

The fourth noble truth is the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The path is the Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.¹⁴ In the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta*, Sāriputta explains that right view is accepting the Four Noble Truths, including dependent origination.¹⁵ This is also repeated in the *Mahā-Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*: And what is right view?

⁹ David P. Barash, *Buddhist Biology: Ancient Eastern Wisdom Meets Modern Western Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 29.

¹⁰ Barash (2014), *Buddhist Biology*, 86.

¹¹ Mark Siderits and Shōryū Katsura, *Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Classics of Indian Buddhism. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2013, 153 – 154.

¹² Nāgārjuna, Mark Siderits, and Shōryū Katsura, *Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Classics of Indian Buddhism. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2013, 273.

¹³ Yinshun, *An Investigation into Emptiness*, Parts One & Two. Towaco, NJ: Noble Path, 2017, 170.

¹⁴ Walpola Rahula and Paul Demiéville, *What the Buddha Taught*, 2nd and enlarged ed. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1974, 45.

¹⁵ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, “Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta: Right View” (MN 9), *Access to Insight*. BCBS Edition, November 30, 2013, <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.009.than.html>.

Knowledge with regard to stress, knowledge with regard to the origination of stress, knowledge with regard to the cessation of stress, knowledge with regard to the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called right view.¹⁶ The belief in *karma* and rebirth is central to right view¹⁷ - that one's present life is the latest in a series of countless rebirths stretching into the distant past. One's next life will be determined by one's actions (*karma*) in both this life and past lives. A person should be very thankful to be born as a human because several other alternatives are possible, including rebirth as an animal, a hungry ghost, or in hell. In fact, a birth as a human is more fortunate than birth as a *deva* because it allows for cultivation towards liberation and enlightenment. In addition to determining a future birth in a particular realm, a person's actions lead to *karmic* fruition at some point in the future.¹⁸ Besides specific actions, motives are also important. Unintentional harmful actions are less severe than intentional harmful actions, although they still may indicate carelessness. In contrast, harmful intentions will result in unfortunate *karmic* fruition even if the intentions are not executed. The Buddhist view of *karma* is in opposition to fatalism, where a person's fate is determined in advance. Also, circumstances experienced by a person are not due solely to their previous actions. Several other factors contribute to a person's circumstances.¹⁹ Therefore, a person's suffering cannot necessarily be blamed on their past actions. The wholesome or unwholesome nature of an action can be judged on three criteria: (1) motivation, (2) direct effects, and (3) contribution to spiritual development.²⁰ Unwholesome actions are characterized by greed, hatred, and delusion. The *Brahmajāla Sutta*²¹ analyzes virtue, listing certain actions that should be abandoned, including the destruction of life, taking what is not given, a lack of chastity, false speech, slander, harsh speech, idle chatter, and damaging seed and plant life. The sutta also mentions certain forms of livelihood that are not virtuous, including fortune-telling, interpreting dreams, reciting spells, and giving auspicious dates for marriages and other events. The Digest of the Four Āgamas (T.1505 四阿含暮抄解)²² by Vasubhadra explains that the Buddhist path to liberation, also translated as 'salvation,' is an ongoing journey - a process of eliminating negativity and increasing positivity in one's being. According

¹⁶ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Maha-Satipatthana Sutta: The Great Frames of Reference" (DN 22), *Access to Insight*. BCBS Edition, November 30, 2013, <https://www.accesstosight.org/ati/tipitaka/dn/dn.22.0.than.html>.

¹⁷ Harvey, P., *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 11 – 12.

¹⁸ Harvey (2011): 17 – 18.

¹⁹ Harvey (2011): 23.

²⁰ Harvey (2011): 46.

²¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Brahmajāla Sutta: The All-Embracing Net of Views" (DN 1), *Access to Insight*. BCBS Edition, November 30, 2013, <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.01.0.bodh.html>.

²² Leon Hurvitz, "The Road to Buddhist Salvation as Described by Vasubhadra," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87, no. 4, 1967: 434 – 86.

to Vasubhadra, moral conduct is the first step towards this goal. He describes moral conduct as consisting of three parts: proper speech, proper conduct, and proper livelihood. According to the Digest of the Four *Āgamas*, proper speech involves abstaining from lying, being duplicitous, speaking rudely, and speaking unnecessarily. Proper conduct includes abstaining from killing, stealing, and engaging in sexual misconduct. Proper livelihood involves begging for food and lodging, clothing, and other necessities for the monk; and for the layperson, it means abstaining from selling things like knives, poison, strong drink, meat, and living beings. Thus, moral conduct is not just about external actions; it also involves cultivating internal qualities such as honesty, kindness, and compassion. The ultimate goal is to purify one's mind and thoughts so that they no longer dwell on negativity and are guided by wisdom and compassion.

IV. COMPASSION

The Buddha taught about compassion in the *Mettā Sutta*.²³ At the heart of this teaching is the cultivation of good intentions towards all beings. According to the Mahāyāna tradition, compassion (Sanskrit: *karuṇā*) is not only a virtue but a fundamental force driving the *bodhisattva*'s journey toward enlightenment.²⁴ The *bodhisattva* is one who, despite being destined to become a Buddha and enter the bliss of *Nirvāṇa*, chooses to delay their liberation to alleviate the suffering of others. This compassionate act of postponing personal liberation is a central aspect of Mahāyāna Buddhism. However, while compassion is crucial, it requires the support of wisdom. Compassion may motivate a *bodhisattva* to act, but wisdom is essential in discerning what truly benefits others, as the pursuit of worldly pleasures might ultimately hinder their spiritual progress. The *bodhisattva*'s compassion must be boundless, extending to all beings, regardless of their species or social status. This is exemplified in stories like the Buddha's self-sacrifice to feed a starving tigress and the vows of *bodhisattvas* to save countless beings from suffering. Also noteworthy is the Mahāyāna emphasis on universality in compassion, which states that all beings are not merely deserving objects of compassion but also possess the potential for enlightenment - even those seemingly lower on the evolutionary ladder. It should be emphasized that wisdom is key to discerning the true needs of beings rather than acting on impulse. It allows the *bodhisattva* to see beyond the illusion of individuality and grasp the interconnectedness of all things. Through this understanding, the *bodhisattva*'s compassion becomes a powerful force for transformation, moving beyond the limitations of individual self-interest and embracing the universal nature of existence. Buddhist compassion is a complex and multifaceted concept. It is a force that propels the *bodhisattva* on their path to enlightenment, transcends the boundaries of individual self-

²³ Piyadassi Thera, "Karaniya Metta Sutta: The Discourse on Loving-kindness" (Sn 1.8), trans. from the Pali, *Access to Insight*. BCBS Edition, August 29, 2012, <http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.1.08.piya.html>.

²⁴ Edward Conze, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies: Selected Essays*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968, 54 – 67.

interest, and embraces the interconnectedness of all beings. While compassion is the driving force, wisdom serves as a crucial guide, ensuring that actions are not merely driven by emotion but by a deep understanding of the true nature of reality. In their book *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*, Kaza and Kraft²⁵ find many canonical examples that inspire compassion and deep reverence for nature. Weaving together stories, wisdom, and reflections from various thinkers, their collection of canonical examples and writings from well-known modern Buddhist figures highlights the interconnectedness of all life, demonstrating how Buddhist principles can help address contemporary ecological and social challenges. One example given is a verse from “A Wish of Loving Kindness” in the *Cullavagga*, which includes this stanza: For those without feet, I have love./I have love for all with two feet./For those with four feet, I have love./I have love for all with many feet.²⁶ Kaza and Kraft’s narrative offers profound insights into how inner transformation can inspire global change. They explore how cultivating compassion, wisdom, and a balanced relationship with nature leads to both personal liberation and societal harmony. Challenging traditional notions of freedom and happiness, the book encourages a shift from material accumulation to inner fulfillment.

In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, the eighth-century Indian Buddhist scholar Śāntideva wrote: For all those ailing in the world,/all those ailing in the world,/Until their every sickness has been healed,/May I become for them/The doctor, the nurse, the medicine itself.²⁷

V. MINDFULNESS

The English word “mindfulness” translates the Sanskrit term *smṛti* (Pāli: *sati*), which appears in canonical Buddhist texts. It is primarily associated with meditation, signifying the ability to maintain continuous mental focus without distraction. Buddhaghosa defines the related term concentration (Pāli: *samādhi*) as: “The state in virtue of which consciousness and its concomitants remain evenly and rightly on a single object, undistracted and unscattered ...”²⁸ Another closely related concept is calming meditation (Pāli: *samatha*), which involves developing mental tranquility through deep absorption in the *jhānas* (Sanskrit: *dhyāna*).²⁹ *Jhānas* refer to a series of meditative states in which the mind temporarily withdraws from external sensory awareness and

²⁵ Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds., *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism*. Boston: Shambhala, 2000, p. 96.

²⁶ Andrew Olendzki, trans., “A Wish of Loving Kindness” (Cv 5.6), *Access to Insight*. BCBS Edition, November 2, 2013, <https://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/vin/cv/cv.05.06.01x.olen.html>.

²⁷ Śāntideva, *Way of the Bodhisattva*, 48.

²⁸ Buddhaghosa, Bhaddantacariya, and Bhikkhu Nanamoli. *The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga*. Pariyatti Press, 2003, 85.

²⁹ Keown. *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1992.

Mitchell, Scott A. *Buddhism in America: Global Religion, Local Contexts*. 1st ed. London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, p. 77 - 78.

becomes fully immersed in an object of meditation. In advanced stages, the process of thought itself may cease. Calming meditation contrasts with insight meditation (Sanskrit: *vipaśyanā*, Pāli: *vipassanā*), which involves analytical contemplation and the development of wisdom (*paññā*). While *samatha* fosters concentration and stillness, *vipassanā* cultivates insight into the nature of reality, particularly the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of all phenomena (*anicca, dukkha, anattā*). Mindfulness is a crucial element of the path to liberation, forming the seventh component of the Noble Eightfold Path (*sammā-sati*). It plays a pivotal role in meditation by enhancing clarity of perception and inhibiting unwholesome mental responses, such as greed, hatred, and delusion. Through mindfulness, one cultivates mental discipline by reducing distraction and fostering mastery over thought processes. Additionally, mindfulness serves as a foundation for related qualities such as circumspection or introspection. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*,³⁰ one of the most important teachings on mindfulness, outlines four areas of mindfulness training: The body (*kāyānupassanā*), Sensations (*vedanānupassanā*), Mental states (*cittānupassanā*), and Specific factors (*dhammānupassanā*). Mindfulness is also the first of the Seven Factors of Awakening (*bojjhaṅga*), essential elements for achieving enlightenment. Buddhist teachings emphasize the deep connection between morality (*sīla*) and mindfulness. Negative mental states conducive to greed, hatred, and delusion (*lobha, dosa, moha*) obstruct progress on the path to liberation. Recognizing this connection is central to Buddhist cultivation, often described as “purifying the mind.” Buddhaghosa’s Path of Purification (*Visuddhimagga*) begins with an in-depth analysis of virtue, affirming that ethical conduct is essential for developing mindfulness and wisdom.³¹ In modern psychology, mindfulness has been adapted into secular frameworks, most notably in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts. MBSR was introduced in his landmark book *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*.³² The program, originating from the Stress Reduction Clinic founded in 1979 and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society founded in 1995, has significantly influenced modern psychotherapy. Key Aspects of MBSR: Derived from Buddhist mindfulness practices; Emphasizes the therapeutic application of mindfulness rather than its Buddhist origins; Uses meditation to cultivate a specific form of present-moment awareness; Primarily used to treat stress, anxiety, and chronic pain; Inspired the development of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT); Defines mindfulness as: “Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and

³⁰ Nyanasatta, Thera. “*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*: The Foundations of Mindfulness (MN 10).” Access to Insight, December 1, 2013. <http://www.accesstinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.nysa.html>.

³¹ Buddhaghosa, *Visuddhimagga*, 5.

³² Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*, Rev. ed. Westminister: Random House Publishing Group, 2013.

non-judgmentally.” Over the past few decades, mindfulness-based practices have gained widespread acceptance in Western psychotherapy, particularly in the United States and Europe. The psychology community has adopted many terms used in Buddhist literature and has even separated mindfulness from Buddhism with the introduction of secular mindfulness. Gethin examines the evolution of mindfulness definitions, contrasting early translations emphasizing “recollection” and “memory” with more recent interpretations arising from meditation practice and mindfulness-based therapies, including MBSR and MBCT.³³ There are some key differences, particularly the emphasis on “non-judgmental” observation in modern contexts.

VI. SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is an important term in the modern study of religion. However, the modern English word “spirituality” does not have an obvious Buddhist canonical equivalent. Nevertheless, several Buddhist concepts overlap with it. The philosophy of the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism may be interpreted to be based on the concept of *dharmakāya*, a cosmic force that is the source of all existence, goodness, and love.³⁴ In this philosophy, all sentient beings are interconnected, like a vast ocean where a ripple in one part will eventually spread to the whole. Buddhists strive to help alleviate the suffering of others by taking upon themselves the burden of evil *karma*, thus promoting the well-being of all. This is done by practicing compassion, not just for oneself but for all beings, as it is a spiritual act that transcends the concept of individual *karma* and the boundaries of self. Chan (Zen) Buddhism has traditionally viewed the passing of the *dharmma* between teacher and disciple as a “special transmission, beyond words and letters.”³⁵ This concept is traced back to a story when the Buddha was teaching the assembly. On this occasion, the Buddha did not say anything. He simply held up a flower.³⁶ Everybody in the assembly was baffled, except Mahākassapa, who smiled. Thus was born the tradition of the mind-to-mind transmission of the *dharmma*. The Japanese Shingon tradition of esoteric Buddhism is also strongly spiritual. Kūkai (744–835), the founder of the Shingon school, argued that *dharmakāya* is the “reality embodiment” of Vairocana Buddha.³⁷ Kūkai was heavily influenced by nature. He wrote that nature itself is a sacred writing: “Being painted by brushes of mountains, by inks of oceans, heaven and earth and the bindings of a sutta revealing the truth.”³⁸

³³ Rupert Gethin, “On Some Definitions of Mindfulness,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 12, no. 1. 2011: 263 – 79.

³⁴ Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, “The Development of Mahayana Buddhism,” *The Monist*, 1914, 565 – 81.

³⁵ Peter D. Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*, Nachdr., Dimensions of Asian Spirituality. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007, 70.

³⁶ Hershock, *Chan Buddhism*, 76.

³⁷ William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield, *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 84.

³⁸ Edelglass and Garfield, *Buddhist Philosophy*, 85.

The Tibetan text *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation* offers a comprehensive foundation for the study and practice of Tibetan Buddhism, from the very first steps to full enlightenment.³⁹ It covers essential teachings on Buddha-nature, discovering a spiritual master, impermanence, *karma*, cultivating bodhicitta, developing the six perfections, the ten *bodhisatta bhūmis*, attaining Buddhahood, and the enlightened activities of a Buddha. Shultz presents a model of Buddhist spiritual development, drawing from Tibetan Buddhist texts, largely *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, and Western psychology.⁴⁰ The stages progress from a foundation in worldly knowledge to peak experiences and aspiration for enlightenment, then community engagement, deep psychological awareness, integrating Buddhist philosophy with personal experience, and finally, Buddhahood.

VII. THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

While early Buddhist discourses emphasized the personal journey of the Buddha to attain enlightenment, later texts introduce the idea of the *Bodhisatta* as a role model for others, embodying the ideal of compassion in action.⁴¹ This transition is illustrated by the evolution of the bodhisattva's marvelous qualities. These qualities initially presented as unique attributes of the Buddha in early Buddhist texts, such as the *Udāna*, are later seen as shared traits of all those aspiring to become Buddhas.⁴² Asaṅga's *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, or *The Stages of a Bodhisatta*, is the most comprehensive guide in the Mahāyāna tradition on the practice and training of *bodhisattas*.⁴³ It compiles the full spectrum of teachings found across the Mahāyāna suttas. A seminal text of the yogācāra school, it has been highly valued in Tibet by all historical Buddhist lineages as a key source on *bodhisatta* ethics, vows, and practices, as well as for its exposition of the ultimate goal of the *bodhisatta* path - supreme enlightenment. *Bodhicitta* is the aspiration of a *bodhisatta* to attain enlightenment. Asaṅga wrote that a *bodhisatta* should pray, "Oh, how I wish to attain unsurpassed true and complete enlightenment! May I accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings ..." Asaṅga also wrote of the need for morality, meditative concentration, and wisdom in the *bodhisatta* path.⁴⁴ The text *The Way of the Bodhisatta* (Sanskrit: *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*) by Śāntideva serves as a guide to awakening the mind of enlightenment and

³⁹ Gampopa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation: The Wish-Fulfilling Gem of the Noble Teachings*. Boston: Shambhala, 1998, p. 120.

⁴⁰ James Shultz, "Stages on the Spiritual Path: A Buddhist Perspective," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 7, no. 1 (1975): 14–28.

⁴¹ Bhikkhu Anālayo, "The Evolution of the *Bodhisattva* Concept in Early Buddhist Canonical Literature," in *The Bodhisattva Ideal: Essays on the Emergence of Mahāyāna*, ed. Bhikkhu Nyanatusita, 1st ed. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2013, 165 – 208.

⁴² Access to Insight, ed., "Udana: Exclamations," *Access to Insight*, 2013, <https://www.accesstinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/index.html>.

⁴³ Asaṅga, *The Bodhisattva Path to Unsurpassed Enlightenment: A Complete Translation of the Bodhisattvabhūmi*. Boston: Shambhala, 2016, p. 29.

⁴⁴ Asaṅga, *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, 21.

cultivating virtues such as love, compassion, generosity, and patience. This text is presented as a personal meditation in verse. It serves as inspiration to practitioners, illuminating the path of the *bodhisattas*, those who forgo individual enlightenment to dedicate themselves to the liberation of all beings, aspiring to attain Buddhahood for their benefit. The Way of the *Bodhisatta* brings together the importance of all the principles listed above in cultivating the *bodhisatta* path. It begins by praising the excellence of *bodhicitta*.⁴⁵ Śāntideva emphasizes the importance of constant mindfulness of morality through vigilant introspection, for without that, “the trainings cannot be preserved.”⁴⁶ The role of meditative concentration is also described: “with penetrative insight joined with calm abiding.”⁴⁷ Finally, the text states the importance of wisdom.

VIII. BUDDHISM IN THE MODERN AGE

Some time after modern European culture was brought to nations in South Asia and East Asia with living Buddhist traditions, the modernization of Buddhism began. One of the most visible aspects of this was the creation of a Buddhist flag.⁴⁸ Before a meeting of Buddhist leaders in Sri Lanka in 1885, there was no Buddhist flag. Now, the flag has become a symbol of Buddhism in the modern age. This is also symbolic of European ideas impacting the organization of Buddhist traditions to varying degrees. Some time after modern European culture arrived in South Asia and East Asia, Buddhism was brought to Europe and North America. Immigrants arriving in Europe and North America brought many different Buddhist traditions with them and interacted with Europeans to create new kinds of Buddhism and new ways of putting Buddhist compassion into practice. Western scholars played an important role in shaping modern Buddhist practice. They studied different branches of Buddhism side by side under the lens of comparative religion and connected received Buddhist traditions with historical people and places. Max Müller (1823–1900) studied Sanskrit literature and Indian religions, including Buddhism. Western scholars translated Sanskrit and *pāli* texts into English to make them accessible to audiences outside of India and Sri Lanka, including Buddhists from East Asia who were unable to read Sanskrit. The British archaeologist Alexander Cunningham (1814–1893) discovered Buddhist sites in India and retraced the journey of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang of the Tang dynasty, which he recounted in his book *The Ancient Geography of India: The Buddhist Period, Including the Campaigns of Alexander, and the Travels of Hwen-Thsang*.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Śāntideva, *Way of the Bodhisattva*, 31 – 36.

⁴⁶ Śāntideva, *Way of the Bodhisattva*, 61 - 76.

⁴⁷ Śāntideva, *Way of the Bodhisattva*, 109.

⁴⁸ Scott A. Mitchell, *Buddhism in America: Global Religion, Local Contexts*, 1st ed., Religious Studies. London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, 13 – 14.

⁴⁹ Cunningham, Alexander. *The Ancient Geography of India: The Buddhist Period, Including the Campaigns of Alexander, and the Travels of Hwen-Thsang*. London: Trübner & Co, 1871, p. 192.

8.1. Hsing Yun

Venerable Master Hsing Yun (1927 – 2023) was the founder of the Fo Guang Shan order of Chan Buddhism, with headquarters in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. He established a network of temples, five universities, monastic colleges, and affiliated institutions worldwide. Hsing Yun was born in Jiangdu, near Yangzhou, China, and was ordained as a youth at Qixia Monastery in the Nanjing area.⁵⁰ Hsing Yun was influenced by Venerable Master Taixu (1889–1947), who was an early force in the modernization of Chinese Buddhism.⁵¹ Taixu advocated for the active engagement of the Buddhist monastic community with the secular world. With the fall of the Nationalists in the Chinese Civil War in 1949, Hsing Yun relocated to Taiwan. Hsing Yun created a brand of Chinese Buddhism that he called humanistic Buddhism (rénjiān fójiào, 人間佛教), which he described as returning to the “core teachings” and also as the “unification of different theories and opinions.”⁵² While being centered on the core teachings of the four noble truths and noble eightfold path, shared with other branches of Buddhism, humanistic Buddhism also embraces the Chinese tradition of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. Hsing Yun emphasized volunteering with the establishment of the Buddha’s Light International Association (BLIA), not just in the service of the Fo Guang Shan community but for society at large.

8.2. Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh (1926 – 2022) was known as a Buddhist leader, a prolific author, and a key figure in engaged Buddhism. He left Vietnam after the Communist takeover and founded the Plum Village tradition in France. Plum Village advocates a form of engaged Buddhism aimed at improving lives, reducing suffering, and focusing on mindfulness. He was recognized for his advocacy for peace during the Vietnam War, including Martin Luther King Jr.’s nomination of him for the Nobel Peace Prize. After moving to France in 1966, he taught mindfulness from the perspective of the Chan tradition. He later expanded the network of monasteries and retreat centers beyond France into the United States, Australia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Hong Kong. Thich Nhat Hanh embodied Buddhist principles in his life. In his book *A Love Letter to the Earth*, he wrote, “We need to recognize that the planet and the people on it are ultimately the same.”⁵³ He introduced the West to the concept of interbeing, which embraces Buddhist spirituality and integrates it with the other Buddhist concepts discussed above. His influential book *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*⁵⁴ explores this concept in depth.

⁵⁰ Fu, Zhiying. *Bright Star, Luminous Cloud: The Life of a Simple Monk*. Translated by Robert Smitheram. Hacienda Heights, CA: Buddha’s Light Publishing, 2008, 15 - 33.

⁵¹ Fu, *Bright Star, Luminous Cloud*, 46 - 47.

⁵² Hsing Yun. *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha*. Translated by Miao Guang. Fourth English edition. Kaohsiung, Taiwan: Fo Guang Cultural Enterprise Co., Ltd, 2018, 6.

⁵³ Nhat Hanh, Thich. *A Love Letter to the Earth*. Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 2013, 8.

⁵⁴ Nhat Hanh, Thich. *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*. New Delhi:

Sieber analyzes Thich Nhat Hanh's impact on popularizing mindfulness in the West, his development of mindfulness-based interventions, and his promotion of engaged Buddhism, which integrates mindfulness with social action. Sieber's research employs a systematic review of literature to confirm the widespread influence of his work.⁵⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh founded the Order of Interbeing, a Buddhist lay community dedicated to engaged Buddhism.⁵⁶ His concept of engaged Buddhism emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings and promotes compassionate action in addressing social, political, and environmental issues. The concept of interbeing underscores the interconnectedness of all beings and is a central theme in his teachings. He taught that all things are interdependent and that our actions impact others and the environment. His teachings stress the importance of mindfulness and compassion. His approach to mindful communication, including deep listening and loving speech, highlights the interconnectedness of individuals and the importance of relationships. Sankapal examines Thich Nhat Hanh's significant contributions to the field of mindfulness, including his role in popularizing mindfulness in the West, his development of mindfulness-based interventions, and his promotion of engaged Buddhism, which integrates mindfulness with social action. His teachings, books, and retreats are central to this widespread influence.⁵⁷ Thich Nhat Hanh's concept of mindfulness centers on cultivating awareness and presence in everyday life. He emphasized being fully present in the current moment, acknowledging and embracing thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations without judgment. Key aspects of Thich Nhat Hanh's mindfulness teachings include: (1) Mindfulness in daily activities: He advocated for integrating mindfulness into ordinary tasks such as walking, eating, and communicating. This involves bringing full attention to the present moment to foster a deeper sense of presence and appreciation. (2) Mindful breathing: He encouraged individuals to focus on their breath to cultivate awareness and anchor themselves in the present moment. (3) Mindful walking: He introduced mindful walking as a practice where individuals focus on each step and their connection with the Earth. (4) Mindful eating: He emphasized savoring each bite and being fully present during meals. Thich Nhat Hanh's concept of mindfulness extends beyond formal meditation to all aspects of daily life, fostering a greater sense of presence, appreciation, and connection with the present moment. Through dedicated meditation and contemplative practices, he cultivated a heightened awareness and a profound sense of presence. This personal transformation served as the basis for his teachings, inspiring others to embark on their mindfulness journeys.

Full Circle, 2009.

⁵⁵ Alexander Sieber, "Hanh's Concept of Being Peace: The Order of Interbeing," *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 5, no. 1 (2015): 1 – 8.

⁵⁶ Sieber. "Hanh's Concept." 3 – 4.

⁵⁷ Suresh Sankapal, "Thich Nhat Hanh's Contributions to the Field of Mindfulness," *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology* 15, no. 1 (2024): 87 – 91.

IX. CONCLUSION

The principles presented in this paper function in conjunction with each other. Beginning with the foundational acceptance of the karmic law of cause and effect, the Four Noble Truths, and the recognition of non-self, morality provides the basis for a compassionate life aimed at benefiting all beings. Wisdom is essential for guiding actions, while mindfulness is necessary for the purification of the mind and the constant attention to details that shape outcomes. Buddhist spirituality provides the impetus and resolve embodied in the bodhisattva path. The bodhisattva ideal integrates all these elements into a cohesive path for Mahāyāna Buddhists to follow. By practicing these principles holistically, Buddhists cultivate compassion and embrace shared responsibility for individual transformation and the betterment of humanity. These principles were exemplified in the lives and actions of two great modern practitioners: Venerable Master Hsing Yun and Thich Nhat Hanh.

Abbreviations

AN:	<i>Aṅguttara Nikāya</i>
SN:	<i>Saṃyutta Nikāya</i>
Sn:	<i>Sutta Nipāta</i>
T:	<i>Taishō Tripitaka</i>

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: PROTECTING ANIMALS AND THE ENVIRONMENT WITH OUR DIET

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Abstract:

In this paper for the 2025 Vietnamese conference, I follow the lead of one of the most famous Vietnamese Buddhist teachers, Thich Nhat Hanh, and focus on Buddhist compassion in action and what Shakyamuni Buddha taught about compassion for all sentient beings and not eating slaughtered animals. The paper compiles previous research I have done on this subject, particularly concerning the original Buddhist *Vinaya* code for monastics on eating animals.

The first part of the paper will discuss the Buddha's teachings on this subject in both the *Theravāda/Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna* traditions. For example, how in the *Vinaya* it is forbidden for monastics to actively choose to purchase and eat animals that have been deliberately killed and are being sold for public consumption and profit. In addition, how Buddha listed butchery and hunting of animals as wrong livelihoods. Then I will discuss the *Vajrayāna* tradition and Tibetan Buddhist masters who chose to be vegetarians despite the high altitudes and lack of plant food.

The final part of the paper will consider my own experience of abandoning eating animals as a Buddhist, and the 21st century issues (not present when Buddha was alive) such as the huge environmental impact and pollution of slaughtering animals for meat en masse in terms of animals, the planet, and natural resources. Also, how in terms of Buddhist ethics, we do not only have to follow what is written down in the Buddhist Sutras, but should use our discerning intelligence and rationality to reflect on other teachings by the Buddha, such as the five precepts, and develop a sense of compassion for animals and the planet that is consistent with the Buddha's teachings on love and compassion for all beings.

Keywords: *Buddhist compassion, vegetarianism, Vinaya rules, ahimsa, meat industry, Tibetan Buddhism.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

“By eating meat we share the responsibility of climate change, the destruction of our forests, and the poisoning of our air and water. The simple act of becoming a vegetarian will make a difference in the health of our planet.”

— Thich Nhat Hanh, *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology*

“We don’t eat meat because we want to reduce the suffering of living beings. Human beings suffer, but animals also suffer. So eating vegetarian food is one of the ways to lessen the suffering of living beings. Knowing this, we don’t suffer when we refrain from eating meat. We feel wonderful when we can follow a vegetarian diet because we feel that we can cultivate more compassion, more love. Even if you are not a monk or a nun, if you eat less meat it shows your concern and love for other living beings and our planet.” - Thich Nhat Hanh (Q & A 2017)

“There are many examples of Tibetan scholars and meditation masters who taught about giving up meat and the faults of eating meat, despite the fact it was very difficult to be vegetarian in Tibet.” – 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje (2021).

One of the fundamental tenets of Buddhist vows and ethics is to abandon any deliberate (and unnecessary) killing or harming of sentient beings or encouraging others to do so. In addition, the concept of nonviolence (*ahimsā*) is a central tenet of Buddhist, Hindu, and other spiritual beliefs. Such a principle forms the basis for compassion in action.

In the 21st Century, many Buddhists generally think they are non-violent, animal-lovers, have pets and would not dream of actively harming another sentient being deliberately. Yet, many also regularly eat murdered animals daily, preferring to turn a blind eye to the cruelty and murder of highly sentient beings (no different from their pet dog or cat), and its catastrophic effect on the environment, natural resources, land and health. Also, the Buddha taught that any monastic who eats animals for desire or health reasons, is breaching the basic *Vinaya* Rules.

This paper explores some of the Buddhist teachings and rules on eating murdered animals, via the *Vinaya* in *Theravāda/Hīnayāna* traditions and great love and compassion and *bodhicitta* in *Mahāyāna* traditions, and some of the potential reasons for this seeming hypocrisy or “blind spot”.

I only consider eating slaughtered animals¹ in this paper, but am well aware that a vegan diet is considered the most compassionate one of all. I conclude that it is clear that Buddha never advocated eating slaughtered animals, and

¹ Nyangshem Gyel (2018): 134. Interestingly, one the most famous Tibetan vegetarians who wrote about the faults of eating meat, Ngorchon Kunga Zangpo uses the term “slaughtered-meat” (*bsad sha*), instead of the term “meat” (*sha*) in general, which probably indicates that Ngorchon Kunga Zangpo tolerated the consumption of *shisha* (*shi sha*), “non-slaughtered meat.”

positively recommended against it. For monastics, it is outright forbidden, except when offered for food while begging for alms, or extremely sick, and it is required for survival.

II. THE PATH OF MONASTIC DISCIPLINE (VINAYA) - EATING ANIMALS PERMITTED ONLY WHEN BEGGING FOR ALMS AND IS PURE IN THE “THREE WAYS”



There is a misconception among some Buddhists, that Buddha permitted people to eat animals due to an ancient rule allowing monastics to eat meat in certain strictly defined situations.

At the time the rule developed, it was the tradition that Buddhist monastics should go out on alms rounds (begging for food) every day and eat what donors gave them. Other than that, they should not choose which food they like better or not; or eat food that is too elaborate; or store food and so on, that was not allowed. However, it was only permitted if monastics were offered the meat while they were begging for food on their alms rounds. And even then, it had to be 100 % clear that the meat passed the three-fold purity rule that checked if it had been killed for them specifically, in one way or another, and if it had then they had to refuse it. If one asks for whom were the three ‘tests’ of purity determined? For monastics, or laypeople? It is primarily for monastics. However, there are different schools of *Vinaya*, which say even laypeople should not eat meat unless it is pure in the three ways. However, generally, in the *Vinaya* it is primarily a rule presented for monastics. Before discussing the rule and how it is interpreted in differing *Vinaya* traditions, I first consider how this rule was said to have developed. *When Buddha was served a meal of meat – a 4th Century text on the origin of the three ‘tests’ of purity, the meat rule.*²

² *The Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara-Nikāya)*, trans. F. L. Woodward, vol. IV, Pali Text Society, London, 1933 (AN 8. 12; 31. 2); *Vinaya Piṭaka*, ed. H. Oldenberg, vol. IV, Pali Text Society, London, 1881 (*Kd* 6. 31; 13. 1); *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya Piṭaka)*, trans. I. B. Horner,

According to a recent teaching in 2021 by the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje,³ supreme head of the Karma Kagyu lineage, in terms of historical sources for the background of the rule of three ‘tests’ of purity of meat, in the 4th century there was a Chinese master called Faxian (法顯).⁴ He was one of the earliest masters who went to India and wrote about his travels going there [In *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* (Foguo Ji 佛國記)]. The main reason he went there was to find complete texts on the Vinaya. When Faxian returned from China to India, he brought texts on Vinaya from different schools and also a manuscript from Sri Lanka.⁵

There was a master called Jiping, in the 5th Century, from a country called Kaspian, to the west of China, a Vinaya master called Buddhajiva (Sangye Tsho) from that region. He broke the text down into Chinese and another master, Sherab Gyenwa then translated it.⁶ This is *Five Sections of the Vinaya*⁷

vol. IV, Pali Text Society, London, 1951 (*Kd* 6. 31; 14. 4).

³ The 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje has been teaching about the importance of abandoning eating slaughtered animals since 2006. In addition, he has also spoken about the reasons he took a life-long vow not to eat meat and how eating meat gives a bad impression of Buddhism to others, see video clips here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtW2wkJCh1Y> and here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EahrhUjGl_o

⁴ According to historical sources: “Faxian (337 CE – c. 422 CE) was a Chinese Buddhist monk and translator who travelled by foot from China to India, visiting sacred Buddhist sites in Central, South and Southeast Asia between 399–412 to acquire Buddhist texts. He described his journey in his travelogue, *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* (Foguo Ji 佛國記). Other transliterations of his name include Fa-Hien and Fa-hsien. Faxian wrote a book on his travels, filled with accounts of early Buddhism, and the geography and history of numerous countries along the Silk Road as they were, at the turn of the 5th century CE. He wrote about cities like Taxila, Pataliputra, Mathura, and Kannauj in Middle India. He also wrote that inhabitants of Middle India also eat and dress like Chinese people. He declared Patliputra as a very prosperous city. He returned in 412 and settled in what is now Nanjing. In 414 he wrote (or dictated) *Foguoji* (*A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms*; also known as *Faxian’s Account*). He spent the next decade, until his death, translating the Buddhist sutra he had brought with him from India.”

⁵ It is said that Faxian obtained a Sanskrit copy of the Mahīśāsaka vinaya at Abhayagiri vihāra in Sri Lanka, c. 406 CE. The 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, Arya Kshema teachings (2021), as compiled in: Tomlin, Adele (2021) (<https://dakinitranslations.com/2021/03/15/rules-of-buddhist-conduct-vinaya-for-monastics-and-laypeople-on-eating-meat-17th-karmapa/>). and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfvUOLgINg&t=0s>

⁶ The Mahīśāsaka Vinaya was then translated into Chinese in 434 CE by Buddhajiva and Zhu Daosheng. This translation of the Mahīśāsaka Vinaya remains extant in the Chinese Buddhist canon as Taishō Tripiṭaka 1421. Daosheng (Chinese: 道生; pinyin: Dàoshēng; Wade–Giles: Tao Sheng; ca. 360–434), or Zhu Daosheng (Chinese: 竺道生; Wade–Giles: Chu Tao-sheng), was an eminent Six Dynasties era Chinese Buddhist scholar. He is known for advocating the concepts of sudden enlightenment and the universality of the Buddha nature.

⁷ The Five Part Vinaya (Pañcavargika-vinaya; 五分律; Wǔfēnlǜ; Wu-fen-lü) (T. 1421), a Chinese translation of the Mahīśāsaka version.

of the *Mahīśāsaka*⁸ Vinaya. The manuscript was then brought from Sri Lanka. It was translated by a person called Sherab Gyenma (?). The 17th Karmapa translated it into Tibetan from the Chinese, the *Five Sections on Vinaya of the Mahīśāsaka* (sa ston sde pa'i 'dul ba lung sde lnga): During his journey to Vaishali, the *Tathāgata* Buddha visited a monastery where he expounded the *Dhamma* on the banks of Monkey Lake, a region known as Mahkattarada. This place, described as a river or a lake, was referred to as the “Monkey Pond” (*Mahākattārada*). At that time, there was a general named Lion (*Siṃha*), who is also mentioned in the Tibetan Buddhist *Vinaya* scriptures. Sometimes translated as Captain Senge or General Senge, he was a high-ranking military officer who showed great respect and devotion to the *Saṅgha*. However, at a later time, General Siṃha experienced great hardship, falling into poverty with little to eat. His story is preserved in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, where it is recorded that he had been a follower of a Jain teacher. Upon hearing that the *Bhagavān* Buddha had arrived in Vaishali, he was filled with joy and longed to receive the *Dhamma*. Without hesitation, he prepared his horses and chariot and set off to meet the Buddha. From a distance, he saw the *Tathāgata*, whose body radiated like a golden mountain. Overcome with reverence, he prostrated and then sat respectfully to one side.

The Buddha then delivered profound teachings on the Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariyasaccāni*). As he listened attentively, General Siṃha experienced a deep realization, awakening the immaculate eye of the *Dhamma* (*Dhamma-cakkhu*), perceiving reality as it truly is. Filled with gratitude, he stood up and expressed his desire to offer a meal to the Buddha and the *Saṅgha*. The Buddha accepted his invitation, bringing great joy to the general. Returning home, General Siṃha instructed those who regularly purchased food for him to buy only the meat of animals that had died naturally, without being slaughtered, regardless of the cost. Throughout the night, he diligently prepared a variety of elaborate and exquisite meat dishes, ensuring that his offering was made with the utmost care and purity of intention.

When everything was prepared, General Siṃha returned to the Buddha and respectfully informed him, “The food and seats are ready. Please let me know when you will come.” In response, the Buddha, accompanied by the *saṅgha*, proceeded to the general’s house. Upon arrival, they took their seats, and General Siṃha personally served the *saṅgha* with great devotion and joy, finding deep fulfillment in the act of offering (*dāna*). At that time, a group of Jain ascetics (*Nigaṇṭha*) — who had once counted General Siṃha among their patrons — heard about his generous offering of a grand meal, including meat, to the Buddha. Overcome by envy and resentment, they wandered through the city, waving their arms in distress and lamenting in loud voices from street to street.

⁸ Mahīśāsaka (化地部; Huàdì Bù) is one of the early Buddhist schools according to some records. Its origins may go back to the dispute in the Second Buddhist council. The Dharmaguptaka sect is thought to have branched out from Mahīśāsaka sect toward the end of the 2nd or the beginning of the 1st century BCE.

They proclaimed to the public that General Siṃha had abandoned his former teacher, violated his sacred commitments (*samaya*), and had even offered meat that had been deliberately slaughtered to the Buddha, who, knowing this, still accepted it. Their accusations echoed through the streets, stirring controversy among those who listened. When the *bhikkhus* heard the commotion, hesitation arose among them, and they refrained from eating the meal. Sensing their concern, General Siṃha addressed them with clarity, affirming that the meat had not come from animals killed for the offering but from those that had died naturally. Hearing this, the Buddha reassured the *bhikkhus*, saying, “Then eat as you wish.” With his words, they sat before the Buddha and partook of the meal. Before departing, the Buddha commended General Siṃha for his meritorious act, emphasizing the virtue of generosity and the profound merit of offering to the *saṅgha*. Then, he and his disciples took their leave.⁹



Afterward, the Buddha gathered the *saṅgha* to address the concerns that had arisen and clarified the proper conduct regarding the consumption of meat. He declared: “Bhikkhus, I permit the use of meat if it has not been seen, heard, or suspected to have been killed specifically for a monk. However, you should not knowingly partake in meat that has been intentionally slaughtered for your sake.”¹⁰ With this teaching, the Buddha established a principle that would guide the *bhikkhus* in their future practice. He emphasized that when receiving alms, three conditions render meat impermissible: (1) If one has personally seen (*diṭṭha*) the animal being killed for the sake of offering, (2) If one has heard (*suta*) that the animal was slaughtered for a monk, (3) If one has reasonable suspicion (*parisaṅkā*) that the meat was obtained through intentional killing for the recipient. If none of these conditions apply, then the meat is considered allowable (*kappiya*). This teaching reflects the Buddha’s nuanced approach to ethical conduct, balancing the practical realities of receiving food as an alms-seeker with the deeper principle of non-harm (*ahiṃsā*). Rather than imposing a rigid prohibition, the Buddha guided the *bhikkhus* to cultivate discernment and ethical responsibility in their daily lives, ensuring that their sustenance did

⁹ Ibid. Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje (2021)

¹⁰ Ibid. Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje (2021).

not directly contribute to the taking of life.

The 17th Karmapa explained that monastics were supposed to accept whatever food they were offered to reduce desire and attachment to food/diet. The principle regarding meat that is *pure in three ways* — not seen, heard, or suspected to have been killed specifically for a monk — arose from both ethical and practical considerations within the socio-cultural context of ancient India. This guideline reflects the Buddha's pragmatic approach to monastic discipline (*vinaya*), ensuring that *bhikkhus* did not contribute to the intentional killing of animals while also upholding their dependence on lay supporters for sustenance. Historically, India has been home to a significant vegetarian tradition, particularly among certain religious groups. The Brahmin caste, regarded as the highest in the social hierarchy, largely adhered to vegetarianism. While some scholars argue that Brahmins may have consumed meat in earlier periods, textual evidence from *Vinaya* sources suggests that, by the time of the Buddha, many Brahmins abstained from it. Given this dietary norm, it is likely that when Buddhist monastics (*bhikkhus*) went on their daily alms rounds (*piṇḍapāta*), they rarely encountered meat offerings in regions where vegetarianism was prevalent. However, the Buddha did not limit alms-seeking to Brahmin or high-caste households. The monastics were expected to receive offerings indiscriminately, accepting food from people of all social strata, including lower-caste families, where meat consumption may have been more common. In such cases, if meat was offered and met the *threefold purity* criteria, it was considered acceptable to eat. A key ethical principle underlying alms practice is that monastics must accept whatever is given, without expressing personal preference or rejecting food based on desire. Refusing an offering could be perceived as an insult to the donor, depriving them of an opportunity to cultivate *puñña* (merit). This understanding underscores the Buddha's inclusive vision — one that transcended caste distinctions and economic disparities. Unlike ascetic traditions that imposed strict dietary restrictions, the Buddha emphasized a path of moderation (*majjhima-paṭipadā*), ensuring that the *saṅgha* remained integrated within the lay community rather than isolating themselves through rigid prohibitions. Ultimately, this approach to receiving and consuming food aligns with the foundational Buddhist teaching on *detachment* (*nekkhamma*) and *non-attachment* (*anupādāna*). The purpose of alms-seeking was not to indulge in personal preferences but to cultivate humility, contentment (*santutṭhi*), and a deep understanding of the interdependent relationship between monastics and lay supporters. By maintaining this balance, the Buddha ensured that the *bhikkhus* upheld both ethical purity and social harmony, fostering a spiritual path that was both compassionate and pragmatic.¹¹

III. CERTAIN TYPES OF MEAT NOT ALLOWED EVEN IF OFFERED?

Does this mean that any meat offered to monastics can be eaten if it is pure in the three ways? No it does not. The 17th Karmapa also taught that

¹¹ Ibid. Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje (2021).

in Tibet there is the *Vinayottaragrantha* ('ba gzhung bla ma) Vinaya texts of the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition, which mentions there are several types of meat that monastics should not eat at all. Such as the flesh of some types of birds, including owls, reptiles, and amphibians such as toads, and the meat of carnivores such as lions, tigers, and bears. Not only were you not allowed to eat those forbidden meats, but also not consume the juices and fats of those inappropriate meats. Also, raw meat was not allowed and monastics were also not allowed to eat meat specifically killed for their sake.

If it was not a forbidden meat, then first one has to examine whether it is pure in the three ways. In the same way, if you eat any meat without caring, there is a danger that you eat impure meat. So one has to think about whether it is pure in those three ways or not.

3.1. Summary of the Vinaya traditions

The 17th Karmapa cited quotations from five texts of the different Vinaya schools, most of which he translated from the Chinese. Among them, the first three are generally for the fully ordained and novice monastics. The last two citations also say that laypeople with the five lay precepts may not eat offered meat, if it is impure in the three ways.

In terms of Chinese or Tibetan Buddhism, the main sources are from the *Sarvāstivāda* tradition. The way the eighteen *Vinaya* schools developed, and their different basis, one way is from the old texts from Sri Lanka. The other way is from the texts in the Chinese tradition. These are the main texts for the development of the eighteen different schools. Most scholars explain that the two original or root schools of the *Vinaya* are the *Theravada* and the *Mahāsāṃghika* school. From those, after they had some disagreements, different ones branched off from them. The *Sarvāstivāda* tradition developed from the *Theravada* school. The Chinese tradition also comes from *Sarvāstivāda* and *Dharmaguptaka* Vinaya tradition. Their practice of the three-fold purity is stricter than other Vinaya schools. The 17th Karmapa explained: In all traditions of *Vinaya*, the consumption of meat is only permissible if it is free from impurity in the three specified ways. But what does this truly imply? Whether the meat comes from a chicken, pig, or ox, if a monastic personally witnesses its slaughter, and it is done explicitly for their sake, it is considered impure (*akusala*). Likewise, if a credible person informs them that the animal was killed for their consumption, or if they harbor reasonable suspicion that it was slaughtered for them, the meat is impure and must not be accepted. These three criteria – seen (*diṭṭha*), heard (*suta*), and suspected (*parisaṅkā*) – define the ethical boundaries of accepting meat within monastic discipline. However, applying these principles in practice is not always straightforward. The *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya* and *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* offer additional clarifications, stating that meat is permissible only if the householder providing it is not a butcher, the animal has died naturally, or the householder did not kill it specifically for the monastic. The fundamental rule is that a *bhikkhu* should not partake in meat that has been deliberately slaughtered on their behalf. Furthermore, it is prohibited for a layperson to purchase meat

that was explicitly killed for monastic consumption and then offer it as alms. Beyond this, the guidelines extend to the surroundings in which the food is obtained. If a householder keeps visible signs of slaughter — such as animal skins, fur, or hides in their residence — it raises ethical concerns, particularly if they have not renounced the act of killing. Even if the householder does not directly engage in slaughter, they may have commissioned a butcher to do so, which still constitutes an indirect violation of the ethical precepts. Additionally, the *Dasādhamma Vinaya* of the *Sarvāstivāda* school mentions that large-scale rituals and festivals often involved animal sacrifices and meat offerings. Monastics were prohibited from attending such events, as their mere presence could imply complicity in the act of slaughter. This restriction reflects the deeper ethical foundation of *ahiṃsā* - non-harming-which underlies Buddhist teachings on right livelihood and ethical consumption. By maintaining these principles, monastics cultivate purity of conduct (*sīla*) and ensure that their sustenance does not

3.2. Butchery and killing animals is listed as a wrong livelihood (*micchājīva*)

“Monks, a lay follower should not engage in five types of business. Which five? Business in weapons, business in human beings, business in meat, business in intoxicants, and business in poison...These are the five types of business that a lay follower should not engage in.” In addition, in the *Vinajja Sutta*¹², the Buddha taught that killing, hunting or butchering animals is a wrong livelihood (*micchājīva*), so it is easy to understand that buying meat from such people, and supporting their work could not be considered ethical from the Buddhist perspective either. Just as it would be unethical to hire an assassin to kill someone we do not like on our behalf, so it is wrong to buy the services of those that kill animals for eating food for pleasure.

3.3. The *Mahāyāna* Path: *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* (Chapter 8) – a handbook on why to abandon eating animals

“It is not true, *Mahāmati*, that meat is proper food and permissible for the Śrāvaka when [the animal] was not killed by himself, when he did not order others to kill it, when it was not specially meant for him.” – Shakyamuni Buddha in *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, Chapter 8. The most famous *Mahāyāna Sūtra* which details the Buddha’s teachings on eating animals, is the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*, Chapter 8 (of which there are several English translations), in which Buddha is cited as saying: (1) To those who eat [meat] there are detrimental effects, to those who do not, merits; *Mahāmati*, you should know that meat-eaters bring detrimental effects upon themselves; (2) Let the practitioner/yogi refrain from eating flesh as it is born of himself, as [the eating] involves transgression, as [flesh] is produced of semen and blood, and as [the killing of animals] causes terror to living beings....(3) For profit sentient beings are destroyed, for flesh money is paid out, they are both evil-doers and [the deed] matures in the hells called Raurava (screaming), etc.”

¹² *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2012 (AN 5. 177).

In this *Sūtra*, the Buddha cites many other reasons why Buddhist practitioners (particularly on the *Bodhisattva/ Mahāyāna*) path should not eat animals, including: (1) developing love and compassion for beings and wish to reduce any unnecessary suffering, (2) regarding all sentient beings are like our very own mothers/children, (3) its negative impact on our inner and outer health and chakras, (4) its negative impact on how we appear and smell to animals, (5) the greater likelihood of being re-born as an animal that eats animals, or is eaten by animals, or in lower existences where killing is normal.



Further, in the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, understood to be the final and definitive *Mahāyāna* teachings of the Buddha given on the eve of his death, the Buddha teaches that “the eating of meat extinguishes the seed of Great Compassion,” and that all consumption of animals – even those found already dead – is prohibited. He specifically rejects the idea that monks begging and receiving meat from a donor should eat it: “[I]t should be rejected... I say that even meat, fish, game, dried hooves, and scraps of meat left over by others constitute an infraction... I teach the harm arising from meat-eating.” The Buddha also predicts in this sutra that later monks will “hold spurious writings to be the authentic dharma,” and concoct their sutras, falsely claiming that the Buddha allows meat eating.

Also, when buying meat, we are inducing others to deliberately kill sentient beings, which is considered one of the five wrong livelihoods in Buddhist teachings¹³. Similar to the post-traumatic stress disorders of soldiers involved in military combat, studies show that people who work in slaughterhouses, often suffer serious depression and psychological trauma due to witnessing and participating in murdering sentient beings. Some studies say meat-eaters show greater levels of aggression.

¹³ “A lay follower should not engage in five types of business. Which five? Business in weapons, Business in human beings, Business in meat, Business in intoxicants, and Business in poison.” *Vanijja Sutta: Business (Wrong Livelihood) Aṅguttara Nikāya* 5.177.

IV. TIBETAN BUDDHIST MASTERS ON EATING ANIMALS



It was not only the historical Shakyamuni Buddha who advocated abandoning eating animals, many great Tibetan Buddhist masters past and present, in Tibet and exile, have strongly recommended it, despite mistaken, yet commonplace perceptions that Tibetans could not be vegetarians due to the high altitude. In his recent book, *The Faults of Meat: Tibetan Buddhist Vegetarian Writing* (2019) Geoffrey Barstow collected translations of various Tibetan Buddhist masters, such as Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen (1292 – 1361), Khedrup Jé (1385 – 1438), the eighth Karmapa, Mikyö Dorjé (1507 – 1554), Shabkar Tsokdrük Rangdröl (1781 – 1851) and Khenpo Tsultrim Lodrö (1961 –). Barstow writes that: “Vegetarianism was not only present in pre-communist Tibet; it was a significant aspect of Tibetan religious practice... Furthermore, these vegetarian lamas came from all the major Buddhist lineages in Tibet, from all regions, and all periods. Some were relatively minor figures, but others were among the most important masters of their day and remain well known centuries later.”

For my recent video podcast interview with Barstow where we discussed some of these issues, see [here](#).

In 2007, I heard the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje give an electrifying and important speech under the Bodhi Tree at Bodhgaya on vegetarianism. Citing the teachings of the Buddha and the previous Karmapas, he stated that the 8th Karmapa had taught that one could not reasonably call oneself a follower of the Karma Kagyu lineage and eat slaughtered animals, which left some meat-eating followers shocked. He also recommended that if devotees wanted him to have a long life, they should abandon eating animals. More recently, the 17th Karmapa gave several teachings on the essential Buddhist monastic rules that forbid eating meat willingly for pleasure or health, the suffering of

murdered animals he witnessed as a nomadic child growing up in Tibet, the teachings of past Tibetan masters like the yogis, Milarepa and Drugpa Kunleg (1455 - 1529) on the 'wrongdoing' of killing and eating animals, the strict vegetarianism of previous Karmapas, and on the catastrophic, destructive effects on the environment and natural resources. In his book *The Heart is Noble* (2014), the 17th Karmapa explains:

When you eat meat, you ingest not only the chemical substances that animals are full of, but also the emotional and physical stress that animals experience throughout their lives and at the moment of their slaughter. That stress is also part of your meat. Some people may tell you that you must eat meat for your health, for the protein. But this is simply not true. The millions of healthy vegetarians around the world are proof of that fact. Protein sources abound in legumes and other foods that are better for our body and for the environment. It is just a matter of where we decide to get our protein. I think it is important to recognize that this is a choice we make every time we eat.

Although he also explained recently that things are improving within the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. For a compiled transcript of the 17th Karmapa's teachings on vegetarianism, see here. In sum, there were many great Tibetan Buddhist masters, past and present, before 1959, who were strict vegetarians who actively abandoned and advocated against eating animals.

Other contemporary examples of Tibetan Buddhist masters who strongly advocate against eating meat were the late Chatral Rinpoche, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo and Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro Rinpoche, for more on those teachings, see here.¹⁴

Interestingly, within the Tibetan Buddhist community, the Dalai Lamas and some Gelugpa masters, including the present-day 14th Dalai Lama (who has stated he eats animals for health reasons, as advised by his Tibetan doctor), have, unlike other main Tibetan Buddhist lineages, permitted it in certain circumstances.

Tibetan scholar, Nyangshem Gyal wrote about this difference recently in his interesting paper, *The Sectarian Formation of Tibetan Vegetarianism: Identifying the First Polemic on Meat-eating in Tibetan Literature*, which considers the fact that:

"The practice of vegetarianism among the Gelug was, indeed, rare before the twentieth century, compared with other norms in Tibetan Buddhist schools."

However, from the perspective of the Buddha's *Sūtra* teachings, and those of the other main Tibetan Buddhist lineages, eating murdered animals for health reasons was never deemed an acceptable reason, unless one was begging for food or starving.

¹⁴ .. For compiled teachings and transcripts of these teachers and teachings, see: <https://dakinitranslations.com/buddhist-vegetarianism/>

In brief, the Shakyamuni Buddha and Tibetan Buddhist masters taught against eating meat long before technological inventions allowed the mass breeding and slaughtering of animals for food. These days, however, there are even more reasons not to eat meat, including one's health (physical and psychological) and environmental reasons.

V. OTHER CONTEMPORARY CONSIDERATIONS AND THEIR RELATION TO COMPASSION IN ACTION AS A BUDDHIST

The Shakyamuni Buddha and Tibetan Buddhist masters taught against eating meat before technological inventions that allowed the mass breeding and slaughter of animals for food. However, if they were teaching today, such 'advances' and the now well-documented addiction to meat, catastrophic harm they cause the environment, wasting of natural resources, land, extinction of other species, physical and huge psychological damage to those who eat animals and work in slaughter-houses, and greater levels of aggression, would no doubt be included as part of the general Buddhist principle of non-violence, love and compassion.

There is also a false perception that one needs meat for health reasons. However, the converse is true. In Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, yogic, and Ayurveda traditions, eating meat has always been considered unhealthy (and unethical) and unnecessary for a balanced diet. In other cultures and religions, the perception of eating animals for health reasons has been different, although that perception is also changing.

VI. CONCLUSION: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND OBSERVATIONS

In terms of my understanding as a Buddhist practitioner, despite growing up in a meat-eating culture and family, in 2006, I abandoned eating animals after the speech given by the 17th Karmapa in Bodhi Gaya encouraging others to take a lifetime vow not to eat animals. Also I had become more interested in animal welfare and environmental conservation.

As a Philosophy postgraduate in London, I not only became interested in Asian philosophy but also the question of animal consciousness, and the philosopher, Peter Singer's views on the sentience of animals and animal rights. In his ground-breaking work, for example, "All Animals Are Equal", Singer compared common arguments used against the Black and Women's Liberation movements to those used against the Animal Liberation movement¹⁵. He accused those who argued against giving all animals equal "consideration" when it came to killing or experimenting on them, of hypocrisy and unreasonable speciesism. I also became aware of the cruelty and horror of mass factory farms

¹⁵ "To protest about bullfighting in Spain, the eating of dogs in South Korea, or the slaughter of baby seals in Canada while continuing to eat eggs from hens who have spent their lives crammed into cages, or veal from calves who have been deprived of their mothers, their proper diet, and the freedom to lie down with their legs extended, is like denouncing apartheid in South Africa while asking your neighbours not to sell their houses to blacks." — Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (2009).

breeding animals for meat, but also the inconsistency of eating murdered animals while talking about love and compassion for all beings as if they were one's child or mother. As well as the serious environmental and health issues also associated with consuming mass-bred animals. In a recent podcast interview I conducted with Singer, he speaks about the "absurdity" of the 14th Dalai Lama eating meat for "health reasons" too.

Assuming that most Buddhists were also vegetarians/ vegans too, I was surprised and saddened to discover that many were not. When I first started studying and living in India and Nepal, I saw many Buddhists from Tibet, Europe, America, China, and other countries regularly eating animals. Seeing sick-looking chickens huddled up for hours with no room to move, and clearly in mental and physical anguish. It is not hidden away like in countries where mass factories and slaughterhouses present the meat in sanitised, cellophane-wrapped packages.¹⁶

However, after giving up eating animals, I noticed that my compassion for animals increased significantly, and even seeing the flesh of animals being cooked or eaten filled me with a deep sense of sadness and compassion for the animals and those eating them. The 17th Karmapa also spoke about his own experience of abandoning eating animals, and how he also experiences great levels of compassion for animals by doing so. The famous Vietnamese Buddhist master, Thich Nhat Hanh also spoke about how abandoning meat consumption increases our compassion and reduces suffering for animals, humans and the planet.

In conclusion, following a spiritual tradition's ethical guidelines and discipline can sometimes be challenging, as we have many faults and a lack of wisdom. However, as it is clear that the Buddha did not permit or encourage eating animals, except in very limited or extreme circumstances, if we want to follow Buddha's teachings, and out compassion into action, then actions speak louder than words, and if we genuinely care for and love animals as fellow species on this planet (and as precious as our mothers), then surely we owe it to ourselves (and animals) to take to heart the fact that "meat is murder".

¹⁶ Yet, I saw many 'Buddhists' actively buying meat from these slaughter-shops. In fact, regular customers at the shops and in restaurants were monastics. When I sometimes asked such people why they ate meat, I was met with either an uncomfortable look, or even outright hostility. Some monastic institutions even have attached restaurants in which meat is bought and cooked not only for the public, but also for themselves away from the monastic canteen. In my recent review of Tibetan artist Tenzin Gyurmey's work *A Crime With My Mother* (2022), I became aware that some Tibetans even travel out of state to buy illegal buff (cow) meat. Yet Buddha did not teach a hierarchy of animals, they are all seen as sacred, equal and worthy of life. So there is no reason for Tibetan Buddhist to distinguish between buff, cow or dog meat.

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BUDDHISM AS AN ENLIGHTENMENT TO THE GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Wangyal Lama Tamang¹

Abstract:

The concern for future sustainability is inevitable in the contemporary world of materialism. Buddhism talks about the Global cause so does the implication of Ecology. The attainment to enlightenment is certainly the realization of “*Dharma*,” the Ecological phenomena and for the welfare of others. The Western interpretation of Ecology is “the study of the interaction between the living organisms and the Environment”. However, the Buddhist way of interpreting it is quite different as Buddhism emphasizes on the cultivation of compassion based on the interconnectedness of all, *pratityasamudpād*, *Catur Brahma Vihāra*, and practice like *Pārmita* to regard all sentient beings as one’s mothers, striving to ferry them from all sorts of suffering, ultimately from the cycle of birth and death. Though the Ecological issue is a Global one, the source is local rather than (normative) individual. The outer pollution is related to inner pollution for we as humans void of compassionate qualities tend to consume excessively more from available ecosystem exploiting natural resources unprecedentedly. Overproductions are deemed falsely as the source of happiness by commercialism, yet happiness comes from within such as satisfaction from less accumulation. The mind is regarded as the source of all happiness and suffering, as illustrated in the first stanza of Dhammapada. “In *Nibbedhika Sutra* also, Buddha admonishes, “*cetanāham bhikkhave, kammam vadāmi*” which means the *karma* is indeed the mind’s intentionality.

Keywords: *compassion, ecology, suffering, happiness, altruism, mind, enlightenment, sustainability, karma, pārmita (practice of perfection), pratityasamudpāda (interconnectedness).*

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I. BUDDHISM AS ENLIGHTENMENT TO THE GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

As the Mahayana-aspiration resonates “*buddho bhaveyam jagato hitāya*”,² meaning may I become Buddha for the welfare of all sentient beings, certainly advocates the establishment of world peace while keeping up the development pace sustainably based on the middle way approach, *Madhyama Mārga* or *Madhyamapratipada*.³ This complicated management requires expertise that is based on both wisdom and compassion the significant aspects of Mahayana Buddhism for the perfect accomplishment. A related crisis comes into existence when the intelligent policy makers probably lack values such as warm-heartedness, compassion, altruism, welfarism, and so on. Buddhism, being the major global religion, goes beyond its Cultural, Political, and Geographical boundaries and is set to eliminate, at least minimise, the existing problems humans and of all sentient beings.

On the other hand, the study of Ecology is important these days as ecological issues are related to individual behaviour. Buddhist ethics serves in this field a great deal to restore the human behaviour suitable for a sustainable world, present and future. From subtle, invisible living micro-organisms to the environment of the colossal universe, ecology is studied. The evolution of human civilization, Religion and other diverse aspects takes place as we go along this study. However, this whole aspect is conventional and requires a great deal of engagement.

Even the present Sakyamuni Buddha, after having attained Enlightenment, did not enter into the inactive state of Nirvana but rather remained active in the world to benefit beings. First, Buddha came to the bank of the river Ganges in Varanasi and spun the wheel of Dharma (Teaching of Phenomena/nature). Before attaining Buddhahood, he was a Bodhisattva accumulating merit. The accumulation of merit/virtuousness and wisdom is the source of Perfect Enlightenment. Paltrul Rinpoche says, “Until one has completed the two sacred accumulations, one will never realize sacred emptiness”.⁴ There are innumerable issues and crises in the world now and then that need to be dealt with high possible diligent. The world is full of suffering though it has its solution too. In the present scenario, the question is often raised by many that relates to the basic one. The one that we rely on to live, like the fresh air, water, soil, and sky. The halt of mere sensual satiation derived from the recurring technological innovated materials is becoming something indispensable when it comes to sav-

² Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna [= Atīśa], *Cittotpādasamvaravidhikrama*, accessed on [February 5, 2025], available at: http://gretil.sub.unigoettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_dIpaMkarazrljJAnacittotpAdasaMvaravidhikrama.htm

³ Prof. Rajjan Kumar and Dr. Sunita Kumari, “Madhyama-Pratipada: The Foundational Teaching of Buddha” in *Bulletin For Technology And History Journal*, Volume 23, Issue 11, 2023, pp. 29.

⁴ Paltrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, chapter four, pp. 283, Shambhala, Boston 1998.

ing the planet and its residences. Here, the role of mind-training is immense, the collective thoughts are overwhelming. Among the three doors, the Body and Speech are controlled literally by the Mind. Buddha says, “The cleansing (training) of Mind is the teaching of Buddha.”⁵ Buddhism is probably the most analytical in mind and its behaviour. *Mind-only* school is one of the four major Buddhist schools in Buddhism which affirms that the world is mere mental projection and inspires to seek inside.

The Article contains the following aspects:

- (i) Two Accumulations
- (ii) Aspiration to serve the world of tormented beings
- (iii) Buddhism for all time and based on universal law
- (iv) Buddhism and Enlightenment
- (v) The teaching in dealing with modern issues like Ecological

II. TWO ACCUMULATIONS (PUÑYA AND JÑYĀNA SAMBHĀRA)

To attain perfect Buddhahood (*Samyak Sambuddha*), the accumulation of merit and wisdom in abundance is indispensably required. Philosophically, this concept is to deal with the critics or fall upon one of the extremes, eternalist or nihilist.

anutpanneṣudharmeṣu nirodhonopapadhyate
*nānantaramato yuktam niruddhe pratyayaḥ kaḥ*⁶

It means that non-arising conditions (cause) give rise to the cessation; a state like Nirvana only serves as the base for further inquiry.

When we assert that the Buddha talked about Nirvana being the state of ultimate bliss, it certainly gives the inclination towards Nihilism, the state of non-existence, and the refutation of the belief system of the world (creation) and the God (creator) being truly existent (*sat*), merely enhance the respective concept. However, this is not the case; the law of Karma in Buddhism teaches the fundamental process of progress toward Nirvana and the significance of involvement in the Universal Law. Thus, the merit objects are none other than the world and its inhabitants.

The five paths in Buddhism represent the Path of Accumulation (*Sambhāra Mārga*) as the first and preliminary path. It is practiced in the relative world (post-mediation period) supported by realization (cultivated through meditation). In the text: “A Brief Guide to the Stages and Paths of the Bodhisattvas, it’s mentioned, “This indicates that on the lesser stage of the path of accumulation, we meditate mainly on the four applications of mindfulness.”⁷

⁵ *Dhammapada* 183. Ch.14. pp. 73

⁶ Dr. Debabrata Das, *Acharya Nagarjuna kṛta Mulmadhyamikakārikā* (ISBN:978-93-84721-83-1), Ch: “Examination of Condition”, pp.5, Maha Bodhi Book Agency, Kolkatta, 2022.

⁷ A Brief Guide to the Stages and Paths of the Bodhisattvas by Patrul Rinpoche, ISSN

There are many stages, and it takes eons of time to accumulate virtue, let alone wisdom. Mainly, the practice of perfections *Parmita* is observed diligently. *Jātakmāla*-translator Dr. Jagadisha Chandra Mishra mentions that the theory of Evolution explains how a flower takes hundreds of years to evolve into the existing particular species. Similarly, to liberate a being from birth and death-cycle, mass accumulation of merit in a long period is indispensable. And so did the Buddha. Only a single life was insufficient for Buddha let alone ordinary man to attain Buddhahood.⁸

The instrumental aspect of all merit accumulation is the cultivation of Compassion or an awakened mind (*BodhiChitta*). *Bodhi Chitta* also means the purified mind as the obscuration to see the phenomena is purified by cultivating altruism, the genuine concern for others' well-being. Such purification of the mind helps to analyse the phenomena and gain wisdom eventually.

"*Bodhi*" implies both purification and realization. To show this, Tibetan translators translated "*bodhi*" or "awakening" as *byang chub* (pronounced *zyang chup*) in Tibetan. *Byang* indicates purification; we can understand that through sole purification of all mental obscuration, it's possible for the mind to directly perceive all phenomena.⁹

III. ASPIRATION TO SERVE THE WORLD OF TORMENTED BEINGS

When we see the phenomena through wisdom, then the aspiration for self-emancipation appears to be the trivial one. The one endeavours to participate in the hardships of others since the perception of impartiality between you and I is very mundane. The non-Buddhist tradition text like *Mahopaniṣad* also aspires the same and quotes,

*ayaṃ nijāḥ paro veti gaṇanā laghu cetasāṃ,
udārcarītānāṃ tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam* ¹⁰

It means that the biased ideology is a mundane concern. For a holistic, realized person, the entire world is his or her family. Another related reference can also be traced from *Mahabharat Drona parva*:

*na tvahaṃ kāmāye rājyaṃ na svargaṃ nāpunarbhavaṃ,
kāmye dukkhataptānāṃ prāṇināṃ ārtināśanam.* ¹¹

Which means the complete submission of one's worldly world beyond ful-

2753 - 4812, pp.7, Lotsawa House

⁸ Dr. Jagadisha Chandra Mishra, *Jātakmālā* (Bodhisattvāvadānamālāparyāyā) of Aryasura, Introduction pp.4, Published by Chaukhambha Surbharati Prakashan, Varanasi 1989.

⁹ What is Bodhicitta? An excerpt from in praise of great compassion, vol. 5 of the library of wisdom and compassion by the dalai lama and thubten chodron.

¹⁰ Mahopaniṣad, Ch:vi, stanza 71, accessed on [February 5, 2025], available at: https://sanskritdocuments.org/doc_upanishhat/maha.html

¹¹ Rantideva, *Mahabharata Dronaparva*, accessed on [February 5, 2025], available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/hinduism/comments/4t9pwe/here_is_an_inspiring_verse_from_mahabharata/

filment to the emancipation from suffering of all beings. The same aspiration is contained in Buddha's preachings of *catur brahmmah vihāra*, the Practice of *Pārmita*, *pratityasamudpād*, and so on.

In the "King Aspiration prayer" *Pranidhānarājā* of Mahayana tradition, Altruistic aspiration is done in the following ways: "For as long as there are buddha-fields and directions, May I strive to quell the misery of the lower realms, May I place all beings only in happiness, And bring them all only happiness and joy."¹²

Aspiration plays an important role in any field of work. Sheer determination impacts the physical, mental, emotional, and psychological levels of an individual to get a transformation in no time. Therefore, the holistic aspiration to the ecological cause nevertheless bears positive outcomes as it empowers the actions of the aspirants. *Śāntideva* says: "All other virtues, like the plantain tree, produce their fruit, but then their force is spent. Alone the marvellous tree of *bodhicitta*, constantly bears fruit and grows unceasingly."¹³

No aspiration in Buddhism is dedicated to one's well-being alone rather than all sentient beings. For in the emancipation of all, all auspiciousness is fulfilled.

IV. BUDDHISM FOR ALL TIME AND BASED ON UNIVERSAL LAW

Buddhism is not only a religious faith but also a science of mind, as narrated by the Dalai Lama. Buddhism was founded by Sakyamuni Buddha more than 2500 years ago. According to Theravada tradition, there were several Buddhas like *Vipassī*, *Sikhī*, *Vessabhū*, *Kakusandha* *Koṇāgamana* *Kassapa*.¹⁴ The Maitreya is the future Buddha. But in Mahayana, the Buddhas are considered innumerable. Similarly, in *Tantrayāna* (a branch of Mahayana), five Buddha families¹⁵ according to five elements, which are as follows, are propagated.

¹² Translated by Glenn H. Mullin with Thepo Tulku, Great King of Prayers, The Prayer of Ways Sublime accessed on [February 5, 2025], available at: <https://www.abuddhistlibrary.com/Buddhism/A%20-%20Tibetan%20Buddhism/Poetry,%20Prayer/The%20King%20of%20Prayers/The%20King%20of%20Prayers.htm>

¹³ *Śāntideva*, The Way of the Bodhisattva, Ch. 1 (The Excellence of Bodhicitta), Stanza 12, Shambhala, Boston & London 2011.

¹⁴ Chakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta, Dīghanikaya.

¹⁵ Padma Sambhava, Tibetan Book of the Dead, Compiled and Edited by W. Y. Evans-Wentz, Introduction, V. The Wisdom Teachings, Oxford University Press, 2000.

Family (Kula)	Buddha	Colour ← Element → Symbolism	Cardinality → Wisdom → Attachments → Gestures	Means → Maladaptation to Stress	Season	Wisdom
Buddha Family	Vairocana	white ← space → wheel	center → all accommodating → rūpa → Teaching the Dharma	Turning the Wheel of Dharma → ignorance, delusion	Transition	法界体性智: The wisdom of the essence of the dharma-realm meditation mudra. ^[15]
Karma Family	Amoghasiddhi	green ← air, wind → viśvavajra	north → all accomplishing → mental formation, concept → fearlessness	protect, destroy → envy, jealousy	spring	成所作智: The wisdom of perfect practice.
Padma (Lotus) Family	Amitābha	red ← fire → lotus	west → inquisitive → perception → meditation	magnetize, attachment → selfishness, lust	summer	妙觀察智: The wisdom of observation.
Ratna (Jewel) Family	Ratnasambhava	gold/yellow ← earth → jewel	south → equanimous → feeling → giving	enrich, increase → pride, greed	autumn	平等性智: The wisdom of equanimity.
Vajra Family	Akṣobhya	blue ← water → sceptre, vajra	east → nondualist (Dualist) → vijñāna → humility	pacify, accept → aggression, aversion	winter	大圓鏡智: The wisdom of reflection.

Source: Williams et al. *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, p. 211. Routledge, Jan 4, 2002, accessed on [February 6, 2025], available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Tath%C4%81gatas

Thus, where time and space exist for the visible and invisible beings to evolve, the Buddha and Bodhisattva emerge spontaneously for their benefit. Even the elements, if recognized during the intermediate period between life and death, are no lesser than the benefitting Buddha himself. It also advocates that the basis for the sound though complex ecological system is something that is to be revered, the way we do to any Buddha and Bodhisattva.

Bodhisattva is a highly realized being or the practitioner in the making of the same. Unlike mundane people like us, they are born by their aspiration of benefitting others irrespective of time and space. Thus, out of compassion, it is likely that they are here among us in this modern era where multiple issues, ranging from ecological to inner peace issues, collide. Since we, the general people, lack clairvoyance, we can recognize them but only infer through extraordinary activities of Bodhisattva in these modern days when people are so engrossed in possessing outer materials and being so-called “developed.”

As one of the shlokas in *Abhisamayāṅkār* by Maitreya Nath echoes (in Tibetan):

*Śe pe srid lā mi ne śing, ngingze śi lā mi ne dāng*¹⁶

Meaning Bodhisattwa remains in the world deliberately to serve all the sentient beings as possibly mass as it possibly can. She is free from any ideological construct that the conventional mind has made. Irrespective of caste, creed and colour, s/he drives oneself by self-motivating that every being not to be left behind from attaining to the buddha hood. Though s/he perceives that *sattva* (being), *dharma* (phenomena), *jiva* (living), *pudgal* (individual) ultimately

¹⁶ Nyima Tenpai; *Abhisamayāṅkar* by Maitri Nath, published by NSWC, CUTS Sarnath, Varanasi 2013.

selflessly empty¹⁷ by nature and have the actualization beyond mundane dualistic perception of world and Nirvana being independent and separate. Dualistic perception is nothing but ignorance as it leads to nowhere but to the cycle of Samsara. For the beginner, the teaching on self-discipline regarding hygiene and so on is significant as a boat to cross the river but once crossed, keeping on attachment to the boat seems nothing but ridiculous. Similarly, at the time of higher wisdom, the mundane dualistic notion is to be shunned. Mainly, the attachment towards any subject, be it good or evil, is eventually a false view and surely leads one to the Samsara of heaven and hell. As the heaven-happiness is also subject to the exhaustion at one point of time and so is not the ultimate objective of Buddhism and Bodhisattva.

Therefore, the manifestation of Bodhisattva is hard to perceive. They can be manifested into a good doctor, police officer, spiritual leaders of any creed, sports player, or even butcher and prostitute.

The beings are in pain. Here, pains include not only physical issues but the mental aspects like worry about the future and regret of the past. It is rightly said that we suffer in our imagination more than in the real world. According to the Buddhist-philosophy, the real world that we perceive is a relative world where we label one matter in comparison with another. Thus, the conventional world is a dualistic world where ignorance prevails and, as a result, suffering is entailed as long as we exist. The ultimate world is a metaphysical world that we can only actualize and not express.

Buddha knew all those pains and their remedies, but out of compassion, this very nectar-like wisdom was shared among many through various levels of teaching. Giving discourse was itself an act of Bodhisattva. The term Bodhisattva was perhaps coined for the first time in the Buddhist text. And sometimes the term *vidhyādhara* in Tibetan *Rigpā zinpā*¹⁸ is used to render close reference. Bodhisattva transcends all the man's mind-constructs as it is the limitation either it is holy or sin for s/he is equipped with profundity of wisdom and immeasurable compassion where dualism hardly exists. Bodhisattva is a being in any form, ever-ready to serve the tormented beings at any cost. Bodhisattva delays or sacrifices one's own liberation and deliberately takes birth in the ocean of suffering that is Samsara and goes to the extreme to benefit the sky-pervasive, motherly beings. Bodhisattva is skilful in terms of benefitting others; thus, in modern times too they appear accordingly in human form in the human realm.

Buddhism is not about pleasing the Buddha and being saved; otherwise, negative consequences would prevail later on. Intimidation is not offered by this liberal Philosophy. And concern for oneself is not the priority in it. The

¹⁷ Master Hsuan Hua, *the Diamond Sutra, A General explanation of Vajra Prajñā Parmita Sutra*, Ch.14, pp. 159 Published by the Sino-American Buddhist Association, Incorporated. 1731 — 15th Street, San Francisco, CA, 94103, USA.

¹⁸ Dudjom Rinpoche (2005), *Wisdom Nectar. Snow Lion*. ISBN 978-1-55939-224-2, pp. 296.

first truth, “truth of suffering,” is universal as “the senses of awareness”; the basis of feelings is all-pervasive. In this regard, the Dalai lama says, “The realization that we are all the same human beings who seek happiness and try to avoid suffering is very helpful in developing a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood; a warm feeling of love and compassion for others.”¹⁹

V. BUDDHISM AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Buddha attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree (fig tree). He then moved to Saranath, Varanasi, and had spun the wheel of Doctrine based on non-violence, love, compassion, and harmony. Above religion, Buddhism is the proper way of living, a science of mind, a philosophy exploring the mystical world of wisdom and enlightenment.

The fig tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment also had the privilege of witnessing or even being enlightened by the overwhelming influence of Buddha. The flora and fauna are equipped with consciousness though the lower one. And so are possessed of transcending potential from existing circumstances.

In Buddhism, Enlightened means Awakened One (Buddha). Every individual has the right to attain Buddhahood. In the text *Mahāyāna Sūtrālamkāra*, Maitreya, the future Buddha, says, “Just as space is accepted as being forever omnipresent, so, too, is enlightenment considered always omnipresent. Just as space is present in every kind of form, so, too, is enlightenment omnipresent in the host of sentient beings.”²⁰

In the Tibetan language, Enlightenment is called *Sāṅgay*, which means awakened from the sleep of ignorance and qualities augmented like Lotus.

Before attaining enlightenment, there are three levels to go through: i. practice of morality, ii. contemplation, and iii. attaining wisdom (synonym of Enlightenment). *Śrāvaka*, *Pratyekabuddha*, and *Bodhisattva* are the different levels of realization respective to different levels of aspiration. To realize this, too, the practitioner goes through the following four stages²¹;

1. “Stream-enterer” (*Sotāpanna*) who is free from Identity view (Pali: *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), Attachment, Doubt.
2. “Once-returner” (*Sakadāgāmin*) is freed from Sensual desire and Ill will.
3. “Non-returner” (*Anāgāmi*) is free from Sensual desire and Ill will.
4. An *Arahant* is detached from all the above defilements of lower stag-

¹⁹ The 14th Dalai Lama’s Nobel Lecture, accessed on [February 6 2025], available at: <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/acceptance-speeches/nobel-peace-prize/nobel-peace-prize-nobel-lecture>

²⁰ Jamgön Mipham, *ROOT TEXT OF MAITREYA’S An Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras* (Skt. Mahayana Sūtrālamkāra), pp.31, Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boulder, CO.

²¹ Gomez, Luis O. (1991), “Purifying Gold: The Metaphor of Effort and Intuition in Buddhist Thought and Practice”, in Gregory, Peter N. (ed.), *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

es and the four meditative absorptions (*rupa jhana*), (*ārupa jhana*), Conceit, Restlessness, Ignorance.

However, the Arhat also enters the *Bodhisattvayāna* at the end.

Enlightenment is the wisdom of every phenomenon right from the subtle atom to the colossal universe, consequently actualizing the true nature of phenomena being dependently originated. It also purifies one's obscuration (individual and phenomenal), and fresh karma is not accumulated since an enlightened one acts without grasping on to the relative objects. In *Madhyamāvatār*, Chandrakirti says, "Because without agent there is no action, Therefore, with no self, there is no 'mine'. And therefore, seeing self and mine as empty, The Yogin is fully liberated."²² Here, Yogi is enlightened/ accomplished (*siddha*), being free from any impartiality.

The fourth seal of Buddhism says that Nirvana is the ultimate bliss. It appears that such ecstasy exists somewhere outside, above, but rather inside our mind and with us in the present.

The Buddha attained enlightenment at the age of thirty-five. This high realization is called Buddhahood, which is free from any form of sorrow. It is the ultimate truth, the wisdom aspect, which can't be expressed in worldly words though relies on the conventional practices like the six perfections, which is called in Sanskrit, *Śad Pāramita*.

In Mahayana, there is a concept of *Tathāgata Garbha*,²³ which affirms that not only Sidharth was capable of attaining Buddhahood but every being has the latent potentiality of attaining the same. It is said in the Mahayana text that "all the sentient beings are buddha though the momentary afflictions obscure them". Logically, too, we all are the same, for every being wants happiness and feels pain. And we are not settled to the fullest with the five sensual pleasures that are derived from the outer materials, which are, once again, momentary. According to the Buddhist scholar *Dharmakīrti and Dignāga*, the perception of the given objects is momentary as the perceived outer objects are subject to the law of causality (*kārya-karan*), and thus the knowledge of the object falls on momentary as well.

Irrespective of all caste, creed and colour, or sex the Buddhahood is available to all as it is the highest bliss that sooner or later all the beings are destined to attain to.

Buddhahood is the complete emancipation from suffering and its source. Here, the suffering is birth in any six realms, from hell to god's realm. Due to the gross and subtle physical forms, we have the notion of self being truly exis-

²² Introduction to the Middle Way Chandra Kīrti's *Madhyamakavatara* With commentary by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche Given at the Centre d'Etudes de Chanteloube Dordogne, France 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000 Arranged according to Gorampa's commentary Edited by Alex Trisoglio © 2003 by Khyentse Foundation

²³ Diana Paul, *The Concept of Tathāgatagarbha in the Śrīmālādevī Sūtra* (Sheng-Man Ching).

tent, which is nothing but ignorance. Hence, in the process of such, we have to go through several kinds of suffering, be it mental or physical.

Buddhahood is the *sūnyatā* stage where every mental construct of four extremes: Existent, Non-Existent, both and neither not established.

Tathagata implies the Buddha, and the *garbha* represents the embryo the latent potentiality. Since it is inclusive that like oneself, all the sentient being wants happiness and unable to quench the momentary thirst that five sense faculties stimulate. Buddha also said, “that all beings have buddha nature, “since buddha Wisdom is always present within the assembly of beings”.²⁴

This means that all beings are Buddha from the primordial period, but due to the obscuration on the process of multiple cycles of birth and death, we are entangled and chained. This notion certainly helps us to cultivate a sense of inclusiveness and interrelatedness. As a result, one becomes more inclined towards benefitting others, an indispensable characteristic of Bodhisattwa, the awakened one.

VI. THE TEACHING IN DEALING WITH MODERN ISSUES LIKE ECOLOGICAL

When all the soldiers and King of Magadh *Ajātsatru* renouncing country and Palace requested Buddha for their ordainment. The Buddha disagreed and admonished them to return and follow the kingdom’s authoritative responsibility they are destined for. Buddha admonished with an example of one monk while treating an injured ordained serpent enquired about how it got to this situation. Serpent replied that he, due to renunciation, forsook biting, and people started humiliating him back physically. Monk laughed on this and had told serpent not to leave its nature of hissing at least. The extreme of non-violence is also violence. The fear of the King or Ruler upon the transgressors is ethical. For the sake of humanity, if war appears to be the final option left, then it is worth defending. However, the personal cause on these matters is to be avoided.”²⁵

Buddha’s teaching is universal as well as relevant. When he says *Ahimsā*, he is referring to the way of dealing with conventional issues peacefully. Specifically, the 21st century has taken lessons from the devastating past of World Wars I and II. However, the devastation caused by other factors like natural calamities and ecological aspects contains the same amount of destruction.

Buddha’s teaching of self-restraint helps leaders to keep their word in executing political power, by which the people, too, can have trust in them. The analysing capacity develops as the moral ground is firm of their leaders and eventually becoming wise, the modern issues are managed duly. But the par-

²⁴ .. Arya Asanga, “*Buddha Nature The Mahayana Uttaratantra Shastra by Arya Maitreya*”, Ch.1, pp. 23. Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, New York.

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIw18w7gpIs&list=PLYRjzriRATTAhIrpSD-d1QTRZL3lz8FW9X&index=51> } Written by: Gajra Kottary, Prakash Kapadia, Puneet S. Shukla 1991- The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development”. Archived from the original on 2013-11-03.

ticipation and contribution of people also play a crucial role. Thus, ecological issues are related to individual behaviour too, for example, the habit of a competitive world of wanting more objects/products directly connected to the exploitation and exhaustion of natural resources. Not only does it symbolize the self-centredness of humans but also not an unwise act to compromise with the next generation. Brundtland²⁶ Commission means “Development. that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.”

The teaching of Buddha also advocates the cultivation of compassion for the genuine concern of others, which is so much in need when it comes to dealing with the issues, local as well as global.

The Debates on Buddhism and Ecology resulted in some groundbreaking realizations about how these three aspects of analysis play significant roles in practicing Buddhism and maintaining Ecology. The advocacy of Buddhism to defend Ecology as a part of Philosophy and Ethics reveals the levels of its relevance in the contemporary modern world. The actualization of Dharma is next to the realization of the nature of nature, the process of Ecological balance, and the universal law that drives this force in an inhuman but harmonious way. Buddhist philosophy advocates for emancipation from the world of suffering and not the world itself. The compassionate qualities of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas would not leave behind the pathetic sentient beings. The sound Ecology outside depends on the sound Ecology inside. Thus, Buddhist traditions of the world seem not distant from adapting universal ecological law. The good examples can be from the ecological tradition of Ladakh and Darjeeling, small regions in the Indian Himalayas where we see how the Buddhist and pre-Buddhist traditions influence the lives and living systems of the localities. However, they struggle to maintain the ecosystem as pristine as it used to be amidst modern industrial culture. The pace of so-called “Material Development” is so high that it not only runs out of sound interaction of Environment and living organisms but also Social and Spiritual richness.

The aspiration of *Brahma vihāra* and the practice of *Pāramitā* in Buddhist practical livelihood also constitutes the Buddhism an Eco- Philosophical way of life. Here, such *Sāadhanās* show a genuine concern for the welfare of all sentient beings, which includes all living organisms and base- Environment. But to magnify the benefits, the subject needs to be empowered. Aspiration alone won't be able to deal with the global Ecological crisis. It is only possible if every move of the aspirant is effective and skilful, almost magical. The way the realized or enlightened being does is multi-powerful in comparison with mundane individuals like us. Therefore, the Enlightenment features expounded in Buddhism are the prerequisites if one has to serve the living organisms and contain the environment cohesiveness. Thus, to conclude, Buddhism is an Eco-Philosophy that still entails some suspicion in terms of their reciprocal relationship.

²⁶ 1991 - The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development. Archived from the original on 2013-11-03.

Bhavatu Sarva Mangalam...

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A STUDY ON HOW THE COMPASSIONATE QUALITY (*KARUNA*) AS DEPICTED IN THE FIVE PRECEPTS INFLUENCES FOR THE HUMAN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

W. Dehemi Mihara Perera*

Abstract:

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is a fundamental ethical principle in Buddhist philosophy, shaping both individual morality and societal well-being. This study examines how *karuṇā*, as embedded in the Five Precepts, contributes to human security and development. While human security traditionally focuses on safeguarding individuals from external threats, this research explores the ethical dimension of security, where compassion fosters sustainable and just societies. The study aims to (1) analyze the role of *karuṇā* in the Five Precepts, (2) evaluate its influence on interpersonal and social structures, and (3) assess its impact on human security indicators such as crime reduction, social trust, and economic stability.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the research incorporates qualitative analysis of Buddhist texts and contemporary literature alongside empirical data gathered from interviews and surveys. Findings indicate a strong correlation between adherence to the Five Precepts and improved social harmony. For instance, non-violence (First Precept) promotes peaceful conflict resolution, while truthfulness (Fourth Precept) strengthens institutional and community trust. Furthermore, compassion mitigates structural inequalities, enhancing opportunities for marginalized groups. This study highlights *karuṇā* as a transformative force, advocating for its integration into policymaking and human security frameworks. By embracing ethical values, societies can cultivate resilience, dignity, and inclusive development.

Keywords: *compassion (karuṇā), ethical virtues, five precepts, human development, human security.*

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE QUALITY OF COMPASSION (KARUNA): MODERN PERSPECTIVE

Compassion, or *karuṇā*, is a timeless virtue celebrated across cultures, philosophies, and religions. Rooted in Buddhist teachings, *karuṇā* signifies a profound empathy for the suffering of others, coupled with an active desire to alleviate it. In contemporary society, this ancient ideal finds renewed relevance, emerging as a critical element in addressing the challenges of an increasingly interconnected and complex world. Right intention is of three kinds: (a) intentions of renunciation, that is, intentions free from self-centered desires and ego-centric impulses; (b) intentions free from aversion; and (c) intentions free from harmfulness, that is, those of benevolence and compassionate love.¹ Modern perspectives on compassion extend beyond individual acts of kindness, encompassing broader implications for social justice, mental health, environmental sustainability, and global development. As humanity grapples with issues such as inequality, conflict, and climate change, compassion offers a pathway toward shared understanding and collective action. It fosters resilience, bridges divides, and encourages innovative solutions grounded in empathy and cooperation. Scientific research in psychology and neuroscience has further validated the transformative power of compassion. Studies demonstrate its profound impact on mental well-being, interpersonal relationships, and societal harmony. Compassion-based interventions, such as mindfulness training and self-compassion practices, have gained prominence in clinical and educational settings, promoting emotional intelligence and enhancing overall quality of life. From a developmental perspective, compassion is not merely an intrinsic quality but a skill that can be nurtured and cultivated. Educational programs, organizational frameworks, and policy initiatives increasingly recognize the value of embedding compassion in systems that shape human behavior. This shift underscores the belief that compassion is not an abstract ideal but a practical tool for fostering human security, dignity, and progress. This exploration of *karuṇā* through a modern lens aims to bridge ancient wisdom with contemporary insights. It seeks to illuminate how this enduring quality, when embraced collectively, has the potential to redefine human interactions and drive meaningful development in an era marked by profound challenges and opportunities.

II. INTRODUCTION TO THE QUALITY OF COMPASSION (KARUNA): BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Compassion, or *karuṇā*, is one of the most beautiful and important qualities in Buddhist teachings. It is the deep, heartfelt desire to ease the suffering of others and help them find peace. But in Buddhism, compassion is not just about feeling sorry for someone - it is about taking action and seeing the bigger picture of how we are all connected. The Buddha taught that suffering (*dukkha*) is a natural part of life, something we all face at different

¹ Vinaya I, p. 10.; *Dīghanikāya* II, p. 312. *Saṅkappa* is defined at *Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā*, p. 124 as *abhiniropanā*, i.e., fixing one's mind upon.

times.² Whether it is physical pain, emotional struggles, or life's uncertainties, we all experience moments of hardship. Compassion starts with recognizing this shared reality and then asking, "How can I help?" It is a way of opening our hearts to others while also finding wisdom in our shared human experience. In Buddhist practice, compassion begins close to home - with ourselves and the people around us - and then grows outward to include all living beings. Through meditation and mindfulness,³ Buddhists learn to cultivate loving-

² *Samyuttanikāya* V, London: Pali Text Society, 1976, p. 420 - 422. "Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ - jātipi dukkhā, jarāpi dukkhā, byādhipi dukkho, maraṇampi dukkhaṃ, appiyehi sampayogo dukkho, piyehi vippayogo dukkho, yampicchaṃ na labhati tampi dukkhaṃ - saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā [pañcupādānakkhandhāpi (pī. ka.)] dukkhā. Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobbhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatrataṭṭrābhinandinī, seyyathidaṃ kāmataṇhā, bhavataṇhā, vibhavataṇhā. Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ yo tassāyeva taṇhāya asesavirāganirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo. Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ ayameva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo, seyyathidaṃ sammādiṭṭhi...pe... sammāsammādi."

"Idaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasacca'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññeyya'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe...pe... udapādi. Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pariññāta'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi."

"Idaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasacca'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pahātabba'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe...pe...udapādi. Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ pahīna'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi."

"Idaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasacca'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ sacchikātabba'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe...pe... udapādi. Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ sacchikata'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi."

"Idaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasacca'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi. Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvetabba'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe...pe... udapādi. Taṃ kho panidaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ bhāvita'nti me, bhikkhave, pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, ñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi."

³ *Khuddakapāṭhapāli*, London: Pali Text Society, 1978, p. 7. Karaṇīyamattakusalena, yantasantaṃ padaṃ abhisamecca; Sakko ujū ca suhujū ca, suvaco cassa mudu anatimānī./ Santussako ca subhara ca, appakicco ca sallahukavutti;/ Santindriyo ca nipako ca, appagabbho kulesvananugiddho./ Na ca khuddamācare kiñci, yena viññū pare upavadeyyum;/ Sukhinova khemino hontu, sabbasattā bhavantu sukhittatā./ Ye keci pāṇabhūtatti, tasā vā thāvarā vanavasesā;/ Dīghā vā yeva mahantā, majjhimā rassakā anukathulā./ Diṭṭhā vā yeva adiṭṭhā, ye va dūre vasanti avidūre;/ Bhūtā va sambhavesi va, sabbasattā bhavantu sukhittatā./ Na paro paraṃ

kindness (*mettā*),⁴ training their hearts to respond to suffering with care instead of judgment. Over time, this practice builds a sense of universal compassion, where we truly want everyone to be free from pain, no matter who they are. A powerful example of this is the *bodhisattva*, a figure in Buddhism who dedicates their life to helping others. They willingly put off their own enlightenment to make sure no one is left behind. This selflessness is a reminder of what's possible when compassion is paired with courage and commitment. But *karuṇā* is not just about reacting to suffering as it happens - it is also about looking deeper. Why does suffering exist? What can we do to address its root causes, not just the symptoms? Compassion in Buddhism is practical and wise, offering a way to build a better world by tackling inequality, conflict, and other forms of harm. In today's fast-paced and often divided world, the Buddhist perspective on compassion feels more relevant than ever. It is a reminder that when we approach life with an open heart and a sense of shared humanity, we can create not only a kinder world but also a more meaningful and connected life for ourselves.

III. THE BUDDHA'S GREAT COMPASSION (MAHĀKARUṆĀ)

"*Paradukkhe sati sādḥūnaṃ kampanaṃ hadayakhedaṃ karotīti vā karuṇā.*"⁵ In Buddhist philosophy, *mahākaruṇā* is the profound, all-encompassing compassion of the Buddha, who wishes to free all beings from suffering. This is not a limited, emotional compassion - it is a deep, wise, and impartial love that motivates the Buddha and bodhisattvas (enlightened beings) to help others, often at great personal cost. It transcends personal attachments or biases and flows from the realization that all beings are interconnected. For practitioners, cultivating *mahākaruṇā* means expanding one's compassion from ordinary feelings of empathy to a universal concern for the well-being of all beings, helping them skillfully based on their unique needs.⁶ (1) Sharing Wisdom to Help Everyone: The Buddha did not keep the profound truths he discovered to himself, even though he initially hesitated, thinking they might be too complex for people to understand. But his deep compassion pushed him to try. His first teaching, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, was like handing over a guidebook for a peaceful and meaningful life. He introduced the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, creating a foundation for people

nikubbetha, nātimaññetha katthaci na kañci, naṃ kiñci, na kiñci;/Byārosanā paṭighasaññā, nāññamaññassa dukkhamiccheyya./Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttamāyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe;/Evampi sabbabhūtesu, mānaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ./Mettañca sabbalokasmi, mānaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ;/Uddhaṃ adho ca tiriyañca, asambādhaṃ averamasapattaṃ./Tiṭṭhaṃ caraṃ nisinno va, sayāno yāvatāssa vitamiddho;/Etaṃ satim adhiṭṭheyya, brahmanetaṃ vihāramidhamāhu./Diṭṭhiñca anupagamma, silavā dassanena sampanno;/Kāmesu vinaya gedhaṃ, na hi jātuggabbhaseyya puna retīti.,

⁴ McConnell, J. A. 1995. *Mindful meditation*. Mahachula Buddhist University, p. 201.

⁵ Dīghanikāya I. (1970). London: Pali Text Society, p. 2.

⁶ Milindapañhapāli. (1991). London: Pali Text Society, p. 409. "*Vadhake devadattamhi, core aṅgulimālake, /Dhanapāle rāhule ca, sabbattha samako muni.*"

to navigate suffering and find liberation.⁷ (2) Caring for the Sick with His Own Hands: When the Buddha saw a sick monk who had been neglected by others, he did not just tell someone else to take care of the monk - he stepped in himself. He washed the monk and cleaned up the mess, showing that compassion is expressed through action. Then he reminded the community, "Taking care of the sick is the same as taking care of me," encouraging everyone to treat others with kindness and dignity.⁸ (3) Preventing War Over Water: When two clans, the Sākya and Koliya, were about to go to war over water rights to a river, the Buddha stepped in to mediate. He reminded them that human lives are far more precious than water or territory. His calm and wise intervention helped both sides see reason, preventing unnecessary bloodshed and fostering peace.⁹ (4) Transforming a Killer Through Compassion: Aṅgulimāla, a bandit who had killed many, encountered the Buddha with the intent to harm him. Instead of fearing or fighting him, the Buddha met him with patience and understanding. Through their interaction, Aṅgulimāla realized the destructiveness of his actions, abandoned his violent ways, and eventually became a peaceful monk. The Buddha's compassion turned even a feared criminal into a disciple seeking enlightenment.¹⁰ (5) Welcoming Everyone into the Community: The Buddha broke societal norms by inviting people of all castes, genders, and backgrounds into the *saṅgha*, his spiritual community. In a society divided by rigid hierarchies, he emphasized that enlightenment was accessible to everyone. For example, he allowed women to join the monastic order, a groundbreaking act of inclusivity for the time.¹¹ (5) Guiding a Mother Through Grief: When Kisa Gotamī lost her only child, she was inconsolable. She came to the Buddha seeking a miracle to bring her child back to life. Instead of dismissing her grief, the Buddha gently guided her on a journey to find mustard seeds from a household untouched by death. Her search revealed to her that suffering and loss are universal, and this realization helped her find peace.¹² (6) Walking Miles to Help Ordinary People: The Buddha did not seek out luxury or comfort, even though kings and nobles often invited him to stay in their palaces. Instead, he walked long distances, often in harsh conditions, to reach villages and teach ordinary people. His compassion drove him to make sure his teachings were accessible to everyone, no matter how remote or humble their lives were.¹³ (7) Speaking Up for Animals: In an

⁷ *Samyuttanikāya* V. (1976). London: Pali Text Society, p. 420.

⁸ *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* I. (1970). London: Pali Text Society, p. 318.

⁹ *Suttanipāṭaṭṭhakathā* I. (1975). London: Pali Text Society, p. 356.

¹⁰ *Majjhimanikāya* II. (1993). London: Pali Text Society, p. 97.

¹¹ *Vinayapiṭaka* II. (1995). London: Pali Text Society, p. 254.

¹² *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* III, (1973), London: Pali Text Society, p. 431. "Taṃ puttāpasam-mattaṃ, byāsattamanasaṃ naraṃ, / Suttaṃ gāmaṃ mahoghova, maccu ādāya gacchati."

¹³ *Jātakatṭhakathā* I, (1990), Pali Text Society, London, P. 87. "Bhagavā aṅgamagadhavāsinaṃ kulaputtānaṃ dasahi sahassehi, kapilavatthuvāsinaṃ dasahi sahassehi sabbeheva vīsatisahasseehi khīṇāsavabhikkhūhi parivuto rājagahā nikkhamitvā divase divase yojanaṃ gacchati. Rājagahato saṭṭhiyojanaṃ kapilavatthum dvihi māsehi pāpuṇissāmi"ti

era when animal sacrifices were common, the Buddha stood firmly against the practice. He taught that all beings, no matter how small, are interconnected and deserve compassion. His advocacy for non-harm (*ahiṃsā*) inspired many to rethink their actions toward animals and led to a greater respect for life in all forms.¹⁴

3.1. Different types of compassion in Buddhism

Buddhism teaches that compassion (*karuṇā*) exists at various levels, each reflecting a deeper understanding and practice. These levels range from ordinary empathy to profound spiritual realization: (1) Ordinary Compassion (*Karuṇā Loka*) - The natural response to the suffering of loved ones or others. It is the instinctive compassion we feel when someone we care about is in pain. (2) Boundless Compassion (*Aparimāṇa Karuṇā*) - A more expansive and impartial compassion that extends to all beings, without bias or attachment. (3) Great Compassion (*Mahākaruṇā*) - The compassion of enlightened beings, which is both wise and proactive. It goes beyond mere empathy, motivating skillful actions to alleviate suffering. (4) Compassion of Equality (*Samatā Karuṇā*) - This form of compassion arises from the realization that all beings, regardless of their circumstances, deserve the same care and attention. (5) Compassion with Detachment (*Anupāya Karuṇā*) - A mature and balanced compassion that allows one to care deeply for others while remaining calm and centered, avoiding emotional overwhelm. (6) Compassion through Skillful Means (*Upāya Karuṇā*) - Compassion that applies wisdom (*prajñā*) to discern the most effective way to help others, adapting to their unique needs and circumstances. (7) Compassion of Non-Duality (*Advaya Karuṇā*) - The highest form of compassion, where the distinction between self and others dissolves, allowing compassion to flow naturally from deep spiritual insight. Each of these levels represents a step on the path to deeper understanding, ultimately leading to the embodiment of the Buddha's boundless compassion in everyday life. By framing the study of *karuṇā* in both modern and Buddhist contexts, this paper aims to demonstrate how compassion can be a powerful force for promoting peace, security, and sustainable development. In the face of global challenges, cultivating compassion - both personally and collectively - can help build stronger, more harmonious societies.

3.2. Beings focused in the Buddha's compassion (*Karuṇā*)

In Buddhism, the Buddha's compassion, known as *mahākaruṇā* or great compassion, is an all-encompassing love that embraces all living beings without exception. Unlike the ordinary compassion we may feel in daily life - often shaped by personal biases - the Buddha's compassion is boundless, impartial, and rooted in deep wisdom.¹⁵ The Buddha's profound understanding of suffering (*dukkha*) and the interconnectedness of all existence forms the

atūritacārikam pakkāmi."

¹⁴ *Apadāna* pāṭi I. (2000). London: Pali Text Society, p. 322. "Na hevaṃ tvaṃ mahāvīra, dāmesi naranāriyo, / Adāḍena asatthena, dāmesi uttame dāme."

¹⁵ *Āṅguttara* nikāya IV. (1979). London: Pali Text Society, p. 150.

foundation of his compassion. He realized that no being exists in isolation - our joys and sorrows are intertwined, and the suffering of one affects the whole world. Because of this realization, the Buddha's compassion transcends boundaries of identity, location, or past actions. It is not merely an emotion but a guiding force that calls for action, urging beings toward liberation (*nibbāna*).¹⁶ In Buddhist cosmology, beings are categorized into six realms of existence, each reflecting different experiences of suffering and karmic conditions. The Buddha's compassion extends to all beings within these realms, driven by his wish to guide them out of suffering and the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*saṃsāra*). Here is how his compassion touches each of these realms: (1) Beings in the Hell Realms (*Naraka*) These beings are caught in extreme suffering, experiencing intense heat, cold, or torment as a result of past harmful actions. While the pain seems endless, the Buddha's compassion offers hope. He knew that this suffering is not permanent and that these beings could find relief through spiritual practice and karmic purification. Compassion in action: We can learn from this to avoid harmful actions and cultivate virtuous conduct in our lives to avoid creating suffering for ourselves and others.¹⁷ (2) Hungry Ghosts (*Peta*) Hungry ghosts are beings driven by endless cravings, often depicted with huge stomachs but tiny mouths, symbolizing their inability to ever satisfy their hunger. This suffering stems from intense attachment and desire, and the Buddha's compassion for them reflects his wish to help them let go of these cravings. Compassion in action: This teaches us the importance of generosity and the need to release attachment in our own lives. By letting go of the things that constantly demand our attention, we too can find peace.¹⁸ (3) Animals (*Tiracchāna*) Animals are driven by instinct, and they are often subject to suffering due to ignorance or exploitation. They lack the ability to practice the Dharma and are vulnerable to the dangers of the world. The Buddha's compassion for animals is an expression of his desire to protect them from harm and guide them toward better conditions in future lives. Compassion in action: This reminds us to treat all creatures with kindness, seeing them as beings with feelings and needs just like us. Practicing non-harm (*ahiṃsā*) is key.¹⁹ (4) Human Beings (*Manussa*) Humans are unique in that we have the ability to reflect on our actions and cultivate wisdom. Yet, like everyone else, we also suffer from illness, aging, and the challenges of life. The Buddha's compassion for humans is about helping us transcend these sufferings through wisdom and ethical living, guiding us toward liberation. Compassion in action: The Buddha offers us teachings like the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, helping us understand that suffering can end through right practice and mindfulness.²⁰ (5) Demigods (*Asuras*) Demigods are driven by envy, competition, and pride.

¹⁶ *Khuddakanikāya* I. (2017). London: Pali Text Society, p. 126.

¹⁷ *Khuddakapāṭhapāli*. (1978). London: Pali Text Society, p. 6.

¹⁸ *Petavatthu*. (1888). London: Pali Text Society, p. 78.

¹⁹ *Dhammapadattakathā* I. (1970). London: Pali Text Society, p. 140.

²⁰ *Milindapañhapāli*. (1991). London: Pali Text Society, p. 409. "Vadhake devadattamhi, core aṅgulimālake Dhanapāle rāhule ca, sabbattha samako muni."

Despite their power, they are often dissatisfied and caught in a constant struggle for more. The Buddha's compassion for these beings is centred on helping them overcome their inner turmoil and find peace by letting go of their need for dominance. Compassion in action: We can relate to this struggle in our own lives, how often do we compete with others or feel discontent? The Buddha's compassion teaches us to cultivate contentment and peace within ourselves. (6) Gods (*Devas*) Even gods, who live in luxury and pleasure, experience suffering because their lives, like all things, are impermanent. Once their good karma runs out, they too face the inevitable reality of aging and death. The Buddha's compassion for gods is a reminder that no matter how perfect our circumstances may seem, nothing lasts forever. Compassion in action: The Buddha teaches us to recognize the impermanence of all things, encouraging us to use our time wisely, even in times of comfort and ease.²¹

3.3. Universal compassion and the *Bodhisattva* ideal

Among the notions that both unite and separate *Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, the idea of the *Bodhisatta*²² is the most central. The Buddha's compassion is not only about alleviating the suffering of individual beings but also about inspiring a greater vision of compassion — what we call the *Bodhisatta* ideal. A *Bodhisatta* is someone who vows to help all beings achieve liberation, putting the needs of others before their own. The *Bodhisatta* delays their own final enlightenment until every being has been freed from suffering. The pre-eminent virtue of the *Bodhisatta*, described in all the *Jātakas*, whether he appears in the form of an animal, a human, or a god, is his compassion. If we understand the distinction between the *Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna* traditions as Paul Williams defines it, we can see the *Bodhisatta* path as the true source of *Mahāyāna*, not at all in conflict with any other Buddhist tradition: The distinction between *Mahāyāna* and non-*Mahāyāna* is not as such one of schools, traditions, *vinaya*, robes, or philosophy. It is one of motivations - the reason for following the religious path. As such, there could, in theory, be a *Mahāyānist*, one with the highest motivation of complete Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings, following a *Theravāda* tradition. This fits with what we know of the historical origins of the *Mahāyāna*, embedded firmly within the non-*Mahāyāna* traditions.²³ In other words, those motivated by infinite compassion for all living beings, making the relief of their suffering their central interest, would be *Mahāyānists*, regardless of philosophical or institutional affiliation. Developing the 'Buddha-mind' is the initiation into *Mahāyāna*, and compassion is the basis and motivating force of the *Bodhisattas*; from it springs the entire edifice of *Mahāyāna*.²⁴ A beautiful example of this is *Avalokiteśvara*, the *Bodhisatta* of compassion. *Avalokiteśvara* hears the cries of all beings and

²¹ *Samyuttanikāya* I. (2006). London: Pali Text Society, p. 1.

²² Norman, K. R. (1990). "Pali Philology and the Study of Buddhism." *The Buddhist Forum* (School of Oriental and African Studies, London), p. 36.

²³ Williams, Paul. (1989). *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundation*. London, p. 197.

²⁴ Williams, Paul. (1989). *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundation*. London, p. 197.

responds with infinite compassion, showing us what it means to live selflessly and act in the service of others.

In this way, the Buddha's compassion offers a blueprint for us to follow in our own lives. It teaches us to recognize the suffering around us and respond with kindness, understanding, and action, as we too walk the path of liberation, helping to relieve the suffering of others along the way.

IV. PRECEPTS (ŚĪLA): DEFINITION IN THE BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

In Buddhism, *sīla* (Sanskrit: शील, Pāli: *sīla*) refers to ethical conduct or moral discipline. It is one of the three core aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path (*aṭṭhaṅgika magga*), alongside *samādhi* (meditative concentration) and *paññā* (wisdom). Essentially, *sīla* is about living with integrity, making choices that align with kindness and mindfulness. It is the foundation that supports mental clarity, wisdom, and ultimately, enlightenment.²⁵

4.1. What does Śīla mean in Buddhism?

Sīla can be understood as “virtue,” “morality,” or “ethical conduct.” It is about striving to act in ways that reduce harm, promote well-being, and create harmony both for ourselves and for others. By practicing *sīla*, we begin to purify our minds, which is necessary for cultivating deeper meditation and wisdom. When we act with ethical discipline, we create the right conditions for clarity and insight to arise.²⁶

The Three Types of *Śīla* (Ethical Conduct): (1) Right Speech (*Sammā Vācā*): Right speech is about how we use our words.²⁷ Are they truthful, kind, and constructive? This type of speech fosters understanding and compassion while avoiding harmful words like lying, gossiping, or speaking harshly. Examples of right speech: speaking the truth, even when it's difficult, avoiding gossip or hurtful comments, and using words to promote peace and kindness in conversations. (2) Right Action (*Sammā Kammanta*): Right action involves doing things that do not cause harm. It is about following the Five Precepts (or additional rules for monastics) and living a life that reflects ethical values. This includes refraining from harmful actions such as killing, stealing, or engaging in sexual misconduct. Examples of right action: Being kind to others, showing generosity, and helping those in need, and acting with integrity, refraining from stealing, or causing unnecessary harm. (3) Right Livelihood (*Sammā Ājīva*): Right livelihood means earning a living in a way that's ethical and does not exploit or harm others.²⁸ This

²⁵ Vinaya I, p. 15; Dīgha Nikāya I, p. 110; Majjhima Nikāya I, p. 379. This is the so-called *anupubbi-kathā* (also spelled *Anupubbi-kathā*), the ‘step-by-step teaching,’ which occurs many times in the Pali Canon, e.g.,

²⁶ Klostermaier, Klaus K. (2006). *Buddhism: A Short Introduction*. Oneworld Publications, England, pp. 106 - 107.

²⁷ Karunadasa, Y. (2013). *Early Buddhist Teachings*. Centre of Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, p. 95.

²⁸ Karunadasa, Y. (2013). *Early Buddhist Teachings*. Centre of Buddhist Studies, University

is about choosing work that is in harmony with Buddhist principles, avoiding jobs that promote things like violence, dishonesty, or exploitation (e.g., selling weapons or intoxicants). Examples of right livelihood: Choosing a career that supports the well-being of others and avoiding professions that contribute to harm, such as selling things that cause addiction or suffering.

4.2. The Five Precepts (*Pañca-śīla*)

The Five Precepts (Sanskrit: *pañcaśīla*; Pāli: *pañcasīla*) are five “rules of conduct” that form the foundation of Buddhist ethics (*śīla*) for both lay and monastic followers. For lay Buddhists, the Five Precepts (*pañcasīla*) serve as a basic ethical guide, outlining how to live in harmony with moral principles. These precepts are voluntary commitments, encouraging practitioners to live ethically and mindfully. Here is a breakdown of each one: (1) To refrain from killing any living being (Pāli: *Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*). This precept encourages compassion and non-violence toward all creatures. It’s about respecting all life, from animals to humans, and recognizing the value of each living being. (2) To refrain from taking what is not given (Pāli: *Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*). This means respecting the property and rights of others, avoiding theft or any form of dishonesty. It’s a commitment to fairness and integrity in how we interact with the world. (3) To refrain from sexual misconduct (Pāli: *Kāmesumicchācāra veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*). This precept focuses on cultivating respectful and ethical relationships. It encourages sexual conduct that is consensual, loving, and free of harm or exploitation. (4) To refrain from false speech (Pāli: *Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*) This means speaking truthfully and avoiding any form of deceit, gossip, or harsh words. Honest and kind communication helps create trust and understanding among people. (5) To refrain from intoxicants (Pāli: *Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*)²⁹. Intoxicants like alcohol or drugs impair judgment and lead to unwholesome actions. This precept encourages mindfulness and clarity of mind, so one can act with wisdom and avoid harm.

4.3. The role of *Śīla* in the Buddhist path

In the Buddhist path, *śīla* (ethical conduct) plays a foundational role. It is the bedrock upon which other aspects of the path are built. Here’s how it connects with the other key elements of the path: Concentration (*Samādhi*): Concentration in meditation depends on a mind that is calm and free of guilt, anger, or harmful actions. Without ethical conduct, the mind remains restless, making it difficult to focus and develop deep concentration.³⁰ Wisdom (*Paññā*): Wisdom grows when we consistently practice virtue and ethics. By reducing mental defilements such as greed, hatred, and ignorance, we create the

of Hong Kong, p. 95.

²⁹ Harvey, Peter. (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge University Press, p. 67.

³⁰ Klostermaier, Klaus K. (2006). *Buddhism: A Short Introduction*. Oneworld Publications, England, p. 109.

mental clarity needed to gain insight into the true nature of reality. Happiness is not a means to wisdom; rather, wisdom is a means to happiness. Happiness is not a means to mental purity; rather, mental purity is a means to happiness. Happiness is not a means to compassionate love; rather, compassionate love is a means to happiness. While wisdom, mental purity, and compassionate love function as the means, happiness becomes the goal. This is certainly not to downgrade but to emphasize the importance and indispensability of wisdom, mental purity, and compassionate love. What this clearly demonstrates is that true, sustainable happiness is not possible unless it is grounded in a proper understanding of the nature of actuality (*paññā*), the highest cultivation of mental purity, and the fullest development of compassionate love.³¹ It is not the case that wisdom, mental purity, and compassionate love arise first and then comes happiness. We need to understand this whole situation not in a chronological sense but in a logical sense. It is only in a logical sense that wisdom, mental purity, and compassionate love come first. In reality, wisdom, mental purity, compassionate love, and happiness all arise together and exist together. We find a similar situation in the enumeration of the three universal characteristics of sentient existence, namely, impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). Although they are listed in sequence, one after another, that does not mean they arise in chronological order. It is only in a logical sense that impermanence is prior to the other two. In fact, impermanence provides the rational basis for all Buddhist teachings on the nature of actuality. In this way, *śīla* is more than just following rules; it is a crucial part of the spiritual journey that purifies the mind, cultivates wisdom, and ultimately leads to liberation from suffering. As practitioners refine their ethical behavior and mindfulness, they gradually prepare themselves for a deeper understanding of life and develop the compassion necessary to transcend suffering.

4.4. Kinds of Precepts (*Śīla*) in Buddhism

Buddhism teaches that *śīla* (ethical conduct) is vital to the path of liberation.³² It includes various precepts or ethical guidelines designed to help practitioners reduce suffering and promote peace. These precepts vary based on the practitioner's level of commitment, with different sets for laypeople and monks/nuns. Let's explore the main categories of precepts:

4.4.1. The Five Precepts (*Pañca-śīla*) for Lay Buddhists

For lay Buddhists, the Five Precepts form the core ethical framework.³³ These are voluntary commitments that guide individuals living in the world and provide a foundation for virtuous behaviour. (1) To refrain from killing any living being (*ahiṃsā*): This precept encourages non-violence and compassion.

³¹ Karunadasa, Y. (2013). *Early Buddhist Teachings*. Centre of Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, p. 117.

³² Klostermaier, Klaus K. (2006). *Buddhism: A Short Introduction*. Oneworld Publications, England, pp. 106 - 107.

³³ *Khuddakapāṭhapāli*. (1978). Pali Text Society, p. 1.

Practitioners vow to avoid intentionally harming or killing any living being, fostering a deep respect for all life. (2) To refrain from taking what is not given (stealing): Practitioners promise not to steal, deceive, or exploit others. They respect the property and rights of others, ensuring fairness and integrity in their actions. (3) To refrain from sexual misconduct: This precept emphasizes ethical sexual conduct, where respect, mutual consent, and avoiding harm are the guiding principles. It discourages behaviors such as adultery, exploitation, or objectification. (5) To refrain from false speech: Practitioners commit to truthfulness, avoiding lying, gossiping, slandering, or speaking harshly. The goal is to foster clear, honest communication that does not harm others. (6) To refrain from intoxicants: This precept encourages mindfulness and clarity of mind by avoiding substances such as alcohol or drugs. Intoxicants can impair judgment and lead to unwholesome actions, so this precept supports mental clarity.

4.4.2. The Eight Precepts (*Aṣṭāṅga-śīla*)

For lay Buddhists observing special spiritual practices, such as during meditation retreats or *Uposatha* days, the Eight Precepts offer a more rigorous set of guidelines. These precepts build on the Five Precepts and emphasize a deeper level of purity and commitment during periods of intensive practice. The Eight Precepts include all five of the basic ones, along with the following additional ones: (1) To refrain from eating after noon: This precept encourages moderation in eating and promotes self-discipline. It mirrors the monastic practice of eating only in the morning, abstaining from food in the afternoon or evening. (2) To refrain from entertainment and frivolous activities: Practitioners are encouraged to avoid distractions such as watching television or playing games. The goal is to dedicate more time to meditation, reflection, and spiritual practice. (3) To refrain from using luxurious or extravagant items: This precept promotes simplicity and detachment from material possessions. It discourages the use of fancy clothing, jewelry, or any items that encourage vanity or indulgence.

4.4.3. The Ten Precepts for Novice Monks (*Sāmaṇera*)

In the Buddhist monastic tradition, novice monks (*sāmaṇeras*) follow a set of Ten Precepts, which are more comprehensive than the basic Five Precepts for lay Buddhists. These precepts guide the novice monk towards discipline, renunciation of worldly attachments, and the cultivation of a simple and moral life. (1) To refrain from killing any living being, (2) To refrain from stealing, (3) To refrain from sexual misconduct, (4) To refrain from false speech, (5) To refrain from intoxicants, (6) To refrain from eating after noon, (7) To refrain from dancing, singing, and watching entertainment, (8) To refrain from using perfume, garlands, or ornaments, (9) To refrain from sleeping on high or luxurious beds and (10) To refrain from accepting money or gold.³⁴

³⁴ Mahāvaggapāli I, (1969). Pali Text Society, p. 83. “*Atha kho sāmaṇerānaṃ etadahosi “kati nu kho amhākaṃ sikkhāpadāni, kattha ca amhehi sikkhitabba”nti? Bhagavato etamattamaṃ ārocesuṃ...pe... anujānāmi, bhikkhave, sāmaṇerānaṃ dasa sikkhāpadāni, tesu ca sāmaṇerehi sikkhituṃ pāṇātipātā veramaṇī, adinnādānā veramaṇī, abrahmacariyā veramaṇī, musāvādā*

These precepts help novice monks cultivate simplicity and renunciation as they prepare for full ordination. By adhering to these rules, they deepen their spiritual practice and grow in ethical discipline.

4.4.4. Introduction to the 227 Precepts for Buddhist Monks (*Bhikkhu*)

The 227 precepts for Buddhist monks, also known as the *Bhikkhu Pātimokkha*, form the cornerstone of monastic discipline in the *Theravāda* tradition. These precepts regulate the conduct of monks and are designed to ensure communal harmony while supporting personal progress on the path to enlightenment. By following these rules, monks can develop ethical behavior (*sīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) - the threefold foundation of the Buddhist path. The name *Pātimokkha* (leaving aside for the time being its etymology) comes from two Pāli words: *pāti* (protection) and *mokkha* (liberation), which together signify that adherence to these rules protects one from moral downfall and aids in the pursuit of liberation.³⁵

4.5. Origin and development of the Precepts

Initially, there were no formal precepts, as the Buddha trusted the integrity of his early followers. However, as the monastic community grew, new challenges arose, prompting the Buddha to establish specific rules. Each of the 227 precepts was introduced in response to particular situations, making the *Pātimokkha* a dynamic code shaped by lived experiences. Monks recite these precepts every fortnight during the ceremony of the *Upasatha* (the observance day, which occurs biweekly). On that day, *bhikkhus* are required to recite the *Pātimokkha*,³⁶ confess any transgressions, and reaffirm their commitment to monastic discipline. This regular practice fosters accountability, communal harmony, and mindfulness.

4.6. Categories of the Precepts

The precepts are organized into eight categories, each based on the severity of violations and the corresponding consequences:³⁷ (1) *Pārājika* (Defeats) - 4 rules: Breaking any of these results in immediate and irreversible expulsion from the monastic community. These rules prohibit killing, stealing, sexual intercourse, and falsely claiming spiritual attainments. (2) *Saṅghādisesa* (Formal Meetings) - 13 rules: Violations of these rules require a formal meeting of the Sangha (community of monks) for resolution. These rules address serious offenses like sexual misconduct and improper handling of wealth. (3) *Aniyata* (Indeterminate) - 2 rules: These rules apply to ambiguous

veramaṇī, surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī, vikālabhojanā veramaṇī, naccagītavāditavisūkadassanā veramaṇī, mālāgandhavilepanadhāraṇamaṇḍanavibhūsanāṭṭhānā veramaṇī, uccāsayanamahāsayanā veramaṇī, jātārūparajatapāṭiggahaṇā veramaṇī. Anujānāmi, bhikkhave, sāmaṇereṇaṃ imāni dasa sikkhāpadāni, imesu ca sāmaṇerehi sikkhitunti."

³⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

³⁶ Gamage, Chamindaji. (1998). *Buddhism & Sensuality*. Karunaratne & Sons Ltd, Colombo, p. 38.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

situations that require investigation by the Sangha. (4) *Nissaggiya Pācittiya* (Forfeiture and Confession) - 30 rules: These rules pertain to improper possession of certain items. Monks must forfeit the object and confess the transgression. (5) *Pācittiya* (Confession) - 92 rules: These rules cover minor offenses such as improper speech, conduct, and etiquette, requiring monks to confess to another monk. (6) *Pāṭidesanīya* (Acknowledgment) - 4 rules: These require a monk to acknowledge certain actions when questioned. (7) *Sekhiya* (Training Rules) - 75 rules: These rules define proper etiquette in speech, eating, dressing, and behaviour, reflecting the monk's role as a moral exemplar. (8) *Adhikaraṇasamatha* (Dispute Resolution) – 7 methods: These provide guidelines for resolving disputes within the Sangha and maintaining harmony.

4.7. Purpose and relevance of the 227 Precepts

The main purpose of the 227 precepts is to create a disciplined environment that facilitates meditation and the pursuit of *nibbāna* (liberation). By regulating body, speech, and mind, these rules prevent unwholesome actions and promote mindfulness, simplicity, and detachment from worldly desires. They also foster respect and trust between the monastic and lay communities, with monks expected to embody the highest ethical standards. Even in modern contexts, these precepts continue to be observed in *Theravāda* monasteries worldwide, inspiring not only monks but also lay practitioners who wish to lead ethical lives, cultivate compassion, and foster human values.

V. INTRODUCTION TO THE 311 PRECEPTS FOR BUDDHIST NUNS (*BHIKKHUNĪ*)

The 311 precepts for Buddhist nuns, or the *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha*, form a similar disciplinary framework to the *Bhikkhu Pātimokkha* but with additional rules reflecting the distinct roles and responsibilities of women in the monastic community. This code guides the ethical and spiritual lives of ordained nuns. The establishment of the *Bhikkhunī Saṅgha* was a historic moment for gender inclusivity in early Buddhism, initiated at the request of the Buddha's foster mother, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. The ordination of women allowed them the opportunity for spiritual liberation, though with a carefully crafted code to maintain harmony within the community.

5.1. Categories of the Precepts

Similar to the *Bhikkhu Pātimokkha*, the precepts for nuns are categorized into eight sections: (1) *Pārājika*: 8 rules leading to permanent expulsion if violated, (2) *Saṅghādisesa*: 17 rules requiring formal meetings of the *Saṅgha* to address violations, (3) *Nissaggiya Pācittiya*: 30 rules requiring forfeiture of improperly obtained items, (4) *Pācittiya*: 166 rules governing everyday conduct, (5) *Pāṭidesanīya*: 8 rules requiring confession in certain situations, (6) *Sekhiya*: 75 training rules for proper etiquette and (7) *Adhikaraṇasamatha*: 7 methods for resolving disputes within the *Saṅgha*. These precepts not only serve as restrictions but also as a path to cultivating inner discipline, self-awareness, and humility. They deepen meditative practice and ultimately lead to *nibbāna*. The *Bhikkhunī* precepts, while rooted in ancient social structures, have been the

subject of ongoing reinterpretation, especially in modern Buddhist practice. The ordination of women has gained significant momentum, particularly in *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* traditions, emphasizing gender equality and the full participation of women in monastic life. The precepts in Buddhism, whether for lay practitioners, novice monks, or ordained monks and nuns, provide a moral foundation for ethical living, mindfulness, and spiritual growth. By adhering to these precepts, practitioners create the conditions for mental clarity, wisdom, and ultimately, enlightenment.

5.2. Introduction to the Five Precepts in Buddhism

In Buddhism, the five precepts (known as *pañcasiḷa* in Pāli and *pañca-śīla* in Sanskrit) are a set of ethical guidelines designed to help lay practitioners lead more mindful, compassionate lives. While these precepts are not commandments, they are commitments that individuals make to live with integrity, reduce suffering, and cultivate peace in their personal lives and communities. The five precepts are a foundation for those who wish to follow the Buddha's teachings but are not monks or nuns. They serve as a practical guide for living in harmony with oneself and others, fostering a life filled with mindfulness, compassion, and respect. The precepts are voluntary and are typically undertaken during Buddhist ceremonies, retreats, or religious observances. For lay Buddhists, they represent an aspiration to live virtuously, creating space for spiritual growth and harmony.

The Purpose and Importance of the Five Precepts: (1) Purification of the Mind: Living ethically through the precepts clears the mind of distractions and harmful tendencies. This mental clarity creates the ideal conditions for meditation, mindfulness, and ultimately the wisdom needed for spiritual growth.³⁸ (2) Moral Foundation: The Five Precepts provide a stable ethical framework for lay Buddhists. They offer a clear path for living a life that minimizes harm and fosters virtues like compassion, honesty, and integrity. These guidelines are not just about following rules, but about grounding one's actions in a moral foundation that nurtures peace and mindfulness. The precepts help create a life in alignment with Buddhist teachings, guiding practitioners toward spiritual growth and a peaceful existence.³⁹ (3) Karma and Consequences: In Buddhism, karma refers to the idea that our actions have consequences both in the present and the future. By refraining from harmful actions and committing to virtuous behavior, practitioners generate positive karma. This not only brings about personal well-being but also paves the way for future spiritual progress. The Five Precepts encourage ethical actions that reduce suffering for both oneself and others, creating a ripple effect of goodness and positive energy. (4) Mental Clarity and Concentration: Observing the Five Precepts helps purify the mind, clearing away distractions

³⁸ Gunaratana, Henepola Mahathera. (1991). *Mindfulness in Plain English*. Buddha Education Foundation, Taiwan, pp. 142 – 154.

³⁹ Karunadasa, Y. (2013). *Early Buddhist Teachings*. Centre of Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, pp. 96 – 97.

and emotional turbulence that could otherwise interfere with meditation and mindfulness. When we avoid actions like lying, stealing, or indulging in intoxicants, we free our minds from unnecessary complications. This enables us to focus more deeply during meditation and to develop the concentration and awareness needed to experience deeper states of wisdom and insight.⁴⁰ (5) Interconnectedness and Compassion: One of the core teachings of Buddhism is the interconnectedness of all beings. The Five Precepts encourage us to act with compassion, knowing that our actions affect others. When we refrain from causing harm whether through words, actions, or intentions we contribute to a more harmonious and peaceful world. The precepts remind us that every living being is part of the same web of life, and by cultivating empathy and kindness, we reduce suffering for all.⁴¹ (6) Reduction of Suffering: Ethical living reduces personal and societal suffering. When we refrain from harmful actions like violence, dishonesty, or selfishness, we promote peace and lessen conflict in our relationships and communities.⁴² (7) Social Harmony: Ethical conduct is not just about individual practice; it's about creating a harmonious and cooperative society. When we live according to the precepts, we foster respect, kindness, and care within our communities, helping everyone to live more peacefully together. (8) Spiritual Development: Following the precepts also supports spiritual awakening. Purifying our actions, speech, and thoughts allows us to develop deeper meditation practices, which in turn lead to greater insight into the nature of reality and ultimately to *nibbāna*, the cessation of suffering.⁴³ The Five Precepts are much more than a list of ethical guidelines; they serve as practical tools for cultivating a virtuous, enlightened life. By incorporating these precepts into everyday actions, lay Buddhists can create a life filled with peace, clarity, and compassion. They're a foundational part of Buddhist practice, helping individuals live harmoniously with others and progress on the path toward spiritual awakening.

VI. INTRODUCTION TO COMPASSION AS REFLECTED IN THE FIVE PRECEPTS

6.1. Compassion as reflected in “*pānātipātā veramābhi sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*” (Refraining from killing)

Compassion, a cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy, is the profound desire to alleviate the suffering of others. This virtue is vividly expressed in the first of Buddhism's five precepts, articulated as “*pānātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*,”⁴⁴ which translates to, “I undertake the training

⁴⁰ McConnell, John A. (1995). *Mindful Meditation*. Mahachula Buddhist University, Thailand, p. 218.

⁴¹ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* IV. (1979). Pali Text Society, p. 150.

⁴² McConnell, John A. (1995). *Mindful Meditation*. Mahachula Buddhist University, Thailand, pp. 8 – 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 239 - 240

⁴⁴ *Khuddakanikāye* I. (2017). Pali Text Society, London, p. 1.

rule to refrain from killing any living being.”⁴⁵ This precept exemplifies the principle of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), offering a practical guide to developing compassion for all living beings, human and non-human alike. Refraining from killing, as emphasized in this precept, is more than abstaining from physical acts of violence. It reflects a profound moral commitment to respecting and valuing life in all its forms. This commitment extends beyond avoiding harm to encompass mindfulness in actions, thoughts, and words, ensuring that no harm is inflicted on any being. At its core, the precept teaches that all sentient beings, regardless of size or form, share an inherent desire to live and experience happiness. To harm or take the life of another being not only causes individual suffering but also disrupts the harmony and interconnectedness of all life. By choosing to refrain from killing, practitioners deepen their awareness of life’s sanctity, cultivating a heart imbued with love, kindness, and empathy. Furthermore, practicing this precept nurtures personal responsibility and ethical living, highlighting the profound impact of one’s actions on the world. It encourages peaceful intentions, thoughtful behavior, and a compassionate mindset, all of which contribute to the reduction of suffering for all beings. In this way, “*pānātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*” transcends being a mere moral guideline. It serves as a transformative practice for cultivating universal compassion - one that nurtures life’s interconnectedness and fosters the well-being of all sentient beings.

6.2. Compassion as reflected in “*adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*” (Refraining from stealing)

In Buddhism, compassion is about genuinely wanting to ease the suffering of others and help them thrive. This idea is woven into the ethical precept “*adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*,”⁴⁶ which means, “I undertake the training rule to refrain from taking what is not given.”⁴⁷ This precept emphasizes the importance of respecting others’ belongings and rights, showing how refraining from stealing is closely tied to the practice of compassion. At its heart, this teaching asks us to live mindfully and ethically by avoiding the act of taking anything that hasn’t been freely offered - whether it’s a physical item, someone’s time, attention, or something intangible. When we steal or take what isn’t ours, we disrupt the natural harmony between people and cause harm, not just to the one we’ve wronged but also to ourselves. Recognizing that such actions lead to suffering helps nurture a more compassionate attitude toward others and their possessions. By committing to this principle, we learn to respect the dignity and independence of others. Compassion here means understanding that what others have - be it their belongings or their efforts - matters to them. Taking something without permission disregards their hard

⁴⁵ Harvey, Peter. (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge University Press, p. 67.

⁴⁶ *Khuddakanikāye* I. (2017). Pali Text Society, London, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Harvey, Peter. (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge University Press, p. 67.

work and needs. This mindfulness fosters trust, peace, and mutual respect, creating a world where everyone can coexist more harmoniously. Following this precept also encourages us to embrace generosity, contentment, and self-restraint. Instead of seeking happiness in what belongs to others, we are guided to find fulfillment within ourselves. When we respect others' rights and value the interconnectedness of all life, we live with integrity and compassion, nurturing healthy relationships and reducing harm. Ultimately, "*adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*" shows that compassion isn't just about feeling kind - it's about acting with kindness. It asks us to care for others, honor their rights and possessions, and make choices that reflect integrity and respect. By doing this, we not only avoid causing harm but also contribute to a world that is more fair, peaceful, and compassionate.

6.3. Compassion as reflected in "*kāmesumicchācāra veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*" (Refraining from sexual misconduct)

In Buddhism, compassion means wishing for the happiness and well-being of all beings while helping them avoid suffering. This idea is closely tied to the ethical precept "*kāmesumicchācāra veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*"⁴⁸, which translates to, "I undertake the training rule to refrain from sexual misconduct."⁴⁹ This precept encourages respect for relationships, the dignity of others, and the idea that sexual conduct should always be rooted in love, respect, and mutual consent. Sexual misconduct refers to behaviors that harm, exploit, or violate others, such as adultery, coercion, or any act that disregards someone's rights and well-being. Practicing this precept is an act of compassion because it protects people from emotional, physical, and psychological harm. It fosters healthy and respectful relationships, ensuring that our actions promote care rather than cause pain. Compassion shines through this precept by recognizing every individual's right to live free from harm, especially in the deeply personal area of sexuality. By following this guideline, we consciously avoid causing suffering through deceit, manipulation, or harm in intimate relationships. Dishonest or harmful behavior disrupts trust and harmony, leading to pain for all involved. This precept also encourages us to take responsibility for our intentions and desires. It asks us to approach relationships with honesty, mindfulness, and care, ensuring that they are based on mutual respect and trust. By refraining from sexual misconduct, we show compassion by treating others with dignity, never as objects or means to an end. On a deeper level, this precept aligns with Buddhist teachings about reducing attachment and craving, which are major sources of suffering. When we practice restraint and mindfulness, we develop a stronger sense of empathy and understanding. This creates space for genuine, loving relationships that are free from harm and built on mutual care and respect. Ultimately, "*kāmesumicchācāra veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*" is a reminder that compassion isn't just about avoiding harm - it's also about

⁴⁸ *Khuddakanikāye* I. (2017). Pali Text Society, London, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Harvey, Peter. (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge University Press, p. 67.

creating positive, uplifting connections. By engaging in ethical, respectful, and loving relationships, we uphold the happiness and dignity of others while nurturing the kind of bonds that promote peace and harmony.

6.4. Compassion as reflected in “*musāvādā veramaṇi sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*” (Refraining from false speech)

Compassion lies at the heart of Buddhist teachings; it is the genuine wish for everyone to experience happiness and freedom from suffering. This principle is beautifully reflected in the ethical precept “*musāvādā veramaṇi sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*,”⁵⁰ which means, “I undertake the training rule to refrain from false speech.”⁵¹ This precept highlights the power of words and their ability to either heal or harm. By encouraging truthfulness and integrity, it invites us to consider how our words impact others and challenges us to speak with compassion and care. False speech includes lying, gossiping, slandering, or any form of communication that misleads or distorts the truth. These actions can cause harm by creating misunderstandings, breaking trust, and spreading negativity, all of which lead to unnecessary suffering. Refraining from false speech is, at its core, an act of compassion; it seeks to protect others from the pain and harm dishonesty can cause. This precept invites us to think deeply about how our words can influence others. Speaking truthfully and kindly becomes a way of expressing compassion, as it helps foster trust, harmony, and understanding. When we avoid deceit and instead focus on clear, honest, and respectful communication, we contribute to stronger relationships and healthier communities. Mindfulness plays a key role in this practice. It is not just about avoiding lies but also about being intentional with how we communicate. Instead of resorting to exaggeration, gossip, or hurtful criticism, this precept encourages us to choose words that promote peace, understanding, and kindness. Words carry immense power - they can heal wounds or deepen them - and this guideline reminds us of the responsibility that comes with using them wisely. Choosing to refrain from false speech is an act of kindness, as it protects the dignity of others and creates a culture of honesty and trust. It encourages us to be mindful of both our words and the intentions behind them, ensuring that our communication uplifts rather than harms. By living this precept, we help create a world where relationships are built on respect, truth, and understanding, reducing the suffering caused by dishonesty and misrepresentation. Ultimately, “*musāvādā veramaṇi sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*” reminds us that compassion is not just about avoiding harm - it is about actively using our words to bring clarity, kindness, and well-being to the lives of others.

6.5. Compassion as reflected in “*surāmeraya majjapamādatthānā veramaṇi sikkhāpadam samādiyāmi*” (Refraining from intoxicants)

In Buddhism, compassion is the heartfelt wish to ease suffering and bring happiness to all beings. This principle is deeply connected to the precept

⁵⁰ *Khuddakanikāye* I. (2017). Pali Text Society, London, p. 1.

⁵¹ Harvey, Peter. (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge University Press, p. 67.

“*surāmeraya majjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*,”⁵² which translates to “I undertake the training rule to refrain from intoxicants that lead to carelessness.”⁵³ This precept reminds us that maintaining a clear and mindful state of mind is essential for making compassionate and responsible choices. Intoxicants like alcohol or drugs can cloud judgment, weaken self-control, and lead to actions that harm both ourselves and those around us. Under their influence, people may act recklessly, disrupt relationships, or cause physical and emotional damage. The Buddha understood that intoxicants foster carelessness and dull wisdom, creating suffering not just for the individual but for others as well. Refraining from intoxicants is an act of compassion because it safeguards our mental and physical well-being. When we remain clear-headed, we are better able to be present, mindful, and aware of how our actions affect others. This clarity allows us to make thoughtful decisions that minimize harm and promote understanding and care. By practicing this precept, we show kindness not only to ourselves but also to the people we interact with, as our choices reflect a commitment to responsibility and integrity. This precept also teaches self-restraint and mindfulness - key qualities in developing compassion. By avoiding intoxicants, we strengthen our ability to resist harmful habits, recognize unhelpful patterns of behavior, and prioritize actions that contribute to the well-being of everyone. Choosing not to indulge in substances that lead to carelessness is a way of aligning our actions, words, and thoughts to reduce suffering and cultivate happiness. Moreover, this precept encourages us to think about the broader impact of our choices. Intoxication does not just affect the individual; it can disrupt families, friendships, and communities. By embracing sobriety, we create space for healthier, more respectful relationships rooted in mindfulness, kindness, and mutual understanding. Ultimately, “*surāmeraya majjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*” reflects the essence of compassion. It guides us toward a life of clarity and responsibility, where our thoughts and actions contribute to peace and well-being for ourselves and others. By refraining from intoxicants, we uphold the values of mindfulness and care, ensuring that our presence in the world reduces harm and fosters harmony.

6.6. Way of compassionate quality (*karuṇā*) as depicted in the Five Precepts and its influence on human security and development

The Five Precepts in Buddhism provide a comprehensive ethical framework for personal and societal development. These precepts are not only tools for individual moral conduct but also foundational principles for fostering a more compassionate, harmonious world. They encompass *pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (refraining from killing), *adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (refraining from stealing), *kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (refraining from sexual misconduct), *musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (refraining from

⁵² *Khuddakanikāye* I. (2017). Pali Text Society, London, p. 1.

⁵³ Harvey, Peter. (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge University Press, p. 67.

false speech), and *surāmeraya majjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi* (refraining from intoxicants). Each of these precepts embodies *karuṇā* - compassion, the core value of Buddhist practice - guiding individuals toward a life of mindfulness, ethical conduct, and empathy for all sentient beings. Compassion, or *karuṇā*, is the deep, empathetic wish for the alleviation of suffering. It is an active force that transforms relationships, communities, and societies. Through the Five Precepts, this compassion extends beyond personal ethics to have a profound impact on human security and development. The practice of compassion in the precepts encourages a societal shift where violence, exploitation, dishonesty, and unhealthy behaviors are minimized, allowing for the creation of safe, equitable, and sustainable environments.

6.7. Compassion and the Five Precepts: A foundation for human security and development

(1) Refraining from Killing (*pānātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*): The first precept advocates for non-violence, which is central to compassion. Refraining from killing reflects the understanding that all life is precious and interconnected. In the context of human security, this precept plays a critical role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It encourages the establishment of societies where the sanctity of life is protected, violence is minimized, and social justice is prioritized. By fostering respect for life, individuals contribute to a safer and more secure environment, which is foundational for the development of peaceful, resilient societies. Compassion in this precept promotes the creation of systems where human security is safeguarded through non-violent means, ensuring the well-being of all members of society. (2) Refraining from Stealing (*adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*): Compassion is expressed through respect for the rights and possessions of others, recognizing that equity is crucial for social harmony. By adhering to the second precept, individuals contribute to a society where resources are distributed fairly and people are not exploited for personal gain. This respect for personal boundaries and property fosters a sense of social trust, which is integral to both human security and sustainable development. When stealing is minimized, resources are protected, and social fairness is promoted, enabling communities to thrive without the exploitation of vulnerable populations. Compassion here ensures that human development is pursued not through greed or exploitation but through equitable means that promote well-being for all. (3) Refraining from Sexual Misconduct (*kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*): The third precept encourages healthy, respectful relationships founded on mutual consent, trust, and dignity. Compassion within this context safeguards emotional and physical well-being, helping to prevent exploitation, abuse, and emotional harm. In a broader societal context, this precept supports gender equality, the protection of human rights, and the maintenance of healthy, supportive family structures. Societies that uphold this precept are better equipped to create environments where individuals are free from harm and exploitation, fostering stronger, more resilient communities. Compassion here ensures that human security is protected by preserving

personal autonomy, emotional integrity, and personal dignity for all. (4) Refraining from False Speech (*musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*): Communication is a powerful tool in shaping relationships and communities. The fourth precept calls for truthfulness and integrity in speech, which directly influences social harmony and trust. Compassion as expressed through this precept prevents harm that can arise from lies, gossip, and misinformation. By practicing honest communication, individuals contribute to a culture of transparency and accountability, which is essential for social stability and the free flow of information. In terms of human security, refraining from false speech ensures that decisions are made based on truth, promoting inclusivity, participation, and informed decision-making processes. Compassionate communication creates a foundation for sustainable development through trust, mutual respect, and understanding. (5) Refraining from Intoxicants (*surāmeraya majjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*): The final precept calls for the abstention from intoxicants that impair mental clarity and mindfulness. Compassion within this precept is reflected in the desire to protect individuals from the destructive effects of substance abuse. Intoxicants not only harm individuals but also disrupt relationships and communities. By avoiding substances that lead to carelessness, individuals maintain the ability to make ethical, responsible decisions, thereby contributing to their well-being and the security of their communities. In the context of human development, refraining from intoxicants promotes health, mental clarity, and personal responsibility, which are essential for sustainable and equitable development. Compassion here ensures that individuals can live in harmony with others, free from the destructive cycle of addiction.

6.8. The role of compassionate quality (*karuṇā*) in shaping human security and development

The Five Precepts, as expressions of compassion, are not just ethical guidelines but powerful instruments for fostering human security and development. Each precept is a practical application of *karuṇā* (compassion), guiding individuals toward actions that reduce suffering and promote the well-being of all sentient beings. When practiced collectively, these precepts create a foundation for a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world, where personal well-being is aligned with the collective good. In societies that embrace the Five Precepts, human security flourishes, as individuals respect each other's rights, lives, and dignity. Development, in this context, is not merely economic growth but the creation of environments where peace, justice, and sustainability are prioritized. Compassion nurtures a world in which human potential can be realized, free from the suffering caused by violence, exploitation, dishonesty, and carelessness. By integrating the compassionate quality of *karuṇā* into every aspect of life, we can cultivate a future where human security and development not only become possible but thrive for all.

6.9. The interconnection between compassion and human security

The Five Precepts in Buddhism offer more than just a personal moral code; they provide a structural pathway for promoting human security through

compassion. Each precept fosters a culture of respect, fairness, and peace, ensuring the protection of human dignity, rights, and well-being. This holistic approach to security extends beyond physical safety to encompass a broader understanding that includes economic, social, cultural, and psychological well-being. When individuals adhere to the precepts, they promote a society in which violence, theft, dishonesty, and exploitation are minimized, leading to safer and more equitable communities. The compassion embedded in these precepts ensures that each person's inherent value is respected, preventing harm while simultaneously advancing human dignity. As a result, human security becomes not only the absence of threats but also the presence of conditions that nurture people's potential, ensuring they live with freedom, justice, and equality. In the context of human development, *karuṇā* (compassion) encourages social justice and equality, focusing on eliminating the root causes of poverty, inequality, and conflict. Compassionate individuals and societies are more inclined to work collectively toward solving societal problems, creating sustainable systems that allow all beings to thrive. The Five Precepts guide individuals to engage in ethical practices that contribute to the larger goal of human security, ensuring that development is inclusive, fair, and focused on the well-being of all, especially the marginalized and vulnerable.

VII. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, *karuṇā* (compassion) serves as a powerful catalyst for transformative change, guiding individuals and societies toward a future of peace, justice, and sustainability. By reflecting compassion through the practice of the Five Precepts, individuals contribute to creating communities where human rights are upheld, social equity is a priority, and the well-being of all beings is cherished. Compassion in this context is not passive but is actively expressed through ethical action, whether it is refraining from harmful actions like killing or stealing or cultivating virtues such as honesty, respect, and mindfulness. As individuals embody the Five Precepts, they are not only shaping their personal development but also fostering environments conducive to global human security and sustainable development. *Karuṇā* offers a path forward, one where the well-being of all individuals is interconnected, and the collective flourishing of humanity is achievable. The ethical conduct outlined in the Five Precepts provides the necessary tools to build societies grounded in fairness and equality, ensuring that the future of humanity is one where peace and prosperity are not just ideals but realities. Compassion, as embodied in the Five Precepts, remains the cornerstone of a peaceful, just, and prosperous world, where the security and dignity of all beings are safeguarded.

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BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

Compassion is a fundamental element of human connections, deeply rooted in our evolutionary history. No doubt that it has contributed to the survival of our species. Human communities could thrive because their members support each other, particularly during times of crisis. Compassion is supported by neurochemical systems, which strengthen social bonding and promote prosocial behavior.¹

The Buddha observed the importance of compassion (*karuṇā*) and thus he recognized its role in alleviating suffering. In Buddhism, compassion is not only a philosophical principle but a practical guideline for living a meaningful life. The Dalai Lama emphasizes that genuine compassion integrates wisdom and loving-kindness, requiring an understanding of the nature of suffering and fostering empathy toward all sentient beings.²

In the mainstream economic system, the focus is on the attitude of “survival of the fittest”. Managers and their companies are in constant competition; no matter what extent, the goal is to produce, expand, grow, and earn profit.³ This research aims to identify business practices that are affected by Buddhist compassion. The paper is based on a literature review on compassion and an analysis of the business practices of Patagonia, Inc. By observing different compassionate approaches of a global company, we can see that there are alternative ways of doing business, demonstrating that profit and purpose can coexist harmoniously.

Keywords: *Compassion, human connections, neurochemical systems, Buddhist compassion, business practices.*

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¹ Esch and Stefano (2011), p. 65 - 75.

² Dalai Lama (2005), p. 59 - 62.

³ Wyllie (1959), p. 629 - 635. Brosch (2023), p. 567 – 595.

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, businesses face different challenges, such as environmental degradation, and employee well-being. These challenges demand a shift away from narrow, profit-centric practices toward a broader approach that emphasizes care, ethics, and long-term sustainability.⁴

Compassion is not just a philosophical concept, it brings concrete, tangible benefits to businesses.⁵ A leader who pays attention to his/ her employees and cares about the community and the environment is something that makes a difference.⁶ The general approach of materialistic value orientation does not support true well-being, often prioritizing short-term gains over collective prosperity.⁷

Studies showed that compassion plays a central role and creates significant changes in the way companies operate.⁸ Compassionate behavior underlies various aspects of corporate management, including employee well-being, customer-focused strategies, community involvement, ethical supplier relationships, and environmental sustainability.⁹ This paper explores how Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) can redefine the practices of a modern business.

II. COMPASSION

Over the past decades, compassion gained attention in various fields. Researchers made attempts to define and measure it, mostly in the field of psychology.¹⁰ Since interdisciplinary is an important approach nowadays, investigating compassion in business is inevitable.

This paper uses the broad study of Cavanagh et al., where they explored the literature on compassion to provide a working definition of compassion. The result is much more a description of a process rather than just a static understanding. They concluded their findings in five steps:¹¹ “Recognizing suffering, understanding the universality of suffering in human experience, feeling empathy for the person suffering and connecting with the distress (emotional resonance), tolerating uncomfortable feelings aroused in response to the suffering person (e.g. distress, anger, fear) so remaining open to and accepting of the person suffering; and motivation to act/acting to alleviate suffering”.

The Buddhist concept of compassion (*karuṇā*) aligns with the scientific process described by Cavanagh et al. (2016). Their work emphasizes acknowledging the suffering and the drive to ease it, combining emotional

⁴ Alexiadou (2023), p. 353 – 377.

⁵ Engel et al. (2020): p.105986. Mathew et al. (2022), p. 01 - 05.

⁶ Barghouti et al. (2023), p. 1 - 19.

⁷ Kasser (2002), p. 1 - 165.

⁸ Mathew et al. (2022), p. 01 - 05.

⁹ Dena and Haque (2024), p. 17 - 22.

¹⁰ Cassell (2009), p. 1 - 18; Goetz et al. (2010), p. 351 – 374.

¹¹ Cavanagh et al. (2016), p. 16.

understanding with tangible actions. According to the report of the WHO, one in eight people worldwide suffers from a mental disorder.¹² Mental health problems cause severe distress and functional impairments for individuals creating a difficult path to maintain quality social interactions at work with friends, and within families. They lead to higher economic and treatment costs than chronic physical illnesses like cancer or diabetes.¹³ The research of Neff et al. (2007) shows that compassion can improve mental health while it prioritizes an individual's well-being. In addition, compassion towards ourselves and others increases well-being.¹⁴ The current state of the literature on compassion confirms the need for further studies to be conducted to understand the benefits of such emotional acts in businesses.

2.1. Compassion in Buddhism

Compassion in Buddhism is a core element for attaining a higher spiritual presence.¹⁵ Compassion is a skill that requires practice, and everyone develops it to different degrees. To cultivate a deeper sense of compassion, regular practice is essential – as it has been also advised by the Buddha in the Four Noble Truths.¹⁶

From *Mettā Sutta, Sutta Nipāta* (1.8): “Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos.” This teaching advocates for an all-encompassing compassion, which can be understood in a business context to empathy and care for employees, customers, and the broader community. If a company is capable of adopting such an approach, its whole environment could potentially benefit from it.

Dāna is one of the first and most important activities that a Buddhist learns. It is the art of giving, that is a foundation of further moral and spiritual development. One of the greatest exercises to reduce possessiveness is the practice of giving. It helps to cultivate an openhearted and sensitive attitude towards others, expressing non-attachment and renunciation.¹⁷ The act of giving is rooted in selflessness, that is, an important component of cultivating compassionate acts. Compassion is an aspiration, a state of mind. It is not passive or simply empathy, rather, it is an empathetic altruism that actively works to relieve others from suffering. Genuine compassion must have two components: wisdom and loving-kindness. It is a process; therefore, the first step is to understand the nature of suffering from which one would like to free others (this is the part of wisdom and refers to the general problem that a person would like to “solve”), and parallel to this, one should experience deep intimacy

¹² WHO (2022), p. 1 - 5.

¹³ Trautmann et al. (2016), p. 1245 - 1249.

¹⁴ Lee et al. (2021), p. 1 - 9.

¹⁵ Tashi and Gration (2013), p. 287 - 297. Makransky (2021), p. 1 - 22.

¹⁶ Dalai Lama (2005), p. 59 - 62.

¹⁷ Zsolnai-Kovacs (2021), p. 57 - 70.

and empathy with other sentient beings (this is loving kindness).¹⁸

2.2. Compassion in Buddhist Economics

Buddhist economics was first introduced in the book of E. F. Schumacher - 1971 – *The Small is beautiful*. He believed that economic activity should not be determined by the desire for maximum consumption and acquiring of profit only. He positioned the focus on human needs, sustainability, and happiness. One of the core fundamentals of Buddhist Economics lies in that people desire not only material but also spiritual and social well-being. Therefore, excessive material growth damages not only nature but people as well.¹⁹

Since the introduction of Schumacher's (1973) approach, many other scholars dug into the field of Buddhist economics, and it became an accepted discipline.²⁰ Throughout the years more and more scholars investigated the topic, thus new aspects have been added to it. In his works, Zsolnai (2007a, 2008, 2011b) suggested understanding Buddhist economics as a minimizing framework. This framework contains the following principles:

(1) The minimization of suffering, (2) the simplification of desires, (3) the practice of non-violence, (4) genuine care, and (5) generosity.²¹ The approach of Buddhist economics underscores the fundamentality of compassion in business.²² According to Zsolnai (2007a, 2008, 2011b), any economic activity or business initiative that is consistent with the five characteristics of Buddhist Economic strategy (regardless of the religious belief system of the person acting) can be considered a Buddhist business practice. These principles are connected to compassion. They provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how businesses can operate in a way that prioritizes well-being and environmental stewardship.

III. BUSINESS PRACTICES THROUGH THE LENS OF COMPASSION

Compassion can be experienced in an economic environment too. Kovacs (2019) in his work suggested five intertwined fields of businesses that he refers to as a caring attitude that can be understood as a form of compassion:

(1) They consider the interests of their employees to a great extent. (2) They treat their stakeholders equally by awarding the same importance to their suppliers and all other partners in business as they award their customers. (3) They pay attention to preserving culture and the natural environment. (4) They have a long-term orientation and (5) they define

¹⁸ Dalai Lama (2005), p. 59 - 62.

¹⁹ Brown (2015), p. 23 - 28. Brown-Zsolnai (2018), p. 497 - 513.

²⁰ Payutto (1994), p. 1 - 75. Welford (2006), p. 25 - 57. Magnuson (2007), p. 253 - 284. Zsolnai (2008), p. 279 - 304.

²¹ Zsolnai (2007a), p. 147 - 151.

²² Payutto (1994), p. 1 - 75. Nelson (2006), p. 195 - 219, (2011), p. 21 - 35. Zsolnai (2007a), p. 145 - 153, (2008), p. 279 - 304, (2011b), p. 88 - 94.

the goals of business more broadly than simple profit-maximization.”²³ If we practice it at a collective level, such as adopting it as an everyday business approach, positive effects on the environment can be expected. Environmental degradation and climate change remain unresolved issues in today’s economies, making it essential for entrepreneurs to play a key role in promoting environmental regeneration and adopting sustainable decision-making processes in their businesses.²⁴ Engel et al. (2020) argue that compassion is a significant predictor of entrepreneurial decisions, as it helps balance ethical considerations between environmental and economic sustainability.

IV. PATAGONIA, INC. - CORPORATE OVERVIEW

The story of Patagonia began in 1973, when Yvon Chouinard rock climber and environmental activist established the company with his wife, Malinda Pennoyer, in California. Chouinard had already been making climbing equipment before the establishment but his commitment to nature conversation led him to look for more sustainable ways of production. Instead of steel climbing tools that damaged the surfaces of the rock, Chouinard began making aluminum wedges that left no traces after usage. This move has already reflected the Buddhist principle of non-harming, which has been a part of the company’s decision-making process since its inception.²⁵ Patagonia’s core principles are to create the best outdoor products while minimizing harm and to demonstrate that businesses and the economy can – and should – be leveraged to address and remedy the current environmental crisis, encouraging others to follow suit. In the early years, Patagonia focused solely on meeting the needs of the climbing community but soon outgrew that niche and broadened its production to include outdoor activities that do not rely on combustion engines, such as running, hiking, skiing, etc. Patagonia acknowledges that, as an active market player, it contributes to the problem by using fossil fuels, water, and plastics, and generating significant waste and carbon dioxide emissions as by-products. However, they are aiming to make the processes transparent so the consequences of their production can be seen by anyone. Through several initiatives, they are sufficiently reducing and neutralizing the negative effects.

From the *Itivuttaka Sutta* 26: “Mendicants, if sentient beings only knew, as I do, the fruit of giving and sharing, they would not eat without first giving, and the stain of stinginess would not occupy their minds. They would not eat without sharing even their last mouthful, their last morsel, so long as there was someone to receive it. It is because sentient beings do not know, as I do, the fruit of giving and sharing, that they eat without first giving, and the stain of stinginess occupies their minds”. This teaching highlights the profound value of generosity and selflessness in Buddhist ethics, reinforcing the idea that businesses practicing compassion align with the Buddha’s vision.

²³ Kovacs (2019), p. 182.

²⁴ Dean-McMullen (2005), p. 50 - 76.

²⁵ Zsolnai-Kovacs (2021), p. 57 - 70. Ocsai (2021), p. 65 - 150.

By integrating a culture of giving – whether through fair wages, community support, or sustainable business practices – modern enterprises can transcend mere profit-seeking and contribute to collective well-being, fostering a more ethical and socially responsible marketplace. Thus, the initiatives of Patagonia involve raising consumer awareness, improving product durability, tracking their carbon footprint, supporting environmental movements and campaigns, and driving business transformation by backing companies with similar commitments.²⁶

The company has four core values that are:²⁷ “(1) Quality: Pursuit of ever-greater quality in everything they do. (2) Integrity: Relationships built on integrity and respect. (3) Environmentalism: Serve as a catalyst for personal and corporate action and (4) Not Bound by Convention: continuous seeking of innovative ways to do things”. Chouinard’s values, influenced by Zen Buddhism, have consistently placed environmental and social issues at the heart of Patagonia’s mission. In line with this, it has been committed to improving its sustainability performance since the beginning. The company became a Benefit-Corporation in 2011 thus it further solidified its reputation not only for its innovative design and quality of outdoor accessories but also for its environmental and social conscience. Becoming a certified B Corporation means that a for-profit company meets “rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency.”²⁸ Being a B Corp means that the company’s environmental and social performance is assessed and independently verified by a third party. To acquire a certification, the firm must score a minimum of 80 out of 200 points on B Lab’s Impact Assessment. Their score from the recent assessment performed in the calendar year 2023 was 166.^{29, 30}

V. 1% FOR THE PLANET

One of their main activities that express compassion began in 1985 when the company started to donate 1% of their sales or 10% of pre-tax profits (whichever is greater) for the restoration and preservation of natural environments through different organizations. The company considers this as a cost of doing business, that everyone should be paying as a tax to the planet.³¹ Their approach is simple: since companies are profiting from the resources they take from the earth, they should protect their resources. Therefore, companies should take responsibility for their environmental impact and provide back in

²⁶ Hepburn (2013), p. 623 - 645. O’Rourke–Strand (2017), p. 102 - 125. Ims (2019), p. 197 - 220. Ocsai (2021), p. 65 - 150.

²⁷ Rattalino 2018, p. 3.

²⁸ B Lab, *B Corporation Certification*, accessed on [December 15, 2024], available at: <https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/certification/>

²⁹ B Lab, *patagoniaInc. – Find a B Corp*, accessed on [January 12, 2025], available at: <https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/find-a-b-corp/company/patagonia-inc/>

³⁰ Ocsai (2021), p. 65 - 150.

³¹ Ocsai (2021), p. 65 - 150.

exchange one way or another. Chouinard thinks, that a company’s responsibility is not only to reduce its negative impacts on the environment but to actively participate in the search for solutions.³²

To simplify this process and inspire others, Chouinard, together with Craig Mathews (owner of Blue-Ribbon Flies), founded the 1% for the Planet alliance in 2002. The mission of the alliance is to form a healthier world by donating at least 1% of profits to organizations that promote environmental conservation and sustainability. In the last 50 years, the company has donated more than \$226 million to environmental causes. Members of the alliance can choose the organization themselves they wish to support. This process helps reduce bureaucracy, encourages transparency, and also helps establish a direct relationship between donors and beneficiaries.^{33,34}

VI. BUILD THE BEST PRODUCT WITH NO UNNECESSARY HARM

Patagonia strives to create the best products while minimizing harm to the planet and its inhabitants, guided by four core principles: (1) Designing and fabricating the highest quality products that prioritize durability, multifunctionality, and non-obsolescence. (2) Ensuring that their products are easily repairable and made from materials that can be reused, and recycled. (3) Reducing the environmental impact of the production process across the entire supply chain with a focus on water and energy consumption too. (4) Collaborating with customers to share responsibility for the product life cycle, ensuring products can be repaired, reused, or recycled. These principles directly focus on minimizing the overall impact of their production. Through the multifunctionality of its products, Patagonia encourages people to purchase fewer products.^{35,36}

Table: Apparel material resources

	2018 ³⁷	2022	2023	2024
Virgin petroleum-based products	49%	15%	14%	16%
Recycled materials	35%	72%	73%	73%

³² Patagonia, *One Percent for the Planet, Our Story*, accessed on [January 18, 2025], available at: <https://www.onepercentfortheplanet.org/about/story>

³³ Rattalino (2018), p. 747–755. Ocsai (2021), p. 65 - 150.

³⁴ O’Rourke–Strand (2017), p. 102–125.

³⁵ Patagonia, *patagonia2023-2024 B Corp Report*, accessed on [January 5, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagonia.ca/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-PatagoniaShared/default/dw2f8292a3/PDF-US/Patagonia-2023-2024-BCorp-Report.pdf>

³⁶ Ocsai (2021), p. 65 - 150.

³⁷ Patagonia, *patagonia2021 B Corp Report*, accessed on [December 22, 2024], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-PatagoniaShared/default/dw18ad9c7c/PDF-US/Patagonia-2021-BCorp-Report-Updated-2-15-22.pdf>

Plant-based materials	15%	12%	12%	9%
Animal products	1%	1%	1%	1%

Source: *Annual Benefit Corporation Report 2021, 2023 - 24*, table edited by the author

The table shows the company’s performance in material usage in different categories in a six-year time frame. The use of polyester/ nylon has been significantly reduced from 49% to 16%. This reflects the commitment to reducing fossil-based material usage, which emphasizes sustainability. The rate of recycled materials almost doubled over the years. The company aims to reduce waste and adopt circular thinking. The use of plant-based materials has remained broadly stable over the years. Through the process, they aim to preserve biodiversity and topsoil. However, this decision significantly increased the risk to profits considering both the higher cost of organic farming and the limited and potentially unstable supply of organic cotton.³⁸

From the *Dhammapada*, Verse 49: “Just as a bee gathers nectar and moves on without harming the flower, its color, or its fragrance, just so should a wise person act in a village.” The teaching of the Lord Buddha also emphasizes the importance of a business model that aims to minimize harm, encourages eco-conscious production, and supports principles of circular economy.

VII. CONDUCT OPERATIONS CAUSING NO UNNECESSARY HARM

Apparel workers are among the lowest-paid employees around the globe. Most of the clothing industry lacks social standards that can lead to unsafe working conditions, long working hours, low wages, and job discrimination for the workers who are predominantly women.³⁹ Patagonia’s products are manufactured through the collaboration of numerous factories, mills, spinners, processors, recyclers, and farms.⁴⁰ Permanently, the company regularly evaluates its policies across all levels, from offices and cafeterias to factories, to assess and reduce its environmental impact.⁴¹ They aim to operate in a way that avoids unnecessary harm by consistently working to minimize their environmental footprint, including aspects such as water consumption, water quality, energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, chemical usage, toxicity, and waste.^{42,43} The principles that guide their daily decisions on how best to make environmentally responsible choices include: Preferable purchasing principles, principles,

³⁸ Zint–Frederick (2001), p. 93 – 113.

³⁹ Hamja et al. (2019), p. 316 – 334. Vijayarasa–Liu (2022), p. 45 – 66.

⁴⁰ Patagonia, Material Traceability, accessed on [January 10, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/our-footprint/material-traceability.html>

⁴¹ Hepburn (2013), p. 623 – 645.

⁴² Patagonia, patagonia2021 B Corp Report, accessed on [December 22, 2024], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/on/demandware.static/-/Library-Sites-PatagoniaShared/default/dw18ad9c7c/PDF-US/Patagonia-2021-BCorp-Report-Updated-2-15-22.pdf>

⁴³ Ocsai (2021), p. 65 - 150.

building principles, paper procurement and use policy, and packaging and merchandising principles.⁴⁴

The “causing no unnecessary harm” approach is widely understood, Patagonia carries out various due diligence efforts to uphold fair labor standards and ensure safe working environments while also maintaining its environmental responsibility in the factories that manufacture its products. As a founding member of the Fair Labor Association®, Patagonia benefits from FLA accreditation, which enhances customer confidence and promotes transparency. It also incorporates the perspective of an objective third party, thus, it enables them to evaluate the processes and initiate improvements. The FLA randomly audits the supply chain to assess the quality of the factory-monitoring program. To further enhance public accountability and transparency, FLA also audits Patagonia’s Social and Environmental Responsibility (SER) program at its headquarters in California. During this process, the company must demonstrate that it follows and reports annually on its compliance with the FLA’s Principles of Fair Labor and Responsible Sourcing.⁴⁵ During the onsite audit, the assessors review their factory files, audit reports, corrective action plans, training materials, data analysis files and their activities with NGOs. Every three years the company undergoes re-accreditation, the full reports are publicly available on the FLA website.⁴⁶

Another important initiative implemented in the mid-2000s is the “Four-Fold” approach, a system designed to pre-screen factories before taking orders. This process includes four steps to evaluate their potential new suppliers. These steps aim to review whether the supplier meets their (1) sourcing, (2) quality, (3) social, and (4) environmental standards. The SER supply chain team collaborates with the sourcing and quality teams to determine if an order should be placed with a new factory. These teams are also responsible for sourcing decisions related to already contracted factories. Another team is involved in the Responsible Purchasing Practices initiative, which seeks to reduce the negative effects on workers within the supply chain. The goal is to avoid disruptive actions, including placing an order and later making major adjustments, pushing for excessively low prices, insisting on short lead times, delaying fabric deliveries, and implementing last-minute design modifications. These are just a few instances that may result in excessive overtime for workers, along with layoffs, forged payroll records, or failure to pay legally required wages.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Patagonia, *Owned and Operated*, accessed on [January 8, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/where-we-do-business/owned-and-operated.html>

⁴⁵ Fair Labor Association, *Manufacturing Principles*, accessed on [December 29, 2024], available at: <https://www.fairlabor.org/accountability/standards/manufacturing/mfg-principles/>

⁴⁶ Fair Labor Association, *patagoniaMember Profile*, accessed on [January 20, 2025], available at: <https://www.fairlabor.org/member/patagonia/>

⁴⁷ Patagonia, *Working with Factories*, accessed on [January 15, 2025], available at:

VIII. FAIR TRADE

Through the Fair-Trade USA program, Patagonia has been producing fair-trade clothing since 2014. The company pays a premium for every item that carries the Fair Trade Certified sewn label. The extra money goes directly to the workers.⁴⁸ Every factory has a democratically elected committee of Fair-Trade workers that determines how the funds are allocated, supporting initiatives such as community projects, healthcare programs, childcare centers, and the purchase of essential products that workers might not otherwise afford. The program helps enhance health and safety conditions, promotes adherence to social and environmental regulations, and fosters communication between workers and management.⁴⁹

IX. VIET NAM - BETTER WORK

Better Work is a collaboration between the United Nations International Labour Organization and the International Finance Corporation. It is a comprehensive program that brings together all levels of the garment industry to improve working conditions, respect workers' labor rights, and boost the competitiveness of apparel and footwear businesses. Their mission is to create safe and decent jobs in sustainable enterprises that empower women, and in which workers and employers can exercise their fundamental rights. Patagonia also participates in this initiative, thus they can align more with the standards they set for sustaining fair labor practices, safe working conditions, and environmental responsibility. Due to their involvement in Better Work, factories have progressively enhanced their adherence to the ILO's fundamental labor standards and national regulations concerning wages, employment contracts, and working hours. Through this initiative companies have significantly improved working conditions and parallel to this, there is a successful growth in factories productivity and profitability.⁵⁰ The company contracted with two Vietnamese sewing factories, one situated in Thai Nguyen and the other in Thai Binh City. These facilities were chosen following a successful pre-screening process known as the Four-Fold Approach, which is used to assess all new and existing suppliers. Through its involvement in this program, the organization strengthens its position as a responsible and forward-thinking leader dedicated to both environmental and social sustainability.⁵¹

X. CARBON NEUTRALITY BY 2025

Another grandiose goal that has Patagonia set is to turn all globally owned-and-operated facilities carbon-neutral by the end of 2025. Even though 95%

<https://www.patagonia.com/our-footprint/working-with-factories.html>

⁴⁸ Ocsai (2021), p. 65 - 150.

⁴⁹ Patagonia, Fair Trade, accessed on [January 25, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/our-footprint/fair-trade.html>

⁵⁰ Better Work, Better Work Programme, accessed on [December 18, 2024], available at: <https://betterwork.org/programme/>

⁵¹ Patagonia, Factories, Farms, and Mills, accessed on [January 2, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/factories-farms-mills/>

of their carbon emissions come from the supply chain, they are working hard to become carbon neutral across the entire business. Due to that, they have all the control over the facilities they own, it is much easier to ensure the low carbon footprint of these entities. First, they want to clean up their own house before asking others to follow suit. In the US they already have covered most of their energy consumption with renewable sources. The amount that they cannot cover they procure through green tariff programs.⁵² The electricity that is not covered through the on-site solar panels or green tariff programs they purchase Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs). RECs are essentially proof that the energy has been sourced from renewable methods.⁵³

Globally, the company has invested in renewable energy projects on every continent where it operates, including 600 kilowatts of solar panels cantilevered over farmland in Japan, that allow farmers to simultaneously grow crops and source energy from the Sun. A non-profit partner in Chile donated a group of solar panels that generate clean energy equivalent to their electricity consumption. Lowering energy consumption also means that they are focusing on reducing the energy demand by using innovative designs for constructing buildings (e.g. using daylight-design features). Energy usage is just one part of being responsible for the environment. They have implemented different waste management techniques such as composting systems at facilities; phasing out single-use plastics in purchasing practices, cafés, and stores, digitizing the entire accounting and payroll processes, and trash recycling and sorting stations.⁵⁴

They are aware that Purchasing offsets to reach carbon neutrality does not eliminate their footprint, nor does it prevent long-term impacts. Most of their emissions - 95% - come from the supply chain and material manufacturing, for which they take full responsibility. Their ambitious goals align with the standards set by the science-based target initiative (SBTi). Science (SBTi). SBTi follows a rigorous target-setting and validation process, which Patagonia has undergone, proving that its goals align with the latest science and the 2015 Paris Agreement's commitment to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Within the company there are three major fields where they are aiming to cut carbon usage: getting oil out of their clothes production (they have been reducing virgin petroleum fibbers in their production since 1993, the same year they started making fleece out of recycled plastic bottles), make products based on environmental profit and loss, (they calculate the carbon cost of every item they sell, and this EP&L drives their product choices; they are cleaning up

⁵² Patagonia, *Owned and Operated*, accessed on [January 8, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/where-we-do-business/owned-and-operated.html>

⁵³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs)*, accessed on [January 10, 2025], available at: <https://www.epa.gov/green-power-markets/renewable-energy-certificates-recs>

⁵⁴ Patagonia, *Owned and Operated*, accessed on [January 8, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/where-we-do-business/owned-and-operated.html>

every part of their business.⁵⁵

XI. BEYOND THEIR BUSINESS

Beyond how they do business they fight climate crises with three major initiatives. They are dedicated to protecting nature since it is the biggest (natural) system that can capture CO₂. For example, since 2008, Patagonia has helped protect Alaska's Tongass National Forest through partnerships with local and Indigenous communities and the 1% for the Planet program. This 17-million-acre forest of old-growth spruce, hemlock, and cedar stores hundreds of millions of tons of carbon.⁵⁶ Another huge campaign that they supported was to help protect 325,000 acres of ecologically sensitive land in Chilean Patagonia.⁵⁷ They are also committed to aiding local endeavors that promote a just transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, particularly in Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color that have experienced the greatest harm from fossil fuel pollution. Finally, they are strengthening the movements of grass root groups on the lines of the environmental crises, by making grants, while expanding their Patagonia Action Works platform that links individuals like you to community activism.^{58,59}

XII. PROVIDING A SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Patagonia demonstrates corporate compassion through its initiative that offers all employees two months of paid leave yearly to participate in internships connected to the company's environmental mission. The majority of their staff are deeply committed to spending time outdoors and preserving nature, which is why the company provides an opportunity for them to do so through the environmental internship program.⁶⁰ Employees from all departments are given the chance to take up to two months off from their usual roles to work for an environmental organization of their choice, while still receiving their salary and benefits. For non-governmental organizations and grassroots groups that are working with local communities is always a huge help to provide interns. But it is a win-win situation because when an intern returns, they bring back stories, inspiration and a new commitment to the environmental mission they

⁵⁵ Patagonia, *Climate Goals*, accessed on [January 12, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/climate-goals/>

⁵⁶ patagoniaWorks, *Coalition of Local and International Groups Launch Fundraising Campaign to Protect Yosemite of South America Forever*, accessed on [January 15, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagoniaworks.com/press/2024/5/1/coalition-of-local-and-international-groups-launch-fundraising-campaign-to-protect-yosemite-of-south-america-forever>

⁵⁷ Reuters, *Brand Watch: patagoniaPioneers New Grassroots Approach to Corporate Giving*, accessed on [January 20, 2025], available at: <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/boards-policy-regulation/brand-watch-patagonia-pioneers-new-grassroots-approach-corporate-giving-2024-06-04/>

⁵⁸ Patagonia, *Action Works About*, accessed on [January 18, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/actionworks/about/>

⁵⁹ Ocsai (2021), p. 65 - 150.

⁶⁰ Ocsai (2021), p. 65 - 150.

are committed to.⁶¹

XIII. “EARTH IS NOW OUR ONLY SHAREHOLDER” – PATAGONIA IS GOING PURPOSE INSTEAD OF GOING PUBLIC⁶²

Yvon Chouinard once admitted that he never envisioned himself as a businessman. He began as a craftsman, producing climbing gear for himself and his friends, and later moved into the apparel industry. As Patagonia became more conscious of the profound effects of global warming and ecological damage and their involvement the company vowed to use its influence to alter the way business is conducted. Their guiding principle was straightforward: act ethically, remain financially stable, inspire others, and contribute to transforming the system.⁶³

In 2018, Patagonia shifted its core purpose, committing to operate as a business dedicated to saving the planet. Recognizing that their efforts to address the environmental crisis were not enough, they sought to allocate more funds toward fighting the crisis without compromising their values. While selling the company and donating the profits was considered, the potential risks of new ownership deviating from their mission were too great. Another option was going public, but even well-intentioned public companies face pressure to prioritize short-term profits over long-term sustainability. Rather than extracting value from nature for investors, they chose to use Patagonia's wealth to protect the source of all wealth. As of September 15, 2022, 100% of the company's voting stock was transferred to the Patagonia purpose trust to uphold the company's values, and 100% of nonvoting stock went to the Holdfast Collective, a nonprofit focused on the environmental crisis. Each year, the company's profits, after reinvestment, will fund a dividend to support the cause, projected at \$100 million, depending on the company's performance.⁶⁴

XIV. DISCUSSION

This research aimed to identify the role of Buddhist compassion in counterbalancing the tendencies of mainstream economic behaviors, such as competitive and profit-oriented actions. Being a billion-dollar company, Patagonia proved that it does make sense to apply alternative business practices, such as compassionate behavior. Yvon Chouinard never wanted to be a businessman, let alone earn millions of dollars. His success perhaps lies in the naturalness of his approach. His goals were defined by selflessness, paired

⁶¹ Patagonia, *Environmental Internship Program*, accessed on [January 22, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/environmental-internship-program.html>

⁶² patagoniaWorks, *Patagonia's Next Chapter: Earth Is Now Our Only Shareholder*, accessed on [January 25, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagoniaworks.com/press/2022/9/14/patagonias-next-chapter-earth-is-now-our-only-shareholder>

⁶³ Patagonia, *Ownership*, accessed on [January 28, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagonia.com/ownership/>

⁶⁴ Patagonia Works, *Patagonia's Next Chapter: Earth Is Now Our Only Shareholder*, accessed on [January 25, 2025], available at: <https://www.patagoniaworks.com/press/2022/9/14/patagonias-next-chapter-earth-is-now-our-only-shareholder>

with his passion respect, and love towards nature. Teachings derived from Zen Buddhism provided him with significant guidance in leading his company. Compassion, which stems from Buddhism, is also supported by contemporary psychology, defining it as a five-step process.⁶⁵ The foundational teachings of Buddhism emphasize recognizing, accepting, and striving to minimize suffering. In their work, Cavanagh et al. (2016) essentially reinforced the thoughts of the Buddha formulated 2,500 years ago. The principles of Buddhist Economics,⁶⁶ such as minimizing suffering non-violence, and genuine care, are clearly reflected in Patagonia's strategies. The use of recyclable materials, the commitment to employee well-being and fairness, the gradual reduction of fossil-based resources, and goals toward carbon neutrality are all examples that demonstrate the application of Buddhist principles in business practices. These solutions actively counterbalance the unsustainable elements of mainstream economics, such as excessive resource exploitation and selfish, short-term profit-seeking. Through creating norms and setting up new standards for running a business Patagonia is a pioneer. Being transparent and sharing their expertise also aims to motivate and help other companies to follow their path and strive for a healthy planet. This goes beyond the individual company level and can become a force for systematic change. Now this is the point where business and Buddhism meet: Reducing suffering should be not done individually, higher responsibility and commitment start when we practice it at the collective level.

XV. CONCLUSION

The research aimed to highlight the pivotal role that compassion – rooted in Buddhism and defined by psychology – can play in the life of a business. Operating a for-profit business in a capitalist environment does not necessarily mean that the only goal of the company should be to generate profit and growth. In conclusion, we can see how Buddhist compassion has the potential to transform how companies address the challenges posed by mainstream economic systems. By prioritizing sustainability, empathy, and long-term well-being, companies like Patagonia can prove that ethical business practices are not only possible but can also be highly successful among businesses that follow traditional paths.

Integrating Buddhist principles, such as minimizing suffering and taking responsibility for one's actions into business strategies can offer a potential path to replace the short-term, profit-driven motives of conventional models. The applied, seemingly successful business practices of Patagonia underscore the need for a broader adoption of compassionate behaviour in business and inspire further, more detailed examination of this topic. Ultimately, embracing compassion in business represents a meaningful step toward sustainability.

⁶⁵ Cavanagh et al. (2016), p. 16.

⁶⁶ Zsolnai (2007a), p. 145 - 153.

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NURTURING COMPASSION: THE PARENTAL AND SOCIETAL ROLE IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT THROUGH BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

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Abstract:

This study focused on the role of family and society in cultivating compassion through Buddhist teachings. The study explored how Buddhist principles can strengthen family relationships, reduce conflict, and promote moral responsibility. It examined the importance of parents in transmitting family values and responsibilities as described in Buddhist scriptures. The study also analyzed common family problems and offered solutions based on Buddhist teachings, comparing them with modern counseling techniques. Finally, it proposed strategies for integrating Buddhist values into parenting and community support systems to promote a more compassionate and harmonious society.

Keywords: *Buddhism, compassion, human development, societal role.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The family is the first and most fundamental institution in which individuals receive moral education and social conditioning. It is within the family that children acquire not only practical knowledge but also ethical values that shape their character and interactions with society. As such, the family should be regarded as the strongest and most essential social unit responsible for instilling moral principles and guiding future generations.

Social scientists define the family as a fundamental social group consisting of parents and their offspring, bound by shared values, long-term commitments, and mutual support. In Buddhism, the family serves as the foundation of moral

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and spiritual development, providing an environment where compassion, ethical conduct, and responsibility are cultivated. The *Sigālovāda Sutta*, often referred to as the “layperson’s code of ethics,” highlights the importance of reciprocal duties within the family, emphasizing respect, care, and moral guidance.

Family structures in society generally fall into two primary categories:

Nuclear Family – A household consisting of parents and their children.

Extended Family – A household that includes multiple generations or additional relatives.

Regardless of the family structure, parents serve as the first teachers of compassion, influencing their children’s moral development and social behavior. A strong family unit fosters emotional stability, ethical consciousness, and a sense of shared responsibility. However, modern societal challenges such as rising divorce rates, economic struggles, and the decline of traditional values have weakened family bonds. Many individuals, caught in the fast-paced demands of contemporary life, neglect the importance of family responsibilities, leading to societal instability. This research aims to explore how Buddhist teachings can offer practical guidance in strengthening familial relationships and cultivating compassion as a shared responsibility between parents and society.

1.1. Research problem

The erosion of family values and responsibilities has direct implications for social harmony, mental well-being, and human development. This research examines:

- (i) How family breakdowns contribute to social issues.
- (ii) The importance of compassion and moral guidance in family life.
- (iii) The influence of young families on broader societal well-being.
- (iv) How Buddhist teachings can offer solutions for strengthening family bonds and nurturing ethical values in children.

In modern society, individuals increasingly prioritize personal ambitions over family responsibilities, leading to weakened relationships and a decline in shared compassion. If Buddhist principles of compassion, responsibility, and ethical conduct are actively integrated into parenting and social structures, family stability and societal well-being can be significantly enhanced.

1.2. Objectives of the study

Aim: To explore how Buddhist teachings can be applied to reduce family conflicts, strengthen parental roles, and promote shared social responsibility for human development.

Key objectives:

- (i) To examine the role of parents in cultivating compassion and moral values in children.
- (ii) To identify Buddhist principles that can be applied to reduce family conflicts and strengthen relationships.

(iii) To analyze societal responsibilities in fostering compassionate and ethical individuals.

(iv) To study the responsibilities of family members as explained in Buddhism.

(v) To investigate how family issues arise due to a lack of responsibility and ethical guidance.

(vi) To propose solutions based on Buddhist teachings for improving family harmony and social stability.

(vii) To compare Buddhist approaches with modern counseling techniques used in Western countries to strengthen family structures.

(viii) To recommend practical strategies for integrating Buddhist values into parenting and community support systems.

Historically, traditional families lived harmoniously, guided by shared responsibilities and moral values. However, rapid urbanization, materialism, and individual ambition in modern society have weakened family ties. Many people prioritize personal success over communal well-being, resulting in family breakdowns, emotional distress, and social disharmony.

Buddhism provides timeless guidance on family ethics, responsibilities, and the cultivation of compassion. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* outlines the reciprocal duties among family members, emphasizing kindness, respect, and moral duty. This research seeks to reintroduce Buddhist perspectives on family harmony, demonstrating how compassionate parenting and shared social responsibility can contribute to human development. By revisiting Buddhist teachings, this study aims to offer practical solutions for addressing contemporary family challenges and nurturing a more compassionate society.

1.3. Methodology

This study investigates the major factors contributing to family issues using qualitative analysis, and deductive and inductive reasoning. It is a primary text study from the Buddhist perspective, focusing on relevant suttas from the *Tipiṭaka*, particularly the *Suttapiṭaka*, as primary sources. Additionally, secondary resources such as books, scholarly perspectives, and articles in English are utilized.

1.4. Limitations of the study

(i) The study deals with sensitive issues that may evoke emotional distress.

(ii) It is limited to a specific cultural and religious perspective, which may not be universally applicable.

(iii) The research may be constrained by varying interpretations of Buddhist teachings across different traditions.

(iv) Some ethical considerations may arise when addressing parental responsibilities and societal interventions in family matters.

This research underscores the vital role of parents and society in nurturing compassion through Buddhist teachings. By integrating Buddhist principles

into family life, individuals can foster moral development, emotional resilience, and social harmony. Strengthening family bonds through compassion and ethical conduct contributes to a more stable and compassionate society, ensuring that future generations inherit values that promote human well-being.

II. DISCUSSION

Parental misdeeds are then silently and venomously cultivated in children and appear in their later adult lives. The underlying social ill is the absence of knowledge of the Dhamma and affectionate family activities. But, political desire, materialism, and jealousy slowly enlarge social inequality gaps through government fiscal allocations where social values are least mattered. The wealthy become wealthier while the deprived are drowned in more depravity. In short, societies and the world turn their backs on Dhamma and are misled by economic illusion, temporal worldly power, and wealth. Indisputably, solid families, being the foundation of the social unit, strengthen societies and are backed by belief fibers.

The religious institution is by birth an exit to help solve societal problems. The Dhamma is applicable to help domestic life and members to become more peaceful where satanic minds envy. Buddhist institutions can easily play a role in supporting this direction because the Buddha's teachings can bring peace therein. Although marriage and the family play a large part in physical life, Buddhist doctrines can spiritually influence, handle, and control behavior and life generally, in society. Global family issues must be revisited, as they are at the heart of societal challenges. In an era marked by increasing individualism, economic pressures, and shifting social values, the stability of the family unit is being tested like never before. Buddhist teachings offer profound insights into addressing these challenges, emphasizing mindfulness, compassion, and interdependence as essential elements in resolving personal and familial conflicts. By nurturing compassion within the family, we lay the foundation for stronger communities, fostering harmony that extends to society, the nation, and ultimately, the world. To save a family is to safeguard the well-being of humanity as a whole, making Buddhist-based solutions an invaluable resource in addressing modern-day family and societal struggles.

Family is the fundamental unit of society, providing love, care, and moral guidance. In Buddhism, family plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' character and values, serving as the foundation for ethical living and spiritual development. However, modern families face various challenges such as conflicts, generational gaps, and economic pressures. Buddhist teachings offer profound insights and practical solutions to these issues, emphasizing compassion, mindfulness, and right understanding. By applying these teachings, families can cultivate harmony, resilience, and a deep sense of interconnectedness.

2.1. The meaning and importance of family

A family entails the relationship and interaction among its members. The husband, the wife, and the children the successors interact with a condition of mind and body. The relationship between the parents and their children is therefore not only a biological one but also one that supplies them with a

set of moral norms that will help them in later life in their role of continuing the family line. Significantly, mutual duty is an important commitment that supports the foundation of the family. The parents hold the duty of teaching their children. The children pay gratitude to their parents and supporters. All then in the family must support the others, as well as the family itself, to maintain a state of moral conscience and good conduct.

2.2. The meaning of family in Buddhism

In the *Aggaññasutta*, the Buddha explains the evolution of humans and the family. Details in the sutta tell us of the change from one condition to another because of greed.¹ Consequently, passion, greed, and self-attachment will deteriorate and decline a family. The family, in the context of Buddhist ethics, has the following four important characteristics, i.e. coexistence between a man and a woman, members of a sexual relationship or one of lineage commenced with their ancestors, specific duties and responsibilities depending on the role of each family member, and various family members should be committed to virtue and have a moral obligation to one another.

According to the Buddha, there are four possible types of relationships,

- (i) a bad man coexists with a bad woman,
- (ii) a bad man coexists with a good woman,
- (iii) a good man coexists with a bad woman, and
- (iv) a good man coexists with a good woman.²

The Lord Buddha has indicated such because parents are the important persons and the family will either prosper or decline, it is in its leader. But its achievement is through maintaining the moral way of life and this is the importance of a family if one claims to be a good Buddhist individual.

2.3. The role of family in Buddhism

Buddhism views family as a crucial environment for moral and spiritual growth. The *Sigālovāda Sutta*, often referred to as the “layperson’s code of discipline,” outlines the responsibilities of family members: parents nurture and educate their children, while children show gratitude and support their parents. Spouses should treat each other with respect, honesty, and kindness. These relationships are built upon the principles of compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and non-harming (*ahiṃsā*), which help maintain harmony within the family.

Furthermore, the Buddha emphasized the importance of householders engaging in ethical living through the Five Precepts (*pañca-sīla*), which include refraining from harming living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants. By adhering to these principles, families can create a stable and supportive environment conducive to mutual growth and well-being.

¹ DN. III. 80.

² AN. II. 59.

2.4. The role and the duty of the family

The National Academies of Science, Bhagavad-Gita the Hindu scripture, and the UNICEF summarize the role and duty of the family as follows.

(i) According to the National Academies of Science (2016), Reproduction is giving birth to new members to not allowing society to disappear since new members restore balance in the local resources.

(ii) *Bhagavad-Gita* (4:26 Purport) said that the Sexual gratification of spouses declines sexual problems such as rape and controls sexual excesses. Provision of a warm and loving environment in which the young may grow up and no institution can perform this better than the family since it provides a sanctuary between birth and maturity.

(iii) UNICEF (2006) states that Many children reared in foster homes or hospitals tend, for example, to develop more slowly, taking longer to learn how to walk or to speak. Such children also tend to have worse temperaments and injure themselves.

Though in the absence of the family, humans would become less perfect; such is not always the case, since children from broken homes, and poorly behaved families, tend not to be treated well and frequently become delinquent. Such children tend to misbehave and disobey regulations. This situation is common in every society, either undeveloped or already developed.

The family is, by the authors, the primary source of;

(i) *Socialization* - the family is the first place in which children undergo training and is the institution with the most influence in preparing children to face the outside environment, teaches children to understand society's regulations, and what makes one popular. The method of training can be direct like in instruction or indirect like role modeling.

(ii) *Social placement or status provisions* - the family provides who and what we are. When the family name is Thai, a family's members are regarded as Thai; when the family name is Chinese, they are regarded as Chinese, and so on.

(iii) *Nurture* - the family is the place where a member should receive the sincere love and warmth of every family member even solving problems and stabilizing the family spirit.

2.5. Good family in Buddhist literature

The Bodhisatta, in his final birth before he attained enlightenment, was born in the city of Jetuttara as the son of King Sañjaya named Vessantara.³ Vessantara was superb and of pure mind, appropriate for one who was to become a Buddha in his next life.⁴ From his childhood, his mind turned to almsgiving, donations, and sacrifice. Money and property of great value were donated as part of his fulfillment of the five *mahāparicaga* or great sacrifices, which consist of the sacrifice of;

³ J. VI. 547

⁴ Cone and Gombrich (1979), p. 99.

- (i) money and property,
- (ii) a physical organ,
- (iii) one's life,
- (iv) one's children, and
- (v) one's wife⁵

The Vessantara story conveys Buddhist doctrines and values to the people. Everybody in Vessantara's family always enjoyed his kindness since he thought only of donations to persons who were in trouble and disadvantageous. Even the king's elephant, which had been born on the same day as he, was donated to another state to solve a lack of rain. It was for this reason that he was banished at the request of the people, and forced to live in the forest. Had he not agreed, and not obeyed his father, he would have caused a rebellion that would bring trouble to his family and his father's throne. When Vessantara was expelled, his wife, Maddi, and his children requested to follow him. The story of Vessantara epitomizes the perfect Buddhist life, which all should seek to imitate. The sad thing is our new generation is obsessed with social media to forget greater virtues than selfishness and harvest the selfishness they have cultivated.

Among the five basic institutions of society, the family is regarded as the tiniest, yet at the same time the foremost institute and the most important constituent in any society. The family is the place for giving birth, the child is nurtured by its parents for a much longer period than the young of other creatures. This is why Phra Sirimangalacariya, the author of *Manglatthadipani*, praises parents for being like Brahma for being like *pubbadevas*, for being their first teachers, and for being respected and worshiped by their children.⁶ Phra Sirimangalacariya further explains that parents are like Brahma since they take care of their children by employing the *Brahmavihāras* or the four following sublime states of mind: (1) *Mettā*: loving-kindness, (2) *Karuṇā*: compassion, (3) *Muditā*: sympathetic joy, (4) *Upekkhā*: equanimity, neutrality.⁷

The reason why parents are like *devas* to their children is that they approach them like Visuddhidevas who have purified their minds, forgive when their children commit innocent mistakes, and seek only what is advantageous to them and brings them happiness. Well-treated and fostered children automatically return their gratitude to their parents and always remind them that their parents are their first gurus, reported, worshiped, and unforgettable persons.

2.6. Common family problems and Buddhist perspectives

Despite its importance, family life is often troubled by misunderstandings, conflicts, and external pressures. Due to these common family issues, parents may lose sight of their role in nurturing compassion. As a result, they may have little to no time to teach their children about compassion and its significance

⁵ Grey (1990), p. 128.

⁶ Somdej PhraMaha Veerawong (1977), pp. 24 - 25; It. 62.

⁷ A. III. 226

in daily life. This lack of guidance can hinder children's understanding of compassion and its importance in their development.

Not all marriages and families fail for the same reason. Nor is there usually one reason for the breakdown of a particular marriage or a family. Whenever the two people decide to live together, conflict could arise from the different cultural origins of each spouse. Most psychologists have concluded, that the following problems may arise because of poor communication among family members, domestic conflicts, and domestic violence and end in separation.⁸ Below are some common family issues and how Buddhist teachings address them:

2.6.1. Conflict and communication breakdown

Communication within the family is extremely important because it enables members to express their needs, wants, and concerns to each other. Open and honest communication creates an atmosphere that allows family members to express their differences, love, and admiration for one another. Communication encourages family members to resolve the unavoidable problems that arise in all families. H. J. Markman says that positive communication contributes satisfaction to the couple's relationship in later lives." Poor communication increases the risk of divorce, marital separation, and more behavioral problems in children.⁹ Poor communication is usually found in unhealthy family relationships, miserable families, and domestic conflicts, naïve to problem-solving, less intimacy fiber and emotional bonds, and risks in marital separation and broken homes.

Many family disputes arise due to a lack of understanding, poor communication, or clashing expectations. The Buddha emphasized the importance of right speech (*sammā-vācā*), which encourages truthfulness, kindness, and constructive dialogue. Practicing mindful communication helps resolve misunderstandings and fosters mutual respect. A study on family communication found that families who actively practice mindful listening and empathetic dialogue report higher levels of emotional connection and reduced conflicts. Applying the right speech can therefore significantly enhance familial relationships.

2.6.2. Generational gaps and changing values

Differences in values and beliefs between generations can create friction. Younger generations may feel restricted by traditional expectations, while elders may struggle to accept change. The Buddhist concept of impermanence (*aniccā*) teaches that change is natural and inevitable. Mutual understanding, patience, and adaptability are essential for bridging generational gaps.

For example, many Buddhist communities promote intergenerational dialogue sessions where elders and youth come together to discuss their perspectives openly, fostering respect and mutual appreciation. Such initiatives highlight the importance of adaptability and continuous learning in family relationships.

⁸ Horne (1993), p. 247.

⁹ Markman (1981), p. 49.

2.6.3. Financial stress and materialism

Economic hardships and excessive material desires often strain family relationships. Buddhism advocates for a balanced approach to wealth, emphasizing contentment (*santuṭṭhi*) and ethical livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*). Families should cultivate gratitude and prioritize meaningful connections over material pursuits.

Research indicates that individuals who focus on gratitude and simple living report higher life satisfaction and lower levels of stress. The Buddhist perspective on wealth encourages generosity (*dāna*), reminding families that true wealth lies in giving and supporting one another rather than accumulating material possessions.

2.6.4. Parenting challenges and moral development

Raising children with strong moral values is a primary duty of parents. The Buddha stressed the importance of leading by example. Parents should embody ethical behavior and instill virtues such as honesty, generosity, and mindfulness in their children. This aligns with the principle of skillful action (*sammā-kammanta*), which encourages wholesome conduct.

For instance, Buddhist-inspired education programs, such as those in Thailand and Sri Lanka, incorporate mindfulness and ethical training into school curricula. Studies show that children who practice mindfulness and ethical reflection exhibit greater emotional regulation and empathy, reinforcing the Buddhist emphasis on early moral education.

However, due to common family problems such as financial struggles, work-related stress, and marital discord, some parents may lose their role as responsible figures in nurturing compassion in their children. In such situations, it becomes the duty of both parents and all adults in society to ensure that children grow up with compassion and moral integrity. The responsibility of raising compassionate individuals is not solely on parents but is shared by the entire community, including teachers, mentors, and religious leaders.

2.6.5. Marital issues and relationship struggles

Many couples face challenges related to trust, infidelity, or differing life goals. The Buddha advised treating one's spouse with respect and fidelity, highlighting the importance of mutual support and emotional intimacy. Practicing loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) can help strengthen relationships by fostering patience and compassion.

Research on couples practicing mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation has demonstrated improved relationship satisfaction, reduced conflict, and increased emotional connection. Buddhist teachings encourage couples to view their relationship as a partnership in spiritual growth, supporting each other's ethical and personal development.

2.6.6. Domestic conflicts

Goody claims that in every society, the problem of divorce often originates from a conflict between the spouses and a failure to effect a reconciliation

between the husband and the wife. For example, not understanding one another can be due to:

- (i) A difference in standpoint, ideas or attitude, and so on.
- (ii) Failing to be aware of one another's feelings.
- (iii) Failing to understand how to communicate with one another.

Moreover, conflicts between spouses can arise from misconceptions as to the role of the husband and wife and the failure to correct such attitudes, or else resolve them, especially when they do not understand their duties to the other".¹⁰ The Department of Teacher Training found that conflict between spouses is,

- (i) insufficient loving-kindness, sympathy, compassion, and irresponsibility,
- (ii) unstable income and instability in their financial status,
- (iii) ongoing conflict,
- (iv) one, or both, of the spouses, truly dislikes married life and pays little attention to creating stability within the same,
- (v) sexual incompatibility and/or impotence,
- (vi) failing to have children,
- (vii) illness or poor health,
- (viii) difference of interests,
- (ix) meddling by a father-in-law or a mother-in-law, or both,
- (x) different educational backgrounds,
- (xi) social and cultural differences,
- (xii) jealousy,
- (xiii) living attitude is not compatible (straight),
- (xiv) mental and/or emotional instability,
- (xv) lack of warmth,
- (xvi) selfishness and arrogance, and
- (xvii) abnormality, and violence to one another¹¹

Work-family conflict tends to depend more on workloads and family role conflict but tends to depend less on work flexibility.¹²

2.6.7. Domestic violence

Domestic violence is fatal in society because violence at home affects not just one person alone but every family member and relative. Domestic violence can be viewed from three separate aspects:

- (i) violence directed towards children,
- (ii) violence directed towards a spouse, and

¹⁰ Good (1990), p. 334.

¹¹ Subhateera (1981), p. 232.

¹² Rittipant, et. al. (2011), p. 55.

(iii) violence from one child to another, or from some other relative in the family.¹³

Domestic violence is classified into self-violence, violence between individuals, and violence between groups. It can also be classified into physical, mental, and sexual violence caused by patriarchal dominance, violence-provocative environments, childhood experiences, stress, conflict, and spending little time with each other. Impacts could be injury, imprinted violence in children, which appears in miserable families, runaway youth, and divorces. In addition, domestic violence between spouses can be chaotic and disturbing for the community, and incur expenses to the government in looking after victims, hiring personnel, and campaigning to terminate and prevent the problem.¹⁴ The results revealed that 34.3 percent of Sri Lankan Sinhala married couples had domestic violence risk behaviors, and the factors affecting domestic risk behaviors with statistical significance consisted of six variables, namely jealous wives, suspicious wives, drinking husbands, drug abusive husbands, are not ready to have one's own family, and lack of time for discussions.¹⁵

2.6.8. Divorce and separation of family members

Divorce in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and around the world is significantly increasing. Familial poor communication, conflict, and violence constitute the main problem that leads to divorce, and such conflict and violence are due to many different factors, all of which may be subsumed under the five major headings of economic factors, social factors, educational factors, sexual factors, and moral factors.¹⁶ Divorce and separation could arise when matriarchy prevails in the family such as matriarchal income, differences in educational degree, sexual relations, suspicious adultery, misconduct, immoral conduct, and virtuelessness.¹⁷ However, if either husband or wife misbehaves, misconducts, and is without virtue soon separation would have happened. Besides Section 1516 of the Civil and Commercial Code, separation could be from either party committing adultery, misconduct, insulting, psychological and physical harm, abandonment, imprisonment for more than a year, infected with an incurable disease, misbehavior, and physical disadvantages.¹⁸

Simple domestic ills like poor communication, domestic conflicts, domestic violence, and divorce/separation could visualize titanic impacts on societies at large. Poor communication increases the risk of divorce, marital separation, and more behavioral problems in children. Domestic conflicts between the spouses and failures of reconciliation lead to separation. Domestic violence between spouses can be chaotic and disturbing for the community, and incur

¹³ Pornpen Petsuksisrit (1993), p. 217.

¹⁴ Laeheem & Boonprakarn (2014), p. 122.

¹⁵ Laeheem (2016), p. 122.

¹⁶ Spielmann (1994), p. 35.

¹⁷ Srikanthana (1997), p. 501.

¹⁸ Thai Embassy. Com, 2015.

expenses to the government in looking after victims, hiring personnel, and campaigning to terminate and prevent the problem. When marriages fail, government costs grow for treating serial ills, and taxpayers in the entire nation are coerced to pick up the colossal cost when families separate and are less unable to care for themselves or to foster their children. Still, even knowing the monstrous impacts are awaiting humans least regret and learn from them except only 15% of world business titans who have done and prospered. Even though, it is still believed that just only over six hundred million Buddhists sensibly apply laity virtues or virtues for good household life.

III. APPLYING BUDDHIST DOCTRINES TO FAMILY LIFE

3.1. Applying the Household Dharma to the family

Buddhism provides (laity virtues or virtues for good household life (*gharavasaddhamma*: *saccā*, *damā*, *khantī*, and *cāga*), involves the following virtues associated with the household life that are thought to bring future stability and happiness to the family. The application of such *gharavasaddhamma* in the family guarantees stability and happiness in the daily life of the household and ensures good management. Distrust between a husband or wife deteriorates relationship orientation, especially if it persists over a long period. But such distrust is unlikely to arise if both partners practice *saccā*, or truthfulness, honesty, and sincerity, which all pave the way for trustfulness and trustworthiness. One should, for instance, try to spend time with the other partner, rather than frequently going out alone, since this will bolster trust and comfort of mind. Trust can also be maintained through frequent telephone conversations, confirming that one is acting sincerely outside, thereby preventing any negative feelings from accumulating. *Damā* and *khantī* both lead to tolerance in all situations, especially those involving conflict and other problems. The use of this dharma to control oneself is an important tool to guard oneself against one's emotions, and thus prevent any danger of subsequent violence or divorce. The exercise of *cāga*, finally, by showing generosity and self-sacrifice, to other family members generates an atmosphere of sharing and doing things together, whether inside the home, when going outside, traveling, or going out for dinner. Happiness within the family depends on warmth and learning how to give and take. All of these Dharma results in happiness and stability.

3.2. Applying the Four *Brahmavihāras* for parental life

The wonderful principles of Dharma, which concern a person's duties towards other members of a family, and especially towards the parents, are summarised in the four *Brahmavihāras*:

- (i) loving-kindness (*mettā*),
- (ii) compassion (*karuṇā*),
- (iii) sympathetic joy (*muditā*),

(iv) equanimity (*upekkhā*)¹⁹

Husbands and wives who seek perfection in married life must practice *Brahmavihāras*. They help to create a firm and lasting partnership, strong enough to pass through the storms of life as they have been blessed by conch-watering during their wedding ceremony blessing that they may both be united in harmony like this water. *Loving-kindness* is the first of four virtues that together form the foundations of married life since love shines over any darkness. Compassion is an apprehensive desire to help others out of their suffering since it brings the bond of gratitude and friendship where enmity will fade out leaving only reciprocal assistance. Sympathetic *joy* is to enjoy the happiness of others, which reduces envy since envy is the cancer of society. Equanimity entails a neutral attitude towards qualities in others that might seem less than desirable and enables husbands and wives to put up with one another and avoid divorce, particularly when the couples are from different backgrounds, education, societies, and cultures.

3.3. Buddhist ways of solving family problems

Besides the five precepts (*pañcasīla*), the five ennobling virtues address family dilemmas because one adheres to physical and verbal morality and moderation, adherence to disciplines, avoidance of evil deeds, and self-restraints like abstaining from killing otherwise it breeds unending vengeance and life imprisonment or ending one's freedom and liberty. Abstaining from stealing helps avoid greed to own what is not one's possession, corruption, and transgression of patents and properties. Abstaining from false speech helps avoid distorting information which burns down both the good and the bad alike. Abstaining from intoxicants causing heedlessness avoids what causes senseless excitement and confusion to better control oneself in what one does and says and ever being conscious.

Buddhism offers four ways in which these problems can be managed, and solved for better family stability, may they be arisen from conduct, viewpoints, complexity, differences, and attitudes. Buddhist principles should be employed to help analyze and review the conduct and behavior on the part of those members, so that that conduct and behavior might be changed in such a way as to bring about improved unity in the family, bearing in mind the following:

All living beings have actions (*kamma*) as their own, their inheritance, and their congenital cause, their kinsman, their refuge. It is *kamma* that differentiates beings into low and high states. From this, it can be seen that most aspects of human life are under the sway of the law of *kamma*:

- (i) One is the owner of one's *kamma*.
- (ii) Good or evil both depend on *kamma*.
- (iii) Results stem from both good and bad *kamma*.
- (iv) Whether one's life is good or bad depends on *kamma*.

¹⁹ A. III. 226.

- (v) The best goal is attaining enlightenment through practicing.

3.4. Buddhist solutions for a harmonious family life

To address family challenges, Buddhism provides practical solutions:

- (i) Cultivating Mindfulness and Awareness – Practicing mindfulness (*sati*) helps family members remain present, reducing impulsive reactions and promoting thoughtful responses.

- (ii) Developing Compassion and Forgiveness – Families should embody *karuṇā* (compassion) and *khantī* (patience) to heal conflicts and foster understanding.

- (iii) Engaging in Right Speech and Ethical Conduct – Speaking kindly, and honestly, and avoiding harsh words helps create a positive family atmosphere.

- (iv) Practicing Generosity and Gratitude – Encouraging acts of kindness and gratitude strengthen family bonds and reduce selfish tendencies.

- (v) Applying the Four Sublime States (*Brahmavihāras*) – By cultivating loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), appreciative joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), families can build a more harmonious and spiritually enriching life.

- (vi) Encouraging Family Rituals and Shared Practices – Many Buddhist families find strength in engaging in daily chanting, meditation, and acts of merit together. These shared experiences create a strong spiritual foundation and reinforce family unity.

Family life, while often challenging, provides a profound opportunity for personal growth and ethical development. By applying Buddhist teachings—such as mindfulness, compassion, right speech, and ethical conduct—families can cultivate a supportive and loving environment. Studies suggest that families who engage in mindful and ethical practices experience greater emotional well-being and resilience in the face of difficulties. Through mutual respect and understanding, they can overcome conflicts and foster a sense of unity, ultimately contributing to the well-being of society as a whole. The solution to all one's problems, according to Buddhism, is all to be found in the mind. If one can adjust the mind to the correct state such problems will disappear.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusion

This study underscores the vital role of the family in shaping individual character and, by extension, societal harmony. The family serves as the primary institution where individuals acquire moral education, ethical values, and a sense of responsibility. Through Buddhist teachings, particularly those found in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, the study emphasizes that parents are the first teachers, and their role in instilling compassion and ethical consciousness is paramount.

Modern challenges such as materialism, rising divorce rates, and the erosion of traditional values have significantly weakened familial bonds. The lack of proper guidance and compassion in family life has led to increased social instability, emotional distress, and ethical degradation. However, Buddhist

principles offer timeless solutions that stress love, mutual respect, and shared responsibilities in nurturing a well-balanced and morally sound family unit.

Key findings of the study highlight the importance of:

(i) **Parental Responsibilities:** Parents must be role models, demonstrating ethical behavior and guiding children through the principles of compassion, patience, and mindfulness.

(ii) **Mutual Respect in Marital Relationships:** A successful marriage thrives on mutual understanding, shared responsibilities, and a commitment to resolving conflicts through dialogue and respect.

(iii) **Social Responsibility:** The responsibility of fostering compassionate individuals extends beyond parents to society at large, including schools, religious institutions, and community leaders.

(iv) **Communication as a Tool for Family Stability:** Effective communication prevents misunderstandings and strengthens familial relationships, ensuring a harmonious household.

When families adhere to these principles, they contribute to a more ethical and stable society, reinforcing the Buddhist vision of collective human development based on compassion and mindfulness.

4.2. Recommendations

To address the challenges faced by modern families and to strengthen family bonds through Buddhist teachings, the following recommendations are proposed:

(i) **Integration of Buddhist Teachings in Parenting and Education:**

Parents should incorporate mindfulness and ethical conduct in daily interactions with children; Schools should introduce value-based education rooted in compassion and mutual respect; Community programs should be developed to educate families on Buddhist ethical principles.

(ii) **Strengthening Marital and Family Relationships:**

Pre-marital and marital counseling should include Buddhist wisdom on patience, understanding, and respect; Couples should practice mindful communication and conflict resolution techniques inspired by Buddhist teachings; Families should engage in joint spiritual activities such as meditation, Dhamma discussions, and acts of kindness.

(iii) **Encouraging Intergenerational Bonding and Gratitude:**

Children should be taught to respect and care for their aging parents as emphasized in Buddhist texts; Intergenerational activities should be promoted to strengthen familial ties and uphold traditions; Parents should instill a sense of gratitude in children by encouraging them to engage in acts of kindness and social service.

(iv) **Promoting Community Involvement in Family Well-being:**

Religious institutions should play an active role in guiding families through Dhamma talks and family-oriented workshops; Governments and non-profits

should support family well-being programs rooted in ethical and compassionate living; Workplaces should encourage work-life balance to ensure parents have time to nurture family bonds.

(v) Encouraging Financial and Emotional Stability:

Families should be encouraged to practice simple living and contentment as per Buddhist values to avoid stress and conflict; Mindfulness and meditation should be promoted as tools to cope with financial stress and emotional struggles.

In conclusion, the research reaffirms that a strong, compassionate family unit is the cornerstone of a peaceful and ethical society. By integrating Buddhist teachings into family life, parents and society can cultivate emotionally balanced and morally responsible individuals. The shared responsibility of nurturing compassion within families extends beyond personal relationships to the broader social fabric, ensuring a harmonious, sustainable, and morally conscious world.

By fostering mindfulness, ethical behavior, and mutual respect, families can become the pillars of a compassionate society — one that embodies the principles of love, understanding, and collective well-being as envisioned in Buddhist teachings.

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BUDDHIST DIGITAL MEDIA: PROMOTING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND COMPASSIONATE DIALOGUE FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

This paper explores the role of Buddhist digital media in promoting unity, inclusivity, and human dignity through compassionate dialogue and shared responsibility for human development. Focusing on Indonesia's pluralistic society, the study employs qualitative content analysis of the Young Buddhist Association (YBA) Instagram platform. The findings highlight how Buddhist digital media fosters intra and inter-religious harmony by acknowledging diversity in spiritual practices, balancing faith, wisdom, and compassion, and promoting ethical dialogue. The analysis reveals that digital platforms serve as vital tools for promoting Buddhist values of compassion (*karuṇā*) and interconnectedness, addressing sectarianism, and fostering mutual understanding in a polarized world. By leveraging digital media, Buddhist communities can contribute to sustainable development, social cohesion, and the realization of human dignity. This paper underscores the transformative potential of Buddhist digital media in advancing world peace and sustainable development, emphasizing the importance of shared responsibility, ethical engagement, and inclusive communication strategies in addressing global challenges.

Keywords: *Buddhist digital media, compassionate dialogue, shared responsibility, Indonesia, Buddhist compassion.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, one of the most diverse nations in the world, is home to a multitude of religious traditions, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous belief systems. However, this rich religious tapestry comes with significant challenges, as the country has witnessed increasing tensions driven by intolerance, sectarianism, and the politicization of religious identity. These issues, which have intensified in recent years, have been extensively documented by prominent research institutions and human rights organizations, highlighting their growing frequency and severity across various regions.

The Setara Institute, a leading Indonesian human rights organization, has consistently reported a steady increase in cases of religious intolerance. In its 2020 annual report, the institute documented 180 incidents, marking a significant rise compared to previous years.¹ These cases encompass various forms of discrimination, including attacks on places of worship, social exclusion of religious minorities, and the enforcement of blasphemy laws. Additionally, reports from international organizations highlight that religious discrimination disproportionately affects minority groups such as the Ahmadiyya and Shia Muslims, as well as Christians.² This issue is particularly acute in regions where conservative interpretations of Islam prevail, exacerbating social divisions and further marginalizing vulnerable communities.

Equally concerning is the increasing use of religion as a political tool, which has deepened tensions and divisions within Indonesian society. A notable case occurred during the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election when Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), a Christian and ethnic Chinese candidate, faced massive protests and blasphemy accusations. Political and religious groups exploited these allegations to mobilize support and widen religious rifts. This incident demonstrated how faith-based identity could be weaponized for political gain, exacerbating social fragmentation. Furthermore, a 2018 report by the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC) highlighted that political actors increasingly leveraged religious rhetoric to consolidate power, particularly during elections, further intensifying societal polarization.³

The impact of rising religious intolerance and sectarianism extends beyond the political sphere, shaping both social and economic realities. Communities grappling with religious tensions often experience diminished trust and

¹ Kidung Asmara Sigit dan Ismail Hasani, *Intoleransi Semasa Pandemi: Laporan Kebebasan Beragama dan Berkeyakinan 2020*. Jakarta: Pustaka Masyarakat Setara, 2021, p. 23 - 56.

² The United States Department of State, Indonesia 2019 International Religious Freedom Report (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2019), accessed February 26, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/INDONESIA-2019-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT>.

³ The Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict (IPAC), *After Ahok: The Islamist Agenda in Indonesia* (Jakarta: IPAC, 2018), 25, accessed February 26, 2025, <https://understandingconflict.org/en/publications/After-Ahok-The-Islamist-Agenda-in-Indonesia>.

cooperation, which undermines social cohesion and hinders local development efforts. In Indonesia, where religion is deeply intertwined with social structures, the prevailing religious dynamics can significantly influence interpersonal trust and collective cooperation. Scholars emphasize that fostering inter-group trust - particularly among ethnic and religious communities - is essential for addressing inequality and poverty in a nation as diverse as Indonesia.⁴

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2017 - 2020 report underscores the detrimental impact of religious intolerance on Indonesia's progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16, which aims to foster peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure access to justice, and establish accountable institutions. In Chapter 4, Strengthening Justice and Stability, the report highlights the rising prevalence of intolerance and violent extremism in Indonesia, warning that these issues threaten community stability and risk reversing hard-earned development gains. Such challenges are significant barriers to sustainable peace and governance, as they erode social cohesion and weaken institutional trust. Consequently, the report emphasizes the urgent need to counteract these threats to maintain long-term progress toward SDG 16.⁵ Furthermore, the deepening sectarian divide undermines the foundations of inclusive growth and human development, posing a substantial risk to Indonesia's stability and future prosperity.⁶

A 2021 study conducted by INFID, titled *Attitudes of Millennials and Generation Z toward Religious Tolerance, Diversity, and Freedom in Indonesia*, reveals a concerning trend of religious exclusivity among Indonesian youth. The study found that a significant majority of Millennials (81%) and Generation Z (77%) primarily seek information about their faiths, with many viewing their beliefs as superior (72% of Millennials and 62% of Generation Z) and more charitable than others (38% of Millennials and 37% of Generation Z). This inclination toward in-group favoritism reflects a broader pattern of exclusivity in religious perspectives. While such attitudes may stem from a natural desire to affirm one's identity and beliefs, they present a significant challenge to fostering religious inclusivity and tolerance among younger generations in Indonesia.⁷

⁴ Asep Suryahadi, Arnita Rishanty, and Robert Sparrow, "Social Capital and Economic Development in a Large and Multi-Ethnic Developing Country: Evidence from Indonesia", *Asian Development Review* 41, no. 2 (2024), p. 301–323.

⁵ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNDP Indonesia Result Report 2017-2020 (Jakarta: UNDP, 2020), 52, <https://www.undp.org/indonesia/publications/undp-indonesia-result-report-2017-2020>.

⁶ Immanuel Ferdinand Barmandi dan Elly Damera Enesca, "SDG 16 in ASEAN: Case Study on Building Just and Inclusive Societies in Indonesia", *Sociae Polites*, 24, no. 1 (2023), p. 14 - 21.

⁷ Alfindra Primaldhi Dahlan, Sahat Khristianus Panggabean, and Paksi C.K. Walandouw, *Attitudes of Millennials and Generation Z toward Religious Tolerance, Diversity, and Freedom in Indonesia* (Jakarta: INFID, 2022), p. 56.

Public perception and media influence also play a critical role in exacerbating religious tensions. Analysts and scholars have attributed this trend to the proliferation of divisive narratives on social media and digital platforms. Twitter, for instance, has become a powerful tool in shaping public opinion on religious matters, often sparking digital conflicts and fostering intolerance.⁸ The rise of hate speech and discriminatory discourse targeting religious minorities on these platforms has further deepened societal divisions.⁹ Additionally, media framing of religious issues significantly influences public attitudes toward religious tolerance, with varying portrayals shaping perceptions of inclusivity and interfaith relations.¹⁰

Together, these empirical findings highlight the pressing need for inclusive dialogue and proactive efforts to bridge the widening religious and social divides in Indonesian society. Addressing the challenges of intolerance, sectarianism, and the politicization of religious identity requires a multifaceted approach that promotes social harmony, cultivates mutual respect, and advances equitable development for all citizens.¹¹

These challenges not only threaten social cohesion but also impede Indonesia's progress toward inclusive human development.¹² The media plays a vital role in fostering dialogue, mutual understanding, and reconciliation across cultural and religious divides. While extremist groups often exploit digital platforms, responsible media can be a powerful force for raising awareness, facilitating constructive dialogue, and advancing peace initiatives.¹³ By safeguarding cultural diversity and advocating for cultural rights, media outlets help dismantle barriers, empower marginalized communities, and promote intercultural citizenship in an increasingly globalized world.¹⁴ Both traditional and digital platforms can serve as bridges for peace, dispelling misconceptions that fuel interreligious conflicts.¹⁵ However, unlocking this

⁸ Nina Farlina, Setyadi Sulaiman, and Faishal Sultan Bagaskara, "Public Perception of Religious Moderation on Twitter: The Case of Kicking Offerings on Mount Semeru, Lumajang", *SHAHIH: Journal of Islamicate Multidisciplinary* (2025).

⁹ Ahmad Alfajri and Abdul Haris Pito, "Regresi Moderasi dan Narasi Keagamaan di Sosial Media", *Andragogi: Jurnal Diklat Teknis Pendidikan dan Keagamaan*, p. 150

¹⁰ Sabil Mokodenseho, Jasiah, Suhari Muharam, Muhammad Rizaq, and Kalijunjung Hasibuan, "The Role of Media in Shaping Public Opinion on Religious Tolerance in Religious News in Mass Media", *West Science Islamic Studies* 2, no. 01 (January 2024): p. 24 – 29, <https://wsj.westscience-press.com/index.php/wsiss>.

¹¹ S. S. Karimullah and A. Sugitana, "The Government's Strategies for Promoting Religious Tolerance in a Multicultural Society", *Journal of Religious Policy* 2, no. 1 (2013): p. 75–102.

¹² Katherine Marshall, "Religious Inequalities and Human Rights: Implications for International Development", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* (2024).

¹³ N. Naji, "The Role of Media in Alliance of Civilizations and Dialogue of Religions", *Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities, Media, and Political Science* (2024).

¹⁴ Mohamed Zayani, "Media, Cultural Diversity and Globalization: Challenges and Opportunities", *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 18, no. 2 (2011): p. 48.

¹⁵ Jacinta Maweu, "Catalysts of Conflict or Messengers of Peace? Promoting Interfaith

potential requires fostering open spaces for democratic debate and equipping individuals with media literacy skills to encourage responsible engagement and counter extremist narratives.¹⁶ Ultimately, a well-informed and ethically guided media landscape can serve as a cornerstone for interfaith dialogue, social harmony, and sustainable peace.

For Buddhism, a minority tradition in Indonesia, digital media presents a unique opportunity to promote its core values of compassion, mindfulness, and interconnectedness while contributing to broader efforts to foster an inclusive and harmonious society. This study examines how Buddhist media contributes to religious harmony and diversity in Indonesia. Platforms such as Dhamma TV play a crucial role in peacebuilding by broadcasting programs that emphasize social cohesion, tolerance, and harmony while deliberately avoiding content that could incite division or conflict.¹⁷ These initiatives align closely with Buddhist teachings, which advocate mutual respect and universal compassion for all living beings. In the broader context of Indonesia's religious pluralism, the country provides a compelling case study of how diverse religious communities coexist and contribute to societal cohesion, underscoring the importance of interfaith dialogue, government policies, and the role of religious leaders in fostering tolerance.¹⁸

The research on Buddhist digital media and its role in fostering religious diversity and compassionate dialogue highlights the transformative impact of digital technology on religious practices and social development. Digital media has significantly reshaped communication and social interaction, fostering virtual communities and expanding access to religious knowledge.¹⁹ It has also influenced worship practices and strengthened connectivity among individuals.²⁰ Furthermore, the integration of Buddhist compassion-based practices within sustainable development frameworks has demonstrated positive effects on community health, education, and social welfare.²¹ However,

Dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Kenya through the Media", in *Media, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2021), p. 113.

¹⁶ Naji, "The Role of Media in Alliance of Civilizations and Dialogue of Religions", *Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities, Media, and Political Science* (2024).

¹⁷ B. Fannani dan M. A. Kholish, "Religion, Media and Peacebuilding: How does Buddhist TV Promote Harmony between Religious Followers in Malang", *Peradaban Journal of Religion and Society* 1, no. 1 (2022): p. 22–30.

¹⁸ F. Hutabarat, "Navigating Diversity: Exploring Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony in Indonesian Society", *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 3, no. 6 (2023): p. 6.

¹⁹ P. Andriyana and B. Adrian, *Agama, Media, dan Masyarakat di Era Digital*, Borneo: *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2024.

²⁰ Putri Andriyana and Bobby Adrian, "Agama, Media, dan Masyarakat di Era Digital", Borneo: *Journal of Islamic Studies*, (2024).

²¹ L. J. Douglas, "Ethical Underpinnings and Social Work: A Case Study on the Role of Buddhist Compassion in Cambodian Sustainable Development", *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 2024.

the use of digital media in religious contexts poses challenges, including the spread of misinformation and the need for responsible engagement.²² As religious identity and spiritual practices continue to evolve in the digital age, further critical scholarship is essential to understanding how individuals construct meaning in this dynamic landscape.²³

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the role of Buddhist digital media in fostering religious diversity and compassionate dialogue in Indonesia. This approach was chosen as it allows for a deeper understanding of the complex social and cultural dynamics surrounding religious practices and media consumption. Qualitative methods are particularly effective in examining how digital media shapes religious identity, facilitates community building and fosters interfaith dialogue. They enable researchers to capture nuanced perspectives and contextual factors that quantitative methods might overlook.²⁴ By emphasizing subjective experiences and interpretations, this approach offers a rich, detailed analysis of how Buddhist digital media contributes to religious harmony.

The primary data sources for this research include a content analysis of a prominent Buddhist digital media platform, specifically the Instagram account of the Young Buddhist Association (<https://www.instagram.com/youngbuddhistassociation>). This platform was selected for its significant influence within the Indonesian Buddhist community and its active engagement in promoting Buddhist teachings, values, and interfaith dialogue. The analyzed content includes videos, social media posts, and other digital materials published on this platform over a specified period. These sources provide valuable insights into how Buddhist digital media addresses religious diversity, tolerance, and compassionate dialogue within Indonesia's pluralistic society.

Thematic analysis was employed as the primary method for data analysis. This qualitative approach is widely used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.²⁵ In this study, thematic analysis was applied to the content of the Young Buddhist Association (YBA) to identify recurring themes related to religious diversity, compassion, and interfaith dialogue. The process involved systematically coding the data, grouping codes into broader themes, and interpreting their significance in relation to the research objectives. This method ensures a rigorous and transparent examination of digital media

²² N. Mu'asyara et al., *Agama, Masyarakat dan Media Masa, RISOMA: Jurnal Riset Sosial Humaniora dan Pendidikan*, 2024.

²³ K. M. Peterson, "Pushing Boundaries and Blurring Categories in Digital Media and Religion Research", *Sociology Compass* 14 (2020).

²⁴ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016, p. 87.

²⁵ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006), p. 77 - 101.

content, offering a comprehensive understanding of how Buddhist values are communicated and promoted through these platforms.

The data collected from YBA were analyzed using both thematic and narrative analysis techniques. Thematic analysis focused on identifying key themes and patterns in the content, such as the promotion of compassion, mindfulness, and both intra- and interfaith understanding. Meanwhile, narrative analysis examined the storytelling techniques employed by these platforms to convey Buddhist teachings and values. This dual approach provided a more comprehensive understanding of how Buddhist digital media constructs narratives around religious diversity and compassionate dialogue. Additionally, the analysis considered Indonesia's broader socio-cultural context, including challenges related to religious intolerance and the politicization of religious identity, ensuring a nuanced interpretation of the data.

By integrating thematic and narrative analysis, this study provides a comprehensive examination of how Buddhist digital media fosters religious harmony and compassionate dialogue in Indonesia. The findings offer deeper insights into the potential of digital media as a tool for promoting inclusive and peaceful coexistence in a diverse and pluralistic society.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The role of Buddhist digital media in constructing narratives of religious diversity

This part of the study examines how Buddhist digital media platforms, particularly the Young Buddhist Association (YBA), construct narratives surrounding religious diversity in Indonesia. The analysis reveals that these platforms play a significant role in promoting inclusive discourses by emphasizing Buddhist values such as compassion, mindfulness, and interconnectedness. Through their content, the Young Buddhist Association actively engages in fostering interfaith understanding and challenging stereotypes that contribute to religious intolerance. The findings highlight the strategic communication approaches employed by these platforms, including the use of storytelling, multimedia content, and community engagement initiatives to advocate for inclusivity and peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society. These strategies not only reflect the core teachings of Buddhism but also address the socio-religious challenges faced by Indonesia, offering a model for how digital media can contribute to building a more harmonious and tolerant society.

The Young Buddhist Association of Indonesia (YBA), with its motto 'Humble and Open-Minded,' exemplifies the effective use of digital media to engage in discussions on religious diversity. Their Instagram account, @youngbuddhistassociation, has demonstrated significant reach and engagement, amassing 262,000 followers and 5,082 posts as of the end of February 2025. This high level of activity and interaction highlights the platform's effectiveness in disseminating content, fostering dialogue, and promoting interfaith understanding among its audience.

3.2. Content analysis “Buddha or Jesus”

A compelling example of YBA’s approach to fostering narratives of religious diversity is their Instagram post on December 25, 2024, titled “Buddha or Jesus”. The post featured insights from Gabor Maté, who highlighted the profound similarities between Buddha and Jesus. Maté emphasized that both figures resisted temptation through inner strength, prioritized teaching over control, and led by example with wisdom and gentle words. This framing aligns closely with YBA’s mission to promote interfaith understanding and harmony, reinforcing the shared values across religious traditions.

The post sparked a variety of responses from netizens, reflecting both support for and resistance to the idea of religious commonality. Many users appreciated the parallels drawn between Jesus’ teachings on forgiveness, kindness, and helping the poor, and Buddhist values such as *karuṇā* (compassion), *mettā* (loving-kindness), and aiding those in need. One commenter, for instance, noted: “Jesus’ messages of forgiveness, kindness, and helping the poor align closely with Buddhist values of *karuṇā*, *mettā*, and assisting the needy”. This response highlights a willingness among some followers to engage in interfaith dialogue and acknowledge shared ethical principles across religious traditions.

However, the post also encountered resistance, with many commenters emphasizing the doctrinal differences between Buddhism and Christianity. Some users outright rejected the comparison, arguing that the two religions are fundamentally distinct. For instance, one comment stated: “This is very different, admin... While they may appear similar in teaching love and kindness on the surface, their core doctrines are vastly different”. This reaction underscores the challenges of promoting religious diversity in a context where theological distinctions are prioritized over shared ethical values.

Interestingly, some comments attempted to strike a balance between recognizing similarities and acknowledging differences. One user noted: “Jesus Christ and Buddha share some similarities, particularly in their teachings on love. However, despite these commonalities, the most important thing is to live out our respective faiths. May the followers of Jesus Christ and Buddha coexist in harmony and mutual respect”. This perspective reflects a pragmatic approach to interfaith relations, emphasizing peaceful coexistence and respect for religious diversity without diminishing doctrinal distinctions.

The mixed responses to the “Buddha or Jesus” post illustrate the complexities of leveraging digital media to construct narratives of religious diversity. While YBA’s efforts to highlight commonalities between Buddhism and Christianity resonate with some audiences, they also risk alienating individuals who perceive such comparisons as diminishing the distinctiveness of their faith. This tension underscores the dual role of Buddhist digital media - both as a platform for fostering interfaith dialogue and as a contested space where religious identity and doctrinal boundaries are actively negotiated.

Thus, YBA’s Instagram account functions as a dynamic platform for engaging with religious diversity, facilitating both dialogue and debate. The significant engagement with the “Buddha or Jesus” post underscores the potential of digital

media to amplify discussions on interfaith commonalities and differences. However, the varied responses also highlight the complexities of navigating religious pluralism in a digital space, where narratives of unity may be both embraced and contested. This case study underscores the need for nuanced, context-sensitive approaches in constructing narratives of religious diversity in the digital age.

3.3. Content analysis “Selling religion through the intimidation of hell”

The Instagram post titled “*Jualan Agama Intimidasi Ketakutan Neraka*” (Selling Religion Through the Intimidation of Hell), published by the Young Buddhist Association of Indonesia (YBA) on February 2, 2025, critically examines the misuse of religion and its impact on interfaith relations. The post asserts that religion should serve as a path to wisdom and inner peace but warns against its manipulation by individuals for personal gain, political agendas, or fear-based control. It highlights the commercialization of religion, the abuse of spiritual authority, and the politicization of sacred texts as key concerns. The post argues that instilling fear - particularly through threats of hell - hinders spiritual growth and distorts the true purpose of religion, which should be to foster understanding and peace.

In contrast to fear-based religious practices, the post highlights the Buddhist approach to spirituality. While Buddhism acknowledges the concept of hell, it does not use it as a tool for intimidation. Instead, it emphasizes liberation from suffering (*dukkha*) through understanding, ethical conduct, and mindful practice. The ultimate goal is to transcend the cycle of birth and death (*samsāra*) and attain *nibbāna*. The post concludes by questioning whether a religion that instills fear rather than wisdom remains a genuine spiritual path or has instead become a means of “selling religion”. This critique reflects YBA’s commitment to promoting a vision of religion centered on ethics, critical thinking, and compassion.

The post elicited a wide range of reactions from its audience, highlighting the complexities of engaging in interfaith critique through digital media. Some users expressed support for the post’s message, appreciating its candid approach in addressing what they perceived as a prevalent issue in certain religious contexts. For instance, one commenter stated, “This is reality; calling it offensive doesn’t change the truth”. Another user remarked, “At least I’ve never heard of “Buddhanization” or “Hinduization” - this seems unique to certain religions”. These responses suggest that the post resonated with individuals who view fear-based religious control as a significant concern and appreciated the discussion on its implications.

However, the post also sparked criticism from users who perceived it as controversial or inappropriate. One commenter asked: “Why does this suddenly seem offensive to other religions, admin?” This reaction highlights the sensitivity surrounding critiques of religious practices, even when presented as general observations rather than direct attacks. Another user cautioned: “Be mindful of the boundaries of speech, admin. Even if something is true, sometimes it’s best left unsaid”. This response underscores the challenges of

navigating interfaith dialogue in a way that fosters understanding without alienating or offending adherents of other religions. The mixed reactions to the post reveal the delicate balance that Buddhist digital media must maintain when engaging in interfaith critique.

The post also revealed deeper interfaith tensions and defensiveness among some commenters. For instance, one user asserted: “The commands and warnings are written in their holy scriptures, and followers are obligated to obey and stand against those outside their faith”. This response reflects broader interreligious tensions, particularly in contexts where exclusivist doctrines are emphasized. Another user expressed frustration with interfaith discussions, stating: “I’m tired of debating this with others. These lengthy discussions only create new conflicts. It’s better to simply understand and move on”. This sentiment underscores the challenge of interfaith critique, which, rather than fostering understanding, can sometimes deepen existing divisions.

The “*Jualan Agama Intimidasi Ketakutan Neraka*” post exemplifies the dual role of Buddhist digital media as both a platform for critical reflection and a space where interfaith tensions can emerge. On the one hand, the post reflects YBA’s commitment to promoting a vision of religion as a path to wisdom and liberation, free from fear-based manipulation. This perspective aligns with broader Buddhist values of compassion (*karunā*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*), as well as the emphasis on critical thinking and ethical conduct. On the other hand, the diverse reactions to the post highlight the challenges of engaging in interfaith critique through digital media. While some users appreciated its candidness, others found it offensive or divisive. This tension underscores the need for Buddhist digital media to approach interfaith discourse with sensitivity - balancing the critique of harmful religious practices with the imperative to foster mutual respect and understanding.

In short, YBA’s Instagram post serves as a case study of the complexities of using digital media to shape narratives of religious diversity. By critiquing the misuse of religion while contrasting it with Buddhist teachings, the post aims to promote a more ethical and liberating vision of spirituality. However, the diverse reactions it generated highlight the challenges of engaging in interfaith dialogue without alienating or offending adherents of other religions. This analysis underscores the need for a nuanced and context-sensitive approach to constructing narratives of religious diversity in the digital age, particularly in pluralistic societies like Indonesia.

IV. CONTENT ANALYSIS: “IDENTIFYING RED FLAGS IN RELIGIOUS FIGURES”

The Instagram post titled “*Kenali Tokoh Agama Red Flag*” (Recognizing Red Flags in Religious Figures), published by the Young Buddhist Association of Indonesia (YBA) on December 9, 2024, critically examines the characteristics and behaviors that define ethical religious leadership. By encouraging followers to be discerning in choosing religious role models, the post highlights the importance of aligning a leader’s actions with their teachings. This study analyzes the content of the post, the audience reactions it elicited, and its

broadier implications for understanding the role of Buddhist digital media in shaping perceptions of religious leadership and ethics.

The post opens with a thought-provoking question that resonates with many: “Have you ever admired someone for appearing deeply devout, only to later notice something that made you doubt them?” This introduction sets the stage for a discussion on the importance of recognizing red flags in religious figures to prevent misguided admiration. The post identifies key warning signs of problematic religious leaders, including superficial piety, exclusivity and judgment, divisive behavior, materialism and exploitation, and resistance to criticism. It contrasts these traits with the qualities of a genuine religious leader, emphasizing openness to discussion, humility, and a commitment to love and peace rather than fear. Concluding with a call to action, the post urges followers to critically evaluate the values promoted by religious figures, ensuring that they lead to genuine goodness rather than exploitation.

The post generated significant engagement, with audience responses reflecting three dominant themes: appreciation for its candidness, personal experiences with problematic leaders, and broader reflections on religious ethics. Many users expressed support for the post’s message, commending its direct approach to a sensitive topic. Some commenters emphasized the importance of focusing on religious teachings rather than idolizing religious figures, reinforcing the post’s encouragement of critical thinking and discernment. Others shared personal experiences, recounting encounters with religious figures who exhibited red flags. One individual described a monk who displayed manipulative behavior by soliciting personal favors under the guise of spiritual guidance, illustrating the emotional and psychological harm that can result from unethical leadership. Another user voiced frustration over religious figures who prioritize material wealth over spiritual integrity, reinforcing concerns about the commercialization of religious authority.

Beyond personal experiences, several commentators reflected on the broader ethical responsibilities of religious leaders. Some compared them to teachers or parental figures, emphasizing their duty to exemplify moral conduct. Others argued that true religious leadership should be grounded in love and peace rather than fear, aligning with Buddhist principles of compassion (*karuṇā*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*). These reflections underscore the community’s expectation that religious figures uphold ethical standards and inspire positive change rather than perpetuate division or exploitation.

The “*Kenali Tokoh Agama Red Flag*” post exemplifies the role of Buddhist digital media in fostering critical reflection on religious leadership and ethics. By highlighting problematic behaviors and promoting ethical standards, the post encourages followers to exercise discernment in their admiration of religious figures. This approach aligns with Buddhist teachings that emphasize ethical conduct, critical inquiry, and compassion.

Furthermore, the post illustrates the potential of digital platforms to foster open dialogue and shared experiences. The personal anecdotes in the comments highlight the real-life relevance of its message, while broader

reflections reinforce its importance in promoting ethical religious leadership. However, the post's candid critique also underscores the challenges of addressing sensitive issues in a way that remains respectful and inclusive. Striking a balance between accountability and the risk of alienating certain audiences remains a crucial consideration in such discussions.

The YBA's Instagram post offers a compelling case study on how Buddhist digital media can influence public perceptions of religious leadership and ethics. By urging followers to recognize red flags in religious figures and prioritize ethical conduct, the post promotes a vision of spirituality grounded in compassion, humility, and critical thinking. The engagement it generated - including personal testimonials and broader ethical reflections - highlights the relevance of such discussions in fostering ethical religious communities. At the same time, the post underscores the need for nuance and sensitivity when addressing complex topics, particularly in an interfaith context. This analysis demonstrates the potential of Buddhist digital media to facilitate meaningful conversations about religious ethics and leadership in the digital age.

V. CONTENT ANALYSIS “THIS SECT’S PRACTICES ARE THE MOST CORRECT, OTHERS ARE WRONG: SSSSS HEY! WHO SAID THAT?”

The Instagram post by YBA (Young Buddhist Association), titled “*Praktik Paling Bener Ya Aliran Ini, Lainnya Salah: SSSST Heh! Siapa itu yang Ngomong?*” (translated as “This Sect’s Practices Are the Most Correct, Others Are Wrong: SSSST Hey! Who Said That?”), posted on February 25, 2025, serves as a compelling case study for analyzing intra-religious harmony (*kerukunan intern umat beragama*) within Buddhism. The post highlights the diversity of Buddhist practices and underscores the importance of balancing compassion, wisdom, and faith in achieving true progress on the Bodhisattva path. This analysis examines how digital media - exemplified by YBA's Instagram content - fosters religious diversity and compassionate dialogue, ultimately contributing to human development and intra-religious harmony.

The post begins by acknowledging the diversity of spiritual paths within Buddhism, emphasizing that individuals embark on their journeys from different starting points based on their spiritual potential. This recognition is crucial in fostering intra-religious harmony, as it affirms the legitimacy of various Buddhist traditions, schools, and practices. By illustrating that practitioners may enter the path through different gateways - such as compassion for those inclined toward greed, wisdom for those struggling with hatred, and faith for those of a simple heart - the post highlights the inclusive nature of Buddhist teachings. This perspective aligns with the concept of *upaya-kaushalya* (skillful means), which emphasizes adapting teachings to suit the needs and capacities of individuals.

The post's emphasis on diversity directly challenges sectarian attitudes that claim the exclusivity or superiority of one school over others. Encouraging practitioners not to remain fixated on a single approach, fosters mutual respect and understanding among different Buddhist traditions. This message is particularly relevant to intra-religious harmony, as it discourages dogmatism

and promotes open dialogue between schools such as Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.

A central theme of the post is the necessity of balancing faith (*saddhā*), wisdom (*prajñā*), and compassion (*karuṇā*). It warns against the dangers of relying solely on faith without wisdom, which can lead to superstition, or wisdom without faith, which may result in nihilistic views. This balanced approach is essential for maintaining harmony within the Buddhist community, as it discourages extremism and fosters a holistic understanding of the Dharma.

The reference to Nāgārjuna's teachings further reinforces this point. Nāgārjuna asserts that understanding "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) without a foundation of faith (*saddhā*) and ethical conduct (*śīla*) can lead to erroneous views. This highlights the interdependence of these qualities. By advocating for the simultaneous development of faith and wisdom, the post promotes unity among practitioners, regardless of their specific school or tradition.

The post's comment section provides further insights into the dynamics of intra-religious harmony. One commenter observes that different traditions suit different individuals, as long as they align with the Noble Eightfold Path and lead to the cessation of suffering (*dukkha nirodha*). This perspective reflects a pragmatic and inclusive approach to Buddhist practice, emphasizing the shared goal of liberation over doctrinal differences.

Another commenter points out that contemporary Buddhist traditions have emerged through historical debates and adaptations within the Saṅgha. This recognition of Buddhism's historical diversity and evolution reinforces the idea that no single tradition holds absolute authority. By encouraging an appreciation of the historical and cultural contexts behind different practices, the post fosters dialogue and mutual respect among practitioners.

The YBA Instagram post exemplifies how digital media can serve as a platform for promoting intra-religious harmony. By addressing sensitive topics such as sectarianism and doctrinal differences in a compassionate and inclusive manner, the post models constructive dialogue. The use of digital media allows for the dissemination of such messages to a wide audience, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries.

Moreover, the interactive nature of social media allows practitioners to engage in discussions, share perspectives, and learn from one another. This community-based approach aligns with the Buddhist emphasis on the *saṅgha*, highlighting collective progress on the path to enlightenment. By leveraging digital platforms, organizations like YBA can foster a sense of global Buddhist solidarity while respecting the diversity of traditions and practices.

The post's emphasis on compassion, wisdom, and faith carries significant implications for human development. By advocating a balanced and inclusive approach to Buddhist practice, it encourages personal growth and ethical living. Cultivating these qualities not only enriches individual practitioners but also fosters a more harmonious and compassionate society.

In the context of intra-religious harmony, the post's message of mutual respect

and understanding helps reduce conflicts and divisions within the Buddhist community. This, in turn, fosters a more harmonious and supportive environment for spiritual growth. By addressing the challenges of sectarianism and dogmatism, the post contributes to the broader goal of cultivating a compassionate and inclusive global community.

The YBA Instagram post serves as a valuable case study for analyzing intra-religious harmony within Buddhism. By recognizing the diversity of spiritual paths, emphasizing the balance between faith, wisdom, and compassion, and encouraging open dialogue, the post demonstrates how digital media can foster religious inclusivity and meaningful discussions. This approach not only strengthens unity within the Buddhist community but also promotes ethical living and mutual understanding, contributing to broader human development. As digital media continues to shape religious discourse, initiatives like YBA's Instagram content provide a model for leveraging technology to cultivate a more inclusive and harmonious world.

VI. BUDDHIST DIGITAL MEDIA AND INTER-AND INTRA-RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN THE CONTEXT OF YBA'S INSTAGRAM POSTS

The analysis of YBA's Instagram posts - including *Praktik Paling Bener Ya Aliran Ini, Lainnya Salah: SSSST Heh! Siapa itu yang Ngomong? Buddha or Jesus, Jualan Agama Intimidasi Ketakutan Neraka, and Kenali Tokoh Agama Red Flag* - highlight the transformative role of Buddhist digital media in fostering both inter- and intra-religious harmony. These posts demonstrate how digital platforms can serve as powerful tools for promoting religious diversity, encouraging compassionate dialogue, and facilitating ethical reflection. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, such initiatives contribute not only to greater religious understanding but also to broader human development.

The post "*Praktik Paling Bener Ya Aliran Ini, Lainnya Salah*" highlights the importance of recognizing the diversity of spiritual paths within Buddhism. By acknowledging that individuals embark on their spiritual journeys from different starting points based on their unique potentials, the poet affirms the legitimacy of various Buddhist traditions, schools, and practices. This perspective aligns with the Buddhist concept of *upaya-kaushalya* (skillful means), which emphasizes the need to adapt teachings to suit the capacities and circumstances of individuals.²⁶ Moreover, the post challenges sectarian attitudes that assert the exclusivity or superiority of one school over others, instead promoting mutual respect and understanding among traditions such as Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.

This recognition of diversity plays a crucial role in fostering intra-religious harmony, as it discourages dogmatism and promotes dialogue. By encouraging an appreciation for the historical and cultural contexts of different Buddhist traditions, the post helps practitioners move beyond rigid doctrinal boundaries and adopt a more inclusive approach to spiritual growth. This message is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where religious diversity coexists with

²⁶ Damien Keown, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*. Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2004, p. 675.

ongoing challenges related to sectarianism and intolerance.²⁷

A central theme across YBA's posts is the necessity of balancing faith (*saddhā*), wisdom (*paññā*), and compassion (*karuṇā*). The post "*Praktik Paling Bener Ya Aliran Ini, Lainnya Salah*" warns against the dangers of relying solely on faith without wisdom, which can lead to superstition, or wisdom without faith, which can result in nihilistic views. This balanced approach is critical for maintaining harmony within the Buddhist community, as it discourages extremism and promotes a holistic understanding of the Dhamma.

The reference to Nagarjuna's teachings further reinforces this point. Nagarjuna's assertion that understanding "emptiness" (*suññatā*) without a foundation of faith (*saddhā*) and ethical conduct (*sīla*) can lead to erroneous views highlights the interdependence of these qualities.²⁸ By advocating for the simultaneous development of faith and wisdom, the post fosters a sense of unity among practitioners, regardless of their specific school or tradition. This balanced approach not only strengthens intra-religious harmony but also serves as a model for interfaith dialogue, emphasizing shared ethical principles over doctrinal differences.

The comment sections of YBA's posts reveal the complexities of fostering dialogue and mutual understanding in a pluralistic society. For instance, the post "Buddha or Jesus" elicited mixed responses - some users appreciated the parallels drawn between Buddhist and Christian values, while others emphasized the fundamental differences between the two religions. This tension underscores the challenge of promoting religious diversity in a context where doctrinal distinctions often take precedence over shared ethical principles.

Similarly, the post "*Jualan Agama Intimidasi Ketakutan Neraka*" received both support and criticism, reflecting the sensitivity of critiquing religious practices. While some users praised its candidness in addressing the misuse of religion, others found it offensive or divisive. These reactions highlight the importance of a nuanced and context-sensitive approach to interfaith dialogue - one that balances the need to critique harmful practices with the imperative to foster mutual respect and understanding.

The post "*Kenali Tokoh Agama Red Flag*" further illustrates the role of Buddhist digital media in promoting critical reflection on religious leadership and ethics. By identifying problematic behaviors and advocating for ethical standards, the post helps cultivate a culture of accountability and discernment within the Buddhist community. This aligns with Buddhist teachings that emphasize ethical conduct, critical inquiry, and compassion.²⁹

²⁷ Sigit dan Hasani, *Intoleransi Semasa Pandemi*.

²⁸ Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 45.

²⁹ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 98.

YBA's Instagram posts highlight how digital media can foster compassionate dialogue and religious harmony. The interactive nature of social media allows practitioners to engage in discussions, share perspectives, and learn from one another. This participatory approach aligns with the Buddhist emphasis on community (*saṅgha*) and collective progress on the path to enlightenment.³⁰

Moreover, digital media enables the widespread dissemination of inclusive and compassionate messages, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. For instance, the post "Buddha or Jesus" reached a global audience, fostering dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. Likewise, the post "*Praktik Paling Bener Ya Aliran Ini, Lainnya Salah*" promoted intra-religious harmony by encouraging practitioners to appreciate the diversity of Buddhist traditions.

However, the mixed reactions to these posts also underscore the complexities of navigating religious pluralism in digital spaces. While some users embraced narratives of unity and shared values, others resisted them, emphasizing the need for sensitivity and inclusivity in online discourse. This highlights the dual role of Buddhist digital media as both a bridge for interfaith dialogue and a space for contestation over religious identity.

The emphasis on compassion, wisdom, and faith in YBA's posts carries significant implications for human development. By advocating a balanced and inclusive approach to Buddhist practice, these posts foster personal growth and ethical living. The cultivation of such qualities not only enhances individual well-being but also contributes to the broader social good.

In the context of intra-religious harmony, the post's message of mutual respect and understanding plays a crucial role in reducing conflicts and divisions within the Buddhist community. This, in turn, fosters a more harmonious and supportive environment for spiritual development. By addressing the challenges of sectarianism and dogmatism, the post contributes to the broader goal of cultivating a compassionate and inclusive global community. Furthermore, the use of digital media to promote religious harmony aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). By facilitating inter- and intra-religious dialogue, Buddhist digital media can play a vital role in building peaceful and inclusive societies, strengthening social cohesion, and reducing inequalities.³¹

YBA's Instagram posts provide a compelling case study on the role of Buddhist digital media in fostering both inter- and intra-religious harmony. By recognizing the diversity of spiritual paths, advocating a balance of faith, wisdom, and compassion, and fostering open dialogue, these posts exemplify how digital platforms can promote religious inclusivity and meaningful discussions. This approach not only strengthens unity within the Buddhist

³⁰ Sangharakshita, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*. Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 1998, p. 69.

³¹ UNDP, UNDP Indonesia Result Report 2017 - 2020.

community but also contributes to human development by encouraging ethical living and mutual understanding.

As digital media continues to shape religious discourse, initiatives like YBA's Instagram content serve as a model for leveraging technology to foster inclusivity and harmony. However, navigating religious pluralism in the digital space requires nuanced and context-sensitive communication strategies. By encouraging critical reflection, ethical leadership, and compassionate dialogue, Buddhist digital media can play a vital role in advancing religious harmony and human development in the digital age.

VII. BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) is not merely a passive feeling of empathy but an active commitment to alleviating suffering and promoting the well-being of all beings. In the context of human development, this principle translates into a shared responsibility among individuals, communities, and institutions to address systemic inequalities, strengthen social cohesion, and support sustainable development. By drawing on credible references, this discussion examines how applied Buddhist compassion can contribute to human development, particularly within Indonesia's pluralistic society.

Buddhist teachings emphasize that compassion is inseparable from wisdom (*prajñā*) and ethical conduct (*sīla*). The *Brahmavihāras* (divine abidings) - loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), empathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) - provide a framework for cultivating a compassionate mindset and translating it into action (Bodhi, 2005).³² In Buddhism, compassion extends beyond individual acts of kindness to addressing structural causes of suffering, such as poverty, inequality, and social injustice. In the context of human development, this means integrating compassion into policies and practices that ensure equitable access to resources, education, and healthcare. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) closely align with Buddhist principles of compassion, particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) (UNDP, 2020). By advocating for policies that tackle these issues, Buddhist communities can play a vital role in building a more just and equitable society.

Buddhist compassion emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings, recognizing that individual well-being is inseparable from collective well-being. This principle of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*) underscores the importance of shared responsibility in addressing suffering and promoting human development.³³ In practical terms, this means that individuals, communities, and institutions must work together to create conditions that

³² Bhikkhu Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2005, p. 124.

³³ Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1991, p. 23.

enable all people to flourish. For example, in Indonesia, where religious diversity often coexists with social and economic inequalities, Buddhist organizations can play a crucial role in fostering interfaith collaboration to address shared challenges. Initiatives such as interfaith dialogues, community development projects, and advocacy for marginalized groups demonstrate how compassion in action can bridge divides and promote social cohesion.³⁴ By working together, religious communities can leverage their collective resources and influence to create positive change.

Compassion in action also involves fostering dialogue and understanding in contexts of conflict or division. The YBA Instagram posts, such as “Buddha or Jesus” and “*Jualan Agama Intimidasi Ketakutan Neraka*”, exemplifies how digital media can be leveraged to promote compassionate dialogue and challenge divisive narratives. By highlighting shared values and ethical principles, these posts encourage followers to move beyond doctrinal differences and focus on common goals, such as fostering peace and alleviating suffering. However, the mixed reactions to these posts highlight the complexities of engaging in interfaith dialogue within a polarized environment. While some users embraced the messages of unity, others resisted them, underscoring the need for sensitivity and inclusivity in communication. This tension reflects broader challenges in promoting interfaith harmony in Indonesia, where religious identity is often politicized and used to fuel divisions.³⁵ Nevertheless, the potential of digital media to amplify compassionate narratives and foster meaningful dialogue remains significant.

Buddhist compassion in action also involves addressing structural inequalities that perpetuate suffering. This requires a commitment to social justice and advocacy for marginalized groups. For example, Buddhist teachings on *dāna* (generosity) and *sīla* (ethical conduct) can inspire individuals and communities to support initiatives that tackle poverty, inequality, and discrimination.³⁶ In Indonesia, where economic disparities are often intertwined with religious and ethnic identities, Buddhist organizations can play a vital role in promoting inclusive development. For instance, programs that provide education and vocational training for marginalized communities can help break the cycle of poverty and empower individuals to contribute to society. By addressing the root causes of suffering, these initiatives embody the principle of compassion in action.

Buddhist compassion extends to all living beings, including the natural world. The principle of interdependence underscores the importance of environmental sustainability as a shared responsibility for human development. Climate change, deforestation, and pollution are not only environmental issues

³⁴ Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p. 89 – 101).

³⁵ Sigit dan Hasani, *Intoleransi Semasa Pandemi*.

³⁶ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 145.

but also social justice concerns, as they disproportionately affect vulnerable communities.³⁷ In Indonesia, where environmental degradation is a pressing concern, Buddhist organizations can advocate for sustainable practices and support initiatives that protect ecosystems and promote biodiversity. For example, reforestation projects, waste reduction campaigns, and education on sustainable living can help address environmental challenges while promoting the well-being of all beings. These efforts align with Buddhist teachings on compassion and the interconnectedness of life.

The integration of Buddhist compassion into human development initiatives has far-reaching implications. By promoting ethical action, shared responsibility, and compassionate dialogue, Buddhist communities can contribute to building more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable societies. This approach aligns with the broader goals of human development, which emphasize expanding human capabilities and creating conditions that enable people to lead fulfilling lives.³⁸ In the context of Indonesia, where religious diversity and social inequalities present both challenges and opportunities, Buddhist compassion in action offers a powerful framework for addressing these issues. By fostering interfaith collaboration, advocating for social justice, and promoting environmental sustainability, Buddhist organizations can play a vital role in advancing human development and creating a more harmonious world.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To maximize the potential of Buddhist digital media in fostering religious diversity and compassionate dialogue for human development, several key initiatives must be prioritized. First, expanding digital literacy and access is essential to ensure that diverse communities, including marginalized groups, can meaningfully engage with Buddhist teachings and discussions on ethical and social issues. Buddhist organizations and institutions should develop programs that enhance digital literacy, equipping individuals with the skills needed to navigate and critically engage with online content while upholding the values of ethical communication and respect.

In addition to improving digital accessibility, the development of inclusive and multilingual content is crucial in Indonesia's pluralistic society. Given the country's rich linguistic and cultural diversity, Buddhist digital media should provide content in multiple languages, enabling broader audiences to access and engage with Buddhist teachings. This approach not only fosters interfaith and intercultural dialogue but also ensures that Buddhist perspectives on compassion, ethical living, and human development reach individuals from diverse social and religious backgrounds.

Furthermore, fostering collaboration between Buddhist communities and other religious or civil society organizations can amplify efforts to address

³⁷ Stephanie Kaza, *Green Buddhism: Practice and Compassionate Action in Uncertain Times*. Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2019, p. 27.

³⁸ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 119.

shared social challenges. Interfaith initiatives, joint educational programs, and partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and policymakers can create platforms for constructive dialogue, peacebuilding, and advocacy for social justice. Such collaborative efforts reinforce Buddhism's commitment to compassion in action and contribute to the promotion of human dignity and social harmony.

Ethical engagement with digital platforms must also be encouraged to ensure that online discussions remain respectful, inclusive, and aligned with Buddhist principles of right speech and compassion. Digital spaces should be cultivated as environments for meaningful dialogue, not as sites for misinformation, divisiveness, or intolerance. Buddhist organizations and digital content creators should promote responsible online engagement by emphasizing the ethical dimensions of communication in the digital age.

Finally, Buddhist digital initiatives should align with broader global efforts toward sustainable development. By leveraging digital platforms to address pressing social and environmental challenges, Buddhist communities can contribute to initiatives related to climate action, mental well-being, and poverty alleviation. Digital campaigns, educational programs, and community-driven projects centered on Buddhist ethical principles can support the realization of sustainable development goals (SDGs) while reinforcing the interconnectedness of all beings. By implementing these recommendations, Buddhist digital media can serve as a powerful tool for fostering religious diversity, ethical discourse, and compassionate action. This approach not only strengthens Buddhist contributions to human development but also reinforces the role of digital platforms in shaping more just, inclusive, and harmonious societies.

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THE ROLE OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS FROM ERIK ERIKSON'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT STAGES

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Abstract:

The paper examines the important yet sometimes neglected connection between Erik Erikson's eight stages of psychological development and Buddhist precepts, particularly the function of compassion. The issue is the insufficient incorporation of philosophical frameworks, such as Buddhism, in comprehending the emotional and social difficulties individuals encounter during their growth. This research employs a qualitative methodology encompassing descriptive analysis, theme analysis, and content analysis to elucidate how Buddhist teachings assist in clarifying the intricacies of Erik Erikson's eight stages. The findings indicate that compassion, intertwined with other Buddhist teachings, is essential in alleviating emotional challenges and promoting resilience, hence strengthening social bonds at every developmental stage. This study underscores the significance of incorporating Buddhist compassion into the psychological frameworks of an individual, promoting its contribution to personal development and communal welfare. This research seeks to bridge the gap between psychological and Buddhist philosophical viewpoints, so enhancing the comprehensive knowledge of human development.

Keywords: *Compassion, Erikson's stages, virtue, mindfulness, psychological development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The connection between psychological development and philosophical theories provides a profound framework for comprehending human growth and mental well-being. Erik Erikson's eight stages of psychological

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development offer a thorough framework for analyzing the milestones individuals encounter throughout their lives, emphasizing the impact of relationship dynamics on identity development, emotional well-being, and societal cohesion. This research highlights Buddhist teachings, especially those focused on compassion, as essential for cultivating resilience, empathy, inner connections, and societal interconnection. Integrating Buddhist teachings with Erikson's stages of development provides insights into how compassion influences individuals' abilities to trust, develop autonomy, and interact meaningfully with others.

This paper will examine each of Erikson's stages, demonstrating how Buddhist compassion may be incorporated into different developmental periods and finally highlighting the significant influence of nurturing connections and compassionate interaction on human growth. This paper does not examine the application of Buddhist compassion in societal activities or community engagement; instead, it prioritizes how the values of compassion, in alignment with other Buddhist teachings, can promote psychological development from infancy to late adulthood, primarily enhancing individual well-being and social harmony.

Research Methodology

This research predominantly utilizes qualitative methods, emphasizing comprehending phenomena through descriptive analysis and exploring the complexities of human experience, specifically in relation to Erik Erikson's stages of psychological development and Buddhist principles, especially compassion. This framework includes several sub-methods: A thorough literature review strengthens relevant academic research to develop an effective theoretical framework. The thematic analysis finds significant themes, including trust, autonomy, empathy, and generativity, throughout developmental stages, demonstrating how compassion affects emotional and social growth, particularly in parenting. Furthermore, content analysis elucidates certain Buddhist concepts and the implications for positive developmental outcomes, highlighting principles such as compassion, mindfulness, loving-kindness, and ethical behavior.

II. DEFINITION AND CONCEPT OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION

Compassion, referred to as "*karuṇā*" in *Pāli*,¹ is a foundational concept of Buddhism, essential to its doctrines, practices, and moral conduct. Buddhism underscores the need to cultivate compassion as vital for mitigating suffering, fostering ethical conduct, and attaining spiritual freedom. The life of the Buddha exemplifies his commitment to alleviating the suffering of others.

Practices like loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) and compassion meditation (*karuṇā bhāvanā*) cultivate goodwill and empathy for all sentient creatures. Compassion is not only a moral virtue in Buddhism; it is a transforming power that improves individual welfare and community cohesion. Bodhisattvas

¹ Buddhadatta, A. P. *New Concise Pāli - English Dictionary*. Colombo, 1949, p. 93.

exemplify selflessness by prioritizing the needs of others, but a Buddha is esteemed for empathizing with the suffering of all beings and endeavoring to provide joy.

Karuṇā, as defined by the New Concise Pāli English Dictionary² and the PTS Pāli English Dictionary,³ embodies enlightened empathy and is one of the four sublime states of mind, which include *mettā* (loving-kindness), *upekkhā* (equanimity), and *muditā* (sympathetic joy). Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh asserts that genuine compassion necessitates comprehending one's suffering while diligently striving to relieve the suffering of others.

III. APPLICATION OF BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES AND COMPASSION THROUGH THE EIGHT STAGES OF ERIK ERIKSON'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1. Trust vs. mistrust (Infancy)

In Erik Erikson's theory,⁴ the initial stage of psychological development is called Trust and Mistrust. The foundational task for newborns is to cultivate a sense of trust in their caretakers or caregivers. Infants necessitate continuous, sensitive, and affectionate care from their parents to effectively traverse this crucial developmental phase. Studies indicate that stable bonds, fostered by affectionate and empathetic parenting, result in favorable emotional and social results in later life.⁵ This supportive dynamic reflects the Buddhist ideal of compassion, highlighting the significance of affectionate relationships.

The Buddha characterizes parents as Brahmā, or God, signifying their essential position as the initial educators in a child's life. He emphasizes four virtuous attributes - loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), appreciative joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) - that parents need to exemplify in their parenting. When caregivers convey warmth and reassurance, they cultivate an atmosphere in which newborns feel comfortable and esteemed, thus promoting the development of trust. The Buddha's teachings further emphasize the immense responsibilities parents have mentioned in one of the five duties of parents in *Sigālovāda Sutta*:⁶ "(i) they restrain them from evil, (ii) they encourage them to do good, (iii) they train them for a profession, (iv) they arrange a suitable marriage, (v) at the proper time they hand over their inheritance to them", in which guiding their children away from harm while encouraging positive behavior and providing support is necessary to apply this stage. This altruistic, safeguarding affection is vital for newborns,

² Buddhadata, A. P. *New Concise Pāli - English Dictionary*. Colombo, 1949, p. 93.

³ Rhys Davids, T. W., and William Stede, Eds. *Pāli-English Dictionary*. London: Pāli Text Society, 1925, p. 222.

⁴ Erik Homburger Erikson, 'Erik Erikson,' *Wikipedia*, accessed March 13, 2025, Erikson (born Erik Salomonsen; 15 June 1902 – 12 May 1994) was a Danish-German-Jewish child psychoanalyst and visual artist known for his theory on psychosocial development and for coining the phrase identity crisis. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erik_Erikson.

⁵ Erikson, E. H. *Childhood and Society*. W.W. Norton & Company, 1978, p. 65 - 67.

⁶ *Dīgha Nikāya* (2012): 180 - 193 (DN 31).

as it establishes the foundation for their capacity to make stable attachments, which is imperative for their healthy emotional and social development in subsequent life stages. The interaction between parents and newborns at this time is fundamental in developing the infant's worldview and their ability to trust people as they develop.

Conversely, distrust in newborns may stem from several circumstances that hinder their capacity to establish stable relationships with caregivers. Inconsistent caring, characterized by unpredictable responsiveness or neglect from parents, can induce anxiety and uncertainty in newborns. Should a caregiver consistently neglect a newborn's fundamental needs - such as nourishment, comfort, or emotional reassurance - the infant may start to view the world as unpredictable and perilous. The emergence of distrust in this initial phase profoundly affects an individual's emotional well-being and social functioning in subsequent life stages.

In essence, the principles of Buddhism underscore the vital role of compassion and nurturing in human development, illuminating the path toward emotional resilience and social harmony.

3.2. Autonomy vs. shame and doubt (Early childhood)

According to Erik Erikson, children during the first two years of their lives are prone to experiencing feelings of shame and doubt while simultaneously seeking to claim independence. At this crucial time, parenting proves to be highly important as it assures both exploration and self-sustaining, also referred to as 'autonomous' behavior. Miller's study states that parenting accompanied by emotional support is more likely to lead to children with self-assurance, confidence, and leadership.⁷

During this time frame, adult supervision and help can aid a child in gaining the confidence required to explore and discover. Caregiver involvement can take the form of simple choice-based tasks to promote decision-making for a toddler. Depending on an arbitrary set of criteria, letting a child select clothes' color to dress up, using a toy, and even selecting a drink can boost their independence. However, it must be emphasized that the aforementioned tasks should also be accomplished with a twist of compassionate supervision of a caregiver or parent.

Incorporating Buddhist principles into parenting can further enrich this process. One way to transform the mundane and repetitive forms of traditional parenting, Buddhism stresses being encouraging, gentle, and nonjudgmental, which can aid in emotional growth and attachment building. Imagine a toddler spilling a drink over a table or misusing objects. Instead of hitting or shouting at the kid, alter the entire situation by being compassionate and gently guiding or encouraging learning rather than shame (*hiri*). It is believed that mistakes and flaws are necessary for development or a natural part of growth.

⁷ Miller, J., The role of parental support in child development: Implications for confidence and leadership, *Journal of Child Psychology*, 32 (4) (2015): 234 - 245.

Conversely, when toddlers experience excessive criticism and a lack of support from caregivers during this stage, they may internalize feelings of shame and doubt, leading to diminished self-esteem and hindered exploration of their environment.

3.3. Initiative vs. guilt (Preschool age)

In Erik Erikson's Initiative vs. Guilt stage, it is necessary to cultivate a sense of initiative while assisting children in managing emotions of guilt for their growth. Vygotsky's research⁸ underscores the significance of a supportive environment that enables discovery devoted to the apprehension of failure. Incorporating the three precepts of the five precepts in Buddhism - abstaining from killing, stealing, and lying - during this period can significantly promote moral growth and social responsibility. For example, instilling empathy and respect for all living beings cultivates compassion, while highlighting the significance of honoring others' possessions promotes trust and cooperation. Promoting honesty encourages children to manage guilt effectively, fostering a secure atmosphere for genuine self-expression. Practices such as loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and basic mindfulness exercises can establish safe environments where young children are motivated to explore their interests while honoring the viewpoints of others, thereby cultivating emotional intelligence, responsibility, resilience, and positive social interactions. By fostering compassionate awareness, caregivers can nurture a sense of community and belonging among children, emphasizing that every action has a ripple effect on others. Caregivers may empower children by permitting them to make decisions regarding their play and everyday activities, such as organizing playtime or directing group games, fostering confidence and a sense of autonomy. Furthermore, implementing basic mindfulness practices, such as deep breathing or sensory-oriented activities, might enhance emotional control and self-awareness. These techniques may encompass "mindful moments" during movements, whereby toddlers listen to outside sounds or interact with various textures.

By integrating Buddhist principles of compassion and mindfulness into everyday practices, caregivers can not only cultivate children's initiative but also encourage a profound awareness of themselves and their social context, thus enhancing resilience and developing constructive social connections.

3.4. Industry vs. inferiority (School age)

Throughout Erik Erikson's fourth stage, Industry vs. Inferiority, school-aged children have to foster a sense of self-worth to prevent emotions of inferiority. Achievements in academic and sporting domains are essential for fostering a sense of self-engagement in team sports cultivating collaboration, discipline, and resilience, hence enhancing children's confidence as they attain individual and team goals. By incorporating the Five Precepts of Buddhism - abstaining

⁸ Vygotsky, S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Published by Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 84 – 91.

from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misbehavior, and the illicit use of intoxicants - into this phase, caregivers can significantly boost children's moral and emotional growth.

The Five Precepts of Buddhism - abstaining from killing, stealing, lying, sexually improper behavior, and intoxicants - are intricately linked to Erik Erikson's fourth stage, which fosters a sense of competence and self-esteem. Abstaining from killing not only cultivates a culture of compassion and empathy but also generates safe environments for children, facilitating the development of good connections essential for emotional stability. Refraining from stealing instills in children the principles of respect and fairness, enhancing their comprehension of limits and control, which is crucial for fostering trust among friends. The issue of lying can be addressed by promoting honesty, which fosters trustworthy relationships and facilitates open communication, a vital factor for enhancing self-esteem and feeling appreciated in social interactions. The principle of abstaining from sexual misbehavior instills notions of respect and proper conduct, aiding children in developing good social interactions. Abstaining from intoxicants, which is particularly relevant for adolescents, can facilitate conversations on healthy decision-making, enabling children to prioritize their well-being and cultivate self-regulation abilities. Collectively, these principles establish a moral framework that fosters children's emotional intelligence, resilience, and feeling of belonging, all essential for effectively addressing the challenges of this critical developmental stage.

Promoting equanimity is crucial at this time, representing a balanced viewpoint that does not differentiate based on factors such as ethnicity, culture, familial history, appearance, or ability. Promoting equanimity reduces problems such as bullying and racism; when children engage with friends through compassion and understanding, they are less inclined to engage in or suffer from bullying. Diversity and respect-promoting inclusion initiatives foster a safer educational environment.

Moreover, self-compassion fosters consistent self-worth, assisting children in managing emotions of inadequacy and safeguarding against adverse effects linked to self-esteem difficulties (Neff & Vonk, 2009).⁹ Proficient communication abilities, articulating thoughts effectively, and encouraging body language enable children to address bullying and engage productively.

Creating an educational atmosphere that prioritizes the Five Precepts, as well as tranquility, compassion, efficient communication, and teamwork, is essential for cultivating a good self-image and sense of belonging. By tackling issues like bullying and racism, schools may assist children in overcoming feelings of inferiority and foster a more inclusive, respectful school and society.

3.5. Identity vs. role confusion (Adolescence)

The adolescent years are crucial for the development of identity, marked

⁹ Neff, K. D., & Vonk, R. Self-compassion versus Self-Esteem: Two Ways of Relating to Oneself. *Self and Identity*, 8(2) (2009): 141 - 149.

by the struggle between developing a unified self-concept and facing role uncertainty caused by family and cultural pressures and expectations.¹⁰ This phase corresponds with Erik Erikson's fifth developmental stage, "Identity vs. Role Confusion," when the task is to reconcile personal ideas and social roles to establish a coherent identity. At this point, as adolescents investigate prospective occupations and make academic subject choices, these decisions are crucial in mirroring and shaping their developing identities, which frequently align with their interests, values, and ambitions, enabling them to articulate their individuality while arguing with the expectations of family and friends. They can gain from fundamental learning concepts that facilitate their development and self-awareness, thus advancing their path to identity creation.

In this self-exploration, adolescents confront essential inquiries: In what manner do roles and identities come together? Do emotions, relationships, cultures, religions, and family dynamics significantly shape identity, affecting sentiments of love and hatred that contribute to self-perception? Buddhism emphasizes compassion and interconnectedness in these relationships, which plays a vital role in understanding oneself and others. Cognitive processes are crucial, influencing the interpretation of experiences and perceptions of success and failure. The investigation of tangible desires introduces an additional dimension to their developing identity, emphasizing the complexity of self-definition at this critical period.

Practicing concepts that foster knowledge is crucial to their quest for self-discovery. Adolescents can cultivate the Right View by following the four *vuddhi-dhamma* (conditions favorable to the growth of knowledge)¹¹ as follows,

- (i) *Sappurisasamseva*: Associating with the wise; they learn to select knowledge sources and surround themselves with virtuous, wise, and respected individuals that might reinforce the Buddhist principle of compassion in relationships.
- (ii) *Saddhammassavana*: Harkening to teachings; they should listen attentively to advice and teachings, proactively seek knowledge from people, books, or media, and apply themselves to learning and research.
- (iii) *Yonisomanasikāra*: Thinking wisely; having learned or heard something, they reflect on it, analyzing its true nature while examining its merits and demerits.
- (iv) *Dhammānudhammapaṭipatti*: Practicing by principles; they must apply what they've learned, ensuring alignment between minor principles and major objectives.¹²

In learning, whether as learners or students, it is essential to consider theoretical frameworks and concrete techniques for achievement, such as the

¹⁰ Phinney, J. S. Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: A review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*. American Psychological Association, 1990, p. 499 - 514.

¹¹ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2012): 612 (AN 3. 24 or A. I. 123).

¹² Payutto P.A. 2007. *A Constitution for Living*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 60.

“four wheels of learning” and the “four pathways to success.” Comprehending the “heralds of learning” is essential; this involves acknowledging good external influences, such as associating with supportive friends and mentors, while also fostering internal elements like *yoniso manasikāra*¹³ - thinking wisely, having learned, reading, seeing, reflecting on its true nature, and its harm or good, reflective thinking regarding personal experiences within larger societal frameworks. Close friendships and encouraging educators create an atmosphere of compassion and understanding that promotes dialogue, guidance, and emotional development, profoundly influencing identity formation throughout adolescence.

Furthermore, the practice of mindfulness, as promoted in Buddhist teachings, harmoniously aligns with these ideals. Mindfulness promotes self-reflection and emotional regulation – crucial capabilities for adolescents with identity challenges. This self-awareness enables individuals to assess ideas and emotions without connection, reducing the impact of cultural expectations. Mindful activities assist adolescents in cultivating compassion towards themselves and others and managing their self-concept, closely corresponding with Erikson’s theories about the significance of critical thought and social interaction in identity formation. By incorporating these principles into identity discovery, adolescents may cultivate a profound comprehension of their identity, surpassing superficial labels. Embracing the seven attributes termed the “auroras of a good life,” which encompass wisdom, discipline, an eagerness for knowledge, commitment to self-actualization, and wise reasoning, enables adolescents to develop resilience and a growth-oriented attitude. These attributes establish a basis for personal identity and cultivate vital social skills necessary for successful relationships and a good self-image.

Moreover, the concept of “learning to be learned” is mentioned in *Dutiyanāthasutta*¹⁴ as follows,

Whatever he learns or studies, he makes himself well-versed in that field by increasing and clarifying his knowledge and understanding until he is endowed with the five qualities of a learned one (*bahussuta*):

- (i) *Bahussutā*: hearing much; he learns, hears, sees, experiences, reads, and amasses an extensive amount of knowledge in his field.
- (ii) *Dhatā*: retaining; he grasps the gist or essence and remembers the subject matter accurately.
- (iii) *Vacasā paricitā*: becoming fluent; he recites or speaks about the subject often so that he is fluent in and clear about it and can answer any queries about it.
- (iv) *Manasānupekkhitā*: becoming thoroughly familiarized; he thinks

¹³ In the Rhys Davids, T. W., & Stede, W. (Eds.). *Pāli-English dictionary*. Pāli Text Society, 1921 - 1925, p. 622. “*Yoniso manasikāra*: fixing one’s attention with a purpose or thoroughly, proper attention, having thorough method in one’s thought.”

¹⁴ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2012): 1354 (AN 10. 18 or PTS 5. 26).

about the subject so often that he is thoroughly familiar with it; whenever he calls it to mind, the content is vivid to him, and he perceives it clearly and thoroughly.

(v) *Diṭṭhiyā supāṭividdhā*: having penetrated; he clearly understands the overall meaning and rationale of the subject; he thoroughly and penetratingly knows its source, its logic, and the relationship of the content and details within the subject itself and about other subjects within that field or theory.¹⁵

This highlights the need to engage deeply with knowledge while cultivating proficiency across many disciplines. For adolescents exploring their identities, this involves comprehending the intricacies of their experiences and the influence of external variables, such as cultural narratives and familial expectations, on their self-concept. The five attributes of an educated person - comprehension, continuation, movement, familiarity, and depth of understanding - must be viewed through a lens of compassion, considering both personal and collective experiences, promoting ongoing self-improvement and critical engagement with identity-related issues.

Teachers, mentors, and parents play a vital role in developing an identity, as well as acting as role models in the navigation of authority and social norms. Respecting and seeking assistance from mentors while actively participating in the learning process maintains the interconnectivity fundamental to both Buddhism and Erikson's theories of creating one's identity. The integration of Buddhist philosophy with Erikson's developmental theory demonstrates a unified approach for adolescents in their pursuit of identity building. By emphasizing compassion, critical reflection, mindfulness, and the development of supportive connections, adolescents may effectively go through the intricacies of their identities, fostering authenticity, resilience, and a profound connection to themselves and others.

3.6. Intimacy vs. isolation (Young adulthood)

In Erik Erikson's sixth stage of psychological development, "Intimacy vs. Isolation," young adults want profound emotional bonds, especially in romantic relationships. The essence of good partnerships is empathy, compassion, and proficient communication. Empirical research, like that by Smith¹⁶ indicates that individuals with elevated empathy levels have increased connection satisfaction, hence diminishing feelings of isolation. Compassionate practices improve essential relationship abilities, enabling individuals to establish significant connections. True love, examined via psychological frameworks, stabilizes self-interest and selfless commitment. This balance is essential for cultivating trust and the vulnerability required for intimacy.

¹⁵ Payutto P. A. *A Constitution for Living*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007, p. 61.

¹⁶ Smith, J., et al. "Empathy and Connection Satisfaction in Young Adult Relationships". *Journal of Social Psychology* 45, no. 3 (2015): 123–134.

The Buddha's teachings provide significant insights into fostering relationships by highlighting key qualities that both partners must equally develop - faith, virtue, generosity, and wisdom. In the *Paṭhamasamajivīsutta*,¹⁷ the Buddha states that "If householders, both husband, and wife, hope to be in one another's sight so long as this life lasts and in the future life as well, they should have the same faith, the same virtue, the same generosity, and the same wisdom". This common base enhances connection and comprehension, which are essential for cultivating intimacy.

The difference between "sweet couples" and "bitter couples" further exemplifies the influence of supportive interactions on emotional intimacy. Research indicates that healthy relationship dynamics, marked by supportive actions and communication, can substantially improve intimacy, whereas negative dynamics frequently result in isolation and discontent. Furthermore, promoting self-reflection allows partners to assess their roles in the relationship, as well as fosters personal development and enhanced intimacy.

As couples share responsibilities, principles such as truthfulness (*sacca*), training (*dama*), patience (*khanti*), and sacrifice (*cāga*) solidify emotional bonds, promoting a stable environment conducive to intimacy. Understanding and responding to each partner's needs - particularly the husband's awareness of his wife's emotional and physical states - highlights the essential role of empathy in nurturing relationships.¹⁸

There are seven tips in psychology to maintain good relationships between couples.

- (i) Maintain and increase positive interactions (Reinforcement from Behavioral Couple Therapy).
- (ii) Set up ground rules for fights and discord.
- (iii) Cultivate emotional acceptance for one's differences and "problems" (Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy).
- (iv) Know your projection from the past and try to see your partner as he or she is (Object Relation Couple Therapy).
- (v) Know your deepest emotions and attachment needs and have the courage to express them to your partner using techniques like the "I" statement (Emotionally Focused Therapy).
- (vi) Whatever you decide to do, think of how it may hurt the person you truly care for (Emotionally Focused Therapy).
- (vii) Forgiveness for self and others.
- (viii) Appreciation, gratitude, and trust.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2012): 444 (AN 4.55).

¹⁸ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2012): 443 (AN 4.53 or 2.58–2.59).

¹⁹ Johnson, Susan M. *The New Science of Couples Therapy: Using the Principles of Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004, p.47.

Thich Nhat Hanh indicates three types of intimacy: physical and sexual, emotional, and spiritual. Every element adds to overall satisfaction, indicating that a comprehensive approach to intimacy is essential for relational well-being. The Buddha, in the *Sangaha Sutta*,²⁰ highlights four essential qualities - generosity, good words, beneficial help, and consistency - that strengthen relationships and enhance connections. Engaging in the Four Immeasurable - loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity - enhances comprehensible love, offering transforming potential.

Authentic love is an ongoing endeavor that needs work, dedication, and cultivation. Couples can develop these traits via everyday practices, including loving-kindness and compassion meditation, active listening, and expressing appreciation. Transparent communication is crucial for comprehending one another's emotions and aspirations, hence strengthening emotional connections.

Encouraging personal development within the partnership improves the overall quality of the relationship. Fostering ambitions enables both partners to thrive individually and collectively. Fostering genuine love, authentic intimacy, and a comprehensible relationship grounded in Buddhist principles²¹ and Erikson's paradigm necessitates compassion, comprehension, and active engagement in one another's lives.

3.7. Generativity vs. stagnation (Middle adulthood)

Erik Erikson's seventh stage in psychological development, "Generativity vs. Stagnation," highlights the essential requirement for individuals in middle adulthood to make meaningful contributions to society and foster the subsequent generation. This stage is characterized by a pursuit of generativity - the desire to create, nurture, and favorably influence others - contrasted with feelings of stagnation, which may emerge from insufficient meaningful involvement.

Buddhism emphasizes this concept via its teachings on compassion, commitment, proactive support, and sharing, encouraging individuals to offer kindness and support to all beings. This compassion can motivate endeavors such as community service and mentorship. Research by McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992)²² demonstrates that persons exhibiting generative actions generally report elevated levels of life satisfaction.

3.7.1. The Pathways to success and generativity

The principles of "*iddhipāda*"²³, or roads to achievement, are in full alignment

²⁰ *Saṅgahasutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya* (2012): 421 (AN 4.32 or PTS AN ii 32).

²¹ Thich Nhat Hanh. *True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart*. Shambhala Publications, 2004, p. 8 - 17.

²² McAdams, D. P., & de St. Aubin, E. (1992). A theory of generativity and its assessment through self-report, behavioral acts, and narrative themes in autobiography. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62 (6), 1003 - 1015.

²³ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (2012): 125 (AN 4.276 or PTS A. II. 256).

with the concepts of generativity and can be aligned with compassion. These concepts might be seen as fundamental techniques for meaningful engagement in life and the cultivation of others.

3.7.2. Generativity and purposeful engagement

The concepts of *chanda* (heart of zeal), *virīya* (effort), *Citta* (commitment to tasks), and *vimāṇsā* (wise investigation) emphasize the significance of participating in endeavors that offer intrinsic value. *Chanda* emphasizes the necessity for individuals to engage in pursuits that benefit their communities with compassion rather than only for personal advantage. This intrinsic motive is essential to Erikson's concept of generativity since it emphasizes people's duties as nurturers and mentors for the subsequent generation.

3.7.3. Devotion and commitment to contributions

The idea of *virīya* is intrinsically linked to generativity, highlighting the need for work and tenacity. Individuals must diligently engage in their positions as mentors or caretakers, guaranteeing that their contributions promote growth and development in others, which echoes the essence of Buddhist compassion, where diligent service to others fosters connection and support.

3.7.4. Reflection and ongoing enhancement

Vimāṇsā emphasizes the importance of introspection and the critical assessment of one's activities. Individuals in the generativity phase must consistently evaluate their contributions, endeavoring to enhance their ability to assist others with their compassionate actions. This introspective activity amplifies their generative influence, reflecting Erikson's concept that personal development and the cultivation of others are interconnected.

3.7.5. Achieving generativity while preventing stagnation

The implementation of these four principles fosters a feeling of purpose and direction in a person's life. In the absence of adequate zeal, effort, devotion, or introspection, individuals are at risk of stagnation and then fail to establish a lasting legacy.

3.7.6. Saṅgha-vatthu principles and social responsibility

Furthermore, Erikson's concept of generativity aligns well with the *saṅgha-vatthu* principles.²⁴ *Dāna* (generosity), *Piyavācā* (kind speech), *Atthacariyā* (beneficial actions), and *Samānattatā* (collaboration). Each of these ideas provides tangible approaches to manifest generativity:

(i) *Dāna* (giving): This concept emphasizes the significance of giving via acts of kindness, which are vital for cultivating an atmosphere that supports others. Generative people contribute to the well-being of future generations by contributing their resources, expertise, and time, reflecting the concept of significant contribution through compassionate giving.

(ii) *Piyavācā* (Amicable Speech): The notion of amiable speech highlights the necessity of supporting, affirmative communication for fostering kind,

²⁴ DN 33 (Pāli Text Society edition, vol. 3, 207 – 271).

understandable, and compassionate relationships. Generative people create relationships through benevolent language, fostering a sense of worth and support in others, and which also emphasizes kindness and care in communication.

(iii) *Atthacariyā* (Beneficial Action): This concept shows the significance of acting for the welfare of others and is strongly associated with Erikson's perspective that generative adults proactively address issues and promote social well-being; such acts embody the essence of compassionate living in Buddhism.

(iv) *Samānattatā* (Participation): The notion of participation promotes the active engagement of individuals within their communities aligned with compassion. Generative adults acknowledge the significance of collective experiences and cohesion, cultivating an atmosphere conducive to mutual development and support.

3.8. Integrity vs. despair (Late adulthood)

During late adulthood, individuals frequently engage in introspection, contemplating their lives and assessing their contributions to society. This analysis is crucial to Erik Erikson's eighth stage of psychological development, Integrity vs. Despair, which emphasizes attaining a feeling of satisfaction and significance (Wong et al. 2010)²⁵ and indicates that older people who practice self-compassion generally report elevated life satisfaction and a more pronounced feeling of purpose.

3.8.1. Accepting transience

The Buddha asserted that impermanence is an essential truth, with death as the one certainty in existence. Embracing mortality instead of fearing it is crucial for a significant existence. Practitioners are urged to contemplate the unappealing nature of the body, as emphasized in the *Girimananda Sutta*,²⁶ which fosters detachment and comprehension of impermanence. Examining corpses in the cemetery as a contemplative exercise to confront mortality. This contemplative practice, endorsed by the *Kāyagatāsati Sutta*,²⁷ fosters mental tranquility and a state of concentrated awareness (*samādhi*), assisting practitioners in embracing the inevitability of death. The subsequent actions are crucial for preparing for death and cultivating the acceptance and tranquility required for integrity, which are fundamental aspects of Buddhist compassion:

(i) Transforming Suffering: Individuals are advised to embrace and navigate life's unavoidable adversities. By fostering patience and comprehension, individuals develop a sense of compassion for themselves and others, strengthening emotional resilience and fostering a heightened sense of peace - essential components for attaining integrity.

²⁵ Paul T. P. Wong et al. "Self-Compassion and Life Satisfaction in Late Adulthood," *Psychology and Aging* 25, no. 3 (2010): 544 – 552.

²⁶ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2012): 109-112 (AN 10.60).

²⁷ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2012): 88-89 (MN 119).

(ii) **Discovering Life's Significance:** Investigating the reason for one's life is essential. Contemplating the importance of life enables individuals to elucidate their values and aspirations, alleviating existential anxieties and allowing for a deeper understanding of one's compassionate legacy.

3.8.2. Recommendations for spiritual care

To properly satisfy these spiritual demands, the following strategies may be utilized:

- (i) Deep Listening and accompaniment with compassion
- (ii) Recollection of Good Deeds: cultivating appreciation and mitigating emotions of remorse.
- (iii) Expressing thanks and Closure: assisting in the restoration of relationships and achieving closure through compassionate understanding
- (iv) Ethical Life and Awareness

Buddhist doctrine claims that unpleasant or terrifying feelings at the moment of death can result from harmful acts or unwholesome karma. Practitioners are advised to abstain from ten non-virtuous behaviors, such as killing, stealing, harsh speech, and so on, and to concentrate on cultivating positive karma through virtuous deeds, thus reflecting a compassionate and aware approach to living.

By embracing the inevitability of death with mindfulness and acceptance, individuals may traverse this transition with compassion and grace, discovering peace and liberation amidst impermanence.

IV. THE ROLE OF BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: NAVIGATING ERIKSON'S STAGES WITH SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Buddhist compassion is crucial in influencing human development via Erik Erikson's eight stages, emphasizing the significance of collective responsibility in fostering people and enhancing society's welfare. The paragraph emphasizes that while other Buddhist teachings facilitate human psychological and behavioral development at various stages, compassion remains an integral value inherent in each of these teachings.

During the very first stage of Trust vs. Mistrust, empathetic parenting fosters a stable bond, enabling newborns to cultivate trust in their caregivers and their environment. During the Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt stage, a supportive environment rich in compassion fosters exploration and personal development, mitigating emotions of shame and enhancing independent decision-making. The supporting dynamic persists throughout the Initiative vs. Guilt stage, when empathetic coaching cultivates emotional intelligence and moral reasoning, enabling children to comprehend their acts and their consequences for others. During the Industry vs. Self-Deprecation period, Buddhist precepts cultivate self-esteem and resilience via ethical conduct and collaborative interactions, hence improving children's emotional stability. During adolescence, at the Identity vs. Role Confusion stage, mindfulness and self-reflection grounded in

compassion facilitate a more genuine exploration of identity while cultivating profound connections with others. In the subsequent phase of Intimacy vs. Isolation, empathetic communication and comprehension cultivate profound emotional connections, alleviating the feelings of isolation that may emerge in maturity. In the Generative vs Stagnation stages of midlife, the cultivation of compassion motivates individuals to contribute positively to society, therefore solidifying their legacy via guidance and community engagement. In the end, in the Integrity vs. Despair stage, embracing the transience of life via mindfulness, acceptance, and compassion enables individuals to contemplate their experiences with poise and appreciation, highlighting their contributions to mankind. During these stages, Buddhist compassion not only improves individual psychological well-being but also fosters a feeling of community responsibility, illustrating that nurturing connections and empathetic involvement are essential for cultivating a peaceful and compassionate society.

V. BUDDHIST COMPASSION IN ACTION, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE PROCESS

Fostering Buddhist compassion in individuals empowers them to become sparks for constructive societal transformation. In Buddhist philosophy, compassion (*karuṇā*) not only transcends mere feeling but also represents a profound effort to reduce suffering in oneself and others. When individuals adopt this approach, they substantially strengthen their capacity for meaningful connections with others. During adolescence, a compassionate mentality grounded in Buddhist teachings fosters open and welcoming communication among peers, resulting in a more inclusive society that appreciates the contributions of each individual. Nonetheless, the process of fostering such an atmosphere is frequently beset by obstacles, including societal pressures and entrenched biases that can obstruct the cultivation of empathy and comprehension. The Buddha stated, "...he abides with his heart abundant, exalted, measureless in loving-kindness, without hostility or ill-will, extending over the all-encompassing world..."²⁸ Addressing these obstacles is essential; initiatives that advocate Buddhist values via educational and outreach programs may alleviate these challenges by fostering an awareness of shared humanity and interconnection.

Individuals who are nurtured in a compassionate environment rooted in Buddhist principles typically manifest these qualities as they advance through life stages, often becoming engaged caregivers, educators, and community members. The Dalai Lama asserts that "compassion is not a luxury, but a necessity", underscoring its significance in diverse societal circumstances.²⁹ These empathetic individuals not only improve interpersonal relationships but also engage in community service and social action, working to tackle societal issues such as inequality, injustice, and mental health crises. By valuing the welfare of others above their own, they cultivate a culture of

²⁸ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (2012): 421 - 422 (AN 4.125 PTS: A. II. 128).

²⁹ Dalai Lama (1998), p. 23.

shared responsibility that underscores communal welfare and the mitigation of suffering. The extensive practice of Buddhist compassion inspires the development of cooperative, compassionate, and humane communities, resulting in enduring change and advancement.

VI. CONCLUSION

The integration of Erikson's psychological stages with Buddhist principles of compassion elucidates the complex relationship between personal development and interpersonal dynamics over the human lifespan. From the fundamental trust formed in infancy to the reflective integrity pursued in late adulthood, each stage underscores the critical need for empathetic interaction in promoting personal growth and cultivating successful relationships. As individuals navigate their emotional complexities, the integration of Buddhist teachings - such as loving-kindness, empathy, virtuous behaviors, and mindfulness - serves as a guiding principle, facilitating resilience in overcoming challenges and fostering a sense of responsibility toward themselves and others. By fostering a culture of compassion at all developmental stages, we enable individuals to improve their well-being and positively impact the community and the world, demonstrating that personal growth is intrinsically connected to the larger fabric of human relationships.

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DYNAMIC COMPASSION: COMPARATIVE APPROACHES TO HUMAN FLOURISHING

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Abstract:

This research investigates the transformation power of compassion across various religious traditions, analyzing its capacity to foster positive societal change. Through a comparative study of key texts, teachings, and practices, it explores how religious conceptions of compassion can motivate and unite communities to tackle pressing social issues, including poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. The study presents case studies of successful social movements and development efforts rooted in compassion in Vietnam and other parts of the world, illustrating how these values can strengthen social cohesion, advance equity, and nurture a more just and compassionate society. By emphasizing the links between religious beliefs, ethical principles, and social engagement, this research seeks to enhance the understanding of how compassion can act as a driving force for meaningful social transformation.

Keywords: *Compassion, religious traditions, social change, ethical frameworks, social movements.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Compassion is a central tenet not only in Buddhism but also in many of the world's religious traditions, serving as a unifying principle that transcends cultural and geographical boundaries. This research investigates the transformation power of compassion within diverse religious contexts, analyzing its potential to drive meaningful societal change. Through a comparative study of key texts, teachings, and practices, the study explores how religious interpretations of compassion inspire and mobilize communities to address critical social challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

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The significance of compassion in religious traditions cannot be overstated. Often portrayed as a moral imperative, it demands selflessness, empathy, and a deep commitment to the well-being of others. This research examines not only how compassion is articulated in sacred texts but also how it is actualized through social movements and development initiatives. Case studies from Vietnam and other global contexts illustrate how compassion has been effectively harnessed to foster social cohesion, promote equity, and cultivate more just and compassionate societies.

At the heart of this research is the interplay between religious beliefs, ethical frameworks, and social action. It argues that compassion, deeply rooted in religious teachings, can act as a powerful catalyst for social transformation. By providing a detailed examination of compassionate action inspired by religious doctrines, the study seeks to illuminate the profound role of compassion in addressing urgent social issues and driving positive change.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Buddhist perspectives

Compassion concept in Buddhist teachings: The Latin word *compati*, often cited as the root of the English word “compassion,” means “to suffer together.” However, Buddhist teachings interpret compassion with a distinct nuance: it signifies transcending suffering rather than merely sharing it. In Pāli, the term *karuṇā*, frequently translated as “compassion,” conveys the idea of a tool or means to help overcome suffering.¹

Broadly, compassion represents a profound empathy combined with an ardent commitment to alleviate the suffering of others. This understanding is rooted in the Buddhist recognition of *dukkha* – suffering – as an inescapable aspect of existence. To address suffering, Buddhists follow the threefold path of ethical conduct (*śīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*).²

In Buddhism, compassion is inseparable from wisdom (*prajñā*). Compassion fuels the emotional resolve to assist others, while wisdom ensures a clear understanding of the causes of suffering and the most effective methods for its alleviation. This synergy forms the basis of skillful action (*upāya*), the art of engaging with the world in a way that minimizes harm and maximizes benefit for all beings.³

The foundational role of compassion in Buddhist practice is eloquently expressed by Ven. Thích Trí Quảng: “Vì tất cả chư Phật mười phương đều thương người, lấy từ tâm và bi tâm làm nền tảng hành đạo, cứu khổ và đem an

¹ Nathan Jishon Michon, *Refuge in the Storm: Buddhist Voices in Crisis Care*. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2023, p. 20.

² Damien Keown, *Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*, Second edition, Very Short Introductions 130. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 4.

³ Bstan-’dzin-rgya-mtsho and Thubten Chodron, *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2014, p. 241.

lạc cho chúng sanh. Không có tâm đại từ bi, không thể nào tiêu biểu cho Phật.”⁴ Because all the Buddhas of the ten directions cherish sentient beings, they base their practice on loving-kindness and compassionate empathy, striving to alleviate suffering and bring peace and joy to all beings. Without a heart of great loving-kindness and compassion, it is impossible to truly represent the Buddha – (translation by the author).

This profound integration of compassion and wisdom underscores the essence of Buddhist practice: The pursuit of liberation for oneself and others, rooted in empathy, insight, and skillful engagement with the world.

Compassion: The heart of Buddhist practice: In Buddhism, compassion is a core spiritual principle cultivated through diverse yet interconnected traditions. In Theravāda, it is one of the four *brahmavihāras* (divine abodes), alongside loving-kindness (*mettā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), developed through meditation and ethical conduct, inspired by the Buddha’s life of selfless service.⁵ Mahāyāna Buddhism elevates compassion through the Bodhisattva ideal, where awakening transcends personal liberation, embodying a commitment to guide all beings toward freedom from suffering. The Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, symbolizing infinite compassion, inspires practitioners to integrate altruism into their spiritual path.⁶ Vajrayāna Buddhism deepens this integration with advanced meditative practices, such as visualizing deities like the Medicine Buddha and Tara and linking compassion to the realization of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which reveals the interdependent nature of existence.⁷ Across all traditions, compassion is not merely an emotional state but a wisdom-infused practice for transformative spiritual and collective growth.

Compassion beyond theory: Personal Buddhist practice centers on meditation techniques like *karuṇā bhāvanā* (compassion cultivation), which systematically develop empathy and active motivation to alleviate suffering. Practitioners ground this approach in ethical living through adherence to the Five Precepts, integrating compassionate principles into daily actions.

Socially engaged Buddhism extends compassion beyond individual spiritual development to societal transformation. This movement applies Buddhist principles to address critical global challenges like poverty, environmental degradation, and systemic violence⁸. Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh’s teachings

⁴ HT Thích Trí Quảng, *Lược Giải Kinh Pháp Hoa*. HCM City: Viện Nghiên Cứu Phật Học Việt Nam, 2011, p. 256, <https://archive.org/details/LuocGiaiKinhPhapHoa/page/n255/mode/2up>.

⁵ Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho and Thubten Chodron, *Buddhism*, p. 207–16.

⁶ Xing Guang, *The Concept of the Buddha: Its Evolution from Early Buddhism to the Trikāya Theory*, RoutledgeCurzon Critical Studies in Buddhism. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005, p. 148.

⁷ Anālayo, *Compassion and Emptiness in Early Buddhist Meditation*. Glasgow: Windhorse Publications Ltd, 2015, p. 97–99, <https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=3B8FAE03-0DFD-46BD-939F-2729BB596DBB>.

⁸ Christopher S. Queen, *Engaged Buddhism in the West* (Boston, Mass.: Wisdom Publica-

have particularly inspired humanitarian initiatives worldwide, demonstrating compassion's transformation potential. Humanistic Buddhism emphasizes the profound interconnectedness of all beings, translating compassion into practical engagement through intentional practices. Practitioners perform acts of kindness, cultivate mindful listening,⁹ engage in social advocacy,¹⁰ practice conscious consumption,¹¹ and develop self-compassion.¹² These approaches create a holistic framework for embodying compassionate awareness in everyday life.

The Bodhisattva ideal comes to life through tangible acts of service, as Buddhist communities and individuals actively work to uplift marginalized populations. This compassionate engagement includes providing free healthcare in underserved areas, organizing disaster relief efforts, distributing food to those in need, offering support to homeless individuals, advocating for environmental sustainability, and promoting animal welfare. These actions reflect a comprehensive vision of compassion, understood not as a passive sentiment but as a dynamic and transformational force. By addressing both individual and systemic suffering, such efforts embody the Bodhisattva's commitment to alleviating suffering and fostering well-being for all beings.

Buddhist compassion: bridging divides and addressing global challenges.

Buddhist compassion aspires to alleviate suffering on a global scale by transcending cultural, religious, and ideological boundaries. This inclusive vision is rooted in the principle of interdependence, which highlights the profound interconnectedness of all beings. By embracing this understanding, Buddhism encourages collaborative efforts to address shared challenges across diverse philosophical, social, and cultural contexts.

In the modern world, compassion presents unique and complex challenges. While Buddhist traditions emphasize personal transformation, addressing systemic issues such as inequality, climate change, and social injustice necessitates collective and institutional action. Compassion is often misunderstood as passive or impractical,¹³ obscuring its profound potential as a foundation for strategic, meaningful intervention and societal change. In

tions, 2000), p. 485–97.

⁹ Nhất Hạnh and Robert Aitken, *For a Future to Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts*. Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 1993, p. 45.

¹⁰ Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal*. Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 2007, p. 217, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10377778>.

¹¹ Allan Hunt Badiner and Julia Butterfly Hill, *Mindfulness in the Marketplace: Compassionate Responses to Consumerism*. Berkeley, Calif.: Parallax Press, 2002, p. 237 – 300, https://archive.org/details/isbn_1888375248.

¹² Kristin Neff, *Self-Compassion: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself*, First edition (New York: William Morrow, 2011), p. 12 – 17.

¹³ *Compassion: Bridging Practice and Science*. Leipzig: Max-Planck-Institut für Kognitions- und Neurowissenschaften, 2013, p. 162–63, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:101:1-2014012819982>.

Buddhist philosophy, compassion is inextricably linked with wisdom, forming a dynamic and complementary approach to addressing suffering. As Venerable Xing Yun aptly notes, “Therefore, loving kindness or compassion without wisdom is like a bird with one wing, or like a cart with one wheel – moving forward is out of the question, and success is impossible.”¹⁴ This integration ensures that compassionate actions are not only well-intentioned but also effective, guided by a clear understanding of the root causes of suffering and a pragmatic approach to alleviating it.

This synthesis of compassion and wisdom empowers practitioners to navigate the complexities of contemporary social landscapes with a nuanced perspective. By combining empathetic motivation with discerning intelligence, Buddhist teachings provide a sophisticated framework for meaningful engagement with the world. Such an approach moves beyond mere emotional sympathy, transforming compassion into a catalyst for transformation action that addresses both individual suffering and collective challenges. This holistic perspective redefines compassion as an active, strategic force. It bridges personal spiritual practice with broader social transformation, offering a powerful tool for healing, resilience, and the creation of a more harmonious and equitable world.

2.2. Parallels in compassion teachings across religious traditions

Christianity: Selfless love and social justice

Christian theology centers on *agape* – an unconditional love that embodies divine compassion. This selfless love is exemplified by the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who championed the marginalized and upheld the inherent dignity of all individuals. God is a compassionate God.¹⁵ Christians are called to emulate this example by engaging in active social justice, confronting systemic inequalities, and advocating for peace. Compassion in Christianity transcends personal comfort, urging believers to align their faith with transformation actions that promote equity and the common good.¹⁶

Hinduism: Dharma as an ethical responsibility

In Hinduism, Dharma serves as a guiding ethical framework that emphasizes moral behavior and social responsibility. Rooted in foundational principles such as truth (*satya*), non-violence (*ahimsa*), and compassion (*karuṇā*), *dharma* inspires individuals to act for the well-being of others while maintaining harmony within the self and society¹⁷. It underscores the

¹⁴ Xingyun et al., *Humanistic Buddhism: A Blueprint for Life*, Rev. ed. Hacienda Heights Calif.: Buddha's Light Pub., 2008, p. 76.

¹⁵ Henri J. M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. Random House Publishing Group, 2006, p. 11–16.

¹⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Stephen Plant, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Anniversary edition. London: SCM Press, 2015, 89, p. 161 - 162, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2283795>.

¹⁷ Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky, and Water*, Religions of the World and Ecology. Cambridge, MA: Distributed

interconnectedness of life, encouraging ethical choices that contribute to the collective upliftment of the community and the natural world, fostering holistic well-being.

Islam: Charity as social transformation

Compassion is integral to Islamic teachings, woven into practices such as *zakat* (obligatory almsgiving) and *sadaqah* (voluntary charity).¹⁸ These mechanisms extend beyond individual acts of kindness, forming a structured approach to wealth redistribution and social welfare. By addressing poverty, reducing inequality, and fostering community solidarity, these practices transform compassion into a tangible force for systemic social change. In Islam, compassion is not only a moral virtue but also a practical tool for building a just and dignified society.¹⁹

Judaism: Tikkun Olam – repairing the world

The Jewish concept of Tikkun Olam (“repairing the world”) underscores a collective responsibility to create a more just, equitable, and harmonious world. Grounded in the ethical teachings of the Torah, Tikkun Olam transforms compassion into action by urging individuals to combat social injustices, support the vulnerable, and address systemic inequalities.²⁰ The concept of social contract inspires active efforts toward a just and harmonious world.²¹ This commitment extends beyond individual acts, calling for sustained efforts to repair societal structures and cultivate a global vision of justice and peace. These religious traditions share a transformational vision of compassion as a dynamic and active force for personal and collective healing. Rather than remaining confined to an emotional or spiritual state, compassion becomes a catalyst for systemic change, transcending individual religious boundaries to address universal human challenges. Through this shared commitment, they inspire humanity to work collaboratively toward a more equitable and harmonious world.

by Harvard University Press for the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 2000, p. 84 – 86, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/44701628.html>.

¹⁸ Marwan Abu-Ghazaleh Mahajneh, Itay Greenspan, and Muhammad M. Haj-Yahia, “Zakat Giving to Non-Muslims: Muftis’ Attitudes in Arab and Non-Arab Countries,” *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy & Civil Society* 5, no. 2 (2021), p. 67 – 69, <https://www.proquest.com/religion/docview/2626303739/abstract/6EE341C1B89943D6PQ/9>.

¹⁹ Abdullahi A. Shuaib and M. Sohail, “The Role of Islamic Social Finance in Societal Welfare: A Case Study of Selected IFBOs in Southwest Nigeria,” *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 15, no. 1 (2022), p. 86, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMEFM-06-2019-0229>.

²⁰ PhD Schwarz Rabbi Sidney and Ruth Messinger, *Judaism and Justice The Jewish Passion to Repair the World*. La Vergne: Turner Publishing Company, 2011, p. 64 – 82, <https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=7125633>.

²¹ David Novak, *The Jewish Social Contract: An Essay in Political Theology*. New Forum Books, 2005, p. 235 – 38.

2.3. Exploring interfaith commonalities and differences

Convergence in action: Advancing human development.

Compassion and responsibility are universal ethical values shared across religious traditions, serving as a driving force behind efforts to alleviate suffering and promote human development. Practices such as *zakat* in Islam, *dāna* in Buddhism, and tithing in Christianity exemplify a shared commitment to charity, community support, and humanitarian outreach. These practices aim to foster societies rooted in justice, equity, and compassion.

A unifying theme across these traditions is the emphasis on supporting marginalized groups. Christianity's preferential option for the poor, Islam's *zakat*, and Buddhism's *karuṇā* (compassion) all prioritize care for the underprivileged, ensuring that resources and aid reach those in greatest need. These shared ethical principles provide a strong foundation for interfaith collaboration on pressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change. By aligning common values, religious groups can work together to create a more equitable and sustainable world.

Divergence: Doctrinal differences and approaches

While religious traditions share overlapping ethical values, their underlying frameworks and approaches differ. For instance, Christianity and Islam derive a sense of shared responsibility from divine commandments, whereas Buddhism and Hinduism ground ethical principles in concepts like interdependence or cosmic law (Dharma). *Zakat* in Islam is a mandated religious duty, while Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) emerges from a personal commitment to alleviating suffering.

The integration of spiritual and worldly concerns also varies among traditions. Christianity and Judaism often link social action with spiritual salvation, while Buddhism emphasizes transcending suffering, though movements like Engaged Buddhism address systemic social issues. Notions of justice similarly differ: Islam and Judaism frame justice within the parameters of divine law, while Buddhism and Christianity often emphasize forgiveness, reconciliation, and the transformation of relationships. Additionally, the balance between communal obligations and individual transformation varies. Islam and Judaism stress the importance of communal responsibility in fostering societal well-being, whereas Buddhism often highlights individual spiritual transformation as a pathway to collective harmony. These distinctions reflect the diversity of ways in which religious traditions approach ethical responsibility and social engagement.

2.4. The impact on human development

Despite doctrinal differences, the shared values of compassion, ethical responsibility, and sustainability across religious traditions form a robust ethical framework for addressing global challenges. These values resonate deeply with modern human development initiatives, particularly the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). Adopted in 2015 by all 193 UN Member States as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

the 17 interconnected goals aim to address critical issues such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, and social injustice.²² By recognizing the convergence of these principles, collaborations among religious groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and governments can create more inclusive and effective responses to global challenges. Leveraging the unique strengths of each tradition allows for innovative and sustainable solutions, fostering a more equitable and harmonious world.

Buddhist insights for human development

Buddhism offers transformation insights into human development by emphasizing compassion, generosity, ethical responsibility, and environmental sustainability. The doctrine of “*pratītya-samutpāda*” (interdependent origination) underscores life’s interconnectedness, inspiring collective action to address systemic social and environmental challenges.

Practical contributions span multiple domains. Mindfulness practices like meditation and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) enhance mental health and resilience.²³ Historically, Buddhist monasteries provided free education and vocational training, a tradition continued by modern organizations addressing poverty and social inequality. Engaged Buddhism, led by influential figures like Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, and Daisaku Ikeda, tackles systemic issues while promoting social reforms. Movements such as the revival of nuns’ ordination reflect deep commitments to gender equity and social justice.²⁴

Sustainable practices are integral to Buddhist philosophy. Initiatives like Right Livelihood, microfinance programs such as “*sajja satcha*” in Thai monasteries,²⁵ and environmental conservation efforts like Thailand’s “tree ordination” ceremonies demonstrate practical applications of Buddhist principles.²⁶ By prioritizing inner well-being over material wealth, Buddhism aligns with progressive development models like Bhutan’s gross national happiness index.²⁷ This approach supports global development goals by

²² “The 2030 Agenda For Sustainable Development,” p. 14–28, accessed January 26, 2025, <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>.

²³ Susan L. Woods, *Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: Protocol, Practice, and Teaching Skills*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2021, p. 162–67, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=6467678>.

²⁴ Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Women in Buddhist Traditions*, Women in Religions. New York: New York University Press, 2020, p. 39–48.

²⁵ Ahmed F., Mia S., and Wiboonpongse A., “Micro Finance Institutions, Programmes and Initiatives in Thailand: A Review,” *International Journal of Economic Research* 14, no. 15 (2017), p. 393.

²⁶ Susan M. Darlington, *The Ordination of a Tree: The Thai Buddhist Environmental Movement*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012, p. 167–70.

²⁷ Maria Marikina, *Gross Domestic Product Or Gross National Happiness - Which Is The Better Alternative For Economic Measurement?*, n.d., p. 1–7.

fostering cross-cultural collaboration to address poverty, inequality, and climate change.

IV. ANALYSIS

4.1. Current challenges and opportunities

While Buddhism traditionally emphasizes individual transformation, its foundation in compassion (*karuṇā*) offers profound potential for addressing systemic inequalities and global crises. As Buddhist-inspired practices like mindfulness gain widespread popularity, it is vital to ensure they remain anchored in their ethical and spiritual roots, particularly the compassionate intention to alleviate suffering for all beings. Buddhist organizations are uniquely positioned to expand this compassionate ethos by promoting gender inclusivity, engaging younger generations, and fostering interfaith collaboration. By rooting these efforts in compassion, Buddhism can play a transformational role in addressing contemporary challenges, from social justice and environmental sustainability to fostering global harmony and equitable development.

4.2. Benefits of interfaith collaboration

Buddhist compassion offers a profound framework for interfaith cooperation by emphasizing shared human challenges like poverty, inequality, climate change, and conflict. For example, the “Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions” brings representatives of the clergy from Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and other traditional religions together to address social, cultural, and religious issues.²⁸

Compassion-driven dialogue, rooted in active listening and mutual respect, becomes a powerful tool for bridging cultural and religious divides. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh’s life work exemplifies how Buddhist principles can facilitate reconciliation, promoting deep understanding between different religious and political perspectives.²⁹ By prioritizing empathy and interconnectedness, Buddhist approaches to interfaith engagement offer a transformation model for addressing global challenges through collaborative, respectful dialogue, and collective action.

4.3. Success stories

The following section presents and analyzes representative examples of various Buddhist and interreligious organizations, focusing on their similarities and differences. These examples illustrate the practical application of compassion as a core value in religious activities.

Buddhist models: Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha (VBS) social and educational activities.

²⁸ “About the Congress | Non-Profit Join Stock Company «International Center for Interfaith and Interreligious Dialogue,” accessed January 24, 2025, <https://religions-congress.org/en/page/o-sezde>.

²⁹ Nhất Hạnh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, 10th Anniversary ed. New York: Riverhead Books, 1997, p. 88.

Established in 1981, the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha (VBS) has been instrumental in guiding Buddhism-based organizations (BBOs) to deliver essential social services to underserved populations lacking access to conventional support systems. By leveraging Buddhism's deep cultural influence and fostering strong community connections, these organizations have effectively supported vulnerable groups through extensive fundraising and grassroots initiatives.³⁰ In addition to social services, the VBS has made significant contributions to education. Buddhist groups and individuals within the Sangha actively support literacy and vocational training programs, including volunteer-based literacy classes that have helped expand access to education and skill development.³¹ An exemplary BBO initiative is the Buddhism Today Foundation (Quỹ Đạo Phật Ngày Nay), which provides humanitarian aid to victims of natural disasters and individuals facing hardship or misfortune. This organization embodies the practical application of Buddhist compassion in addressing the needs of those most affected by adversity.

“Quỹ Đạo Phật Ngày Nay (Buddhism Today Foundation) có các chương trình nhân đạo đa dạng, nhằm cứu giúp: (1) Các nạn nhân thiên tai, (2) Những mảnh đời cơ nhỡ, bất hạnh (người nghèo, người già neo đơn, trẻ mồ côi, người tàn tật, người bệnh tật), (3) Xây dựng cầu nông thôn và nhà tình thương, (4) Cúng dường học bổng cho Tăng, Ni và tặng học bổng cho sinh viên nghèo hiếu học, (5) Ấn tống kinh, sách, băng giảng, máy nghe pháp, (6) Tổ chức hiến máu nhân đạo, (vii) Tổ chức hiến mô, tạng và hiến xác cho y học.”³²

The Buddhism Today Foundation operates a variety of humanitarian programs to assist: (1) Victims of natural disasters. (2) Vulnerable populations, including the poor, elderly without support, orphans, people with disabilities, and patients with chronic illnesses. (3) Building rural bridges and providing compassionate housing. (4) Offering scholarships to monks, nuns, and academically promising students from impoverished backgrounds. (5) Publishing and distributing Buddhist scriptures, books, lecture recordings, and Dharma listening devices. (6) Organizing humanitarian blood donation drives. (7) Facilitating organ, tissue, and body donations for medical research and education (translated by the author).

4.4. Tzu Chi and Soka Gakkai as international Asian models

Tzu Chi Foundation (Taiwan), established in 1966 by Dharma Master Cheng Yen, operates globally based on Buddhist principles through Four

³⁰ Huong T Hoang, Trang T Nguyen, and Jerry F Reynolds, “Buddhism-Based Charity, Philanthropy, and Social Work: A Lesson from Vietnam,” *International Social Work* 62, no. 3 (May 1, 2019), p. 4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872818767257>.

³¹ Duong Van Bien et al., “Engagement of Vietnamese Religious Communities in National Education: Resources, Challenges, and Opportunities,” in *Vietnamese Language, Education and Change In and Outside Vietnam*, ed. Phan Le Ha, Dat Bao, and Joel Windle. Singapore: Springer Nature, 2024, p. 269, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-99-9093-1_13.

³² TT. Thích Nhật Từ, *Cẩm Nang Tu Học Đạo Phật Ngày Nay*. NXB. Hồng Đức, 2018, p. 70.

Missions: Charity, Medicine, Education, and Culture.³³ With branches in over 50 countries, the foundation sustains its humanitarian efforts through donations and volunteer work, focusing on disaster relief, healthcare, education, environmental protection, and cultural outreach.³⁴ Soka Gakkai, a Japanese lay Buddhist organization founded in 1930, emphasizes peace, culture, and education through individual empowerment.³⁵ With members in 192 countries, it engages in grassroots activities including peace advocacy, value-creating education, disaster relief, cultural exchange, and environmental initiatives to promote global citizenship.

These three Buddhist organizations differ in structure, engagement, and reach. Tzu Chi maintains centralized professional management, Soka Gakkai operates through hierarchical lay leadership, while Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha follows traditional monastic leadership with government coordination. Their approaches to social engagement vary: Tzu Chi prioritizes humanitarian aid and medical services, Soka Gakkai emphasizes education and culture, and Vietnamese Buddhism combines traditional temple services with modern social programs. Their funding models also differ: Tzu Chi relies on donors and business partnerships, Soka Gakkai on membership contributions, and Vietnamese Sangha on traditional donations and state support. While Tzu Chi and Soka Gakkai have an extensive international presence, Vietnamese Buddhist engagement remains primarily domestic.

4.5. Western Buddhist initiatives: Plum Village and Buddhist Global Relief (BGR)

Plum Village and BGR represent innovative Western Buddhist approaches, characterized by unique adaptations of traditional Buddhist practices. Plum Village specializes in mindfulness-based programs designed for Western audiences, integrating Vietnamese Buddhist traditions with contemporary psychological methodologies. Their approach centers on community building through residential retreats and emphasizes experiential learning and transformation training experiences.³⁶ Buddhist Global Relief, founded by Bhikkhu Bodhi, focuses on addressing global hunger and malnutrition. Guided by Buddhist principles that frame hunger as the most severe illness, BGR sponsors international projects aimed at improving food security and educational opportunities for disadvantaged communities.³⁷

³³ .. Mark O'Neill, *Tzu Chi: Serving with Compassion*. Singapore: John Wiley, 2010, p. 45.

³⁴ C. Julia Huang, *Charisma and Compassion: Cheng Yen and the Buddhist Tzu Chi Movement*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 186 – 90.

³⁵ Daisaku Ikeda, *A Piece of Mirror and Other Essays*. Kuala Lumpur: Soka Gakkai Malaysia, 2007, p. 94 – 97, <https://archive.org/details/pieceofmirroroth00iked>.

³⁶ Kaira Jewel Lingo, "In the Symphony of the Storm: Four Phases of Engaged Buddhism in Thich Nhat Hanh's Life," *A Journal of Wakeful Society, Culture & Politics* 10 (2023), p. 53–58.

³⁷ "Buddhist Global Relief - Vision & Mission," *Buddhist Global Relief* (blog), accessed January 18, 2025, <https://buddhistglobalrelief.org/about-us/vision-mission/>.

Both organizations diverge significantly from traditional Asian Buddhist models by implementing more collaborative leadership structures. They blend monastic and lay practitioner perspectives, creating more flexible and accessible organizational frameworks. Their approaches prioritize secular engagement, integrating Western psychological insights and social service models with Buddhist philosophical foundations. These initiatives share a distinctive focus on mental health, personal development, and environmental consciousness. By emphasizing interfaith and secular collaboration, Plum Village and BGR demonstrate a strategic reinterpretation of Buddhist principles, prioritizing practical social impact over traditional religious hierarchies. Their innovative methods reflect a broader trend of adapting spiritual traditions to contemporary global contexts, making Buddhist insights more accessible and directly relevant to diverse populations seeking personal growth and social transformation.

V. INTERFAITH COLLABORATIVE MODELS

5.1. Interfaith Cooperation in Vietnam: A grassroots approach

In Vietnam, interfaith cooperation flourishes through informal, locally driven networks rather than formal institutional frameworks. Religious communities from Buddhist temples, Catholic churches, and other faith traditions collaborate organically, guided by deeply rooted cultural values of mutual assistance and community solidarity. These grassroots partnerships emerge dynamically in response to local needs, with religious leaders coordinating efforts at neighborhood and district levels. This bottom-up approach enables efficient problem-solving while circumventing bureaucratic constraints, particularly evident during humanitarian crises.³⁸

During natural disasters like floods and typhoons, religious communities demonstrate remarkable collaborative capacity. After severe floods in Central Vietnam, diverse faith groups have rapidly organized joint relief efforts, providing essential resources such as food, clean water, and temporary shelters. Local leaders from different religious backgrounds often coordinate logistics to reach isolated communities effectively. Interfaith collaboration extends beyond disaster response to addressing broader social challenges. Religious communities jointly tackle issues like poverty alleviation, elder care, and youth education, leveraging each group's unique resources and capabilities to serve shared community needs. A notable example is the Buddhist-Catholic coordination in Nghe An province, where religious groups collaborated on rural infrastructure development and housing construction for disadvantaged families.³⁹

³⁸ Grant Ethan, "Religions In Vietnam: Full List & Statistics," Faith Inspires, February 20, 2024, <https://faithinspires.org/religions-in-vietnam/>.

³⁹ "Religious Communities in Nghe An Contribute 15.9 Billion VND to Urban Infrastructure Development in 2024 - RELIGION | VIETNAM GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS," accessed January 20, 2025, <https://religion.vn/religion/religious-communities-in-nghe-an-contribute-159-billion-vnd-to-urban-infrastructure-development-in-2024-post18q9y0bqgD.html>.

Despite these successes, interfaith cooperation faces significant challenges. Operational obstacles include balancing different institutional structures, coordinating decision-making processes, and managing resource allocation. Cultural complexities involve navigating diverse religious calendars, respecting varied religious practices, maintaining distinct religious identities, and building trust across religious boundaries. These collaborative efforts represent a sophisticated, adaptive approach to community support, demonstrating how shared humanitarian values can transcend religious differences in Vietnam's diverse social landscape.

Global Interfaith Network Initiatives: INEB and religions for peace

The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and Religions for Peace represent innovative global platforms for multi-religious social activism, addressing critical global challenges through collaborative approaches. INEB connects Buddhist and multi-religious social activists, focusing on social justice, environmental issues, and leadership development.⁴⁰ Its key programs include the transformation learning institute, interreligious climate & ecology network, and Buddhism and conflict transformation group. The network prioritizes understanding and cooperation among inter-religious social action groups.

Religions for Peace operates through a comprehensive global structure, featuring regional councils, specialized working groups, and leadership development programs. Their initiatives span peace, climate action, health interventions, and humanitarian responses. Significant projects include multi-religious humanitarian councils, women of faith networks, interfaith youth programs, and climate action coalitions.⁴¹

Global interfaith humanitarian projects leverage joint emergency response systems, shared resource mobilization, coordinated volunteer management, and standardized monitoring frameworks. Their implementation encompasses refugee support, disaster response, environmental protection, and health service delivery. These initiatives face significant challenges across both organizational and operational domains. Organizational hurdles include navigating cross-cultural coordination, managing diverse structures, balancing local and global priorities, and ensuring clear, consistent communication. On the operational side, obstacles encompass complex resource allocation, varying accounting standards, disparities in partner capacities, and differences in technological infrastructure. These networks, however, reveal the transformative power of collaborative, cross-religious efforts to address global social and environmental challenges.

5.2. Discussion and conclusion

Buddhist teachings offer timeless wisdom that remains highly relevant in the modern world. Compassion, a fundamental concept, is embodied in practices like *mettā* (universal loving-kindness). This focus on compassionate

⁴⁰ "INEB Home Page," INEB, accessed January 20, 2025, <https://inebnetwork.org>.

⁴¹ "Religions for Peace," accessed January 20, 2025, <https://www.rfp.org/>.

action mirrors teachings in other major religions. Christianity emphasizes *agape* love and mercy, Islam highlights *rahman* and *rahim* (compassion and mercy), and Judaism stresses *chesed* (loving-kindness) and *tzedakah* (charitable justice). Hinduism's concepts of *daya* (compassion) and *seva* (selfless service) also place compassion at the core of spiritual practice.

Religious teachings on compassion offer practical solutions to modern issues. Organizations like the Vietnamese Buddhist *Sangha* (VBS) in Vietnam play a crucial role in disseminating these practices and fostering spiritual growth within local communities. Meanwhile, global faith-based consortiums such as the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, Catholic Charities, Islamic Relief, and Jewish humanitarian groups illustrate how compassion-driven approaches can improve healthcare access and support vulnerable populations. These efforts show how religious compassion translates into effective healthcare and community networks.

In economic justice, compassion influences ethical business practices and poverty alleviation. Buddhist economics advocates mindful consumption, Islamic finance promotes ethical practices, and Christian and Jewish traditions emphasize fair wages and worker dignity. These principles suggest more equitable economic systems that prioritize human dignity and sustainability over profit maximization.

Compassion also plays a vital role in political challenges. Interfaith initiatives, like those by Religions for Peace and the Parliament of the World's Religions, demonstrate how shared values can drive conflict resolution and peace-building, addressing climate change, refugee crises, and inequality. Environmental protection benefits from compassion-based perspectives as well. Buddhist interdependence, Hindu reverence for nature, Islamic stewardship (*Khalifah*), and Judeo-Christian teachings on creation all encourage ecological responsibility that balances social and environmental needs. In education, compassion-based methods foster emotional intelligence and ethical leadership. Programs incorporating mindfulness and service-learning show how ancient wisdom can enrich modern education.

VI. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the shared value of compassion across religious traditions offers a foundation for tackling contemporary challenges. By building on these shared values while respecting diverse perspectives, we can create inclusive, effective solutions to global issues.

Future Directions, the profound potential of Buddhist compassion to address global challenges calls for timely exploration across some key domains:

Education: Compassion-based teachings from early childhood to higher education can foster empathy, interconnectedness, and ethical awareness, promoting holistic learning. Collaborative efforts between secular and religious leaders can shape inclusive curricula that nurture intellectual growth and emotional resilience. (2) Social Challenges: Compassion-driven initiatives can tackle crime and systemic inequalities by addressing root causes like poverty,

discrimination, and marginalization. These approaches foster community and mutual responsibility, offering effective strategies for prevention and rehabilitation. (3) Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI): Integrating Buddhist principles of compassion and interconnectedness into AI ethics is crucial as technology transforms society. Responsible innovation guided by these values can ensure progress aligns with humanity's collective well-being and ecological sustainability.

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