

Right Action, Right Living, (and Right Consumption): Morality, Sex, and Drugs in Buddhism

Intro:

- 1) So, now we've moved on from the aspects of wisdom in Buddhism, and starting last week we've begun discussing morality in Buddhism. Adeesha kicked it off with Right Speech, and we all learned how to handle whether or not tell someone if they have a bad haircut or not.
- 2) If Wisdom is how we understand the world, Morality is how we express that Wisdom with our bodies and actions; so, often times I think the stages of morality are pretty important, because they are a little easier to understand. We might not necessarily understand the finer complexities of the universe, as Wisdom requires, but we can at least figure out how we should act.
- 3) And, for the most part, I think a lot of this stuff is pretty much common-sense: it's stuff we all know, really.
 - i) However, in Buddhism we have a unique attitude towards our morality, which we can discuss. REMEMBER: Although morality is important, what's almost more important is that we approach morality with the proper intention.
- 4) I also think there are some parts of Buddhist morality which are vague—we know not to kill, but what about abortion? What the heck is the 'sexual misconduct?' How'd the Buddha feel about drinking a few cold ones with your bodies?
- 5) Well, we'll talk about all of that too, and more importantly, we can discuss a lot of this stuff. The point where the idealism of Wisdom runs up against the real-world Right Action is a fascinating place, and one which we should all explore.

Morality:

- 1) Let's start by first defining the Morality stages of the Path
 - i) Morality comes down to Right Action and Right Livelihood—these two are put together because, essentially, they're entirely interconnected.

Right Action:

- 1) Right action comes down to three main parts, and for this, I'll quote the Buddha:

“What now is Right Action?

 - 1) There someone avoids the killing living beings, and abstains from it. Without stick or sword, conscientious, full of sympathy, he is anxious for the welfare of all living beings
 - 2) He avoids stealing, and abstains from it; what another person possesses of goods and chattels in the village or in the wood, that he does not take away with thievish intent.
 - 3) He avoids unlawful sexual intercourse, and abstains from it. He has no intercourse with such persons as are still under the protection of father, mother, brother, sister, or relatives, nor with married women, nor female convicts, nor with [engaged] girls.”
Anguttara-Nikaya, X. 176)

So, let's go a little further in depth with these things:

Killing

- 1) One of the things Buddhism is most known is its peacefulness: if you ask someone to describe Buddhism in one word, they're likely to say "Peaceful."
- 2) But ALL world religions teach that killing (at least in most situations) is wrong; why do we get such a good rep?
- 3) I think this is because we do not just have a commandment not to kill, but have a really good reason not to kill—we are to be *full of sympathy*, and not just towards humans, but *ALL* living beings. In fact, we're to be concerned with making sure that all things stay alive and healthy.
- 4) In the Tibetan tradition, there is the belief that, due to the many reincarnations of living beings, every living thing we encounter was once our mother. Although this may seem silly, the implication is just as true: even if that annoying fly wasn't actually my mother, doesn't it have the same right to live as my own mother?
- 5) To say something has been *killed*, the following has to be true:
 - i) The thing being 'killed' has to be alive
 - ii) We have to know it's alive
 - iii) We have to have the intention to kill it
 - iv) There must be an effort to kill it
 - v) The being is killed as a result.
- 5) So, this is pretty common sense, right? Don't kill things...
 - i) But, as we all know, this gets complicated sometimes.
 - i) What about hunting/fishing? Pest control? Abortion?
 - ii) The complication arises when one of these five requirements is iffy
 - If you catch-and-release fish, you may never intend to kill the fish, but might accidentally
 - I've heard stories of monasteries having to call exterminators for cockroaches and rats; however, they do not *want* to kill the pests, who could be harmful to themselves and others, and thus, this was deemed okay (albeit unfortunate)
- 6) Abortion is interesting, because the issue is not with the intention or anything else, but with parts 1 and 2—is it alive yet?
 - i) For the most part, a Buddhist's view on abortion seems to be more determined by their surrounding culture; however, these attitudes are often founded on another religious/political dimension
 - ii) HOWEVER, traditionally, most Buddhist schools teach that *life begins at fertilization*.
 - iii) BUT, if there is a gray-area in the realm of Intention, many Buddhist teachers (including H.H.) agree that an abortion may be permissible; like in an extreme medical or legal situation.

Stealing

- 1) Now, I think this one is pretty darn obvious—don't take what isn't yours, and don't take what is not given.
- 2) So, basically, if you find something, unless someone turns to you and says: "Oh, hey! You can have that!," don't take it.
- 3) Again, this kind of comes down to the intention of taking something. Have you ever come back to your room at the end of the day, and realized you have a pen you've never seen before? I think we all at least own one 'stolen' bank-pen.
 - i) However, have you ever left a cash register and realized they gave you a \$10 bill instead of a \$1 for change? The moment you make that realization—the moment you have something that you know you were not intended to have—you should go back and remedy the problem.

Sexual Misconduct

- 1) For the most part, it seems like Buddhism is vague on issues of sex: it just kind of comes down to "Don't commit sexual misconduct."
 - i) I think this is because, for the most part, these texts are directed to monks, and for monks, the answer to any question is pretty simple: Don't fool around. At all.
- 2) And where it is defined, like in the text I read, it's again pretty much common sense stuff we already have been taught (or it's pretty culturally specific to ancient India):
 - i) Don't have sex with minors; those who aren't in a state of mind to have sex at their own choice ("Those in care of family")
 - ii) Don't sleep with someone engaged or married (or dating, I can assume)
 - iii) Don't sleep with convicts (for all of you who are becoming wardens)
- 3) Now, that's A LOT of a gray area—there *has* to be more to Buddhism and sexuality than that, right?
- 4) Well, for the most part (and this may be a drastic over simplification), I think it comes down to this: Harm no one with your sexual relationships.
 - i) Very often, Buddhism does not speak to the physical and social mechanics of sex, because these are pretty different from country to country, from time to time.
 - ii) However, no matter our country or our time, we all know that if handled incorrectly, a sexual relationship can be just as destructive as it can be wonderful.
- 5) Now that homosexuality and gay marriage has entered into the forefront of our cultural knowledge, lots of people wonder what, exactly, the Buddhist view on homosexuality is.
 - i) For starters, I think for the most part you'll find that this is not something most Buddhists really care about. Although most schools of Buddhism historically are opposed to homosexuality (including the Tibetan school), for the most part this is questioned by modern Buddhist leaders. H.H. admits and maintains that Tibetan Buddhism is, historically, opposed to same-sex relationships, but finds that a healthy homosexual relationship is the same as a healthy heterosexual relationship.

- ii) Now, this is my own theory, but I think this unique view of sexuality is because Buddhism simply does not exist to answer these sorts of questions. In fact, at its core, we have to remember that Buddhism encourages us to deny temporary, earthly passions—and I think sex counts as one of these
- iii) So, the issue is not *who* we're having sex with, but *why* we're having the sex at all.

Right Consumption (Drug use)

- 1) Now, there is no idea of “Right Consumption” when it comes to right action in the Eightfold Path
- 2) However, Buddhism DOES have an opinion on drug use, which is mentioned in other places (namely, the 5 Precepts), and for the most part, it is pretty opposed to the consumption of inebriates of *any* sort.
- 3) The reason for this is not that drugs are inherently sinful or wicked, but that they're not beneficial, and can often be harmful.
 - i) The purpose of a drug, at its core level, is to chemically alter your state of consciousness; in Buddhism, we are trying to be mindful and in control of our consciousness! Buddhism is not about forgetting your problems, but facing them.
 - ii) Often times, these drugs have negative side-effects to our bodies; and, if you recall from talking about rebirth, this human form is precious and rare.
 - iii) Although taking a drug may in itself not be a bad thing, the altered state of mind that drug causes may lead you to do bad things not inherently related to the drug. (Story of the monk and the Evil Spirit). I think we've all seen this at a party once.
- 4) The other thing is that the attitude that is inherent in drug use is one we are not trying to foster as Buddhists. The purpose of recreational drugs, very often, is to change or escape the world around us, without us having to do anything ourselves. We want to change the chemicals in our brain to make the world how we want it.
 - i) BUT WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO FACE THE WORLD EVENTUALLY; sobriety is an inevitability
- 5) Now, I think for lay people, this can come down to the word “Moderation.” By no means do I want to sound hypocritical—I myself will have the occasional drink and some tobacco products. However, I think as lay people, we should always examine *why* we're using a drug: is it to get “loose and crazy,” or is it because we think a glass of wine would go well with our dinner?
 - i) But ultimately, the Buddha had a “just say no” policy.

Right Livelihood

- 1) Right livelihood means that we should have livings that do not, in any way, compromise any other part of our religious path; we should not benefit monetarily from committing misdeeds.
- 2) For the most part, this traditionally comes down to 1) Don't be in a profession that requires killing (butcher, soldier), 2) Don't sell or make weapons that will kill anything, 3) Do not sell

or make drugs that will inebriate others. Some texts even say that we should not be in jobs which harm the environment or earth.

i) Likewise, we should not join companies that do any of the above.

- 3) Essentially, Right Livelihood prevents both us *and others* from committing misdeeds, and holds us accountable for what we may give to the world. *We* may not kill anybody, but if we give someone the gun to do so, we are just as accountable; we may not do drugs, but if we get someone high, we are just as accountable.
- 4) And when we join with wholesome industries, we should work honorably. Don't lie to make sales; don't deceive your employer. Basically, make your money with honor.