

# Moral rectitude towards green environment

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## INTRODUCTION:

In this day and age, the world we inhabit is confronting much catastrophe: especially natural disasters due to global warming and deterioration of natural environment. Everything in the natural world is connected. For many decades, human activities have ruined forest and other habitats, polluting the air, sea and land, using up natural resources. If we continue to do this, the Earth will run out of resources and living thing will become extinct. The relationship between all living things and their physical environment is called ecosystem. A healthy ecosystem is less likely to be seriously damaged by human interaction, natural disasters and climate change.

Most of scholars proposed that the disastrous effects are caused by human, for instance; the reckless felling trees by man causes deforestation, the large amount of Green House Gases emission, etc. It is rarely suggested that these are rooted from the mind. Indeed, the balanced ecosystem depends on human's mindset

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and morality. Mind always leads all beings as well as material world. Even though scientists invented the wonders of modern science, they cannot figure out the function of the mind. Mankind tries to improve physical development; however, mental development is more crucial. The Buddha's teaching clearly and exactly defines the human values which are interconnected to moral codes. Environmental crisis are broadly being discussed on an international level by governments and NGOs. Therefore, it is obvious that we need to protect and conserves the world's ecosystems and to use the Earth's resources wisely. Safeguarding the environment requires the action of everyone\_ individuals, organizations and governments. If the action is not taken, there will be further damages to the environment.

Around the world, the rate of extreme poverty is increasing day after day. The environmental problem is one of the major causes of poverty. The United Nation tries to eradicate extreme poverty by adopting the Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)<sup>1</sup> and contributed the efforts to integrate the implementation. The MDGs set specific targets to be achieved by 2015. The loss of environmental resources, biodiversity loss, unsafe drinking water, inadequate basic sanitation and increasing amount of slum dwellers are the most remarkable threats for the environmental protection. This paper attempts to accomplish one of MDGs: Environmental sustainability<sup>2</sup>, by the way of the Buddha's Teaching.

Living things and their environment are related each other in equilibrium. If this balance is spoilt, the world we live in will be ruined. Hence, mutual relation between the particular community is crucial everywhere. In order to establish the stable and harmonized world, individual responsibility is one of the vital needs for the modern age. From the rational standpoint, religion is the satisfactory theory of solution. By following the respective doctrine of religions, everyone will have self-realization what is suitable or unsuitable to do. Based on morality, Buddhism points out the way how to preserve oneself and his environment.

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1. [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals)

2. MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

## THE WORLD WE INHABIT

The Earth is home to millions of species of life, including humans. Both the mineral resources of the planet and the products of the biosphere<sup>3</sup> contribute resources that are used to support a global human population. An ecosystem is a community of living things in conjunction with the non-living things of their environment, interacting as a system. Ecosystems will fail if they do not remain in balance. No community can carry more organisms than its food, water, and shelter allows. Food and territory are often balanced by natural phenomena such as fire, disease, and the number of predators. Human have affected ecosystems in almost every way imaginable for many years.

The water, water temperature, plants, animals, air, light, and soil all work together. If there is not enough light or water or if the soil doesn't have the right nutrients, the plants will die. If the plants die, animals that depend on them will die. If the animals that depend on the plants die, any animals that depend on those animals will die. Ecosystems in nature work the same way. All the parts work together to make a balanced system. A healthy ecosystem has lots of species diversity and is less likely to be seriously damaged by human interaction, natural disasters and climate changes. Every species has a role in its ecosystem that helps keep the system healthy.

**Biotic<sup>4</sup> and abiotic<sup>5</sup> factors are interrelated. If one factor is changed or removed, it impacts the availability of other resources within the system<sup>6</sup>.**

If a single factor (biotic or abiotic) is changed, perhaps by pollution or natural phenomenon, the whole system could be altered. For example,

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3. The biosphere is the global sum of all ecosystems.

4. Biotic, meaning of or related to life, are living factors. Plants, animals, fungi, protist and bacteria are all biotic or living factors.

5. Abiotic, meaning not alive, are nonliving factors that affect living organisms. Environmental factors such habitat (pond, lake, ocean, desert, mountain) or weather such as temperature, cloud cover, rain, snow, hurricanes, etc. are abiotic factors.

6. System, Biotic and abiotic factors combine to create a system or more precisely, an ecosystem. An ecosystem is a community of living and nonliving things considered as a unit.

humans can alter environments through farming or irrigating. While we usually cannot see what we are doing to various ecosystems, the impact is being felt all over. For example, acid rain in certain regions has resulted in the decline of fish population.

The world of all beings and things of nature that is apt to rise and fall. According to Buddhism, there are mentioned three kinds of world<sup>7</sup> and they depend on one another. The world we live in is the Inanimate World, *Okāsa Loka*. It comes out formerly among three worlds. The Buddha expounded that the expansion of the world in *Aggañña Sutta*<sup>8</sup>:

“There comes a time, *Vāsetṭha*, when sooner or later after a very long period, this world begins to expand again.”<sup>9</sup>

“At that period, *Vāsetṭha*, there was just one mass of water, and all was darkness, blinding darkness, Neither moon nor sun appeared, no constellations or stars appeared, night and days were not distinguished, nor month and fortnights, no years or seasons, and no male and female, beings’ being reckoned just as beings”<sup>10</sup>

After that, *Satta Loka* that the world of living beings appeared. The earth, trees, forest, mountains, etc., are *Kammaṣaccayautuja rūpa* that related to the *kamma* (wholesome or unwholesome deeds) of beings. The conditional world is shaped by mind and matter. All predicaments, wars, troubles happening in this world are out of human’s behavior. When mankind is shamelessness and fearlessness in doing evil deeds, the conditional world demolish. As long as the conditional world is perished, the animate world as well as the inanimate world is also destroyed. Hence, moral shame and moral fear are the guardians of the world.

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7. (i) *Saṅkhāra Loka*: The Conditioned World, consisting of the sum of conditioned mental and physical phenomena; (ii) *Satta Loka*: The Animate World, which makes up the sum of living beings. (iii) *Okāsa Loka*: The Inanimate World, which forms the habitat of living beings.

8. *Digha Nikāya*, *Pāthika Vagga*, DN 24.6

9. *Ibid*

10. *Ibid*

“And as a result of this was their self-luminance disappeared. And as a result of the disappearance of their self-luminance, the moon and the sun appeared, night and day were distinguished, months and fortnights appeared, and the year and its seasons. To that extent the world re-evolved.”<sup>11</sup>

Herein, there are many evidences to prove that peelings, people lose their opportunities and also they faced much difficulty by the practice of unwholesome actions. Since the time of world expansion, the opportunities came out and then disappeared one after another because of people’s lust and ignorance. That is why; we should check why people commit immoral conducts. People do not distinguish definitely either which deed is good or which is bad. They do not know the advantages of observing morality and the disadvantages of breaking morality.

“He who has understanding and great wisdom does not think of harming himself or another, nor of harming both alike. He rather thinks of his own welfare, of that of others, of that of both, and of the welfare of the whole world. In that way one shows understanding and great wisdom.”<sup>12</sup>

To realize it, firstly, we need to breed empathy so that we can develop sympathy to the other beings. Sympathetic mind accompanied with wisdom can differentiate the good and evil deeds.

### **SCRUTINIZING THE CAUSE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS**

Approaching the scientific point of view, the foremost causes of Environmental Problems include population growth, unsustainable resource use, inadequate environmental education and poverty, natural global climate change, wealth, the pollution of air and water sources, erosion of soils, increase of world temperature, and the rise of ocean levels by global warming, as well as the loss of biodiversity. All these causes are affected by mankind. In fact, the mind is the origin of all conditional change. From the Buddhist standpoint, the chaos we are making of our planet is caused by our own greed, hatred, and delusion. Leaving aside wisdom, people know

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11. Ibid

12. Anguttara Nikaya (Gradual Sayings) Fours, No. 186

nothing whether good or bad. For example, a man kindles fire for the sake of warming himself; he is not under consideration that the smoke causes air pollution and it affected the environment. Normal thinking, he may think that there is no guilt. In the Buddha's teaching, just only guarding for oneself is not enough, as well as observing morality by oneself is not adequate. Everyone should keep under precepts and make others secure by cultivating sympathy.

"By protecting oneself (e.g., morally), one protects others; by protecting others, one protects oneself."<sup>13</sup>

Our planet, the Earth, is wounded by years of thoughtless exploitation of nature.

- The release of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and methane from industries and vehicles leads to global warming and climate change. The result is increase in the sea level, and it poses a danger of drowning the low-lying areas.

- Because of Ozone depletion, the Earth receives excessive ultraviolet radiation from the sun. This is harmful for trees and plants (and for animals and human beings who depend on plants).

- Industrialization has been the hallmark of human progress. This is a host of toxic gases that are being released into the atmosphere. Industries release gallons of liquid waste into the seas and rivers. Water pollution has led to a decrease in the number of various aquatic animals.

- The global forest cover has shrunk to half its area in the last 11,000 years. Deforestation at such alarming rate has been a cause of constant worries for environmentalists the world over.

- 'Biodiversity' plays an extremely important role when it comes to maintaining the life on Earth. The variety and interdependence of all living things has led to the evolution of world. The relentless hunting by human

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13. Samyutta Nikaya (Kindred Sayings) 47; Satipatthana Samy., No. 19

beings has wiped out the existence of a large number of animals in just a century. Besides hunting, human activities like environmental pollution and deforestation has led to the extinction of a large number of animals and plants due to loss of habitat. The relentless hunting by human beings has wiped out the existence of a large number of animals in just a century.

Presently, it should be properly understood that we have put our own survival to stake, has finally hit us hard. Now as more and more studies and research are being carried out to understand the various effects that humans have had on the environment, an increasing number of people are awakening to the fact that the well-being of the environment and survival are intricately woven into each other.

### **HOW HUMAN IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT**

As the alarms of the environmental hazards become more recurrent, it is regarded as an international level issue. Agreed upon by world leaders at a UN summit in 2000, the MDGs set specific targets – to be achieved by 2015 – on poverty alleviation, education, gender equality, child and maternal health, environmental stability, HIV/AIDS and malaria reduction, and a global partnership for development. The targets in order to ensure environmental sustainability are to gain access to safe drinking water and sanitation services; to reduce biodiversity loss; to balance the urban population and slum dwellers.

With the knowledge we have today about the causes of environmental problems, we as individuals should take moral responsibility for environment. Throwing garbage into a trash bin, using recycle things, saving energy, etc., are the good attitude to save our planet. We have to pay attention to choose right action to our environment. For example, walking or using a bike or public transportation is better choice for saving energy and reduce carbon emission. When an individual plays a part in the environmental campaign, it will become successful in a country, then, through the whole world.

As a religious outlook, morality is the ethical value of human beings and also shows the human's behavior. Every religion teaches the relevant doctrine and moral conducts. The focus of ethics in the world's religions has

been largely human centered. One of the greatest challenges to contemporary religions, then, is how to respond to the environmental crisis. Clearly World religions need to take part in this issue with the development of a more comprehensive ethical view toward sustainability. Whether from an anthropocentric or a biocentric perspective, more adequate environmental values need to be planned and contributed to the public. Scholars of religion as well as religious leaders will be key players in this process as religion is one of control of adherents' mind-set. By teaching the relevant doctrine, people will be educated concerning with moral ethics. Regular lectures and preaching on morality by the religious leaders can provide the way how to live in harmony with the living and non-living environment. Publishing ethical books, using internet are the effective technique to widely spread to an individual, groups, schools, and organizations. Both scientism and spiritual ways should be utilized to protect environment and sustain the world condition not to be worse. That is why, world religions collaborate with each other to implement the green world we want.

### **BUDDHIST POPULATION AND BUDDHIST RESPONSE**

The generally agreed number of Buddhists is estimated at around 350 million (6% of the world's population). This makes Buddhism the world's fourth largest (in terms of number of adherents) religion. Buddha's Teaching is profound truth and also adaptable to the nature. Therefore, Buddhist response to the nature is to rectify morality of human beings. Firstly, every Buddhist should be educated in Buddha's teaching. Secondly, their education is not merely theory; they must be in practice. Personal welfare is prior than welfare of beings.<sup>14</sup>

On account of the population, a Buddhist can propagate the Buddhist scriptures to 16 adherents of other religions. It is not intended to persuade to convert, just only make them realized the cause and effect of actions. This is the fundamental understanding to take responsibility. Next crucial point is to have sympathetic mind. One who considered before he harm to others, he put himself to the other's place; he is able to cultivate compassion. He

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14. Chavālāta Sutta (AN 4.95)

would not do any torture to others.

## **PRESENT WORLD AND MORAL ATTITUDE**

Today world is full of crisis. The rival development of material things are growing faster due to the human's endeavor. Indeed, it is also a sort of moral challenging. Shrinking global boundaries make people closer in every aspect. The character and mind-set of humanity are gradually degraded. The greater the greed, hatred, ill-will rise in human's mind, the lesser the compassion to the others. Mankind becomes depraved in doing their business or in pursuing their social, economic prosperity without respecting human dignity.

Morality is actually derived from a basic sense of humanity. It stands for the cornerstone of mental development. Since the time immemorial, mankind laid down the ethical rules that should be followed. Refraining from killing any living being; refraining from taking what is not given; refraining from sexual misconduct; refraining from wrong speech; refraining from taking drinks and drugs which befuddle the mind and reduce mindfulness, these five discipline are necessary to observe. Breaking any of these would affect not only to others but also to whom committed. In Buddhism, these five are regarded as basic moral precepts (*Pañca sīla*). Therefore, Buddhist ethic codes are not only for its followers but also for all beings. Moreover, one should follow the social ethics that should be done. It would become a well-balanced society by practicing morality. When a person is free from any sort of bodily and verbal misconduct, he is said to have observe morality. Without moral conduct, a man may normally descends to an animal level who lack in compassion and loving-kindness, no tolerance and reasoning power, cognitive functions and no moral restraint thoughts, words and deeds.

If everyone who lives in this world whether Buddhists or non-Buddhists preserve five precepts with great esteem, it can bring the welfare and peace to our mankind. Thus, *Pañca sīla* is regarded as the guardian of the world. There were records of ancient kingdoms where severe drought and starvation happened when the King, ministers, officers and citizens did not observe the five precepts. Nevertheless, the climate became normal

condition with regular rain and the kingdom was prosperous again when each citizen observed *Pañca sīla* respectfully. Thus, all of five precepts are important to preserve without a slight flout. A person who is endowed with moral precepts will be able to gain development of wealth; good reputation; self-confidence to attend the ceremonies or assemblies; death without bewilderment; and rebirth in the happy states after death.

### FUNDAMENTAL FACTORS TO UNDERTAKE MORAL PRECEPTS HIRI AND OTTAPPA

Every action we have done either good or bad would effect to us. Everyone desires good future; never expects awful. If we clearly know the deeds that return the bad result, we would undoubtedly make a decision not to do it. Thus, it is the key factor that we should realize the cause and effect of action done by bodily, verbally and mentally. Moreover, two mental qualities: *hiri* and *ottappa* are the fundamental safeguards of morality which act as the protectors of both the individual and society as a whole. *Hiri* is a sense of shame over moral transgression; *ottappa* is moral dread, fear of the results of wrongdoing.

Moral shame and moral dread played an important role in human beings. Herein, *Hiri*, the sense of shame, has the characteristics of disgust at evil. It has the function of not doing evil and that in the mode of humility. It is manifested as shrinking from doing evil deeds. Its proximate cause is self-respect and induces one to shrink from wrong doing out of a feeling of personal honor. A man rejects evil through conscience out of respect for himself, as the daughter of a good family does.<sup>15</sup>

*Ottappa*, fear of wrong doing, has the characteristics of dread of doing evil deeds. It has the function of not doing evil and that in the mode of dread. It is manifested as shrinking from doing evil deeds. Its proximate cause is respect of others. He rejects evil through *ottappa* out of respect for another, as a courtesan does. It is the voice of conscience that warns one of the dire consequences of moral transgression on: blame and punishment by

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15. Visuddhimagga (Myanmar) Vol III. Pg 90

others, the painful *Kammic* results of evil deeds, and the impediment to the desire for liberation from suffering.<sup>16</sup>

While moral shame and fear of wrongdoing are united in the common task of protecting the mind from moral defilements, they differ in their individual characteristics and modes of operation. Acariya Buddhaghosa illustrates the difference between the two with the simile of an iron rod smeared with excrement at one end and heated to a glow at the other end: *hiri* is like one's disgust at grabbing the rod in the place where it is smeared with excrement, *ottappa* is like one's fear of grabbing it in the place where it is red hot.

### GUARDIAN OF THE WORLD (LOKAPĀLADHAMMA)

In order to protect the conflicts happening in various fields such as social, economic and political, honesty is the best attitude to solve out all problems. The essence of the Buddha's Teaching is concerning with moral rectitude: not to do evil, to do good and to purify one's mind. Training in morality like observing five precepts or eight precepts or ten precepts designates a man to be honest. In the present-day, many people conceive wrongly the definition of *hirī* and *ottappa*. Like, being inferior to others in status, wealth, possession, rank is reckoned as shame. The feeling while facing an accident, and the feeling while going to the forest are not real dread. These are just only superficial meaning. *Hirī* is rooted in self-respect and induces us to shrink from wrongdoing out of a feeling of personal honor. *Ottappa*, fear of wrongdoing, is the conscience that makes caution of the terrible consequences of immoral deeds: blame and punishment by others, the painful kammic results of evil deeds, and the obstacle for liberation from suffering.

The Buddha expounded moral shame and fear as a guidance of the world as well as the purification of the human world. The world will exist no longer without moral shame and dread to do evil. Therefore, these two *Dhammas* are the foremost principles of purifying the world.

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16. Ibid. Pg 91

A person who has no shame and dread will not be afraid to commit evil deeds. When most people have no sense of shame and fear in committing evil, the world becomes demolished. So also, wholesome deeds spring out from the virtuous mind out of moral shame and dread. As the roots of morality, these two qualities sustain the moral dignity of human being, at the same time preserve their environment. *Hirī* and *Ottappa* differentiate man from beast not to indulge in immoral acts such as sexual relations between mother and son or between father and daughter even at the time of very low civilization. So *Hirī* and *Ottappa* are known as “*Lokapāladhamma*”.

### THE DESTROYER OF THE WORLD

The contrary of *Hirī* and *Ottappa*, shamelessness and fearlessness in doing evil deeds (*Ahirīka* and *Anottappa*) are strong potentiality to end the world. These are unwholesome mental factors arising together with mind. *Ahirīka* has the characteristic of being disgust with unwholesome states and evil deeds, or being shameless in unwholesome states and evil deeds. Its function is to do evil deeds in shameless way. It manifests as not shrinking from doing evil deeds. Its proximate cause is lack of respect for oneself. It is an origin that causes a man shameless to do evil and unwholesome deeds. *Anottappa* has the characteristic of being fearless in doing evil and unwholesome deeds. Its function is to do evil in fearless way. It is manifested as not fear from doing evil deeds. Its proximate cause is lack of respect for others.<sup>17</sup>

Among the ten defilements (*kilesas*)<sup>18</sup>, shamelessness (*Ahirika*) and lack of moral dread (*Anottappa*) may also be considered elements of moral defilements. Defilements are lust for sense desire which makes mind and body on fire. When people indulge on sensual pleasure have much defilement, ‘*Lobha, Dosa, Moha*’ are dominated in his mind and commit

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17. Visuddhimagga (Myanmar) Vol III. Pg 93-94

18. Ten Kilesās: 1. Greed (*Lobha*), 2. Hatred (*Dosa*), 3. Delusion (*Moha*), 4. Conceit (*Māna*), 5. Wrong view (*Diṭṭhi*), 6. Skeptical Doubt (*Vicikicchā*), 7. Torpor (*Thina*), 8. Restlessness (*Uddhacca*), 9. Shamelessness (*Ahirika*) and 10. Lack of Moral dread (*Anottappa*)

evil deeds. As a pig that likes excrement, a man dominated by *Ahirika* does not despise, but greatly likes such disgusting evil deeds without despising them, being concealed by *Moha* and blinded by its darkness.

Hence evil deeds are very dreadful indeed. Nonetheless, when *Anottappa* steps in, even the wise who normally dread evil acts are inclined to commit fearful deeds without shame and dread. And so those evil deeds are really fearful and dreadful things. But like a moth (fire-fly) that dashes against the fire, the people dominated by *Anottappa* commit those evil deeds fearlessly, not being reluctant.

When a person has lack of shame and lack of moral dread, he commits various evil deeds easily and he would earn his living by injustice ways and he never content anything in accepting. The fire of *Ahirika* and *Anottappa* burns as well as it will send him to the lower abode at last. *Ahirika* and *Anottappa* are the one cause of all evils and they are very fierce and violent.

Furthermore, '*Ahirika* and *Anottappa*' are included in the fourteen kinds of unwholesome mental factors. '*Ahirika* and *Anottappa*' are always associated with *Moha*. Yet a man being overwhelmed by *Moha*, *Ahirika* and *Anottappa* occasionally commit the evil deeds, unaware of moral shame and fear. At that time, he would have without dignity and good image. So this is noticeable to see how *Ahrika* and *Anottappa* destroy oneself and other.

## TOWARDS GREEN ENVIRONMENT

If we expect a pure and green environment, we must adopt a new lifestyle that springs from moral and spiritual aspect. The materialism could be guidance for his way of life that puts him in very severe problems. Buddhism teaches that mind is the forerunner of all things. If one's mind defiled with greed, hatred and delusion, the unavoidable consequence is painful. When one acts with a pure mind with compassion and wisdom, happiness will follow like a shadow.

The Buddha expounded to choose an honest lifestyle abstaining from two

extremes of indulgence in sensual pleasure (*Kāmasukhalikanuyoga*)<sup>19</sup> and self-mortification (*Attakilamathānuyoga*)<sup>20</sup>. One should have satisfaction of basic human needs, lessening the desires, thriftiness. These are crucial to have a happy life. When an unwholesome mind leads everywhere, the world is changing into hostile place. Today's world is turning from the green one to colorful because of environmental problems. Therefore, we have to take individual responsibility towards green environment. Each man should have self-awareness in this case that is not because of natural problem but because of human's morality. It is only when each man has moral shame and moral dread in doing evil; moreover, rectify moral ethics, mankind as a whole will stop polluting the environment. This seems to be the only way of overcoming the present ecology crisis. By doing so, man will adopt a non-exploitative, non-aggressive, gentle attitude towards nature. He can then live in harmony with nature, utilizing its resources for the satisfaction of his basic needs. Buddhism is utilizable for nature. Like a bee which collects pollen from the flower, never make an adverse effect on its beauty and fragrance. Just as the bee manufactures honey out of pollen, human should be able to find happiness and fulfillment in life without harming the natural world in which he lives.

## CONCLUSION

Summing up, this paper set to describe the Buddhist response to the environmental sustainability. In this paper, *Hiri* and *Ottappa* are emphasized as the elementary requirements for observing morality, and moral rectitude to protect oneself and his environment. Instead of greed and hatred, compassion and loving-kindness should be cultivated in our mind. Whether Buddhists or non-Buddhists, if one has moral shame and dread; if one has loving-kindness and compassion to others, our world will be colored with green sooner or later.

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19. Saṃyutta Nikāya, Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (SN 56)

20. Ibid

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