

# Transformation of Suffering: A Buddhist Approach Leading to Peace and Happiness

Ton Ngoc Hung

Ph. D. Research Scholar in Department of Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Arts  
University of Delhi, Delhi - 110007

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Buddhism has appeared in this world for more than 2600 years, contributed to the remarkable values in terms of culture, arts, science, education, and so forth. Particularly, nowadays, with the message of compassion and wisdom of Buddhism may be considered as a key to resolving every problem that people is facing with modern challenges of conflicts, violence, discrimination, hatred, war, and so on. It may say that Buddhism is one of great religions in the world that always emphasizes on the ethic values of truth, goodness and beauty of each individual in order to bring into the happiness for oneself, human beings and the living beings. In other words, Buddhism's appearance on this earth is like an effective resolution to build a happy life for humankind in particular, and leading to the peace and bliss for the world in general. Therefore, the milestone of Buddha's career was always engaged in spreading his teachings that promoted to develop compassion, loving-kindness and wisdom and praised the spiritual efforts in order to eliminate the evil thought of covetousness, anger, and ignorance to establish a happy life in this life and after life. In fact, having fully enlightened at Bodhgaya, the Buddha started his career of giving teachings to his disciples. Historically, five disciples who were listened the Buddha's teachings at the Deer Park, became Arhats or the highest grade of the Buddhist saints. Having had such enlightened monk-disciples, the Buddha sent them out on a mission to transmit the Dharma, saying: "Walk, monks, on tour for the blessing of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of gods and humans."<sup>1</sup> It is clear that Buddhism always respects for ethical and harmonious living of each individual, and the lifestyle of purifying one's minds of covetousness, anger and ignorance to create a better life for oneself, for family, for society and for the world's peace.

What is suffering? Why transformation of suffering or the realization of the nature of suffering can lead to peace and happiness?

As we have known, the aim of the Buddha's appearance in this world is to 'teach suffering and

the path leading to the cessation of suffering.' What is suffering? It is necessary to look back the Buddha's teaching mentioned in some sūtras. 'The processes of body, mind and experience of life are suffering (dukkha): unsatisfactory, frustrating and productive of suffering, whether in a gross or subtle form,'<sup>2</sup> but generally, suffering is too many kinds of sufferings, without any word to describe suffering enough in this world. However, in many sūtras, the Buddha explained in various forms of sufferings known as eight sufferings or three sufferings etc that cause the living beings suffer, or unhappiness.

What is the suffering? In Pāli word, suffering is "Dukkha" or (Sanskrit: Duḥkha). In ordinary usage, the word Dukkha or Duḥkha means 'suffering', 'pain', 'sorrow' and 'misery', as opposed to "Sukha" meaning 'happiness', 'comfort' or 'ease.' However, the term "Dukkha" as the First Noble Truth, which describes the Buddha's view of life and the world, has a deeper philosophical meaning and connote enormously wider senses. Therefore, not only including quite clearly ordinary meaning of suffering, but also in the First Noble Truth, it also includes deeper ideas such as 'imperfection', 'impermanence', 'emptiness', 'insubstantiality'. In fact, the Buddha does not deny happiness in life when he says there is suffering, in contrast, the Buddha admits various forms of happiness both material and spiritual for laymen as well as for monks. In the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*,<sup>3</sup> the Buddha mentions a list of happiness (sukhāni) such as the happiness of family life and the happiness of the life of a recluse; the happiness of sense pleasures and the happiness of renunciation; the happiness of attachment and the happiness of detachment; physical happiness and mental happiness etc. But all these are included in Dukkha.<sup>4</sup> The Buddha also says "whatever is impermanent is dukkha" (yad aniccaṃ tam dukkhaṃ) and because of impermanence, they are 'dukkha and subject to change.'

The conception of dukkha is understood in three kinds as mentioned below:

The first kind, "Dukkha-dukkha" contains all kind of suffering in life like: "birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is

suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair are suffering; association with unpleasant persons and conditions is suffering, separation from beloved ones and pleasant conditions is suffering, not getting what one desires is suffering. In short the five clinging-aggregates are suffering.”<sup>5</sup> All such forms of physical and mental suffering, which are universally accepted as suffering or pain, are included in dukkha as ordinary suffering (dukkha-dukkha).

Second, “dukkha as produced by change” (yipariṇāma-dukkha): this kind describes that whatever is permanent is subject to change, because it changes, it produces pain, suffering, unhappiness. A happy condition or a happy feeling in life is not permanent, not everlasting. Therefore, it changes sooner or later. This vicissitude is included in dukkha as suffering produced by change.

Third, “dukkha as conditioned states (samkhāra-dukkha): in this kind, what we consider as a ‘being’, as an ‘individual’, or ‘I’, according to Buddhist philosophy, is only a combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces or energies which may be divided into five groups or aggregates (pañcakkhandha)<sup>6</sup>. The Buddha says “In short these five aggregates of attachment are dukkha” or elsewhere the Buddha distinctly defines that dukkha as the five aggregates: “O Bhikkhus, what is dukkha? It should be said that it is the five aggregates of attachment.” We should understand that here the five aggregates and the dukkha are similar things, the five aggregates themselves are dukkha. Therefore, in the third aspect, we are suffering because of combination of ever-changing physical and mental forces what so-called the five aggregates. They are all impermanent, all constantly changing. So, ‘whatever is impermanent is dukkha’ is also included in this third kind of dukkha.<sup>7</sup>

In the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*<sup>8</sup>, The Buddha speaks of what we call a ‘being’, or an ‘Individual’ or ‘I’ that is formed by a combination of these five groups is only a convenient name or label. But they are all impermanent, all constantly changing, not-self, unreal, and subject to change. So the text says:

“I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Vanarasi in the Deer Park at Isipatana (the Resort of Seers). There he addressed the group of five monks: “Bhikkhus.” – “Venerable sir,” They replied. The Blessed One said this.

“Bhikkhus, form (matter) is not self. If form were the self, this form would not lend itself to affliction. It would be possible to say with regard to form, ‘Let this form be thus. Let this form not be thus.’ But precisely because form is not self, form lends itself to affliction. And it is not possible to

say with regard to form, ‘Let this form be thus, Let this form not be thus.’”

“Bhikkhus, feeling (sensation) is not self...”

“Bhikkhus, perception is not self...”

“Bhikkhus, mental formations are not self...”

“Bhikkhus, consciousness is not self. If consciousness were the self, this consciousness would not lend itself to affliction. It would be possible to say with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’ But precisely because consciousness is not self, consciousness lends itself to affliction. And it is not possible to say with regard to consciousness, ‘Let my consciousness be thus. Let my consciousness not be thus.’”

What do you think, monks – Is form permanent or impermanent?”

“Impermanent, Venerable Sir.”

“Now is what is impermanent painful or pleasant?”

“Painful, venerable Sir.”

“Now is what is impermanent, what is painful since to subject to change, fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am?’”

“No, Venerable sir.”

“What do you think, monks – Is feeling permanent or impermanent?...”

“Impermanent, Venerable sir,”

“Is perception impermanent?...”

“Is mental formations?...”

“Is consciousness permanent or impermanent?” – “Impermanent, venerable sir.” – “now is what is impermanent pleasant or painful? – “Painful, venerable sir.” – Now is what is impermanent, what is painful since subject to change, fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, this is I, this is my self’? – “No, venerable sir.”

“Thus, monks any body whatsoever that is past, future or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: Every body is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’”

“Any feeling whatsoever...”

“Any perception whatsoever...”

“Any mental formations whatsoever...”

“Any consciousness that is past, future or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: Every consciousness is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: ‘This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.’”

“Seeing thus, the instructed noble disciple grows disenchanted with the body, disenchanted with feeling, disenchanted with perception, disenchanted with mental formations, disenchanted with consciousness. Disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion, he is fully

released. With full release, there is the knowledge, 'Fully release.' He discerns that 'birth is depleted, the holy life fulfilled, task done. There is nothing further for this world.'

"That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the group of give monks delighted at his words. And while this explanation was being given, the hearts of the group of give monks, through not clinging (not being sustained), were fully released from fermentation/effluents."<sup>9</sup>

What the Buddha said in the *Anattalakkhana Sutta* construes what we call a 'being' or an 'Individual' or 'I' is not inherently real, not-self, impermanent, subject to change and it is inconstant, therefore it leads to suffering (Dukkha). In Buddhist philosophical view holds that because we have the body, so we are subjected to change, impermanent, dukkha. It is almost clear for us to experience it in this world.

However, Buddhism is not a religion of annihilationism or pessimism, but it is a realistic and optimistic religion. Because the Buddha's teaching is aimed at liberating the living beings from suffering and the nature of the Buddha's teaching possibly enable one to reach to the other shore, the shore of security, enlightenment, liberation, deathlessness. The Buddha confirms that whoever understands and practices this Buddha-dharma can be got enlightenment, liberated from the cycle of birth and death, and full-Awakening. Hence, it is clear to say that the teaching of the Buddha has the only taste, that is the taste of the liberation or enlightenment. It is a really reasonable attitude when the Buddha teaches the life is full of suffering and intends the sentient beings to realize the nature of the suffering, then they can remove or root out away their suffering and finally attain the happiness or full enlightenment in this life and after life. What I mean is that Buddhism points out life is not only suffering but the cessation of suffering, the methods to destroy one's suffering and the path leading to the cessation of suffering (happiness or Nirvana).

How to looking for happiness in the world while we are living in the world of full suffering?

On Buddhist view, the realization of suffering is the key leading to the happiness. The notion of Buddhist loving-kindness and compassion consist of two senses: Loving-kindness means to confer happiness or bringing bliss and compassion means to free the sentient beings from suffering. Therefore, combination of the two words can understand that the Buddha's teachings can eliminate suffering and bring happiness. Happiness is understood in many ways. It may be not easy to get an exact definition of happiness. Some suppose that happiness is having fun at a party, the joy of a wonderful meal, the excitement of new experience,

thrill and passion of sexual intercourse, or happiness is as one's life fulfills one's needs and so on. However, on the Buddhist perspectives, these can bring the temporary happiness, soon fade way and after that continue to suffer out of their impermanent nature. It is also called an unreal happiness. Happiness that Buddhism wants to seek for is happiness without full absence of craving, elimination of evil thoughts like greed, anger and ignorance. In other words, happiness is absence of desires. The Buddha says 'as craving is completely rooted out is happiness or nirvāṇa.' Nirvāṇa literally means "extinction" or "quenching" that is normally indicated for the 'extinction' of a fire. The "fires" of which Nirvāṇa is the extinction are explained in the "fires sermon." The "fire" as taught in this text in a sense of everything in the world is burning with the fires of craving, anger, delusion, birth, decaying and death.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that a state of non-attachment, or nirvāṇa is regarded as a real happiness that Buddhism wants a person should look for. Particularly, insight into the reality of pain or looking deeply into the nature of emptiness of everything will bring about more peace, reconciliation, understanding and love. This can help us practice looking deeply, so that we easily see all everything is inter-embedded in everything else and perceive the inclusive nature in everything. As a result of this practices we can touch happiness or nirvāṇa and should remember that we cannot touch happiness if we practice exclusion.<sup>11</sup>

In another words, insight into the transformation of suffering is the key leading to happiness. Why? Because 'if we cannot have true peace, true understanding, or true love if we are not touched the nature of interbeing, a source of happiness.'<sup>12</sup> If we cannot find the cause and nature of suffering, what problem we are suffering? I suppose we may not find or gain a real happiness. If happiness is not brightened by wisdom or light of causal chain of dependent co-arising conditions, happiness may be an aim that make us trouble or make us act bad deeds on the way to looking for happiness. Happiness or nirvāṇa is arising from interbeing, impermanence and nonself and it is also defined being the extinction of all notions, including notion of self. Therefore, it is so necessary to have or cultivate this wisdom or insight to throw a light for us on questing for a solid happiness in our lives. Whenever we understand what the suffering is, what the cause of suffering is, so we can behave our lives different, deeper, and meaningful, we behave many people around us harmonious and happy. It is important to remember that happiness will be present as we have mindfulness of every moment; mindfulness of the change of every moment of our thoughts;

mindfulness of the impermanence of constant births and deaths in every phenomenon, whereby, there will be still a severe competition of gain and loss for existence nor anger, harm, discrimination. Whenever we realize that life is full of suffering and life is very short and permanent. It is not worthy for us to argue something or harm someone, everyone is worthy to be lived in happiness, loving, and peace.

It is clear that happiness is not an individual matter. It coexists in an interaction of dependent co-arising. In this manner, if your beloved is not happy, you cannot be happy either. Therefore, according to Buddhist teaching, everything is made of causal chain of dependent co-arising, thus everything is not existed alone, but together dependent co-arising. Buddhism mentions the notion of two words, Lokadhatu and Dharmadhatu, both representing the reality. The 'Lokadhatu describes a realm of separations and limitations, of differences.' While the 'Dharmadhatu is a realm of the ultimate reality, of suchness and unity, of interbeing.'<sup>13</sup>

In the Lokadhatu's view, everything exists outside of everything else; they exist outside of us; the flower exists outside of the cloud in the sky. That is the world that we are caught in discrimination, so the Lokadhatu can reveal itself to us. That is, the world that we are living in when we are deluded or ignorant. Therefore, we are being suffered when we are caught in discrimination, and caught in our perception of opposite: being and nonbeing, to be or not to be, self and nonself, Buddhism and Christianity, Hindu and Muslim, black and white etc.

However, in Buddhism the concept of Mahābhūta (great element), each of great elements of earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness contains all others. If we have the insight that the one contains the all, then we cannot see the differences and the world of the Dharmadhatu will be present as we have the insight of interbeing, of nonself. The Dharmadhatu is the world of full of light, love and wisdom manifests itself to us. It looks like a kingdom of God. 'The Dharmadhatu is a world of which everything contains everything else.' 'The flower contains the sunshine; the sunshine contains the flower.' 'The father contains the son; the son contains the father.' Undoubtedly, this insight is very clear, and that may be reason why there are a lot of lights in the Dharmadhatu as the chain of interrelation among things may be seen if we transform the suffering under the discernment of Dharmadhatu. At this time, we cannot realize the differences between us and others; between us and the external the world, but there will be a world in which everyone and the world coexist in the interrelated forces. When we practice walking in

the world of Dharmadhatu every step bring us a lot of happiness. When we have freed from the idea that our body is our self and that another body can be our enemy, we walk in the Dharmadhatu right away if have the insight of interbeing of all things. As we touch the interbeing's nature or realization of nature of suffering in each of us, then we are able to release our suffering and stop feeling sorrow and lonely.<sup>14</sup> We should look profoundly to realize this. In fact, we never live in the Dharmadhatu if we lock ourselves away in the Lokadhatu, where everything is separated from everything else.

In short, to get happiness, one of essential steps for us to create the practical forces is that we, ourselves, must realize the important needs of this life is looking for happiness and peace in our minds and the world through the effective means of:

Nourishing and developing our inherent good qualities such as loving-kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity, mutual understanding, loving etc to keep mind that life is short, impermanent and full of suffering, everyone and the living beings in the world are so dear and worthy to live in happiness and peace. Thus, we should not harm and make someone painful and unhappy. The Buddha said:

"All tremble at punishment,

Life is dear to all.

Comparing others with oneself,

One should neither kill nor cause to kill."<sup>15</sup>

These above passages are understood that we are basically not different other beings in desiring pleasure and disliking suffering, so that there is no good reason to add to the common lot of pain by inflicting it on others. In doing so, moreover, harms ourselves as well as others, or harms others as well as ourselves. Because:

"Whoever, seeking his own happiness,

Harms with sticks

Pleasure-loving beings,

He gets no happiness hereafter."<sup>16</sup>

Thus, it may say that the benefit of ourselves and other are intertwined in relation to the law of karma so that concern to lessen our own pain go hand-in-hand with lessening that of others. Remember that helping others help ourselves and helping ourselves by purifying our character enables us to help others better.<sup>17</sup>

Realizing the nature of life is transitory, and it will be terminated inevitably, the evil deeds that we are making will bring about the bad consequents or results in terms of karmic results. Thus, more wholesome deeds that should be created can bring us more happiness and peace.

Transformation of our own sufferings that have been made from greed, hatred and ignorance by methods of practicing meditation, doing charity, patience, keeping moral precepts (Sīla), cultivation

wisdom and so forth is also contributing to the establishment of happiness. Besides, we stop the evil thoughts, do not do the unwholesome deeds and try to purify our minds, because 'with an impure mind as we speak or act, suffering follows us like the wheel that follow the foot of the ox.'<sup>18</sup> Doing so, they are also the basic foundations of bringing happiness and peace for the human and the world. So, the Buddha said:

"To avoid all evil,  
To cultivate good,  
And purify one's mind.  
This is the teaching of the Buddhas."<sup>19</sup>

Relating to happiness, the highly educational and ethical verses in the *Dhammapada* remind us the truth of happiness is placed on loving, compassion, ahimsa (non-violence) and subdued one's mind (unwholesome minds/evil thoughts such as greed, anger, delusion, pride, doubt, evil views,...). Thus, happiness will be present when our mind is wholly calm and tranquil. It is benefited for us if we practice the teaching of the Buddha in the following verses. The author thinks that this is one of the standard lifestyles to get happiness. The Buddha says:

"Let us live happily then,  
Not hating those who hate us!  
Among men who hate us.  
Let us dwell free from hatred!"<sup>20</sup>

Or  
"Victory begets enmity,  
The defeated dwell in pain,  
Happily the peaceful live,  
Discarding both victory and defeat."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka* (Th.); (tr. I. B. Honer), *The Book of the Discipline*, vol. 2, London. PTS, 1938-66, p.21. Also see, Peter Harvey, *An introduction to Buddhism: Teaching, History and Practices*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd, 1990, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Āṅguttara-Nikāya* (*The Book of Gradual Sayings*) is the fourth one of the Five Original Collections in Pāli Canon containing the Buddha's Discourses. According to Wilhem Geiger, it consists of 2,308 *suttas* into 11 sections (*nipāta*), or 2,344 *suttas* by Edmund Hardy or 9,557 in Buddhist books (*Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*, London, 1886, p. 23; *Aṭṭhasālinī* (p. 25, Introduction, Discourse). Others are briefly mentioned as below:

*Dīgha-Nikāya* (*Longest Dialogues of the Buddha*) consists of 34 *suttas* that grouped in 03 sections or

*vaggas*: *Sīlakkhandavagga* (13 *suttas*), *Mahāvagga* (10 *suttas*) and *Pātheyya* or *Pāṭikavagga* (11 *suttas*).

*Majjhima-Nikāya* (*The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings*) contains 152 *suttas* (or *Paṇṇāsa*) of which it distributed into three groups: *Mūlapaṇṇāsa* (1-50), *Majjhimapañṇāsa* (51-100) and *Uparipaṇṇāsa* (101-152).

*Saṃyutta-Nikāya* (*The Book of the Kindred Sayings*) consists of 7,762 *suttas* of which are arranged into five *vaggas*: *Sagāthavagga*, *Nidānavagga*, *Khandhavagga*, *Salāyatanavagga* and *Mahāvagga*; and

*Khuddaka-Nikāya* (*Collections of Miscellanies*) contains 15 books such as *Khuddakapāṭha*, *Dhammapada*, *Udāna*, *Itivuttaka*, *Sutta-Nipāta*, *Vimānavatthu*, *Petavatthu*, *Theragāthā*, *Therīgāthā*, *Jātaka*, *Niddesa*, *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, *Apadāna*, *Buddhavaṃsa*, *Cariyāpiṭaka*.

<sup>4</sup> Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, London and Bedford: Gordon Fraser Gallery Ltd., 1978, pp. 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> *Saṃyutta-Nikāya* 56.11.

<sup>6</sup> Pañcakkhandha: Rūpakhandha (Matter), Vedanākkhandha (Sensations), Saññākkhandha (Perceptions), Saṅkhārakkhandha (Mental Formations), and Viññākkhandha (Consciousness). In Buddhism, this Five Aggregates create the sentient beings, what we call as a 'being', or an 'Individual' or 'I'. To further information, also see, *Saṃyutta Nikāya XXII. 48. (Khandha Sutta.)*

<sup>7</sup> Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, London and Bedford: Gordon Fraser Gallery Ltd., 1978, pp.19-20.

<sup>8</sup> *Anattalakkhana sutta* (無我相經, The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic) is the Buddha's second discourse after the first sermon, the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta* (Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion; *Saṃyutta-Nikāya* 56. 11) which The Buddha discusses about the principles of 'Anatta' (無我, non-self) with the group of five ascetics at Present-day Vanarasi. By the methods of a question-and-answer dialogue with his audience, the Buddha expounds that there can be no abiding self in any of the five aggregates that we tend to

identify as 'self.' As a result of attending in this discourse, all five monks who are Anna Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama and Assaji attain full Awakening of Arahatta. Also see, *Anatta-Lakkhana Sutta* in *Samyutta Nikaya XXII. 59*.

<sup>9</sup> *Samyutta-Nikāya XXII. 59*.

<sup>10</sup> *Vinaya Piṭaka* (Th.); (tr. I. B. Horner), *The Book of the Discipline*, vol. 1, London. PTS, 1938-66, pp. 34-35.

<sup>11</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *the Path of Emancipation*, New Delhi: Full Circle Publishing, 2008, p. 203.

<sup>12</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *the Path of Emancipation*, New Delhi: Full Circle Publishing, 2008, p. 203

<sup>13</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *the Path of Emancipation*, New Delhi: Full Circle Publishing, 2008, p. 204.

<sup>14</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *the Path of Emancipation*, New Delhi: Full Circle Publishing, 2008, p. 205.

<sup>15</sup> *Dhammapada*, Verse. 130.

<sup>16</sup> *Dhammapada*, Verse. 131.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> *Dhammapada*, Verse. 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Dhammapada*, verse. 183.

<sup>20</sup> *Dhammapada*, verse. 197.

<sup>21</sup> *Dhammapada*, verse. 203.