



THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

and Other Teachings

Ven. Dr K Sri Dhammananda

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Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery

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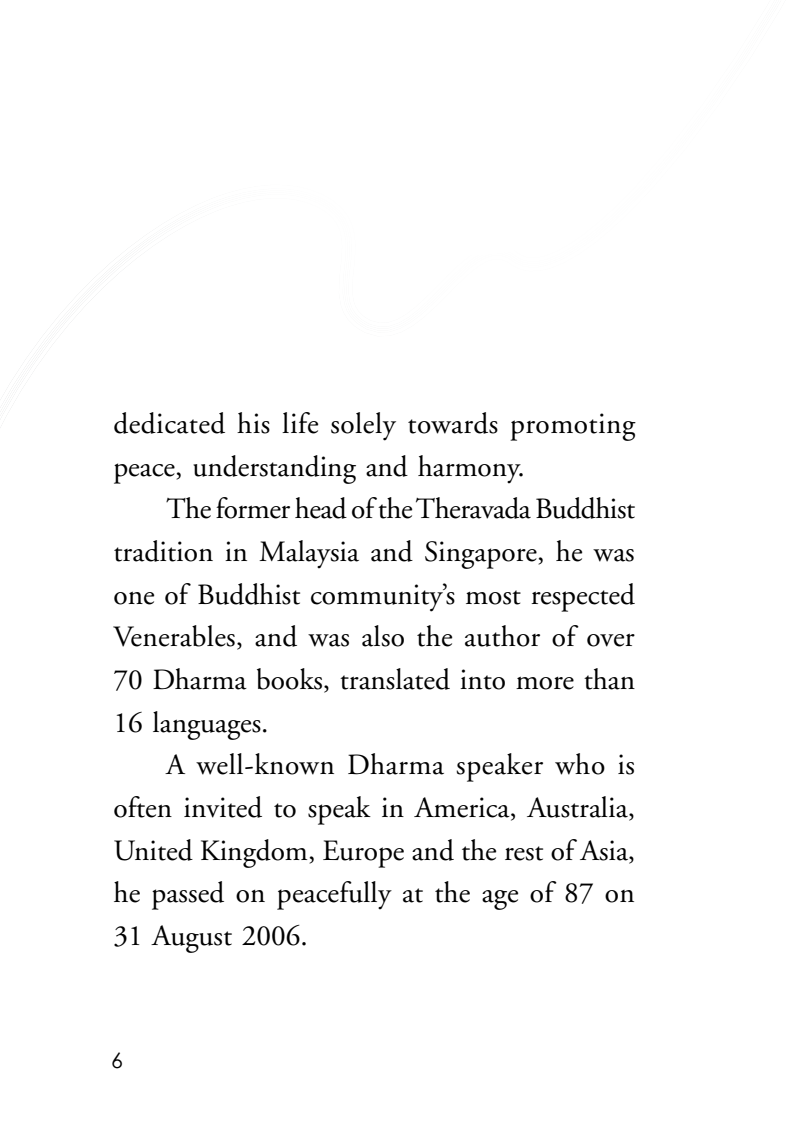
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“The gift of Dharma excels all gifts”



Ven Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda, was born in 1919 in Southern Sri Lanka (Ceylon). He was ordained as a novice monk at the age of 12 and was given the name “Dhammananda” meaning “one who experiences happiness through the Dharma”. He became a fully ordained monk in 1940 and later received higher ordination at the age of 22. After doing his postgraduate studies in India, he spent four years there spreading the Dharma. In 1952, from about 400 monks, he was selected to go to Malaya (Malaysia) to administer the religious needs of the Sinhalese Buddhists in the country. With over 50 years of missionary work, he



dedicated his life solely towards promoting peace, understanding and harmony.

The former head of the Theravada Buddhist tradition in Malaysia and Singapore, he was one of Buddhist community's most respected Venerables, and was also the author of over 70 Dharma books, translated into more than 16 languages.

A well-known Dharma speaker who is often invited to speak in America, Australia, United Kingdom, Europe and the rest of Asia, he passed on peacefully at the age of 87 on 31 August 2006.

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PREFACE



In memory of Ven. Dr K Sri Dhammananda, this book which is a compilation of some of the succinct teachings given by this well-known Venerable is published.

This book gives very clear, practical and direct advice to those who seek to achieve an understanding of their life on earth, and how to lead a noble and peaceful life amidst the confusion, murkiness, materialism and strong craving that this age heralds.

Ven. Dhammananda shows us the real nature of worldly life, giving us a correct understanding of life as it is and puts worldly pleasures into its right perspective. We are

responsible for our own inner peace, happiness and unhappiness, and for the way things turn out. Using the Middle Path, he guides us gently onto the path of truth, peace, happiness, wisdom and liberation.

May all sentient beings be well and happy.

Yours in the Dharma,
Sister Esther Thien
Executive Editor
Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery
Awaken Publishing & Design
Dharma Propagation Division

Mindfulness is the Method, Compassion is the Expression,
and Wisdom is the Essence.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE



What is the purpose of Life? This is a very common question that people often ask. It is not easy to give a satisfactory answer to this apparently simple yet complex question. Although some people have given certain answers, according to their way of thinking, it seems that they are not very satisfactory answers to the intellectuals. The reason is that they have not learned to see life objectively and to understand the proper perspective of life. They have created imaginations in their own minds about life according to their capacity to understand. At the same time, we know that many religious teachers, great

philosophers, well-known poets and great thinkers are also not satisfied about life. When we read what they have to say about life, it would appear that some of them, too, are unable to give a clear picture of life.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE & HUMAN DIGNITY

Some say that life is full of suffering; uncertainty and unsatisfactoriness. Others would say: “How nice if we were never born.” Still others would ask: “Why were we born to this world full of suffering?”

According to their concepts, we can understand that they have seen life objectively. But the ordinary man only sees life superficially as it appears to him, and not as it really should be. Some people say that there is no specific purpose in life and that it can be utilised for any purpose. Based on this theory, there is

something for us to ponder over wisely: to make use of life for purposes beneficial to ourselves as well as others instead of wasting it for unnecessary things. In this manner, the purpose of life can be said to be dependent on the way we handle and use it. If we misuse it by violating good humane qualities, by disgracing human dignity and committing immoral practices, or by giving in to our human weaknesses, it is impossible for us to achieve something worthwhile in our life.

THE NATURE OF LIFE

But on the other hand, if we act wisely by observing universally accepted moral and ethical principles such as exercising patience, tolerance, sympathy, humility and kindness, as well as render some service to others and train the mind to be unbiased, then we should be able to achieve something noble and



beneficial to all. Those who cultivate such virtues would experience peace, happiness, calmness and satisfaction. Life would then be worthwhile! That type of life would be more meaningful and beneficial to everybody.

“Life wastes itself while we are preparing to live,” said one learned man. “Sickness, old age and miseries are the payment we are making for occupying this body of ours as a

house,” lamented another learned man. “We have to pay the price of fear and worry for creating selfish desires,” which was a saying of yet another religious man. “Birth of a man is the birth of sorrow. The longer he lives, the more stupid he becomes. His thirst for survival in the future makes him incapable of living in the present,” said another Chinese philosopher. “We are the result of what we were and will be the result of what we are,” said the Buddha. When we consider all these views, we can find out and understand the true nature of life and its purpose.

If we are going to please only our senses as the purpose of our life, then, we must be prepared to face various problems arising from there. For no one can enjoy pleasure without facing different problems as a result of one’s actions.

Although scientists have discovered wonderful things for man’s convenience, they

cannot fully understand the very purpose of life. Therefore, another well-known scientist said:

*Is there a purpose for life?
What is the purpose of life?
What, or where or when?
Out of space came universe,
Came sun, came earth, came life,
Came man, and more must come,
But as to purpose whose or whence?
Why?
None*

Regarding the behaviour of man, one scholar has said: “Man is not what he is, man is what he is not.” According to him, man does not behave as a real ‘Man’. According to Buddhism, Man is not a fixed substantive entity but an expression, existing literally only from moment to moment on the basis of energy.

Human life neither appeared nor was created by anybody as an experiment for any supernatural being. Life has its own individual identity.

We cannot understand the real nature of life due to our own ignorance and strong craving. That is why we crave to exist in spite of having to suffer in this world. Therefore, it is impossible for us to find out whether or not there is any specific purpose to life in this world without proper understanding.

KARMIC ENERGY

Life has been described as a combination of mind and matter. As a result of this combination, a being comes into existence and it goes on changing until dissolution takes place. However, dispersed mental energy and molecules once again form elements or matter and reappear in various other forms and in different spheres as life in accordance

with the behaviour in one's previous life. This continuity of life-stream goes on again and again as long as the karmic energy and craving for existence remain.

THE FIVE AGGREGATES

According to the teachings of the Buddha, life comprises five aggregates (*pancakkhandha*), namely material form (*Rupa*), feelings (*Vedana*), perception (*Sanna*), mental formations (*Sankhara*) and consciousness (*Vinnana*). Four kinds of elements such as solidity, fluidity, heat and motion comprise matter. Material form plus the four mental factors classified above as feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness are combined together to form life. The real nature of these five aggregates is explained in the teachings of the Buddha as follows: material form is equated

to a heap of foam, in which feeling is like a bubble, perception is described as a mirage, mental formation is like a banana tree and consciousness is just an illusion. With such an analysis of life, it is difficult to ascertain the reality or purpose of life as constituted.

This analysis of life posed a big challenge to many religious beliefs at one time because according to the Buddha, there is no such thing as permanent life or entity that exists without changing and without dissolution.

Body is nothing but an abstract generalisation for a constantly changing combination of chemical compositions or elements. Life is a drop in an ever flowing river and contributes its part to the great stream of life.

WORLD IS NOTHING BUT A SERIES OF WAVES

The scientific analysis of the universe shows the world is nothing but an unbroken series of movement. Dr Albert Einstein said: “All matter is made of waves and we live in a world of waves.”

We are part of the same waves, if a man can be aware: of the states of his body, of his feelings, of the states of his mind and of the states of mental objects, such an awareness will lead him to find out whether there is any purpose in life.

CHANGE YOURSELF

What can you achieve by changing the world? Can you achieve perfection? Never. You will only feed your vanity and fulfil your ego. You will be bound to the wheel

of existence. But by changing yourself, by realising the nature of self through selflessness, self-discipline and self-exertion, you can achieve perfection. By achieving perfection, your life becomes meaningful and you can render great service to others. People will be inspired by your example; they will follow you and also achieve the common aim in life.

Man today is the result of millions of past thoughts and actions. He is not ready-made for he “becomes and continues becoming.” His character is determined by his own thinking process. Man is not perfect by nature; he has to train himself to be perfect.

Life does not belong to human beings alone. Many other life forms exist in this universe. However, human beings have a greater thinking and reasoning power. In that respect, they are superior to other living beings since they have the intelligence to mould their way of life in order to get rid of

their worldly sufferings. Hence, if the purpose of life is just to get rid of sufferings, then human beings can achieve that through their own effort. But life will be a failure if it is not used properly.

The Buddha in his teachings stressed the value of being a human. He painted the most perfect picture of a human being striving and struggling from life to life in his quest for perfection. In fact, life is a unique experience. There is nothing with which to compare it; no measure of its value could be determined in terms of some other things, and money cannot purchase it. Yet, with this 'priceless pearl', many have not learned what to do with it. Here, life does not mean mere physical body or senses, but the thinking human mind.

CLASSIFICATION OF MEN

The Buddha has classified humankind into four groups:

1. One who works for his own good, but not for the good of others;
2. One who works for the good of others, but not for his own good;
3. One who works neither for his own good nor for the good of others; and
4. One who works for his own good as well as for the good of others.

One who works for his own good, but not for the good of others – it is he who strives for the abolition of evil thoughts, words and actions in himself, but does not encourage others to abolish greed, hate and delusion.

One who works for the good of others, but not for his own good – it is he who encourages others to abolish evil thoughts, words and

actions but does not strive for the abolition of greed, hate and delusion in himself.

One who works neither for his own good nor for the good of others – it is he who neither strives for the abolition of evil thoughts, words and actions in himself, nor does he encourage others to abolish greed, hate and delusion.

One who works for his own good as well as for the good of others – it is he who strives for the abolition of evil thoughts, words and actions in himself, and also encourages others to abolish greed, hate and delusion.
(Anguttara Nikaya)

LIFE IS NOT FREE FROM SUFFERING

If we contemplate deeply, we have to agree that life is indeed one of eternal suffering. Every moment, we are suffering, either physically, emotionally or mentally. Can we ever find a single person in this world who is free from


physical, emotional or mental pain? Even those who have attained sainthood are not free from physical pain so long as their physical bodies exist. Life and suffering are inseparable.

If anybody asks, “What is the most uncertain thing in this world?” – the correct answer would be “Life is the most uncertain thing.” Everything that we do in this world is to extract ourselves from suffering and death. If we neglect this life for even one second, that is more than enough for us to lose our life. Most of our daily routine, such as working, eating, drinking, sleeping and walking are ways and means adopted by us to avoid suffering and death. Although we occasionally experience some sort of momentary worldly pleasures by satisfying our desires, the very next moment these same things that gave us pleasure might turn into suffering. Therefore, the noble treasure of peace and happiness need not be in the

rich man's hand but in the man who has renounced worldly pleasures.

Everything pertaining to our life is subject to change and unsatisfactoriness. That is why the Buddha explained that as long as there is craving for worldly pleasures or desires for existence, there is no way one could escape from suffering. Desire is important for existence. When existence takes place, suffering is unavoidable.

Many contemplate seeking eternal life, and yet, ironically, many seekers of longevity find life so boring that they do not even know how to pass the day! There is a Chinese proverb on man's insatiable desire for longevity. "Man fools himself. He prays for a long life, and yet he fears an old age". Apparently his intention is to remain young in order to enjoy the pleasures of life perpetually. According to the Buddha, this craving for immortality is one of the causes for selfish ideas and sufferings.



*Everything pertaining to our life
is subject to change and unsatisfactoriness.*

*It is easy enough to be pleasant
When life flows along like a song.
But the man worthwhile
Is the man who can smile
When life goes dead wrong.*

Whatever little happiness we get is secured amidst many disappointments, failures and defeats. Man cannot find a life where there are no difficulties, problems, conflicts, disappointments, and so on among thousands of other uncongenial situations. Day and night, man is struggling to get rid of these unpleasant situations. The more he struggles to escape from this unhappy state of affairs in a worldly way, the more he entangles himself with some other problems. When he manages to get rid of one problem, intentionally or unintentionally, he would have created for himself some other problems. Where then is the end of these problems?

For our own survival, we have to accept such difficulties and sufferings without complaining. There is no other alternative. Suffering will always be there! Yet suffering and unhappiness are by no means inevitable. Suffering, said the Buddha, is a disease and can therefore be cured completely when purity or perfection is attained.

Lao Tze, the well-known Chinese teacher said: "I have suffered because I have a body. If I had no physical body, how can I suffer?"

"If all the mountains were books and if all the lakes were ink and if all the trees were pens, still they would not suffice to depict all the misery in this world." (Jacob Boehme)

When you look at the way people suffer in this world, you can see the real situation of worldly life. Why should they suffer in this way? And who is responsible for their sufferings? According to the Buddha, each and every person is responsible for his own suffering.

They are suffering here today because of their strong craving for existence, as craving for existence influences them to commit unwholesome deeds. This is the main cause of suffering. It has taken more than 2500 years for many philosophers and psychologists to understand that what the Buddha said was indeed true. A poet analysed our life in the following way.

*To the fire flies the moth
Knows not it will die.
Little fish bites the hook
Knows not of the danger
But though knowing well
The danger of these evil worldly pleasures,
We still cling to them so firmly
Oh how great is our folly!*

FLEETING NATURE OF LIFE

Buddhism points out that the duration of life is very short and we should work mindfully, vigilantly and heedfully for our salvation:

*People can never really understand
That we are here but for a little spell.
Those who realised this truth indeed
Avoid from suffering and quarrels.*

- Theragatha

THE WORLD IS A BATTLEFIELD

The whole universe is a vast battlefield. Existence is nothing but a continuous struggle, molecules against molecules, atoms against atoms, electrons against electrons and so on. Within the physical system itself, is a big battleground. The mind itself is the biggest battlefield.

The man who is not at peace with himself cannot be at peace with the world, and external wars have to continue in order to hide the fact from individuals that the real war is within. The most important prayer of humankind today is for peace, but there can be no peace in this war-torn world until the conflicts of man within himself are ended.

In the eyes of the Buddha, living beings tremble like fish in a stream that is almost dry, being in the grip of craving, either leaping hither and thither, like hares caught in a snare or lost like arrows at night. He saw the struggle of all against all, the senseless series of predators trying to prey upon or rob their victims in which one feeds upon another, only in order to be fed upon in return. War is created by the human mind, and the same human can create peace with justice if only man uses his unbiased mind.

World history tells us that racial prejudice, colour discrimination, religious fanaticism and greed for political power and wealth have created enormous disasters, miseries and sufferings in this world. They have taken a heavy toll on human lives in a cruel way. Such issues have never contributed towards worldly progress. People who are thirsty for power and wealth and are intoxicated with jealousy and greed always create trouble and often try to justify their cruel acts by talking nonsense in the name of peace and justice. We are living in a make-believe world which appears physically united but mentally undivided, and at times mentally united but physically divided. The following saying indicates how changes take place in our life:

*We live and work and dream,
Each has his little scheme,
Sometimes we laugh;*

*Sometimes we cry.
And thus the days go by.*

A LOT OF NONSENSE

*A lot of fuss. A lot of tears
A lot of people. A lot of money
A lot of time. And all for what?
A lot of trouble. A little body!*

*A blob of proteins
Fast unwinding,
A little corpse
Quick decaying.
No longer is it
Dear Father, mother
Or any darling other.
In spite of this
We must have
Consolations and coffins,
Processions and Tombstones*

*Parties and mourning
Rites and rituals
Buried or burnt
Embalmed for ever,
All for these little
Bloated bodies*

*Sons remember,
Grandsons little,
And after them
Are the dead forgotten,
Stones and bones alone remaining.
So is this not
A lot of nonsense?
- Bhikku Khantipalo*

SPIRITUAL VALUES

Julian Huxley said:

*Life should lead to the fulfilment of
innumerable possibilities –*

*physical, mental, spiritual and so forth –
what man is capable of.
And humanity is capable of greater
and nobler things.*

You are born into this world to do some good and not to pass your time in idleness. If you are indolent, then you are a burden to this world. You must always think of rising higher in goodness and wisdom. You will be abusing the privileges of becoming a human being if you do not prove yourself worthy of the merit which brought you here. To waste one's existence in grieving over the past, in idleness and heedlessness is to show one's unfitness for this world.

The tree of civilisation has its roots in spiritual values which most of us have not realised. Without these roots, the leaves would wither, fall and leave the tree a lifeless stump.



We can make use of this life for a better purpose by being of service to others, by cultivating morality, by training the mind and living as cultured men in peace and harmony with the rest of the world.

The Buddha advised us not to be lazy, but to get up and do some work and try to gain some income and protect what we have earned without neglecting or wasting it. The Buddha saw worldly life in its proper perspective, without any selfish or egoistic attitude. On the other hand, enlightened religious teachers explained that if we allow this life to go round and round in the cycle of birth and death, while suffering physically and mentally, there is no real purpose of this life. But we can make use of this life for a better purpose by being of service to others, by cultivating morality, by training the mind and living as cultured men in peace and harmony with the rest of the world. According to the Buddha, human beings are not puppets devoid of responsibilities. Man is regarded as the highest fruit of the tree of evolution. Our ancient philosophy, however, expressed the purpose of life in this way:

Leading from darkness to light, from untruth to truth and from death to deathlessness.

These simple yet meaningful words give us much food for thought.

IMMORTALITY AFTER DEATH

All the questions man asks about his life are related to the reality of death; he differs from all other creatures, it would seem, in being aware of his own death and in never being fully reconciled to sharing the natural fate of all other living organisms. If only man can understand that life is short and that death is inevitable, he can solve many problems pertaining to life. In his resistance to death, man has achieved some prolongation of life which may be equated to a child playing by the seaside, working desperately to build up his sandcastle before the next wave breaks

over it. Man has often made death the centre of religious objects and invoking heavenly blessings for the gaining of everlasting life.

Death happens to all living beings, but man alone has created, out of his constant fear and threat of death, a will to endure. And out of the desire for continuity in all their conceivable forms, man has created religion, which in turn, has attempted to give a more meaningful end to life.

Although certain religions believe in the existence of heavenly abodes where life would be one perpetual bliss, we have yet to hear the devout followers of any particular religion keen to give up their earthly existence to be with the Almighty in heaven. Similarly, even Buddhists would prefer to cling on to their precious earthly existence, although they fully realise that life in this world is nothing but suffering, and that ultimate bliss is liberation from suffering.

The biggest problem faced in many countries today is the problem of population explosion. Ways and means will have to be found to curb the perpetual swelling of this stream of life. These millions need food, shelter, comfort and security. To these people the question is not “what is the purpose of life?” but “what to do with life?”. The simple answer is that one should make the best use of life and its resources and find whatever happiness that one can grasp in a practical and righteous manner rather than worry unduly about the metaphysical proposition of the mystical purpose of life. However, religion steps in to console man, or rather awaken him to the fact that life is not dreary and hopeless, as often viewed on the basis of the physical aspect alone. There is hope for a better life.

All the progress in this world made by man is due to the fact that he realises he is mortal and that he would like to leave his mark

behind after he is gone. If man were to achieve immortality and his days on earth were endless, he would be inclined to take things easy, and lose all incentives or initiative to progress; there would be no desire for him to make the world a better place than when he found it. If there was no death, life would become stagnant, monotonous, unspeakably burdensome and boring. If man is given the insight to realise and know the time of his death, he would definitely act differently from what he is doing presently.

*Man's body turns to dust,
but his influence persists*
- *The Buddha*

Even though our ancestors are dead and gone, we can assume they still exist amongst us, not physically but through the influence created by them in the past from generation

*Thinking people have realised that
the course of human history is determined
not by what happens in the skies,
but by what takes place in the hearts of men.*



to generation – their influence persists. By the term ‘ancestors’, we refer not only to our forebears but also to all those who had contributed to the welfare and happiness of others. In this sense, we can say that the heroes, sages, philosophers and poets of days gone by still exist amongst us – through their influence. As we link ourselves to these martyrs and thinkers, we come to share their wisest thoughts, the noble ideals and even fascinating music of the centuries!

The cry of a man’s heart for a purpose is the dim recognition of the nature of life. When a man comprehends within himself his divine and noble nature, he no longer cries for a purpose of life for he realises that he himself is that very purpose.

Thinking people have realised that the course of human history is determined not by what happens in the skies, but by what takes place in the hearts of men.

The Buddha said that there is no other supernatural living being higher than the perfect man. Man can and must raise himself above the limitation of his individuality, but he cannot raise himself above the laws and principal characteristics of his kind.

MAKE THE BEST USE OF LIFE

The important point about life is that we have it and therefore we must make the best use of it. This indeed is the great value of life, the opportunity of making the maximum use of it. Many people lead narrow, unhappy and depressed lives because they do not try to make the best use of life; they spend most of their time worrying and struggling for survival, working like slaves, and confronting enormous problems and hindrances. We spend more energy in a battlefield – fighting for survival, fighting for power, fighting for gain, fighting

for name, fighting for pleasure and fighting to be free from danger. Occasionally, we do gain a little bit of momentary emotional satisfaction but every pleasure inevitably ends with suffering.

Look at the world, and you can see how people are fighting against each other, bombing, hijacking, and harming one another. The whole world is like a mad house. People have forgotten their good human character and have allowed crookedness, cruelty, cheating, robbing, harbouring of anger, grudge, greed and ignorance to reign over them. Apparently, there is no room in man's mind to cultivate good thoughts. How then can one find peace, happiness and contentment in a battlefield in which one is continually fighting either for gain or escapism from danger?

Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.

If you can understand the real nature of

life and the world, then you can readily understand why it is absolutely necessary to attain liberation – Nirvana (*Nibbana* in Pali) – and you would not delay your effort for attainment of this blissful state. Today, you are fighting to escape from suffering through a worldly way, which is a losing battle. However, if you try to get rid of your suffering by developing the spiritual aspect of your life, then you can find real peace. That is Nirvana.

WORLDLY PLEASURES

We know there are many in this world, even amongst Buddhists, who are not prepared to work for the attainment of Nirvana. For this reason, some have introduced their own version of “Nirvana” as a paradise where people can enjoy everlasting sensual pleasures. Such an introduction will appeal to those who have a

very strong craving and attachment to their life and worldly pleasures. They cannot understand that such a concept of “Nirvana” is but a dream. Nevertheless, worldly people always think and pray for this kind of “Nirvana”. On the other hand, there are also people who think it is better to remain in this world despite all sorts of sufferings in order to enjoy their life. They are ignorant. They fail to understand that due to the cravings and attachments which they have developed, they are unable to appreciate the fact that Nirvanic bliss is the real everlasting bliss and that other worldly conditions which they consider as happiness cannot relieve them of physical and mental suffering.

According to the Buddha, it is due to ignorance that people crave for existence within this “*Samsara*” (cycle of birth and death) while enduring suffering and running after a mirage in a perpetual search for something to please their senses. They should learn to

calm their senses instead of placating them by fleeting indulgences.

ENDLESS WORLD SYSTEM

Some people think that if all of us attain Nirvana, this world will be an empty place and that there won't be anybody to work for the progress of this world. This is a shallow idea in the minds of such people who lack real knowledge of living beings.

They should understand that this world will never become empty since very few wise people will be able to attain Nirvana. As far as world systems are concerned, there is no limit to them. And there is no such thing as either the beginning or the end of world systems and the universe. World systems will always appear and disappear. When one world system disappears, another is born. The dispersed world systems reappear due to the combination

of molecules and energies. Living beings who have departed from other world systems also come into existence due to the recombination of these elements, energies and their mental formation with karmic energies. One should not think there are only a limited number of living beings who appear and disappear again and again in this universe. Living beings are numerically unlimited and infinite.

PROGRESS AND POLLUTION

Are we really working here for the progress of this world? We may think so but we are actually damaging this world. We have discovered many gadgets to destroy this world. Nature has produced so many things in this world. To achieve our own ends, we are destroying the natural beauty of this earth. We are polluting the atmosphere, the water and the air. We are destroying plant life as

well as all animal lives. We should not assume that we as human beings are the only ones who have the right to live on this earth. Each and every other living being too has an equal right to live here. But we deprive other beings of their privileges. Not only that, even within our own human community, one race will try to topple the other race, hindering their progress and not allowing others to live in peace. They declare wars and start to slaughter others in the name of patriotism.

As long as human beings have polluted minds, there will be no peace on earth. It is



due to the existence of such people that this earth has become a place of turmoil. Today, we see blood-baths all over the world. Each and every person is planning to swindle another person. Selfish ideas always prevail in their minds. One man cannot trust another man. They view others with suspicion in their hearts. One cannot understand the real character or motive of another man.

MAN IS RESPONSIBLE

People always talk about the uncertainty of the world situation. Who is responsible for this unfortunate situation? Is there anybody else other than the so-called smart man?

How can we expect a better and peaceful world if men behave as uncultured persons? How can we enjoy our life in this uncertain world? Scientists seek to conquer nature for their own material ends. Religions and

philosophy aspire to live in harmony with nature for peace of mind and spiritual achievement. You cannot change worldly conditions according to your wishes but you can change your mind to develop contentment to find happiness. A man who is absorbed in seeking only worldly satisfaction will never reach higher knowledge, for it cannot be found without strenuous search. Materialism degrades man to the brute state while religion elevates him to the divine or noble state. In a materialistic regime, men become slaves to their senses. Naturally, most people dislike to face the true facts of life. They like to lull themselves into a false sense of security by sweet dreaming, imagination and take the shadow for the substance. The Buddha's attitude to worldly powers and worldly pleasures is best described thus:

Better than absolute sovereignty over the earth, better than going to heaven, better than even lordship over the worlds, is the fruit of a stream winner – the first stage of perfection.

By spending his life only for material and worldly progress to feed his insatiable desire, it is impossible for man to see the end of unsatisfactoriness in his life. According to the Buddha, this world is based on conflict, friction or unsatisfactoriness and impermanence. Again, he said that the way to worldly gain is one thing and that to Nirvana is another.

THE MAN AND HIS HONEY

Here is a small parable to help us understand the real nature of life and worldly pleasure: A man had lost his way whilst he was going through a thick forest covered with thorns and rocks. Then he was confronted

by a huge elephant which started to chase him. He ran for his life. While he was running he saw a well and thought that it would be a good place for him to escape from the elephant. Unfortunately, he saw a big poisonous snake at the bottom of the well. But since there was no other way to escape from the elephant, he jumped into the well and managed to cling onto a thick thorny creeper that was growing on the side of the well. While he was hanging onto the creeper he saw two mice, a white one and a dark one. To his horror, he saw that these two mice were slowly nibbling at the creeper he was clinging onto. He, however, found a beehive close by from which occasional drops of honey trickled down.

Facing his death in three different ways in this precarious position, he greedily started to taste the honey drops. Then someone passed by and, seeing the pathetic situation of this poor

man, volunteered to give him a helping hand to save his life. But this greedy and foolish man refused to listen to him because of the irresistible taste of the honey he was enjoying. The taste of the honey had intoxicated him to the point that he preferred to ignore the dangerous position he was facing.

Here in this parable, the thorny path of the forest is equated to *Samsara* (the wheel of existence). The thorny path of *Samsara* is a very uncertain and troublesome one. It is not so easy for a person to carry on his life through the rough and tough jungle of *Samsara*. The elephant here represents death. Death always follows us and makes us unhappy; our old age also creates unhappiness and insecurity in our minds. The creeper is our birth. Just as a creeper goes on growing and coiling with other plants, so also our birth goes on accumulating, holding, clinging on to so many other superfluous things in this

world. The white and dark mice represent day and night respectively. From the very day we are born into this world, the passage of day and night goes on cutting and shortening our lifespan. The drops of honey are the fleeting sensual worldly pleasures which tempt man to remain in this impermanent and uncertain world. The kind man who came to give his helping hand to show him the correct path and to get rid of his dangerous situation was the Buddha.

A man who thinks that it is better for him to remain in this world to enjoy worldly life without trying to attain Nirvana, is exactly like this foolish man who refused the offer to escape from the dangerous situation of his life just to taste a little bit of honey.

THE AIM AND WAY OF LIFE



As human beings, we must have an aim in our life. A person who does not observe a righteous way of life will never find the aim of life. He can even become a danger to society if he does not uphold some noble principles. No doubt scientists and psychologists have widened our intellectual horizon, but they have not been able to give us the purpose of life, which only noble principles can do.

Religion also originally developed as humanism to uphold humane qualities. Later, it was introduced as divine law. However, a noble way of life is needed to maintain our human values and dignity. The noble way of

life to be discussed here is a proven method wherein by cultivating the mind one can gain supreme wisdom.

Countries in which attempts were made to supplant the noble principles of religion with socialism or materialism have proved to be modern day failures. It is apparent that human beings must have some noble principles to gain confidence in life.

Human beings must choose a rational and meaningful way of life based on their firm conviction, and not one founded on mere mythological beliefs, traditional practices and theories. One should not force anyone to accept any particular religious laws, or exploit his or her state of poverty, illiteracy or emotions to induce that person to accept their beliefs.

A person should be free to choose a reasonable way of life according to his or her way of understanding. Following a religion blindly only abuses human intelligence and

dignity. Human beings have common sense to distinguish between right and wrong. They can adapt themselves to changing circumstances. They should therefore choose a respectable way of life that is suitable, and one that measures up to their expectations. They must be properly guided in this respect and then be given a chance to decide for themselves without recourse to any form of coercion.

THE MIDDLE-WAY

The noble way of life that is being introduced here is a practical educational system of mental culture known to the world some twenty-five centuries ago. The founder of this way of life was a most enlightened and compassionate teacher. This method is also variously known as the *Middle-Path*, *a righteous way of life*, *an ethico-philosophical system*, *a do-it-yourself*

method and also can be introduced as *a path of freedom and reason*. It teaches us to do three things; namely, *to refrain from doing bad deeds, to be of some service to others and to maintain a healthy pure mind*.

This message is very meaningful and practical. Yet, people experience difficulties when they try to put them into practice, due to their own inherent human weaknesses. The moral conduct of human beings plays a most important part in this way of life. The great teacher once said,

My teaching is not to come and believe but to practise.

It encourages people to study the teachings fully to allow them to judge for themselves whether they should accept the teachings or not. No one is asked to come and accept

this way of life without first having had an understanding of its teachings.

Superfluous rites and rituals, and animal sacrifices have no significance in this noble way of life. Superstitious beliefs, fear of supernatural beings and secret doctrines are not encouraged.

People have the liberty to investigate for themselves the teachings and to ask questions so as to clear all doubts. According to the teacher of this way of life, one should not believe merely because the founder of this noble method happened to be a great sage or because it had all along been traditionally accepted by many; but only by reasoning and common sense can one decide to accept it. This teacher also advises any one not to accept or reject anything hastily but to investigate it thoroughly before coming to a final decision.

NOBLE PATH

The noble eightfold path taught in this way of life is:

- Perfect Understanding,
- Perfect Thought,
- Perfect Speech,
- Perfect Action,
- Perfect Livelihood,
- Perfect Effort,
- Perfect Mindfulness and
- Perfect Concentration.

This unique middle path is a code of morality which paves the way for people to lead a noble and peaceful life.

The middle path is neither a metaphysical nor a ritualistic path; it is neither dogmatism nor scepticism; neither self-indulgence nor self-torture; neither eternalism nor nihilism;

neither a law given by some divine authority nor a mere imagination of man.

It is a path of Enlightenment, a means of deliverance from suffering or unsatisfactoriness. This way of life rejects the idea that human beings are suffering today because of their original sins. Every living thing, including plant life, experiences suffering. Every person carries his or her merits and demerits individually. Human beings are solely responsible for their own pain or pleasure.

One who follows the middle path should find real peace and happiness. One should be able to lead a respectable life without being a slave to any form of belief, thus contributing to one's peace and happiness by living in complete harmony with others and the environment.

REAP WHAT YOU SOW

This way of life satisfies humanity's most profound and lofty aspirations. Yet it is able to counteract the stress and strain of everyday life, besides giving a purpose to life. It does not instil fear in people. *Good begets good and bad begets bad. Every action has its reaction.* These are universal laws. This way of life fully agrees with these fundamental laws and people have to abide by them and 'reap what they sow'.

People perpetrate evil deeds out of greed, anger and ignorance. Such weaknesses can only be overcome through self-realisation. The fortunes and misfortunes people experience in this world are not due to some external influences but to the good and bad actions, words and deeds they themselves had previously committed. For this very reason, this teaching says: "We are the results of what

we were, and we will be the results of what we are.” That means we are responsible for everything in our life.

Forgiveness of sin is not acknowledged in this way of life. One is solely responsible for one’s own actions, good or bad. If one has committed evil, one has to face up to the consequences. The only way to purge the mind of evil is to do good. It is only through a long process of mental training that the mind could become purified.

This way of life teaches that death is not the end of life. A living being is just a bundle of energies holding the elements together. The physical death of a being is just an interlude in the repeated cycle of birth and death. Therefore, a being who is ‘not the same and yet not different’ continues to live, life after life, until the aim of life is finally attained.

According to this teaching, the law of cause and effect plays a very important part

in our lives. In a cycle of cause and effect, a first cause is inconceivable as the cause ever becomes the effect, and the effect in turn becomes the cause. Everything that exists is interdependent.

A GREAT TEACHER

The founder of this unique method is not a myth but a Great Teacher who actually lived in this world. He never tried to present himself as a supernatural being but as a human being who had himself realised the absolute truth: the cosmic or universal law, the secret of life and the real cause of suffering and happiness. He made no claim to divinity.

Today, this teacher is not only honoured by hundreds of millions of his followers but also by the cultured people and intellectuals throughout the world. Although this Noble Man, this Liberator, this Social Reformer,

this Democrat and Inspirer had passed away, he left behind a noble message for humanity to follow in order to eliminate human suffering, misery, fear, worry and unsatisfactoriness. From his message, one can gain happiness in this life and in the life hereafter: the ultimate liberation of all human sufferings.

This great teacher comforted the bereaved. He helped the poor who were neglected. He ennobled the lives of the deluded and purified the lives of criminals. He consoled the weak, united the divided, enlightened the ignorant, clarified the doubts of mystics, elevated those debased and dignified the noble. Both the rich and the poor, the saintly and the criminal loved him. Despotic or righteous Kings, famous or obscure princes and nobles, generous or stingy millionaires, haughty or intelligent scholars, and destitutes, paupers, down-trodden scavengers, wicked murderers, cannibals and despised courtesans – all benefited from his

noble way of life, wisdom and compassion.

His noble example was a source of inspiration to all. His serene and peaceful countenance was indeed soothing to the troubled. His message of peace and tolerance was welcomed by all with indescribable joy and was of lasting benefit to everyone who had the good fortune to hear and to practise it. His iron will, profound wisdom, universal love, boundless compassion, selfless service, brave renunciation, perfect purity, magnetic personality, exemplary methods employed to introduce his teachings and his final success – all these factors have inspired about one fifth of the population of the world today to hail and honour this teacher as their supreme master.

This noble teacher sacrificed his worldly pleasures for the sake of suffering humanity to seek the Truth and to show the path of deliverance from suffering. He visited the

poor whilst kings and ministers had to visit him. After his enlightenment, he dedicated 45 years of his life guiding deluded human beings to lead meaningful, respectable and peaceful lives.

This great teacher feared none nor did he instil fear in others. This is one quality that should be cultivated by all in this war-torn world of ours where the most precious thing – life – is sacrificed at the altar of brute force and where armaments are creating fear, tension and hatred. He also did not create temptations of sensual pleasure as a means to introduce his noble way of life.

He was the perfect scientist in the study of life; the perfect psychologist who analysed the nature of the mind to the extent that his teaching was acclaimed as a scientific method. Modern scientific discoveries never come in conflict with his teaching.

To great philosophers and unbiased

thinkers, he was a teacher who understood worldly conditions in its proper perspective. To moralists, his teaching was the highest code of discipline. He symbolised perfection. 'He was the perfect model of all the virtues he preached.' To rationalists, he was the most liberal-minded noble teacher. To free-thinkers, he was a teacher who encouraged people to think independently to find out the truth. To agnostics, he was a very gentle and understanding teacher who guided humanity.

He was no doubt the most persuasive of all the great teachers. He never used compulsion or fear as a means of gaining converts. He has introduced a noble way of life without even attaching a religious label to it. What he wanted was to see people living in harmony as cultured, harmless and contented human beings by upholding his noble advice.

He was the humble servant of humanity, unperturbed by either praise or blame. He did not ask people to come and worship him or pray to him in order to gain salvation. He did not introduce his message by means of charismatic techniques or so-called miraculous powers but by educating and convincing the public.

PEACE, HAPPINESS AND SALVATION

Today, the message of peace of this Great Universal Teacher is more important than ever before, particularly at a time when human beings are intoxicated with power, greed, jealousy, pride and craving for world domination.

This teacher was born to this world to dispel the darkness of ignorance, and to save the world from its ills. It is common knowledge that throughout the world many people continue to live without practising any form

of noble life. However, if they would only make an effort to study and understand what this Great Teacher had taught, they could clarify their doubts, and be convinced of his teachings that could best contribute to find the aim of life.

Whether one believes in him or not, his teachings had a profound effect on all people. His message was spread without any violence. It is a significant fact that not a single drop of blood had ever been shed in its name. This is indeed a most remarkable record in world history which could be written in letters of gold. This teaching illuminates the way by which humanity could cross from a world of unsatisfactoriness to a world of light, love, peace and happiness.

The twenty-five century old teachings of this great teacher are strong enough to face any challenge without flinching or having the need to reinterpret its original doctrines;

because the doctrines he preached are for all time and are the absolute truth.

The teachings consider virtue as one of the prerequisites for the attainment of liberation from worldly suffering. The other prerequisite is wisdom. Virtue is like a vehicle that brings one up to the gate of liberation, but the actual key that opens the gate is wisdom.

HEAVENLY BLISS

The followers of this way of life do not regard themselves as the chosen people to gain heavenly bliss. They believe that a person creates his or her own hell and heaven depending on that person's conduct and way of life. Sufferings in hell or heavenly bliss can also be experienced in this earthly life itself instead of in the life hereafter, as is commonly believed.

This noble teacher never preached by frightening people with hell fire or with

alluring everlasting heavenly life, but only by revealing the true nature of life and the universe. According to his teachings, anyone can enjoy heavenly bliss so long as one leads a righteous way of life. Heaven is not reserved for any one particular group in a religious community. It is open to all – anyone who leads a noble life.

Tolerance, patience and understanding are considered virtues in his teachings. In addition, loving-kindness, compassion and sympathy towards others are not confined to human beings but also extended to all living beings – since destruction of life, be it human or animal, is cruel and unjust, and is against the teachings of this great teacher.

For harmony's sake, this teacher also advised his followers to respect other people's views and to accept the truth wherever it may be. He advocated tolerance towards traditions and cultural practices of others if they are harmless.

WAY OF LIFE

This way of life is clear, reasonable and gives complete answers to all important questions and problems about life. It provides a solid foundation for helping humanity towards building a positive and better way of life.

This method does not divide humanity into two groups, the “saved” and the “lost”. As a civilised and understanding system, it teaches us how to tame the wild and to refine the tamed.

Followers of this way of life do not indulge in petitional prayers. They believe in the importance of self-exertion and in the efficacy of meditation for self-conquest, self-control, self-purification and enlightenment. Meditation serves as a tonic for the body as well as the mind.

ONE CAN MOULD ONE'S LIFE

This method contends that mind is the all-powerful force – the creator and destroyer of humankind as well as the architect of humanity's fate. Therefore, one should be capable of moulding anything if only one knows how to develop and make proper use of the mind.

In fact, this way of life has been an admirable beacon of light radiating on the hill for guiding humanity to fulfil the aim of life. Through this method, people can dispel the darkness of ignorance. By following the guidance given in this way of life, people learn how to use their life to the fullest to be meaningful. It is true that the world today is riddled with racial, political, religious, communal and ideological differences. To solve these complex problems, people must exercise the spirit of benevolence and

tolerance towards each other. This noble method inculcates ethical-moral co-operation for the universal good. Humanity must realise that spiritual development is more important than material development for human happiness. Truth, service, charity and love must be practised if this world is to become a better place for us to live in.

ACTUALITY

This liberal teacher through his enlightenment, declared that:

- The greatest virtue is that gained in the cultivation of universal love;
- The supreme happiness is the happiness derived from mental calmness;
- The absolute truth is acquired through the understanding of the causes of human suffering;
- The highest religion is one that teaches

supreme wisdom, morality and mental purification; and

- The greatest philosophy is the philosophy that introduces analytical knowledge and a practical way of life without depending on theories and mere beliefs.

This way of life does not obstruct anyone from reading and learning the teachings of other religions. It has no place for fanaticism. A fanatic cannot be guided by reason or even by the scientific principle of observation and analysis. Therefore, the followers of this method are endowed with an open mind and are not subservient to anyone for spiritual development.

If you care to learn a little more about the moral code of ethics and mental training which this system of teachings has to offer, you might have to review any previous misunderstandings you would have had about this way of life. One should not pre-judge any

particular way of life by just looking at certain aspects of devotional, traditional and emotional practices. Instead, one should always try to make an in-depth study and understand the fundamental teachings of the teachers.

CREDIT TO HUMAN INTELLIGENCE

Instead of placing human destiny under the arbitrary control of an unknown external agency and becoming subservient to such a supreme power, this way of life has raised the status of humanity. It accorded human beings the intelligence that is their just due. It taught people how to cultivate their submerged human potential.

This teacher told us how to render selfless service to others. Those who follow this way of life abstain from evil not out of fear of retribution from some unseen being but out of self-realisation that evil would only bring

about suffering to living beings. Their motive of doing good to help others is done not to please any supreme being in expectation of an ultimate reward, but out of feelings of compassion towards them in order to release them from their sufferings.

In this way of life, we can find a method to perfect goodness and wisdom. We can achieve the highest wisdom through realisation and not 'revelation'. We can attain redemption without the assistance of a vicarious redeemer. We can gain salvation within this lifetime by the judicious exercise of our own faculties without waiting for the life hereafter.

This way of life teaches that human beings are not for religion but that religion is for humanity. Without becoming slaves to any particular religion, human beings must make use of religion for their own betterment and liberation. In other words, people can practise this method as noble human beings without

having to undergo suffering in the name of any form of belief. This way of life does not prohibit the experiencing of sensual pleasures in a reasonable and respectable way if it is conducted within the bounds of accepted noble principles.

IS IT POSSIBLE?

- Without belief in immortality, can people gain confidence in life and be moral?
- Without help from any supreme authority and law-giver, can people become righteous?
- Without rites and rituals, can people lead a noble way of life?
- Without emotional faith and beliefs, can people lead a noble life?
- Without depending on a supernatural being, can people gain their final salvation?
- Without suffering through certain religious penances, can people attain liberation?

- Without creating fear in the mind, can people follow certain noble principles?
- Without using force to threaten others, can we introduce a proper way of life?
- Without resorting to superstitious beliefs and dogmas, is it possible to convince the masses to lead a pure life?
- Can people appreciate a meaningful life without following mysticism, occultism, supernatural powers and priestcraft?

Yes, said the founder of this noble way of life. These ends could be attained by altruistic service, by purity, discipline and wisdom.

The realisation of the law of cause and effect as explained by this teacher clarifies and helps to solve the problems of human sufferings, the ‘mystery’ of fate and predestination, and above all the inequality of humanity. Through understanding of this universal law, one can

gain consolation, hope, self-reliance and moral courage.

This righteous way of life is one of the greatest and richest human civilising forces that the world has ever known. It has a notable history of achievement in art, literature, philosophy, ethics and in the social and educational institutions which, in the course of centuries, has brought into being among the nations whose allegiance it had won. From the very outset, it appealed most strongly to the intellectuals. It was this way of life that first called architecture into the service of noble life. The history of this message was written in the name of brotherhood and goodwill. The concept of life and the world changed from the day that this doctrine was preached.

This noble way of life was not planned in heaven but nurtured in the purified human mind. It was born in a long experimental process. This is a method to study, to practise,

and to experience the results in the end. Its contribution to a real noble way of life is most ancient and yet most modern. Its teachings of causation, its relativism, doctrine of sense-data, pragmatism, its emphasis on morals, its disbelief in any permanent soul, its unconcern about a creator God, eternal heaven and eternal hell, its denial of rituals and its appeal to one's own experience, all tend to establish its superior claim to modernity.

NOBLE LIFE IN A MODERN SOCIETY

It has every quality required of a rational way of life to fit into the present and future world. It will be beneficial for anyone to study and to appreciate it in the modern world. It is acknowledged to be more scientific than science itself and more progressive than all the known progressive elements in spiritual development. It is one of the most effective

means for the maintenance of world peace, harmony and understanding.

NO DISCRIMINATION

It was this way of life which was the first to revolt against the degrading caste system. It taught humanity to accord equal opportunities for all to distinguish themselves in every walk of life. This way of life was also the first in giving freedom to women to study and to practise to achieve spiritual development.

The Great Teacher declared that the gates to success and prosperity are open to all, in every stage of life whether high or low, saintly or criminal, who would care to seek and aspire for perfection. He did not make his followers slaves either to himself or to his teachings but instead granted them complete freedom of thought and investigation to gain self-confidence for themselves.

This system classifies living beings into mind and matter which are in a state of constant change, not remaining the same for two consecutive moments. Mind and matter arise and perish and the continuous cycle goes on. Nothing will remain permanently either in this world or elsewhere in the universe, because everything which exists in the universe is nothing but a combination of elements and energies. Therefore, it is quite natural that these things will one day disintegrate and disappear. This system of teachings also tells us that every existing component thing is subject to change and conflict because of worldly conditions.

The main principles recommended in this way of life are not commandments. By observing precepts such as abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicated drinks and drugs which cause infatuation and heedlessness,

the followers of this noble way of life can purify themselves through good thoughts, good speech and good action, and thereby live in harmony with others and allow others to live peacefully.

OUR AIM

Our aim in publishing this book is to enlighten people on how to seek inner peace and happiness and to practise their own noble way of life with firm conviction. We encourage people to practise their own way of life properly if truth, peace, happiness, wisdom and salvation can be found in it. What we want is for everyone to lead a respectable life without abusing one's innate human dignity.

In fact, this way of life may be the answer to many of your spiritual and human problems. It may give fresh impetus and direction to your way of thinking on devotional and

philosophical matters. It may also help you understand your own way of life. You may find here the spiritual guidance the modern world badly needs. This system of teachings brought into the world a new spirit, a new hope, a new path, the truth and necessity of which is evident everywhere and felt today as it was in days of old. The way of life referred to here is *Buddhism* and its founder is none other than Gautama the Buddha – the Enlightened One.

Whatever may be your purpose in life, we invite you to take a closer look at this way of life and the ideals expounded by its founder. We are ready to help you in your search for truth. Therefore, be unbiased, avoid religious prejudices in your noble endeavour to find the ultimate truth and the aim of life. The aim of life is nothing but finding the end of physical and mental sufferings.

IS IT WRONG TO BE AMBITIOUS?



It is difficult to find human beings who are free from selfish motives. That is the reason why there is conflict and discrimination among human beings. Buddhism teaches us to reduce our cravings or ambition. As we are attached to the world, we want to know whether it is wrong to entertain some ambitions. Is it wrong to become successful in a worldly sense? The ideas that people develop in their minds to become successful doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors, teachers or businessmen are ambitions. Some Buddhists have asked, “If Buddhism advocates renunciation, then should Buddhists turn their backs on material

success?” Nobody in this world can say that such ambitions are wrong or contrary to Buddhism.

ADVICE FOR LAYMEN

Buddhism is misinterpreted and misunderstood by many people. The Buddha clearly recognised two classes of people: those who had renounced the world and those who chose to follow the life of householders. Certain precepts and observances that the Buddha prescribed are specifically meant for those who have renounced the worldly life. Some people have mixed these with the precepts meant for householders. For those who have renounced the worldly life, there is one way to develop selfless ambition. For those who are still attached to the world as householders, there is another way. For instance, during the Buddha's time, many rich people who enjoyed

their mundane pleasures approached the Buddha, and told Him that it was difficult for them to renounce the world. They had worldly commitments, family obligations and many other duties to fulfil. So they requested the Buddha to lay down a suitable religious way of life for them to practise. The Buddha did not ridicule them; for He knew that not everyone was ready to give up worldly pleasures.

Knowing the complex situation of the household life, the Buddha spoke of total renunciation for the life of a monk or nun as the only way for a religious life. He gave householders suitable guidelines to lead a religious life while tending to their normal occupations. The Teacher who had renounced absolutely everything for His own Enlightenment knew the nature of worldly attachment. Renunciation must only be undertaken when realisation appears in the

mind. Otherwise, there will be feelings of disappointment or frustration. Those who make a premature renunciation may return to the lay life. So we have to wait until such realisation appears in our mind.

THE BUDDHA'S ADVICE FOR HOUSEHOLDERS

The first happiness *atthi-sukha* is to enjoy the economic security of wealth acquired by just and righteous means; the second *bhoga-sukha* is spending that wealth liberally on oneself, one's family, friends and relatives, and on meritorious deeds; the third *anana-sukha* is to be free from debts; the fourth happiness *anavajja-sukha* is to live a faultless, pure and blameless life committing no evil in thought, word or deed. When you come to know that you have earned something honestly, the happiness that you gain through your

accumulated wealth develops confidence in the household life. Some people who go on earning and accumulating wealth neither experience happiness nor use wealth in a proper way. According to the Buddha, we can experience worldly happiness by using what we have earned in a reasonable way, following basic religious principles. It is not correct to say that Buddhists should not experience worldly happiness. Certain harmless cultural amusements and entertainments relax the mind and help reduce tension. Human emotions can be satisfied without disturbing the peace and happiness of others. Many cultural performances in Asia actually developed through the influence of Buddhism.

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT

When people reach a certain level of spiritual development and see the real nature of worldly life, they will give up even such entertainments. They realise that ultimately, life is nothing but a dream and that worldly pleasures are of a fleeting nature. The three characteristics of every existing component thing: *Anicca*, *Dukkha* and *Anatta* – impermanance, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality – can be understood clearly through insight. By insight, we mean a realisation of the ultimate truth which appears when a person has trained his mind to see the real nature of existence.

Some people say Buddhism is responsible for certain countries being undeveloped and backward. They also say that Buddhism always draws attention to suffering and insists that people give up the worldly life to sit in a forest to meditate. It is for this reason that



Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta
– impermanance, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality

Westerners in the past have treated Buddhism as a ‘pessimistic religion’. It is true that Buddhism emphasises the unsatisfactoriness of life. But this does not make it pessimistic. In the same way, we cannot call a doctor who tells a patient that he is dying of cancer ‘pessimistic’. A religion is pessimistic if it simply says life is miserable. But in Buddhism, clear teachings are offered on how to become happy and contented.

MIDDLE PATH

The Buddha was the most active and energetic religious teacher. He advised people to use their skills and knowledge in their daily life. A Buddhist should not lead a lazy and easy life and blame Buddhism for any of his/her failures. A good Buddhist has the quality of *viriya* – energy. Buddhists must strive for perfection. They must not delay doing

something by finding excuses like it is too hot or it is too cold. The Buddha's advice to lay people was not to go to either extremes of sensual pleasure or self torture to practise a religion. Everyone must try to lead a happy, harmless and peaceful life. Buddhism is known as the Middle Path.

It is true, however, that the household life can easily influence you to violate some religious principles when temptation, needs and irritation are aroused. You may come across certain difficulties in your daily life as householders. You find it difficult to maintain absolute honesty, kindness and tolerance. It is also true that few can become perfect religious persons in the household life. Your responsibilities, obligations and duties can disturb your mind. They provoke you to do certain things which go against your conscience. If you try to be a religious fanatic as a lay person, your attitude may not appeal

to your family members, friends and others. If you follow Buddhist rules which are meant specifically for monks who lead a monastic life, your associates may feel embarrassed; and they may regard you as a nuisance or an eccentric. Therefore, try to lead a sensible life by observing reasonable religious principles. This is how you avoid becoming a religious fanatic. If you go to extremes, not only will people laugh at you, they will also get a wrong idea of what Buddhism teaches. If you are not fanatical, you can live and work even with other religionists. The Buddha had pointed out that you must know your limit in everything. Try to practise religious principles which are universally accepted. As lay Buddhists, your duty is to lead a normal religious life while fulfilling your family obligations. If you neglect your responsibilities towards your family, you may experience problems. Others may think you are a useless person.

You must know how to adjust your way of life to the country and society you live in without going against the important cultural and traditional practices of the majority, if they are harmless. You should also co-operate with others without behaving as if your religion is the only one that has the right to exist. Buddhism is a religion of freedom. It respects the freedom of other religions. Your common sense and understanding are important in practising a religion.

NATURE OF AMBITION

Every person entertains some kind of ambition. When we refer to the Buddha, He too had an ambition that was implanted in His mind long ago. He continued to develop that ambition, life after life, until He achieved what He wanted. But this ambition is best described as an aspiration. When we read

the Buddha's discourses, we can understand how He had worked to reach the goal He aspired to. He revealed this to us by referring to previous birth stories. He also explained the nature of the great virtues and discipline that He had to cultivate to achieve His aspiration.

When we compare our ambition with the Buddha's aspiration, we can see a vast difference. This is because our ambition is primarily based on desire and anxiety bound to worldly pleasure. On the other hand, the Buddha's aspiration was to free Himself from selfishness in order to serve others. We develop our ambition by disturbing others' happiness. That is how we create problems and misery in this world. We are willing to do any kind of unwholesome or non-virtuous deed for our own pleasure. From the Buddhist point of view, this kind of selfish ambition is not justifiable.

What we should constantly strive to do is to develop the higher kind of ambition

by working very hard to obtain freedom, happiness and liberation from our existing worldly problems. This ambition is harmless and reasonable. However, this is not the final goal: we must not be satisfied with these temporary mundane ambitions. Our ultimate goal should be freedom from suffering – Nirvana, where all ambitions cease and the reality of existence is seen.

RENDERING SERVICE TO OTHERS

While working for our own happiness, freedom and salvation, we have to render some service for the benefit and happiness of others. The Buddha adopted this type of aspiration with deep conviction and boundless compassion. Whilst working for His own salvation, He served others in every possible way. He continued His service to humanity by sacrificing His sensual pleasures, by cultivating all the good

qualities and virtues and by eradicating non-virtuous thoughts to maintain purity in the mind. This is the way He developed His selfless ambition to gain His enlightenment.

He never cultivated it for His own benefit but for the welfare and liberation of every living being. He developed boundless compassion and wisdom and expressed them by word and deed. But our ambitions, which are selfish in nature, can create much misery. Therefore, we have to learn how to direct our ambitions in such a way as to relieve the suffering of others. Such ambitions are wholesome because they contribute to the greater good of humankind.

CAN WE LIVE WITHOUT CRAVING?


Many people are bothered by this question: if eradication of craving is essential to achieve final liberation, how can we live without

craving? It is true that certain necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, transport and medicine are indispensable for our living. At the same time, we need to have income to support our families to fulfil our duties. Attachment to one's husband or wife and children is natural. We should not regard such attachment as irreligious craving. The Buddha did say that craving for existence creates problems, but He did not say that we must torture ourselves and those around us whilst striving to give up craving. In Buddhism, craving itself is not a 'sin' but it creates mental impurities or unskillful action arising from ignorance which delays our spiritual progress. In Buddhism, we develop spirituality in stages. At first we serve those we love in our own family circles. But we must learn to work for the benefit of all humanity. In this way we can refine our human nature to experience the divine nature. The Buddha wanted only to point out the

danger of selfish desires. People develop these selfish desires for worldly gain which motivate non-virtuous deeds. Our striving for necessities could be decent if we do not develop an undue craving which harms others. Buddhism as well as other religions point out the danger of selfishness.

ERADICATING CRAVING

If selfish desire is harmful, how can we eradicate it? When we have difficulty eradicating craving for own property, we should understand what feelings others have for their own. That is why we observe the precept not to take things which belong to others, to stop craving for others' possessions. When we stop this selfish desire, we allow others to live without any fear about their property. When we become aware of this selfish craving, we should take steps to train



*If we are unduly attached
to material things,
we will experience various problems.
Fear, insecurity and suspicion
will disturb our peace of mind.*

our mind to regard all our necessities as impermanent and as mere aids to fulfil our duties. For example, if we have a large amount of money, we should take it as an opportunity to help our fellow beings. Those who do not have money can give their moral support and co-operation for the welfare of others. At this stage, we have to think that we are only custodians of the property which we claim as ours.

If we are unduly attached to material things, we will experience various problems. Fear, insecurity and suspicion will disturb our peace of mind. That is the price we have to pay for clinging to property. Because of this clinging, some people have become insane when they lost their property through natural disaster or theft. Buddhism teaches us not to be so unreasonably attached to material things. After all, we cannot take them away with us when we die.

If we really want to experience peace, the only thing that we can do is to reduce our responsibilities. Try to hand over our possessions to others who are entitled to them; alternatively, donate them to charitable or religious organisations. If we do so, we free our minds from greed. If we want to develop spiritually, we must be prepared to sacrifice our property for the welfare of others. By this we mean those suffering from poverty and sickness and other calamities. However, this distaste for owing material wealth must come naturally – from true understanding. As we progress spiritually, ignorance gives way to understanding. Then we will freely give up material possessions. This ‘renunciation’ brings great happiness, because it is accompanied by the wisdom of seeing things as they really are.

CONTENTMENT

Those who have not learnt how to maintain contentment while leading a worldly life never get satisfaction. They develop jealousy, suspicion and fear. They experience worry and insecurity. That is why the Buddha says '*Santutthi Paramam Dhanam*' – contentment is the highest wealth. Poor people think rich people are very happy and lucky. They do not know the fear and restlessness that disturb the minds of the wealthy. Many wealthy people experience sleeplessness. A poor man does not experience such problems although he has to face other difficulties. The poor and the rich can only be happy if they feel contented and do not crave for the property of others. In this sense at least, we can say that the poor and the rich are equal.

One day, the Buddha had to sleep in a forest without any shelter during the winter.

The next morning when He came out from the forest, He met a prince. The prince asked the Buddha where He was coming from. The Buddha said He was coming from the forest where He had spent the night. When the prince asked whether He had slept happily and peacefully, the Enlightened One said He is one who sleeps peacefully and happily not only one night but every night. Why did He say that? It was because His mind had no worries or disturbances. His mind was always pure. He was free from family problems or property problems. Therefore, He could sleep peacefully. Our minds are not free from problems. That is why we are not happy and find it difficult to sleep peacefully. Attachments give temporary pleasures but ultimately, they disturb our peace of mind.

EMOTIONAL SATISFACTION

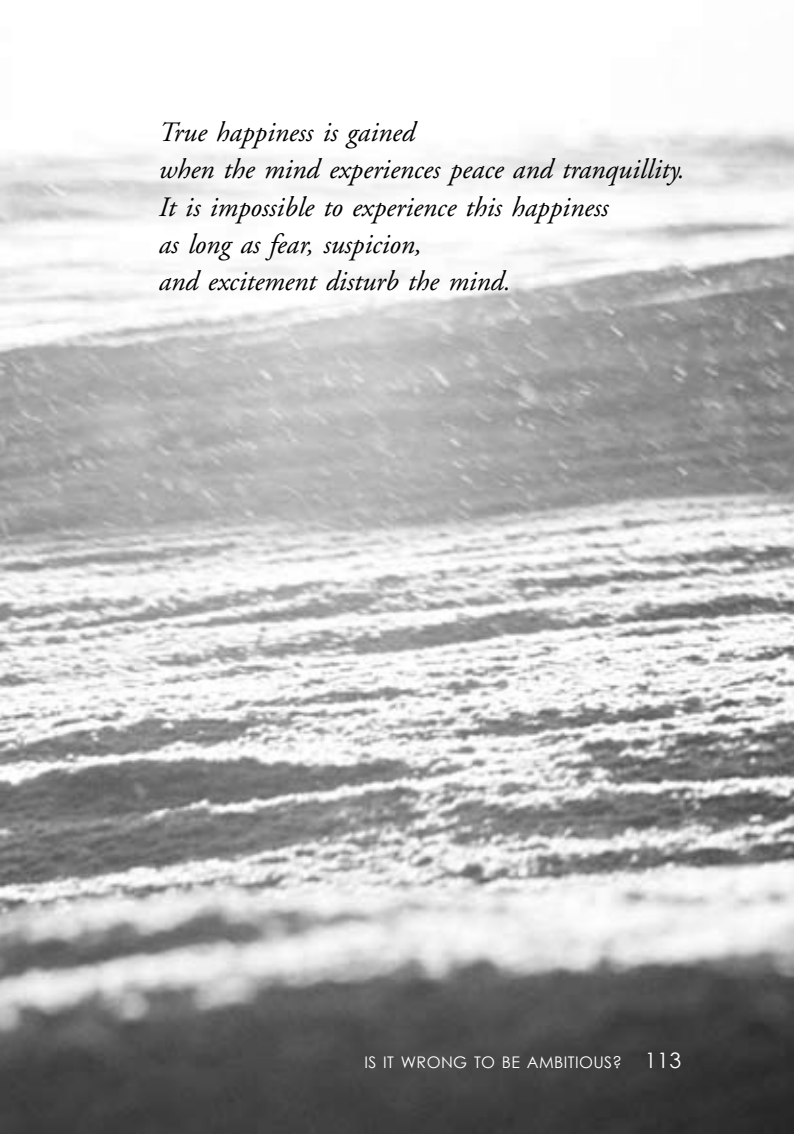
The Buddha did not encourage householders to detach themselves from everything at once. Although He pointed out how attachments can create disappointments. He knew that the life of those whose minds are still defiled, can become very miserable or dull without attachments. This does not mean the Buddha encouraged attachments. He was saying that while we allow ourselves to be attached at a lower stage of our spiritual development, we must discard them at the later stages. When we develop attachments, we have to think about worries and disturbances as natural occurrences. We must strive to be free from attachments and be like the lotus which rises clear from the muddy water. The pleasurable feeling that people get through the five senses to satisfy craving is emotional satisfaction. People regard this as happiness.

Although people lay great emphasis on this type of satisfaction, it is shown that nearly all human problems, corruptions and immoral practices are traceable to this desire for sensual pleasures. True happiness is gained when the mind experiences peace and tranquillity. It is impossible to experience this happiness as long as fear, suspicion, and excitement disturb the mind. The ambitions that we develop can create disappointment and frustration if they are of a selfish nature.

Religious knowledge is important to maintain a healthy mental attitude to face unfavourable worldly conditions. When changes and separation take place, we must adjust our way of life. It is meaningless to say Buddhism prohibits people from having craving and attachment. Emotional attachments to property, people or ideas carry no formal punishment tags. All that Buddhism does is to explain the repercussions that occur when

one becomes a slave to craving and attachment. This is just like a parent advising a child not to play with fire.

People cannot experience worldly pleasures and attachments without paying the price in worry and misery. They must be prepared to accept the consequences if they really want to enjoy worldly life. Those who are unaware of the consequences will be deeply disappointed. Changed circumstances due to old age and sickness could cancel out these pleasures. People who are not ready to face these problems commit suicide or end up in mental institutions. So do not label Buddhism a pessimistic religion simply because it points out these realities of life! All the Buddha's Teachings show us how to lead meaningful and happy lives by understanding our human nature. Buddhism is the most optimistic of all religions.



*True happiness is gained
when the mind experiences peace and tranquillity.
It is impossible to experience this happiness
as long as fear, suspicion,
and excitement disturb the mind.*

CRAVING FOR OUR PHYSICAL BODY

We have already discussed why we need to reduce our craving and how to do it. We also explained the nature of craving for the property of others as well as our own. If we remove these two types of craving, we will still have craving for our physical body. This craving for self-preservation is intense. Most people are not willing to sacrifice anything from their body for the welfare of others. In their ignorance, they even protect their physical bodies at the cost of the lives of others. But when people come to know the unreal and the impermanent nature of the physical body, they will even go so far as to donate organs from their physical body, By doing so, they will reduce their strong attachment towards the body.

A person who can understand the uncertainty or the impermanence of life would be quite willing to sacrifice even his or her life

to save the life of another. To such a person, morality and virtues would be more important than life. This is the way wise people reduce their craving step by step. The main purpose of eradicating craving is to be free from all existing physical and mental suffering.

The Buddha reduced His craving gradually life after life. By cultivating virtues to uproot mental defilements, by sacrificing His worldly pleasures and even giving His own life on numerous occasions. He achieved His goal of Enlightenment to save others from suffering. Great people are willing to sacrifice their lives to relieve others from suffering. To them life is nothing if it is not used to help fellow beings. Jesus Christ, Socrates, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King sacrificed their lives for the sake of others. But their names can never die. The whole world remembers and respects them. Others who have developed selfishness and violated the peace and

happiness of humankind are never respected. They are remembered after death only with horror and loathing. Just consider how Stalin and Hitler are regarded today. Real human values lie in our virtues and principles for the betterment of humankind.

CRAVING FOR EXISTENCE THROUGH REBIRTH

Although we have reduced attachment to the physical body, we are still not free from craving for existence through rebirth. Some people develop a selfish desire to have a pleasurable permanent existence in heaven or paradise. Others crave to be born in very rich families to have pleasant worldly life. All these ambitions develop craving. This is alright as a temporary measure, but one day we have to get rid of craving too. Otherwise,

we will never gain permanent peace, liberation or salvation.

Today, the whole world has become a battlefield because of selfish desires. Why do people want to harm and swindle others? Why do they want to indulge in immoral activities and illegal practices? It is due to their selfish craving for pleasure. Such actions bring stress to their lives and create suffering.

The belief in immortality is like a candy given to a child to make him forget his toothache. Many people would not be able to accept the overwhelming situations of life unless they are told there is a pleasurable immortal existence after death. They are fooled into accepting the unsatisfactoriness of the present existence by hoping for an eternal existence in some paradise after death. That is what Karl Marx attacked when he said that *“Religion is the opium of the people.”*

Naturally, foolish people cling to this

comforting thought and never try to question the validity of the belief. They do not know the real nature of existence. Sometimes, Buddhists who do not understand the Dharma fall easy prey to those who talk about eternal happiness in heavens. When some people tell them of such a place, they succumb to the craving for a fantasy of an eternal life. They must understand that even life in those heavens is not permanent. Only Nirvana is permanent. It is the state where all desires have been completely and permanently eradicated – with no more death or rebirth.


Many people are not ready to accept truth. If the truth is not pleasant to their ears, they refuse to listen. Truth is not pleasant to one who is a slave to sensual pleasures. Truth is natural and unbiased. We will not have disappointment when we realise the universal characteristics of nature. Truth does not bend to our selfish needs. We have to understand truth.

The rounds of rebirth in accordance with karma we create prolong our attachments and craving. Every birth implies decay, sickness and death. This is the unsatisfactory nature of existence and rebirth in any part of the universe. The longer we remain in this cycle of birth and death, the longer will be our suffering. We can never completely satisfy our craving. Satisfying our desire is a losing battle. As soon as we satisfy one desire, we get tired of it and seek fresh ways to satisfy another desire much like drug addiction. The Buddha rejected belief in an immortal life because He knew the real nature of existence. He wanted us to understand the uncertainty of the wheel of existence.

Existence (by birth) is the main cause of all our problems and unhappiness. Simply by entertaining some vague beliefs in an after-life, we will not get what we want. They are figments of the imagination. Universal nature is unchangeable. It does not operate

in our favour simply by our wishing it so. We are subject to the laws of the universe. Our ignorance of this unbiased law is no excuse for our mistakes. An innocent child may die because of ignorance of the danger of a 'live' electric wire. We cannot argue that he must live because he was innocent. The cause of his death is ignorance. The cause of our suffering is also ignorance. Only knowledge and wisdom can save us.

The universal law does not operate on hatred, retribution, revenge or anger. Our duty is to live in accordance with this law if we want to avoid suffering. We cannot change this universal law by worshipping or praying to anyone. This is what the Buddha taught. If we do good, we will get good results; if we do negative, we will be hounded by negative results.

A large, leafless tree silhouette stands against a light, overcast sky. The tree's branches are intricate and spread out, creating a complex web of dark lines. The ground below is a flat, dark horizon line. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

*If we do good,
we will get good results;
if we do negative,
we will be hounded by negative results.*

CRAVING FOR NON-EXISTENCE

Besides craving for material comfort and a happy after-life, people ask how the ambition of wanting 'not to exist' can become a craving.

The answer lies in frustration or unfulfilled desires. Because of this craving, they try suicide. They believe that there will not be another life hereafter. So long as mental defilements are active, no one can stop 'becoming' or rebirth. If we are not happy with this life, mental purification is the only solution to stop rebirth. Buddhism teaches that we should not confuse ourselves by worrying about existence or non-existence. We should completely calm our minds by always living in the present moment. And in each moment, we must be free from hatred, greed and delusion. This is the secret of real happiness. When the mind is free from all worldly ambitions, selfish desire or craving, we will be free from all physical and mental problems. Ambitions must be diverted to serve others as well as ourselves. Such ambitions would mean true liberation from worldly conditions.

Let us remember that Buddhism is not against people having a pleasant life during their existence on this earth. The Buddha preached the middle path. He advocates a gentle and rational way of life which neither punishes by deprivation nor panders by excess.

Buddhism teaches us to be moderate in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. It encourages the gradual and consistent development of the spiritual life which leads to the destruction of all craving, the root cause of unsatisfactoriness. Buddhists are not expected to become saints overnight. Rather they are shown how to gradually gain final release from the pain of continuous rebirth. The way to do this is to practise Morality (*Sila*), Concentration (*Samadhi*) and Wisdom (*Panna*). Even the Fully Enlightened One took innumerable lifetimes to attain his final goal. Buddhism is a practical religion. It should be practised in a gentle and rational way.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE



Human nature being what it is, all of us are inclined to put the blame on others for our own shortcomings or misfortunes. Do you ever give a thought for a moment that you yourself can be responsible for your own problems? Your sorrows and miseries are not caused by a family curse that is handed down from one generation to the next. Nor are they caused by the original sin of some ancestor who has returned from beyond the grave to haunt you. Nor are your sorrows and miseries created by a god or by a devil.

Your sorrow is caused by yourself.

Your sorrow is your own making.

You are your own liberator.

You must learn to shoulder the responsibilities of your life and to admit your own weakness without blaming or disturbing others. Remember the old saying:

*The uncultured man always blames others;
the semi-cultured man blames himself and
the fully cultured man blames neither.*

As a cultured being, you must learn to solve your own problems without blaming others. If each person would try to correct himself, there would not be any trouble in this world. But many people do not make any effort to realise that they themselves are responsible for many misfortunes that befall them. They prefer to find scapegoats. They look outside themselves

for the source of their troubles because they are reluctant to admit their own weakness.

Man's mind is given to so much self-deceit that he does not want to admit his own weakness. He will try to find some excuse to justify his action and to create an illusion that he is blameless. If a man really wants to be free, he must have the courage to admit his own weakness. The Buddha says:

*Easily seen are others' faults;
hard indeed it is to see one's own fault.*

You must develop the courage to admit when you have fallen victim to your weakness. You must admit when you are in the wrong. Do not follow the uncultured who always blames others. Do not use other people as your scapegoat – this is most despicable. Remember that you may fool some of the people some of the time, but not all the people all of the

time. The Buddha says:

*The fool who does not admit he is a fool,
is a real fool.*

*And the fool who admits he is a fool
is wise to that extent.*

Admit your own weakness. Do not blame others. You must realise that you are responsible for the miseries and the difficulties that come to you. You must understand that your way of thinking also creates the conditions that give rise to your difficulties. You must appreciate that at all times, you are responsible for whatever comes to you.

*It is not that something is wrong with the
world, but something is wrong with us.*

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

Remember that whatever happens to you cannot hurt you if you know how to keep a balanced mind. You are hurt only by the mental attitude that you adopt towards yourself and towards others. If you show a loving attitude towards others, you will receive a loving attitude in return. If you show hatred, you will undoubtedly never receive love in return. An angry man breathes out poison and he hurts himself more than others. Anyone who is wise not to be angered by anger will not be hurt. Remember that no one can hurt you unless you allow others to hurt you. If another person blames or scolds you, but you follow the Dharma (truth), then that Dharma will protect you from unjust attacks. The Buddha says:

*Whoever harms a harmless person,
one pure and guiltless,
upon that very fool the evil recoils like
fine dust thrown against the wind.*

If you allow others to fulfil their wishes in hurting you, you are responsible.

BLAME NOT OTHERS – ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY

You must learn to guard your mind by maintaining a proper perspective so that any external happenings cannot affect your equilibrium. When you are in a tight corner, you must not blame circumstances when things go wrong. You must not think that you are unlucky, the victim of fate, or of somebody else's ill-will. No matter what reason you give, you must not try to evade self-responsibility for your own actions instead of laying the

blame on circumstances. Try to solve your problems without showing a sour face. In times of difficulty, work cheerfully under the most trying circumstances. Be courageous to accept change if change is necessary but be serene enough to accept what you cannot change. Be wise enough to understand the worldly conditions which are common to everybody. Be wise enough to face certain problems without being frustrated and unhappy. The difficulties are for you to overcome. Those who try to do some service to others earn more blame than those who do not serve, but this does not mean they must be discouraged. They should have the wisdom to realise that selfless service brings its own reward.

*Love without knowledge
and knowledge without love
cannot produce a good life.*

- B. Russel.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR INNER PEACE

You must learn how to protect whatever inner peace and calm you have managed to create within your mind. To preserve the inner peace, you must know when to surrender yourself; you must know when to throw away your pride, when to subdue your false ego, when to change your adamant attitude or false conviction and when to practise patience. You should not allow others to take away your inner peace, and you can preserve your inner peace if you know how to act wisely. Wisdom comes through recognition of ignorance.

*Man is not a fallen angel,
but an arising animal.*

THE CORRECT ATTITUDE TOWARDS CRITICISM

You must learn how to guard yourself from unjust criticism and how to make use of constructive criticism. You must look objectively at criticism that others give to you. If the criticism that comes to you is just, well-founded and given with good intention, then accept that criticism and put it to use. However, if the criticism that comes to you is unjust and ill-founded and given with bad intention, you are under no obligation to accept this kind of criticism. If you know that your attitude is correct and appreciated by wise and cultured people, then do not worry about ill-founded criticism. Your understanding of both constructive and destructive criticism is important. The Buddha says:

There is no one who is not blamed in this world.

EXPECT NOTHING AND NOTHING WILL DISAPPOINT YOU

You can protect yourself from disappointments by not having any undue expectations. If you expect nothing, then nothing can disappoint you. Do not expect reward for the good that you have done. Do good for the sake of doing good with kindness. If you can help others without expecting any kind of reward, then you can have no disappointment. You can be a great man! The happiness that appears in your mind for the good that you have done, is in itself a big reward. That happiness creates satisfaction in your life.

Perhaps you are a person who is good by nature and you do not do any harm to others. But you get blamed by others despite doing good. You have to face difficulties and disappointment even though you have always helped others and have done good for others.

Then you might ask, “If good begets good and bad begets bad, why should I have to suffer when I am completely innocent? Why should I have to undergo so many difficulties? Why should I get so many disappointments? Why should I get blamed by others despite my good work? The simple answer is that when you do some good deeds you have to face certain evil forces. If not, you are facing a bad karma that is ripening in the present.

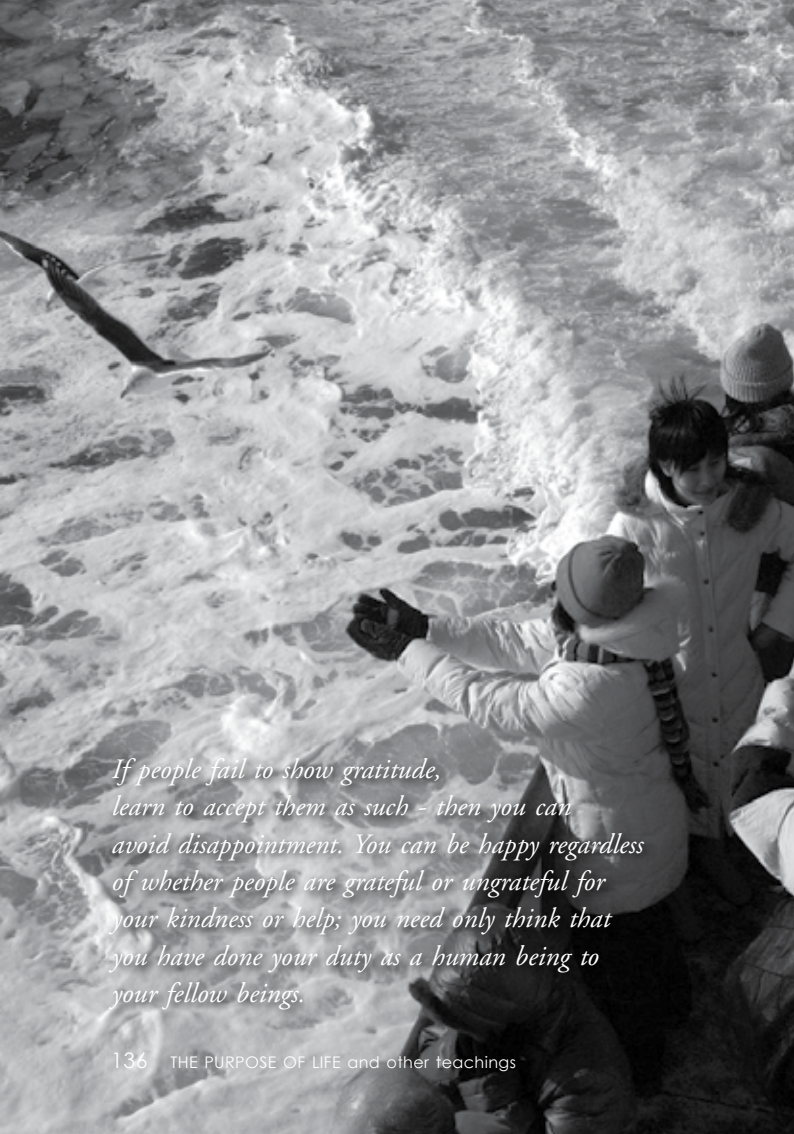
Continue with your good work and you will eventually be free from such troubles. Remember that you have created your own disappointments and you alone can overcome these disappointments, by realising the nature of karma (action and reaction) and the worldly conditions as explained by the Buddha.

*If you can protect yourself,
you can protect others.*

GRATITUDE IS A RARE VIRTUE

The Buddha considered gratitude as a great virtue, yet it is very rare. Yes, it is true that this virtue is rare in any society. You cannot always expect other people to be grateful for what you have done for them. People are inclined to be forgetful especially when it comes to remembering favours. If you expect gratitude from others, you will perhaps have to meet disappointment. If people fail to show gratitude, learn to accept them as such – then you can avoid disappointment. You can be happy regardless of whether people are grateful or ungrateful for your kindness or help; you need only think that you have done your duty as a human being to your fellow beings. That should be the only reward you should seek.

*He who knows that enough,
will always have enough. - Lao Tze*



*If people fail to show gratitude,
learn to accept them as such – then you can
avoid disappointment. You can be happy regardless
of whether people are grateful or ungrateful for
your kindness or help; you need only think that
you have done your duty as a human being to
your fellow beings.*

COMPARE NOT WITH OTHERS

You can rid yourself of unnecessary worry and troubles simply by not comparing yourself with others. “So long as you regard others as your ‘equal’ or as your ‘superior’ or as your ‘inferior’, you will continue to have problems to worry about. But if you do not adopt such an attitude there is nothing for you to worry. If you think you are better than others, you may become proud. If you think you are equal to others, you may stagnate. If you think you are inferior to others, you may become useless to yourself and to others. You may lose your self-confidence.

It is very difficult for most people to surrender their pride or sense of superiority. But you must learn to reduce or to suppress your pride. If you are able to sacrifice your pride, then you can find your inner peace and you can help humankind to find peace

and happiness. Which is greater to maintain and to support – your pride or your peace of mind?

Comparing yourself with others can be a source of unnecessary worry. Try to realise that equality, inferiority and superiority are all changing, relative states: at one time you may be poor; at another time you may be a rich man. In the endless rounds within the ocean of life and death (*Samsara*), we are all equal, inferior and superior to each other at different times. So why worry?

*If you are good to yourself,
you are good to others.
If you are good to others,
you are good to yourself.*

HOW TO HANDLE TROUBLE-MAKERS


It is one thing to realise that you are at all times responsible for all the troubles and problems that befall you. It is another thing to know what you must do to overcome the disturbances that come to you through other people and circumstances.

You must learn how to handle trouble-makers and evil-doers. They are also human beings; they must also be accommodated into the religious fold. Every effort must be made to correct them instead of isolating and neglecting them. If you are strong enough to resist their evil influence, there is no reason for you to avoid associating with them. Through your associations with evil-doers, you can influence them for the better. Remember that it is your understanding that protects you from evil-doers and allows you to influence them to become good. Here is

the understanding that will protect you and help others.

You must understand that if a man does something wrong to you due to his ignorance and misunderstanding, that is the time for you to reveal your wisdom, your education, your sympathy, your culture and your religious attitude. What is the use of all your education and religious knowledge if you have not learned how to behave as a cultured man in a time of need? When others do wrong to you, you must regard their action as an opportunity for you to develop your patience and understanding.

Patience and education are prime qualities which everyone must cultivate. The more you practise these virtues the more you maintain your dignity. You must know how to make good use of these qualities and they will help relieve you from many of the enormous miseries, sufferings and burdens of life. Sometimes, you may come across certain

A black and white photograph of a cloudy sky. The clouds are large, billowy, and have a textured appearance. In the bottom right corner, there is a dark silhouette of a tree with many branches. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

*When others do wrong to you, you must regard
their action as an opportunity for you to develop
your patience and understanding.*

people who try to take advantage of your tolerance and patience. That is the time to act wisely. You must practise wisdom. Remember that your spirit of tolerance, patience and understanding has some powerful influence over your enemies so as to make them realise that they are in the wrong.

Patience is bitter but its fruit is sweet.

Virtues must be practised wisely.

FORGIVE AND FORGET

You must also understand that to take revenge on trouble-makers only creates more problems and difficulties. You must realise that negative feelings and actions only bring harm and suffering to both you and the trouble-maker. In order to take revenge, you have to create a sense of hatred in your own heart. This hatred is like a poison which you inject into a trouble-maker.

But since the poison is initially created in you, surely it will harm you before it can harm anyone else. Before you can throw any cow-dung at another, you must first dirty yourself with cow-dung. Then your behaviour is the same as the action of the foolish person. There is no basic difference between you and the evil-doer. By hating others, you only give them power over you. You do not solve your problem. If you become angry with another and he simply smiles back at you without any show of anger, then you are the defeated person. Since he did not co-operate with you to fulfil your wish, he is victorious; you are defeated. The Buddha says:

*Ah, happily do we live without
hate amongst the hateful.
Amidst the hateful men, we live without hate.*

Perhaps you may not be strong enough

to love your enemies; but for the sake of your own health and happiness, you must learn at least to forgive and forget.

By not hating or crushing your troublemaker, you are acting like a wise and cultured man. To act in this manner, you must understand that the other person is intoxicated with greed, anger, jealousy or ignorance. He is no different from all other human beings who are also at one time or another intoxicated with the same negative states of heart and mind. The Buddha once said:

*Evil-doers are not wicked by nature.
They do evil because they are ignorant.*

We should not curse them. It is not justifiable to condemn them to eternal suffering. Instead, we should try to correct them. We should try to explain to them that they are wrong. With this understanding, you can treat the evil-doer as

a patient who is suffering from a sickness. If you can help to remove the cause of the sickness, then the patient can be cured and everyone can be well and happy.

*Good life is inspired by love and
guided by knowledge.*

If a man does something wrong to you due to his ignorance or misunderstanding, then that is the time to radiate your compassion and understanding to the evil-doer. For one day he will realise his folly and give up his evil habits. So it is better to give him a chance to be good. If you can radiate loving-kindness to the trouble-maker, then one day he will change into a better person. The Buddha said:

*Hatred is never ceased by hatred;
by love alone is hatred ceased.
This is an eternal law.*

If you can adopt this method of radiating loving-kindness, then no harm will come to you when you try to correct the evil-doer. This method will help you to achieve both physical and mental relief. Life means giving and taking; like breathing in and out. Those who do not understand this get into trouble and face difficulties in their living.

If a man does something wrong to you again and again, you must be wise and try to correct him each time he makes the mistake. Try to follow the good example set by the Buddha who always returned good for evil. He said:

*The more evil that comes to me,
the more good will radiate from me.*

Some people think that it is not practical to return good for evil. Try and see for yourself. If you find it difficult to return good for evil,

then you can still do yourself and others a great service by not returning evil for evil.

*Sympathetic consideration is needed
for less understanding people.*

WE ARE ALL HUMAN

All human beings have weaknesses and are prone to making mistakes. All human beings have the basic weaknesses of desire, hatred and ignorance. These weaknesses are within human beings in varying degrees. Unless you are a perfect man or an *Arahant*, you are no exception.

*Man is not satisfied with his life and
never finds the purpose of life even
after gaining the whole world.*

Let us take a closer look at the weakness of delusion or ignorance: man is enveloped in ignorance. His mind is clouded by disturbances, difficulties and darkness. Out of ignorance, man creates suffering and he shares this suffering with his fellow man. The miseries and worries that come to man are due to worldly conditions, man's unbalanced, uncultured mind and the reaction to the non-virtuous practices perpetrated by man.

Nobody is perfect in this world; everybody is liable to commit certain unwholesome actions either intentionally or unintentionally. How can you think that you are free from evil?

Fear and worry disappear when ignorance is dispelled by knowledge.

If you can understand the nature of the weaknesses that are within man's mind, then there is no reason for you to grumble over

your sufferings and miseries. You will have the courage to face and to tolerate all miseries, worries and sufferings that come to you.

Nothing happens to man that is not contained within man. - C. Jung

PARENTAL LOVE

You are responsible for the well-being and upbringing of your own children. If the child grows up to be a strong, healthy and useful citizen, it is the result of your effort. If the child grows up to be a delinquent, you must bear the responsibility. Do not blame others. As parents, it is your duty to guide the child on to a proper path.

A child, at its most impressionable age, needs the tender love, care and attention of the parents. Without parental love and guidance, the child will be handicapped and

will find the world a bewildering place to live in. However, showering parental love, care and attention does not mean pandering to all the demands of the child, reasonable or otherwise. Too much pampering will spoil the child. The mother in bestowing her love and care, should also be strict and firm in handling the tantrums of a child. Being strict and firm does not necessarily mean being harsh to a child. Show your love coupled with a disciplined hand – the child will understand.

Unfortunately, amongst present day parents, parental love is sadly lacking. The mad rush for material advancement, the liberation movements and the aspiration for equality, have resulted in many mothers joining their husbands, spending their working hours in offices and shops, rather than remaining at home tending to their offspring. The children, left to the care of relations or servants, are

bewildered on being denied tender motherly love and care. The mother, feeling guilty about her lack of attention, would try to placate the child by giving in to all sorts of demands from the child. Such an action spoils the child. Providing the child with all sorts of modern toys such as tanks, machine guns, pistols, swords and the like as an appeasement is not psychologically good. The child is being taught to condone destruction instead of being taught to be kind, compassionate and helpful. Loading the child with such toys is no substitute for a mother's tender love and affections. Devoid of parental affection and guidance, it will not be surprising if the child subsequently grows up to be a delinquent. Who then is to be blamed for bringing up a wayward child? The parents of course! The mother, especially after a hard day's work in an office, to be followed by family chores, could hardly find time for the child that is yearning

for her care and attention.

In the battle between the sexes for equality, many women seem to think that the solution is to compete with men outside the home. Such women would be best advised to bear no children. It is selfishness of the worst kind to bring a life into this world and then abandon it. You are responsible for what you create – you are responsible to see that a child is not only satisfied materially, but more importantly spiritually and psychologically. The provision for material comfort is secondary to the provision of love and attention. We know of many people from poor homes who have brought up their children well with plenty of love. Conversely, many rich people have provided every material comfort for their children, but deprived of love these children have grown up devoid of psychological and moral development.

Some women may feel that advising them

to concentrate on the upbringing of the family is degrading and conservative. It is true that in the past women have been treated very badly, but this was more due to ignorance on the part of men than an inherent weakness in the concept of depending upon women to bring up children. The Sanskrit word for a woman is *Grubini* which literally means “leader of the house”. Certainly, it does not imply that a woman is inferior. Rather it means a division of responsibility for the male and the female. In Japan, some husbands surrender every cent of their pay packet to their wives who have complete control over domestic affairs. This leaves the man free to concentrate on what he can do best. Since each partner knows clearly what his or her responsibilities are, there is no conflict and the atmosphere at home is happy and peaceful, where children can grow up well.

Of course, the husband must see to it

that his partner is well cared for, that she is consulted on every family decision, that there is enough freedom for her to develop her personality, to have free time to pursue her interests and so on. In this sense, husband and wife are equally responsible for the welfare of their family and are not in competition with each other.

A mother should weigh carefully as to whether she should continue to be a working mother or a housewife giving all the affection and care for the well-being of her growing child. Strangely, some modern mothers are also being trained to handle guns and other deadly equipments when they should be cuddling their children and training them to be good and law-abiding citizens.

The modern trend and attitude of working mothers towards their children also tends to erode the time-honoured filial piety which children are expected to shower on their

parents. The replacement of breast-feeding by bottle-feeding, is also another cause for the erosion of the affection between mother and child. Hitherto when mothers used to breast-feed and cuddle babies in their arms, the tender affection between mother and child was much greater and the influence the mother had on the child, for its well-being, was much more pronounced. Under such circumstances, filial piety, family cohesion and obedience were invariably present. These traditional traits are for the good and well-being of the child. It is up to the parents, especially the mother to provide them. The mother is responsible for the child being good or wayward. The mother can reduce delinquency! At the highest level of thinking, you can see things as they are, not as you are. Then you know that you are responsible for everything.

*Those who lead their lives by going
against nature, must face the consequences
either physically or mentally.*

HOW TO REDUCE YOUR MENTAL PAIN

Whenever certain difficulties and problems arise, there are various ways and means for you to make up your mind to reduce your mental agony and unhappiness. First and foremost, you must try to understand the nature of the world in which you live in. You must realise that you can never expect everything in this world to be perfect and to run smoothly. The world is not always in your favour. You must be prepared to face difficulties and problems in the day-to-day life. There is no world and no life without problems.

If you have strong craving for existence and an insane craze to enjoy the sensual pleasures of the world, you have to pay the price in terms of

physical pain and mental agony. This can be equated to the payment of rental for the “house” occupied by you – “rental” being the “physical pain and mental agony” and the “house” being your physical body, occupied by you on a temporary basis. Through your “body”, you enjoy sensual pleasures and you must pay for it. There is nothing free in this world.

However, if you very much wish to eradicate or eliminate the “physical pain” and “mental agony”, you should try to give up or subdue that strong craving force and the desire for sensual pleasures. So long as you are subjected to this “craving force”, you are subjected to the consequences of pain and agony. To do away with the “physical pain and agony” and to achieve spiritual happiness, you must make your choice. There are no two ways. You should not therefore accuse others, when you come across some problems while

you are enjoying sensual pleasures.

One way to find solace for your occasional mental agony and unhappiness is to understand the degree of your own sufferings and difficulties with that experienced by others. When you are unhappy, you feel that the world is against you. You think that everything around you is about to collapse. You feel that the end of the road is near. However, if you try to take a mental stock of things and try to count your blessings, you will find, surprisingly that you are better off than many other people. You have probably heard the saying, "I complained I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet." In short, you have been unduly exaggerating your own difficulties and problems. Many others are worse off than you, and yet they do not worry unduly. Problems are there, and you should try to resolve them instead of worrying and creating mental anguish and pain. The Chinese have a

practical saying about resolving problems:

*If you have a big problem,
try to reduce it to a small problem.*

*If you have a small problem
try to reduce it to no problem.*

Another method to be adapted to contain your difficulties and problems and reduce it to its proper perspective, is to recapitulate what you have gone through before, under similar or worst circumstances, and how you have, through your patience and efforts, been able to surmount your then seemingly insurmountable difficulties. By doing so, you will not permit your existing difficulties or problems to “drown you”. On the contrary, you will be determined to resolve whatever issues or problems that you face. You should realise that you have gone through worse situations and that you are prepared to face

the issue – come what may. With this frame of mind, you will soon regain your self-confidence and will be able to face and resolve whatever problems that are in store for you.

ALL ARE NOT EQUALLY GOOD

Occasionally, there are complaints from certain people who have never caused or given any trouble to others, that they are the innocent victims of the wiles and intrigues of others. They thus feel frustrated that despite the good lives they live, they are being harmed through no fault of their own. Under such circumstances the innocent victim must realise and appreciate that the world is made up of all sorts of people – the good and the not so good, the bad and the not so bad, and with all sorts of idiosyncrasies. The innocent victim may console himself that he belongs to the good category whereas the disturber of peace

belongs to the bad category, and that on certain occasions, he will still have to bear with the misdeeds of those belonging to the “bad category”.

Similarly, we take the case of the “good and the careful driver” and the “bad and reckless driver”. The good and careful driver took every precaution to drive carefully in order to avoid accidents. Nevertheless, the good and careful driver met with an accident, through no fault of his, but through the fault of the bad and reckless driver. Thus on occasion, the good have to suffer, despite their goodness, because there are bad and reckless people just like the bad and reckless driver. The world as such is neither good nor bad. It produces criminals as well as saints, fools and enlightened ones. Out of the same clay, beautiful and ugly, useful and useless things can be made. The quality depends on the potter, not on the clay. In this case, the potter is you. You are solely

responsible for moulding your own happiness or unhappiness.

YOU GAIN WHAT YOU SEEK FOR

If you try your very best to overcome your difficulties by practising the advice given in this book, then you will definitely find the peace, happiness and harmony which you are seeking. *If you follow the master, the dog will not bite you.*

*Victory breeds hatred.
The defeated live in pain.
Happily the peaceful live,
Giving up victory and defeat
- The Buddha*

