

## Right Attitude to Life

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We are living beings, and the act of living makes us real beings. It is this continuous process of living that we call life. But why do we live? What is the meaning of doing so? To be more precise, what is the meaning of our life? Does it have a meaning. This same question is asked with reference to purpose – what is the purpose of life?

A popular answer given to this question is that there is a purpose in our life, but that purpose is not what is chosen or determined by us, but is given to us, and this popular view holds that the purpose of life has been given to us by a Creator God who bears our responsibility on behalf of us. This view amounts to saying that our life is externally controlled or determined and we even do not know what this purpose is.

Buddhism, however, gives a different answer, according to which, we are the results of our own actions, and the life we have got is something for which we hold responsibility. Here we are thinking about our own past life and its actions and the present life which is a result of those actions. If this is not very convincing because we do not know and see the past life, think about the present life, which is nothing other than a result of what we have done and not done from the point of our birth. Our life at the moment with a particular physical body, with a degree of health or absence of it, with a particular education, with a particular upbringing etc. etc. are all the results of what we have done or not done. Buddhism teaches us that it is this same process of action with a moral element, i.e. morally and ethically good or bad actions, that determines our next life.

The point in talking about our own actions as the leading factor that determines our life is that it provides a direct answer to the question - how should I live? In our social life, our actions influence the others who live with us, in physical proximity or even those separated by time and space thanks to advanced technologies of communication. This requires us to be watchful about our own actions to make sure that those will not be harmful or destructive to others, others to include fellow human beings, animals and environment.

In the Buddhist tradition, this ideal is articulated with reference to Siri Sanghabodhi, the legendary saintly ruler of ancient Sri Lanka who said, 'I maintain this body with flesh and blood only for the welfare of the world.' If this is a way too high a goal, Buddhism articulates a relatively moderate intention too, 'let there not be any inconvenience to others owing to me.' This Buddhist sentiment, ultimately, is rooted in compassionate world-view according to which one's own self-interest is not achieved at the expense of that of another.

Why do we have to have an ideal or purpose of life of this nature? Here Buddhist answer is that all living beings love their life, do not like pain, but desire happiness; since 'all living beings' include ourselves too, this maxim is applicable to ourselves equally. Whereas others should not harm me, If I do not like what others do to me, I too should not do that to others.

In Buddha's teaching, human life is more precious than many others forms of life mainly for the reason that the capacity for advanced moral judgment is found only in human beings. Human life, accordingly, is to be lived for one's own happiness as well as for the happiness of others. Our attitude to life, to our own life and that of others, and finally, to the life of all living beings and that of all living organisms, in this manner, has to be directed by our own moral judgment characterized by compassion for all.