

Dhamma Center: BUDDHISM & SUSTAINABILITY Series:

01 Buddhist Living and Consumer Culture

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19 June 2021

- What is consumer culture? The world context.
- What is Buddhism For?
- What is Sustainability? What did the Buddha say specially about Sustainability?
- The global purpose of his Teaching
- Where does Sustainable Consumption start in Buddhism?
- The Buddha's response to corrupt living
- Governance and its impact on people
- Human trafficking, safeguarding of women and girls
- Mindful eating
- Recycling among the Sangha
- Healing with Nature
- What Buddhism Offers: paradigm shifts — drawing conclusions from what the Buddha said and did and their relevance for our daily lives and the world today.

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Early Buddhist Texts (EBTs)

The Pali Canon



Sutta (Pali) (Skt. sutra) is generally regarded as a discourse or by the Buddha or his contemporary disciples. But Sutta also means to sew or thread together.

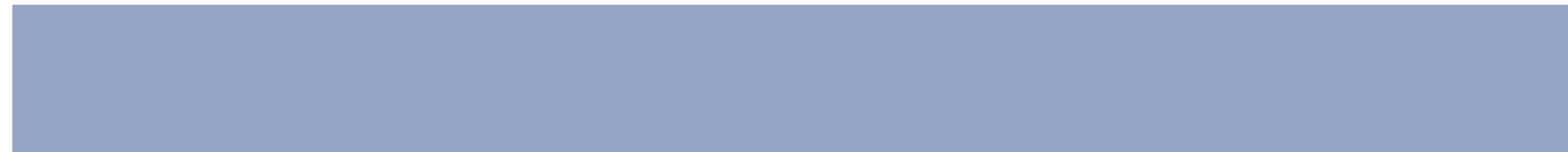
This is similar also to the English word "suture", which comes from the Latin "suture". Suture in the medicine means a process to hold body tissues together after an injury or surgical procedure. Professor Richard Gombrich, President of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies, in his book Buddhism and Pali, says: "The number of sermons preserved in the Pali Canon is very large: Theravada Buddhists count them as 17,505." Reference: Sumangala Vilasini pages 22 to 23. The Pali Cannon is also called Early Buddhist Text.

In my presentations, my purpose is to thread together discourses of what the Buddha said and did on sustainability. The Pali Suttas are rich in dealing with critical issues, which are very relevant for our time.

The Buddhist SUSTAINABLE Mindset:
Bahujana-hitaya (Welfare of Many People),
Bahujana-Sukaya, (Happiness of many people),
Lokanukampayo, (Compassion for the World)

Itivuttaka: The Buddha's Sayings The Section of the Threes 84.
For the Welfare of Many

What is Consumer Culture?



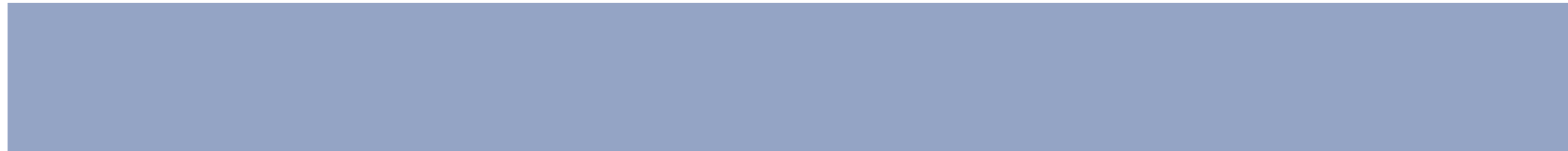
A culture may be understood as a pattern of beliefs, values, meanings and customs shared by a group of people. Consumer culture suggests that consumption - the act of buying goods or services - is a cultural activity, imbued with meaning and driven not just by practical or economic factors.

Our economic life depends on market forces — how successful a nation is buying and selling goods. The market economy has lifted many out of poverty. But unbridled market forces in the pursuit of wealth — damage our lives and the environment.

Vance Packard, in 1957, wrote: *The Hidden Persuaders*, which sums up consumer culture.

David Ramsay in *Total Money Makeover*: ““We buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like.” In my view, it is the way in which advertising plays on our greed, desire, ignorance and delusion for short-term happiness and long-term profit.

The World Context



**RICH
NATIONS ARE
VACCINATING
ONE PERSON
EVERY SECOND**



**WHILE THE
MAJORITY OF
THE POOREST
NATIONS ARE
YET TO GIVE A
SINGLE DOSE.**



The “new normal”?: As we return to “new normal”, the hope is that “**revenge shopping**” sweeping through sectors as pent-up demand is unleashed will restore economic growth.

That has been the experience of all previous economic downturns. Buying our way back to restoring economic growth is the main focus of economic leaders at present.

NO 'RETURN TO NORMAL'



Our best chance of all staying safe is to ensure a COVID-19 vaccine is available for all as a global common good. This will only be possible with a transformation in how vaccines are produced and distributed — pharmaceutical corporations must allow the COVID-19 vaccines to be produced as widely as possible by sharing their knowledge free from patents.

GAP BETWEEN RICH THE POOR



The United Bank of Switzerland 2020 report, "RIDING THE STORM", says: total wealth of the billionaires at end of July 2020 was US \$ 10.2 trillion.

US \$ 10,200,000,000,000

Total number of billionaires : 2,158 in 2017, NOW 2,189.

A World Bank 2020 "nowcast", incorporating COVID-19 impacts, predicts those in EXTREME POVERTY to rise to between 703 and 729 million.

OUR ECONOMY IS RIGGED

OBESITY: According to the World Health Organisation (2016), there are around **2 billion adults** overweight, of those **650 million** are considered to be affected by obesity. That equates to 39% (39% of men and 40% of women) of adults aged 18 or over who were overweight, with 13% obese. The worldwide prevalence of obesity nearly tripled between 1975 and 2016.

FASHION: The \$2.5 trillion fashion industry is one of the biggest polluters and the second-biggest consumer of water.

The major issue is that most of the fabrics in cheap garments are synthetics and polyesters, which are derived from oil and petroleum production.

Synthetic particles don't biodegrade. So when clothes are dumped into a landfill, toxic synthetic fibres pollute water sources.



WASTE: World Bank estimates that the world generates 2.01 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste annually.

WRAP UK estimated annual food waste arisings within UK households, hospitality & food service, food manufacture, retail and wholesale sectors in 2018 at around 9.5 million tonnes. This had a value of over £19 billion a year,

Only 700,000 tonnes of food surplus from manufacturing, retail and hospitality and food service is either being redistributed via charitable and commercial routes, such as Foodbanks.

PLASTIC: Plastic items from takeaway food and drink dominate the litter in the world's oceans, according to the most comprehensive study to date. Single-use bags, plastic bottles, food containers and food wrappers are the four most widespread items polluting the seas, making up almost half of the human-made waste, the researchers found.

Journal: Nature Sustainability



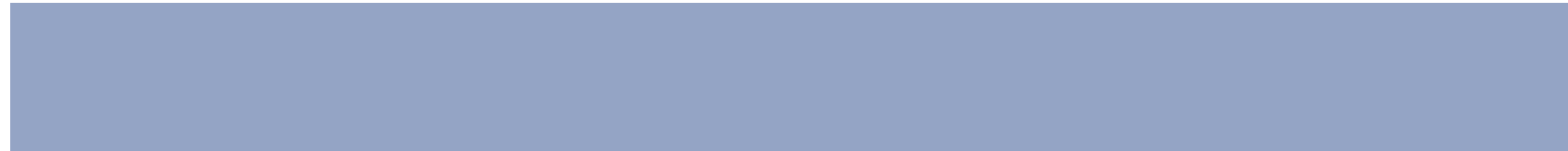
Mental Health problems in the UK

1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind each year in England.

1 in 6 people report experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety and depression) in any given week in England.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, calls to mental health helplines and prescriptions for antidepressants have reached an all-time high, while access to potentially life-saving talking therapies has plunged during the coronavirus pandemic, a Guardian investigation has found.

What is Sustainability?



**Chair: Gro Harlem
Brundtland,
former Prime Minister of
Norway**



OUR COMMON FUTURE

THE WORLD COMMISSION
ON ENVIRONMENT
AND DEVELOPMENT



“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” -- World Commission on Environment and Development.

Sustainability is not just about conservation: the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, which ALL member states have signed up to:



The Buddha on Sustainability

Numbered Discourses 3 Aṅguttara Nikāya 3 7. The Great Chapter
7. Mahāvagga 66. With Sāḷha and His Friend 66. Sāḷhasutta

“dīgharattam hitāya sukhāyā”
lasting welfare and happiness



**“What the Buddha
taught?”**

What do we mean by being a
Shramana, a renunciant?

04

Bodhisattva or not a
Boddhisattva? Eco-Dharma?

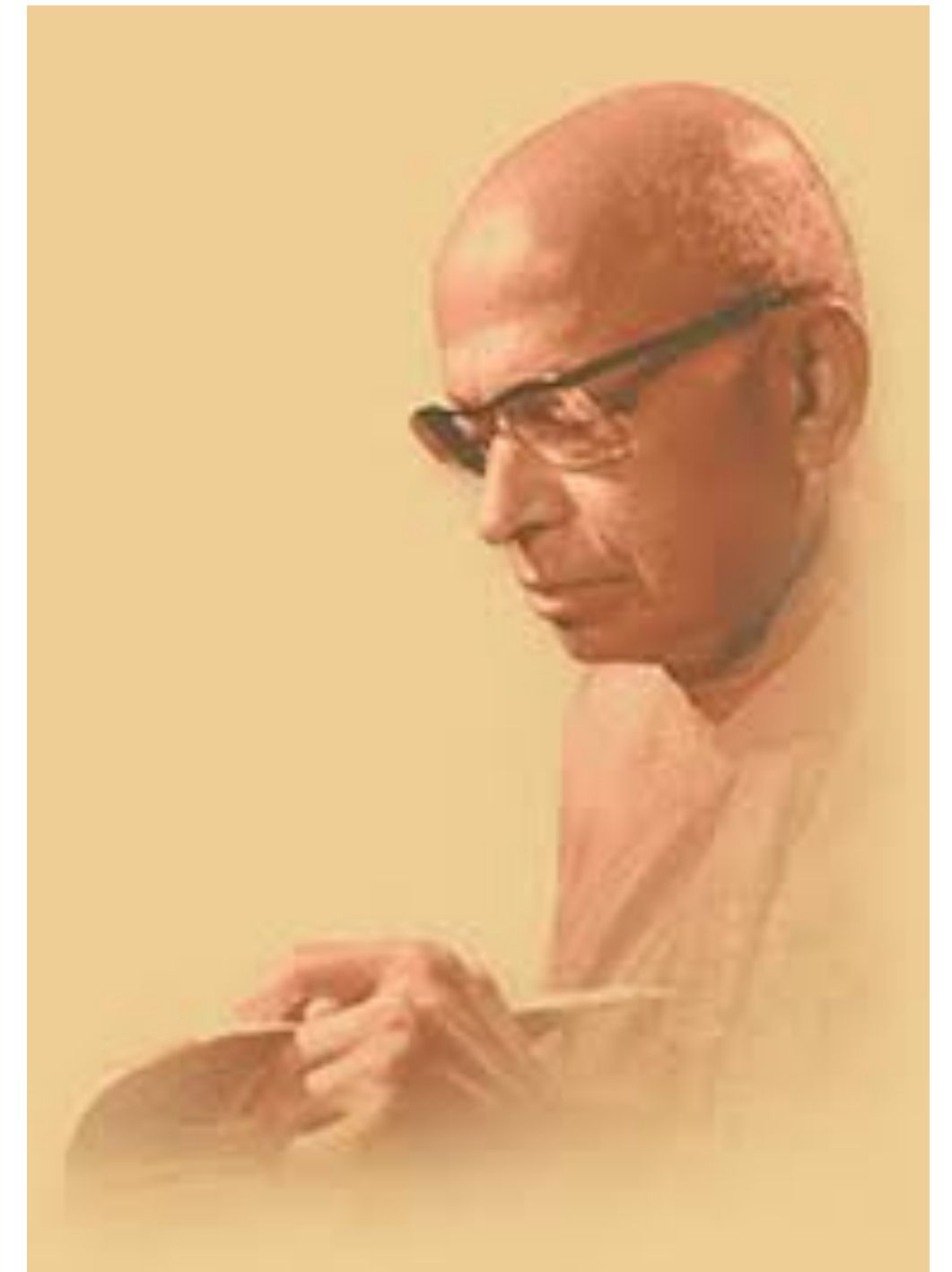
Engaged or disengaged?

Radical or not radical?

Much has been written about being a Bodhisattva and whether the Buddha talked about the process. We all have the capacity to be enlightened. What is more important is to look at the evidence and examine actually what the Buddha said and did to live in a sustainable world.

“What the Buddha Taught”: 1959

“There are some who believe that Buddhism is so lofty and sublime a system that it cannot be practised by ordinary men and women in this workaday world of ours, and that one has to retire from it to a monastery, or to some quiet place, if one desires to be a true Buddhist. The vast majority of people in the world cannot turn monk, or retire into caves or forests. However noble and pure Buddhism may be, it would be useless to the masses of mankind if they could not follow it in their daily life in the world of today.” (Ch 5)

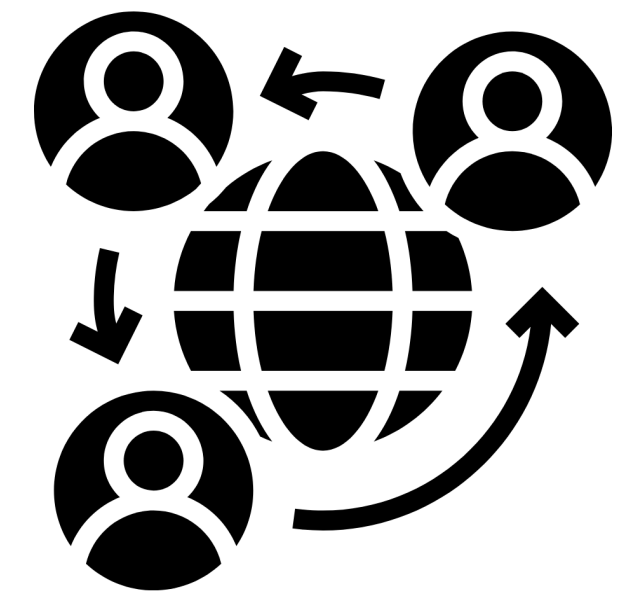


Walpola Rahula Thero was a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk, scholar and writer. In 1964, he became the Professor of History and Religions at Northwestern University, the first monk to hold a professorial chair in the Western world

The Teachings (Dhamma) of the Buddha are: Radical, Eco, Engaged, Inclusive, Open, Transparent, Democratic, Effective and Sustainable.

Buddhism can change the price of bread for an individual

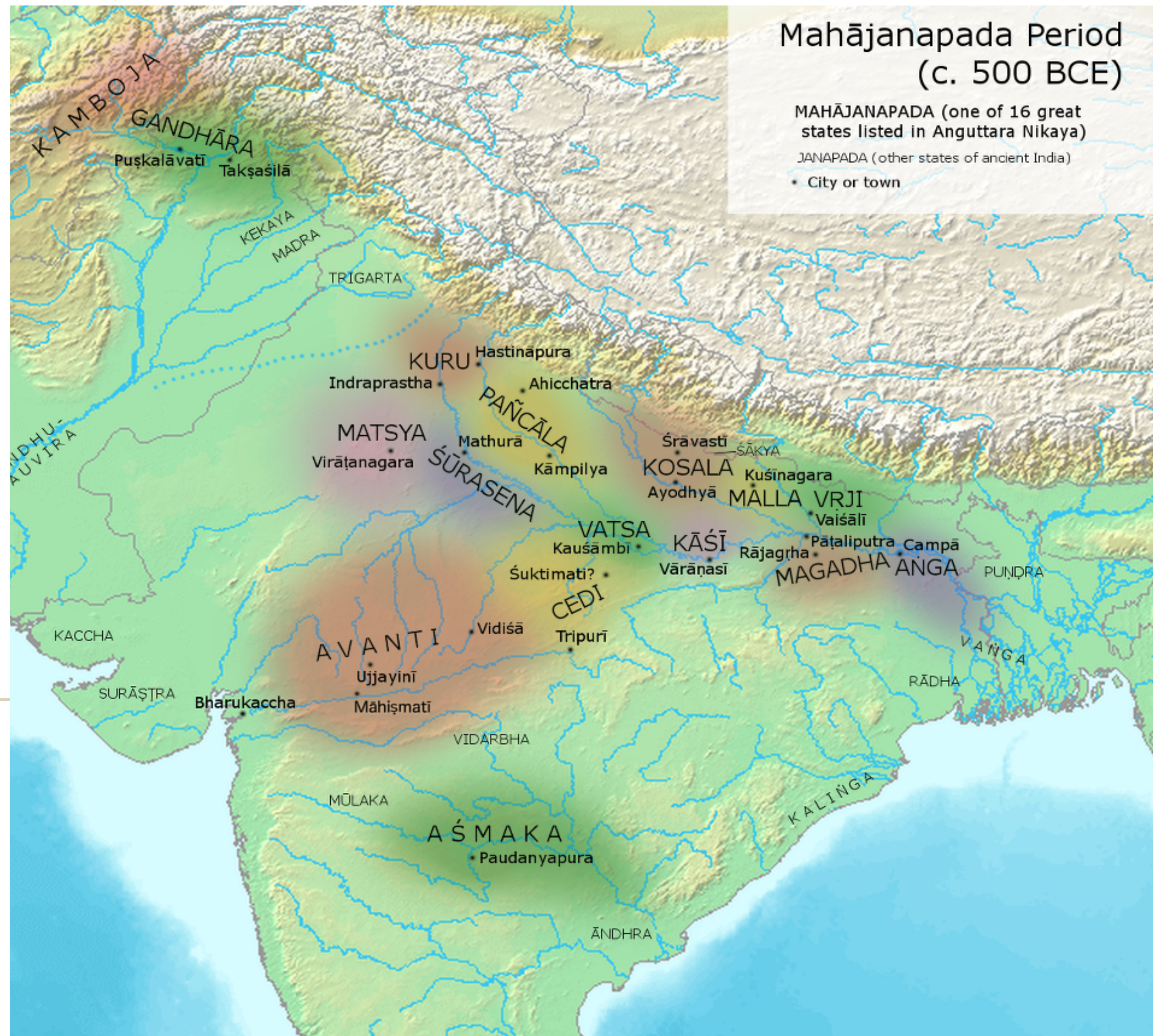
**Can human
attitudes change?**



Royalty

- **Siddhartha Gautama was born into privilege. He was a son of ruler of the Sakyan janapada. The Shakya were a clan of Vedic India in the Indian subcontinent (present-day nations of India and Nepal).**
- **The Shakyas formed an independent oligarchic republican state known as Śākya Ganarajya. Its capital was Kapilavastu, many mentions in the EBTs. The Buddha was the son of Suddhodhana the elected leader of the Śākyan people.**
- **The Shakya republic was ruled by an elite council of the warrior and ministerial class that chose its leader.**

The Sakyan Kingdom, northeast of Kosala







Gandhakuti in Jetavana Monastery, Sravasti, Uttar Pradesh, India. Remains of the hut where Buddha used to live.

Ananda: “Bliss”

- **Most of the Buddha’s inner group were from royal families, who relinquished their princely privileges and duties to be truly homeless, daily begging for food, dependent on the giving (dana) of the communities.**
- **The recorder of the Early Buddhist Texts was Ananda, first cousin of the Buddha and stood out among having the best memory among the disciples.**



Part of limestone sculpture,
northern Xiangtangshan Caves,
550–77 CE

Extreme Austerity: Middle Discourses 12:

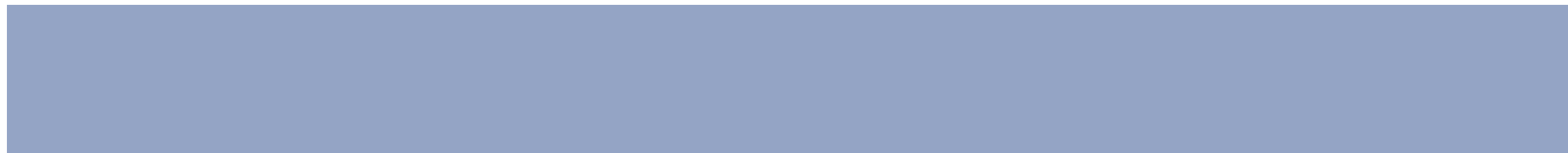
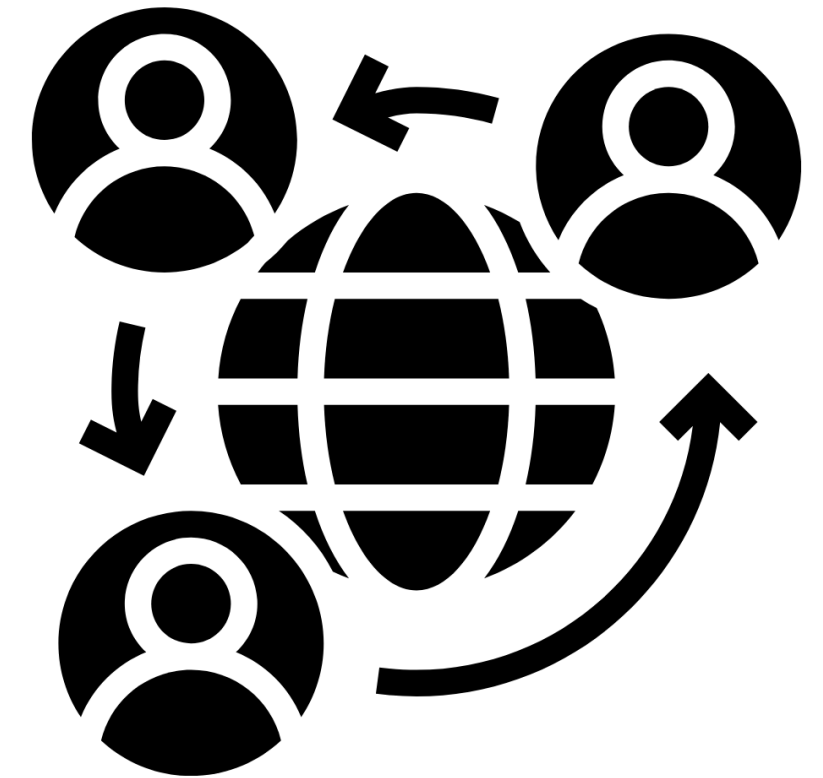
The Buddha undertook many fasts, penances and austerities. In this discourse, the Buddha shares his experience: “Such was my asceticism, Sāriputta, that I went naked, rejecting conventions, licking my hands, not coming when asked, not stopping when asked; I did not accept food brought or food specially made or an invitation to a meal; I received nothing from a pot, from a bowl, across a threshold...

I took food once a day, once every two days... once every seven days; thus even up to once every fortnight, I dwelt pursuing the practice of taking food at stated intervals. ...lived on forest roots and fruits; I fed on fallen fruits....Such was my asceticism....



Is sustainable consumption something new to Buddhists?

Where do you first encounter sustainable consumption in Buddhism?



The Five Precepts **pañca-sila**

1. Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the precept to refrain from destroying living creatures.

2. Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the precept to refrain from taking that which is not given.

3. Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct.

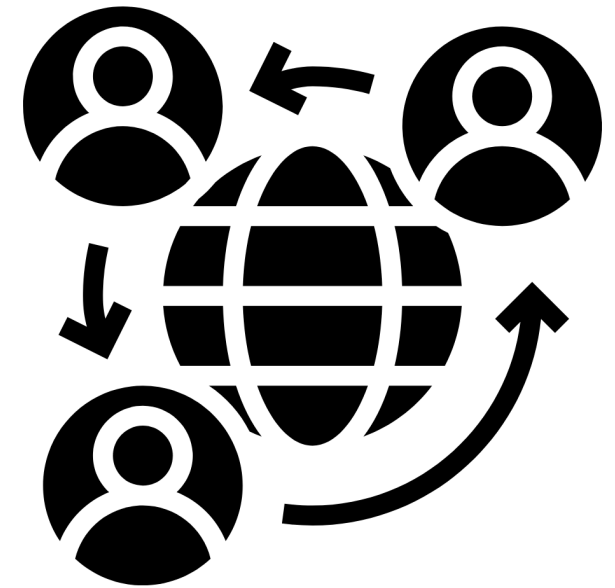
4. Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the precept to refrain from incorrect speech.

5. Suramerayamajja pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami

I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.

Corrupt Lifestyles



Linked Discourses 64. Surāmerayasutta

“... the sentient beings who refrains from alcoholic drinks that cause negligence, are few, while those who don't refrain are many. ...”

... “Evameva kho, bhikkhave, appakā te sattā ye surāmerayamajjappamādaṭṭhānā paṭiviratā; atha kho eteva bahutarā sattā ye surāmerayamajjappamādaṭṭhānā apaṭiviratā ...pe....”

- ### Aṅguttara Nikāya Book of the Fours 4.50. Obscurations

“Clouds are an obscuration of the sun and moon, obscured by which the sun and moon don't glow, don't shine, don't dazzle.”.....

“There are some contemplatives and brahmans who drink alcohol and fermented liquor, who don't refrain from drinking alcohol and fermented liquor. This is the first obscuration of contemplatives and brahmans, obscured by which some contemplatives and brahmans don't glow, don't shine, don't dazzle.”

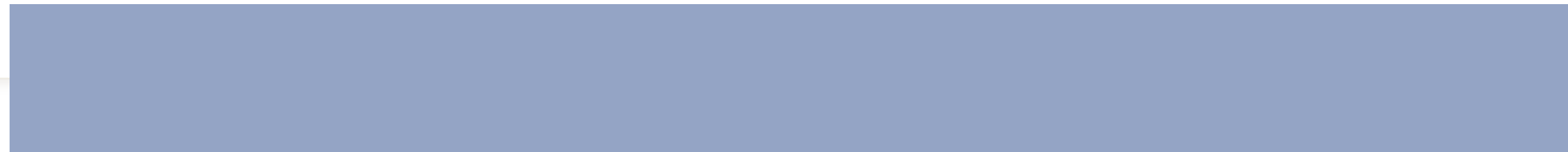
Corrupt luxurious life

The Buddha was once challenged by King Ajatasattu of Magadha -- to demonstrate whether a contemplative life plays any productive role in society. (Samannapala Sutta, Discourse: The Fruits of the Contemplative Life). Reference follows:

In his response, The Buddha was critical of the profligate living:

"Whereas some brahmins and contemplatives, living off food given in faith, are addicted to high and luxurious furnishings such as these – over-sized couches, couches adorned with carved animals, long-haired coverlets.....white woollen coverlets.....fringe, silk coverlets embroidered with gems; large woollen carpets; elephant, horse, and chariot rugs, antelope-hide rugs, deer-hide rugs.....couches with red cushions for the head and feet – he abstains from using high and luxurious furnishings such as these. This, too, is part of his virtue."

Expulsion



“Willful Blindness ”

Willful blindness is a serious matter facing many faith communities. Throughout the world, many devotees pay a heavy price for not taking action about critical issues facing their communities.

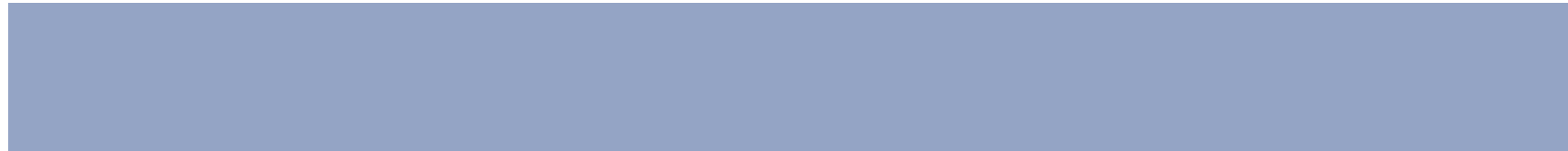
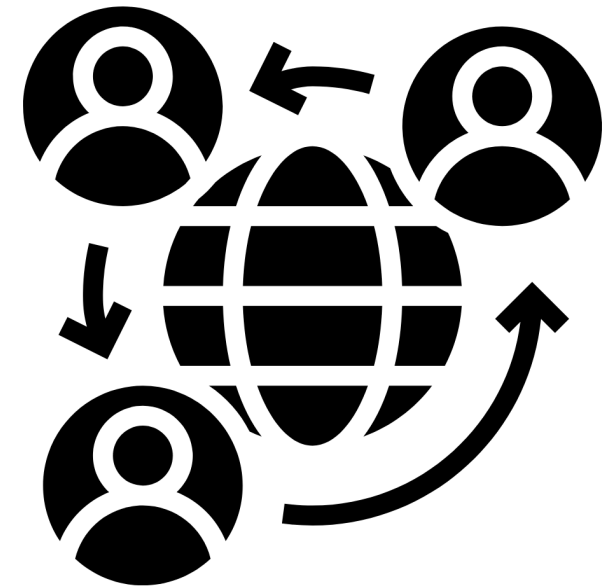
Although the term was originally—and still is—used in legal contexts, the phrase "willful ignorance" has come to mean any situation in which people intentionally turn their attention away from an ethical problem that is believed to be important.

“Decisive Action”

“On one occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Campā on a bank of the Gaggārā Lotus Pond. Now on that occasion monks were reproving a monk for an offense. When being reproved, that monk answered evasively, diverted the discussion to an irrelevant subject, and displayed anger, hatred, and resentment. Then the Blessed One addressed the monks: **“Monks, eject this person! Monks, eject this person! This person should be banished. Why should another’s son vex you?”**”

“Here, monks, so long as the monks do not see his offense, a certain person has the same deportment as the good monks. When, however, they see his offense, they know him as a corruption among ascetics, just chaff and trash among ascetics. Then they expel him. For what reason? So that he doesn’t corrupt the good monks.”

Governance

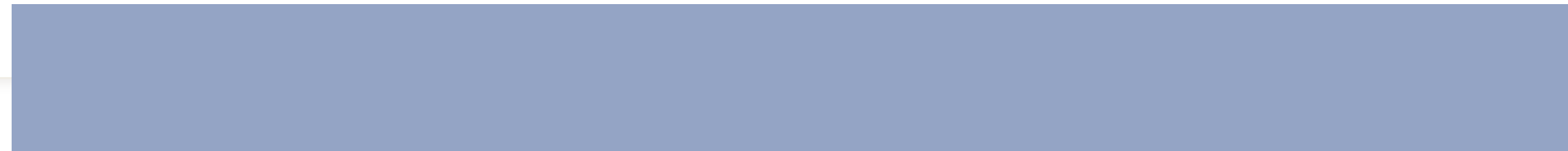


“At a time when kings are unprincipled, royal officials become unprincipled. When royal officials are unprincipled, brahmins and householders become unprincipled. When brahmins and householders are unprincipled, the people of town and country become unprincipled. When the people of town and country are unprincipled, the courses of the moon and sun become erratic. ... the courses of the stars and constellations ... the days and nights ... the months and fortnights ... the seasons and years become erratic. ... the blowing of the winds becomes erratic and chaotic. ... the deities are angered. ... the heavens don’t provide enough rain. ... the crops ripen erratically. When people eat crops that have ripened erratically, they become short-lived, ugly, weak, and sickly.”

Adharmika Sutta, Numbered
Discourses 4.70: Unprincipled

“At a time when kings are principled, royal officials become principled. ... brahmins and householders ... people of town and country become principled. When the people of town and country are principled, the courses of the sun and moon become regular. ... the stars and constellations ... the days and nights ... the months and fortnights ... the seasons and years become regular. ... the blowing of the winds becomes regular and orderly. ... the deities are not angered ... the heavens provide plenty of rain. When the heavens provide plenty of rain, the crops ripen well. When people eat crops that have ripened well, they become long-lived, beautiful, strong, and healthy.”

“Mindful” Eating



Donapaka Sutta: King Pasenadi goes on a diet SN 3.13

Once when the Buddha was living at Savatthi, King Pasenadi of Kosala overate, and then visited the Buddha, engorged and panting. Observing the King's state with compassion, the Buddha said:

When a person is constantly mindful,

“Manujassa sadā satīmato,

And knows when enough food has been taken,

Mattaṃ jānato laddhabhojane;

All their afflictions become more slender –

tanukassa bhavanti vedanā,

They age more gradually, protecting their lives

Sanikaṃ jīrati āyupālayanti.”

Indeed, King Pasenadi of Kosala heeded the advice and gradually settled down to moderate eating. Later, when his body had become quite slim, King Pasenadi said:

Indeed the Buddha has shown me, compassion in two different ways

“Ubhayena vata maṃ so bhagavā atthena anukampi

For my welfare right here and now, and also for in the future

diṭṭhadhammikenā ceva atthena samparāyikenā cā”ti

Human Trafficking & Safeguarding



Stop raping and abducting Women and Girls

Numbered Discourses 7:21 To the representatives from the Vajji state on the seven principles of social harmony:

“As long as the Vajjis do not rape or abduct women and girls from their families and force them to live with them, only growth is to be expected for them, not decline.”

In the Middle Discourses: 27: The Shorter Elephant’s Footprint Simile to Jāṇussoṇi, a powerful brahmin:

“They avoid receiving....Women and Girls

itthikumārikapaṭiggahaṇā paṭivirato hoti

..... male and female bondservants,

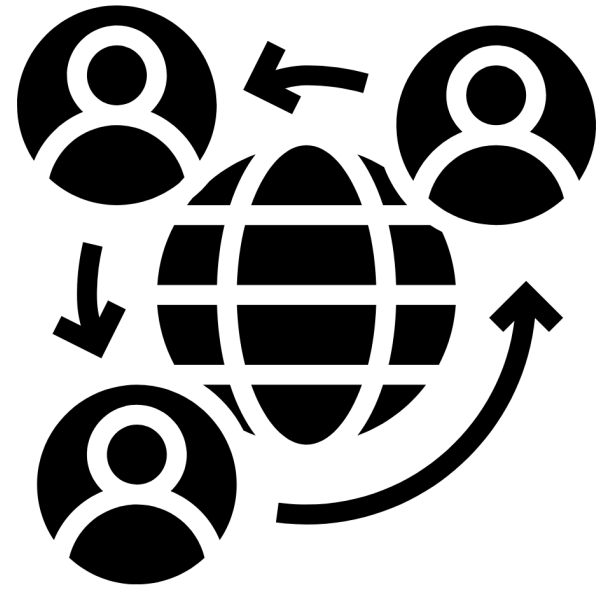
dāsidāsapaṭiggahaṇā paṭivirato hoti”



SN 56 Women and Girls: Kumarikasutta

“... the sentient beings who refrain from receiving women and girls are few, while others, who don't refrain are many. ..”

“Evameva kho, bhikkhave, appakā te sattā ye itthikum ārikapaṭiggahaṇā paṭiviratā; atha khoeteva bahutarā sa ttā ye itthikumārikapaṭiggahaṇā appaṭiviratā ... pe



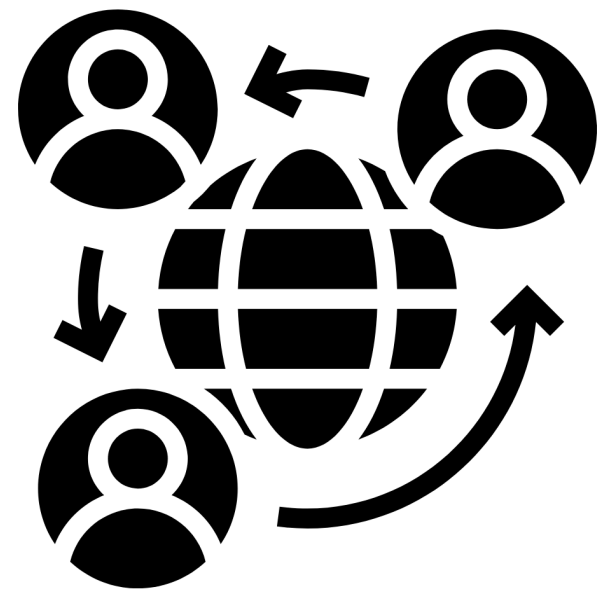
Recycling



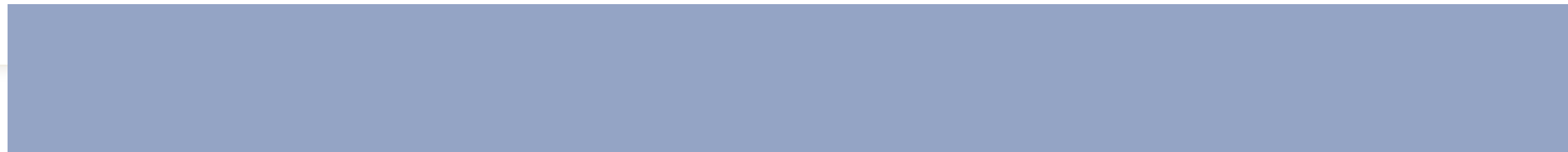
Recycling: Cullavagga (Small Group) Pages 382-384

Once Ananda, Buddha's assistant, explained to King Udena the thrifty economic use of robes by the monks:

When new robes are received the old robes are used as coverlets, the old coverlets as mattress covers, the old mattress covers as rugs, the old rugs as dusters, and the old tattered dusters are kneaded with clay and used to repair cracked floors and walls.



Accountability



Suttavibhanga: Section of the Code of Conduct (Vinaya Pitaka) Examples of environmental protection:

Background context: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pāṭimokkha>

- **"*bhūtagāmapātabyatāya, pācittiyaṃ.*"** (*pācittiya 11: a pacittiya requires confession*) If a *bhikkhu* destroys or causes someone else to destroy plants – nature -- that already reached their growing stage or completed their growth, he commits a *pācittiya* – an offence, which must be confessed.
- **"*yo pana bhikkhu sañcacca pāṇaṃ jīvitā voropeyya, pācittiyaṃ.*"** (*pācittiya 62: requires confession*) If a *bhikkhu* acts with the intention to kill an animal and succeeds in killing it, he commits a *pācittiya*.

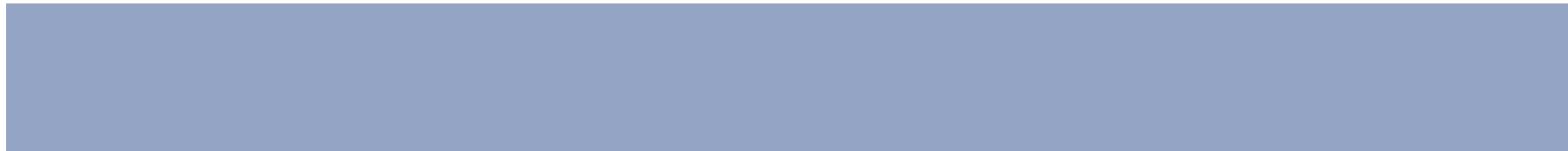
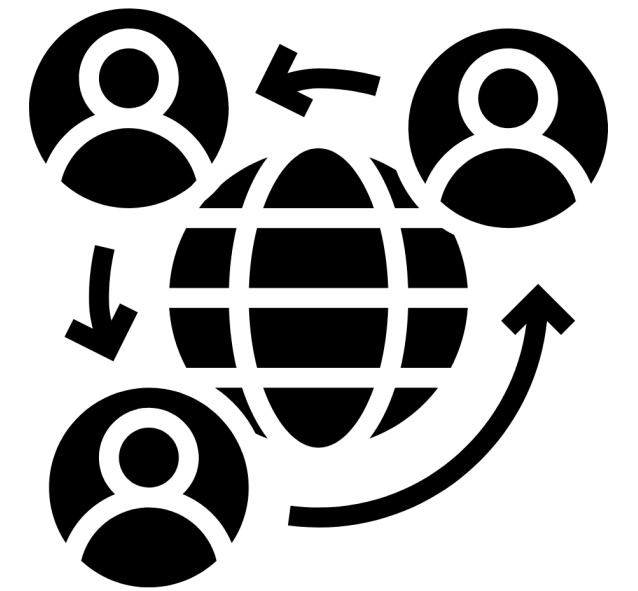
“The wise endowed with virtue
Shine forth like a burning fire,
Gathering wealth as bees do honey
And heaping it up like an ant hill.
Once wealth is accumulated,
Family and household life may follow.

**DN 31 Sigalovada
Sutta: The Buddha's
Advice to Sigalaka**

In the *Anaṇa Sutta* (AN 4.62), the Buddha describes four types of happiness

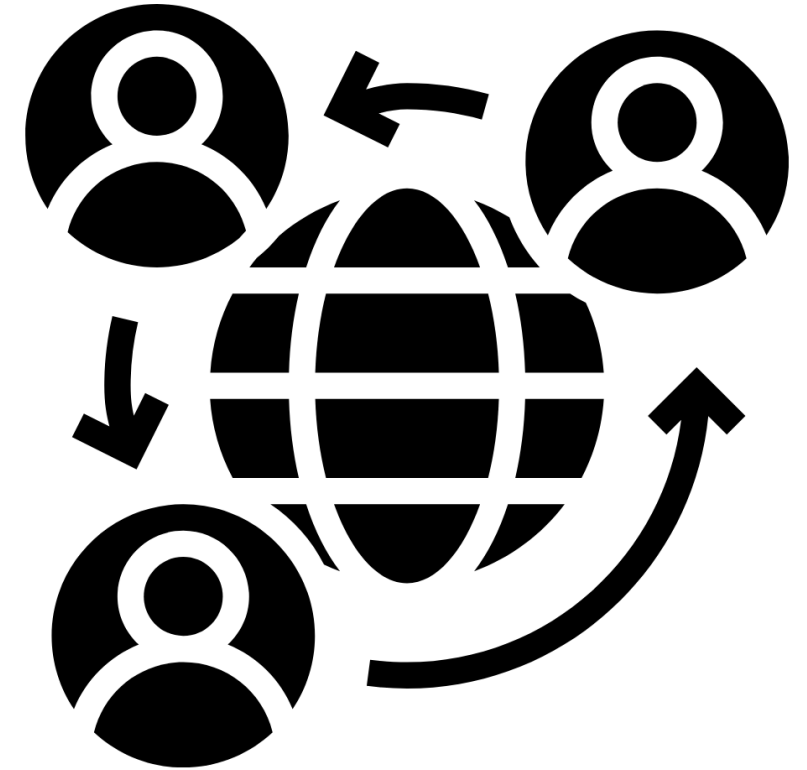
- the happiness of earning (*atthi-sukha*) wealth by just and righteous means
- the happiness of using (*bhoga-sukha*) wealth on family, friends, & on meritorious deeds
- the happiness of debtlessness (*anaṇa-sukha*) be free from debts
- the happiness of blamelessness (*anavajja-sukha*), to live a pure life

Liberation from Conditioning



- As with the Bhaddiya case study our minds are conditioned by latent tendencies — Anusayas — from within and strong forces from the outside which coalesce with each other to live in an illusory world that achieving our desires would bring lasting happiness. Economic “growth”, which is based on greed, is unsustainable for people and the planet.
- Bhavana — the cultivation of the mind — through our own efforts — lead to liberation from **CONDITIONING**.

Takeaways



What does Buddhism offer Sustainable Consumption?

From Greed to Need

From Conditioning to Liberation

From Impulse Buying to Reflective Buying

From Competition to Cooperation

From Me First to We All

From Curative Health to Preventive Health

From Individual Interest to Community Interest

From Rights to Obligations

From Independence to Interdependence

From My Country to One World

04 We have clear evidence that: The Buddha and his followers addressed critical issues of the time. The Dhamma is Eco. The Dhamma is Radical. The Dhamma is Engaged.

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Contact

For questions or concerns

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