AN INTRODUCTION TO
BUDDHIST ETHICS

This systematic introduction to Buddhist ethics is aimed at anyone interested in Buddhism, including students, scholars and general readers. Peter Harvey is the author of the acclaimed Introduction to Buddhism (Cambridge, 1990), and his new book is written in a clear style, assuming no prior knowledge. At the same time it develops a careful, probing analysis of the nature and practical dynamics of Buddhist ethics both in its unifying themes and in the particularities of different Buddhist traditions. The book applies Buddhist ethics to a range of issues of contemporary concern: humanity’s relationship with the rest of nature; economics; war and peace; euthanasia; abortion; sexual equality; and homosexuality. Professor Harvey draws on texts of the main Buddhist traditions, and on historical and contemporary accounts of the behaviour of Buddhists, to describe existing Buddhist ethics, to assess different views within it, and to extend its application into new areas.

Peter Harvey is Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Sunderland. Co-founder of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies, he was the first Professor specifically of ‘Buddhist Studies’ in the UK. He also serves on the editorial board of the very successful Internet Journal of Buddhist Ethics and that of Contemporary Studies in Buddhism.
AN INTRODUCTION TO
BUDDHIST ETHICS

Foundations, Values and Issues

PETER HARVEY
University of Sunderland
An introduction to Buddhist ethics: foundations, values and issues / Peter Harvey.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 53394 5 (hbk)
0 521 55304 6 (pbk)

1. Buddhist ethics. I. Title.

92-894257 2000
294.3'56 - dc21 99-27738 CIP

© Cambridge University Press

0521553946 - An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues
Frontmatter

More information
Not to do any evil,
to cultivate what is wholesome,
to purify one’s mind:
this is the teaching of the Buddhas

(Dhammapada, verse 183)
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of plates</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of abbreviations</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A note on language and pronunciation</td>
<td>xix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SHARED FOUNDATIONS OF BUDDHIST ETHICS</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of guidance to Buddhists</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebirth and karma</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The realms of rebirth</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karma and its effects</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The status and working of the law of karma</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ‘karmic fruitfulness’ of actions</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karmic fruitfulness and motive</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The <em>Saṅgha</em> as the best ‘field of karmic fruitfulness’</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karma and fatalism</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in the working of karma</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed results of karma</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The effect of character</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remorse and the acknowledgement of fault</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebirth, karma and motivation</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Four Noble Truths</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impermanence</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-Self and respecting others</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Noble Eightfold Path</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noble persons</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The place of ethics on the Path</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wise, skilful, wholesome actions</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The <em>Arhat</em> as ‘beyond fruitful and deadening actions’</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy of action</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for differentiating good and bad actions</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Cambridge University Press                                       www.cambridge.org
vi

Contents

Comparisons with Western ethical systems 49
Intention, knowledge and degrees of unwholesomeness in actions 52
Conclusion 58

2 Key Buddhist Values 60
Giving 61
Sharing karmic fruitfulness 65
Keeping the lay precepts 66
The first precept: non-injury 69
The second precept: avoiding theft and cheating 69
The third precept: avoiding sexual misconduct 71
The fourth precept: avoiding lying and other forms of wrong speech 74
The fifth precept: sobriety 77
The nature of the precepts and precept-taking 80
Partial precept-taking and the issue of precept-breaking 82
Taking extra precepts 87
Monastic values 88
Celibacy 89
The role of monasticism 91
The monastic code of discipline 92
Harmony, sharing and spiritual companionship 96
The ethics of inter-personal relationships 97
Parents and children 98
Other relationships 99
Marriage 101
Lovingkindness and compassion 103
Social ethics 109
Social cohesion and equality 109
Engaged Buddhism 112
Political ideals 113
‘Human rights’ and Buddhism 118
Conclusion 122

3 Mahāyāna Emphases and Adaptations 123
The path of the Bodhisattva 123
Compassion and wisdom in the Mahāyāna 124
The arising of the thought of enlightenment 126
Developing the Bodhisattva perfections 128
The ethics of the Bodhisattva 130
The Bodhisattva precepts 132
Skilful means and overriding the precepts 134
Compassionate killing 135
Compassionate stealing, non-celibacy, and lying 139
Who may perform such acts, and are they obligatory?

Specific strands of Mahāyāna thought and practice

Tantra

Pure Land Buddhism

Zen

Nichiren Buddhism

Mahāyāna reassessment of monasticism

Conclusion

ATTITUDE TO AND TREATMENT OF THE NATURAL WORLD

Humanity’s place in nature

Non-harming of animals

Animal sacrifice

Meat eating

Meat eating in early and Theravāda Buddhism

Meat eating in Mahāyāna Buddhism

Animal husbandry

Pest control

Animal experimentation

Positive regard, and help, for animals

Plants, trees and forests

Conservation and environmentalism

Conclusion

ECONOMIC ETHICS

Lay economic ethics

Right livelihood

Moral and spiritual qualities aiding worldly success

Appropriate uses of income

Buddhist giving and its socio-economic impact

The Buddhist attitude to wealth

Economic ethics for rulers

The justice of economic distribution

The monastic economy

Buddhism and capitalism: Weber’s ‘Protestant ethic’ thesis

The case of Japan

‘Buddhist economics’

The purpose of economics and a critique of consumerism

Critiques of capitalist and Marxist development models

Buddhism and economics in the modern world

The Sarvādāya Śramaṇa movement in Sri Lanka

Buddhist elements in the modern Japanese economy

Conclusion
6 War and Peace

Buddhist analyses of the causes of conflict
Solutions to conflict
Economic means
Negotiation and emphasizing the mutual harm of war
A non-violent moral stance
Reflections to undermine hatred and develop patience
Forbearance and forgiveness
Defusing a situation
Non-violent reflections on a violent world
The position of the soldier
Buddhist 'justifications' of, and involvement in, violence
Sri Lanka
South-east Asia
China
Japan
Buddhist action for peace in the modern world
Peace activities of Japanese Nichiren-based schools
Sarvodaya Sramadāna as a force for defusing conflict in Sri Lanka
Buddhist action to heal Cambodia
Conclusion

7 Suicide and Euthanasia

Considerations and arguments against suicide
Suicide and the precepts
Euthanasia
Buddhist reasons for rejecting euthanasia
Cases of non-intended death
The question of the criteria of death
Conclusion

8 Abortion and Contraception

Embryonic life
Abortion and Buddhist principles
Relevance of the age of the foetus
Possible grounds for abortion
Contraception
Abortion in Buddhist cultures
Among Tibetans
Lands of Southern Buddhism
Lands of Eastern Buddhism, especially Japan
Anti-abortion but pro-choice? The relationship between morality and law
Conclusion
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 SEXUAL EQUALITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in early Hinduism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The effect of Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The spiritual potential and achievement of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Arhats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahāyāna images of female spiritual perfection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender, rebirth and the status of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views on spiritual status unattainable by women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images of wise and wayward women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascetic wariness of the opposite sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ordination of women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuns and other female religious roles in Buddhist cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancient India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lands of Eastern Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lands of Southern Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lands of Northern Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laywomen in Buddhist texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laywomen in Buddhist cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lands of Southern Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lands of Eastern Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lands of Northern Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 HOMOSEXUALITY AND OTHER FORMS OF ‘QUEerness’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex-change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermaphrodites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panḍakas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual behaviour of panḍakas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The psychological nature and limited potential of panḍakas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panḍakas and rebirth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexuality in Buddhist cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lands of Southern Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lands of Eastern Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Buddhism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Glossary and details of historical figures and texts | 435 |
List of references | 439 |
Useful addresses | 461 |
Index of Buddhist texts, schools cultural areas, movements and organizations | 463 |
Index of concepts | 467 |
Index of names | 475 |
Plates

1. The Tibetan ‘Wheel of Life’.  
2. Lay people giving alms-food to monks at a festival at Ratanagiri monastery, north-east England.  
3. A temple mural in Sri Lanka showing the Buddha in a past life as the ‘Teacher of Patience’, who could not be roused to anger even when cut to pieces with a sword (courtesy of Richard Gombrich).  
4. The Buddha with a devoted monkey and elephant before him, at a temple in Ko Samui, Thailand.  
5. A. T. Ariyaratne, founder of the Sarvodaya Sramadana movement, with Professor George Bond, who researches the movement, on his right.  
7. Cambodian monastic leader and peace activist Mahaghosananda (courtesy of River Publications).  
8. A Japanese cemetery, with statues of the Bodhisattva Jizō dedicated to aborted or stillborn babies (courtesy of Elizabeth Harrison).  
9. A popular print from Sri Lanka, showing the Buddha returning to earth from a heaven after teaching his dead mother the Abhidhamma, a complex compendium of analytical wisdom.  
10. An image of Tara, the ‘Saviouress’, in the courtyard of a temple in Kathmandu, Nepal.
Acknowledgements

My thanks to Damien Keown, of Goldsmith’s College, London, and co-editor of the Internet Journal of Buddhist Ethics for comments on aspects of chapters 7 and 8, and to my research student Liz Williams for checking and offering comments on a draft of this work, especially on chapter 9, and for help with the indexes. Over many years, while teaching a University of Sunderland final-year undergraduate module, Ethics in Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, both my colleagues Dr James Francis and Phil André and our students have also helped me to reflect further on Buddhist ethics.
Abbreviations

Note that below:
Th. = a text of the Pali Canon or later Theravāna literature
My. = a Mahāyāna text in Sanskrit, Chinese or Tibetan


A. A. Commentary on A.; untranslated.

AKB. Abhidharma-kaśa-bhāṣyam [of Vasubandhu; a Sarvāstivāda work]; (tr. from Louis de La Vallée Poussin’s French translation by Leo M. Pruden, *Abhidharmakosābhaṣyam*), Berkeley, Calif., Asian Humanities Press, 1988–90. References are to chapter and section numbers in original text.


List of abbreviations
BCE Before the Christian era.
BPS Buddhist Publication Society
CE Christian Era.
D. A. Commentary on D.; untranslated.
J. Jātaka with Commentary (Th.); (tr. by various hands under E. B. Cowell), The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, 6 vols., London, PTS, 1895–1907.
Khp. A. Buddhaghosa’s commentary on Khp.
List of abbreviations


M. A. Commentary on M.; untranslated.


Mīl. T. Commentary on Mīl., untranslated.


Nd. II. Cullaniddesa (Th.); untranslated.


PTS Pali Text Society.


Pr. Petavatthu (Th.); (tr. H. S. Gehman), The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon, Part IV (also includes a translation of Vī., by I. B. Horner), London, PTS, 1974. References to chapter and story number.


S. A. Commentary on S.; untranslated.

Skt Sanskrit.

List of abbreviations

Ss. Śīkṣā-saṃuccaya (My.); (tr. C. Bendall and W. H. D. Rouse, Śīkṣā Samuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine, Compiled by Śūtrotātha Chieflly from the Early Mahāyāna Sūtras, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1971 (1st edn, 1922). References are to translation pagination.


Vin. Vinaya Piṭaka (Th.); (tr. I. B. Horner), The Book of the Discipline, 6 vols., London, PTS, 1938–66. Vīn. iii and iv are translated as Book of the Discipline, vols. 1, ii and iii, and Vīn. i and ii are translated as Book of the Discipline, vols. 4 and v. Note, also, that in

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org
Horner’s translations, the page number of the original Pali text, which appears in bold in the midst of the English, means ‘Page x ends here.’ In all other translations by the PTS, it means ‘Page x starts here.’

Vin. A. Commentary on Vin.; untranslated directly into English, but translated from the Chinese translation: Bapat and Hirakawa, 1970.


V. Vinañnavatthu (Th.); (tr. I. B. Horner), The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon, Part IV (also includes a translation of P. by H. S. Gehman), London, PTS, 1974. References to story number.

V. A. Commentary on V.; untranslated.

WFBR World Fellowship of Buddhists Review.

Most of these works are still in print; reprints have only been mentioned where the publisher differs from the original one. Translations given in this book are not necessarily the same as the cited translations, particularly in the case of translations from Pali. For Theravāda texts, the references are to the volume and page number of the edition of the text by the PTS, or to the verse number for texts in verse. The page numbers of the relevant edition of an original text are generally given in brackets in its translation, or at the top of the page. The volume number of the translation generally corresponds to the volume of the PTS edition of the texts, except for the Vinaya (see above).
A note on language and pronunciation

Most of the foreign words in this work are from Pali and Sanskrit, which are closely related languages of ancient India. Pali is the scriptural, liturgical and scholarly language of Southern Buddhism, one of the three main cultural traditions of Buddhism. Sanskrit, or rather ‘Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit’, is the language in which many of the scriptures and scholarly treatises of Mahāyāna Buddhism came to be written in India. Northern and Eastern Buddhism, where the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism predominates, generally use the Tibetan or Chinese translations of these texts. Many works on Buddhism give only Sanskrit versions of words, but this is artificial as Sanskrit is no longer used by Buddhists (except in Nepal), but Pali is still much in use.

This work therefore uses Pali versions of terms for most of early Buddhism, for Southern/Theravāda Buddhism, and when discussing Buddhism in general. Sanskrit versions are used when particularly discussing Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism, for some early schools which also came to use Sanskrit, and when discussing Hinduism. Sanskrit is also used for certain key terms that have come to be known in English: Nīvaraṇa (Pali Nibbāna), karma (Pali kamma), Bodhisattva (Pali Bodhisatta) and Stūpa (Pali Thāpe). In many cases, Pali and Sanskrit terms are spelt the same. Where they are spelt differently, the Pali spelling is the simpler.

Both Pali and Sanskrit have more than twenty-six letters, which means that when they are written in the roman alphabet, the extra letters need to be represented by the use of diacritical marks. Once the specific sounds of the letters are known, Pali and Sanskrit words are then pronounced as they are written, unlike English ones. It is therefore worth taking account of the diacritical marks, as they give a clear guide to pronunciation. The letters are pronounced as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a} & \text{ is short and flat, like the } u \text{ in ‘hut’ or ‘utter’} \\
\text{i} & \text{ is short, like } i \text{ in ‘bit’} \\
\text{u} & \text{ is like } u \text{ in ‘put’, or } oo \text{ in ‘foot’}
\end{align*}
\]
e is like e in ‘bed’, only pronounced long
o is long, like o in ‘note’ (or, before more than one consonant, more like o in ‘not’ or ‘odd’).

(ii) A bar over a vowel makes it long:
ä is like a in ‘barn’
ï is like ee in ‘beet’
ü is like u in ‘brute’.

(iii) When there is a dot under a letter (t·, d·, n·, s·, r·, ł·), this means that it is a ‘cerebral’ letter. Imagine a dot on the roof of one’s mouth that one must touch with one’s tongue when saying these letters. This produces a characteristically ‘Indian’ sound. It also makes s· into a sh sound, and r· into ri.

(iv) Abar over a vowel makes it long:
ä is like a in ‘barn’
ü is like u in ‘brute’.

Aspirated consonants (kh, gh, ch, jh, th, dh, th, dh, ph, bh) are accompanied by a strong breath-pulse from the chest, as when uttering English consonants very emphatically. For example:
ch is like ch-k in ‘church-ball’
th is like t-h in ‘hot-house’
ph is like p-h in ‘cup-handle’.

When aspirated consonants occur as part of a consonant cluster, the aspiration comes at the end of the cluster.

(v) c is like ch in ‘choose’.

(vi) ě is like ny in ‘canyon’; ęę is like any.

(viii) m is a pure nasal sound, made when the mouth is closed but air escapes through the nose, with the vocal chords vibrating; it approximates to ng.

(ix) ě is an ng. nasal sound said from the mouth, rather than the nose.

(x) h is like a normal h sound, but followed by a faint echo of the preceding vowel.

(xi) v may be somewhat similar to English v when at the start of a word, or between vowels, but like w when combined with another consonant.

(xii) Double consonants are always pronounced long; for example nn is as in ‘unnecessary’.

All other letters are pronounced as in English.

ō is used to denote a long o in Japanese (as in ‘note’, rather than ‘not’). For Tibetan words, this book gives a form which indicates the pronunciation, followed by the Wylie form of writing Tibetan in roman script, which includes unpronounced letters.