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The Early Buddhist Teaching On the Practice of the Moral Life

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The Lectureship

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The Lecturer

The fall 2001 Chairholder for the Numata Chair in Buddhist Studies, Yakupitiyage Karunadasa, is Director-Designate, International Buddhist University, Thailand. Professor Karunadasa holds a B.A. Honours (1958) in Pali from the University of Ceylon and a PhD (1963) in Indian Philosophy from the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies. He previously held the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai Visiting Professorship at the School of Oriental and African Studies (1993).

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The Early Buddhist Teaching
On the Practice of the Moral Life

The Buddhist practice of the moral life, as most of you are aware, begins with Right View (*samma ditthi*). It draws our attention to the ideational framework through which we perceive the world and its impact on how we conduct ourselves in our individual and social life. For our perspectives on the nature of reality condition, to a great extent, the way we make our choices and goals and how we respond to our social environment. The Buddha says that he sees no single factor so responsible for the suffering of living beings as wrong view (*miccha ditthi*), and no factor so potent in promoting the good of living beings as right view (*samma ditthi*).[1] This is the rationale for Buddhism's emphasis on the importance and relevance of the right view for the practice of the moral life. A system of morality, if it is to be oriented towards the right direction, should be based on a correct view of reality, on a proper understanding of our world of experience.

Although Buddhism draws our attention to the importance of the right view, it does not endorse dogmatic adherence to views, even if they are right. To be infatuated with "the rightness" of our own views and ideologies is called *sanditthi-raga*,[2] and dogmatic attachment to them is called *ditthi-paramasa*.[3] The root cause of both is the belief: "This alone is true, all else is false" (*idam eva saccam mogham annam*).[4] It is this kind of warped attitude that provides a fertile ground for bigotry and dogmatism, what Buddhism calls *idam-saccabhinivesa*[5]. Its external manifestations, as we all know, are acts of fanaticism and militant piety, indoctrination and unethical conversion, fundamentalism and persecution, not to speak of interpersonal conflicts, and acts of terrorism, often leading to internecine warfare. From the Buddhist point of view, therefore, dogmatic attachment to ideologies is very much more detrimental and fraught with more danger than our inordinate attachment to material things. Inter-religious wars, wrongly referred to as Holy Wars, are a case in point. If Buddhism does not encourage dogmatic attachment to views, it is because, from the Buddhist way of looking at it, a view is only a guide to action. In his well-known discourse on the Parable of the Raft (*kullupama*),[6] the Buddha tells us that his teaching, should be understood, not as a goal in itself, but as a means to the realization of the goal. Thus, the teaching of the Buddha, as the Buddha himself says, has only relative value, relative to the realization of the goal. It is a thing to be used, and not a thing to be ritually adulated. What this clearly implies is that even the right view, like all other views, is a conceptual model, serving as a guide to action. If it is called the Right View, it is because it leads us rightly to the right goal. The right goal, according to Buddhism, is a right vision (*samma dassana*) into the nature of reality (*yathabhuta*), an insight into the true nature of the world within and outside us (*yathabhuta-nana*).[7]

It is in the context of the Buddhist view of reality that the Buddhist teaching on moral life assumes significance. Therefore if we are to understand it in its proper context we should first focus our attention on how Buddhism seeks to explain the nature of reality, our world of internal and external experience.

The early Buddhist view of reality is sought to be presented as a critical response to two other views. Thus, addressing Kaccayana, the Buddha says:

> "This world, O Kaccayana, generally proceeds on a duality, of the 'it is' and the 'it is not'. But, O Kaccayana, whoever perceives in truth and wisdom how things originate in the world, in his eyes there is no 'it is not'. Whoever, Kacayana, perceives in truth and wisdom how things pass away in the world, in his eyes there is no 'it is'."[8]

The two beliefs referred to above are very often introduced as *sassatavada* and *ucchedavada*. *Sassatavada* means the view of permanence or the belief in Being (*bhava-ditthi*), and *ucchedavada*, the view of annihilation or the belief in non-Being (*vibhava-ditthi*). Early Buddhism presents these two views as occupying a position of mutual opposition, while describing its own position as one that sets itself off from both of them. It is, in fact, against these two views that Buddhist polemics are continually directed and it is by demolishing them that Buddhism seeks to construct its own view of the nature of existence. The conclusion suggests itself therefore that it was as a critical response to the mutual opposition between *sassatavada* and *ucchedavada* that the early Buddhist view of existence was sought to be presented. What exactly does Buddhism mean by *sassatavada* and *ucchedavada*? And why does Buddhism perceive itself as a critical response to both?

The term, *sassatavada* literally means eternalism and it occurs in many contexts to refer to many variations of the theory. But in its usual sense, and this is the sense we are concerned with here, it refers to the theory of individual existence as advocated by all religions current during the time of the Buddha. The theory is represented in the Buddhist texts as that which makes a clear distinction between a soul-entity on the one hand and the physical body on the other (*annam jivam annam sariram*)[9]. It, thus, assumes a duality between two basic principles: one spiritual and the other material; a permanent metaphysical soul on the one hand and the temporary physical body, on the other. Man's true essence is to be found, not in the perishable physical body, but in the permanent metaphysical soul. Hence this theory came to be represented in the Buddhist texts as *sassatavada*, eternalism or the belief in an eternal self. Let us refer to this theory as the theory of the metaphysical self, while noting at the same time that all religions and philosophies that subscribe to it are, from the Buddhist point of view, different versions of *sassatavada*.

Ucchedavada, which is the opposite view, perceives itself as a reaction against *sassatavada*. It is the theory of individual existence as advocated by the schools of materialism current during the time of the Buddha. This theory is represented in the Buddhist texts as that which asserts the absolute identity of the self and the physical body (*tam jivam tam sariram*)[10]. For this theory, man's true essence is to be seen, not in an elusive metaphysical principle, but in the empirically observable physical body. If the self and the physical body are identical, it logically follows that with the break-up of the body at death, the self itself comes to naught, to complete annihilation. Hence this theory came to be represented in the Buddhist texts as *ucchedavada*, annihilationism or the annihilationist theory of the self. Let us call this theory the theory of the physical self, while noting at the same time that all materialist ideologies that subscribe to it are, from the Buddhist point of view, different versions of *ucchedavad*a.

Buddhism believes that our desires and expectations have a direct impact on what we choose to believe in. Therefore the Buddhist critique of views (*ditthi*) takes into consideration their psychological origins as well. According to the Buddhist diagnosis of *sassatavada*, the belief in a permanent unchanging self-entity, its psychological origin can be traced to *bhava-tanha*,[11] the craving for eternal life or the immortality of the soul. It is the desire for the eternalization of the self, the desire to perpetuate our individual existence into eternity. On the other hand, the psychological origin of *ucchedavada*, the belief in a temporary physical self, can be traced to *vibhava-tanha*,[12] the desire for self-annihilation. It is the desire to see a complete annihilation of the individual existence, without any prospect of post-mortal survival. What seems to be assumed here is that *ucchedavada* resists the belief in survival because of its fear of moral retribution, for this view gives us an open licence to live our lives without being burdened by a sense of moral responsibility. Thus, according to the Buddhist analysis, the dialectical opposition between *sassatavada* and *ucchedavada* represents, on the one hand, the perennial conflict between the spiritual and materialist views of individual existence and, on the other, the human mind's oscillation between two deep-seated desires.

If Buddhism transcends the mutual conflict between *sassatavada* and *ucchedavad*a, it is through its doctrine of Dependent Origination (*paticcasamuppada*). The principle of Dependent Origination is defined to mean the arising of phenomena in dependence on other phenomena, with no unchanging substance behind the phenomena.[13] The sole purpose of this doctrine is to establish the causal structure of individual existence. Individual existence is a process of inter-dependent mental and material phenomena, all in a state of constant change. Within the empiric individuality there is no independent self-entity, mental or material, which is impervious to change. Nor is there a soul, in the form of a spiritual essence, which relates it to a transcendental reality. This is where the Buddhist view of individual existence radically differs from all versions of *sassatavada*. Nor is the empiric individuality, as *ucchedavada* claims, a pure product of matter that will be completely annihilated at death. Buddhism rejects the materialist notion that individual existence is due to fortuitous circumstances *(adiccasamuppanna*) and that it is subject to abrupt termination *(ucchedavada*). It is through the doctrine of Dependent Origination that Buddhism seeks to explain the uninterrupted continuity of the life-series in *samsara* (cycle of births and deaths). In common with other religions, Buddhism, too, recognizes both survival *(punabbhava*) and moral responsibility *(kammavada*). But in Buddhism both are explained strictly according to the principles of Dependent Origination.

Buddhism sees a close connection between the self-theory of *sassatavada* and the practice of self-mortification as a means to salvation. The polarity between two principles, one spiritual and the other material, implies a mutual conflict between the two. What inhibits the freedom of the soul is its bondage to the flesh. To redeem the soul it is necessary, therefore, to mortify the flesh. This is the principle that sustains all forms of asceticism, what Buddhism calls *attakilalamathanuyoga* or the practice of self mortification.[14] Self- mortification could assume varying degrees of intensity and visibility depending on how the relation between the soul and the physical body is defined. Nevertheless the duality principle on which *sassatavada* is based necessarily leads to the justification

of self-mortification as a means to salvation. On the other hand, the self- theory of *ucchedavada* veers towards the opposite extreme, that is, sensual indulgence, what Buddhism calls *kamasukhallikanuyoga.*[15] As *ucchedavada* believes in the identity of the self and the physical body, it sees no reason why we should sacrifice immediate sense pleasures for the sake of an elusive bliss in a dubious future.

In Buddhism's assessment both self-mortification and sensual indulgence are equally self-defeating practices: The practice of self-mortification is ignoble *(anariya*), fraught with suffering *(dukkha*) and does not lead to the realization of the goal (*anatthasamhita*).[16] The practice is based on the mistaken view that "the body is the cause of the bondage when the real source of the trouble lies in the mind – the mind obsessed by greed, aversion and delusion".[17] To mortify the flesh in order to liberate the soul is to impair an instrument necessary for mental culture. The other extreme, which is sensual indulgence, is more unsatisfactory. It is lowly (*hina*), vulgar (*gamma*) and is associated with secularism (*pothujjanika*).[18] The practice mistakes the mere titillation of the senses for happiness. It fails to take into consideration "the principle of diminishing returns which operates in the mere gratificatory quest for happiness".[19]

The Buddhist practice of the moral life is based on the rejection of both self- mortification and sensual indulgence. Avoiding the two extremes, it steers a middle course – which is therefore called the Middle Path or Middle Way *(majjhima patipada).* What Buddhism calls Middle Path is another expression for the Noble Eight-fold Path, which embodies the quintessence of Buddhist ethics and which the Buddha presented as the Fourth Noble Truth of his teaching. The use of the term, middle does not mean it is a compromise between the two extremes. It is their complete avoidance, the setting itself equally aloof from both. The words used in defining it are: "without entering either of the two extremes" (*ubho ante anupagamma).*[20]

It will thus be seen that both in theory and practice Buddhism steers a middle course. Its doctrine of Dependent Origination, on which is based its view of individual existence, and its Noble Eight-fold Path, on which is based its moral life are both described as Middle Positions. The former is the Middle Doctrine *(majjhima desana*) [21]because it steers clear of the two ideological extremes of *sassatavada* and *ucchedavada*, the spiritualist and the materialist views of existence. The latter is called the Middle Path (*majjhima patipada*) because it avoids, in the self-same manner, the two extremist practices of self- mortification and sensual indulgence, the two practices that have *sassatavada* and *ucchedavada* as their theoretical background. Thus Buddhism's use of the term, middle (*majjhima*) brings into focus its identity as a religion and its position in relation to all spiritual and materialist views of existence.

It is in the light of the above observations that we need to discuss the theory and practice of the Buddhist moral life. At the very outset let us focus our attention on three fundamental doctrines which serve as its foundation. Among the three doctrines, the first is called *kammavada*.[22] Understood in a broad sense, *kammavada* means the advocacy of the moral life. It is the recognition of a moral order to which our individual behaviour and inter-personal relations should conform. It is best

understood as the opposite of moral nihilism. From the Buddhist point of view, all religions are different forms of *kammavada*, because they all advocate the supremacy of the moral life. Hence the Buddha called the religious teachers who were contemporaneous with him *kammavadino*, i.e. those who advocate the moral life. The second doctrine that serves as the foundation to the Buddhist moral philosophy is called *kiriyavada*[23]. It is the doctrine that recognizes the efficacy of moral actions by providing a causal correlation to our moral actions and their consequences. The third doctrine is called *viriyavada*.[24] It is the doctrine that justifies the role of the human effort (*viriya*) in pursuing the moral life. These three doctrines – *kammavada*, *kiriyavada*, and *viriyavada* – bring into focus three important dimensions of the Buddhist teaching on moral life. What they seek to show is that the recognition and advocacy of the moral life is in itself not adequate. To be meaningful, it must be supplemented, first with a rational explanation as to the efficacy of moral actions and secondly, with a justification of the necessity and desirability of the role of human effort in the practice of the moral life. This will become clear if we examine here the Buddhist criticism of four moral theories, as recorded in the early Buddhist discourses.

Among the four theories the first is the theory of self-causation *(sayam-kata*). It is called so because it assumes a permanent self-entity that functions both as the agent of moral actions and as the experiencer of their results. There is thus a continuous and absolute identity between the one who acts and the one who experiences. This theory is presented in the Buddhist texts in the following form: A does, A experiences *(so karoti, so patisamvedeti*).[25] Clearly the reference here is to the moral theories based on s*assatavada*, the belief in a permanent, unchanging self-entity as the agent of experience. The second theory is the direct opposite of the first. It is called the theory of external causation (*param-kata*). It is called so because it assumes a principle external to man as the source of man's experience. The theory denies the identity between the one who acts and the one who experiences. Its definition takes the following form: A does, B experiences (*anno karoti, anno patisamvedeti*).[26] Examples of external causation are moral theories based on the belief in a creator God (s*abbam issara-nimmana-hetu*), or in an unalterable destiny (*niyati*), or the belief that everything is due to past karma *(sabbam pubbekata-hetu*).[27] For these theories seek to explain man's experience with reference to an external power over which man has no control. The third theory is a combination of both self-causation and external causation *(sayam katam ca param katam ca*).[28] As a synthesis of two contradictory theories, it seems to concede to man the right to act as a responsible moral agent but under certain conditions, the conditions being determined by an external agent. As an example we could cite a theistic religion which, while granting that man has free will still maintains that God is supreme. The fourth theory denies both self-causation and external causation and maintains that all what we experience is entirely due to fortuitous circumstances *(adhiccasamuppanna*).[29] The reference seems to be to materialism (*ucchedavada*) because it denies a moral order operating according to the principles of moral causation.

As to the theory of self-causation, Buddhism does not deny its validity as a basis for the practice of the moral life. What it contends, however, is that the theory is based on the wrong assumption that there is a permanent, unchanging entity as the agent of human experience. The

notion of a permanent self-entity as actor and experiencer necessarily involves a situation where the process of actions and their results can never come to an end. It is a situation where one has no other alternative but to get trapped in eternity (*sassatam pareti)*[30].

The Buddhist criticism of the theory of external causation takes the following form: If there is a principle external to man, such as God *(issara*), destiny *(niyati*), as the source of man's experience, then man is not morally responsible for any of his actions. He is reduced to the level of a hapless object in the presence of an external power over which he has no control. Thus, although the theory of external causation advocates moral life, it fails to establish moral responsibility, a rational correlation between our actions and their consequences. In other words, it does not lead to *kiriyavada*, the doctrine that validates the efficacy of moral actions. In consequence, it also fails to establish *viriyavada*, i.e. it fails to justify the necessity and desirability of human effort in practising the moral life. For if there is no correlation between what we do and what we experience, then our own efforts have no practical significance whatever.[31]

The third theory which combines self-causation and external causation needs not deter us here, for as a combination it combines the faults of both.

The fourth theory, the theory that denies both self-causation and external causation, fares no better. If, as it claims, things happen fortuitously, as if befallen by chance, then no rational correlation can be established between what we do and what we experience. In this situation it makes no sense to speak of moral responsibility or the efficacy of moral actions. The theory undermines the very foundation of the moral life and leads to moral chaos. It becomes another expression for moral nihilism.

If Buddhism rejects the four theories relating to the nature of our experience, it amounts to this: Our experience is not self-caused in the strict sense that there is no enduring self-entity that remains identically the same as agent and experiencer. Individual existence is a process of dependent origination (*paticcasamuppada*), where the two principles of absolute identity (*atthita*) and absolute diversity (*natthita*) do not operate. Nor is our experience other-caused, for there is no external principle by which our experience is completely determined. Nor is it due to haphazard circumstances that defy any form of empirical observation. The Buddhist position on this matter is that our experience is explainable according to the principles of Dependent Origination (*paticcasamuppada)*

The principle of Dependent Origination avoids the two versions of strict determinism (*niyati*): the theistic determinism which maintains that everything is due to a creator God (*sabbam issaranimmana-hetu*), and karmic determinism which maintains that everything is due to past karma (*sabbam pubbekata-hetu*). It also avoids the opposite theory of strict indeterminism or fortuitous origination *(adhiccasamuppanna*) and establishes a causal connection between our actions and their consequences *(kiriyavada*). It thus ensures the possibility and desirability of human effort (*viriyavada*). Human effort *(attakara*) is not strictly determined. It can serve as a factor in the causal process. The very evident fact that we feel free to act and exercise our effort (*arambha-dhatu*) in many situations is cited as an example for the possibility of human effort. Hence the Buddha says:

"How can one, while walking up and down with one's own effort, say that there is no personal effort?"[32] The importance attached to human effort is also shown by a variety of terms used to refer to it: *attakara, purisakara, arambha-dhatu, purisa-viriya,* and *purisatthama.*

Thus it is on the basis of its doctrine of causality that Buddhism seeks to ensure both *kiriyavada* and *viriyavada*. The same doctrine explains the operation of the moral order, which in the Buddhist commentaries is called *kamma-niyama*. The moral order is not an imposition from the above by a supreme deity, nor is it an invention on the part of the Buddha. The Buddha only discovers it. The Buddha's position in this regard, the Buddha himself explains in the following words: "You yourselves ought to do what ought to be done. The *Tathagatas* (only) show the way."(t*umhehi kiccam atappam; akkhataro Tathagata*).[33] Thus the Buddha does not claim to be a saviour who can redeem mankind. He is the Awakened One who shows the way to others' awakening, the awakening from the slumber of ignorance. He is the Enlightened One who shows the way to others' enlightenment. He is therefore called the Torch-Bearer to mankind (*ukkadharo manussanam).*[34] In this context we need to understand the moral teachings in Buddhism, not as injunctions and commandments, but as guidelines for moral action. They are more descriptive than prescriptive. Their purpose is to show the way and not to coerce. This does also mean that according to Buddhism morally good and morally bad actions are neither rewarded nor punished. They have their own consequences according to the principles of moral causation.

The next item that merits our attention here is the Buddhist teaching on moral evaluation, that is, the criteria adopted in evaluating morally qualifiable actions as wholesome and unwholesome. In this connection we find the early Buddhist discourses using many pairs of evaluative terms, as for example, *punna* and *pap*a (meritorious and demeritorious), *kusala* and *akusala* (skilful and non-skilful), *dhamma* and *adhamma* (righteous and unrighteous), *sevitabba* and *asevitabba* (what should be cultivated and what should not be cultivated), *kalyana* and *papaka* (auspicious and evil), *sukka* and *kanha* (white and black). Among these pairs, it is the first two, *punna-papa* and *kusala-akusala* that occur more often and it is these two pairs that are used in a very specific technical sense.

The two evaluative terms, *punna* and *papa* are of pre-Buddhist origin. There is evidence to suggest that they were used by pre-Buddhist religions in India for purposes of moral evaluation. While *punna* meant what is meritorious, praiseworthy and morally right , *papa* stood for all that is evil, demeritorious and morally reprehensible. The distinction implies that while acts of *punna* result in beneficial consequences, acts of *papa* result in harmful consequences to the doer[35]. It was this notion of morality, which was based on the *punna-papa*-dichotomy, that the schools of Indian Materialism singled out in their indictment against all religions. The materialists argued that morality based on *punna* and *papa* is not genuine morality. It is a reward-and-punishment-oriented morality. One does what is good expecting some sort of personal benefit, either here or hereafter, and one avoids what is bad in fear of punishment. We find this materialist criticism very forcefully articulated in the following words of Purana Kassapa, a materialist who lived during the time of the Buddha.

> "Were someone to go along the south bank of the Ganges striking and slaying, mutilating and having men mutilated, oppressing and having men oppressed, there would be no *papa* thence resulting, no increase of *papa* would ensue. Were he to go along the north bank of the Ganges giving alms, and ordering gifts to be given, offering sacrifices or causing them to be offered, there would be no *punna* thence resulting, no increase of *punna* would ensue."[36]

This criticism, on the part of materialists, against the concept of *punna* and *papa* does not necessarily mean that they were advocating some sort of moral nihilism, that they denied the validity of the moral distinction between good and bad and the desirability of leading a moral life. Rather, what they seem to have questioned was the how the religions of the day sought to justify it by a theory of moral retribution involving reward and punishment.

Buddhism seems to have taken into consideration the materialist criticism of the morality based on *punna* and *papa*. However, unlike materialism, Buddhism approached the problem from a more pragmatic angle. Whatever inadequacies *punna* may have as an ethical concept, yet it can be made to play an important role in promoting the moral life. Surely that *punna* is better than *papa* even the materialists will have to admit Therefore what Buddhism did was not to dispense with *punn*a altogether, but to redefine its position in relation to another level of morality which it introduced by the term *kusala*.

In this situation *punna* came to be understood as morally good actions, although they are motivated by the desire for one's own personal benefit. It is true that acts of *punna* could be motivated by self-interest and self-expectation.[37] But one cannot overlook the fact that they have a social dimension as well. While they ensure our own well-being, they contribute to the well-being of others as well. The concept of *punna* assumes significance particularly in the context of *karma* – the Buddhist doctrine of moral causation, and *samsara* – the Buddhist teaching on the cycle of repeated births and deaths. Accordingly, *punna* came to be understood as that which has a tendency to promote one's own well- being both here in this life and in the lives to come: "One who has done acts of *punna*", says the *Dhammapada*, "delights both here and hereafter; while one who has done acts of *papa*, suffers both here and hereafter"[38]. The concept of *punna* assumes significance in another important context. For Buddhism, the practice of the moral life is a graduated course (*anupubba-cariya*), a graduated discipline (*anupubba-sikkha*). It involves self-transformation from a lower to a higher level. It has a beginning, an intermediate stage and a consummation. This notion of gradualism defines the role of *punna* in moral culture. It is true that acts of *punna* alone will not lead to the realization of the final goal. Nevertheless they can bring us nearer the goal, if not to the goal itself. For acts of *punna* habituate our minds for the cultivation of a higher morality which finally leads to the final erosion of the self-notion.

While thus adapting the concept of *punna* from contemporary religions, Buddhism, as noted earlier, introduced another level of morality, which is higher than that indicated by *punn*a. It is referred to as *kusala*, a term that literally means "skillful" or " that which promotes skillfulness". Its opposite *akusala* therefore means "unskillful" or "that which leads to unskillfulness". So here we have a psychological term used to express an ethical concept. It shows the close connection

Buddhism establishes between ethics and psychology. In which sense, then, should we understand what is skillful as morally wholesome, and what is unskillful as morally unwholesome?

Buddhism traces all moral evil and moral good to six radical roots. To take the latter first, all moral evil is traced to the three radical roots of *lobha* (greed, covetousness), *dosa* (hatred, aversion), *moha* (delusion, ignorance, mental confusion). These are the three psychological mainsprings of all defilements, all pollutants, all unwholesome mental dispositions that manifest themselves either mentally, vocally or physically. On the other hand, all moral good, all states of moral wholesomeness can be traced to the three radical roots of *alobha* (non-greed, non-covetousness), *adosa* (non-hatred, non-aversion), and *amoha* (non-delusion, absence of ignorance). Though expressed negatively, as the opposites of the unwholesome roots, they should be understood in a positive sense to mean generosity, compassionate love, and wisdom. It is on the basis of these six roots, the wholesome and the unwholesome, that Buddhism makes its moral evaluation as *kusala* and *akusala*. Any volitional action, this is what Buddhism means by karma, which is conditioned by the three wholesome roots, is evaluated as *kusala*. Conversely any volitional action, which is motivated by the three unwholesome roots, is evaluated as *akusala*.[39]

The psychology behind this moral evaluation is that a mind which is obsessed with greed, malice and delusion is a mind that is defiled (*kilittha-citta*), diseased (*atura-citta)* and in bondage (*avimutta-citta*). Such a mind cannot see things in their proper perspective. It is in a state of disharmony with actuality. It is therefore called *akusala*, "unskillful". It lacks the skill to see things properly and to act properly. On the other hand, when the mind has the opposite *kusala*-qualities, namely generosity, compassionate love and wisdom, it experiences the positive qualities of mental purity, mental health and mental freedom. It is a mind that is in harmony with actuality. Such a mind is therefore described as *kusala*, "skillful". As the Buddhist commentators observe, when we have *kusala* qualities we experience mental health (*arogya)*, mental purity (*anavajjata*), dexterity (*cheka*), all of which result in mental felicity (*sukha-vipaka*).[40] Thus if negative mental dispositions such as animosity and jealousy are called *akusala*, it is because they impair our mental (as well as physical) health and reduces the mind's skillfulness. And conversely, if positive mental dispositions such as compassionate love and charity are called *kusala*, it is because they enhance our mental (as well as physical) health and promotes mind's skillfulness.

Kusala is also understood as that which leads to *Nibbana*, the final goal of Buddhism, and its opposite *akusala*, as that which leads away from *Nibbana*. Why this is so becomes clear when it is remembered that, in one important sense, *Nibbana* means the complete elimination of all traces of self-centricity and ego-centric impulses. Therefore, the definition of kusala as that which leads to Nibbana should not be understood as having any mysterious implications. It simply means that when we do more and more selfless acts (*kusala*), we will become more and more selfless, in other words, we will come closer and closer to the realization of *Nibbana*.

Nibbana is defined as the highest level of wisdom (*panna, anna*), because it is based on a true insight into the nature of sentient existence; as the highest plane of moral perfection (*visuddhi),*

because one who has realized it is endowed with the highest *kusala* qualities (*parama-kusala, uttama-kusala*);[41] as the highest level of happiness (*parama-sukha*), because on attaining *Nibbana* , craving which is the cause of all suffering, is completely uprooted;[42] and as the highest Noble Truth (*paramam ariya-saccam)*[43], perhaps because it represents the ultimate purpose of the other three Noble Truths. Therefore when it is said that acts of *kusala* bring us closer to *Nibbana*, this means that when we do more and more *kusala* acts we come closer and closer to realizing the many ideals which *Nibbana* represents.

Thus the Buddhist moral evaluation in terms of kusala and akusala is based on psychology, on a distinction made between positive mental dispositions which enhance our mental health, on the one hand, and negative mental dispositions which impair our mental health, on the other. Unlike the *punna*-based morality which is not completely free from self-interest and self-motivation, the *kusala*-based morality is *Nibbana*-oriented and thus leads to the decomposition of the self-notion. While the concept of *punna* was pre-Buddhistic and adapted by Buddhism, the concept of *kusala* represents Buddhism's own contribution to the subject of moral evaluation.

Another problem closely connected with the subject of moral evaluation in Buddhism is how it addresses the problem concerning the relative position of one's own good and the good of others. There is a general belief among some modern scholars that early Buddhist morality is individualistic in that it is concerned only with one's own moral well-being as a means to one's own emancipation. In point of fact, the schools of Mahayana Buddhism contend that the ideal of *Arhathood* is a self-centred goal, because one who aspires to realize it is concerned only with one's own deliverance from suffering, whereas one who follows the *Bodhisattva* ideal exemplifies the highest qualities of altruism. This is the main reason why the Mahayana calls the other schools of Buddhism Hinayana, the Inferior Vehicle.

Although the problem raised above has given rise to some unnecessary speculations and misinterpretations, the early Buddhist position on this matter is quite clear. For it is precisely in order to clarify this situation that the early Buddhist discourses classify individuals into four groups, in the following manner:

1. The individual who pursues neither his own well-being (*atta-hita*) nor others' well-being (*para-hita*)
2. The individual who pursues others' well-being (*para-hita*) but not his own well- being (*atta-hita*)
3. The individual who pursues his own well-being (*atta-hita*) but not others' well-being (*para-hita*)
4. The individual who pursues his own well-being (*atta-hita*) as well as others' well-being (*para-hita*).[44]

It will be seen that the four individuals are mentioned here according to an ascending order of excellence. Therefore the first individual is considered the most inferior and the fourth as the most superior (*aggam akkhayati*). Why this should be so is of course obvious. What is intriguing, however,

is why the third individual is considered better than the second. It shows that pursuing one's own well-being (*atta-hita*) is better than pursuing others' well-being (*para-hita)*. This idea is not incongruent with the fourth individual being considered as the best. For although he is pursuing others' well-being, he is at the same time pursuing his own well-being as well.

If we are to understand this situation correctly, it is of utmost importance that we clarify first what the term "well-being" (*hita*) means here. Apparently the term seems to mean well-being based on such extraneous factors as material or economic conditions. Any such understanding could easily lead to a conclusion just the opposite of what is intended. For it must be clearly noted here that in the early Buddhist discourses the two terms, *atta-hita* and *para-hita* are always used in an ethical context to mean "one's own moral well- being" and "others' moral well- being" respectively.[45]

Then the question that arises here is why the pursuit of one's own moral well-being is considered more important than the pursuit of others' moral well-being. The answer to this question is found in the following words of the Buddha addressed to one Cunda, as an illustration of this situation:

> "It is not possible, Cunda, for one who is stuck in the mud to pull out who is (also) stuck in the mud. But, Cunda, it is possible for one who is not stuck in the mud to pull out another who is stuck in the mud".[46]

This illustration draws our attention to two equally important points: The first is that one who is stuck in the mud of moral depravity cannot save another who is in the same predicament. The second is that one who has pursued one's own moral well-being is in a sure position to help others to pursue their own moral well-being. We find this situation exemplified in the life of the Buddha himself. It is after realizing his own moral perfection that the Buddha began his mission for the moral uplift of others. It is also exemplified in the lives of the Buddha's early disciples as we find them recorded in the early Buddhist texts. It is best illustrated in the Buddha's admonition to the first sixty *Arahants* to go forth and preach the *Dhamma* "for the benefit, well-being and happiness of the many"[47]. The conclusion to be drawn is that one who has followed his own moral well-being, rather than remaining indifferent to others, addresses himself to the task of promoting others' moral well-being.

From these observations we can come to an important conclusion as to why the individual who pursues only his own moral well-being is held higher than the individual who pursues only others' moral well-being. The reason for this is not that others' moral well-being is less important than ours', or that our moral well-being is more important than others'. It only means that we should give priority to ours' so that we will be in a position to help others. If we pursue our own moral well-being first, this could be considered, not as a case of helping ourselves first, but as a case of preparing ourselves to help others. What is taken into consideration here is not "whose moral well-being is more important" but "whose moral well-being should get priority." This should also explain why the fourth individual is considered to be the best. It is because he gives equal priority to both.

In this connection it is also important to remember that the benefits of moral cultivation are reciprocal. When we eliminate from our own minds such unwholesome mental dispositions as greed and hatred, thereby we also eliminate the possibility of their external manifestation in relation to others. In the same way, when we develop within ourselves such wholesome moral qualities as generosity and compassionate love, thereby we ensure the possibility of their external manifestation in relation to others. Thus moral cultivation has an individual as well as a social dimension. In point of fact, when it comes to the practice of the moral life, the very distinction between our own good and the good of others tends to get obliterated. We find this situation beautifully expressed in the following words of the Buddha:

> "Monks, one who takes of oneself, takes care of others. One who takes care of others, takes care of oneself. How, monks, is it that one who takes care of oneself takes care of others? It is by moral training, moral culture, and moral development. And how, monks, is it that one who takes care of others, takes care of oneself? It is by forbearance, by harmlessness, by goodwill, and compassion".[48]

As for the criticism made by some that the early Buddhist ideal of *Arhatship* is individualistic and self-centered, all that needs to be said here is that it is by uprooting all traces of individualism and self-centricity that one becomes an *Arhant.* How then can it be said that the ideal of *Arhatship* is individualistic and self-centered? The very criticism amounts to a self-contradiction.

The role of knowledge and awareness in moral conduct is another important aspect that concerns the Buddhist teaching on the moral life. All moral cultivation, in Buddhism's view, should be based on knowledge and constantly accompanied by awareness. "Just as one washes hand with hand or foot with foot", so runs the illustration, " both knowledge and conduct should help each other".[49] This means that a person who is cultivating moral qualities should be fully aware of what he is doing and of the different levels of moral purification that he has attained to. This also means that a person who is morally perfect but is not aware of his moral perfection is not morally perfect. This may sound rather paradoxical but is really the case from the Buddhist perspective. We find this situation well illustrated in one of the Buddhist discourses in the Pali Canon. As recorded here one day a disciple of a religious teacher called Uggahamana visited the Buddha. On being asked how his Master teaches moral culture, he explained: "A person who does not do an evil act with his body, speaks no evil speech, intends no evil intention, leads no evil livelihood is, to that extent, morally perfect".[50] Apparently this is how the Buddha himself teaches moral cultivation. However, the Buddha found it necessary to make the following observations:

> "According to this view of moral perfection, even a young baby-boy, lying on his back, would be morally perfect. A young baby-boy, lying on his back, does not think of his own body. How, then, could he do an evil deed with his body, except for a little kicking about? He does not think of his own voice. How, then, could he utter an evil speech, except for a little crying? He does not think about his own intention. How, then, could he lead an evil mode of livelihood, except for taking his mother's milk?".[51]

The naïve innocence of a baby-boy, as the above quotation shows, cannot be equated with moral perfection. It is based on sheer ignorance and is not accompanied by awareness. Nor is it consciously and deliberately cultivated. It is bound to collapse as the years pass. The moral cultivation and moral perfection that Buddhism speaks of is of an entirely different kind. It has to be grounded on knowledge, accompanied by knowledge, and should culminate together with knowledge. "Just as a man", so runs the illustration, "whose hands and feet are cut off, knows that his hands and feet are cut off, even so one who is morally perfect, whether he is walking or standing still or asleep or awake, in him there is constant and perpetual presence of knowledge to the effect that all mental defilements are destroyed by him".[52]

The Buddhist theory of the moral life does not assume that either the sense-organs or the sense-objects are in themselves an obstacle to mental culture. If two oxen, one white and the other black – so runs the illustration – are tied by a yoke, it is not correct to say that the black ox is a bond for the white ox, or that the white ox is a bond for the black ox. It is the yoke that constitutes the bond, it is that which unites them both. In the same way, what constitutes an obstacle to mental culture are neither the sense organs nor the sense-objects but craving or attachment. If it were otherwise one would have to rule out the very possibility of the practice of the moral life.[53] More or less the same idea is reflected in an early Buddhist discourse where the Buddha questions a disciple of a contemporary religious teacher how his Master teaches mental culture. In reply the latter says that the senses are to be trained to the extent when they fail to fulfill their respective functions: the eye does not see forms, the ear does not hear sounds and so on. The Buddha rejoins that this kind of mental culture will lead to the conclusion that the blind and the deaf have their senses best cultivated.[54] The clear implication is that mental culture is not to be associated with the suppression of the senses. The senses should be cultivated to see things as they truly are (*yathabhuta)*.

What has been discussed so far pertains mostly to the theory of the Buddhist moral life. The practice of the Buddhist moral life, as we all know, is based on the Noble Eight-fold Path (a*riya-atthangika-magga*), which is called the Middle Way (m*ajjhima patipada*) as it avoids the two extremes of self-mortification and sensual indulgence. One widespread misunderstanding of the Noble Eight-fold Path is that it is meant only for those who have renounced the lay life and not for the laity. This misunderstanding is part of the mistaken view that early Buddhism is an out-and-out other-worldly religion dissociated from this world. The most definitive textual evidence that can be adduced here to show why this conclusion is wrong comes from the *Samyutta Nikaya*, the Book of Connected Discourses. As recorded here, the Buddha refers to two paths. One is the Wrong Path (*miccha patipada*) and the other is the Right Path (*samma patipada*). After defining the Wrong Path as the direct opposite of the Noble Eight-fold Path, the Buddha says: "Monks, I do not uphold (*na vannemi*) the Wrong Path either for laymen or for monks". (*Gihino caham bhikkhave pabbajitassa va micchapatipadam na vannemi*).[55] Thus the Noble Eight-fold Path, which the Buddha presented as the Third Noble Truth of his teaching, is the Right Path, not only for monks (*bhikkhus*) and nuns (*bhikkhunis*) but also for laymen (*upasaka*) and lay women (*upasika*). It may also be noted here in passing that as recorded in the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the Book of Gradual Sayings, the word "*sangha*"

meant not only monks and nuns but also the male and female lay followers of the Buddha.[56] This fourfold Buddhist community is in sharp contrast to Brahmanism's fourfold division of the society according to caste system, where birth decides to which caste one belongs.

That the Noble Eight-fold Path is meant for the laity as well as the Sangha is also shown by the definition given by the Buddha to Right Livelihood (*samma ajiva*), which is the Fifth Factor of the Noble Eight-fold Path. It is defined as abstention from such morally reprehensible means of livelihood as trading in weapons, in human beings (slave trade, for example), in living beings (butchery and meat production), in poison, and in intoxicating drinks.[57] Obviously it is mostly the members of the lay society who follow these five trades as a means of livelihood. Therefore when Right Livelihood (samma ajiva) is defined as abstention from these morally reprehensible trades, its definition is made by taking the laity into consideration. All this goes to show that the ethical teachings embodied in the Noble Eight-fold Path are meant for both the laity and members of the Sangha. The moral qualities enshrined in the Path are intended to ensure three main functions, namely happiness in this life (*ditthadhamma-sukha*), well-being in the life after (*samparaya-hita*), and the realization of *Nibbana (nibbana-gamini patipada).*

What all this amounts to is that the Noble Eight-fold Path can be followed at different levels or in varying degrees of intensity. If one cannot follow it fully, one can follow it as far as possible. If the best thing is to realize the ideal, the next best thing is to be nearer the ideal. We often see a gap between precept and practice. This situation is not peculiar to religion alone, but is true of all other ideals of individual and social life. And just because there are varying degrees of difference between the ideal and the practice we do not propose to give up the ideal. The ideal is the source of inspiration to do the right thing and to resist from doing the wrong thing.

As noted earlier, it is with Right View (*samma ditthi*) that the Noble Eight-fold Path begins. It focuses on the need for a proper ideational basis in order to give right direction for the practice of the moral life. If the Right View (*samma ditthi*) provides the ideational basis for the moral life, the second path-factor, Right Intentions (*samma samkappa*) draws our attention to the mind's intentional function, the purposive or volitional aspect of mental activity. It is through this factor that values in consonance with Right View and directed towards the right goal get properly structured. Right Intentions are of three kinds: (I) intentions of renunciation, i.e. intentions free from self-centered desires and ego-centric impulses, (ii) intentions free from aversion, and (iii) intentions free from harmfulness, i.e. those of benevolence and compassionate love.[58] Such wholesome intentions constitute the psychological foundation for benevolent moral actions. All actions which are socially harmful, all forms of social conflict, violence and oppression can ultimately be traced to our bad intentions. They are the external manifestations of our thoughts motivated by greed, malice, and delusion. Thus our mind's intentional function has a tremendous impact on our social environment. The cultivation of right intentions is the surest guarantee of interpersonal concord. Today when we are living in a global village that cuts across natural barriers and national frontiers, our right and wrong intentions have a wider impact than at any period in the history of the human civilization.

The next three path factors take into consideration our speech (*vaca*), physical actions (*kammanta*), and livelihood (*ajiva*). Together they represent the vocal and physical manifestations of our right or wrong intentions, which in turn are conditioned by our right or wrong views. It is at this level our private thoughts and intentions begin to have a concrete impact on our social environment, for better or worse. In the context of social ethics it is these three factors that assume the greatest significance.

The Buddhist teaching on Right Speech (*samma vaca*) takes into consideration four aspects. The first is that it should be dissociated from all forms of falsehood (*musavada*). Positively this means devotion to truth that makes one reliable and worthy of confidence. The second is abstention from calumny or slanderous speech (*pisuna vaca)* which is intended to make enmity and division among people. Its opposite is the speech that heals divisions and promotes amity, harmony and friendship (*samagga-karani*). The third is abstention from harsh speech (*pharusa vaca*). All forms of abuse, insult, and even sarcastic remarks are its variations. Its opposite is the speech that is "blameless, pleasant to the ear, lovely, reaching to the heart, urbane, pleasing and appealing to the people". Fourthly, Right Speech consists of abstention from frivolous and vain talk (samphappalapa), which is defined as "idle chatter and pointless talk, all lacking in purpose and depth". Its opposite is "meaningful, purposeful, useful and timely speech". Right Speech requires us to refrain from uttering even what is true if it leads to harmful consequences (*anattha-samhita*). In uttering what is true one should take into consideration not only its potential effect but also the proper time for its utterance (*kalavadi*).[59] The effects of speech are as pervasive as the effects of physical action and their potential and consequences for good or bad are limitless. Hence the Buddhist teaching on Right Speech (*samma vaca*) enjoins us to exercise our capacity for verbal expression with great caution and circumspection, always being watchful of our words (*vacananurakkhi*)[60]. This advice, as Bhikkhu Bodhi observes, has more relevance and importance today "when the positive and negative potentials of speech have been vastly multiplied by the tremendous increase in the means, speed and range of communications".[61]

If Right Speech (*samma vaca*) is related to vocal acts, the next Path Factor, which is Right Action (*samma kammanta*), is concerned with bodily acts. It enjoins first abstention from injury to life and from all forms of violence, "the laying aside of all cudgels and weapons" and, positively, the cultivation of love and compassion to all creatures that have life. Secondly it enjoins one to abstain from "taking what is not given". All kinds of thievery, robbery, fraudulence through false claims, deceiving customers by using false weights and measures are some of its many variations. Positively this means cultivation of honesty and purity of heart at all levels of interpersonal relations. Thirdly Right Action requires abstention from wrongful gratification of sensual desires through sexual misconduct or illicit sexual relations.[62]

The fifth Path-Factor relates to the necessity of following a morally acceptable means of livelihood (*samma ajiva*). The Buddha mentions five specific modes of livelihood which are to be avoided, namely trading in weapons, in human beings (slave trade, for example), in living beings (butchery and meat production), in poison, and in intoxicating drinks.[63] Among other wrongful means

of livelihood mentioned in the Buddhist texts are deceit, treachery, soothsaying, trickery and usury.[64] In short any occupation which involves harmful consequences to others is to be considered as morally reprehensible, although it could be materially rewarding.

The last three factors of the Noble Eight-fold Path, namely Right Effort (*samma vayama*), Right Mindfulness (*samma sati*), and Right Concentration (*samma samadhi*) form a closely interrelated group involving direct mental training. They have as their basis the purification of conduct brought about by the three prior factors. The first requires putting forth energy to eliminate unwholesome dispositions and to prevent them from arising anew and to cultivate and stabilize wholesome dispositions.[65] This particular Path Factor brings into focus the indispensability of effort, diligence, exertion and unflagging perseverance for the successful practice of mental culture. It is the vital factor "necessary for the triumph of the moral will over the baser emotions"[66]. The second, which is Right Mindfulness, is presence of mind, attentiveness, alertness or awareness that plays the role of an inward mentor watching over and guiding all mental activity. For purposes of watching the mind it is necessary that it remain in the present, free from all judgements, evaluations and interpretations. The ultimate aim of Right Mindfulness is to give proper moral direction to all volitional acts and to all their mental, vocal and physical manifestations. The last Path Factor, which is Right Concentration (*samma samadhi*), is to be realized by unifying the usually differentiated mind. It is the calm, clear, unconfounded state of the mind, "the centering of all mental activity rightly and evenly".[67] Right concentration is the indispensable prerequisite for wisdom, an insight into the nature of actuality, for it is only a properly concentrated mind that can see things as they truly are (*samahito yathabhutam pajanati*).[68]

This is a general survey of the (eight) factors of the Noble Eight-fold Path. The eight factors, it must be noted here, are not like the steps of a ladder that we normally follow in sequence and sometimes bypassing some for purposes of expediency. As Bhikkhu Bodhi observes, "They can be more aptly described as components rather than as steps, comparable to the intertwining strands of a single cable that requires the contributions of all for maximal strength".[69] However, as he further observes, at the beginning and until such time when they begin to support each other, some degree of sequence is inevitable. We should also understand the use of the term "Path" in its proper context. Any other path we can leave behind once we have reached the destination. Not so the Noble Eight-fold Path. For the so-called Path Factors are in fact eight moral qualities which are to be cultivated, developed, absorbed and internalized. Once the eight factors are fully developed and brought to perfection, it helps to gain two other factors, Right Knowledge (*samma nana*) and Right Emancipation (*samma vimutti*). These are the ten wholesome (*kusala*) qualities which one who is enlightened and morally perfect (*Arahant*) is said to be endowed with.[70] Thus, according to Buddhism the highest level of moral perfection coincides to a great extent with the very path that leads to it.

The Buddhist scheme of moral practice can also be understood under the three aspects of *sila* (morality), *samadhi* (concentration), and *panna* (wisdom). These three aspects are mutually dependent and gradually progress towards a higher ideal. There is a clearly presented psychological theory behind this threefold scheme of moral culture. According to this theory all our moral evil

exists and activates at three different levels. The first level is called *anusaya*, a term which literally means "asleep". This is the level at which moral evil remains dormant in the form of latent tendencies. We are not aware of these deep-seated psychological proclivities in us until they manifest themselves as excited feelings and emotions. The second level is called *pariyutthana*, a term which literally means "arising all around". This is the level where what remained earlier as latent proclivities are now fully awake, this is what we experience as the turbulence of our own emotions and excited feelings. The third level is called *vitikkama*, a term which literally means "going beyond". This is the stage when our emotions and excited feelings manifest themselves in the form of vocal and physical actions[71].

Clearly it is at the third level, called *vitikkama*, that our moral evil begins to have a direct and concrete impact on others. All kinds of evil committed vocally and physically – lying, slandering, thievery, sexual misconduct, violence and inter-personal conflicts, acts of terrorism and internecine warfare, to name but few, are all instances of moral evil manifesting at *vitikkama* level. On the other hand, whatever detrimental impact the other two levels may have is private to ourselves. Thus of the three levels where moral evil operates, the *vitikkama* level is the most dangerous. However, of the three levels it is also the easiest to bring under control. At first this may not appear to be so. But little reflection on the situation should convince us that it is really the case. We all know by experience that it is easier to refrain from acts of violence but much more difficult to prevent thoughts of violence from welling up within us. The same situation is true of many other kinds of moral evil such as sexual misconduct, fraud and falsehood. Temptation is much more difficult to be controlled than its external manifestation. It is of course true that external factors such as public opinion, social conventions and laws of the country serve as restraining factors here. Nevertheless the fact remains that acts of transgression due to temptation are more easily avoided than thoughts of temptation themselves.

The *vitikkama* level, as noted above, is the most dangerous but the easiest to control. Therefore the Buddhist scheme of moral cultivation begins at the *vitikkama* level. The function of controlling this level is assigned to *sila* (morality), which is listed as the first step in the threefold moral training (= *sila, samadhi, panna*). Since all moral evil at *vitikkama* level manifests itself either vocally or physically, *sila* is defined as moral discipline in speech and body (*kayena vacaya samvara*). Once the *sila*-based morality is fully accomplished, the next step is to control moral evil at the *pariyutthana* level, where we experience the turbulence of our own excited feelings and emotions. This function is assigned to *samadhi*, which is listed as the second step in the scheme of threefold moral training. *Samadhi* is one-pointedness of mind or mental composure. It is the unification of the mind which usually remains differentiated. It is the best antidote to a mind that is in turbulence. However, the function of *samadhi* is only to still the mind and bring it under our conscious control. It cannot remove the roots of moral evil that remain at *anusaya* level, embedded in the deepest recesses of our minds in the form of latent proclivities. The function of uprooting moral evil at this third level is assigned to *panna*, which is the third step in the threefold moral training. *Panna* is wisdom or insight. It is the mind's ability to see things as they truly are

(*yathabhuta-nana*). It is by *panna* that moral evil is tackled at its very roots. With the help of this refined cognitive faculty we can observe and identify the roots of all moral evil lying dormant in the deep recesses of our minds. This observation takes place as bare awareness, without allowing our mind to edit or interpret what comes to be observed. For it is only then that bare awareness is able to eliminate all roots of moral evil without leaving any residue.[72]

The threefold scheme of moral training shows that the way to moral perfection is a graduated course (*anupubba-sikkha*), leading systematically from one step to the next. If *sila* paves the way to *samadhi, samadhi*, in turn, paves the way to *panna*. The premise behind this is that it is only by first disciplining one's vocal and physical acts that one can develop right concentration, and it is only by developing right concentration that one can realize wisdom, that is mind's ability to see things as they truly are.

The threefold scheme of moral training also shows why Buddhist morality begins with the observance of the Five Precepts (*panca sila*). The Five Precepts, as we all know, refer to abstention from depriving a living being of its life, not taking what is not given (thievery, robbery, etc), sexual misconduct or illicit sexual relations, false speech, and taking intoxicating beverages which impair our diligence and vigilance. These are five moral transgressions at the *vitikkama* level, having the most detrimental impact on the social environment. It is obvious that they do not represent all moral violations at the vitikkama level. However, as they constitute five of the most dangerous, abstention from them is considered as the very beginning of the moral life.

In order to prevent moral evil surfacing at the *vitikkama* level, i.e. as vocal and physical acts, Buddhism provides us with a set of moral guidelines. Their purpose is to help us make the right moral decision and to refrain from moral transgressions. One such moral guideline is called *attupama* or self-comparison. It invites us to put ourselves in the other person's position and to refrain from inflicting on others what we do not like to be inflicted on ourselves. This moral guideline finds expression in the *Dhammapada*, the Buddhist Anthology of Ethical Verses, in the following form: "All tremble at punishment; all fear death. Comparing oneself to the other, let one refrain from killing others, let one refrain from tormenting others".[73] The same idea is more poignantly expressed in the following quotation from the *Samyutta Nikaya*, the Book of Connected Discourses:

> "Here a noble disciple reflects thus: 'I like to live. I do not lie to die. I desire happiness and dislike unhappiness. Suppose someone should kill me, since I like to live and do not like to die, it would not be pleasing and delightful to me. Suppose I too should kill another who likes to live and does not like to die, who desires happiness and does not desire unhappiness, it would not be pleasing and delightful to the other person either. How could I inflict on another that which is not pleasant and delightful to me". Having reflected in this manner, he, on his own, refrains from killing, and speaks in praise of refraining from killing".[74]

This moral guideline shows that while refraining from killing, one must also dissuade others from committing the same evil. The Buddhist precept relating to abstaining from violence to any

living being is based on the Buddhist observation that all living beings seek pleasure and recoil from suffering (*sabbe satta sukhakama dukkhapatikkula).*[75]

Another guideline for moral reasoning is the one based on what the Buddhist commentators call the threefold *adhipateyya*.[76] It requires the individual to examine the possible consequences of what he intends to do from three different points of view. The first, called *attadhipateyya*, is to examine whether they would result in self-blame or repentance, whether his own self would censure him (*atta pi attanam upavadati*) [77]and to take a morally correct decision on the matter. Thus what is called *attadhipateyya* is a case of allowing oneself to be controlled by oneself. The second is called *lokadhipateyya*. It requires the individual to examine whether what he is going to commit would be censored particularly by the intelligent people in the society. Thus *lokadhipateyya* is a case of allowing oneself to be controlled by public opinion.[78] However, the Buddhist idea of public opinion does not exactly correspond to how we understand it today, that is, as opinion of the majority. For Buddhism what matters is neither the opinion of the majority nor the opinion of the minority, but the opinion of those who really know, the wise people in the society, the people who are knowledgeable (*vinnu purisa)*. This is the yardstick that Buddhism would like us to adopt when we are confronted with what others say. What is morally approvable is therefore referred to as "praised by the wise" (*vinnuppasattha),* and what is morally reprehensible as "censored by the wise" (*vinnu-garahita).*[79] The third guideline for correct moral reasoning is called *dhammadhipateyya*. It requires the individual to examine whether what he is going to do is in accord with the Moral Norm (*Dhamma*) and to avoid all actions which deviate from it. It is an appeal to man's higher moral sense.[80] It is man's higher moral sense that separates him from other living beings on a lower level of evolution. Its necessary concomitants are moral shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*ottappa*). Where these two are lacking there is no civilization. Hence the Buddha aptly calls them "Guardians of the World" (*loka-palaka dhamma).*[81]

In concluding this discussion on the theory and practice of the Buddhist moral life, there is one problem that we need to examine here. The problem concerns whether the moral life, as understood by Buddhism, is only a means to an end. The problem arises because of the view maintained by some that *Nibbana*, the ultimate goal in Buddhism, "transcends both good and evil".[82] If this were so, then this would mean that the pursuit of the moral life is only a means to an end, where all moral distinctions are completely abrogated.

What misled some scholars in this regard is their failure to understand the difference between the two ethical concepts of *punna* and *kusala*.[83] The fact that the *Arahant*, the one who has realized *Nibbana*, is described as "transcending both *punna* and *papa*" (*punna-papa-pahina*) was misunderstood to mean that the *Arahant* transcends not only what is morally unwholesome but also what is morally wholesome. As we have already noted early Buddhism recognizes two levels of morality, one represented by the term, kusala, and the other, by the term punna. It was also noted that kusala represents the higher level of morality. What the quotation cited above says is that the *Arahant* has gone beyond *punna* and not that he has gone beyond *kusala*. In point of fact, it is specifically mentioned that the *Arahant* is endowed with ten *kusala*-qualities. They consist of the eight moral

qualities of the Noble Eight-fold Path and two other qualities that result from following the Path perfectly, namely Right Knowledge (*samma nana*) and Right Emancipation *(samma vimutti*).[84] We find the same idea expressed in the statement that the *Arahant* is the one who has reached perfection (*paramappatta*) in noble virtue *(ariya-sila),* in noble concentration (*ariya-samadhi*), in noble wisdom (*ariya panna*), and in noble emancipation *(ariya-vimutti*).[85] We also find the Arahant described as one who is endowed with the highest (*parama*) and noblest *(uttama) kusala* qualities.[86]

If the *Arahant* is endowed with the highest (*parama*) and noblest *(uttama*) *kusala* qualities, this implies that the mental, vocal and physical acts of the *Arahant* can also be described as *kusala*. In which sense they should be understood as kusala needs explanation. In this connection it is important to remember here that *Nibbana* is sometimes defined as *kamma-nirodha,* that is, as cessation of karma.[87] For all karmic activities are said to be conditioned by ignorance, the ignorance of the true nature of sentient existence.[88] And since the *Arahant* is the one who has completely destroyed ignorance, it logically follows that on realizing *Nibbana,* he has freed himself from all karmic activities as well. However, the *Arahant*'s freedom from karmic activities does not mean that he has withdrawn from all activities. It only means that he has withdrawn only from *karmic* activities, i.e. those self-centered activities conditioned by ignorance. Since the mental, vocal, and physical actions of the Arahant are thus free from self-interest and transcend the sphere of karma, such actions can be aptly described as *kusala* of the highest and the noblest kind (*parama-kusala, uttama-kusala*).

Therefore it is not correct to conclude that Nibbana is an amoral state, transcending all moral distinctions. Nibbana is best described as an ethical ideal. The purpose of the moral life is not to abrogate moral distinctions but to realize an ideal that represents the highest level of moral perfection. It is an ideal that has to be realized by uprooting *raga* (greed), *dosa* (hatred), and *moha* (delusion), the three radical roots of all moral evil.[89] These three are described as "that which limits" (*pamana-karana*),[90] because they set limits and constraints to our perspectives and thus prevents the total vision. One who is overcome by them is by that very reason unable to see things as they truly are (*yathabhuta*). If Nibbana is described as "limitless" (*appamana*), it is not because that Nibbana is infinite in an abstract, meaningless sense, but because it is free from these three "limiting conditions". These "limiting conditions" are also called "boundaries" (*sima*) and therefore the *Arahant* who is free from them is described as "one who has transcended the boundaries" (*simatiga*).[91] They are also called "barriers" (*mariyada*) and therefore the Arahant who is free from them is described as one "who is living with a mind where all barriers have been broken asunder" (*vimariyadikata-cetasa viharati*),[92] that is, a mind that has become truly universal. Thus the Buddhist ideal of moral perfection is the same as the Buddhist ideal of universalism.

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Endnotes

[1] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy (Sri Lanka), 1985, p. 23.
[2] *Suttanipata*, PTS *(= Sn.), gatha* 175.
[3] *Dhammasangan*i, PTS (=*Dhs*.), para 1498.
[4] *Sn. gatha* 895.
[5] *Majjhima Nikaya*, PTS (= *MN*.), II, 167.
[6] *MN*. II, 457.
[7] The early Buddhist discourses make a clear distinction between *ditthi* and *dassana*. *Ditthi* means view, conceptual model, or the ideational framework through which one perceives the world. *Dassana* is a direct insight into the true nature of actuality. Although *ditthi* can be either right (*samma*) or wrong (*miccha*), *dassana* is not so qualified. *Cf. ditthin ca anupagamma silava dassanena sampadeyya (Metta Sutta, Sn*.). When the Buddha was asked by Vacchagotta whether he had his own view, the Buddha told him that there was no need for him to have any view (*ditthi*) when he had viewed (*dittha) (MN*. III, 145 *ff.).*
[8] *Samyutta Nikaya*, PTS (=*SN*.), II, 17 (Tr. from *Kindred Sayings*).
[9] See e.g *Digha Nikaya*, PTS (= *DN*.), I, 157, 158, *MN*. I, 157, 426.
[10] Ibid. loc. cit.
[11] See *e.g. DN*. III, 113*; SN*. IV, 330.
[12] *Ibid. loc. cit.*
[13] *Cf. Imasmim sati idam hoti; imassa uppada idam uppajjati. Imasmim asati idam na hoti; imassa nirodha idam nirujjhati* (When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases to be.)
[14] *Vinaya*, PTS *(= Vin.*), I, 10.
[15] *Ibid. loc. cit.*
[16] *Ibid. loc. cit.*
[17] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *op. cit.* p. 15.
[18] *Vin.* I, 10.
[19] K N Jayatilake, *The Principles of International Law in Buddhist Doctrine*, Extract from *Recueil des Cours*, Vol. II, Leyden, 1967, p. 24.
[20] *Vin.* I, 10.
[21] The exact words, *majjhima desana*, do not occur in the Pali *suttas*. Our use of the two words is based on the sentence: *Tathagato majjhena dhammam deseti*, which is used with reference to the doctrine of Dependent Origination; see *SN., Nidana Samyutta*.
[22] *Anguttara Nikaya*, PTS. (= *AN*.), I, 62; *DN*. I, 115; *Vin.* I, 71.
[23] *Ibid. loc. cit.*
[24] *Ibid. loc. cit.*
[25] *SN*. II, 20.
[26] *Ibid. loc. cit.*
[27] *AN., Tika Nipata*.
[28] *SN*. II, 20.
[29] *Ibid. loc. cit.*
[30] *Ibid. loc. cit.*
[31] AN., Tika Nipata.
[32] Ibid. III, 337.
[33] *Dhammapada , gatha* 276.
[34] *Suttanipata, gatha* 335.
[35] Clearly suggested by the criticism made by Purana Kassapa, a senior contemporary of the Buddha, against the concept of *punna* and *papa* (Samannaphala Sutta, *DN*.).
[36] *DN*., Samannaphala Sutta (Tr. from *Dialogues of the Buddha*).

[37] Although *punna* plays an important role in Buddhist ethics, cf. Bodhisatta's words: *Anumattena punnena attho mayham na vijjati*, which show that acts of *punna* do not directly lead to the realization of *Nibbana* (*Sn., gatha* 321).
[38] *Dhammapada, gatha* 18.
[39] See *e.g. MN*. I, 47; *AN*. I, 203*; DN*. III, 214; *Dhs*. 32, 313.
[40] *Atthasalini (Dhammasangani Atthakatha*), SHB, 62 ff.
[41] *MN*. II, 28, 29.
[42] *Cf. Nibbanaparamam sukham (Dhp. gatha 67); Tanhaya vippamuttassa natthi soko kuto bhayam (Dhp. gatha 97).*
[43] *MN*. II, 98
[44] *AN*. II,95.
[45] See *e.g. DN*. II, 233; *AN*. II, 95; *Suttanipata gatha* 122; *Dhammapada gatha* 328.
[46] *MN*. I, 45.
[47] *Vin*. I, 23.
[48] *SN*. V,169.
[49] *DN*. II, 89
[50] *MN*. II, 24 (Tr. from I B Horner's *Middle Length Sayings* II, 223-4).
[51] *Ibid. loc.cit.*
[52] *MN*. I, 523.
[53] *SN*. V, 163.
[54] *MN*. III, 29 *ff.*
[55] *SN*. V, 18-19.
[56] *AN*. II, 234.
[57] See below, n. 63.
[58] See *DN*. I, 156; *MN*. I, 118; *SN., Magga Samyutta*.
[59] *Ibid. loc. cit.*
[60] *Dhammapada gatha* 281.
[61] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *op.cit.* p.34.
[62] See *DN*. I, 156; *MN*. I, 118; *SN., Magga Samyutta*.
[63] *Ibid. loc. cit.*
[64] *DN*. I, 22.
[65] See *DN*.I, 156; *MN*. I, 118; *SN., Magga Samyutta*.
[66] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *op. cit.* p. 56.
[67] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *op. cit.* p. 57.
[68] SN. III, 67.
[69] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *op. cit.* p. 57
[70] See below, n. 84.
[71] See *Visuddhimagga*, PTS (= *Vsm.)*, 5 *ff.*
[72] *Ibid. loc. cit.*
[73] *Dhammapada gatha* 129
[74] *SN*. V, 354.
[75] *MN*. I, 341.
[76] *Vsm*. 311.
[77] *MN*. II, 76.
[78] *Vsm*. 312.
[79] See *e.g. SN*. I, 169.
[80] *Vsm*. 312.
[81] *SN*. II, 50.
[82] See *e.g*. Tachibana, *Buddhist Ethics*, Colombo, 1965 (Reprint).
[83] For more details on this subject, see P. D. Premasiri's reference article on Buddhist Ethics in *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*.
[84] See *e. g. MN*. II, 28.

[85] *Ibid*. III, 28.
[86] *Ibid*. III, 146.
[87] *SN*. III, 69.
[88] *Cf. Avijja-paccaya samkhara* in the twelve factored formula of Dependent Origination. The term samkhara as used here refers to karmic activities.
[89] See above, n. 39
[90] *SN*. III, 64.``````
[91] *Sn. gatha* 795; *Mahaniddesa*, PTS (= *MNd*.), 99.
[92] *SN*. II, 173; VI, 11; *AN*. V, 151.