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Prospects of the Buddhist Humanism in the Modern World

Although the concept of humanism is of Western origin and only arose relatively recently, its broader and more meaningful implementation in the interpretation of Buddha's teachings today could be fruitful and constructive. Firstly, the fusion of the fundamental tenets of Buddhism with the present-day conception of humanism could become considerably better and more clearly comprehensible from the point of view of contemporary thought and rationality. Secondly, the conception of humanism itself could be broadened, adding to it important aspects and meanings that are largely unknown or undervalued in contemporary culture, but are of key importance in Buddhism. Herein I refer mainly to those connected with the Buddhist doctrine of emancipation or liberation.

Western secular humanism is connected with the emancipation of the individual due to the scientific, technical and social revolutions of modern times, based on the understanding that the measure of a man-made world and value system is man himself and the destination mankind can reach through evolution. In the base texts of Buddhism such an anthropocentric approach to making sense of man, human society and the universe was formulated more than 2000 years ago.

Let me give only few examples to prove this statement. We know that in order to become a Buddha, the Buddha necessarily had to be born into the world of men. Thus Buddhism emphasises the uniqueness and unavoidability of being human from the point of view of becoming a Buddha. Further, of all categories of living beings, only humans are capable of accepting and implementing Buddha's Law (*dharma*), the exceptional cultural phenomenon that makes it possible to free people (more exactly – all beings) from suffering and transport them to the Buddhahood. So, Buddhism values the human race as the highest circle of beings, because it is only through human existence that the Mind of Awakening (*bodhicitta*) can be developed. In Buddhism, a unique step-by-step path of personal spiritual development leading to this supreme condition and containing several intermediate levels and corresponding personality types has been developed and described in great detail in several texts. This path can be seen as a model for the spiritual evolution of man, humankind and in the supreme sense the whole universe, which is defined by the central concept of Buddhism – emancipation.

In Buddhism, three levels of humanism could be distinguished: individual, universal and transcendental. The first is the level of arhats, the second that of bodhisattvas, and the third of completely pure Buddha fields. In the modern humanism only the two first have undergone some development while the third aspect of humanism is largely unknown. Therefore, I argue that the deeper awareness of the emancipation teachings emphasised in Buddhism in the context of contemporary humanism could be of great benefit at our civilisation's present level of spiritual evolution, where the individual and the individual's rights are overemphasised, whereas the individual's responsibility towards humankind, the evolution of life on earth and of the universe as a whole has received insufficient attention. The integration of Buddhism and modern humanism and the body of scientific knowledge could give a new direction to the evolution of humankind.

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