

# **Buddhist Ethics and Contemporary World Scenario (Based on Theravāda Buddhism)**

**By:**

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The Buddha was indeed the brightest star in the galaxy of reformers. He could see with His penetrating insight that there was a good deal that needed to be reformed in the old philosophical and ethical views. The topmost priority, according to Him, had to be given to purity of characters besides high philosophical thought. During His time, majority of the Sramanas as well as Brāhmanas cared more for outward chance and transformation whereas the Buddha emphasized on inner purity and inner transformation, as hinted in the *Upanshads*. As per the Buddha, inner purity was the basis of spiritual progress and in absence of inner purity; all outward appearance amounted to mere hypocrisy. The Buddha emphasized this point when He said: “O monk of evil intelligence! Of what good is matted hair to you and of what good is the deer skin? When internally you are unfathomable, why are you polishing the exterior?” (*The Dhammapada, Brāhmaṇa Vagga*, Verse No. 15). The Buddha is one of the greatest Ethical teachers world has ever produced. He starts with the assumption that life is suffering and removal of suffering is the motive of His teachings. The Buddhist Ethics is based on its psychology which is elaborated in its ethical interest. The Buddha’s ethical teachings are summed up under the ‘*Eight Fold Path*’ about which He himself is reported to have said in His first sermon called the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*: “There are two extremes which he has gone forth ought not to follow habitual devotion, on one hand and to self mortification on the other hand which is quite painful”.

The doctrine of Buddhism is the philosophy of life.<sup>1</sup> The ethical persuasion under Theravāda Buddhism gives light to the dark corners of moral crisis which occurs abundantly in the modern ways of living. Buddhism used a variety of teachings and means to help people come out of delusions that causes attachments and sufferings. These teachings focus on *dhamma* in its three aspects: how to understand practices and realize it. These teachings have become more imperative in the fast changing modern life. In this age of material civilization, how one has to conduct one’s life seems to be determined by oneself. Thought this is what is required for one to decide what is good and bad oneself, there are certain norms that need to be practiced. In the absence of these norms, the

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<sup>1</sup> Sang Chandra-ngarm, *Buddhism and Thai people*, Chiang Mai: Ming Muang Printing Press, 1999: 4.

conduct becomes corrupted. Another difficulty in practicing good conduct in modern life is due to the fact that modern technology and science has largely replaced the spiritual norms with their own rationality which is mechanistic and sensual.

In the present world scenario, human beings gives all emphasis on development, growth and material comforts, changes and mobility, all markers of modern life-face a deep moral crisis when it encounters with the moral agency, the bearer of virtues in human being. It is in this context, that the Buddha's Enlightenment has much to do with this crisis of modern life, the problem of being a moral agent in a material civilization. Theravāda Buddhism gives way to adjust the world of fast nobilities-by instilling certain values deep inside the agency himself, to practice certain knowledge about how one has to live and about the philosophy of life.

The primary concentration of my paper is upon the ethics of Theravāda Buddhism to relocate the contemporary relevance and importance of value-based society in terms of current moral problems emerged due to technological advancements. In this paper I am trying to investigate the ethical concepts in Theravāda Buddhism which can be extended to the practice of ordinary daily experiences so that the Theravāda can be unconfined from being a discipline of monkhood to an ethical practice of daily experience. This paper related to the concerns with Theravāda ethics towards finding a connection between conducting Theravāda ethics and leading a better life, thereby rendering a more attainable solution of the much accosted problems of moral issues that plagued our present times. Therein, lays the significance of the conduct of Theravāda principles in relation to overall well beings of human life. Criteria for judging the moral and the highest virtue or the highest life goal are discussed with an analysis of Theravāda Buddhism and its scripture and other related documentaries according to the Theravāda *Tipitaka*.

Theravāda considers that the household life is incompatible with the pursuit of spiritual life and believes 'monkhood' as only way to attain the ultimate goal. That's the reason it is more than a just a school of Buddhist monasticism existing in several countries like Thailand, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. The Theravāda school is closely associated with the *Buddhavacana* (the teaching of Buddha) preserved in *Pāli* language. According to the commentarial and *Vamsa* tradition, Theravāda is original Buddhism. Like the *Sutta* (Sanskrit, *Sūtra*) and *Vinaya* texts of its *Tipitaka*, its *Abhidhamma* texts too are attributed directly to the Buddha, who is said to have taught them to his mother in heaven, where they were witnessed for posterity by the Buddha's disciple Sāriputta (Sanskrit, Sāriputra). Theravāda believes that

its commentaries were compiled at the First Council following the Buddha's death. All the texts in its canon were rehearsed again at a second council one hundred years later.<sup>2</sup>

Buddhism, like other systems of Indian philosophical tradition and religion, expects purity at personal level by practicing in accordance with the law of *Kamma*<sup>3</sup> (Skt. *Karma*). The term '*Kamma*' etymologically means 'work or action' but in term of '*Dhamma*', it has a specific meaning 'action based on intention (*cetanā*)'. In other words, an action belongs to the law of *kamma* only if it has been done with an intention. An action, free of intention, can not be considered as *kamma*. All *kammas* produce results whether good or bad and the agent is bound to bear them by the *Law of Dependant Origination (Patityasamuppāda)*. The Theravāda tradition focuses mainly upon the actions or *Kamma* we perform since *Kamma*, in relation to the world, can be referred as the manifestation of thoughts through action. Since, every *Kamma* produce fruit according to the kind of *Kamma* performed by the agent, therefore, it is considered in Buddhism that good *Kamma* produce good result and bad *Kamma* produce bad result. The Theravāda school, like the Buddha, prefers the good *Kamma* so that the performer can make harmony and peace in the world and attain the ultimate goal (*Nibbāna*).

Monastic ethics of Theravāda tradition can be understood through its historical background. The monastic ethics is mainly based on the disciplinary rules, known as *Vinaya*, in Buddhism. The followers of the Buddha have preserved *Vinaya* belonging to the various Buddhist schools and traditions namely Theravāda, Mahāsaṅghika, Mahisāsaka, Dharmaguptaka, Sarvāstivāda etc. Almost every school follows to the basic ethical teaching of the Buddha preserved in *Pāli* texts. It is important to note that the monastic life evolved at the time of the Buddha when he addressed, for the first time, a group of sixty monks.<sup>4</sup> But the real establishment of monasteries took place after many years of his first teaching.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert E. Buswell, Jr., Editor in Chief, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* volume two, United States of America, 2003: 837.

<sup>3</sup> "The law of *Kamma* is one of the triple rounds in the process of *Dependant Origination (pratītyasamuppāda)*. The doctrine of dependant origination, according to the Buddha, is the triple round of defilement, *Kamma*, and result". Bikkhu P. A. Payutto, *Good, Evil and Beyond: Kamma in the Buddha's Teaching*, Bangkok, Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1993, 1-4.

<sup>4</sup> "O monks, I am freed from all bonds both human and divine. You are also freed from all bonds both human and divine. Go forth,, O monks, on tour, for the sake of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of compassion for the wordings, for the profit, gain and happiness of deities and men. Do not go alone, go two of you together. Preach the *dhamma*, good at the beginning, good at the middle and good at the end. Propagate the highest life which is pure, complete and endowed with meaning and sound". *Vinayapitaka*<sup>3</sup>, Vol. 1, PTS, 1879, 20-21.

The *Vinayapitaka* of Theravāda School composes of five texts, namely, *Parājjikapāli*, *Pācittiyapāli*, *Cullavaggapāli*, *Mahāvaggapāli* and *Parivārapāli*. There has been discussed the disciplinary rules for monks and nuns in first two texts, known as *Ubhatovibhanga*, of the *Vinayapitaka*. In the *Cullavaggapāli* and *Mahāvaggapāli*, the duties, rules and other social ceremonial activities of monastic life have been discussed thoroughly.<sup>5</sup> The objectives of the ethics was, even is, to maintain the discipline among the monks and nuns encourage them to follow the moral life. The objectives are as follows:

1. For the excellence of the *Samgha*.
2. For the comfort of the *Samgha*.
3. For the restraintment of evil-minded persons.
4. For the comfort of well-behaved monks.
5. For the restraintment of defilements related to the present life.
6. For the destruction of defilements related to future life.
7. For the satisfaction of unsatisfied persons in regard to the order.
8. For the multiplication of satisfaction of those who are already satisfied in regard to the order.
9. For the long standing of the *dhamma*.
10. For the encouragement of the discipline.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the Theravāda tradition is mainly concerned with purely monastic moral life, which is the centre point of my present research work.

From past to the present, we find a gradual and systematic progress, both moral and non-moral, in the human society through the scientific development in technology all around and the entire mankind has been taking a new shape day by day. Today, we are dependant more on the technologies compared to the past. The terms ‘Development’ and ‘Technology’ seem to be synonymous when we observe the modern trend and form of human life. We see a revolutionary growth in scientific inventions in past centuries. But surprisingly, due to the scientific development, ‘man’ has been ‘a machine’ today. The essence and value of humanness have been slipped into the subservient. In the past man was working for virtues and values but today he is working for machine and indirectly damaging his own existence.

Definitely, it is impossible to exist in today’s world without science and technologies but there are many other things like our identity,

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<sup>5</sup> Prof. Sumanapala Galmanagoda, *Buddhist Social Philosophy and Ethics*, Samadhi Buddhist Society, Singapore, 2006, 72-80.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. Cit.*, Vol. III, PTS, 1881, 21.

individuality, social responsibility, moral duty and obligation to be considered at the same time. The human society, in the present time, necessarily has to have close and consistent relationship with science but not at the cost of our duties since our duties reflect our rationality.

Today, human duties and obligations have been more difficult to perform than in the past since we now are an object of machine. It is a fact that in the early time there was a long gap in communication between different societies and communities. The people had less and inconvenient communication means. Their relationship was not so strong because they were in the early stage of development. In the agricultural age, their mutual relationship developed but only a little. However, the society was moving forward day by day and the science was emerging very fast. As a result, we have a world we live in today having remarkable advancement in technologies on the one hand and facing problems of different kinds in different areas on the other. The moral problem is one of them.

Today, we are living in the era of globalization in which the entire world is like a small village. The wide and leading relationship is growing with rapidity between two nations to share and exchange their knowledge, culture, and social life style. This has been possible only after the development in science and technology. Thus, the broader and wider communication through computer, internet, and transportation is today's motto and very important for our survival.

However, the developments coming through modern technologies have created many big problems to the society, for instance, the ethico-socio-political, environmental, religious etc. These problems are playing a contradictory role in moral life. The man is unable to decide what to do and what not to do because moral life requires different norms compared to the machinery life. For this reason, most of the people are living in mental frustration. Their lives have become a burden to them. Consequently, the question what is good and what is bad is not easy for them to decide. I, like others, believe that the Buddhist ethical life may be an answer.

We find a rich and relevant discussion upon ethical and moral problems both in western and eastern world by philosophers, thinkers and religious personalities. The Buddha is one of them who have shown a way of virtuous life, not only to his followers but to the entire world. Buddhism focuses mainly upon the purity of human nature by living moral life. There are many ethical rules for a good and happy life, which we see in primary texts of Buddhism. Those ethical norms or principles are in fact the way of good life, which I intend to look thoroughly in Theravāda Tradition.

But before I proceed towards Theravāda tradition, I would like to focus briefly upon what are the ethical problems that emerged conceptually. In general, it is considered that the ethics is the study of ‘moral problem’ or ‘what is good and bad in human conduct’. G. E. Moore, a moral philosopher, uses the term ‘ethics’ to cover the general inquiry into what is good.<sup>7</sup> According to Professor Wolf, ethics is a normative science and its main problem turns on the following conceptions:

1. The highest good of human conduct, or its ultimate ideal aim, which may serve as the ultimate standard of right conduct.
2. The origin or source of our knowledge of the highest good or of right or wrong.
3. The sanctions of moral conduct.
4. The motives which prompts right conduct.<sup>8</sup>

There is a close connection between the above mentioned ethical problems, though conceptual, by Prof. Wolf and the moral teachings of Buddha. The *Lokuttara*<sup>9</sup> state, in Buddhism, serves as the ultimate standard of good conduct. The teaching of Buddha covers the connection between the moralities of daily life and *Lokuttara* state. In the hierarchy, the *Lokuttara* state is on the top and a morality of daily life is on the bottom. According to Buddhism, every person must begin from the bottom (morality of everyday life) to the top (*Lokuttara* state) to attain ultimate goal (*Nibbāna*). This interrelated connection is known as *Magga* or *Mārga* (a path or road). This Buddhist approach provides the complete ethics both for the common men and monks.<sup>10</sup>

In Theravāda Buddhism, the morality is known as *Dhamma*<sup>11</sup> which decides what a person ought to perform and what ought not to perform. A matter of *dhamma* is better known as the ethical norms and principles in Buddhism. It is a thing to be considered for education to understand, in wider sense, what is useful for the mankind.

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<sup>7</sup> “I may say that I intend to use ‘ethics’ to cover more than this – a usage for which there is, I think, quite sufficient authority. I am using it to cover the general inquiry into what is good.” G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge University Press, Reprint 1954: 2.

<sup>8</sup> From the article of Professor Wolf published in *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

<sup>9</sup> “*Lokuttara*: ‘Supermundane’ is a term for the 4 paths and 4 fruitions of *Sotapatti* etc. (s. *ariya-puggala*), with *Nibbāna* as ninth. Hence, one speaks of ‘9 Supermundane Things’ (*navalokuttaradhamma*).” Nyanatolika, *Buddhist Dictionary*, 90.

<sup>10</sup> Hammalawa Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, Wilson Publication, Boston, 2003: 4.

<sup>11</sup> “*Dhamma*: lit. the ‘Bearer’, Constitution (or Nature of a thing) Norm, Law (jus), Doctrine; Justice, Righteousness; Quality; Thing, Object of Mind (s. *āyatana*). Nyanaponika, *Buddhist Dictionary*, published in Taiwan, 47.

In general, it is accepted that for every person there must have ethical rules to perform his duty accordingly for his own sake and for other persons in the society. He should take care of what is beneficial and supportive for social welfare without harming a single human being. If every human being performs his or her duty, there would necessary be peace and harmony in the world. The moral problems emerge when the man either does not live according to the expected norms of good life or live in a way that always harms others life. Theravāda Buddhism shows a way to enjoy a happy and peaceful life by possessing some human qualities and virtues.

The term 'ethics' has always been used in the term of human behavior that makes a push (externally and internally) to perform an action rightly and to abstain from bad things. A right action can be performed with the help of wise knowledge in which the agent knows the case and result of his action both in his daily life and life at different situations. Theravāda Buddhism attempts to develop such a good life. My endeavor in this thesis is to focus upon the way Theravāda Buddhism applies to solve the different problems of the society particularly of modern time.

Normally, the different religions seem to have two approaches: one, that suggests to ignore wrong and unethical path completely and concentrate wholly on the higher aim of merging with God or realizing ultimate truth; and the other that suggests to go into great detail about such matters telling us how to organize our will for a particular action, what foods to eat and what to avoid, what clothes to wear and what not to wear etc. These would seem to be two extremes. Theravāda Buddhism is a teaching of moderation. It steers a middle course between the two extremes. It prefers practicality in the affairs of daily life. It offers guidelines for human behavior to be followed and ignored based on timeless truth.<sup>12</sup>

In some situations, we find our lives struggling between two conflicting interests, for instance, good and bad, moral and immoral, rich and poor, just and unjust etc. Phra Dhammapitaka rightly observes that if the goal of life is seen as material wealth or power, the society struggles between conflicting individual interests and tries to protect some and ignore some others. The attitude of this kind, in a particular society, belongs to the "negative ethic" that is based on selfish interests. The Buddhist teachings belong to a "positive ethic" that always prefers the well-being of all rather than the interests of an individual. There is no category of poor and rich, boss and worker, ruler and ruled in Theravāda

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<sup>12</sup> Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A.Payutto), *A constitution for Living*, Bangkok: Religious Affairs Printing Press, 1997: 6.

Buddhism. Everyone has equal right to live and utilize the resources. One can equally maximize his self-development and well-being to reach to the ultimate truth, i.e. the Buddha teaching.<sup>13</sup>

It is considered that for the Buddhist followers, the highest state of knowledge lies in the enlightenment of the Buddha and his teachings.<sup>14</sup> Enlightenment, in Buddhism, means to have knowledge of the things in accordance with reality (*Yathābhuta*<sup>3</sup>). According to Buddha, the appearance of a thing exists in the phenomenal world, or the stream of events is entirely according to absolute reality. In his own words, the climax of his teaching is as follows:

“He comes to know what, in absolute truth, are the influxes (*Āsavas*), their origin, their cessation, and the way to their cessation. From knowing thus and seeing thus, his mind is freed from the influxes and he knows ‘I am free.’ He knows: ‘Exhausted is birth; the Higher Life has come to perfection; that which should be done has been done; there will be no more of the present state.’”<sup>15</sup>

Theravāda Buddhism attempts to follow Buddha’s teaching in the same way as it believes that the absolute reality or the knowledge of it always lies in it. The followers of this tradition have the view that Buddhism is an ethical system that contains an excellent moral code both for the monks and the laity. However, it is much more than an ordinary moral teaching that provides a path for a good life for everyone. Some philosophers like Kant<sup>16</sup> take morality as an end but in Buddhism morality (*Sīla*) is only a mean to an end. It is not an end in itself. It is the preliminary stage to purify oneself with the help of Wisdom (*Prajñā*). Narada Maha Thera has minutely observed this fact in the following lines:

“Morality (*Sīla*) is only the preliminary stage and is a means to an end, but not an end in itself. Though absolutely essential, it alone does not lead to one’s Deliverance or perfect purity. It is only the first stage on the Path of Purity. Beyond morality is wisdom (*Paññā*). The base of Buddhism is morality, and wisdom is its apex. As the pair of wings of a bird are these two complementary virtues. Wisdom is like unto man’s eyes; morality is like unto his feet. One of the

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>14</sup> H. Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, Canada: wisdom publications, 2003: 15.

<sup>15</sup> D. I. 84.

<sup>16</sup> A German philosopher, who emphasized on moral ends and is well known for his doctrine ‘Duty for Duty sake’.



appellatives of the Buddha is *Vijjācaranasampanna* – endowed with wisdom and conduct.”<sup>17</sup>

The fourth of the *Four Noble Truths* reflects the ethics of Buddhism based on its philosophy. It reflects that morality is a rational and practical code for all based on individual experience in the phenomenal world. It is neither based on any divine revelation nor is ingenious product of an exceptional mind. It is the code of the perfection as Prof. Max Muller opines.<sup>18</sup>

Interestingly, Theravāda Buddhism deals with the questions what is ethically good and bad and what is neither good nor bad. It tends to focus upon deeds that cause to cease all other deeds. Good deeds, according to this tradition, are essential for one’s emancipation, and when one attains once the ultimate goal of the Holy Life he transcends both good and evil. In Buddhism, deeds, associated with attachment (*Lobha*), are called illwill (*Dosa*) and deeds, associated with delusion (*Moha*), are evil. But, a deed, always associated with non-attachment (*Alobha*), is goodwill (*Adosa*) and goodwill is good forever.

On the other hand, there are deeds that possess no ethical value, for example, the deeds of an *Arahant*<sup>19</sup>. The reason is that he has gone beyond both good and evil. But it does not mean that he is passive. No, he is always active and active selflessly. He always helps others to tread the path he has trodden himself. His actions, in *Pāli*, are called *kiriya* (functional).<sup>20</sup>

But one question can be asked: what is the criterion of ethical norms in Buddhism particularly in Theravāda tradition? One can find the answer in the admonition given by the Buddha to young *Sāmanera Rāhula*.

“If there is a deed, Rāhula, you wish to do, reflect thus: Is this deed conducive to my harm, or to others harm, or to that of both? Then is this a bad deed entailing suffering. From such a deed you must resist. If there is a deed you wish to do, reflect thus: Is this deed not conducive to my harm, nor to others’ harm, or to that of both? Then is this a good deed entailing happiness. Such a deed you must do again and again.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Narada, *The Buddha and his teachings*, Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre, 159-160.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>19</sup> This word is derived from the root *arh*, to deserve, to be worthy, to be fit, and is used to denote a person who has achieved the goal of religious life (in Theravada Buddhism). G. P. Malalasekera (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Volume II, 1966: 9.

<sup>20</sup> Narada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, Singapore Buddhist Meditation Centre, 160.

<sup>21</sup> *Majjhima Nikāya*, I, 61, *Rāhulovāda Sutta*, 416.

According to the Buddha, if a particular deed is harmful either for the agent or for the others or for both, it is a bad deed and creates suffering. The Buddha forbids performing such deeds. On the other hand, if a deed is desirable to attain happiness for all (both for human beings and non-human beings) by every means, it should be exercised every time. To understand Theravāda Buddhism and its ethical feature, one must carefully read the primary texts like *Dhammapada*, *Sigālovāda Sutta*, *Vyāgghapajja Sutta*, *Mangala Sutta*, *Mettā Sutta*, *Parābhava Sutta*, *Vasala Sutta*, *Dhammika Sutta*, etc.

It can be said here that in Theravāda tradition, morality is the mean to realize the essence of the Buddha's teaching. It is a beginning and not an end. If one is living a moral life as taught by the Buddha, he is a good person and is able to reach the truth of phenomenal world. In fact, Buddhism is a way to live a happy life. That is the reason it is sometimes called as unity of philosophy, ethics and religion.

It is notable that the Buddha talks about a universal code of ethics. He formulates a moral code of different kinds for the human civilization. He provides for us an abstract principle to use as a guideline in determining the basic precepts of morality. This is known as the rule "using oneself as a standard" (*Attanā<sup>3</sup> upāma<sup>3</sup> katvā*). This is the rule to decide how to treat others. The Buddha derives, from this abstract principle, the four main precepts of his moral code: (1) to abstain from killing, (2) from stealing, (3) from sexual misconduct, and (4) from lying. For the personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of the communities in the society, he adds a fifth moral code: to abstain from intoxicants thinking that it will help to establish communal harmony. These are the Five Precepts (*Pañcasīla*) and the basic moral code of Buddhism.

However, the Buddha does not regard morality merely as a set of rules based on human reasoning. He is of the thought that there is a universal law, which connects our conduct with our personal destinies and ensures that moral justice ultimately prevails in the world. This is, in fact, 'the law of karma' and its fruit, which holds that our actions, based on motive and intention, determine the type of rebirth we take and the diverse experiences we undergo in the entire course of our lives. This is known as 'impersonal law'. This law does not work in accordance with the status of a person. It treats everyone equally whether the person is of high profile or of low profile, rich or poor. Those who violate the laws of morality do face its consequences of a bad rebirth and future misery. They can not escape from the different phases of suffering. Contrary to this, those who engage themselves in virtuous and moral conduct acquire wholesome *Karma* leading to future benefits, i.e. a good rebirth, a happy life and progress on the way to final liberation (*Mahāparinirvāna*).

Several primary and secondary texts on Buddhism reflect the fact that the Buddha gives special attention to the subjective springs of morality and is purely psychological. He traces immoral behavior to three mental factors known as ‘the three unwholesome roots’: greed, hatred, and delusion; and moral behavior to their opposites ‘the three wholesome roots’: non-greed (generosity), non-hate (kindness), and non-delusion (wisdom). He directs us to a more refined interior level of ethical purity to be achieved by mental practice or meditation. This refined interior level reveals in four lofty attitudes called the "divine abodes" (*Brahma-vihāra*). They are (1) loving-kindness (*Mettā*<sup>22</sup>), (2) the wish for the happiness and welfare of all beings; compassion (*Karunā*<sup>23</sup>), (3) the wish that all afflicted with suffering be freed from their suffering; altruistic joy (*Muditā*<sup>24</sup>), and (4) rejoicing in the happiness and success of others; and equanimity (*Upekkhā*<sup>25</sup>). In accordance with the Buddhism, these four divine attitudes are to be developed universally without distinction or discrimination.

Undoubtedly, the human beings are special in term of the rationality and different from the animals. They have special feature to develop themselves as ‘noble beings’ by education. They do have knowledge of how to conduct and live a good and happy life. But what is a good life? We have an answer of this question given by Phra Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto). He maintains that there are seven fundamental qualities, known as the auroras of a good life, to be acquired for becoming a noble being:

1. *Kalyānamittata* (having a "good friend", a person or social environment that is helpful to one's life development), seeking out sources of wisdom and good examples.
2. *Sīla-sampada* (perfection of morality), having discipline as a foundation for one's life development.
3. *Chanda-sampada* (perfection of aspiration): having a heart that aspires to learning and constructive action.
4. *Atta-sampada* (perfection of oneself): dedicating oneself to training for the realization of one's full human potential.
5. *Ditthi-sampada* (perfection of view): adhering to the principle of conditionality, seeing things according to cause and effect.

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<sup>22</sup> *Mijjatih Sinihyateeti Meta.*

<sup>23</sup> *Pardukkhe Sati Sadhunamhadaye Kampanam Karoteeti Karunā.*

<sup>24</sup> *Parsampatti Disva Modanti Etayati Muditā .*

<sup>25</sup> *Upekkhāteeti Upekkhā.*

6. *Appamāda-sampada* (perfection of heedfulness): establishing oneself in heedfulness.

7. *Yonisomanasikara-sampada* (perfection of wise reflection): thinking wisely so as to realize benefit and see the truth.<sup>26</sup>

In Theravāda Buddhism, the emphasis is mainly on those qualities, virtues, moral paths that make every person noble and gentle – a true human being. A true human being (*Manussa*) possesses good conduct (*Sucarita*): righteous bodily conduct (*Kaya-sucarita*), righteous speech (*Vaci-sucarita*), and righteous mentality (*Mano-sucarita*). *The first* does not allow a person to kill, oppress, harass, filch and misconduct as it possesses kindness, compassion and helpfulness. *The second* does not allow a person to speak lie, malicious speech, vulgar and frivolous speech as it possesses truth, politeness and gentleness. *The third* allows a person not to be greedy and not to have hateful and destructive thoughts. It allows cultivating right view (*Sammāditthi*) i.e. to understand the law of *Kamma*.<sup>27</sup>

A person needs to be moral because he contributes to social harmony through the practice of *Sangaha-vatthu*. It is the unity of four principles that unites people in a society: (1) *Dana*<sup>28</sup> (2) *Piyavaca* (3) *Atthacariya* and (4) *Samanattata*.

Traditional Buddhist ethics teaches that all that happens to us is a result of our *karma*. But, as Harvey points out, according to the *Pāli Suttas* this is not what the Buddha taught. He also points out that actions are wholesome not because of their effects, but rather that wholesome actions produce certain effects because they are wholesome. ‘Action’ or *karma*, as the *Pāli Suttas* tell us, is ‘intention’ *Cetanā*. And we are reminded that ‘The law of *karma* is not regarded as rigid and mechanical’, but is ‘flexible, fluid and dynamic’. For example, it is stated in early recensions of the *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra*, that ‘while it is a fault to kill an ant, it is not a fault to kill an *icchantika*’ (someone who is said to have no ‘good roots’ and therefore can never ever enter the spiritual path).

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<sup>26</sup> Phra Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto), *A Constitution for Living*, Thailand, Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education, 1997: 1-3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-9.

<sup>28</sup> “Dāna, derived from the root *da* – to give, means: “bestowing” or “giving”. In Buddhism, *Dāna* has an important ethical significance. There is another word used in Pāli literature to connote the same ethical meaning, namely, *caga*, which is mostly rendered into English as giving up or liberality, that is, ability to part with something one owns and values to benefit another. But *Dāna* seems to be the most popular and commonly used one.” Jotiya Dhirasekera and W. G. Weeraratne (eds.) *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, Vol. IV, 1979 – 1989: 307.

This research paper tries to throw sufficient light upon the ethical features of the Theravāda Buddhism from the different perspectives for better understanding of the tradition existing in several countries. It may encourage the audience and other people to have a better insight of the ethical life of layman, monks and their monasteries. However, from the practical point of view, it makes clear that the moral life is good for the humanity. The present problems of the world can be resolved by the practice of moral rules. The moral rules help to get mental peace, happiness, and prestige not only the agent of an action but the other persons too.

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