



## THE ETHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF VIMALA-BHŪMI IN PRESENT WORLD: BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT :

Present situation in the world, many problems and conflicts have been arising in every individual and among the society, countries and even among the members of family due to they do not fulfill their obligations and moral ethics. For instance, most of people in the world are undergoing problems such as wars, national conflicts, terrorism, corruption, destruction of environment, drug abuse etc all the time. Therefore, the whole world is needy for peace which we all desire. However, if we talk about peace without searching the cause of problems and the way to peace, we cannot attain a real peace. Thus, we have to search the root of problems and the way to peace from the teaching of the Buddha.

*Vimala-Bhūmi* is nothing but the important tool in order to solve various problems and conflicts. There is no separation between *Vimala-Bhūmi* and peace because *Vimala-Bhūmi* is the way to peace of the whole world and is also the path searching for the peace of individual. Even though *Vimala-Bhūmi* is the second stage of *Bodhisattva's* practice, it is relevant to the present world for the purpose of escape from the suffering, misery, grief, and ignorance etc. And it can create the world where is no hatred, fear, misery, grief, sorrow, suicide, violence and war by approaching the *Vimala-Bhūmi*. Hence the main aim of this paper is to exploring: what is *Vimala-Bhūmi*, how *Bodhisattva* practice the *Bhūmi* and why is it significance in present world.

**KEYWORDS :** national conflicts, terrorism, corruption, destruction of environment.

### INTRODUCTION

"The Mahayana, Great Vehicle or Great Carriage (for carrying all living beings to the Nirvana), is also, and perhaps more correctly and accurately, known as the *Bodhisattvayana*, the *Bodhisattva's* vehicle. It may be said without doubt that Mahayana Buddhism is based principally upon the path of a *Bodhisattva* and thus Mahayana is known as *Bodhisattvayana*." Accordingly, in the Mahayana scriptures, there are a lot of ways of *Bodhisattva*. For example, the ten major and forty-eight minor precepts of *Bodhisattva*, twenty blemishes, four defeats, sixteen advantages of *Bodhisattvayana* and so on. Among them, the Ten Stages (*bhūmi*) are systematically explained in the *Mahavastu*, *Dasabhumika Sutra*, *Bodhisattva-Bhūmi Sutra*, *Avatamsaka Sutra*, *Pajnaparamita Sutra*, *Abhisamayalankara* and others. For this reason, in the Mahayana, *Bhūmi* or stages are important role in the spiritual progress of the *Bodhisattva*.



"Even though *Bodhisattva* is just a human being in the world, his idea, behavior, concept, career, philosophy, ability and activity are different from others. He is a spiritually perfect person because his careers are outstanding. Buddhism does not explain that one can get

something without doing anything, without struggling for oneself, without attempt. The Buddha considered the perfection of man as the result of right and continuous striving. In his views, profound knowledge does not come to man straightaway, but it comes by a gradual experimental and scientific inquiries.”

It is correct to say that according to Buddhism, if one wants to get or achieve something, one must do something. Otherwise one would not get it due to things in the world never automatically come to you. In that way the *Bodhisattva* knew that he cannot achieve *Buddhahood* by mere declaration given by the Buddha. The Buddha wanted to find out what are the things he has to fulfill and has to fulfill necessary things. This article is to bring out the ethical significance of *Vimala-Bhūmi* and its method to the present world.

### The Concept of Vimala-Bhūmi

The term *Vimala*, terminologically, is compound word; *Vi* and *Mala*. ‘*Vi*’ means without and ‘*Mala*’ is defined as impurity, stain, dirt. So *Vimala* is almost invariably translated into English as purity, stainless. The term of *Bhūmi* generally refers to the meaning of ground, earth, region, stage, level, stage of consciousness and plane. In this case, *Bhūmi* figuratively refers to stage, level and stage of consciousness. Thus *Bhūmi* is one of the ten stages of understanding and realization and activity through which a *Bodhisattva* progresses towards enlightenment. Regarding the meaning of *Bhūmi*, Har Dayal remarks “A *bodhisattva's* entire career has been divided into several parts and stages. He rises and advances from one stage to another till he attains Enlightenment. These stages have been called *Bhūmi* and also *Viharas*.”

The *Mahavasthu* points out the four main practices of *Bodhisattva*: *Prakṛiti carya*, *Pranidāna carya*, *Anuloma carya* and *Anivatana carya*. *Prakṛiti carya* indicates *Bodhisattva's* the natural careers. Before he becomes a *Bodhisattva*, he has already had this *Prakṛiti carya*. He has to respect his mother and father, *Samana* and *brahmana*, elders, to collect tenfold wholesome action and to honor the Buddha and His disciples.

The tenfold wholesome course of actions (*kusalakamma patha*) is called the moral conducts, also known as bases of meritorious actions (*punnakiriya vatthu*). They are: donation or giving, virtue, meditation, giving due respect to other people, rendering service and help, sharing merits, rejoicing at and listening to the *Dhamma*, teaching the *Dhamma* to others and right belief. *Pranidhana carya* means resolving career to be enlightenment. *Anuloma carya* is the career of the *Bodhisattva* when he fulfills the ten *Bhūmi*. *Anivatana carya* refers to persevering career.

The Ten *Bhūmis* or ten stages of the *Bodhisattva* are; joyous stage (*pramudita*), the stage of purity or immaculate stage (*vimala*), the stage of illumination (*prabhakari*), bright or radiant stage in which one accomplishes the perfection of effort (*arcismati*), the stage of most extreme invincibility (*sudurjaya*), stage of right in front or turned towards *Bodhi* (*abhimukhi*), far-going stage (*durangama*), immovable stage (*acala*), the stage of good thoughts (*sadhumati*), the stage of cloud of the law (*dharmamegha*).

### Vimala-Bhūmi as Practice of Bodhisattva

The second stage is *Vimala* the stainless or renounces the defilement stage connected with moral discipline (*sila*). In accomplishing the second *Bhūmi*, the *Bodhisattva* is free from the stains of immorality or impurity by eradicating the defilements. Therefore, this *Bhūmi* is called 'Stainless, purity' (*vimala*). Moreover, in the second stage or *Vimala-Bhūmi*, *Bodhisattva* becomes complete with pure precepts and gives up all actions which are contrary to morality and comportment. Hence, on this ground, he renounces the filth of afflictions behind. He especially emphasizes and practices the *Sila parami* (morality) without neglecting other *Paramis*.

The *Vimala-Bhūmi* has been explained in the *Cata sahasrika Prajana paramita* as under: “A *Bodhisattva* purifies his conduct by paying no heed to the doctrines of the Hinayana and other systems that are prejudicial to his progress towards Enlightenment. He cultivates the virtues of gratitude, forbearance and harmlessness. He experiences great joy by maturing the living beings in the three ways and working for their rescue and salvation in a spirit of devotion. He feels such deep compassion for all creatures that he resolves

to suffer in the purgatories for their sake. He has faith in his teacher and reveres and serves them. He devotes himself exclusively and entirely to the practice of the perfections in order to mature and ripen all beings.”

*Sila* or morality is guarding mentioned actions from committing misconducts and it is good behavior or keeping bodily actions and verbal actions properly or good performance. In Buddhism, it can be often translated as moral conduct. The physical and verbal activities of a person who cultivates the moral precepts are not in disarray because of morality serves as the foundation for the development of all meritorious actions. In this stage, that is why, the *Bodhisattva* can remove the ten evil conducts in deeds, words and thoughts. It is also known as tenfold unwholesome course of action in Buddhism.

They are; (1) “Bodily action: killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, (2) verbal action: telling lie to somebody, slandering, malicious speech and foolish speech, (3) mental action: covetousness, ill-will and wrong view.”

“Such an irreversible *Bodhisattva* observes the ten ways of wholesome action. He himself observes and instigates others to observe abstention from taking life, abstention from stealing what is not given to him, abstention from wrong conduct as regards sensuous pleasures, abstention from intoxicants as tending to cloud the mind, abstention from lying speech, abstention from harsh speech, abstention from indistinct prattling, abstention from covetousness, abstention from ill-will, abstention from wrong views.”

All the negative activities come under the tree called *Akusala-mula* which means the root causes for them namely; greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and ignorance (*moha*). All the evil that we can think of the evil action, the evil speech, the evil thought, evil conduct in any form, they can arise only because of their root causes. Therefore, it is able to cultivate some amount of control over greed or lust, sensuality, hatred, ill will etc and the delusion or ignorance we have applied power of controlling by means of morality.

In sort, it should be noted here that the main purpose of keeping moralities is in order to stop the unwholesome deeds, words, thoughts and come to peace and well-being. On the other hand, morality brings about a moral and psychological transformation of the individual amounting to removal of unwholesome mental traits as well as the cultivation of wholesome mental traits. Buddhism believes that the morality or the cultivation of wholesome deeds and removing of evils is essential for the promotion of a harmonious and peaceful social life of this world. That is why, the *Bodhisattva* has to cultivate in this stage (*vimala-bhūmi*) in order to train an exemplary, virtuous man and to establish compassion, equality, respect for justice and truth, eliminating personal sin and finally bringing peace to all living beings.

### Ethical Significance of Vimala-Bhūmi in Present World

The original word for ethics came from the Latin word “Ethos” which means character. So ethics may be considered the science of character, habits of activity or conduct of human beings. Ethics is also known as moral philosophy. The term moral derived from the Latin word 'mores' meaning convention or practice. “Ethics has to do with human conduct and is concerned with questions regarding what is good and evil, what is right and wrong, what is justice and what are our duties, obligations and rights.” Therefore ethics is literally construed as the science of convention or practice and the science of human conduct.

“The Buddha's *Dhamma* is a moral and philosophical system which expounds a unique path of Enlightenment, and is not a subject to be studied from a mere academic standpoint. The doctrine is certainly to be studied, more to be practiced, and above all to be realized by one-self. Mere learning is of no avail without actual practice. The learned man who does not practice the *Dhamma*, the Buddha says, is like a colourful flower without scent.”

Accordingly the above mentioned definition of ethic and Buddhist view on ethical disciplines, there is no doubt that *Vimala-Bhūmi* is based on the moral ethic. We may say that *Vimala-Bhūmi* shows to mankind what is good and bad, what is right and wrong, what is to be practiced and what is to be avoided and so on. That is why, it is important to note that *Vimala-Bhūmi* is not only for *Bodhisattva* but also for all human beings for their welfare, moral ethics and spiritual upliftment.

Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda highlights this point by saying that “To understand the real purpose of life,

it is advisable for a person to choose and follow an ethical and moral system that abstains a person from evil deeds, encourages him to do good, and enables him to purify his mind. For simplicity, we shall call this system religion.”

Of course, whatever may be the differences and interpretations, all people would invariably agree that morality is an absolutely necessary. And also morality plays a vital role in the peaceful development of individual, family, society, nation and the world. Morality is nothing but *Vimala-Bhūmi*. There is no separation between morality and *Vimala-Bhūmi* because *Vimala-Bhūmi* is based on the fundamental teaching of the Buddha; to avoid evils, to do good and to purify the mind from mental impurities. Therefore *Vimala-Bhūmi* is the path leading to the peace of the entire world and is also the path searching for the peace of individual. Equality, universal brotherhood, humanism and non-violence constituted the core of morality.

Ven. K. Wimalajothi states that “Although the Buddhist precepts or moralities are not commandments, they should be observed at one's own free will for the peace, happiness and welfare of the individual and society at large. A person who observes *Sīla* is a blessing to himself and to others, and not a curse to any man or animal.” Thus, it goes without saying that morality is the most important aspect of living in the present world. According to Buddhist teachings, the ethical and moral principles are overwhelmed by examining whether an action or related to body or speech is likely to be harmful to one's self or to others and thereby keeping away any actions which are likely to be harmful.

That is why the Buddha always advises anyone not to hurt, not to kill, not to give any trouble to anyone, not to steal, not to destroy anything belonging to anyone, not to commit, not to lie to somebody, not to speak malicious and unkind speech, not to drink or enjoy intoxicating effects of alcohol and drugs. They are called the basic morality in Buddhism. However, these moralities are not only for Buddhist but also for all human beings and the Buddha did not introduce these precepts as a religious law but universal law.

These precepts closely associate with the noble eight-fold path. In the five precepts and the Noble eight-fold path, the Buddha gave us spiritual guidelines to establish peaceful and harmonious society. The Noble Eight-fold Path, of course, is projected into our human relationships, exercise of patience, forbearance and understanding. Hence, if we follow the path, we are taking to achieve peace, harmony and tranquility. The Eight-fold paths are; right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

The Buddhist philosophy of ethics finds its practical expression in the various ethical moralities. These precepts or moral disciplines are nothing but general guidelines to point out the direction, to create peaceful and harmonious life and society and final salvation. Although many precepts are expressed, we should not think that Buddhist morality consists of refraining from evil without complement of doing wholesome deeds.

The ethical morality found in the teachings of the Buddha can be summarized in three-fold simple principles. They are; “not to do any evil, (*sappapapassa akaranam*) to cultivate good (*kusalassuppa sampada*), to purify one's mind (*sacitta pariyodapanam*).” This is the essence of the teachings of the Buddha and very simple and very effective moral ethic in order to overcome many problems and conflicts in present world. Hence, *Vimala-Bhūmi* was introduced in order that societies could be cultured and civilized and live in peace and harmony.

## CONCLUSION

The *Bodhisattva's* practice is the method of to attain the ultimate stage and *Vimala-Bhūmi* is second stage of spiritual progress. In this stage *Bodhisattva* emphasizes and cultivates morality which is discipline of deed, speech and thought. *Vimala-Bhūmi* contains and disseminates loving-kindness, compassion, peaceful coexistence and so on. Thus *Vimala-Bhūmi* is nothing but cultivating moral ethics. Understanding and applying the *Vimala-Bhūmi* or ethical morality is the powerful weapon for all human beings in order to stop the evil and come to peace and well-being and it can create the world where there would be no conflicts and problems. Accordingly, *Vimala-Bhūmi* or Buddhist morality can make revolutionary change as a remedy in



the society to wipeout present issues.

Without practicing moral ethics, anyone cannot have the peace in the mind and the peace cannot spread out among people in the world. Through the observance of these moral principles, no wars on the surface of the world, no transgression of the law committed, no invasion made, no violation and no ill-treatment. People all over the world could live in co-existence, establish better relationship, construct close co-operation and bury up greed, hatred, conceit. Such are potential consequences of the maintenance of these moral conducts. Thus, if any human beings belonging to whatever religion or whatever nationalities are able to observe precepts, all of them will enjoy and be happy physically and mentally.

Keeping *Vimala-Bhūmi* or moralities, therefore, is the tool to bring about a moral and psychological transformation of the individual and society amounting to elimination of unwholesome mental traits as well as the cultivation of wholesome mental traits. It is essential tool for the promotion of a harmonious and peaceful social life of this world. That is why, *Vimala-Bhūmi* is significance in the present world in order to train an exemplary, virtuous man and to establish compassion, equality, respect for justice and truth, eliminating personal sin and finally bringing peace to all living beings.

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