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BUDDHISM: INDISPENSABLE PRINCIPLES FOR THE MODERN ROUTE OF EXISTENCE

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ABSTRACT

Lord Buddha once said, “Just as treasures are uncovered from the Earth, so virtue appears from good deeds, and wisdom appears from a pure and peaceful mind. To walk safely from the maze of human life, one needs the light of wisdom and the guidance of virtue.” Buddhism is the first religion which drew people together from a vast spectrum of customs, languages, civilizations and races. Its motive is to help mankind move towards its final goal. Buddha preached the four noble truths. The first two Noble Truths present the philosophy of worldly sufferings and their causes; the Third Noble Truth declares that suffering can be brought to an end and the Fourth Noble Truth prescribes the path to end the sufferings.

It is true that we are plagued with problems such as environmental and noise pollution. But what is even more dangerous is the pollution of the mind or spiritual pollution. Therefore, the need of the hour is to embrace the teachings of Buddhism to achieve a better world. Unfortunately, over the past few decades, Buddhism has attained a more religious character as compared to an educational one. The true essence of Buddhism explained by the teachings of Lord Buddha has been somewhat lost under the shrouds of time. It is indeed very unfortunate to see it being reduced to religious rituals and even more sadly, as cults.

It is extremely important, especially now, to rejuvenate our tired educational system with the help of Lord Buddha’s teachings. According to him, every human being has a deep well of knowledge, compassion, kindness and intellect inside him/her. His teachings and doctrines will lead us on our path of salvation and bless all human beings on this journey called life. According to the famous author H. G. Wells, “Buddhism has done more for the advance of world civilization and true culture than any other influences on the chronicles of mankind.”

KEYWORDS: Compassion, Knowledge, Philosophy, Teachings, Humanity, Truths, Life, Spirituality, Education, Culture Etc....

INTRODUCTION

BUDDHISM: ITS ORIGIN AND RISE

To understand Buddhism in the contemporary world, we must understand about its origin and examine the seeds from which it sprang. However, that is not an easy task. Buddhism is an extremely old religion and a lot of information about it is clouded by the dust of hundreds of generations that have gone by. But fortunately, many records still exist of ancient Buddhism’s philosophical schools and religious debates.

When Siddhartha Gautama was born in the 5th or 6th century BC, India already had a very rich and varied culture. There were different kinds of class and ruling systems prevalent in the country at that time. It was an era of social and spiritual ferment that resulted in a unique cultural flowering in the country. There were mighty rulers who ruled over large kingdoms. At the same time, there were many tribal kingdoms with smaller number of subjects and restricted to smaller areas and places. The Iron Age had dawned in India and this resulted in an unprecedented agricultural surplus that could now support larger governmental and religious institutions than before. The economy was shifting from the local barter system to a far-reaching international trading system based on monetary system. Siddhartha Gautama’s father was the ruler of a tribal kingdom that was dominated by the usual Brahman priesthood and the caste system. Gautama was the heir to the throne and had a life of great comfort and ease. One saint told his father that Siddhartha would either become a great ruler or a great Saint. His father became determined to hide all the sufferings of life from him. He wore only the finest of clothes, ate the finest of foods and was heavily protected. Yet no one can be protected forever. Legend holds it that one day he saw a dead body and a diseased man and his mind became very troubled and uncomfortable. He realized that it was an inescapable reality of life and dedicated himself to find its solution. For this he took a last look at his family and transformed himself into an ascetic. His quest for truth led him to study under different masters and gradually he mastered the art of meditation and concentration. Even demons in the form of Discontent, Delight and Desire could not distract him. His compassion for the suffering of humankind eventually won out and he spent the next forty-five years of his life as a teacher wandering from town to town spreading the dharma (a term that means many things, including the truth, the teaching, and the nature of things).

THE TEACHINGS: Although many scholars have tried very hard to explain what Lord Buddha realized during his enlightenment, to really have that understanding is itself to be enlightened. The Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Threefold Training, the Four Foods, the Eight Freedoms, the Three Jewels, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, the Five Skandhas, the Three Poisons, and the Five



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Precepts are some of the lists which make his teachings more understandable for the people. The basis of his teachings was philosophies like “karma” and “rebirth” and these ideas were widely accepted by Indians at that time. It means that what happens to us in this life is the result of our karma in our previous life and the same concept applies to our future births too. So even if our intention is good but the outcome of our activity is negative, we will have a better life in our next birth. On the other hand, if our intention is bad although the outcome is positive, we will bear its brunt in our next life. Also, the root cause of immorality is ignorance, and its cure can only be found in wisdom. According to what is called the Principle of Interdependent Causality, everything arises from an infinite chain of past causes and produces effects that have infinite consequences for everything else. Nothing, including ourselves, has any independent being or unchanging essence. In applying this wide vision to human life, the Buddha discovered the Four Noble Truths. The first is that the unenlightened life most of us lead has an unsatisfactory quality about it and is full of suffering. The second is that the cause of this suffering is desire or “thirst”. The third truth is that the cause of suffering may be ended if we stop our clinging and enter the state of Nirvana. The final truth is the means by which this suffering can be ended, that is, the eightfold path involving ethical behavior, meditation and wisdom.

1. BUDDHISM: KING ASOKA AND MAHATMA GANDHI

Both King Asoka and Mahatma Gandhi were ardent followers of the teachings of Buddhism and they spread the light of its teachings throughout this world. Philosophies and teachings of Buddhism formed the core values of their lives.

KING ASOKA: It is a well-known fact that King Asoka was a fierce warrior and a great emperor who unified the whole of India under his political authority. The war in Kalinga made Asoka an ardent Buddhist as he felt that the message of Lord Buddha accepts people of all states, cultures, races and sects. He also realized the concept of all humanity as one and that they should share the beauty of life and this made the concept of war redundant for him. An important factor in the Asokan tradition is the concept of Peace after the Kalinga War. It is important for a country to have peace at its core as values. Peace does not only mean the cessation of war but the beginning of a great movement. He carried the message of nobility and goodwill, of beneficence and well-being to the people all over the world. Asoka sent missions throughout the world as far as North Africa, Greece, Syria, Egypt and so on. He preached “Dharma” which according to him was helping all mortal beings including humans and animals too. He provided water to the thirsty, gave food to the hungry, provided shelters for animals and helped every soul that needed help, both physically and spiritually. When we consider the role of Asoka in the evolution of Buddhism, the most important point is that he spread the religion all over India. He sanctioned the construction of 84,000 stupas all over the country which were symbols of Buddhist worship. He brought a new vision in international relations, that neither conquest nor domination is important but what is essential is the amelioration of the spiritual and worldly conditions of humanity. He is not the dominance of a super power but the dominion of Dharma in general. Asoka’s message to the contemporary world is to seek a healthy and happy living as well as helping others. He crossed the frontiers of India with tenderness and compassion. Another emphasis is happiness in this life and the other. He strove for a world order based on Dharma and inspired humankind to the long journey of values. His edicts and legends are symbolic systems that articulate a powerful stream of flowering of the mind with life and love.

MAHATMA GANDHI: Gandhiji has said, “Purity of personal life is the one indispensable condition for building up a sound education”. The prayers of Gandhiji ended with “OM SANTIH SANTIH SANTIH”. The first SANTIH means peace without or peace with nature, the second SANTIH means peace between communities and nations and the third SANTIH means peace within. A wholeness can be brought about by having all three: ecological peace, societal peace and spiritual peace where all three are in harmony. The mission of Gandhiji has always been to remove tears from each and every eye. For this he looked towards Avalokiteshwara, the Japanese god of compassion who is believed to have a thousand eyes and arms for helping a thousand people at a time. He was also taken with the three monkeys who advocated “seeing no evil, hearing no evil and doing no evil”. These monkeys were a part of the Japanese Buddhist philosophy and Gandhiji advocated this message throughout his lifetime. Mahatma Gandhi simply said that men should strive to attain what they need because there is enough for their need but not enough for their greed. If one cannot control desires then one will not be able to help others. If we crave for too much wealth, war is inevitable. To prevent war and to give peace a chance, human beings should consume only that which is required and leave the rest for others which will lead to a sense of contentment. Therefore, we can say that the effect of Buddhism on Mahatma Gandhi led him to have three basic principles: Compassion, Contentment and Non-Violence. Compassion or “Karuna” is the sharing of whatever is possible, “Santosa” is being satisfied with whatever one has and “Ahimsa” is non-violence both of the mind and of the actions. These will be very important for our country when modern technology uses natural resources to an alarming degree. It is an urgent need to have harmonious relations between individuals as well as to emphasize on life within. As humans master the self, they will become ideal citizens and will realize that they have to conserve nature. He also believed that nobility of mind is central to the needs of the individual, the country and the entire cosmos.



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2. BUDDHISM FOR THE COMMON MAN IN A CHANGING WORLD

Buddha says that one can put an end to one’s suffering by examining and annihilating its cause. Suffering and its cause arise due to different factors and we have the capability to root out the main reasons. Lord Buddha’s philosophy was homocentric. He spoke about our futile speculations and attempts that didn’t enable us to extricate our self from our greed for worldly possessions. He said that man can get salvation from trading on the “Eightfold Path”. This path mapped out by him consists of virtue, concentration of mind and wisdom. Humans create their own suffering but at the same time they have a built-in mechanism within which can help them end it. And to activate this mechanism, humans have been advised by Lord Buddha to walk on the Eightfold Path. Ethical precepts are important to have concentration of mind and only then wisdom can be achieved that will enable us to see the real nature of things. And when we see the real nature of things, we will not be attached to them which will keep us away from desire that is the root cause of all our sufferings. He was very pained to see the distinctions made by men among other men that gave way to divisions made on caste, creed and race. He showered his love and compassion on all the people and ordained many low castes people and gave the glorious message that all men are equal. So, if we follow this message and love one another, peace will prevail in the world and a large portion of our troubles will disappear. Following these ethical precepts and moral will go a long way in establishing peace in our society. Also, we should practice non-violence and shouldn’t injure the feelings of others, loving them as we love ourselves. Although the teachings of Buddhism were directly preached about more than three thousand, they have not lost their relevance in the contemporary times at all. Rather, they have become even more relevant in the present circumstances because the world is on the brink of a catastrophe with the armament race and the stockpiling of deadly nuclear weapons. Even a single act of folly can bring down the entire human civilization and all that is valuable to mankind will be destroyed forever. But the real question is how do we live and act so that the valuable gems of his teachings are preserved and that light of knowledge that humans have achieved from Lord Buddha be conserved in this arduous journey.

Buddha was a philosopher of a different kind who did not base his teachings and sermons on speculations about the infiniteness of this world because such speculations do not help us in reaching the true conclusions and answers. Although he scattered knowledge about subjects like detachment, purifications from lust, morals and the right conduct, and tranquilization of the heart, the most important thing that he stressed on was how to end one’s suffering. Suffering, according to him, is also of three types namely, mental suffering, physical suffering and the essential form of suffering called cosmic suffering. Cosmic suffering is concerned with the people who are on their way to enlightenment, whereas the other two forms of suffering like mental and physical plague almost everybody. Although Lord Buddha primarily preached about ways to attain relief from cosmic suffering, he was deeply concerned with physical and mental suffering as well. In this regard, he observed that our suffering is caused by no one but us. Also, all kinds of suffering arise from our desires for worldly possessions. The path that he prescribed to end all forms of suffering for the human being is called the Eightfold Path, and consists of right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. So, if humans tread on the Eightfold Path, one is likely to achieve the light of salvation from all sufferings. In this way, Buddhism evolved in a form of mental culture that asks us to dedicate ourselves to constructive practices like meditation and honesty through which we can attain insight into the real nature of things of the world and attain Nirvana.

In Lord Buddha’s famous treasure of preaching, the “Dhammapada”, he says that “All beings are afraid of pain, all beings are afraid of death. Recognizing oneself in others one should neither kill nor cause to kill.” Believing in this philosophy will surely reduce violence and will enable people to participate in activities that propagate peace. Giving free play to our feelings of hatred, jealousy and anger leads to most of the ills of this world. Becoming more egoistic leads to a chain reaction of hatred which pulls everyone in the swirling whirlpool and makes us likely to be doomed. Buddha has also explained in great detail the importance of virtue for our spiritual life, although virtue is also important for the common man to spend a peaceful life who does not want to think about terms like enlightenment or spirituality.

In Buddhism, great emphasis is laid on right livelihood, right speech and right action. Right livelihood means purity of livelihood and abstaining from trades that deal in harmful activities and which have the potential of harming humanity. The most dangerous trade in the present era is the huge investment in and exchange of dangerous weapons. Owning different powerful weapons makes a nation drunk with power and superiority. Apart from this, people sometime indulge in other activities like deceit, treachery, sooth-saying, trickery and usury to earn their livelihood. Buddha has spoken at length about them in the “Brahma Jala Sutta” and has said that these means of livelihood must be avoided. Secondly, Buddha talks about the importance of right speech and says that it is the true adornment of a man and no other adornment can replace the relevance of right speech from a man’s life. According to him right speech means speaking the truth, abstaining from lies, not making slanderous speech, not using harsh words, using words that are gentle and soothing to the ear and being courteous and agreeable to many. Buddha always asked his disciples to exercise control over their tongues. Most importantly it is the use of words and language that distinguishes a man from an animal. Thirdly, Buddha stressed on the importance of right action because it prevents us from indulging in violence, treachery and sexual misconduct. The need of the



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hour is non-violence and the world badly needs it right now to save itself from disaster. There is another respect in which Buddhism has become very relevant in the modern times. The “Vippasana” method of meditation is becoming increasingly popular among people of all ages, ethnicities and cultures. It helps people to deal with diseases like migraine, mental tension and nervous diseases. Today, most of our suffering is our own creation because of ignorance, greed and ego. The teachings of Buddhism are not just meant for an individual. On the contrary, in the present era, these teachings become relevant for an entire country which is made up of individuals. If a positive mental culture is adopted by the individuals of a nation, all negative aspects like greed, jealousy and ego can be significantly reduced. The practise of four “Brahmaviharas” like “maitri”, “karuna”, “mudita”, and “upeksa” as taught by Buddha are very relevant today.

3. NON-VIOLENCE AND RIGHT LIVELIHOOD: SIGNIFICANCE IN MODERN TIMES

“Ahimsa” or non-violence is one of the cardinal virtues and an important tenet of major religions including Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. It is a multi-dimensional concept inspired by the premise that all living beings have the spark of divine spiritual energy and therefore, to hurt another being is to hurt oneself. According to Buddhist philosophy, non-violence is just one among the various other practices like honesty, empathy and philanthropy that a person should follow to tread on the path of salvation. The traditional Buddhist understanding of non-violence is not as rigid as in some other religions like Jainism.

The relevance and emphasis of Buddhism on non-violence has been wrongly interpreted by some scholars. Some people who propagate Buddhism as a negative religion state that Buddhism teaches man to escape the problems facing him and that it leaves him unprepared to face the problems of the real world. But that is not the case. The remark that it inculcates a weakening influence is not justified. It is because of this unbalanced view of some scholars that the weakening of a person is attributed to the non-violent teachings of Buddhism. It is indeed unfortunate to see the non-violent teaching of Buddha being confused with pacifism.

Buddha once said “It is better to conquer yourself than to win a thousand battles. Then the victory is yours. It cannot be taken from you, not by angels or by demons, heaven or hell.” Instead of being a theologian, Buddha was a liberator who taught us of the path to nirvana, freedom from delusion, hate and fear. It still puzzles some people today who want to understand what “ism” or what philosophy he propounded. But in reality, he was against all embracing belief systems. Whenever Buddha taught “Dhamma”, he started with the five moral precepts: not to steal, lie, use intoxicants, have sexual misconduct and not to kill. Therefore, nonviolence becomes the first prerequisite step to walk on Buddha’s path of “Dhamma”. For a student of Buddha, non-violence is a psychological necessity to become a good human being. In the present era, it has become very important to realise that enmity, hate and violence never improve our state of mind, on the contrary destroy it. There were certain differences in the non-violence as taught by Buddha and pacifism. Buddha did not teach a social or political philosophy. He gave a path of non-violence that he asked people to follow. And he also realised that the same path was not suitable for all the people because they had different histories and choices. In other words, Lord Buddha taught people according to their “karma”.

A very good example that his non-violence was not pacifism can be explained as follows. He was himself of the warrior caste and maintained cordial relations with the other rulers of adjoining states. Although he himself shunned political involvement, he never asked his royal students to abandon legal administration, warfare and other political activities related to their kingdoms. It is true that he asked his followers and students not to indulge in violent activities. However, he never asked anyone to turn weak in the face of danger or adversity and tolerate the cruelties of others. It is here that the crucial essence of his teachings lies. A similar understanding of the early and ancient understanding of Buddha’s teaching of non-violence comes from King Asoka. He lived several hundred years after Lord Buddha and is credited to be known as the greatest Buddhist ruler of all times. He carved famous rock edicts which tell us about principles based on Dhamma – the universal path to liberation- which are universal philosophies and not restricted to Buddhism. Although Asoka’s conversion to Dhamma led him to abandon military conquest, he didn’t abjure warfare, never abandoned his armies and retained the option of capital punishment. He explicitly banned animal sacrifice and protected his kingdom from the oppression of foreign forces.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RIGHT LIVELIHOOD: To put an end to suffering and tread on the path of salvation, Lord Buddha devised an Eightfold Path and having a right livelihood is one of its main constituents. According to Buddha, without having a right livelihood and abstaining from illegal activities, one cannot lead a spiritual life. A person must observe the five precepts which include abstinence from killing, stealing, sexual intercourse, telling lies and taking alcoholic drinks and right livelihood means earning livelihood without breaking these five precepts. For instance, if one deals in flesh, kills human beings, slaughters animals and sells arms, poison or liquor, then these kinds of livelihoods can’t be considered pure. Of course, these trades were mentioned keeping in mind the situations and environment of the times in which Buddha preached, but these sermons are very relevant in the contemporary times as well. Right livelihood should not be earned by just small sections of individuals, but by entire nations. Only then the whole



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world may realise peace, prosperity and harmony. In fact, Lord Buddha did not just mention the means of right livelihood, he also told us about the wrong ones. A lot of emphasis has been laid on trading in an honest manner. While trading we come in contact with our fellow human beings and it becomes very important not to hurt or injure them in any way. Throughout our lives, we get a lot of chances to indulge in dishonest and greedy means of trading, but here comes the opportunity for us to practise self-control and honesty.

Buddha has wondered “All wrong-doing arises because of mind. If mind is transformed can wrong-doing remain?” Let us consider some examples which will explain Lord Buddha’s teachings in greater detail. Today individuals and nations trade in weapons on a very large scale and therefore the danger of annihilation of humanity has increased manifold. The world is virtually sitting on a volcano ready to erupt. Although a valid argument is that weapons are required to protect a nation and its citizens and also to feel confident and secure, but at the same time it leads to a situation of a perpetual cold war. In such a situation how can the world live in peace? For this reason, Buddha forbids us to deal in weapons and harmful ammunition. Secondly, trading in flesh means slaughtering innocent animals and selling their meat which Buddha has condemned as a bad profession. Thirdly, trading in human beings is monstrous and only someone completely devoid of love and compassion can indulge acts of such monstrosity like trading humans for slavery and sexual exploitation. Fourthly, trading in alcohol is equally harmful because alcohol makes a person lose his sense of responsibility and he becomes a bad citizen. There are so many instances of people becoming addicted to alcohol and they lose all their money and so many families are broken. This practice of abstaining from consuming and selling alcohol is very relevant in the present scenario because not only individual but entire societies are affected by it. And lastly, the fifth trade that Buddha warned against in selling poison. It is the ultimate means of taking a life and is extremely dangerous and harmful. A major example in this regard is the chemical warfare that is carried on these days. Its results can be disastrous and people are afflicted with diseases that last their entire lifetime. Such diseases not only afflict the people living and witnessing the warfare, but they are carried from generation to generation. However, Buddha explained that if a poison is capable of saving someone’s life it does not remain a poison but becomes a lifesaving drug and selling it is not forbidden.

Therefore, these kinds of negative professions and many more like black marketing, adultery, yellow journalism, blackmailing and dishonest advertising should be avoided at all costs. By adopting honesty, the entire world will become abode of peace.

4. BUDDHISM: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

We think that the world is highly advanced these days with great advancements in various fields, but is it really the case? Corruption, crimes and atrocities against women are at a peak in the present society. According to the teachings of Buddha, these negative tendencies and actions are taking place because of a lack of spiritual development. Therefore, it becomes even more important to reflect on and embrace the Buddhist teachings.

When one talks about Buddhist spirituality, it doesn’t mean giving up one’s family life for salvation and enlightenment. On the contrary, all the teachings of Lord Buddha are based on scientific principles. Albert Einstein once said that “If there is a religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.” Buddha left us with many teachings on a very rational and scientific approach to human development. For this reason, no scientist or scholar has ever had any disagreement with Buddhist teachings. To guide humans on the path of development Buddha presented various lists and methods out of which two guiding paths really help us. These are “the Eightfold Path” and “the Panchsila” or the five precepts. The components of “the Eightfold Path” are as follows:

Sila (Morality)

1. Right Speech
2. Right action
3. Right livelihood

Samadhi (Mastery over mind)

1. Right effort
2. Right mindfulness
3. Right concentration

Panna (Direct Experiential Wisdom)

1. Right thought
2. Right understanding



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These are the eight practices which Lord Buddha encourages every human being to follow to walk on the path of self-development. At the same time Lord Buddha also proposed the “Panchsila” or the 5 precepts which enable us to lead a healthy life morally as well as physically and spiritually. They are:

1. Abstaining from killing: Just as we don't wish to be hurt or be killed, in the same manner we should abstain from killing any living being. Killing is always the result of deep sorrow and agony in the heart. Even a terrorist who kills people on a massive scale cannot do the act without deep sorrow and angst dwelling in his heart.
2. Abstaining from stealing: An activity like stealing is not a casual misconduct but affects a person on the mental scale as well. In fact, it is developing into a serious disease these days known as “Kleptomania”. Irrespective of the value of the things, no one wishes his/ her property to be stolen.
3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct: Sexual misconduct is a sign of an unhealthy and unstable mind and in turn it goes on to harm one's mind even more. No one wishes for one's father, mother, sister, brother, husband or wife to commit adultery.
4. Abstaining from lying: Similar to stealing, lying can also have a deep impact on our minds, leading to serious mental and psychological diseases. Just as we wouldn't like our colleague or friend to lie and cheat against us, we shouldn't do it to our any other person as well.
5. Abstaining from the use of intoxicants: Intoxicants cause a person to lose control because of which he may not be able to observe the above-mentioned precepts. Additionally, intoxicants harm the nervous system, the heart and brain cells. People may also become addicted to intoxicants because of which it becomes essential to practice abstinence.

Studying about and observing the above-mentioned paths of self-development help a person to walk on the path of nirvana. Buddha has rightly said “You will not be punished for your anger; you will be punished by your anger.”

EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES: Buddhist teachings are not just meant to attain a higher level of consciousness and enlightenment by following strict rules and regulations. On the contrary, they are meant for the common man in the 21st century. And of course, they said the common man in attaining the aforementioned higher level of consciousness by guiding him in his everyday life. In order to help all beings from suffering, one should be a good cultivator, excelling in moral and academic achievements. Even a few years ago, the subject of moral education had a lot of significance in primary education. But unfortunately, this subject is losing its importance day by day to fancier subjects that make us more technologically advanced but not spiritually inclined. It is very important to revive the subject of moral education and incorporate Buddha's teachings into it. We should realize that these teachings are not about any particular religion but about humanity as a whole. Before comprehensive learning about the good of mankind, it is important to incorporate good virtue by ending our afflictions including greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance, as they are the sources of all the misdoings in this world. These teachings should begin at the primary school level itself. Social service should be taken up as a practical subject where children shall learn that being materialistic is a negative approach to life which will enable the importance of charity to sink in at a young age. Thus, it will annihilate greed and excessive desire for material things. Buddhism always teaches us that there are human beings out there who are not as fortunate or blessed as we are and helping them enables us to move ahead on our path to salvation. These activities at the school level also instill in us values like humility and respect. Secondly, at the employment level, more and more people should be given opportunities to work in various charitable fields which will improve the world and also help the needy. These values are deeply embedded and inherent in the Buddhist values and one need not practice the religion to exercise these virtuous practices. Perhaps this is the reason that so many people in the western world who are plagued with life's problems are turning towards Buddhism? We need to look for the answer within ourselves. Buddha has rightly said “I do not believe in a fate that falls on men however they act; but I do believe in a fate that falls on them unless they act.”

6. CONCLUSION: BUDDHISM FOR WORLD PEACE

The modern society is plagued by various evils and problems. Some of them are the widening gaps of wealth and opportunity in the world, the maldistribution of water and food, shelter, healthcare and education, the global reach of economic and political exploitation by rich countries and corporations, the lawlessness and corruption of government officials at every level, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and the reign of organised crime and terrorism in poor and rich nations alike, and finally, the deep divisions of race, religion, caste, ethnicity, nationality, and culture that drive the hatreds and resentments of people everywhere. But it is also a critical turning point for humanity where global systems of communication and transport make it possible for people to work together and to end these evils; when vast technical and material resources and compassionate volunteers aid the people in the event of calamities like the tsunami and wars; and when citizens of different backgrounds, races, religions and culture come together for the sake of their children and world peace.

The new Buddhism that has emerged which aids world peace has practices and teachings in a global network of affiliated or non-affiliated NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations). This new Buddhism offers a new interpretation of the ancient Buddhist



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concepts. The emphasis is no longer on personal salvation and the attainment of “Nirvana”, but on the collective worldly awakening which includes individual, communities, villages, towns, cities and nations. And it is not a far-fetched futuristic concept but is taking place in this lifetime in this world. According to the contemporary Buddhist philosophy, “worldly awakening” is the quest for a clean environment, safe drinking water, basic clothing, diet, housing and health care, and access to communication energy, education and cultural and spiritual resources. This clearly shows us that Buddhism is not only about religious teachings about Dhamma and salvation. It is much broader in its context which helps the community and the whole world to attain peace and salvation in the true sense. The recent rise of Buddhist social service can be seen not only in areas with a large Buddhist population but in every corner of the world. This newly revitalized Buddhism has groups that have adopted a hands-on approach to reach out to society through charitable works and social causes.

The Nobel Prize has been conferred on to two Buddhist leaders who have struggled for democracy and cultural survival in the times of extreme hardships: Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama of Tibet (in 1989) and Aung San Ssu Kyi, the detained opposition leader of Myanmar (in 1991). Therefore, Buddhist believers have been involved in social welfare and medical services, education, publications, and environmentalism all over the world. Perhaps the most meaningful manifestation of Buddhism today is that of the Dalit Buddhist Liberation Movement in India, the land of Buddhism’s birth, where the oppressed class of Dalits were offered better lives through education, employment and equality.

At this turning point in humanity, it is the responsibility of all citizens to find ways of applying the teachings of techniques of religious practices of not only Buddhism but all other religions in our quest for world peace.

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