

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD (SAMMĀ ĀJĪVA) OF BUDDHISM

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Abstract: The Buddha described the Eightfold Path as a “Middle Way” that avoids two extremes: ‘The pursuit of sensual happiness in sensual pleasures, which is low, vulgar, ignoble, unbeneficial; and the pursuit of self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, unbeneficial.’ Though the Buddha portrayed the Eightfold Path as a middle way between seeking sensual happiness and undergoing self-mortification, it clearly involves a rigorous discipline that is supposed to radically transform us. This path, the Buddha said, “leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.”¹

Index Terms - Noble Eightfold Path, Right Livelihood, Sammā Ājīva

1. INTRODUCTION

The existence of Right Livelihood as one of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path necessitates a Buddhist economics and has a number of implications.² In fact, all human beings want to be happy and they seek happiness. Man’s search for happiness has been going on from age to age but it can never be found in the way, it is sought in merely adjusting the conditions of the external world and ignoring the internal world of mind. The history of the world proves this. Social reforms, economic reforms, legal reforms, and political reforms, however well-intentioned and well calculated they might have been, have never brought complete and genuine happiness to man. When one set of unsatisfactory conditions has appeared, it has been eliminated, another rears its head, and when that is eliminated yet another appears. This appearance and re-appearance, this rise and fall is of the essence of all mundane things and conditions. There can never be any mass production of true happiness. It is something personal and individual. It comes from within and not without. It is not much the external world of mind.

2. THE VIEW OF MODERN SCIENTISTS ON THE LIFE

Modern science declares that nothing in the universe is static. Everything is dynamic; everything is in motion. Nothing stands still. We either go forward or backward. We grow better and happier or else we grow in the direction of evil and thus accumulate sorrow. To be happy is to overcome sorrow. To overcome sorrow, the Buddha shows humanity the path that leads to the eradication of all sorrows. The path to happiness is the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha only discovered the path, but did not create it, since it existed from the ancient past. This path contains a careful and wise collection of all-important requisites necessary for the spiritual development of man.³

3. THE RIGHT LIVELIHOOD – THE RIGHTEOUS WAY OF LIFE

The Buddha presents the Fourth Noble Truths, the path (Magga) that leads to the cessation of dukkha, in the next lines of his sermon, the Buddha says, “Now this, O Monks, this is the Noble Truth of the way that lead to the cessation of dukkha. This is Noble Eightfold Path, namely, Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration...” The steps of the eightfold path are arranged under three categories, namely: 1-Ethical conduct (sila): right speech, right action, and right livelihood. 2- Mental discipline (Samādhi): right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. 3-

¹ S. II. 65-66.

² P. A. Payutto, Op. Cit., p.18.

³ K. Dhammananda, Op. Cit., pp.155-156.

Wisdom (paññā): right understanding and right thought.⁴ Here I will only raise up Right Livelihood (Samma Ajiva) for discussion as following:

A person who practices right action is naturally drawn to a right livelihood. Right Livelihood is concerned with all means of living in a righteous way. For lay Buddhists, the Buddha advises them how to gain wealth in accordance with certain standards that one should acquire only by legal means, peacefully, honestly, and in ways that do not bring harm and suffering to others living being. The Buddha gave examples of wrong livelihoods, the sale of arms and lethal weapons, the slaughter of animals and human beings, and the production of intoxicating drinks and poisons. It is clear that any occupation that requires violation of right speech and right action is a wrong form of livelihood and therefore should be avoided. In pursuing any acceptable form of work, the Buddha cautioned that a layperson's motivation should not be to make more money than one needs. Work should not be done in order to make money for the enjoyment of luxuries. If work is done for this purpose, it is a wrong way of making one's livelihood that only deepens one's craving for, and attachments to, the pleasures of life. Further, if one is motivated by the desire to become rich for one's own benefit, one may be willing to use deceit or to exploit others to get ahead. If this happens, any form of livelihood even an honorable one becomes a detriment to moral and spiritual living. By working this 'wrong' way, one is becoming more and more bound to what will be a dissatisfactory lifestyle for oneself while harming other persons at the same time. On the other hand, by working the 'right' way, one's work can itself be a vehicle for the development of compassion and loving kindness for others. One will then have the satisfaction of making a living for oneself and one's family, serving humankind, and personally advancing toward spiritual freedom all at the same time.⁵ Such doing naturally creates a very good atmosphere for others who want to live peacefully. It is a fact that when one individual cultivates loving-kindness and compassion, his behavior in turn affects the well-being of others.⁶

Likewise, earning one's living is one of the three aspects of moral conduct: right livelihood. It means that one does not earn one's living by anything that could hurt other beings. Everybody has to come to terms with by himself. There are many livelihoods that are "right," far more than "wrong" ones, but there are some, which are hurtful. They are to be checked out against the five precepts. If one breaks any of the five precepts through one's activities, it is obviously wrong.⁷

Right livelihood is important as an aspect of purification, because if one pursues wrong livelihood, one becomes hardened and set in a groove of unwholesome action. A killer of animals, in an abattoir, for instance, will have to deaden his compassion in order to continue that kind of work. Otherwise, it is likely that he could go on with it. Such a person would become hardened and would lack love and compassion for other beings. Killing is one aspect of wrong livelihood. There is also lying, drinking intoxicants, and taking what does not belong to oneself. All these can happen as livelihoods. Wrong conduct in sexual matters can also be used as livelihood. Any one of these is quiet clearly detrimental to one's own and others' well-being and is based on greed. People do rationalize, justify, and excuse these acts. If they do, that is their own view. Every step on the way depends upon right view, and that is why it stands at the head of the path.⁸

4. CONCLUSION:

Key points for mindfulness of right livelihood (skillful livelihood)

Here are the key points to remember concerning mindfulness of skillful livelihood:

- Our means of sustenance should not interfere with our spiritual development.

⁴ M. I. 301.

⁵ Donald W. Mitchell, Op. Cit., p. 55.

⁶ A. III, 208.

⁷ Ayya Khema, Op. Cit, p.158.

⁸ Ayya Khema, Op. Cit, p.159.

- We can assess whether a job qualifies as skillful livelihood by means of a three-tiered inquiry.
- At the first level, we examine whether a job is inherently harmful to others or to precepts.
- At the second level, we consider whether a job causes us to break any of the five moral precepts.
- Finally, we ask whether other factors related to the job make it difficult for the mind to settle down.
- Loving friendliness may improve a difficult job situation.
- If you lack harmful intentions, your mind will not be harmed by a job's adverse consequences.
- Skillful livelihood is a goal to be sought gradually as our spiritual practice matures.⁹

REFERENCES

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3. K. Dhammananda, Op. Cit., pp.155-156.
4. Majjhima Nikaya. I. 301.
5. Donald W. Mitchell, Op. Cit., p. 55.
6. Anguttara Nikaya. III, 208.
7. Ayya Khema, Op. Cit, p.158.
8. Ayya Khema, Op. Cit, p.159.
9. Bhante H. Gunaratana, Op. Cit., p. 148.



⁹ Bhante H. Gunaratana, Op. Cit., p. 148.