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Peace of Mind for Peace of All

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In this 21st Century, we are facing great catastrophes all around us. We noticed the sudden calamity and disasters all over the world. These events effect humans physically and mentally. It is the purpose of this paper to present the effective way for people to deal with the situations that we are facing in this century. In discussing the importance of self-knowledge, and knowing reality of the self of great thinkers such as Socrates, Montaigne, in relation to the three characteristics of reality in Buddhism. Why does such knowledge enable humankind to attain peace from within in the mist of uncertainty and disaster and hopefully able to create peace among men?

Socrates, the leading thinker of the West, his wisdom is 'Know Thyself'. For Socrates self knowledge is the most important thing. As Plato, Socrates admirer wrote in one of his books *Gorgias*, "*The noblest of all studies is the study of what man is and what he should pursue.*" In other words, one should observe or examine oneself, as "an unexamined life is not worth living" said Socrates. What is the meaning of understanding the self? Plato used Socrates' dialectic or dialogue to bring out the innate ideas or knowledge within the self. Socratic methods in examining men's everyday opinions by means of a carefully elaborated system of question or, as Plato called dialectic. The method that Socrates used to stripping away of prejudice, the probing of superficial opinions, trying to reach to the inner self or knowledge that is innate. For the truth is in all of us, only it needs to be brought to birth. When Plato writes of Socrates as a midwife, he tells a story about the relationship between teacher and student, about education. The true

knowledge of man is innated, we only need to bring it out from within.

In *Apology* of Plato, Socrates was defending himself in court after being accused by the opposition that he corrupted the young minds of Athens and taught them not to believe in the city gods. That Socrates spent time with many young men and many other follow Socrates around Athens engaging in dialogues which Plato was among the people who listen carefully to him. Socrates stands firm upon his way of life, and explains why he lived the way he did. His task is to cultivate virtue which is an art in dialogues with people in Athens, he said he is like a gadfly, who tried to wake up people to see life in reality, able to realize the knowledge of the self in order to live well. Man should not search for fame and fortune or material gains only but to have the self-knowledge. At the end of *Apology*, Socrates said about the wisdom of life that all men should follow: "*....and if I say again that the greatest good of man is daily to converse about virtue, and all that concerning which you hear examining myself and others, and that the life which is unexamined is not worth living*"¹⁵

The above paragraph is one of the most important passages in all philosophy, as it shows the notion that philosophy deals with thinking and more self-examination. Socrates believed in virtue and self-knowledge, even he was condemned to death by the jury of Athens, but he welcome death. Some Existentialists thought that the dilemma of life and death, Socrates choose to die, Socrates knew very well that the way he defended himself in court, not the majority of juries will be on his side, but he said what he wanted to say. Nietzsche even talk about the concept of 'super-man' (the superman is the ideal of someone who has mastered the practice of overcoming himself), Socrates is the one example who is ready to die. Plato's *Crito*, shows Socrates is ready to die as he never regret of what he did and did not want to escape from prison that Crito suggested. And also in his own words at the end of *Apology*, "*Wherefore, O judges, be of good cheer about death, and know this of a truth – that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death.....The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways - I to die and you to live. Which is better God only knows.*"¹⁶

Socrates departed this world in peace, after drinking hemlock only his friends mourn over the death of the greatest thinker. Great minds are never afraid of dying. Socrates knows well what was his duty, he did it well and ready for anything. One who knows himself can always face anything in life and that he believes in his own goodness that 'no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death.'

Another great thinker of the West that was concerned about the knowledge of the self is Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). At the age of 38, Montaigne retired from public life that he used to serve as a courtier and diplomat. Then he devoted the remainder of his life to writing, he was among the very first to write in short form of *Essays*, which turn out to be great influential and

15 Plato, *Apology*, 41d

16 Ibid., 42a

impressing great minds such as Shakespeare, Pascal and Nietzsche.

Even though Montaigne started questioning things and being a skeptic, that he cannot know anything with absolute certainty. This in consequence led him to be open minded, that we should be tolerant of the differing opinions and customs of others, especially in matter of ethics and religion, we should base our judgment upon what seems to be born by experience, as it is our main guide for knowledge. **We should strive for self-knowledge, since it is only through self-examination that we can hope to understand our nature and needs, as so be happy and fulfilled.**

He wrote Four Rules to fulfill one's life. First, examine and carefully observe oneself in all directions. Second, understand and accept one self. Third, understand and accept others. Fourth, live accordingly to one's own nature. These Four Rules start from something simple to more complex. That it is hard enough to know about oneself or self-examined, or 'Know Thyself' of Socrates as the First Rule, and for the Second Rule is to understand and accept oneself is even harder. Many of man's problems come from not knowing who we are and not being able to accept of what we are. This leads to many problems and conflicts among men.

From the First Rule, through observing and questioning about ourselves lead us to know the purpose of life, why we are here? What do we plan to do with our life? Without knowing who we are, we cannot know the direction of our life and able to do things with confidence. But to know ourselves clear and real are very difficult and even more difficult to come to the Second Rule that is to accept ourselves. As we all have good and weak points, to know both sides and able to accept them is very hard. Painful experience can prevail. Once when one overcomes the painful stage and able to accept oneself, one can reach to a certain point of blissfulness, and able to go on to another stage, the Third Rule: to understand and accept others.

Montaigne is a man of wisdom, his writing showed great introspection within himself with sense of humor that he is able to understand human nature very well. He tried to bring us to realize how to understand others. That is one has to put oneself in one's own shoes first then able to know what it is like to put oneself in another people shoes. The Third Rule comes after the second, when one knows oneself and able to accept oneself, then one is able to accept others. This is very logical. And the Forth Rule, to live accordingly to one's own nature. When one learns well of one's nature, one can achieve whatever one wants to do in this life, then able to satisfy and do well in life. From knowing how who we are, we can live this life at best. Peace from within can easily be attained, from these Four Rules.

Mindful meditation in Buddhism has the same method of 'Know thyself.' But in mindful meditation the observation has to be continuous at all times. By observing ourselves (mind-body) in different actions in time and space such as walking, sitting, standing, lying down. For example, while sitting one has to observe the movement of one's tummy, the rising and falling of the stomach and observe the state of mind in each moment, depends on which is more noticeable. This is the

reflection of the self through the knowledge of the body and mind. Knowing the body means to notice different position of the body, knowing the mind means to notice the calmness, peaceful, distress, anxiety, hatred or anger that appear within the mind.

If one observes the body-mind at all times continuously one can realize the truth or three characteristics of reality: first, the changes of all things (*Anicca*), second, the suffering (*Dukkha*) and no-self (*Anatta*). Accordingly to Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, great master of Insight meditation from Burma taught how to go about observation in meditation:

"While eating, the meditator notes the taste and knows when the taste disappears. The taste which appears afresh and disappears is, therefore, impermanent. The impermanent nature of taste is very plain. However pleasant the taste is, it remains on the tongue only for a short while before it disappears. As with the taste, the material quality of the tongue on which the taste manifests disappears simultaneously. Thus when the taste is seen to be impermanent, the material quality of the tongue is seen also to be impermanent."¹⁷

This kind of realization of the impermanence of taste comes from mindful meditation. The realization of the four elements (water, air, solid, and fire or energy) of the body's composition can also be realized. These realizations come from knowing the change from within, such as realizing the movement of the bloods that flow like water, or the moment of air flow lightly up and down within the body, or the solid elements such as bones appear so clearly or the warm movement of the flow of energy within the body. All these characteristics of movements came so clearly through a certain stage of mindful meditation, which enable the meditator to realize **the impermanence** of the body-mind that is happening at all times, at every second of our breath.

For suffering (*Dukkha*): this concept of life had been realized by the young prince Sitthata (name of the Buddha at young age). Before the prince escaped from the palace, he never experienced any suffering, no form of sickness, or death present before him. After he experience the outside world which is full of pain, sickness, old age and death, these truth of life struck him hard, to the point he tried to find way to end suffering. Suffering may be interpreted as pessimistic view of life, but it can also turn to be a very optimistic way to look at life from understanding it and able to overcome it from within.

According to Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, in the Commentary definition of suffering, "it is suffering because it is fearsome."¹⁸ That all things are ever arising and perishing, and so it is fearsome. Most people imagine things to be enduring and stable. When they realize that things do not endure even for a second and are constantly dissolving, they can no longer see any goodness in them.

Then if they discover the facts of life: 'suffering' and learn to overcome this fearful life through meditation. Through mindful meditation one can realize things as they are, and able to accept life as it is. When one

17 Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, *The Great Discourse on Not Self-examination*, p.97.

18 Ibid., p.99.

understands the suffering of life, one can overcome the suffering itself. One can see things clearly, not under any illusion, one is beyond any kind of suffering, able to see things from the bird's eyes view, and able to see the whole picture of life through.

The third concept of reality, the concept of no-self: that the self is in the process of change both mind-body. This concept is very difficult to understand as we always attach or identify ourselves with our body, our name, our positions and all of our belongings. These are our perceptions of the self. The Buddha said "All perceptions, whether past, future or present, internal or external, gross or fine, inferior or superior, far or near should be seen with one's own knowledge, as they truly are, thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this not myself.'¹⁹

Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw explained in his writing about the nature of perception during mindful meditation that the perception which recognized sense objects a moment ago did not reach the present moment; they disappeared even while recognizing that they are impermanent, suffering, and not-self. Nor that the perceptions which are recognizing and remembering things now also perish which actually recognizing; or the perceptions which will recognize things in the future will also vanish at the time of recognizing and they are therefore impermanent, suffering and not-self.²⁰

This idea of no-self is like one of the British Empiricists, David Hume. He wrote, "*When I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never catch myself at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception.*"²¹

There is nothing to the mind but these perceptions. Hume continues, do we have any idea of a self, that the self or person is not any one impression, but our several impressions and ideas. The self then is just a bundle of perception, like role of film, that one cannot pin point which part of the film is the self, but only perceive one perception after another. Then there is no such thing as self identity. Our idea of a persistent self is simply a result of the human habit of attributing continued existence to any collection of associate parts like the idea of the necessary connection of cause and effect.²²

Why is the understanding of the three characteristics of reality important to attain peace of mind? If one can realize the impermanent of all things, one will not attach to one's belongings, or person. This can help one's attitude towards seeing the world by realizing that material things can always change at all times. Imagine most of us who leave the house in the morning, will always expect to return at the end of the day. But anything can happen like what happened in Fukushima or Christchurch in 2011. But if one has in mind, nothing stays the same, not only the material world outside change but the inner self are also changing every second. Every time we breath in and out, our heart, our thoughts are changing all the time as well. All is in the

process of change. If we keep this in mind or being aware of all the changes at all times, we are ready for any changes. Besides, one can eliminate one's greed, not to cling to material world, as things are always changing.

Besides the awareness of material changes, one can be aware of the changes that can happen to our love ones as well. Being aware of all these changes, led one simply accept whatever will happen, without much distress. Then peace can be easily attained.

Conclusions

We can see that self-knowledge is the key to live this life in reality. Know thyself of Socrates, or the Four Rules of Montaigne, and mindful meditation that lead to know the three characteristics of all things. All are interconnected. In mindful meditation one observes oneself every second, and finally gains the knowledge of reality, that is impermanence, suffering and no-self. These are keys to bring us to have a new attitude towards the world. Able to see things in reality, in seeing this way one can overcome the hard suffering facts of life, the lost of love ones, the property and all belongings enable to live this life fully, in being aware of the reality itself. Peace of mind can easily attain by the knowledge of this self and reality of all things.

As Venerable Matthieu Ricard (a Buddhist monk who had a promising career in cellular genetics before leaving France to study Buddhism in the Himalayas thirty-five years ago) expressed in his writing the following, "*Meditation makes it possible to see the events of your life within a larger perspective. It allows you to experience them with greater serenity without falling into indifference, to accept whatever happen without a sense of resignation and to envisage a future on the basis of altruism and confidence. Thus little by little, through training the mind, you can change your habitual way of being. You can develop a more accurate understanding of reality and finer understanding of the laws of cause and effect, so you will be less shaken by the drastic reversals that inevitably occur in people's lives and less carried away by superficial successes. There are the signs of a genuine personal transformation, a transformation that will enable you to act more effectively in the world you live in and contribute to building a wiser and more altruistic society.*"²³

We can see that through self-knowledge and meditation one can attain peace of mind and enable us to extend loving and kindness to peace of all as well.

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19Ibid., p.136.

20Ibid., p.137.

21 Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, p.132.

22 Ibid., p.143.

²³ Ricard, Venerable Matthieu. *The Art of Meditation*, p.180-1.

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A Journey towards Peace: An Example of Cambodia Youth Peace Ambassador Club

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I recently graduated from my Bachelor degree in Education. Although I am a Cambodian UNESCO Youth Peace Ambassador, I am merely an ordinary youth who is striving her best to contribute to peace. This is how the journey begins.

Let me start by sharing my experience in Hiroshima, the place where I trained to be a UNESCO Youth Peace Ambassador trainee. I had never been involved in any extra curriculum activities beside those mentioned in the school nor had I been traveling abroad. I was at my late nineteen when I first traveled overseas. I thought it was normal despite the fact that many Cambodian youths especially women are not allowed to travel without their parents'. The first place I flew to was Hiroshima, Japan. I remember precisely that it was on 8 October 2010. The purpose of visiting was to attend the first International UNESCO Youth Peace Ambassador Training Workshop. The reason of my excitement certainly was being able to be on the plane regardless of other purposes.

Upon my arrival in Hiroshima, I realized that I was wrong. There were two main lessons I learned. First of all, youth from around the world traveled to pursue extra-curricular activities. The purpose is to extend networks and to learn from real practices. Some were around 14 or 15 years of age. However, they possess fluent skills in presentation, creativities and the like. More than this, the bitter history of Hiroshima described by the atomic survivors led me to a deep thought of how ignorant I had been towards my beloved country and myself. Here comes the second lesson. I was asked to create an action plan applied to my country, Cambodia. I came up with an action plan entitled "Love Life, Love Peace". It was basically an action plan which was to draw people's attention towards minorities and the vulnerable especially those who are carrying incurable diseases. This was the first action plan I have ever developed in my life that I gave so much hope to activate. Nevertheless, since there were five Cambodian participants, I was asked to join the group and combine it into one action plan. At the end, we had "Youth Peace Project" (YPP), a long-term project on peace promotion, as our representative action plan.

After return, I continued my simple life – going to university. However, I always wished to have my action plan implemented but I realized that Love Life, Love Peace or YPP is too broad for me alone to initiate. Therefore, I called upon other Cambodian Youth Peace Ambassadors to discuss for the possible changes. My best friend, Rongsong Sodalín, another one of the peace ambassador trainees, and I, met and tried to figure out another practical action plan. The new action plan was

born which we named it as "Educational Peace Fair and Gala For Lives". Nonetheless, we encountered funding problems since there seemed no organization was interested to support us financially although we sent out the proposal. My assumption was "we are too new to the field." Coincidentally, we were contacted to organize a peace-sharing workshop two months before our action plan. The key person was Dr. Darryl Macer, the UNESCO Regional adviser in social and human science for the Asia and the Pacific. This gave hope to my group members and I. Again, Dalin and I drafted out the agenda and the details in the workshop. I gave a name to this introductory workshop as "Peace No Longer a Dream: New Paths to Walk On."

As two little girls, we were anxious of how to make this happen, with no conference-organizing experience and funds. We decided to contribute our own allowance and ask for charity contribution in addition to fund proposal. Certainly, the result met our hopes. There was one organization which was willing to sponsor us, the International Republican Institution (IRI). The reason was one of our members, Mr. Samith Vattanak Oudom, is an employee there. With our self-funded capital, contributions from Dr. Macer and those of IRI, we finally had this first workshop came into place.

It was held at Cambodia-Japan Cooperation Center on 29 January 2011. There were 110 participants from various high schools, universities, NGOs attended. From this, I learned that "Nothing is impossible". Therefore, I told Dalin that we had to organize the follow-up, which means our initial action plan "Educational Peace Fair and Gala For Lives" had to be on-screen. I thank Dalin and the group members who always gave me a YES answer whenever I proposed a plan. We started drafting the details again. Due to the time constraints and budget limitations, we reduced the activity to only "Peace Art Competition" followed by an "Educational Peace Fair" and a morning "Peace-sharing Workshop". With all the assistance from our advisors and patrons, we succeeded in implementing our action plan. From so doing, I would like to sustain the activities related to peace by our members. After all the consideration and discussion with all the group members, we decided to create a Cambodia UNESCO Youth Peace Ambassador club which welcomes all the Cambodian UNESCO Youth Peace Ambassador (CamYPA) trainees to join. This club serves as a platform to discuss, share and assist each other of how to implement the entire action plans, as I understand the challenges.

CamYPA faced a lot of challenges before it arrives at the present state. We now have 27 members in total. Most of us are tied up with study while some are busy with their jobs. After several meetings, I learned that it is a difficult to have every member joined the meetings. As all the activities under CamYPA are voluntary, I could only draft the necessary documents for the club with frequently-joining members. Our energetic members including Rongsong Sodalín, In Lina, Taing Kimchhe, Tin Kolmen, Nop Ponalén, Chan Sokunthea, Tan Samphoursasmey and Sun Chhorvy have been working very hard to design the club's logo, structure, objectives, mission and vision. We together worked cooperatively and after a few weeks, we had the initial draft done. The