

Buddhist contribution to Healthy Living

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This paper aims to examine and analyse the Buddhist contribution to healthy living from the perspective of Buddhist philosophy. Health is an important issue in everyone's life. However, healthy living under such drastic and polluted environment in the present context becomes a challenge in life today.

There are numbers of health problems that can be seen today. They could arise from physical, social, environmental, spiritual or mental factors. In the present context, human activities are the main factors that cause many curable and incurable sicknesses or diseases. For instance, global warming becomes a life threatening today for all human mankind as well as other species in the universe. Sometimes, we are subject to many unusual natural disasters like tsunami, flood, earthquake and typhoon.

Normally, our health system is deteriorated in a number of ways in day to day life. It could be because of improper diet, lack of food, toxic food, environmental pollution, social disturbances, poisonous gases, lack of physical exercise and mental illnesses.

Whereas many of us do not receive good treatment in the private

or government hospital which need to be taken into consideration to upgrade our health care system. Millions of people around the globe are living without proper health care today especially in remote areas in developing countries. The internal and external developments of many children are very limited as a result of poor diet from an early age. They suffer in malnutrition. Many children in different parts of the world do not get a vaccine which is considered the most importance antibiotic drugs to be taken to fight against diseases. The pregnant mothers do not receive extensive health care during the conceiving period of the child. As a matter of fact, there are numbers of physically disabled children born as a result. It is a well-known fact that a number of pregnant mothers die every year during childbirth in remote areas due to poor health care.

Next, using of fertilizer in agriculture has increased rapidly today. Large numbers of chemical factories around the globe produce harmful gases which affect the physical health of living beings directly.

However, when talking about the Buddhist contribution to healthy living, I would say that Buddhism has given utmost importance to every aspect of health care that whether environmental, social, physical, spiritual or mental. In *Sukhavagga of the Dhammapada*, **the Buddha states that “Health is the greatest gift, contentment is the greatest wealth, a trusted friend is the best relative, Nibbāna is the greatest bliss”**. Here, the Buddha advised king Kosala to eat moderates in order to maintain good health. For monks, a rule was promulgated to refrain from eating at unsuitable times. It is not merely a rule rather saying that the Buddha had been taken great care of the health of the Bhikkhus and Bhikkunis. According to Buddhism, overeating is supposed to make oneself inactive and lethargy which is the main obstacle to the progress of spiritual development. In *Vinaya Piṭaka*, we can see that the Buddha advised the monks to use a water strainer to purify water. Refraining from destroying the plant, seed and branches of a tree can be taken into consideration as measures to protect the environmental health.

Besides, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) introduced by the United Nations in order to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to

combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, to improve maternal health and to reduce child mortality rate are basically concerned with healthy living.

This paper intends to explore further health issues focusing on Buddhist meditation, psychotherapy, Suttapitaka, and Vinayapitaka. Finally, I will discuss further the Buddhist perspective to achieve the Millennium Development Goals which are the international goals of the United Nations.

BUDDHISM AND HEALTH

The world is ailing from a broad range of modern diseases that still did not classified as standard medical illnesses. These diseases are increasing day by day in the contemporary world and many people suffering with those diseases in predominantly. We can cures many illness by observe the *Dhamma* and we can take Buddhism as a medicine for several diseases as well as we can resolve the conflicts in our day to day life. The Buddha introduced as a *Jivaka* because sometime he was act as a great doctor. In Buddhism we can see many contain referrers to the Buddha's knowledge about medicine. He was good in cure diseases of the body and mind. Greed, anger and ignorance are the basically understood as the mental diseases. Greedy can be cure by doing generosity, anger can be cure by practicing kindness, ignorance can be cure by cultivation of wisdom. These are the medicine, the Buddha taught us to cure the diseases of both mind and body. Once occasion, the Lord Buddha mentioned some medicines for some diseases. For phlegm and increase or decrease in the body's temperature could be taken as a medicine butter, honey and oil based food respectively.

There is a saying, "A healthy body is a healthy mind". Without a healthy body, we cannot meet the pre-determined goal that we desire to achieve in an ordinarily life. When we become physically weak, it affects our mental health too. However, Buddhism has not given priority on physical health only but it has given more importance on mental health too. Both physical and mental health are utmost need to make a desire or pre-determined goal success whether it is in spiritual

or worldly life. As a matter of fact, Buddhism gives priority on both physical and mental health. Both physical and mental health can be affected sometimes due to environmental health. Hence, Buddhism has taken intense care the environmental health too.

There is Chinese idiom “Troubles are caused by words following out of the mouth; illness is caused by food going into the mouth.” Here discipline is very much important to practice good health. In the Buddhist country like Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand invited monks to recite *Mahāpiritha*, which is chanting by a group of monks to prevent the evil forces and diseases. We believe that *Mahāpiritha* has special power to prevent the evil and weird. In the same way, listening or reciting *pirith* such as *Girimananda sutta*, *Bojjanga sutta*, *angulimala sutta* etc. is also great protection. There is belief that *Pirith* has especial power to cure physically and mentally illness. Buddhist people strongly believe that reciting *pirith* is a great protection to the life and cure diseases. On the other side *Ratana sutta* also has special power to avert the evil forces of diseases.

Once, the city of Vesali was afflicted with a famine. It began with a serious drought. It caused to the people and many people were died, especially poor folk. The stench of death was everywhere. Due to that reason corpse evil spirits began to hunt the city. It was happening because of epidemic. So people expectant the help of the Buddha who was living in Rajagaha. The Buddha came to the city of Vesali and there were torrential rains thus cleansing the city. Sakka, the king of the Devas, came with his followers to pay homage to him and the evil spirits purified.

The same day evening the Buddha delivered the Ratana sutta and advised to the venerable Ananda to recite same sutta while tour the city of protection to the people of Vesali. The venerable Ananda followed his advised and sprinkled the sanctified water from the Buddha's own alms bowl. As a result of it evil spirits were gone. Then who were got sick, they became recovered. Same sutta the Buddha recited continues for seven days and end of the seven day everything was became normal and heavy rain cleaned the city of vesali. Following I mentioned some

verses,

“Yānīda bhūtāni samāgatāni
Būmamāni vā yāniva anatalikhe
Sabbeva bhūta sumana bhavañtu
Atthopi sakkacca sunnattu bhāsitaṃ”

Whatever beings (non-human) are assembled here, terrestrial or celestial, may they all have peace of mind, and may they listen attentively to these words.

“Tasamā hi bhūta nisamettha sabbe
metthaṃ karoṭṭha manusiya parajaya
diva ca rattha ca haranati ye baliṃ
tasma hi ne rakkhatha appamattha”

O” beings, listen closely. May you all radiate loving kindness to those human beings who, by day and night, bring offerings to you. Wherefore protection them with diligence.¹

Ratana sutta shows that Buddhism does not concern on only mental health but physical health too. People can get disease from evil spirit also. This shows that evil spirit also how much powerful to get sickness. Normally people’s mind very weak. According to their thinking patterns many disease can arise. So Buddhism helps to recover all the mental and physical illness too. In the same way, listening or reciting *pirith* is also great protection.

Another instance, *Girimananda sutta* shows us the value of meditation. *Bhikkhu Girimananda* was badly ill, so venerable *Ananda* informed to the Buddha about this sick *Bhikkhu*. That time Buddha advised to the venerable *Ananda* and perched the “*Dasasanna*”. After listen him the ten king of *dasasanna*, he will be cured soon. Venerable *Ananda* visited the place where monk *Girimananda* lived and recited *Girimananda sutta*. He becomes completely cure from his sick. The ten kind of *Dasasanna* (ten precepts) are as follows,

1. *Upasatikamatu* – Quality of understanding, ability to see the true nature of deep understanding.

1. Ratana Sutta

2. *Aniccakasana* – Perception of impermanence
3. *Anattasanna* - Perception of absent soul
4. *Asubhasanna* - Perception of impurity
5. *Adivasanna* - Perception of danger
6. *Pahanasanna* - Perception of destruction of passions
7. *Viragasanna* - Perception of dispassion
8. *Nirodhasanna* – The perception of cessation
9. *Sabbaloke anabhiratasanna* - The perception of non-delight in the world
10. *Anapansati* – Mindfulness of breathing in and out-breathing

In the *Girimananda sutta*, the Buddha explained the perception of danger, destruction, and dispassion cessation and non – delight in the world. He explained the value of inhaling and exhaling – *Anapanasati* meditation. After listen to these ten perceptions venerable fully *Girimananda* was fully cured.²

Next I would like to pay attention on *Vinayapitaka*. It is mentioned about how to live a healthy life. He paid his especial attention on healthiness of monk's. As I mentioned above environmental diseases such as pollution, resource destruction, and loud noise so on. Water takes special place when we talk about environment. I decided to mention about water pollution, because water is the main course to make diseases in day to day life. For example many kidney diseases arose and many people were died in some villages in Sri Lanka. Because of using of fertilizer in agriculture has increased rapidly today. Large number of chemical factories all around the globe produces harmful gases which affect the physical health of living beings directly.

Furthermore, water is a natural resource in the earth. It is one of main needs of human beings and essential to every living being. It is impossible to live any creature in the earth without water. According to scientist investigation, 70% of our body mass is water. Water is helps to people in many ways of purposes. Such as, drinking, domestic hygiene, agricultural etc. Water pollution is the main problem having

2. *Girimananda sutta*

in contemporary world. It is one of the serious problems that we face today. Because of water polluted many number of living beings were died per day and many diseases occurred. In accordance with Buddhist view point, the Buddha paid his special attention to the purification of water. In the Buddhist canon we can find much information about water management. In the *Pāli Vinaya Pṭaka* says that polluted water is condemns immoral deeds. In the Buddhist canon we can see numerous rules and precepts prevent the monks from water polluted. Following records prove that the Buddha advised to the monks, how to usage water.

1. Senāsanakkandhaka
2. Vattakkhandhaka
3. Chullavaggaṇāli – Khuddhakavattthukkhandaka
4. Cammakkhandhaka in Mahāvaggaṇāli
5. Pācittiyapāli

The Buddha paid his special attention to protect the water. In the *Pāli Vinaya Pṭaka* of the *Vinaya Pṭaka*, the Buddha laid down special *vinaya* rules to protect water which is help to polluted.

“*Na udake agilāno uccāraṃ vā passāvṃ vā kheḷṃ vā karissāmiti sikkhākaraṇīyā ti*”.

Bhikkhus (monks) should not put excreta, spittle, and garbage, impure food into water faddy fields or on the premises of the ārāma. In accordance with *vinaya* rules there are two kind of water.

1. Drinking water (*pānīyaṃ*)
2. Water that use for other purpose (*pāribhogikaṃ*)

In *Chullavaggaṇāli* of *Khuddhakavattthukkhandaka* mentioned that the Buddha has paid his special attention to the purification of drinking water of the Buddhist *saṅgha* community. At that time Buddhist monks lived as wanders. When they were travelling they wanted to drink water from the water sources. But they don't have enough evidence to prove whether water purify or not. So the Buddha advised to monks to use a strainer to strain water before drinking.

“*Tena kho pana samayena antara magge udakaṃ akappiyaṃ hoti parisāvanaṃna hoti. Bhagavato etamattaṃ ārocesuṃ*

“Anujānāmi bhikkhave parissāvananti””

The Buddha explains, when the monks are travelling who doesn't have a strainer he should use corner of his robe to strain water. Without strain if someone drink water can be effect to life as well as will be harmful to our life in two main ways.

1. Will get ill
2. Killing animals

Khuddhakavattthukkhandaka mentioned how to use water without harm to any living creatures and how to purify the water. In *Vattakkhandhaka* of the *Chullavaggapāli* explain not to waste water. When we use water for other purpose we should use water with carefully. The Buddha advised to his followers not to waste water by any reasons.

“*Udake dīyamāne ubhohi hatthehi pattam paṭiggahetvā udakam paṭiggahetabbam. Nīcam katvā sādukam aprisattena patto dhovitaḥ sace udaka paṭiggāhako hoti.*”

- Monks should not splash water with neighboring monks.
- Monks should not splash their robes with pure water.
- When pound water became impure for a few days; it should be clean and put new water.
- In *Sekhiya*, the Buddha advised to monks not to throw away even bowl-rising water to the environment.

It is very obvious that the Buddha laid down a *vinaya* rules to protect the water from polluting. Through the training rules the Buddha tried to protect the water from polluting and tried to use water in a good way. The Buddha thoroughly mentioned about value of water.

Mental illness can effect to physical health and mental health too. Mental health is a psychological state of well-being. It can divide in to three parts such as physical, mental and social. All human beings are suffering both mentally and physically. Mental health can also be defined as an expression of emotions, and as signifying a successful adaption to a range of demands. The importance of maintaining good mental health is crucial to living a long and healthy life. In the other hand we can describe

an absence of mental disorder. Some scholars define mental illness as follow,

- Mental health is a psychological state of well-being, characterized by continuing personal growth, a sense of purpose in life, self-acceptance, and positive relations with others.

- Mental health is a relative state of mind in which a person is able to cope with and adjust to the recurrent stresses of everyday living in an acceptable way.

- Mental health is a state of psychological and emotional well-being that enables an individual to work, love, relate to others effectively, and resolve conflicts.

- Mental health in a single word is “happiness”.

Furthermore, mental health can divided into three parts such as, physical, mental, social health. Physical health mean body balance - (Doing Exercise, Taking Nutritious food, Drinking pure water, Taking good sleep, work according to time table). Mental health is Mind Balance – (Doing meditation, listening music, listing dhamma talk, Reading dhamma book, listening songs). Social health mean - Talking Nicely (Listening, Hearing [communication side]). Mainly influence of mental health is stress. There are many aspect of the stress. Such as, educations, poverty, economic hardship, divorce, unemployment, loss of job, death of spouse, illness, and natural disaster so on. We all have the potential for suffering from mental health problems, no matter how old we are, whether we are all male or female, rich or poor, or ethnic group we belong to. When mental energy becomes low, it becomes easy for other evil spirits to attack the person. For instance,

Patachara, a daughter of a rich man, was gone mad temporarily because of losing her husband and two younger sons, who were very daring to her. Her husband was bit by a poisonous snake which killed him immediately. She was lamenting while she found her husband died on the road. At the same time she lost her two daring Childs while she was crossing the Acirawati River. One of her son has been carried away by a hawk, the other swept away by the river, and by the roadside my

husband lies dead. Now Patacara became very distressed and cried.. She went off weeping until she met a man and asked him, “Sir, where do you live?” The man answer

Finally, she discovered that due to the heavy rains last night, her family”s house collapsed, and died all of them.

No sooner had Patacara heard this than she fell on the ground, rolling to and fro with grief. Some villagers came and took her to the Jetavana monastery, where the Buddha was. The Buddha asked some ladies to wash her, clothe her and give her food, and then he consoled her in a most sweet and wonderful voice. When she recovered her senses, and having gained insight into her experiences, Patacara begged the Buddha to ordain her. Thus Patacara became a bhikkhuni (nun).

In present we can see there is several common mental health. Scholars divided mental health as follow,

- **“Depression** – Feeling sad. Low mood, lack of motivation, sense of emptiness, disturbed sleep patterns, self-neglect, thoughts of hurting or killing oneself.
- **Mania (Bipolar)** – Mania is a serious mental illness. Elated mood, rapid speech, little sleep, reckless behavior
- **Psychosis** – Disordered, delusions, strange speech, agitated, extreme emotional states.
- **Schizophrenia** – This most common psychotic disorder. Poor personal hygiene and poor motivation.
- **Anorexia Nervosa** – Extreme fear of being fat distorted body image, extreme low dietary intake, excessive exercise
- **Bulimia Nervosa** – Binge eating, induced vomiting, induced diarrhea
- **Obsessive** – Compulsive- Repetition of behaviors, ruminating repetitive thoughts.”

The Besajjakkhanda of the Mahāvaggapāli demonstrate a lot of information regarding various types of diseases that existed at the time of the Buddha and how those diseases were cured. Many of treatments and medicines as recommended in that section could

be used even at present. Taking medicine on proper time has been emphasized repeatedly. Even good medicine taken at improper time in a wrong way was discouraged. Some of the other medicines were for example: tallow from bears, fish, alligators, swine and donkeys (all cooked, mixed, and consumed at proper times), roots from turmeric, ginger, orris, white orris, black hellebore, khus khus, nut grass etc. for rheumatism several treatments are mentioned some being sweating treatment and use of herbs. In this manner we would look for diseases, medicines and their practicability in our time, whether they contain something that would be helpful to modern medical science.

In the *Roga Sutta* in *Anguttara Nikaya IV.157*, the Buddha also pointed out that there are two kinds of illnesses. The illnesses are:

1. Illness of the body and
2. Illness of the mind.

All human beings have possibility to get freedom from mental illness but difficult to get freedom from the mental illness. Except *Arahat* every individual person's get mental illness. Even *Ariya Puggala* who developed their spiritual strength also suffers from mental illness. Only *Arahant* can say that free from mental illness. They can call as a perfect healthy mind. The Lord Buddha said that, Healthiness is the greatest gain - "*Aroggiya pramālābā*".

In the *Sallekha Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, mental illnesses, mental disorders, mental resources have been explained. According to this sutta, there are 44 kinds of mental illnesses that exist in every individual. Wrong view, wrong speech, and wrong intention, so on. "WHO (World Health Organization) estimated that about one in every five adults has some kind of mental illness or disorder. There are a lot of people with mental health problems"³. The Buddha said that mental illness causes due to some factors. They are:

1. Lack of contentment with possessions;
2. Thirst for fame and acceptance;
3. Putting forth effort to procure fame, acceptance with wealth, and;

3. WHO-World Health Organization

Visits supporters and restrains the calls of nature with the sole aim of procuring fame, acceptance and wealth.

Risk factors for common mental disorders

1. Absence of full-time worker in the household.
2. Unemployed.
3. Lower standard of living.
4. Financial difficulties.
5. Migration before the age of eleven years.
6. Older age-group.
7. Victimization
8. Personal attacks.
9. Racial discrimination.
10. Discrimination in housing and employment.
11. Absence of confident.
12. Social isolation.

HEALTH AND MEDITATION

Meditation is cultivating mind or practice good things. Mentally, physically, verbally are very important for mediation. Through meditation those thing can be calm. Meditation is a three steps process that leads to a state of consciousness that brings serenity, clarity and bliss. Meditation means awareness, whatever you do with awareness is meditation.

Definitions of *pāli* term for meditation

- *Bhāveti kusaladhamme āsevati vaddhati etāyāti bhāvanā*
(Cultivating wholesome thoughts)
- *Cittaṃ bhāvēti bhāvanā* (Cultivating mind)
- *Bhāvanāti vaddhanā* (Cultivating in meditation)

Specific words for meditation

- ✓ *Āsevatitāya* – Frequented
- ✓ *Bhāvitāya* - Developed
- ✓ *Bahulīkatāya* – practice Frequented
- ✓ *Yānikatāya* - Mated

- ✓ *Vattukatāya* - Experienced
- ✓ *Pañnatāya* - Accustomed

The main objective of Buddhist meditation is to obtain spiritual and mental health, which could affect physical health. There are three kinds of meditation:

1. Calm meditation (*Samatha*),
2. Insight meditation (*Vipassanā*), and
3. Loving-kindness meditation (*Mettābhāvanā*).

Meditation has possibility to cure mental health and physical health too. Meditation has now been proved that high blood pressure and other diseases connected with the heart could easily be cured by Buddhist meditation.

Besides, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) introduced by the United Nations in order to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, to improve maternal health and to reduce child mortality rate are basically concerned with healthy living. The Millennium Development Goals consisting with eight international development goals. Out of eight international development goals, two goals are based on “**improve Mental Health and Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases**”. The **United Nations Millennium Development Goals** are eight goals that all 191 UN member states have agreed to try to achieve by the year 2015. The United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000 commits world leaders to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women. The MDGs are derived from this Declaration, and all have specific targets and indicators. The Eight Millennium Development Goals are:

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
2. To achieve universal primary education;
3. To promote gender equality and empower women;
4. To reduce child mortality;
5. To improve maternal health;
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases;

7. To ensure environmental sustainability; and
8. To develop a global partnership for development.

The MDGs are inter-dependent; all the MDG influence health, and health influences all the MDGs. For example, better health enables children to learn and adults to earn. Gender equality is essential to the achievement of better health. Reducing poverty, hunger and environmental degradation positively influences, but also depends on, better health.⁴ According to Nestlé, “the community and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, the International Association for Maternal and Neonatal Health in Senegal, to establish 20 centers to improve nutritional and hygiene status of mothers and their infants under 5 years of age. Pregnant women without family support receive counseling, education and medical care in the centers, including information on HIV/AIDS and women’s health issues. In total, the program provides health care information to 3500 families, improves the nutritional status of more than 2000 infants and young children, and promotes understanding of HIV/AIDS among nearly 15 000 persons”.

To sum up my article I would like to say that health is an important issue in everyone’s life. However, healthy living under such drastic and polluted environment in the present context becomes a challenge in life today. Buddhism has special power to free from mental and physical illness too. Besides, the Millennium Development Goals is the main theme of this work. Theme was “Buddhist Perspective towards achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals.” Through these many goals can be achieved a several targets.

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