

MINDFULNESS – UNDERSTANDING OF ALL PHENOMENA

Millennium Congress, Kassel, Germany

October 8-9, 1996

Lama Doboomb Tulku

A Buddhist monk's effort to understand all phenomena are based on his belief in (a) the universal regime of cause and effect; (b) the interdependence of all phenomena; (c) the dependent or contingent nature of all origination; and, therefore, change and disappearance and disintegration; (d) the impermanence of conditioned things and absence of inherent existence in all phenomena – the cognizer as well as the cognized, (e) the inherent suffering that arises from mistaken perceptions in the permanence of reality of phenomena. In our social life as well as our individual lives, we have to encounter the suffering caused by our false apprehensions of reality or happiness.

Buddhism does not believe in mortifying the flesh; it does not believe in ignoring the demands of life, or the potential for expanding knowledge about the universe; it does not deny that knowledge can help to reduce suffering or improve conditions of living. It has therefore no distaste for science or technology. On the contrary, it believes that skillful use of science and technology can improve the quality of life for millions of people all over the world. But since technology involves the choice of goals, that nature of the goals, as well as the motivation that prompts the choice and pursuit of goals become very important from a Buddhist point of view. If they ignore or violate any of the beliefs that we listed in the beginning, they are bound to increase individual and social suffering, and not welfare. It is thus that, what we believe will contribute to our pleasure sometimes, or often, turns out to be the cause of aggravated suffering.

To the Buddhist, ethics and morality are not extraneous to the realm of cause and effect. They are not commandments of one who is the creator, and who functions above the realm of cause and effect. Nor have their observance to be induced by a system of rewards, and punishments. The belief that actions take place in the realm of cause and effect (that all actions are subject to the law of cause and effect) has liberated Buddhism from the need to look for an external source of authority or rewards and punishments administered by an external authority. Actions have their inescapable consequences as they are governed by the law of cause and effect. Thus, my motivations and actions will have their effects on me and the social and even natural environment in which I live. I can not overlook this effect, and therefore, the responsibility to see that my conduct to what creates a conducive effect on me as well as my social and natural environment.

The last few centuries have witnessed a spectacular advance in Science and Technology. We have become increasingly aware of our power to protect and promote life as well as to cause the extinction of the eco-system, and the human species.

All the advances that have been made in the field of science and technology have not been based on an analysis of motives, or the impact and chain-reactions that these were likely to cause on the psyche and environment of the human being, and therefore, on his individual and social transactions, institutions, incentives and concepts of sanctions, (on the course of voluntary control over the mind and its desires, or social control and recourse to coercion). Our advances have not been made with mindfulness about consequences, and the inescapable relation between cause and effect. The suicidal consequences of this absence of mindfulness (abdication of mindfulness) have now been spectacularly brought to our attention. What do we do?

Persist in the mindless pursuit of individual power and material possessions, unconcerned with its consequences, in other words running the risk of a suicide of the species? or at least of the human being, society and environment as we have known them.

The answer lies within us, within our minds. The corrective lies within us, within our minds, and radiating from our minds. Science and Technology of the previous centuries now compel us to recognize the inevitable need for mindfulness about motivations and consequences. To a believer in Buddha Dharma it is this mindfulness which is the basis on which to choose the path that leads to freedom and fulfillment, and not destruction and slavery. Among the most powerful enemies of mindfulness are desire, greed and the ego, the desire to promote one's ego at the cost of others or society or the environment. One cannot shy away from the needs of ethics and morality on the ground that hypocrites too talk of morality and ethics, or that such talk smacks of paternalism or authoritarianism. Perhaps one should examine whether these pleas are not sometimes used as ploys to befog the mind. The answer that Buddha Dharma gives it mindfulness even to protect mindfulness, and the ethics and morality that mindfulness makes imperative in a world governed by cause and effect.
