



TI-SARANA BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION

Ti-Sarana

NEWS

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Buddha on the Value of Human Life

Buddhism teaches us that to be born as a human being is an extremely rare event and evaluates human life for a better living for the sake of this very life and after. In order to illustrate this fact, the Buddha has drawn the Parable of the **Blind Turtle and the Yoke**. The Buddha addressing the monks said:

“Suppose a man throws into the sea a yoke with one hole in it, and the east wind carries it to the west, west wind carries it to the east, and the north wind carries it to the south, south wind carries it to the north. And suppose there is a blind turtle that comes up once at the end of each century. What would you think, O, monks? Would that blind turtle be able to put its neck through that hole in the yoke?”

“It might, Sir, sometime or other at the end of a long period,” the monks answered.

The Buddha continued:

“O, monks the blind turtle would take less time to put its neck into that yoke with a single hole in it than a fool, who once gone to perdition, would take to regain the human state, I say. Why is that? Because there is no practising of good there, no practising of what is righteous, no doing of what is wholesome, no performance of meritorious deeds. There prevails only mutual devouring and slaughter of the weak.”

As emphasised in Buddhism, the fact to be born as a human being is an extremely rare event for two reasons. Firstly, one realises the enormous suffering that a person has to undergo in his wandering in the cyclic existence of birth and death, and therefore, strives to escape from the cycle of birth and death. Secondly, in order to inculcate an awareness of urgency in the mind of humans to practise what is righteous, just and wholesome, which leads to liberation from the cycle of birth and death. In other words, one should be good and do good during his lifetime deriving the best out of living a human life.

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Since Buddhism is an ethico-philosophical religion, its ethical aspect dominates from beginning to end. The Path to attain the goal is called Middle Path and characterised by eight constituents qualified as 'correct' or 'right'. All verbal, bodily and mental actions of an individual should be 'right' in the sense that they should not be harmful to oneself and others. For instance, Right Thoughts are thoughts of letting go, loving kindness and non-violence. Right Livelihood is living by wholesome means of livelihood. On the other hand, wrong livelihood means gaining a living by earning wealth through ways and means that are detrimental to other beings and it is considered as a transgression of social and ethical norms.

The Pali word for man is '*manussa*' (*Sanskrit: manusya, Gothic: manna*). Hinduism connects the word to a mythical ancestor called 'manu' and gives the meaning 'offspring of manu'. But the Buddhist scholars as far back as in the 5th century have given an ethical twist to the word and defined it in conformity with Buddhist ethics as "**man is called manussa because of the fullness of the mind**". Buddha says in the Dhammapada that everyone trembles at the rod, life is dear to everyone, therefore, one should not kill and also should not cause to kill (Dhammapada 197). In order to highlight to how Buddhism evaluates human life full of love and compassion here is an incident recorded in the Buddhist scriptures:

Once a battle ensued between the Sakya and Koliya clans in India over the waters of a river called Rohini. These two clans lived on the either side of the dam of the river. The dam had been constructed across the river and they had been in the habit of cultivating their fields with the waters of the Rohini River. When there was a severe drought, a violent quarrel arose between the two peoples and gradually it turned into a battle. Then the Buddha appeared there in the nick of time and convinced them of the folly of killing each other for the sake of some water. The Buddha questioned the two contending parties:

"Why are you clansmen in battle array?"

"For the sake of the waters of the Rohini River, Sir."

"Tell me what is more valuable, water or human lives." Buddha asked them.

"Human lives." They answered.

Thereupon the Buddha asked them whether it is proper to kill each other for water, which is of less value than life. Being thoroughly convinced by the Buddha's timely mediation and pertinent explanation of the value of life, they gave up the battle, reconciled and re-established friendly relations.

Ven. Dr. P. Gnanarama Maha Thera



Highlights of My First Trip to Sri Lanka

Following the invitation on 7Fon 7

Blessing of Bottled Water on 10th Oct. 2009, Sat.

6.30 pm