

# **Integrating Buddhist Values into the Modern World**

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Buddhist values such as the Five Precepts and the Ten Good Actions have immense utility in the modern world. Men following these moral principles are likely to be more virtuous than men who do not. Also, meditation has immense benefits for mankind. Throughout the ages, Buddhism has developed a large number of meditative practices, which can be done by people for their benefit. While the whole world may not agree with the philosophical matters of Buddhism, the practice of virtue and the meditative practices can be done by everyone for their own benefit and for the benefit of the modern world.

Regarding meditation, both absorptive meditation and analytical meditation can be done either separately or in a sequence to bring calmness and insight to the mind. Mindfulness in all aspects of life is another very productive concept. This brings calmness and steadiness in all aspects of life. For elderly people, mindfulness in all aspects of life is likely to lead to a smoother life that is less prone to accidents. One point is to be noted here. The earlier these practices are started, the better it is. In my numerous articles on meditation, I have not emphasised the point that meditation needs to be started early in life because I did not want to discourage elderly people. But the fact remains, let alone Dhyana Paramita which is said by the Mahayana Dashabhumika Sutra and some other Mahayana Sutras to be practised by a Bodhisattva on the Fifth Stage called Sudurjaya or Difficult to Conquer, even a modest achievement in meditation is unlikely to be made if one starts meditation at the age of eighty.

Buddhism is very strong in its practical aspects apart from its theoretical aspects. The practical aspects primarily pertain to moral discipline and to meditation, both of which have immense value in the world today.

Buddhism can bring about a man being established in virtue from a very young age. Also, meditation should be taught very early. All this can lead to greater patience and enable a young student to concentrate on his work better. He will do better in his extra-curricular activities also. If he is inspired by the ideal of Viriya Parami or Virya Paramita, he will be more likely to do well in manly endeavours.

Although I myself am not old yet, I see around me a lot of old people who are unable to accept their age gracefully. Fundamentally, they do not take care to prepare for old age

mentally by cultivating mental qualities and interests as befits their old age. They continue to try to live as though they are much younger. Since this is physically impossible for them, they lead a discontented life and if they try to engage in the same physical activities that they did when they were younger, they become prone to physical accidents thereby suffering themselves and making their children suffer too. With life expectancies rising and the number of elderly people who continue to remain enmeshed in hedonism rising too, this is becoming a major problem in the world today. A mental shift out of hedonism and into spirituality does not happen overnight. It has to be actively cultivated, and if unfortunately one is not introduced to Buddhist practices at a young age, it is still possible for one to enter into Buddhist practice during one's middle ages. That will give one an adequate mental make up well before one enters old age.

It is a fact that Buddhism offers a way out of pessimism. In Lord Buddha's very first sermon, he showed a way out of suffering and into bliss. The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to lead a holy life. Just to take an example, Right Livelihood is essential if one is to be happy and at peace with oneself. Before a man lives with others, he must be able to live with himself. This is a point that so many people do not understand. Living with oneself is not automatic. Parents need to inculcate in their children the art of living in bliss. If this is ingrained in a young child, it stays with him throughout his life. If all persons are pure, the society is pure because the society is nothing other than the sum total of individuals.

Change is inherent in life and in the world. The Third Noble Truth, Dukkha Nirodha, presupposes change. To change from a state of Dukkha to a state of Dukkha Nirodha is to, well, change for the better. Dukkha is dependently-originated and is susceptible to change and lacks any trace of permanence. This has to be taught to children at a very young age. So, there is nothing to be pessimistic about in life and one should always be optimistic about one's future and about the future of the world. Needless to say, if the individuals are optimistic, so will the society.

People often talk of values without understanding or even pondering to think about what their values mean in practical terms. No child is born money-minded. This is an undesirable trait that develops when some people grow up. Why? Mostly because of their upbringing. If their parents are money-minded, then it is more than likely that they will be money-minded as well because their parents will be unable to teach them any positive values. On the other hand, if a father tells his son from a very early age that what is really important is not what the boy has but what the boy is, then the son will grow up to be a virtuous man. Several people die enmeshed in money-matters. That is a pity. They do not understand what they are missing out on life. Not everything can be bought with money. These hedonistic people do not even realise that everything cannot be bought with money. A big amount of life is invisible to them. Culture means nothing to them. Their attitude is 'Why should I bother about what an ancient pundit wrote? It does not increase my wealth!'

Cultured people do not belittle their ancestors. They are wise enough to realise that they see more because they stand on their shoulders. So, they pay appropriate respect to cultural matters and cultural aspects, in all its forms, plays a vitally important role in their lives. As a result, their lives become richer and fuller and they lead their lives to the full instead of merely surviving. Buddhist values can play a very big role in this transformation of man. Such a man never feels lonely because he is never separated from his values. If he

cultivates a habit of writing and publishing, so much the better. Then even if he is ill and confined to bed, he can still continue with his writing even from his bed. Such a man lives a productive old age. He continues to be a source of inspiration for others. He does not become a burden on anyone in his old age because he has already planned it out well in advance and leads life accordingly. He knows that it is not important to know what he does not like but that it is important to know what one likes. Thus, he expands his sphere of likes because he is wise enough to realise that the more likes he has in life, the greater are his sources of happiness. His juniors look up to him as an example of how a life ought to be lived.

Buddhism teaches man how to live an enriching life and how to conduct himself at all stages of his life. A true Buddhist is at peace with himself and with all the world. That is the relevance of Buddhism in the world today.

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