

THE HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

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A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

*Tis utterly impossible
To reach by travel the world's end;
But there is no escape from pain
Until the world's end has been reached.
It is a sage, a knower of the worlds,
Who gets to the world's end, and it is he
Whose life divine is lived out to its term;
He is at peace who the world's end has known
And hopes for neither this world nor the next.
(Samyutta-Nikāya, 1:62)*

The World

Most of the material I have used in this paper is drawn from the Abhidhamma, that section of the Buddhist Canon which consists of seven books and deals with Science and Metaphysics from the Buddhist point of view. The value of the Abhidhamma for modern man and modern thought lies in its being able to bring Ethics into the field of Science, and in serving as a meeting ground for many different schools of Psychology and Philosophy past and present. As we shall see it is very relevant to the Environment and modern-day Ecological concerns. The Abhidhamma is both a scientific treatise and a metaphysical discourse, and was taught by the Buddha. It analyses the constituents of living beings and the workings of their organic processes. It also explains how the external world relates to beings and provides a means of understanding the intricate relationship between the mental and material elements, and how the natural laws govern and operate in the Universe.

Reality

The Buddha's teachings can be divided into two levels; those to do with conventional truth, (Samuti-sacca) and those concerning ultimate truth, (Paramattha-sacca). Most of the teachings given by the Buddha for the understanding and benefit of ordinary people are concerned with conventional truth, and were given to help them to understand his doctrine and put it into

practice in order to attain Insight and Wisdom. There are also those of his teachings which are very abstract and deep which only those who have the wisdom-eye can see. It is these profound doctrines which make up the higher teachings of the Buddha. When we speak about the world or the Universe we find that the Buddha has given us two levels of teachings, two perspectives from which to view reality, the world and the Universe. One type explains these things in terms of conventional truth and the other in terms of ultimate truth. The Buddha taught that the world was not created by a supreme being or power, but that it is a manifestation of mental and material qualities which operate under the influence of the laws of cause and effect. I would now like to explain, first of all, what is the nature of the world as Buddhists understand it, how it is manifested and how it functions in terms of conventional truth. Next, I would like to explain how Buddhists understand the world in terms of ultimate truth, and then from this perspective examine what the real nature of the world is, and how it functions. Last of all, I would like to speak about our world; how it came into being and what as human beings are our responsibilities towards it.

The Knower of the World

One of the nine major attributes of the Buddha was the title, "Lokavidu" meaning 'the knower of the worlds'. In this context it is said that the Blessed One has known, experienced and penetrated the world in all ways as to its individual essence, its arising, its cessation and the means of its cessation. On this subject, the Buddha once said to one of his disciples:-

"Friend, that there is a world's end where one neither is born nor ages nor passes away nor reappears, which is to be known or reached by travel - that I do not say. Yet I do not say there is ending of suffering without reaching the world's end. Rather it is this fathom long carcass with its perceptions and its consciousness that I make known to the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world, and the way leading to the cessation of the world."

The Three-fold World

In general there are three kinds of world explained in the Buddhist Scriptures. The first is the world of formations (Saḅbhāra-loka), which includes all physical and mental compounded things and conditioning states, and also includes all creative or created physical and mental energies. The second kind is the world of beings (Satta-loka), that is, those energies manifested as beings under the control of the law of Kamma. The third kind is the world of location or space (Okāsa-loka) in which all kinds of matter, material phenomena and beings exist; this is the whole of space spanning the entire Universe.

In Buddhism the term Loka, 'the world', is defined in the sense of dissolving or crumbling, "Lujjati palujjati loko", and it includes all physical and mental phenomena. For example, all mentality and materiality in the way we understand it as material form, feelings, perception, mental formations and mind are included in the world of formations. The Abhidhamma states that each and every particle in the Universe is itself, a whole and a universe. When these material and mental phenomena are manifested as living beings as a result of their Kamma, then they are called 'the world of beings'. A Buddha, in virtue of his Buddhahood is one who knows the habits of all beings, knows their inherent tendencies, temperaments and natures and it is because of this knowledge that the Buddha is the 'Knower of the World', he knows all beings according to their different characteristics. In the context of the world of location the Buddha said: "One world's sphere (cakkavāṭī) is twelve thousand leagues in length and three thousand four hundred and fifty leagues in breadth" (One league measures approximately eight miles). (The Path of Purification-P 216)

The word Cakkavāṭī is a term for a single, complete universe and is just one of an infinite number of such universes. The concept of the Cosmos, in its general form, is not peculiar to Buddhism, but appears to have been the generally accepted one in the ancient world. Buddhism uses the term 'Loka-dhātu', 'world element' and in its most limited sense it refers to a single world sphere, but it can be extended to mean any number of spheres, as for example, the group of world spheres dominated by a particular Brahma in a Brahma world.

The World Sphere

Buddhist Cosmology defines the Cakkavāṭī, the 'world sphere' or universe as that world sphere which contains the Earth, and the other planets, suns, moons and all the stars. In this world sphere there exists a total of thirty-one realms: the hell worlds (which are seen as being below the earth), the animal kingdom, the realm of hungry-ghosts, and demons or Asuras. These four are known collectively as the miserable realms (Apāya-bhūmi), the human realm (Manussa-bhūmi), the six divine realms (Deva-bhūmi), the sixteen material Brahma realms (Rūpa-bhūmi), where people are reborn as a result of their attainment of the meditative absorptions, (the Jhānas), and there are also four formless realms (Arūpa-bhūmi), where people are reborn who have attained the higher Jhanas. These are what Theravada Buddhists call the thirty-one realms and are the planes of existence where one will be reborn again and again as a result of one's wholesome and unwholesome Kamma, until such time as one attains Nibbāna and thereby wins total release from rebirth in Saṅsāra.

Mind and Matter

It is very difficult for anyone to understand the Buddha's doctrine of Kamma if one does not understand the Buddhist systems of Cosmology and Cosmogony at

the outset. The Buddhist theory of Cosmogony maintains that there have been immeasurable and innumerable Kappas (aeons) or periods of time already gone, and that there will be innumerable kappas (aeons) in the future. In terms of conventional or relative truth, the earth, the sun, the moon and the stars do indeed exist, as well as animate and inanimate objects.

There are human beings, animal beings, divine beings and also ordinary beings as distinguished from enlightened persons, Buddhas, Arahats and Bodhisattas and so forth. However, when we examine the Buddha's Paramattha-desana, those of his teachings concerning ultimate truth we come to know that all these things are in truth illusive and so whatever we see, perceive or understand are conventional realities and not ultimate realities. Concerning the nature of the world the Buddha said:-

*"The world is led by craving,
By craving is it defiled
And craving is that one thing,
Controlled by which all follows"*

(Samyutta-Nikaya-17.8)

He also said:-

*"It is just suffering that arises,
Suffering that stays and disappears.
Nothing but suffering ceases and nothing else."
"As when with all parts assembled,
Chariot is the word then used,
So when the aggregates exist,
One speaks of being by convention."*

(Sag'athavagga-saEyyutta- v.19)

These verses point out the fact that desire is the fire which fuels suffering one of the three characteristics of the world together with those of impermanence and no-self. From the Theravada standpoint, in the ultimate sense all things are nothing more than mental and material phenomena or N'ima-R'ĕpa. Indeed the entire Universe is nothing but mind and matter. Mind and matter are, in fact the fundamental energies of the Universe. Buddhism encourages people to examine and investigate the real nature of the World. The Buddha fully analysed the entire Universe and stated that the Universe was, itself made up of five aggregates, twelve bases or eighteen elements. At this point, I would like to describe the five aggregates very briefly:

The Five Aggregates

(i) The first is the aggregate of matter, or the material universe. This includes the four great primary elements, (the Mahabhutas) and they are:- solidity, fluidity heat, and motion. It also includes the derivatives of these four primary elements and they are our five material sense organs, that is the faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue and body and their corresponding objects which are visible form, sound, odour, taste and tangible things. The whole realm of matter both internal and external is included in these five aggregates.

There are four mental aggregates, namely the aggregate of sensations, the aggregate of perceptions, the aggregate of mental formations and the aggregate of consciousness.

(ii) The aggregate of sensations includes all of our feelings, be they pleasant, unpleasant or neutral; as well as experience through the contact of the physical and mental sense organs with the external world. These sensations are of six kinds and they are the sensations experienced through the contact of the eye with visible forms, of the ear with sounds, of the nose with odour, of the tongue with taste, of the body with tangible objects and of the mind with mental objects, thoughts or ideas. All our physical or mental feelings are included in this group.

(iii) The aggregate of perception is also of six kinds in relation to the six internal faculties, and the corresponding six external objects. Like the sensations, they arise through the contact of our six faculties with the external world. It is perception that recognizes sense objects, whether they be physical or mental.

(iv) The aggregate of mental formations includes all volitional activities, both good and bad. What is generally known as kamma belongs to this group. The Buddha's own definition of kamma was this : "Oh, Bhikkhus, it is volition (cetanā) that I call Kamma. Having willed, one acts through body, speech and mind", (Anguttara-Nikaya). In this group of mental formations there are also other mental properties such as attention, will, determination, confidence, concentration, wisdom, energy, desire, hatred, conceit, ignorance, the idea of self, and so forth. There are a total of fifty such mental activities which constitute the aggregate of mental formations.

(v) The aggregate of consciousness is an awareness, cognition or response which has one of the six faculties that is, eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind as its basis, and one of the six corresponding external phenomena, that is, visible form, sound, odour, taste, tangible things and mental objects as its object. It should be understood clearly that consciousness does not recognize an object. It is only a sort of awareness, an awareness of the presence of an object. For example, when the eye comes into contact with colour, with for instance, the colour blue then visual consciousness arises which is simply an awareness of the presence of colour;

but it does not recognize that it is blue, no such recognition arises at this stage. It is not the faculty of consciousness but that of perception which recognizes that it is blue. The term "visual consciousness" is simply a philosophical expression and denotes the same idea as is conveyed by the ordinary word 'seeing'. In this situation seeing does not mean recognition, and similarly for the other forms of consciousness. According to the Buddhist doctrine of Anatta, there is no permanent, unchanging spirit which can be described as 'self', 'soul' or 'ego.' The Buddha declared in quite unequivocal terms that consciousness depends upon matter, sensation, perception and mental formations, and that it cannot exist independently of these. He said:-

"Consciousness may exist, matter as its means, as its object, as its support, and seeking delight it may grow, increase and develop in the same way as sensations, perceptions and mental formations as its means, object, support and seeking delight it may grow, increase and develop." (Samyutta-Nikaya- III.58)

The Buddha called these five aggregates taken as a whole 'the world. What we call a 'being' or an 'individual' or "I" are only convenient names or labels given to the combination of these five groups. They are all impermanent, all constantly changing and because of their impermanent nature they are also dukkha or suffering. In this connection the Buddha said. to the Brahmin Ra††hapála: -

"Oh Brahmana, it is just like a mountain river, flowing far and swift, taking everything along with it, there is no moment, no instant, no second, when it has stopped flowing. But it goes on flowing and continuing. So Brahmana, is human life like a mountain river." (Anguttara-Nikáya)

The Buddha also told Ra††hapála that the world is a continuous flux, and it is impermanent.

Units of Elements

According to the Abhidhamma, the Buddha reduced the entire material world into Kállpas. A kállpa is a unit of elements. Each Kállpa contains the four great primary elements and their secondary characteristics, such as colour, odour, taste and subtle nutriment. Each of the four great elements has two chief characteristics or qualities. The earth element has the qualities of hardness and softness, the water element has the qualities of fluidity and cohesion, the fire element has the qualities of heat and cold, and the air element has the qualities of motion and movement. These Kállpas are very tiny and cannot be seen by the naked eye. They are sub-atomic particles which are in constant flux; they arise and pass-away millions of times a second. Each kalapa tends to exist independently, but they are inter-dependent with each other, and exist by repetition so that when they combine together a material substance is formed. Theravada Buddhism teaches us to understand that these tiny particles are 'Sabháva', meaning real. The investigation

one undertakes in meditation enables a person to see that the entire universe is in a constant state of flux. At that time one is seeing just the present moment; from this moment in the present one can also see the past and the future and it is this insight which enables a person to realize that the whole of the world system is always changing and through this experience and insight into the present moment a person can understand precisely what the Buddha meant when he said: "Sabbe sa+khárl aniccl," all compounded things are changing.

According to our understanding the material and mental units travel from the infinite past towards the infinite future and they only exist in the present moment. In one sense time is the measure of change and the present is the one point in time at which the past separates from the future and its duration is immeasurably tiny, as tiny as a geometrical point. The present moment helps us to measure the units of mind and matter. The Buddha explained that the Universe is infinite in every way. The measure of infinity is more than figures can express. It is immeasurable. There is no beginning nor end in time in either direction; past or future time extends to infinity. Therefore, any point in time is the centre of time; so the present is as much the centre of time as is a point of time in the countless years occurring in the past or future. When, therefore, we are considering the duration of a human life span, the duration in time of the existence of the earth or the duration of this portion of the Universe, we know that we are considering definite lengths of time be they in the past, present or future.

In Theravada Buddhist meditation great emphasis is put upon awareness of the present moment. If we understand the nature of things in the immediate present, from moment to moment then surely we will understand the nature of all things. Therefore, when we observe the sub-atomic particles, the Kállpas, in the light of the present moment we can know that these particles are like everything else, ever changing or transient and completely empty of essence or entity. There is no permanent substance in this continuously fluctuating Universe.

In the same way we have to understand our mind and its properties as a constant flux. The duration of one mental and material unit is divided into three instants, that is into its arising, its development and its dissolution. The duration of a unit of mind is so short that it is said in the Abhidhamma that a unit of mind changes about a trillion times during a single flash of lightning and its rate of repetition is regular and constant. The forces of mind vary from being to being according to the accumulated weight of the perfections, such as patience and giving and the defilements such as sensual pleasures and false-views each one of us carries. It is said that the rate of speed at which the mind changes is sixteen times faster than that of any of the physical elements. The Abhidhamma also says that the mind of each human being is heart-centered and that it extends to every live molecule in the body. Thus the element of mind is present in every part of a person's physical system but the intensity of its presence varies. The presence of the mind is more intense in the six sense organs and it is less intense in other parts of

the body. It is important to understand that the five aggregates of the physical and mental universe are constantly changing and are completely void of an everlasting soul and no essence can be found in them. This is their nature.

This concept of voidness, or emptiness is, by some schools of Buddhism, called the Doctrine of *Suññatá* or 'the emptiness' of everything that exists in the Universe. It is a transcendental reality and as such is quite beyond the grasp of the intellect and verbal expression. However, the Theravada school of Buddhism and some other schools maintain that there are a total of seventy-two Dhammas or metaphysical realities. In their view, these realities exist but are impermanent and have no everlasting soul or entity.

The Generative Forces of the Matter

The Theravadins also hold that there are four absolute realities or *Paramattha* and they are: consciousness, mental factors, matter and *Nibbána*. *Nibbána* is uncompounded and unconditioned. The other three, namely consciousness, mind and matter are, however, compounded and conditioned and therefore, are subject to change. When these generative forces of mind and matter arise they do so from moment to moment and are dependent on particular causes and natural laws. The *Abhidhamma* also states that there are four principal causes for the existence of material atoms and they are: *Kamma*, our past actions, *Citta*, thought, *Utu*, energy and *Óhára*, nutriment. Volitional acts performed in the past generate in the present life certain kinds of matter such as the life element, the sex element, and the sensitive-element of the body. Present thought also generates a number of different kinds of atoms. Energy or heat is an integral property of every kind of matter. The interaction between internal and external energies is responsible for most of the different kinds and states of matter, and nutriment is also common to all matter. This is an element within the atom and not the atom itself. Thus the entire material universe exists because of these four generative forces.

The Natural Laws

As previously explained the Universe consists of an innumerable number of heavenly bodies, existing as a system. The world of each system can be further divided into three sub-systems. This universe of animate and inanimate objects exists on a basis of conditioning and the occurrence of physical and mental events that are governed by natural laws. In Buddhist philosophy all mental and material phenomena are seen as being subject to invariable and inexorable natural laws and are not thought to be the products of an arbitrary creator. These natural laws, known as *Niyáma Dhamma* are divided into five categories and they are: the law of past action, (*kamma-niyáma*), the law of thought or consciousness (*citta-niyáma*), the law of heredity (*bAja-niyáma*), the law of energy (*utu-niyáma*), and the law of phenomenology (*dhamma-niyáma*). Each unit of mind and matter exists according to these five laws. The Buddha expounded in detail in the *Abhidhamma* how these

natural laws operate and govern the Universe. Moreover, these natural laws which we human beings are also subject to remind us that we are not exempt from responsibility for our part in the creation and survival or destruction of the world we live in.

Causal Relations

According to the doctrine of causal relations all phenomena and events are not the product of a single cause, but of a multiplicity of causes or conditions. According to this doctrine there is no first cause, and there is no single cause which conditions any particular effect. To help us to better understand this very profound Doctrine of Causal Relations the Buddha taught this formula - "When this is, that is; this arising, that arises; when this is not, that is not; this ceasing, that ceases." To clarify this formula and to facilitate our understanding of it the Buddha preached the Paticca-samuppada, the Law of Dependent Origination. This doctrine of universal causation, or dependent origination, is stated and formulated in the numerical list of the twelve Nidanas, or original causes which has been explained as the Law of Causality Relations, The twelve Nidānas are ignorance (avijjā), mental formations (sa+khāras), rebirth consciousness (viññāna), mind and matter (Nāma-Rūpa), the six sense spheres (sa-līyatana), contact (phassa), feelings (vedanā), desire (taṇhā), clinging (upādāna), becoming (bhava), birth (jāti), and old-age, and death (jarā-maraṇa).

Although, Buddhism has a number of schools distinguished by their various philosophical and cultural traditions, nevertheless, all of the schools accept the Doctrine of Dependent Origination as the basis for their philosophical concepts but, each school interprets it according to its own philosophical views and tradition. This fundamental doctrine is interpreted on different levels to enable people to understand it according to their individual abilities. This doctrine is also called the Wheel of Life and as such it describes in a conventional and relative way how people are reborn again and again in Saḍḍāra, the cycle of rebirth, as dictated by the laws of nature and according to the fruits of their accumulated kamma. Thus life is depicted as a wheel or cycle, and however primitive that life form may be as for instance, that of an amoeba, it cannot be traced back to a first beginning, because it contains within it the possibilities of progress and of regress. The question of tracing cause back to a first event does not arise because a first event never existed. This, however is not a statement in respect of species, which is the vehicle of a particular life form, but pertains to the individual or the personality.

Concerning causality, the Buddha also expounded twenty-four causal relations (Paccaya). According to these causal relations an effect is not produced by a single cause but by a number of causes. This is a many to one relation. The Law of Dependent Origination points to the basic or main cause. For example, in the preparation of a meal of rice, rice paddy is the main cause; however, the cooking pot, the water, the fire-place and the cook are all necessary; but if the farmer did not

produce the paddy then the other things would be of no use. In this case according to the Law of Dependent Origination the paddy is singled out as the main cause. On the other hand, the system of Causal Relations or Paṭṭhāna, examines all the relevant causes or relationships or the precise circumstances due to which as for example, out of the paddy, a rice meal is produced.

If we examine or investigate the Doctrine of Dependent Origination or causal relations we will understand that whatever we apparently see in this world is an illusion, a kind of hallucination. We also come to realize that ultimately, there is no such thing as an individual, "I" or personality, just the phenomenon exists, which in nature never exists for two consecutive moments as it is an ever changing process. However, we have to understand this reality, as without understanding it we would be unable to realize the Four Noble Truths or appreciate the true nature of the world, its inherent unsatisfactoriness, impermanence and lack of substantiality and entity.

If we examine the nature of the Universe in the light of the Buddha's teachings and perspective then we can begin to understand how much we are responsible for the whole Universe. If we look at the Universe from a perspective of Conventional Truth then we can see that all living beings are born and die repeatedly from the infinite past to the infinite future. During this long journey in Saṅsāra we have met together many times with each being; therefore, we Buddhists say all beings are related at some time or another as mother, father, sister, brother and so forth. We should, therefore regard all living beings as our relatives, all these beings are suffering in the same way and we should help those we can and encourage them to develop their wisdom and understanding. Without understanding, without wisdom no one will ever find release from the suffering that is inherent in life. Our own individual liberation is not important, the important thing is how we can be of help to others. The Buddha throughout his forty-five year long ministry again and again encouraged the practice of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity because this practice will help all beings to eliminate their ignorance and develop wisdom. Buddhism does not hold the giving of material things to be the most important thing, but the giving of Dhamma is most excellent as is said in the Dhammapada:- "The gift of Truth (dhamma) excels all other gifts." When the Buddha sent forth his disciples to teach, for the first time, he advised them to go in all directions and explain the Dhamma for the benefit of many and for the happiness of many. According to Buddhism all living beings are suffering from the darkness of ignorance so it is important to show them the light so that they can see their way towards the ultimate goal of Enlightenment. This requires dedication and even self-sacrifice. The Bodhisatta Avalokiteshvara took the vow that he would not enter Nirvana (Nibbāna) while any living being remains in Saṅsāra. At the same time we must take care not to neglect our own spiritual development and education.

The Environment

The concept of the Environment covers just about everything associated with the human organism and includes other organisms and the inanimate part of the world in which life occurs. This word 'environment' has approximately the same meaning as surroundings, but it is interesting, and I think particularly relevant to our seminar, that as a verb to 'environ' carries the connotation of surrounding in the sense of caring for and protecting as one would a living thing. Not only are we alive, but the earth and its environment is, indeed, a living thing, harm it and we harm ourselves. The evidence for this is abundant especially in over-industrialized countries where large populations of people make more and more demands on the Environment. Also modern farming methods are convenient and money-making businesses for some, but in the end harmful and destructive to humans, animals and even the crops because of the chemical pesticides now used. All of these things contribute to what we call the Global Environmental Crisis. A crisis is defined as both a crucial moment and a turning point. We are at this turning point as far as the Environment is concerned. Its survival or destruction is our responsibility.

The Environment is a thing which we have created and is a designation of the natural process that has moved and developed through countless ages and inconceivable causes in the infinite past, therefore it is undergoing a process of change day in and day out regardless of whether people recognize this or not. The Buddhist perspective on the Environment is an individual's relationship with the world and our transformation of the world we live in. We need to see how things live, and how they are inter-related. It is in this context that Buddhism expounds on the wholeness of all things in inter-relationship. In the Doctrine of Dependent Origination, the Paṭicca-samuppāda, it is stated that nothing is created or can exist apart from this network of inter-relationships. Things do not exist independently. This network is not a static process but one of dynamic motion with infinite potential in the infinite Universe.

The Buddha emphasized the need to see the nature of change in the Universe as impermanence or suffering. It is because of our ignorance that we do not understand the inter-relationship of all things and their inherent impermanence. As long as we live in ignorance we are blinded to the truth of things as they really are and so we fail to see the world as it really is. Ignorance also makes us develop attachment to a false and deluded sense of 'I' or 'We', and it is this sense of egocentricity that creates barriers, boundaries and separations between men and their world. Whenever we have these biased and selfish views then our energies are exerted in striving to preserve our own lives seeking only our pleasure and profit. We strive to acquire more and more personal possessions, many of which are unnecessary, to the exclusion of others happiness and well-being and often to the detriment of the world all of us share and depend upon. This is not good for us and it is not the way to personal and universal happiness and harmony. The Buddha gave us a workable method to eliminate ignorance, greed and self-centredness the

roots of our own and the world's ills. This is our task ,our responsibility. He once said:- "It is suffering, the origin of suffering, the arising of suffering and the way out of suffering that I teach." He also encouraged us to 'Learn to do good, cease to do evil and purify the mind. This was his formula for personal and Universal purification, well-being and deliverance and total liberation from ill. Mind is very important. As we have seen mind is most important in the Buddha's teaching. As the very first verse in the Dhammapada says: "A defiled mind generates unhappiness and suffering, a pure mind brings happiness and freedom from suffering." If we free our minds of the mental defilements we will become enlightened to the fundamental wholeness of the world, its intricate and inter-related balance. We will also come to be clear about how we are conditioning the entire Universe and what a great responsibility we have for the inter-related world.

Buddhism emphasises the need to comprehend the nature of change in the Universe and its characteristic impermanence and suffering. It is because of our ignorance that we do not understand the inter-relationship of things or their impermanence. As long as we are blinded by ignorance we develop a false and wrong and harmful attachment to the idea of "I" or "We." This kind of concept creates boundaries, and separation from the rest of the world and much selfishness. When we have these kinds of views then our energies are exerted to preserving our existence and procuring personal possessions. Therefore as Buddhists our main task is to eliminate ignorance and attachment and self-assertion. If we are free from these harmful mental defilements then we will be aware of and awaken to the oneness of the Universe and will learn how to live within the wholeness of inter-related balance. Also we will see clearly about how we are conditioning the entire Universe and how much we have responsibilities to the inter-related world and how much we can contribute to its well-being or destruction.

Ecology

Nowadays, Ecology has become a popular science and virtually a household word. A few years ago not many people understood or used the word. These days people are more interested in talking about Ecology and there is a move towards taking Ecology seriously and making the preservation and safety of the environment a priority, particularly in the western world. In the East, too there is a growing awareness of the Environment and Ecology and the crisis facing it and the rest of the world. Recently, the blight of air pollution across much of South East Asia has highlighted the gravity and urgency of the need for environmental awareness and effective ecological action here and world-wide. Ecology has been defined in the New Oxford Dictionary as,"the scientific study of people, plants and animals and institutions in relation to the Environment." It is also concerned with methods and processes naturally beneficial to the Environment and with the growth of populations, with animals and plants, their welfare and conservation and with the non- exploitation of the Earth's natural resources. Awareness and purposeful action is the way to care for and protect the Environment. Another thing which Ecology

concerns itself with is the structure of communities and their relationship to local environments, which are always in a state of flux. Ecologists say that there are many possible kinds of relationship between organisms (plants, animals, and other living things such as viruses) and that part of the inanimate world in which they occur. Most relationships between plants and animals are baffling in their complexity and it is virtually impossible to make any assumptions about the outcome of a deliberate change in or interference with the natural environment. Nevertheless, Ecology as a scientific study is concerned with the complex relationships between plants and animals and according to ecological analysis everything in the world is related to everything else: this includes the levels of growth and decrease of populations, individual and environmental changes and organic development and so forth.

Human beings are not the only living beings in the world, other beings also have the right to live and develop. If we examine the history of the earth it becomes clear that as long as the human population has grown it has depended upon the natural environment and has contributed in varying degrees to the destruction of the environment. The evidence of past and current environmental abuses and disasters is alarming and cannot be ignored. It is important that we understand that as human beings we cannot live on this earth by ourselves. We are dependent upon animals and plants in many ways even for the very air we breathe and for our food, clothing, shelter and medicine. Animals and plants in turn depend upon us to some degree for their survival. There is a delicate and intricate balance existing between the human realm and the animal and plant kingdoms. All too often mankind has ignored this and exploited the environment for his own greedy and selfish ends, ultimately to his own detriment as well as others and the planet as a whole. This problem has escalated particularly since the growth of more industrialized societies.

Let me give you an example. The Buddhist Scriptures say that in the beginning of this aeon the life-span of human beings was very long because the nutrition provided by plants and vegetables was of the highest quality. When people developed anger, hatred and delusion, these mental forces which influenced and governed their physical bodies and their vibrations adversely affected the plants and animals. As a result the quality of the nutrition in plants was reduced and consequently the human life-span grew shorter and shorter and disease became a problem. Even now we have to use a great deal of drugs to treat and try to fight human diseases. These drugs are derived from other organisms and plants. In ancient times people used leaves and roots as medicine. As has been explained previously the whole of the Universe is inter-related and inter-dependent. When therefore, we human beings generate wholesome or unwholesome energies it is bound to influence not only ourselves but also everything else in the world. Many practical things can be done and some are already being done to protect our environment. However, it is just as important for us to see that on a spiritual level, too there is much that we can and should do to foster, nourish and protect ourselves and others on a local and even on a global scale. If we develop wholesome energies

such as the forces of Loving-kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity, what are known in Buddhism as the Brahma-viharas or the Divine-abidings, it will benefit us, and if we also extend these wholesome mental energies to others they also will be positively affected by them. As has been explained previously the whole World is inter-related to the extent that when we generate wholesome or unwholesome energies it will affect others and everything in it either for the good or ill. The Buddha often stressed that we should be aware of ourselves and our every thought, word and deed and guard against transmitting any impure or harmful energies to others. If we do this all of mankind can indeed live in this world happily and peacefully and animals and plants will benefit, too.

The Human Environment

Crisis

Human beings need a place to live, a habitat. The earth is our home and we depend upon it and its environment totally as without this global home we would have no place in which to exist and would eventually become extinct. For as long as human beings have lived on this earth they have found it necessary to alter the earth's environment to suit their needs and in so doing have often damaged and even destroyed not only its beauty but also its natural resources and the delicately balanced eco-systems in the environment. In the end this pattern of behaviour has cost mankind dear and its detrimental effects have produced the current global environmental crisis and a human crisis as well. A Zen Master once said : "The Human being is the number one bad animal on this earth."

Although, we can identify a number of reasons for these crises, it has to be said that the number one culprit is man, himself. In the western world the mass migrations of peoples to that part of the world occurring over an extended period of time has been one of the main causes of the current environmental crisis. For example, the large number of foreigners who have migrated to the United States of America have wrought significant changes there not only to the natural environment but also to the new multi-racial environment which has developed as a result of these influxes of immigrants. These changes have been for the good and for the bad, and their results are something that, we here today, should consider carefully. At first the reaction of the USA's indigenous peoples to the foreign population was one of distrust, fear and resentment. Their first impulse was to reject these strangers from strange lands who brought so much into the country that was different and hitherto unknown. Gradually, however the immigrants have been accepted and absorbed into American society as people recognized the many advantages and benefits of doing so.

Moral Decline

The rise and rapid growth of Science and Technology in the West has produced much that is good and profitable and which of the rest of the world's peoples envy but it also has had a negative effect for it has caused a decline in people's interest and support for Religion. This has been especially true of Christianity, a religion primarily based on faith. When Asians began to move to the western hemisphere and settle there they brought their religious beliefs and practices with them. As a result the people already established there became more aware of religions other than Christianity. Similarly, when western people began to travel abroad more and explore foreign countries such as India they also became aware of a very different religious and cultural environment; to some extent their travels were part of a quest for some new religion to replace what they had become dissatisfied and disillusioned with. "God is dead", the USA newspapers read in the mid 1960's. However, these travellers in search of new faiths to replace the faith they had lost were often reluctant to accept and commit themselves to religions and beliefs which they found strange and difficult to comprehend. Their unwillingness to adopt them also was due to their being wary of and disillusioned by 'Religion' in general. So many of them abandoned their search and renounced religion altogether and became more materialistically inclined. Inevitably this brought about a decline in people's sense of moral duty and ethical behaviour and responsibility. A person who does not believe in the morality or immorality of action is ready to commit any number of unwholesome actions without compunction. In any society morality and ethical principles are necessary to regulate people's lives. Without this voluntary self-regulation and self-control people become immoral and eventually even amoral. All society suffers as a result of a decline in moral behaviour. This decline in moral values is already very apparent in the western world where crimes happen daily which are virtually unheard of in the Eastern world. Nowadays, there is much talk and many movements favouring things like Human Rights, Women's Rights, Children's Rights and so forth. These rights are good in principle but they too can be abused and mis-used when people are given a free hand and allowed to do whatever they please in the name of this or that right or freedom. This kind of extreme action has serious consequences for individuals and society. For example, when parents no longer have the right to guide and discipline their children because of the demands of Children's Rights the children are spoiled and society is spoiled. Moral order and social order deteriorates and can break down completely as is demonstrated by things like reports of gang warfare, street riots and robbery and vandalism and the many cases of juvenile crime including murder which are quite common in western society. Often law and order breaks down, families are divided and no longer form the basic social unit which can guide and regulate their children's behaviour. As a result of an increase in immoral behaviour western society's moral environment is now threatened with collapse. I do, sincerely hope that all Asian people will deplore this moral and ethical breakdown and damage to the western world's social environment that I have, in part described. None of us should ever allow such deplorable situations and moral and social transgressions to become the norm in our communities. Up to now such things are uncommon in this

part of the world, however, we need to be forewarned so as to be prepared to protect our peoples and our countries from this kind of moral decline.

Human Crisis

Nowadays, people living in South East Asian countries are trying to develop their economies and raise their standards of living. Some countries such as Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore have enjoyed a rapid economic development recently whilst others have yet to succeed in reaching their development targets and desired economic goals. Although, these countries have profited from their economic successes, this unfortunately has been achieved at a great cost because their environments have suffered significant damage and their natural resources have been exploited and depleted for the sake of profit. This is not right and it now essential for all countries to devise sensible programmes of action that will protect their environments whilst at the same time ensuring steady economic progress. In the early days of SEA's economic growth there was and still is a considerable gap between the rich and poor that is visible to both groups. The poor see what has been happening and how advantaged are those people who have become rich quickly. The poor have grown discontent and envious but are unable to match the rich man's wealth and success. This has led them to try to close this gap by earning money by immoral and criminal means. Although they may have succeeded in gaining wealth and a better standard of living, the price they have had to pay is high because they have lost their moral reputations and human dignity and these things no amount of money can redeem. This is the human-environmental crisis that SEA faces today and we need to rectify it, urgently.

In those countries where Theravada Buddhism is the main religion people are strongly encouraged to practise Loving-kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic-joy and Equanimity. However, the moral standards of the people in these places is in decline. Fifty years ago people's moral standards and behaviour were very high but, today they are very low. There are many reasons for this sharp decline in morality. Some may blame the situation on the consequences of past and present political and economic situations but in truth we cannot blame any individual or group but, must look to place the responsibility for this moral decline on South East Asian society as a whole. It is a society which is ultimately responsible for whatever it does to itself and politics is not the only operative factor. According to the Buddha's doctrine of Dependent Origination, no single cause creates a result, there is always a tangled web of causes and conditions, inconceivable in their complexity and intricacies of inter-relationship which bring about any and all situations. This is true of the moral decline in our societies as well.

Although, the rapid growth of people's interest in the fields of Science and Technology has led people in the Western world to lose interest in spiritual values and religion, this is not the case here in South East Asia. Here, people's interest in religion has generally grown stronger. It is a fact that as the rate of interest in

Science and Technology has increased people's interest in Buddhism in SEA has not declined but is on the increase. People here tend to view Buddhism as being a very scientific religion and appreciate that it can, in theory bring many benefits to their lives. Unfortunately, the majority of Buddhists do not always practise what the Buddha said and so do not benefit from Buddhism as much as they might. Instead, they give too much of their attention and energy to Buddhist ceremonies, rites and rituals. Consequently, the practical application of the Buddha's teachings to their lives is very limited. The Buddha-Dhamma is most definitely not something only to be believed in blindly, but it is most definitely something that should be thoroughly investigated, understood and practised in a person's daily life. Buddhism is not a religion of grace promising salvation but it is one of self-perfection through insight and practise for the attainment of freedom from Dukkha or Suffering. So it is true to say that the purpose and development of Buddhism has really nothing to do with the building of temples, pagodas and monasteries or with a person performing pious practices and participating in ritualized ceremonies or even concern for the growth in the numbers of Buddhist monks, nuns and lay people. The real measure of Buddhism as a religion lies in the number of people who understand and apply SAḷa, Samādhī and Paññā to their daily lives. The actual fact of the matter is that, a person who gives donations and contributes to the construction of temples and pagodas or supports the Sangha is not a true follower of the Buddha unless and until that person also practises SAḷa, Samādhī and Paññā in his or her daily life. The question now arises; Why do many people not apply the Buddha's teaching to their daily lives? Who is responsible for this? In answer to this question, I would like to say that it is none other than each one of us. It is we Buddhist Monks, ourselves, who bear the responsibility for this laxity in people's practice. Many Buddhist monks expend too much of their energy and time on building up the numbers of Buddhists in their local communities and in organizing building projects for the construction of monasteries and pagodas and the necessary fund-raising that goes with this work. They do however, make little effort to teach people how to understand the Buddha-Dhamma fully and apply its principles to their daily lives. It is our failure to do these things and were this not the case, then we would not be experiencing the crisis in the human environment with its decline in people's moral and ethical standards or seeing the devastation of our natural environments by human beings which we in South East Asia are witnessing today. Something needs to be done, urgently and it is up to us to decide what to do and then do it!

The human environmental crisis has reached a very serious stage in South East Asia. There, as elsewhere people's moral standards have changed for the worse. Nevertheless, as I said before, we can not and ought not seek to blame one person or one group for this or for the decline in people's moral behaviour. In the final analysis these situations are simply due to the Law of Cause and Effect. We are meeting here today because all is not right with our world and things are in a bad way. Urgent action needs to be taken immediately if we want to remedy the moral

sickness that is now at a critical stage in our societies and reduce the effect it is having on all of us and our environments.

The Solution

With regard to Myanmar in particular, I would like to point out that the roots of Theravada Buddhism run long and deep in the hearts of her people. It is also true that in Myanmar the Sangha is highly respected and its reputation is also good. The Sangha of Myanmar also commands the most respect and power of any group of people in the land. This is a result of the key role it plays in education. It is the norm for most Buddhists in Myanmar to have their primary education in their local monasteries. Throughout its long history every government has supported this practice of monastic education for the young. Out of a total population of forty-six million people, five-hundred thousand men are monks and there are more than one-hundred thousand nuns. These figures partly account for the fact that Myanmar has the largest Buddhist Sangha population in the world. Every Myanmar village has its own monastery and it is the centre point of the village and community life where people come not only to make use of its religious facilities but also to study and learn and seek help and advice from the resident monks. The Sangha performs a very important social function in Myanmar because as well as tending to the religious needs of the community, the Sangha also acts as guidance counsellors and social workers for people in their communities. Times being what they are, it would greatly benefit everyone in Myanmar if the Sangha were also to encourage people to understand the Buddha's teaching on SĀla, SamĀdhi and Paññā, (Morality, Concentration and Wisdom). They also should encourage people to practise Loving-kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic-Joy and Equanimity as this will help them to grow and develop in many ways as individuals and as responsible members of society.

All religion is a powerful tool; if handled and used correctly it can exert a beneficial influence on people's lives and in society. This is true of Buddhism, too. It is important for all of us to understand that the Buddha-Dhamma is not something to be worshipped or intellectualized, nor is it a matter for philosophical speculation and debate. It is far more useful and practical as it is not merely a set of religious values and ideals but a way of life that can be and ought to be practised in our daily lives, if its benefits are to be fully experienced.

In conclusion, I would like to say to all of you here, that if we are to help and protect our countries and peoples and their environments and safeguard their various eco-systems on which we depend, first of all we need to investigate and try to understand the principles and mechanisms at work in them. We also need to understand far more about Ecology. As I said before, the Buddha's teachings on Dependent Origination and Causal-relations are important and should be studied closely as they are the key to our understanding the whole problem of the human-environmental crisis and the crisis now facing all the other types of environments in

our world. For these reasons the Sangha of South East Asia needs to take responsibility for encouraging people to practise Loving-Kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity for the sake of peoples well-being and the powerful, protective energies they can provide. It is also our duty to assume more responsibility for making the Buddha's teachings on Dependent Origination and Causal-relations better known and understood. Without the knowledge that the understanding of these teachings gives people, they are powerless to understand themselves or the consequences their good and bad behaviour has on them personally and on society and on the world around them. Our present and future well-being and well-faring in this world, that is our shared home, depends on our willingness to take responsibility for it.

may all beings be happy