

NIRVANA

Where the mind leads the way.

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ABSTRACT

Suffering is equivalent to dissatisfaction and misery in present day world that impacts our wellbeing and happiness. The Buddhist concept of Four Noble truths provide the framework to understand suffering, its nature, its causes and its removal. This fourfold concept of Noble truths derived from early Buddhism will help, an individual in dealing with stress and anguish in one's life. This paper proposes a model, NIRVANA to achieve a state of happiness for the well-being and positive growth of an individual. NIRVANA offers to provide a way or a solution to deal with present day challenges. Where N- Non- attachment, I – Impermanence, R- Right way of life, V- Values, A – Abstinence from greed, hatred and envy, N- nurture mindfulness, A- Attribute of sympathy and kindness. This model is intended to alleviate an individual from existential suffering that grips the world today. It is based upon philosophical perspective keeping in mind the implementation through psychological concepts.

Key Words – suffering; Noble Truths; NIRVANA; wellbeing and happiness.

“Leela, Leela. Life is just a play!” According to OSHO our true existence of life is to reside in the present and flow with the challenges of life. As soon as we envision these experiences and challenges to be our sufferings, then we start perceiving our life to be worthless and insignificant. On the other hand, the moment we change our outlook towards life, as to be insignificant then a playfulness appears which can help in releasing the burden of our heart. To attain this very sense of feeling, our Indian philosophical tradition provides Siddhi Sopan, which the ladder for freedom from suffering.

Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama once said, while “modern science has developed a highly sophisticated understanding of the physical world, including the subtle workings of the body and the brain, Buddhist science on the other hand has devoted itself to first-person understanding of many aspects of emotions - areas that are still new to modern science”. Hence, globalization and advancements are essential but on the other hand psychological wellbeing is also very important in present day scenario. The ability to manage and cope with these stressors is the ultimate end to one's suffering.

Through this paper we incline to explore one of the most prominent schools of Indian philosophical tradition Buddhism, that talks about suffering and emancipation from suffering, through its fundamental doctrine of four noble truths. To Buddhists, existence is a cycle of life, death, rebirth and suffering that they seek to escape altogether. The Four Noble Truths contain the essence of the Buddha's teachings. The Noble truths focus upon the suffering and its solution, may throw light on the course of the process, for further reconstruction of contemporary human psyche.

The teaching of four noble truths is a perspective of reality in attaining a pragmatic design for psychological wellbeing. To attain this psychological well-being we need to understand the following points

1. To acknowledge the problem or suffering (Dukkha) 2. To look for its origin or source (Dukkha Samudaya) 3. Acceptance that the suffering can cease (Dukkha Nirodh) 4. The way to cure the suffering (Dukkha Nirodh Marg)

Keeping the above vision in mind, this paper proposes a model NIRVANA, a model that can help to deal with the existential suffering that grips the world today. NIRVANA is enlightenment and is achieved by extinguishing the three fires of greed, delusion and hatred from one's life. The one who reaches a state of Nirvana does not immediately disappear to a heavenly realm, rather Nirvana is a state of mind that humans can reach in this world itself. It is a state of profound spiritual joy, without negative emotions and fears. In Hindu Dharma as a ritual during marriage, ceremony one takes seven vows symbolizing the beginning of new life wherein, NIRVANA also symbolizes the beginning of life which is free from pain and suffering. Each step of NIRVANA involves a necessary element, required to make life successful and the bond between our belief (THOUGHT) and action stronger. Hence, it is based upon philosophical perspective keeping in mind the implementation through psychological concepts. The seven vows of NIRVANA are:

N – Non-attachment, I - Impermanence, R- Right way of life, V – Values, A - Abstinence from greed, hatred and envy, N- Nurture mindfulness, A -Attribute of sympathy and kindness.

Non-Attachment – The first vow towards NIRVANA

According to Buddhism the self is intimately connected with the experiences of life and its pleasures. This leads to action and arousal of passion in us to enjoy pleasures. We cling to our emotions, desires and feelings. This causes immense sorrow. If a man cultivates moral greatness, that is, he acts with lesser passion and shows restraint towards overindulgence he may eventually attain absolute dispassion towards worldly activities. His mind becomes completely non-attached with citta which contains within it the root of all emotions, ideas and actions. Thus, detached, the self-conquers all sorrows, pain and suffering. and true knowledge which uproot pain once and for all.

This concept of non-attachment can be seen as a great tool of achieving optimal stage of psychological health when we apply it towards self. Self is an important determinant of our quality of life and behavior. Thus, self plays a very imperative role in development of self-

concept and self-comparison. Different researches have shown that if our self is negatively impacted then it can lead to low self-esteem, further primes to mental and emotional disorders. An individual can attain this by using its defenses to overcome such situations. For example, if an individual is criticized in front of others, then they can explain themselves that, opinion of others is not important for me or criticism which I have received will help me in overcoming my mistakes. Thus, detachment from criticism may aid an individual in dealing with such surroundings. This can only happen if an individual detach himself away from all those events which are incongruent with his self-concept. An individual can achieve this by using its *defense mechanisms*, that might arouse their self-esteem.

IMPERMANENCE- The Second Vow

The Pali word for impermanence is *anicca*. The self and the material world are each a flux and constantly changing. This concept is explained by the example flame of fire. When a candle is about to burn out we can light another candle from its wick and pass on the flame to the second candle. Since the flame flows in continuity we say it is the same flame. But the flame now burns with a new wax candle base, new pieces of wax, a new section of wick. We say it is the same flame because it continues in the succession. In the like manner all the things- mind, matter is only a series- a succession of similar things or happenings and the notion of fixity is unreal. Early Buddhist philosophy did not accept any fixed entity as determining all reality. Phenomena's are happening and passing away. The phenomena are happening in a series, and the initial moment giving birth to the next and so on. This is called the famous Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination.

Change is the true essence of human existence. It is visible in both our physical and psychical self. Body is conditioned by birth, aging, sickness and death and our mind undergoes fleeting thoughts and emotions. From the day we are born till the time of death. People are constantly adapting to profuse changes in one's life, as nothing is constant, what one has right now might not be with him later. Yet, people seem relatively unaware to these irresistible realities, and strive to achieve a sense of permanence and stability in their life (Levine & Levine, 1982). Thus, it would not be incorrect, to assume that people are generally resistant to change.

Fox, 1998 "Change is a transformation from one state into another and involves the interruption of a given state of affairs". Making us aware that nothing is permanent in this life, even Darwin's theory of evolution says that, we as humans have evolved. Changes happened within us and our apprehension towards accepting this change could be due to fear of uncertainty and loss of control. Oreg, 2006 defined resistance to change as "negative attitude towards any change, which might include affective, behavioural and also cognitive interventions".

It is when one starts to accept that everything changes and nothing is static, then only one can cognize the significance of impermanence. The resistance to change is a biggest obstacle for growth at personal and professional level. Believing that possessions will always remain same, it's just an attitudinal problem and no room for accommodation. The reason could be that change brings lot of uncertainty, responsibility and even unpredictability. It may elicit a stress response, effecting us physically and mentally. When one feels that their resources are

depleted, however, change will most likely be perceived as a threat and the stress response will be exacerbated (Blascovich & Mendes, 2000).

To know impermanence is not sufficient. One actually needs to practice it in order to understand its true meaning. To achieve this we need to observe and pay attention to the changes around us - our feelings and experiences. They are all of fleeting nature. If we repeatedly turn our mind to focus on this fact of change we can train our mind to accept this feature or mark of existence. Thus, making *conscious effort* to understand that what is happening right now, will not last and will be replaced, will help us remain positive for future. negative feelings yielding from bad days, loss of employment etc. will disappear. One will learn to live in the present moment and be content in it. *“What is it that allows us to open our hearts to every moment of our life? It’s the remembrance that it’s passing and it’s precious.”- Tara Brach.*

Thus understanding about impermanence will help in dealing with challenges with more wisdom and acceptance. *“All conditioned things are impermanent’ — when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering.”-Dhammapada 277* *“The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance.”-Alan W. Watts*

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD- The Third Vow

samyag-ājīva or Right livelihood is one eight practices of the eightfold path mentioned in the fourth noble truth and lays down the right way to earn a living. Pāli: sīla)

For a common man Buddha’s teaching of right livelihood means ethical livelihood. The wealth has to be obtained through rightful means i.e. one should refrain from cheating, lying and stealing in their occupation and it should not be acquired by causing harm to other living things. Thus the occupations dealing with arms and weapons, animal lives, drugs and intoxicants are to be avoided. The notion of right livelihood involves the notion of conscious livelihood i.e. we must be aware of implications and consequences of the profession we undertake.

This third step towards NIRVANA, *Right way of life or Right Livelihood*, is at outmost importance for psychological and spiritual well-being of an individual. For survival we need to earn, thus earning with honesty and without any hurtful way is the key to happiness. Right view towards our occupation can lead to *positive thoughts, intentions* and contribution towards mankind. These positive thoughts and actions can further contribute towards our happiness and good to others. The decision is entirely ours, which path we choose. Thus, it’s the choice of any individual in which direction they want their life to go, creating happiness, well-being and wisdom, and away from suffering.

No matter in whatever position one might be, the number of luxuries one is having, all this will hold no value when one is not happy mentally and spiritually. The question to be asked from us is that does it hold any worth in comparison to happiness and satisfaction. It has been seen that attainment of psychological needs such as respect, autonomy, mastery, well being and social support are more important than income (Weiting 2013), thus proving that even if we

cheat someone still, we cannot attain happiness and contentment. Research has also shown that income has a minor effect on satisfaction, (Boes, 2010). Therefore, our efforts must be towards welfare of mankind, rather than creating wealth.

VALUES- The Fourth Vow

How can one achieve happiness by doing welfare to others? Now it is the time that one has to take its fourth step towards NIRVANA, **Values**. The fourth noble truth or the path to cessation of suffering comprises of three elements, Pragna (right wisdom or intelligence), Śīla (right moral conduct) and Samadhi (right concentration or mental disposition) which are equally morally significant. According to Buddhism it is when one does not have the right wisdom and the right mental disposition than one becomes the cause not only of his suffering but of others too. Śīla advocates peace and self-control. It has two aspects right execution (*caritta*), and right prevention (*varitta*). Fulfilling these tenets of *sīla* is considered a great contribution to the welfare of others (mahadana) because it produces an environment of faith, reverence, and wellbeing.

In the model of NIRVANA, V- Values hold a very important place. They are moral principles that guide our actions and shape our character. The formation of values starts from a very young age, through stories and belief, driven with hope and motivation. Values empowers our feelings, thoughts, actions or behaviors, as values signify practice. Therefore, values serve as guidelines for people to behave in different situations.

Value contributes a lot by giving meaning and purpose to our life. They are the building blocks of imagination, in form of dreams, unconscious processes or even our conscious aspirations. When these aspirations are not controlled by right or wrong, then they start impacting our personal and social life. According to R.K. Mukherjee, “Values are socially approved desires and goals that are internalized through the process of conditioning, learning or socialization and that become subjective preferences, standards, and aspirations”.

Values influence relationships as well. If we compromise on our values, we create a wall between us and our family and friends. The impact of troubled relationship can take a toll on us. When we perform actions that violate our values we often regret and experience sorrow or grief. We try to fit the action in our value system but fail to do so. It is difficult to get over the action. It keeps popping up in our mind causing discomfort and restlessness. To live a life of meaning and integrity we need to develop our moral values and consistently follow them. They are a source of ethical guidance and enhance our decision-making ability. Thus, we should put a conscious effort towards building a strong moral character to overcome temptations and achieving much peace.

The values learnt must be displaced in proper manner for them to be useful for us and others. that is the true essence of involvement of these values. The proper displacement of these values can build one’s confidence in themselves and surroundings. Confidence to create, innovate and explore new things in life. Leading to creation of joy and happiness. Joy and happiness to take care of our elderly or poor people. Which can give us happiness and relieve us from stress.

Taking care and helping others in some way or the other makes us happy. This happiness will further lead to satisfaction. This is an antidote from all psychological problems.

By following a path of moral values, we become comfortable with ourselves. We accept our identity and live a more simple and satisfactory life. This deepens our relationship with our family, friends and colleagues.

ABSTINENCE FROM GREED, HATRED AND ENVY - The fifth Vow

But in reality we are heading in the wrong direction where we have developed hatred, jealousy and envy towards our family, friends and colleagues. These negative attitudes can be dealt with by **abstaining from greed, hatred and envy**.

This step is the hardest, but an essential one, that is taking control of oneself. Why we experience greed, hatred and envy? Greed and envy are just like twins, envy being the extreme desire of greed. Greed being a distinctive attribute that is dominant amongst most human beings and its existence can be traced back as long as this day and age. Uncontrolled greed is related to unhappiness, deprivation, misery and suffering. Eventually an individual places high value towards money and acquisitive things, to overcome their suffering. Where they start feeling that possession of materialist things and earning lot of money will make them happy. But they fail to understand that, a person's ideal happiness or highest level could be a different than another person's (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978).

They start associating happiness and satisfaction with possession of money, which can buy them materialistic things. The moment they are not able to achieve, they start indulging in possession of others, thus leading to hatred for all those who enjoy those worldly things.

Greed is not just wanting more, it's the caprice that accumulating more stuff will stimulate personal gratification. Unfortunately, delusion creates a vicious cycle. Not only it frustrates us; we crave for more.

The reason could be that we tend to cling and attach to things or relationships which we don't have or desire for more and more. But this is actually a loss loss situation for us because giving importance to things in our life in a way leads to attachment. Attachment motivates envy, hatred and jealousy.

Another reason is social pressure. Social pressure leads to frustration, it builds the seed of envy or jealousy when a person is compared with others. For example when a person gets more recognition than you, pressure starts to build upon, to perform and comparison point is set. Thus peoples' happiness depends on comparison to others who are around them, rather than their own life achievements (Hecht, 2007). Hence we start believing that by doing this we are trying to protect ourself and status, greed makes us believe that these objects demarcate us from others.

So, how can one come out of the greed and envy. The notion of meeta found in Buddhism is a cure to curb the thoughts of anger, greed, hatred and envy which are the causes of so much of human suffering. Meeta means a friend and in Buddhism it connotes a feeling of unselfish love

towards fellow human beings, not because of any obligation towards them but because of a sincere concern for their well-being and happiness. It means loving-kindness, benevolence, non-violence and fellowship. It is not confined to self, family and friends. It is universal love extending to all irrespective of any discrimination. It removes clinging to negative states of mind like envy, greed, hatred etc. by developing an attitude of benevolence towards all.

The metta bhavana can be cultivated through practice. Initially one needs to develop this feeling of love towards oneself. The anger, envy, hatred we have for others stems from a negative attitude we have towards ourselves. So first we have to learn to love ourselves to be able to genuinely love others. The love inwards will allow the flow of kindness and sympathy outwards. After igniting the feeling of love towards oneself it should now be extended to others. A shift in the identity occurs which now includes others as well. It emanates from a simple thought which enables us to participate in the inward experience of the others. That is, it leads to the understanding that since I wish to be happy and to be free from suffering, so do the others. All humans share the basic need to be happy.

Metta or loving-kindness here, states Harvey, is a heartfelt aspiration for the happiness of all beings. It is different than "lack of ill-will", and more an antidote to fear and hatred. It is the precept to conquer anger by kindness, conquer the liar by truth, conquer stingy by giving, conquer evil by good, states Harvey.

NURTURE MINDFULNESS – *The Sixth Vow*

Right Mindfulness (pali Sati) is the seventh of the eight factors in the eightfold path, and belongs to the concentration or samadhi part of the path. Mindfulness or awareness is a psychological faculty (indriya) that forms an essential part of Buddhist teachings. It brings the field of experience into focus and makes it available to immediate consciousness. Thus, right mindfulness is not simply presence of mind or awareness. Rather mindfulness brings forth pure and immediate experience of the moment. It reveals the object as it is before it has been put into concepts and categories of language and thought. It is a detached observation of what is happening within us and around us in the present moment. All judgements and interpretations have to be suspended. It is a practice of undoing: no thoughts, no evaluation, no imagination, no desire. In right mindfulness the mind just observes what occurs and is just conscious of the present moment without slipping into further thoughts. There is only continuous observation of experience in its purity.

The understanding of mindfulness as being aware of our present moment and focussing on it only helps people to come to terms with suffering without being overwhelmed by it. Just breathing in has the capacity to accept whatever is happening around us, that is mindfulness. Mindfulness has the capacity to assist us in taking control of our present, without thinking of past or future. This can be supported by a research of Whitehead et al., 2019, in which he revealed that individuals who scored very high on nonattachment, worked through most difficult situations. They all got strength to deal with their difficult situations in life and come out of their sufferings. The success was that they were able to integrate psychotherapy and

meditation. They became more reflective in their behaviour by letting things go. Thus being mindful, help us to become strong so that one can detach from all those events and things that can cause stress, anxiety and make us unhappy.

Mindfulness also helps us to activates ones pre frontal cortex and take control of amygdala, being our inner cave. It is this inner cave that gets activated automatically when one experience stress or misery. Activation of amygdala makes us more depressed , control our responses and rational thinking. Breathing in and out helps in activation of our prefrontal cortex, responsible for logical thinking, judgements and thinking of other alternatives. Daniel Goleman called this overreaction to stress “amygdala hijack”.

With mindfulness we understand how to deal with our suffering and pain, without losing our control over mind. When we stop and take a breath in this way, we unite body and mind and come back home to ourselves.

According to Buddha “ *We can condition our bodies and minds to happiness with the five practices of letting go, inviting positive seeds, mindfulness, concentration, and insight*”.

ATTRIBUTE OF KINDNESS- The Seventh Vow

The last vow is Kindness. It known as Karuna and it signifies infinite and unconditional compassion in Buddhist tradition. It should extend towards all living beings. It is all-encompassing and not be limited to our family and friends. Since Karuṇā is understood as the love for all beings, it is not equated with the conventional understanding of the term. which is egoistic and self-centred love. Compassion is directed towards diminishing suffering of others. When one observes the helplessness and suffering in others, one is driven by compassion to lessen their grief and sorrow. Another important component of compassion is being humane. To practice compassion, it is essential to be non -cruel as the ill will and hatred obstruct the flow of sympathetic joy. Compassion can be developed by meditating on the fact that all are same in joy and in sorrow. Everyone desires happiness like I do and so I should not be the cause of anyone’s distress. Acknowledging this fact, I should extend my helping hand to anyone who suffers. Also, one should look for opportunities to serve others without any expectation. It is manifested in he acts of charity -care and concern for helpless and destitute and respect for all sentient beings.

Other researches suggest that individuals who display to have more compassion towards others tend to exhibit more prosocial behaviour such as altruism, empathy, and forgiveness, and are more likely to endow social support to others (Fehr & Sprecher, 2009). It has also been seen that they tend to display more appreciation and gratitude in daily life (Neto & Menezes, 2014). Research suggests that compassionate love has been related to greater life satisfaction (Robak & Nagda, 2011), self-esteem (Sprecher & Fehr, 2006), and positive emotions as a result of providing care and support to others (Sprecher, Fehr, & Zimmerman, 2007). Individuals who exhibit compassionate goals tend to show lower levels of anxiety, depression, and chronic distress (Crocker, Canevello, Breines, & Flynn, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Happiness helps us to handle our sufferings with much prudence. The moment we embrace and cognize with our suffering, we tend to suffer less and endure happiness. Therefore transforming an individual to be more compassionate, forgiving and empathetic towards oneself and others. This can only happen when we are able to manage or learn to deal with our suffering.

Henceforward, the model of NIRVANA is an ethical model with psychological interventions. This model proposes to change ones outlook towards oneself and channelize thoughts in a positive manner. Having attachment to worldly things, hatred, anger and dissatisfaction add on to our woes and multiply our sufferings. But if we change our perception towards events and situations, then surely one can attain a playful attitude and view life as full of opportunities. Efforts should be made in creating experiences that can give happiness to us and to others. That the world has suffering in it cannot be denied but having a positive attitude towards it can convert our journey from being painful to lively.

For the viability of this model we were not able to take into consideration all comprehensive views of four noble truth, including the 8 fold path. Only selected factors have been used to make the model viable and applicable.

This model gives recommendation for facing the challenges in life in a positive manner, for which the training has to be imparted at a very early stage of our life. By making this part of our early education years, this can be developed only by knowing and practice. This should be set apart and followed in such a way that we are able to integrate in our life.

This work is an endeavour to benefit the mankind , to deal with challenging events of life, with more positive outlook and help one with long lasting benefit. As humans, our task should be to embrace this very life, with much love and playfulness, rather than capturing ourselves in the misery of day to day life challenges.

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