



# Amitrakshar International Journal

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## The Current Relevance of Buddhist Ethics

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### Abstract

The basic principle of human religion introduced in the post-Vedic era is non-violence and the successful proponent of this basic principle is Gautama Buddha. Although the religion he introduced is called Buddhism, it is actually a human religion. Buddha realized that every human being is subject to suffering, such as old age, disease, and death. To show people the way out of these sufferings, he renounced his royal wealth and embarked on austerity. He attained enlightenment and realized the four ultimate and supreme truths of life, which are called the “Four Noble Truths” in Buddhism. These four noble truths are called ‘Catvāri Āryasatyāni’. So, they are - a) There is sorrow in life. b) There is reason to be sad c) There is an end to suffering and d) There is a way to end suffering. Buddha has shown us a way to save people from suffering in the hands of the elderly. This path or path is called the ‘Aṣṭāṅgika Mārga’. This Aṣṭāṅgika Mārga, as a means of getting rid of suffering, is- a) Right view b) Right resolve c) Right speech d) Right action e) Right livelihood f) Right effort h) Right mindfulness and h) Right concentration. In this way, Buddha wanted to develop moral behavior, build good character, and instill a sense of humanity in people. He was very realistic and through his ethics, he showed the way to remove all the problems of human life in a realistic and rational way. In the post-Buddhist era, the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka, a devoted follower of Buddha, propagated the principles of Buddhism to the human society through his teachings. Infact, the principle of non-violence introduced by the Buddha was fully reflected in Aśoka’s policy of Dharmavijaya, by implementing which he was determined to establish world friendship, brotherhood, and world peace.

The non-violence principle of Buddha is completely extinct today, the message of equality is completely upset. Therefore, today’s India and the world need the presence of a just, compassionate, social reformer, and public welfare-loving person like Buddha who can build a just society by introducing the principle of non-violence.

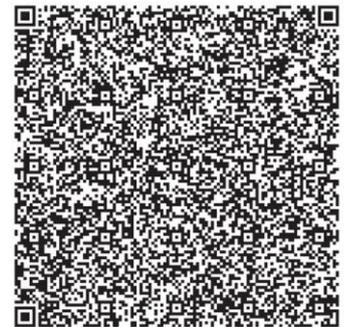
**Key Note :** Catvāri Āryasatyāni, Aṣṭāṅgika Mārga, Right view ( सम्यक् दृष्टिः), Right resolve (सम्यक् संकल्पः), Right speech( सम्यक् वाक्) ,Right action(सम्यक् कर्मान्तः) etc.

### Introduction

The basic principle of human religion introduced in the post-Vedic era is non-violence and the successful proponent of this basic principle is Gautama Buddha. Although the religion he introduced is called Buddhism, it is actually a human religion. He understood the world and life correctly and propagated its underlying theory for the welfare of humanity. He was not in favour of the rituals and sacrifices of the Vedic era, but he propagated as a theory what humans should do and behave for the liberation of life for the benefit of humanity. Therefore, the principles of Buddhism are in the true sense related to justice and ethics and psychological review. However, these theories are not actually theories. He propagated them in human society to implement them in practice so that people can achieve liberation. He propagated to people the cause of the bondage of living beings and the only way to get rid of it. According to him, the cessation of suffering in human life is possible only through the formation of moral character.

### Buddhist Ethics:

Buddha realized that every human being is subject to suffering, such as old age, disease, and death. To show people the way out of these sufferings, he renounced his royal wealth and embarked on austerity. He attained enlightenment



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and realized the four ultimate and supreme truths of life, which are called the “Four Noble Truths” in Buddhism. These four noble truths are called ‘Catvāri Āryasatyāni’. So, they are - a) There is sorrow in life. b) There is reason to be sad c) There is an end to suffering and d) There is a way to end suffering.

The ethics of Buddhism are actually inherent in these four noble truths. Realizing these four noble truths (noble principles) will bring about Nirvana in human life. The entire human race will experience liberation.

Although the Buddha did not record his ethics in any book, his worthy disciples later compiled Buddhist scriptures called the Tripitaka. The Vinaya Pitaka section of this book contains advice on the rules of righteous conduct for people, the Sutta Pitaka contains short stories through which the Buddha wanted to convey his so-called rules to people in the form of advice, and the Abhidharma Pitaka contains philosophical discussions.

## Four Noble Truths

Of the four noble truths inherent in Buddhism, the fourth is particularly important because the Buddha showed people the way to freedom from suffering, which is a core feature of Buddhist thought.

■ According to the First Noble Truth, the existence of suffering in human life is recognized. The bondage in the world is the ultimate cause of this suffering of man. Due to the desire for pleasure and the intensity of seeking and getting in life, man has to take birth again and again. Enjoyment of pleasures in life, living a luxurious life, greed for money, etc. are all the reasons for this rebirth. When these desires are not satisfied, extreme aversion, sorrow, anger, and mental anguish come to man’s life. Buddha realized that the entire human life and the entire universe are actually full of suffering. Therefore, Nirvana or Moksha is the end of this suffering.

■ According to the Second Noble Truth, just as there is a cause behind any event or action, there is also a cause behind this suffering. He has highlighted the principle of pratyasamutpada behind the origin of suffering. According to him, according to this principle, there are twelve causes behind the origin of suffering, namely a) Avidyā b) Saṅskāra c) Vijñāna d) Nāmarupa 5) Śadāyatana f) Sparśa g) Vedanā h) Triṣṇā i) Upādāna j) Bhava k) Jāti and l) Jarāmaraṇa. This cycle of causes is actually called the twelve cycles of existence or the cycle of existence. Ignorance has been called the root cause of suffering. In Patanjali’s philosophy of yoga, ignorance has also been mentioned as one of the five afflictions.

“अविद्याऽस्मितारागद्वेषाभिनिवेशः पञ्चक्लेशः। अविद्या क्षेत्रमुत्तरेषां प्रसुप्त इच्छंल्लोकानपि ।”<sup>1</sup>

In the Upanishads also, avidyā is described as the root cause of suffering and the cause of the living entity. It is mentioned as one of the causes of the bondage of worldly life. Just as ignorance is one of the five afflictions, so is ignorance one of the twelfth causes. From this ignorance arises formation (the result of actions done in previous births and unfulfilled desire for enjoyment). This formation gives rise to knowledge (human consciousness). This knowledge in turn gives rise to name-form, that is, the organization of the body and mind. From this name-form, the six-body organ is created. The six-body organ refers to the five sense organs of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin and the mind together. This major sense organ is the cause of the knowledge of touch. These senses touch external objects and as a result of this contact, the knowledge of touch is created. Due to this contact of the senses with the object, knowledge becomes the cause of pain. Pain refers to the experience of the senses, as a result of which the human mind is attracted to the enjoyment of objects. The desire for enjoyment or craving for enjoyment arises from this pain. This is called thirst. This craving is the attachment to enjoy worldly things that gives rise to the attachment which is called material. This attachment is the reason for human bondage, i.e. rebirth. The desire to be born in the mind of a person to enjoy worldly things appears and he is born. This birth is the Bhava or the race. As soon as a person is born, he is again subject to old age and death. He is again afflicted by old age, disease and death. Due to these twelve reasons, a person has to revolve in the cycle of birth and death.

Just as the Buddha spoke of the twelve ‘nidānas’ or cycles of existence as the root cause of suffering, he also mentioned fruitive actions as the cause of suffering. If any action is done

with desire and desire due to anger, hatred, and delusion, it does not always turn out as desired, and such actions are definitely a cause of suffering.

■ According to the Third Noble Truth, there is definitely an end to this suffering. The main reason for this end is the destruction of ignorance. According to the principle of ‘pratyasamutpāda’, since ignorance is the cause of suffering, the only way to get rid of this suffering is to get rid of ignorance. Just as if the cause can be completely destroyed, no more meaning can arise from it, similarly, if ignorance or ignorance is removed, then the end of suffering will definitely occur.

■ According to the Fourth Noble Truth, the liberation of man from this extreme evil is a way. He has shown us a way to save people from suffering in the hands of the elderly. This path or path is called the ‘Aṣṭāṅgika Mārga’. This



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Aṣṭāṅgika Mārga, as a means of getting rid of suffering, is- a) Right view ( सम्यक् दृष्टिः) b) Right resolve ( सम्यक् संकल्पः) c) Right speech ( सम्यक् वाक्) d) Right action (सम्यक् कर्मान्तः) e) Right livelihood ( सम्यक् जीविका) f) Right effort (सम्यक् प्रचेष्टा) h) Right mindfulness ( सम्यक् स्मृतिः) and h) Right concentration ( सम्यक् समाधिः)।

## Aṣṭāṅgika Mārga

The Dhammapada mentions following this eightfold path as the best way to attain liberation from all kinds of suffering.

“ यो च बुद्धिञ्च धम्मञ्च सङ्घञ्च सरणं गतो,  
चत्तारि अरियसच्चानि सम्मप्पञ्जाय पस्सति  
दुक्खं दुक्खसमप्पादं दुक्खस्स च अतिक्कमं,  
अरियञ्च द्वाङ्गिकं मगं दुक्खूपसमगामिनो  
एतं खो सरणं खेमं एतं सरणमुत्तमं,  
एतं सरणमागम्म सव्वदुक्खा पमुच्चति।”<sup>2</sup>

Right view is right knowledge. Right view is the acquisition of right knowledge by destroying false knowledge or ignorance about the world and life.

According to the Buddha, right intention is to attain true knowledge, renounce attachment to material enjoyment according to that knowledge, be inspired by the ideals of friendship and compassion, adopt the principle of non-violence, and be determined to devote oneself to the welfare of the world. The Dhammapada states that it is possible to end violence by adopting the principle of non-violence.

“अक्कोधेन जिने कोधं असाधुं साधुना जिने।  
जिने कदरियं दानेन सच्चेनालिकवादिनम्।”<sup>3</sup>

According to Buddha, the principle of restraint of speech is definitely acceptable. Immoderate speech is capable of harming any person. People should refrain from lying, gossiping, slandering. Envious speech harms people mentally and physically. Therefore, moderation in speech, the use of friendly and amicable words, and speaking the truth are obligatory, and violence must be renounced. Thus, restraint in the use of words is right speech.

Restraint in behavior, such as speech control, is right action. Action is manifested through action. Action performed by acquiring right knowledge, inspired by the ideal of the welfare of the world, and by using right speech is right action. Right action, therefore, refers to the performance of desireless actions that's called 'Samyak Karmānta'. When the mind free from attachment performs actions inspired by the ideals of friendship, compassion, and non-violence, then that action becomes desireless action. The five precepts mentioned in Buddhism are included in right action. These five precepts are non-violence, truth, non-violence, celibacy or restraint, and non-attachment. These five precepts are mentioned in the Dhammapada, where it is said that as a result of practicing these five precepts, the immaculate scholar attains stability.

“यम् हि सच्च धम्मो च अहिंसा सञ्जमे दमो।  
स वे वन्तमलो धीरे श्रेरोति पव्वुचति।”<sup>4</sup>

Right livelihood is earning and living an honest and virtuous life. Living a life without violating the five precepts and without resorting to unwholesome means is right livelihood or right livelihood. It is mentioned in the Dhammapada:

“यो च वन्तकसावस्स सीलेसुसुसमाहितो।  
उपेतो दमसच्चेन स वे कासावमरहति।”<sup>5</sup>

That is, a person who is well-established in the precepts or is a pratimoksha, who is restrained by the senses, who is a pure earner and who is endowed with conviction can elevate himself to a very advanced level through truth and restraint, that is, he can advance on the path to attaining Nirvana. Here, the term “pure earner” refers to living a life earned on the path of Dharma, without making a living through false means such as deceit or deceitfulness, and this is the right earner or right livelihood. Right effort refers to right mental exercise. Mental Exercise is contemplation, meditation and meditation. It is necessary to avoid thoughts of evil deeds and practice the thought of arah-sang constantly. Right effort is understood to mean constantly generating new and good thoughts in the mind.

Right remembrance means remembering the true nature of an object. The true nature of an object is the true nature of the object itself. In fact, right remembrance is the realization that body, life, and all the desires, wishes, and desires within these two are the sole and ultimate cause of suffering. Therefore, detachment from these paves the way for man to be free from suffering. 'Samyaka Samadhi' refers to meditation or contemplation with a calm, absorbed mind that can elevate a person on the path to Nirvana. When a person becomes self-absorbed by concentrating his mind on the



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Four Noble Truths, ending all arguments, debates, and doubts, and awakening a feeling of boundless, unquenchable joy, he can become self-absorbed.

This eightfold path shown by the Buddha is actually the best way to escape from extreme human suffering, the path of self-cultivation, and above all, the best way to build a strong and righteous character. Building a righteous character and practicing the five precepts are the cornerstones of a person's moral life. The five precepts are also called household precepts in Buddhism. The five household precepts are mentioned in the Dhammapada. The practice of the five precepts is the cessation of the five poisonous sins. These are not killing animals, not stealing, not violating the modesty, not telling lies, and not consuming alcohol. Buddhists have to exercise complete restraint in these five matters:

“ यो पाणं अतिपातेति मुसावादञ्च भासति  
लोके अदिम्नं आदियति परदारञ्च गच्छति।  
सुरामेरयपानञ्च यो नरो अनुयुञ्जति,  
इधेवमेसो लोकस्मिं मूलं खणति अत्तनो।”<sup>6</sup>

If we arrange the five precepts introduced by the Buddha into ten precepts, it can be seen that the five precepts can be included in the first seven precepts of the ten precepts. The seven precepts are a) abstention from killing animals or actions such as killing animals. It is obligatory to show kindness and compassion to all living beings. b) To refrain from giving or stealing. c) To abandon celibacy and live a sober life. d) Refrain from speaking the truth, i.e., always speaking the truth. e) Refrain from speaking hateful words, or not speaking hateful words. f) Refrain from speaking vulgar words, or not speaking cruel words. g) Refrain from gossiping, or not speaking nonsense. Don't talk meaningless and harmful things.

In order to attain Nirvana, the Buddha advised the human mind to first move towards Brahmavihara. According to him, Brahmavihara is that meditative state where the only thing that is pure is friendship, compassion, greed and disregard. This friendship is universal harmony, compassion is kindness, compassion, greed is cheerfulness of mind and disregard is neutrality. However, at the root of all these qualities and behavior is non-violence, which is the basic principle of Buddhism.

In this way, Buddha wanted to develop moral behavior, build good character, and instill a sense of humanity in people. He was very realistic and through his ethics, he showed the way to remove all the problems of human life in a realistic and rational way. Regardless of race, religion, caste, rich or poor, he advised all people to manifest themselves, awaken the infinite power hidden in their hearts, and above all, build a better human society through the proper application of their tender heart instincts. Therefore, he said to everyone - “Ātmaḍīpo Bhava”.

## Post-Buddhist Aśoka's promotion of Buddhist ethics

In the post-Buddhist era, the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka, a devoted follower of Buddha, propagated the principles of Buddhism to the human society through his teachings. Religious corruption, communalism, caste-religion-caste discrimination, etc. created an anarchic chaotic atmosphere in the Indian society and the world at that time. Aśoka's efforts were sincere in normalizing and calming such a situation. He tried to create an atmosphere of friendship, brotherhood and peace in the entire country and the world by spreading the message of non-violence, the main principle of Buddhism. To develop moral behavior he advises - “साधु मातरि च पितरि च सुसूसा - मित्रसंस्तुत-जातीनं वाम्हणसमणानं साधु दानं प्राणानां साधु अनारंभो अपव्ययता अपभाडता साधु।”<sup>7</sup> The saintly mother and father are blessed with good friends, and the saintly give their lives to the saints, and the saintly do not waste their lives, and the saintly do not take advantage of their wealth. In the fourth main precept, he also says - “अनारंभो प्राणानंअविहीसाभूतानाम्”<sup>8</sup> The saintly do not waste their lives, and the saintly do not take advantage of their wealth, which is just an echo of the word of non-violence introduced by the Buddha. He inspired the royal officials and subjects under him with the principles of self-reliance and self-sufficiency for the development of humanism, the development of humanity and the achievement of human welfare, “कतव्यमते हि मे सर्वलोकहितम् तस च पुन एस मूले उस्टानं च अथसंतीरणा च नास्ति हि कंमतरं सर्वलोकहितत् पा।”<sup>9</sup> As he intended, he should strive for the welfare of the whole world, and he should strive for the welfare of the whole world from the very beginning, and he should strive for the welfare of the whole world from the very beginning.” He preached the message of harmony among all religions, “सो सयमो वो साधु”<sup>10</sup> to end communal hatred and religious fanaticism, and followed the method of religious enrichment, 'सारखधी अस सवपासंडानम्'<sup>11</sup>.

Infact, the principle of non-violence introduced by the Buddha was fully reflected in Aśoka's policy of Dharmavijaya, by implementing which he was determined to establish world friendship, brotherhood, and world peace.

## The Significance of Buddhism in Present Era



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In present-day India and the world, human society is engaged in bloody struggles, horrific incidents of murder and terrorism are happening every moment, day and night. Violence, selfishness, greed, barbarity, lust for power - all these have taken possession of the human mind - today there is no kindness, compassion, love, affection, tender feelings of affection in the mind of the human being, there is no sign of purity, softness, humility, politeness, holiness, etc. There is discrimination in all fields such as caste, religion, caste, class, gender, etc. The non-violence principle of Buddha is completely extinct today, the message of equality is completely upset. Therefore, today's India and the world need the presence of a just, compassionate, social reformer, and public welfare-loving person like Buddha who can build a just society by introducing the principle of non-violence. In fact, all the animalistic instincts, uncontrolled mind, and uncontrollable desires of man have turned him into an animal. Today's man should free himself from that animalistic instinct and become righteous, ethical, disciplined, and above all non-violent through the proper practice of the precepts introduced by Buddha, which will help the most in building a just society.

### Conclusion

Therefore, Buddhist ethics shows the way to overcome the current instability, environmental crisis and mental health problems. The current relevance of Buddhist ethics are :

1. **Provides Mental Peace** : Buddhist meditation, mindfulness practice can alleviate the mental stress and anxiety of today's busy people.
2. **Reducing World Conflict and Non-Violence** : Buddhism is based on non-violence and compassion. Therefore, Buddhism is important to current world to reducing global conflict and violence.
3. **Environmental Protection Education** : Buddhism respects nature and the natural environment. So, Buddhist ethics are relevant in protecting the environment and creating an atmosphere of peace.
4. **Education of social Ethics** : Buddhist ethics teaches us to be everyone in society and to follow the five moral rules (पञ्चशीला). This is necessary for today's society.

Moreover, Buddhist ethics provide lessons for peace, tolerance, respect for the environment, compassion for all the deep and compassion for all religions, not just for religious followers but for all people of the entire world which are relevant in the current world.

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2. Buddhavaggo, 190-192
5. Kothavaggo, 223
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5. Yamakavaggo, 10
6. Dhammapada, Malvaggo, 246-247
7. 3<sup>rd</sup> Mukhyagiri śāsana, lines 4-5
8. 4<sup>th</sup> Mukhyagiri śāsana, Appendix 5-6
9. 6<sup>th</sup> Mukhyagiri śāsana, lines 9-11
10. 12<sup>th</sup> Mukhyagiri Śāsana Line 6
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