Principles of Lay Buddhism
by R. Bogoda

(This article has been condensed. The entire article can be found at the Web site "Access to Insight")

Introduction

The central problem of a lay Buddhist is how to combine personal progress in worldly matters with moral principles. He strives to achieve this by building his life on the foundation of the Fourth Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and to shape his activities in accordance with it. The first step of this Path is Right Understanding; by developing a lifestyle in accordance with it, the other factors of the Path result from it, namely: Right Thoughts, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. The eight steps of the Path fall into the three divisions of Wisdom (the first two), Morality (the second three), and Mental Culture (the last three). The order of development is, however, Morality (sila), Mental Culture (samadhi), and Wisdom (pañña).

The Path outlines the practice of Buddhism, the Buddhist is particularly concerned with Morality. Right Understanding, however, is the prerequisite. Right Effort is the training of the will, and Right Mindfulness, the all-round helper. Progress to a lay Buddhist means the development of the whole man in society. It is, therefore, an advance on many fronts — the economic, the moral, and the spiritual, the first not as an end in itself but as a means to an end: the full flowing of the human being in the onward-carrying stream of Buddhist ideas and ideals.

A Practical Guide

Right Understanding is the beginning and the end of Buddhism, (it) provides a sound philosophy of life. Right Understanding, the first step of the Path, is seeing life as it really is. All things are nothing but incessant change (anicca), therefore unsatisfactory (dukkha) and productive of suffering. Right Understanding implies a knowledge of the working of kamma — the moral law of cause and effect. We reap what we sow. We know that actions consciously performed again and again tend to become unconscious or automatic habits. They, in turn, whether good or bad, become second nature. They more or less shape or mold the character of a person. Kamma includes both past and present action.

The past is dead, yet influences the present, but does not determine it. The past and the present, in turn, influence the future that is yet to be. The responsibility of using the present for good or bad lies with each individual.

continued on next page
And the future, still unborn, is one’s to shape. We, often unmindful of the rights of others, desire for, grasp at, cling to, the wrong sorts of things: the pleasures that money can buy, power over others, fame and name, wishing to go on living forever. We hope that pleasures will be permanent, satisfying and solid, and find them to be passing, unsatisfying, and empty. The result is frustration and disappointment.

To remedy this, we must correct our understanding and thinking and first reduce, and finally remove all shades of craving or desire that are the causes of this restlessness and discontent. This is not easy, but when one does so by treading the noble Eightfold path, one reaches a state of perfection and calm (Nibbana) thereby bringing to an end the pain-laden cycle of birth and death.

Kamma, implies making choices or decisions between, broadly speaking, skillful (kusala) and unskillful (akusala) actions. The former are rooted in generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom leading to happiness and progress, and therefore, to be cultivated again and again in one’s life. The good actions are Generosity, Morality, Meditation, Reverence, Service, Transference of merit, Rejoicing in other’s good actions. Hearing the Doctrine, Expounding the Doctrine, and Strengthening one’s views. The unskilled actions are rooted in greed, hate and delusion, leading to pain, grief and decline, and therefore, to be avoided. There are ten such actions: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, harsh speech, gossip, covetousness, ill-will and false views.

Buddhism teaches, above all, moral responsibility. One therefore strives to be a best avoid evil and to do good for one’s own welfare as well as for the benefit of others. This conduct leads to peace within and without.

Social and Economic Aspects

To the philosophical concept of life as dynamic change (Buddha) added its social equivalent: the doctrine of social fluidity and equality based on nobility of conduct.

What matters then is not the societal class into which one was born but the moral quality of one’s actions. As a tree is judged by its fruit, so shall a man be judged by his deeds.

In this way, the doors of the Deathless and of the unconditioned freedom beyond, and of social freedom here on earth, were thrown open to all, regardless of caste, color, or class. No caste, class, or race privileges existed among his lay followers or in the Order of the Sangha that he founded. A social doctrine based on the alleged superiority of any caste, class, or race, and advocating to keep it dominant by the use of force, must necessarily lead to the perpetuation of social tensions and conflict, and will never bring about harmony and the fraternity of men.

The Buddha’s doctrine of equality does not, however, imply that all men are alike physically or mentally. It does mean that each one should be treated equally with human dignity, and given an equal chance to develop the faculties latent in each, as all are capable of moral and spiritual progress.

The character of a society depends on the beliefs and practices of its people as well as on its economy. An economic system based on Buddhist ethics and principles, therefore, seems the only alternative. The true nature of man is that he is not only a thinking and feeling creature but also a striving creature, with higher aspirations and ideals. If he is aggressive and assertive, he is also cooperative and creative. He is forever making not only things, but himself. And the making of oneself by perfecting the art of living is the noblest of all creative aspirations, yielding the highest happiness and satisfaction in life.

Progress in the material side of life alone is not enough for human happiness. True happiness, contentment, and harmony come from an emancipated mind. A person’s worth, for instance, ought not be measured in terms of what he has but on what he is. Buddhism stands for a society of equals, in which justice and ethical principles shall supplant privilege and chaos.

But humanity in the mass can be influenced for good by the example of a few really noble and selfless men with vision and wisdom, with ideas and ideals to live for and to die for. They provide the guiding star round which others, too timid to lead but strong enough to follow, cluster around and become willing followers.

It is then the duty of every genuine Buddhist to help to make known, far and wide, the Teaching of the Buddha in all its many aspects, and thereby make possible tomorrow the seemingly impossible of today — a new and just socio-economic order based on Buddhist ethics, principles, and practices.

Buddhism and Daily Life

A follower of the Buddha learns to view life realistically, which enables him to adjust to everything that comes his way. Buddhism...clarifies what his attitude should be to specific matters like self, job, sex, and society. Thus it assists him in the business of living, for to lead a full life four fundamental adjustments have to be made. He must be happily adjusted to himself and the world, his occupation, his family, and his fellow beings.

(a) Himself and The World

A Buddhist tries to see things as they really are. He remembers the instability of everything and understands the inherent danger in expecting to find permanence in existence. So, a discerning lay Buddhist is not unduly elated or upset by the eight worldly conditions of gain and loss, honor and dishonor, praise and blame, pleasure and pain. He does not expect too much from others, nor from life, and recognizes that it is only human to have one’s share of life’s ups and downs.

He looks at life’s events in terms of cause and effect, however unpleasant or painful they may be. An understanding layman accepts dukkha as the results of his own kamma — probably a past unskillful (akusala) action ripening in the present.

He sees the connection between craving and suffering and therefore tries to reduce both the intensity and variety. As the Dhammapada states: “From craving springs grief, from craving springs fear. For him who is wholly free from craving, there is no grief — whence fear? — Dhp 215

Therefore, he tries to eliminate the non-essential and learns to be content with the essential. Such a person soon discovers that to need less is to live better and happier. And when disappointments come, one tries to look at them with some degree of detachment, standing, as it were, apart from them. In this way, a person gains a feeling of inner security and frees himself from frustration and disappointment.
What Are You Looking For?
(taken from page 101 of the book no death no fear by Thich Nhat Hanh)

The French have a song called: “C’est - ce qu’on. Attend Pour Etre Heuroux?” What are you waiting for to be happy? When I practice breathing in and I say, “I have arrived,” that is an achievement. Now, I am fully present, one hundred percent alive. The present moment has become my true home. When I breathe out I say, “I am home.” If you do not feel you are home, you will continue to run. And you will continue to be afraid. But if you feel you are already home, then you do not need to run anymore. This is the secret of the meditation practice. When we live in the present moment, it is possible to live in true happiness.

The dangers are
fears, anxieties, and many other heavy burdens.
How does a lay Buddhist view himself? The self or soul is then a piece of fiction invented by the human mind.
One should therefore see oneself as one truly is — a conflux of mind and matter energized by tanha or craving, containing immense possibilities for both good and evil, neither overestimating nor underestimating one’s capacities and capabilities. One must also take care to recognize one’s limitations and not pretend that they do not exist.
Seeing that no two are alike, physically or psychologically, in the light of kamma, a wise person should, therefore, avoid comparing himself with others.
So, instead of keeping pace with, or outdoing others, socially, financially, and in other ways, the understanding layman proceeds to do something more useful. He decides to take stock of himself, to know himself, his true nature in all aspects, as a first step to improving it: the secular (such as his physical, mental, emotional qualities), the moral, and the spiritual, through careful self-examination and observation, by past performance, and by the candid comments of sincere friends. Seeing himself as a whole, he plans for life as a whole in the context of the Noble Eightfold Path. Such a plan when drawn up will include all important events of a normal layman’s life including occupation, marriage, and old age... A thoughtful lay Buddhist will not simply do what others do. He can resist the pull of the crowd when necessary. He is ever mindful both of ends pursued and the means employed. He does not merely go through life aimlessly; he goes, knowing clearly where he wants to go, with a purpose and a plan based on reality.

(b) Earning a Living

Men work to satisfy the primary or basic urges of hunger, thirst, and sex, as well a host of secondary wants and desires created by a commercial civiliza

So work is essential for happy living. Choosing a suitable career, like choosing a marriage partner, is one of the most important yet one of the most difficult tasks in life.
And one of the essential needs of a man is to feel he is wanted in the world. He should not gain a living by methods detrimental to the welfare of living beings — anakula ca kammanta, “a peaceful occupation,” as the Discourse on Blessings (Maha-mangala Sutta) has it. So the Buddha forbade five kinds of trade to a lay Buddhist, and refraining from them constitutes Right Livelihood, the seventh step of the Path. They are: trading in arms, human beings, flesh (including the breeding of animals for slaughter), intoxicants and harmful drugs, and poisons.

Work should serve men, not enslave him. While income and wealth through righteous means will bring satisfaction and lay happiness, the mere accumulation of riches for their own sake will only lead to unbridled acquisiteness and self-indulgence resulting later in physical and mental suffering. Conservation and improvement of one's resources and talents, acquired or inherited, with balanced living, living within one's income, ensuring freedom from debt is a sure indicator of right seeing or understanding. Lastly, a blameless moral and spiritual life should be the aim of right livelihood.

Within the Tibet Buddhist tradition there is the legend of Shambhala - hidden city/state where everyone in the entire kingdom is enlightened and devoted to the teachings of the Buddha. This legend is worth reflecting upon. I wish I knew more about it. Its image has the power to draw out the best in us.

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Mental Health
Life is full of stress and strain. Successful adjustment to life in the light of Buddha's teachings will, however, ensure the all-round progress of the lay Buddhist, maximizing happiness and minimizing pain.

Yet even the happiest person cannot say when and in what form misfortune may strike him. Real happiness and security are then to be sought in one’s own mind, to be built up by constant effort, mindfulness, and concentration. For, the Buddha teaches us that: Mother and father well supporting, Wife and children duly cherishing, types of work unconflicting, this, the Highest Blessing. — Sn 2.4

In Buddhism, however, marriage is not a compulsory institution for all lay followers. It is optional. Steps should also be taken to foster and maintain all that is wholesome, as for instance, wise friendship, and keeping oneself usefully occupied at all times.

Social Relationships
A lay Buddhist lives in society. He must adjust himself to other people to get on smoothly with them.

The lay person who practices morality (sila) by reason of his virtue, gives peace of mind to those around him. He controls his deeds and words by following the third, fourth, and fifth steps of the noble Eightfold Path, namely Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood or by observing the Five Precepts (PÅ‘íca Śīla).

Such regulated behavior flows from proper understanding of the Buddhist doctrine of kamma, that a man is what he is because of action and the result of action. So, the Buddhist avoids killing living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, drugs, intoxicants, and harmful lying, tale-bearing, harsh words, and idle talk.

Positively, the Buddhist layman is kind and compassionate to all, honest and upright, pure and chaste, sober and heedful in mind. He speaks only that which is true, in accordance with facts, sweet, peaceable, and helpful. Morality is a fence that protects us from the poisons of the outer world. It is, therefore, a pre-requisite for higher spiritual aspirations and through it character shines. The development of personality on such lines results in charm, tact, and tolerance — essential qualities to adjust oneself to society, and to get on well with other people. The Four Sublime States, Loving Kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, and Equanimity. . . should be the four cornerstones of genuine lay Buddhist life. The Four Sublime States form the foundation of individual and social peace.

Something to Consider.
by Dan Lee
Ultimately I believe that anyone attracted to the spiritual life wants to be of benefit to the world. We want to learn how to be sane, how to be more openhearted in our daily lives, and how to spread sanity and compassion in an increasingly chaotic world.
The first step is encountering our mental demons through getting to know ourselves in meditation.

”Wash away my troubles, wash away my pain
With the rain in Shambala
Wash away my sorrow, wash away my shame
With the rain in Shambhala

Everyone is lucky, everyone is kind
On the road to Shambhala
Everyone is happy, everyone is so kind
On the road to Shambhala

How does your light shine, in the halls of Shambhala?”
- Song lyric by Three Dog Night

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The more I reflect upon the strong my aspiration for good-

man who is unhappy at work is unhappy at home, too. Unhappiness spreads. Likewise, business life is part of life. The Dhamma of the Blessed One should therefore pervade and permeate one’s entire life for only wealth rooted in righteous endeavor can yield true happiness.

(c) Bringing up a Family
In the Maha Mangala Sutta the Buddha teaches us that: Mother and father well supporting, Wife and children duly cherishing, types of work unconflicting, this, the Highest Blessing. — Sn 2.4

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ness, loving-kindness. The name Shambhala means “place of peace, tranquility and happiness.” In the land of Shambhala there is no such thing as war or violence or injustice. Everyone lives in harmony. Peace and tranquility permeate the land and all its people. The leaders and all the inhabitants practice meditation, are motivated by loving kindness and consistently demonstrate concern for all beings.

Buddha is said to have taught about the Kingdom of Shambhala at the request of King Suchandra. That teaching is preserved in the sutra of the Kalachakra Tantra. The Kingdom of Shambhala is also recorded in the ancient writings of the Zhang Chung culture which predated Buddhism and existed in the West/Northwest section of modern day Tibet.

Shambhala is said to be hidden somewhere in the Himalayas surrounded by mountain peaks. It is rule from the capitol city of Kala. The story goes that in a future age when the world has been fully corrupted by violence and greed the then King of Shambhala will wage war against the forces of evil and usher in an enlightened society. That light is discerning and wise. We are all enlightened beings. That light is not a physical place that we can actually find. We can only say that it is a pure land, a pure land in the human realm. And unless one has the merit and the actual karmic association, one cannot actually arrive there.

We can “go there” as it were by practicing the teachings given by the Buddha for they open our hearts making us vulnerable loving and compassionate as well as clear thinking awake to life, discerning and wise. We are all enlightened beings. That light is caked over or covered with ignorance, aversion and indifference (techniques we use to protect ourselves against hurt and perceived loss). As we meditate and open ourselves, we see that we are the Kingdom of Shambhala. We carry Shambhala everywhere we go.

When we arrive at work, or the this perfect kingdom and tried to tap into its powers.

What makes the image of an enlightened kingdom so powerful that it captivates hearts and minds of Non-Buddhists and Buddhists alike? Why do I return time and time again to reflecting on this wondrous land? An answer to that question can be found in our true nature. The aspiration for a society whose emarces are peace and happiness with kindness and equality prevail is at one with our fundamental nature - Buddha Nature, Mind, Basic Goodness. The desire to create such a world and be the type of person who is found in that world is at the heart of who we are.

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of Buddhism. Jeff emphasizes “letting go” and just observing what happens. To me this is when awareness or a “one-pointedness” or concentration comes into play. I attempt to establish direct contact with deep processes. One approach is to be given a question which can be readily answered by the deeply spontaneous mind but is utterly intractable for the discursive surface. This approach was developed within certain schools of the Chan-Zen tradition, that important East Asian expression of Buddhism. Nowadays, it is particularly associated with Rinzai-shu, one of the two major schools of Japanese Zen. Such a conundrum is called a koan in Japanese; “What is the sound of one hand?” and “Mu” are two famous one’s. The koan question is mercilessly pressed to deeper and deeper levels, and, in the process, great samadhi power is developed. When an answer wells up, it carries with it a valuable insight. In this way, by answering many such koans, the wisdom faculty is gradually exercised. However, if the question is pressed deeply enough, the insight accompanying its solution will be sufficient to crack moha and bring kensho (initial enlightenment). It is important to remember, however, that there are many kinds of koans for specific purposes and that individual teachers use koans in different ways.

The practice of vipashyana or clear observation, on the other hand, if developed with sufficient intensity and consistency leads to a moment of insight into the nature of the self identification process. At that moment, awareness penetrates into the normally unconscious chain of mental events which gives us the rock-solid conviction “I am separate and limited.” This insight brings with it a radical and permanent change in perspective . . . a refreshing sense of freedom which is not dependent upon circumstances. The attainment of this perspective and the full manifestation of its implications in daily life are the intention of Buddhist meditation.

I guess what it comes down to is to be open and clear in one’s intentions during meditation. There are many paths for entering the reality of Nirvana, and seeing. It has been said “Stopping is the primary gate for overcoming the bonds of compulsiveness. Seeing is the essential requisite for ending confusion.” May we all benefit from our meditation.
negative karmas created by
means of speech: harsh words and slander.

He calls these “sharp weapons that slice hearts” for our words are instruments that cut others deeply when we use them harmfully. They are most commonly used on, and also most hurtful to, those we love and with whom we are most close. In many ways abusive speech is a more profound form of harming others than is physical violence, for its impact goes deeper.

Both of these negative karmas of speech have as their underlying force the thought to harm. Unfortunately in this age of darkness both are also considered normal and acceptable. Those following the enlightenment tradition, however, always try to speak gently and with the desire to be helpful and meaningful.

Slander does not only refer to speaking untruthfully in such a way as will create division between others. It also includes the expression of irrelevant facts or truths while holding an inner will to harm. Unfortunately in this age of darkness both are also considered normal and acceptable. Those following the enlightenment tradition, however, always try to speak gently and with the desire to be helpful and meaningful.

How can We Deal with Anger?

(Excerpts from answers by the Ven. Thubten Chodron)

Buddhism teaches us not to become angry. But isn’t anger a natural part of being human and therefore acceptable if it were to arise occasionally?

From the point of view of a being in samsara, who caught in the cycle of existence and influenced by afflictions and karma, anger is natural. But the real question should be whether anger is beneficial. Just because it is natural, does not mean it is beneficial. When we examine anger more closely, we see firstly that anger is based on exaggerating the negative quality of someone or projecting negative qualities that are not there on a person or object. Secondly, anger is not beneficial because it creates many problems for us in this life and creates negative karma which will bring about suffering for us in our future lives. Anger also obscures the mind and prevents us from generating Dharma realizations and thus from attaining liberation and enlightenment.

Why is it that certain people get angry easily while others do not? Is this due to their past karma and thus nothing can be done about it?

One of the results of karma is that people have the tendency to do the same action again. However, the fact of anger arising in the mind to begin with is due to the seed of anger existing in the mindstream. The Buddha taught methods for counteracting anger and for purifying negative karma created by anger. So there is absolutely no excuse to say that you are born like that and there is nothing that can be done about it. Don’t think, “I’m just an angry person. There’s nothing that can be done, so everyone just has to live with me and love me anyway.” That’s nonsense!

Some psychologists say that it is better to release negative emotions such as anger rather than keeping them within us as it will affect our health. What does Buddhism have to say about this?

I think psychologists assume that there are only two things that can be done about anger. One is to express it and the other, to suppress it. From a Buddhist perspective, both are unhealthy. If you suppress anger, it is still there and that is not good for your health. If you express it, it is not good as well because you might harm others and you will create negative karma in the process.

So Buddhism teaches us how to look at the situation from a different perspective and how to interpret events in a different way. If we do that, we will find that there is no reason to get angry to start with. Then there is no anger to express or to suppress. For example, when someone tells us that we did something wrong, we usually think that person is trying to harm us. But look at it from a different perspective and consider that he may be giving us some useful information. He may be trying to help us. …If we interpret it in a different way, the anger will not arise.

What are the antidotes to prevent anger from arising? As lay people, how do we apply them in our everyday life?

Whether you are lay or monastic, applying antidotes to destructive emotions is important. We must practice the antidotes that the Buddha taught and again and again. …There are a few slogans which I remember when anger begins to arise. One is “Sentient beings do what sentient beings do.” That is, sentient beings are under the influence of ignorance, afflictions, and karma and. Any being that is under the influence of those obscurations is going to do harmful actions. It is clear that living beings are imperfect. So my expectation that they be perfect is totally unrealistic. When I accept this, I understand why they act like that and am more compassionate regarding what they do. They are caught in this dreadful prison of cyclic existence. I don’t want them to suffer, and I certainly don’t want to inflict more suffering on them by getting angry. Holding this big picture of sentient beings trapped in cyclic existence enables us to feel compassion instead of anger when they act in mistaken ways.

How can we learn to accept criticism without being angry?

If someone criticizes you, don’t pay attention to the tone, vocabulary, or volume of their voice. Just focus on the content of their criticism. If it is true, there’s no reason to get angry. For example, if someone says, “There is a nose on your face” you are not angry because it is true. There is no use pretending we don’t have a nose—or didn’t make a mistake—because everyone, including us, knows we did. As Buddhists we must always improve ourselves and so, we should put our hands together and say, “Thank you.” On the other hand, if someone says, “There is a horn on your face” there is no reason get angry because that person is mistaken. We can this to the person later when they are receptive to listening.

Patience is the opposite of anger and is highly praised in Buddhism. But sometimes others take advantage when we cultivate patience. What do we do in such a situation?

Some people fear that if they are kind or patient, others will take advantage of them. I think they misunderstand what patience and compassion mean. Being patient and compassionate does not mean you let people take advantage of you. It does not mean that you allow other people to harm and beat you up. That is stupidity, not compassion! Being patient means being calm when confronted with suffering or harm. It does not mean being like a doormat. You can be kind and at the same time, be firm and have a clear sense of your own human dignity and self-worth. You know what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior in that situation. If you are clear in this way, others will know that they cannot take advantage of you. If you try very hard to please people and do what they want so that they will like you, other people will take advantage because your own mind is unclear and attached to approval.
**Contact Us!**

**REFLECTIONS** is seeking submissions. Everyone is invited to contribute. Submission topics can include but are not limited to the following:

- Letters to the Editor and suggestions
- Poetry (any style)
- Notes about your spiritual journey and reflections
- Buddhist thoughts on a contemporary movie or novel or other books
- Short suggestions about or Buddhist Literature (books, magazines, etc.)
- Information on Buddhist resources and area events

Deadlines for submission for Autumn 2011 issue is October 15, 2011

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65 North Main St. Yardley, PA 19067
Service and Meditation 7pm - 8pm
Group Discussion and Tea 8pm - 9pm
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