

Relevance of Meditation in Social Ethics

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Abstract: *In the modern industrial world, high-end technologies and large-scale social institutions have resulted in a fundamental separation between individuals, as well as between humans and the living world. Nowadays, our lives seem to be completely dependent on a man-made world – the economy, electric power, cars and highways, and the medical system; consequently, we depend more on the techno sphere than on life, or the biosphere. The result of this is violations of justice, poverty and environmental pollution. In such a depressive atmosphere, we are unable to lead truly peaceful or happy lives. Thus, we shall never achieve the permanent cessation of problems such as-poverty, environmental crises, socially ethical problems, terminal diseases and so forth. We shall still have to experience them in our countless future lives and, in this life, although we work very hard to prevent these problems, they are increasing throughout the world. Instead of taking refuge in technology and science to be merely satisfied with temporary happiness and artificial triumphs, we should look forward to some solutions by taking refuge in ourselves to attain real happiness and ultimate liberation (Nibbāna). In this article, we would like to discuss the role of practicing loving-kindness meditation in helping people cultivate ethical behaviours. In our first study, we present a brief overview of issues of social ethics in the contemporary world. Key word: meditation, ethics, social ethics.*

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1. Introduction

In the modern industrial world, high-end technologies and large-scale social institutions have resulted in a fundamental separation between individuals, as well as between humans and the living world. Nowadays, our lives seem to be completely dependent on a man-made world – the economy, electric power, cars and highways, and the medical system; consequently, we depend more on the techno sphere than on life, or the biosphere. The result of this is violations of justice, poverty and environmental pollution. In such a depressive atmosphere, we are unable to lead truly peaceful or happy lives. Thus, we shall never achieve the permanent cessation of problems such as-poverty, environmental crises, socially ethical problems, terminal diseases and so forth. We shall still have to experience them in our countless future lives and, in this life, although we work very hard to prevent these problems, they are increasing throughout the world. Instead of taking refuge in technology and science to be merely satisfied with temporary happiness and artificial triumphs, we should look forward to some solutions by taking refuge in ourselves to attain real happiness and ultimate liberation (Nibbāna). In this article, we would like to discuss the role of practicing loving-kindness meditation in helping people cultivate ethical behaviours. In our first study, we present a brief overview of issues of social ethics in the contemporary world. Then we will discuss loving-kindness meditation and its contemplative practice. We then broaden this discussion by connecting this practice to resolve the problems of social ethics.

1) The Social Ethics

'Ethics' is originated from the Greek word ('ethos'). It is a philosophical terminology, meaning character or custom. It refers to describe and prescribe moral behaviors and requirements, which propose the ways of behaving which may be acceptable or unacceptable and work as a function of philosophical principles. It is a crucial part of living among other people. [15] Ethics does not mean that we always

behave ethically, but that we evaluate others and their behaviors according to our own ideas about what is appreciated as right and wrong – good or bad behavior. Evaluating other people's behavior, or the state of the world brings the question of responsibility to the fore when the questions that follow good versus bad, right versus wrong, is what should be done instead.

Ethics is concerned with rights, responsibilities, use of language, what it means to live an ethical life and how people make moral decisions. Ethics, thus, means the way we lead our own lives, and mostly it contains the way we behave with one another. It consists of two ways, i. e., the attitude of the individual towards society, and the viewpoint of a social reformer. It means that we can think of: "how should I behave towards my relationships?", or we can ask, "how should society be organized?"

Social ethics is "a methodology of performing moral principles to resolve social issues". The purpose is to properly declare the moral principles and social goals inherent in social issues and public initiatives. It asserts that the relative strength of various moral claims can only be compared within the context of a particular social issue. Social ethical issues, in reality, consist of how to bring about benefit and charity to the poor, how to help people falling in addiction, how to perform animal rights and the environmental protection, and so on.

2) The issues of social ethics in the contemporary world

Nowadays, modern societies are usually swept up in glitz and glamour idolize science and technology that make them leave the meaning of religion; modern society's life is often encountered by many people who feel anxious, insecure, stress and do not have a handle on life. There are huge amounts of real risks threatening, not only the economic interests of society, but also the social life of individuals. These security risks should be seen as an inseparable part of all social processes. Modern humans are ignoring the most

basic needs and spirituality which is the reason why they are not able to find their inner peace. It causes an absence of balance within them. This situation will be more acute if modern humans are not able to meet their spiritual needs, so it is no wonder that humans return and flock to religion that has a certain function, such as give meaning to life. Besides, the most acute problems facing modern humans is that they enjoy and exploit satisfaction without any sense of duty and responsibility. They are influenced by a large number of materials that give them temporary pleasures. This has led them to develop greed, hatred, jealousy, delusion, and selfishness. As we know, greed, ignorance, and hatred are the main causes of regional conflicts, national apprehensions, inter-state misgiving, family disputes, marital discords, and racial and or ethnic or religious misunderstandings. The flourishing of materialism and the changes in the social structure have made people confused in their values. As a result, they do not really know what they need and what they want out of craving, what is legitimate to acquire, and what is essential needs due to their responsibilities. Since they are unable to distinguish between needs, wants, worthy, and propriety, most people simply go with the crowd and follow the trends of society – ‘if other people have it, I want it too.’

We also find modern living so organized that it demands the least possible direct dependence on others. The universal ambition for everyone seems to be to own their own house, their own car, their own computer, and so on in order to be as independent as possible. [16] The increasing autonomy that people enjoy as a result of advancements in science and technology has its good points. These days, people tend to live independent of others, which is different to the habits of the past. It gives a sense that others are not important for my happiness, and that their happiness is not important to me. They have created a society in which everyone finds it harder and harder to show one another basic affection. In brief, the problems of social ethics that mankind is facing in modern society are as follows:

- **Lack of Honesty and Integrity:** Wide-spread corruption & evading taxes are symptoms of the malaise and lack of integrity & honesty in society.
- **Intolerance:** modern humans have confronted large-scale violence.
- **Lack of Discipline:** Disregard for rules (traffic rules), littering in public places, the tendency of a large part of the population to be late for meetings, etc.,
- **Loss of Conscience:** murders that happened in public places. Today, people tend to lack a sense of humanity, which is an issue that must be addressed as a top priority.
- **Ethical issues relating to women and girls:** Gender Inequality, molestation, dowry, etc., are still taking place in contemporary society.

When we think carefully, we can see that they are all ethical problems and man-made. The Buddha teaches that: “*Dhammā manopubbaṅgamā manoseṭṭhā manomayā (Mind is the forerunner of all mental phenomena)*” [17]. Therefore, if modern humans dwell in the peace of mind, in the mind of loving-kindness, they will live harmoniously and behave in a friendly manner to one another, and these problems will be

solved. In other words, if they practice *mettā* (loving-kindness) meditation, ethical problems will be remedied.

2. Meditation and Social Ethics

Loving kindness meditation is, ultimately, a meditation on how we are connected to people, animals, life, and all creation. The essence of this meditation is to centre ourselves in the heart area and to contact a basic warmth there. After connecting with the heart, we then attempt to share this warmth and energy with others. [18] Cultivating loving-kindness meditation enables us to improve our attitude of love and kindness towards others, specially people living around us, even people who we dislike. Through loving-kindness meditation, the practitioners’ mind will come to receive loving-kindness and compassion, then send these positive powers towards others, such as their family, and friends. Loving-kindness meditation helps practitioners promote the mind of compassion and true love, both for oneself and for all beings. It can help those affected by: anger, frustration, resentment, and interpersonal conflict. This type of meditation may increase positive emotions and has been linked to reduced depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress and so on.

Meditation on loving-kindness is a training on the thoughts and deeds that benefit others. It is the mind of loving-kindness that enables us to open our mind to love man-kind, causing our mind to receive feelings of peace and joy. Peace and joy generated by loving-kindness awakens our own enlightened mind and transforms us into skilled, competent, and humble servants for all beings. Authentic world peace and true happiness can only be over-come by loving-kindness. [19] This is a powerful and transformative practice. It awakens the awareness of and care for both yourself and others equally, while also recognizing that there is no essential separation.

Cultivating mettā meditation (loving-kindness meditation)

While practicing *loving-kindness* meditation, we first have to be able to observe the feeling of calmness and quietness within. Then, we have to feel it radiate outwards. We need to observe the quality of the feeling. We can start to practice mindfulness with our own body. By observing our breathing, in and out [20], we will begin to notice when we are tired, or when we are angry, etc., because the pattern of our breathing changes. Then we know that we need to pause and bring our attention within and generate loving-kindness. By observing our posture, we will start to notice how incorrect posture also affects our wellbeing, and we will start to learn to treat our own body with loving-kindness. [21]

It is important to be mindful of our state of mind. Sometimes we try to apply loving-kindness when we get affected by negative emotions, such as anger, jealousy, confusion, or depression, but we find it difficult because we are so caught up in that emotion. That is why the effective cultivation of loving-kindness requires mindfulness. Mindfulness helps us to focus on the present. Once we are mindful, clearly aware of the emotion itself, we have already stepped out of that state and start to firstly send loving-kindness towards ourselves as follows: *Aham avero homi* (May I be free from

enmity and danger; *Abayabajjo homi* (May I be free from mental suffering); *Aniggo homi* (May I be free from physical suffering); *Sukhi attanam pariharami* (May I take care of myself, happily). After that, we will respectfully send loving-kindness towards those we respect, neutral people, those we dislike, and all beings by repeating the following phrases: *Avera hontu* (May you/they be free from enmity and danger); *Abayabajjo honto* (May you/they be free from mental suffering); *Anigga honto* (May you/they be free from physical suffering); *Sukhi attanam pariharantu* (May you/they take care of yourself/themselves, happily).

While practicing loving-kindness meditation, we should not try to stop our thinking. Let it stop by itself. Let all the images and thoughts and sensations rise and pass away without being bothered, without reacting, without judging, without clinging, without identifying with them. We only observe carefully, microscopically, all the waves coming and going. If something comes into our mind, let it come in and let it go out. It will not stay long. When we try to stop our thinking, it means we are bothered by it. Do not be bothered by anything. It appears as though something comes from outside our mind, but actually it is only the waves of our mind and if we are not bothered by the waves, gradually they will become calmer and calmer. . . If we leave our mind as it is, it will become calm. [22] The most important point to remember is that we should not do loving-kindness towards those who are already dead. We do not develop loving-kindness towards them because we do not know where they are now. We do not know what existence they have been reborn in. Our loving-kindness is somewhat dispersed or scattered; we only do it towards living people.

The positive energies of loving-kindness help to relieve the stress and tension of our mind and body, re-establishing balance, and harmony in our energy field, and allowing our body's defence mechanism to function optimally for the healing process to take place. Being an antidote to anger, hatred and grudges, loving-kindness helps to transmute negative thoughts and emotions, allowing the spirit of forgiveness to manifest, thereby cleansing various blockages, and restoring balance within oneself. Coming from the sincere wish to be well, the practice of loving-kindness has the potential to heal all aspects of our being: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. [23]

Therefore, as our loving-kindness develops, we will find that we do not want to hate anybody that we do not subscribe to hatred any-more. No matter what, we will believe that love is the answer, not hate, not anger. Consequently, we will be able to forgive easily, we will not keep or nurse grudges, and we will not seek revenge.

3. Conclusion

In summary, we have focused on the issues of social ethics in the contemporary world, and present the way of cultivating loving-kindness meditation in order to resolve issues of social ethics in modern society. By doing this, we promote positive mental states aimed at all sentient beings and thereby changing our emotional responses and behaviour towards them. As we achieve higher stages of loving-kindness, we will likewise expand our sphere of

ethical development, until the final liberative insight that includes the realization of non-self and the resulting connection (to greater or lesser extents) to all beings in the world. Buddhaghosa wrote of this as “*the breaking down of the barriers (between oneself and others)*” as a result of successful meditation on loving-kindness (Vism 9.40– 43). In *Kakacūpama Sutta* (MN I.122), the Buddha tells his monks that, should they be assailed by bandits demanding a sacrifice of one of their lives, they should be unable to choose any among their group, including themselves, to be sacrificed. In this way, meditation on loving-kindness links the ethical goals of non-harm and the philosophical wisdom of non-self. We might say, following the metaphor given by the brahmin *Soṇadaṇḍa*, that ethics, meditation, and wisdom are like three hands washing each other, and that this combination is ‘the highest thing in the world’. While we can separate them out analytically and definitionally, they come together in complex ways in the lives of practitioners.

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- [16] His Holiness The Dalai Lama, *Ethics For The New Millenium*, New York: Riverhead Books, 1999, page 113.
- [17] *Dhammā manopubbaṅgamā manoseṭṭhā manomayā* (Mind is the forerunner of all mental phenomena); *Ce*

paduṭṭhena manasā bhāsati vā karoti vā (Mind is their master, they are mind-made, if one talks or acts with an evil mind); *Tato dukkhaṃnaṃanveti vāharo padaṃ cakkamiva.*” (suffering follows him as the wheel follows the hoofprint of the draught-ox). *And Dhammā manopubbaṅgamā manoseṭṭhā manomayā* (Mind is the forerunner of all mental phenomena); *Ce pasannena manasā bhāsati vā karoti vā* (Mind is their master, they are mind made, if one talks or acts with virtuous mind); *tato naṃ sukhamanveti chāyā va anapāyini.* (happiness follows him as the constantly following shadow.) (Dhp 1-2)

- [18] John P. Miller, *The Contemplative Practitioner*, Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press, 2014, page 51.
- [19] Tulku Thondup, *The Healing Power of Loving-Kindness*, Boston & London: Shambhala, 2009, Page 3.
- [20] In *Ānāpānasati Sutta* the Buddha taught that: Breathing in long, he understands: “*I breathe in long*”; breathing out long, he understands: “*I breathe out long*.” Breathing in short, he understands: “*I breathe in short*”; or breathing out short, he understands: “*I breathe out short*.” He trains thus: “*I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body*”; he trains thus: “*I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body*.” He trains thus; “*I shall breathe in tranquillising the bodily formation*”; he trains thus: “*I shall breathe out tranquillising the bodily formation*.” (MN 118:18)
- [21] Ven. Dhammarakkhita, *Metta Bhavan: Loving-kindness Meditation*, Thailand: Dhammodaya Meditation Centre, 2001, page 2.
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