Abstract

The modern day environmental crisis is a complex social problem that needs to be addressed in a multi-disciplinary manner involving scientific, social, political, economic and religious commitment and collaboration. Theravada Buddhism as an ancient and reputable religious system can contribute to addressing the environmental crisis by offering a cohesive and practical environmental spirituality for its followers as well as for those who admire Theravada Buddhist philosophy. This research project proposes a three step process in developing and affirming a well-rounded Theravada Buddhist environmental spirituality. The process begins with examining the state of human-nature relationship, especially the negative aspects of this relationship as a result of human moral and spiritual degeneration. The next step involves presenting ways of envisioning a healthy and wholesome human-nature relationship supported by fundamental Buddhist teachings. Finally, a path is offered as to how such a vision of harmonious human-nature relationship may be accomplished within the Theravada Buddhist framework. This three-step process highlights the two essential dimensions of Theravada Buddhism—the relational dimension and the developmental dimension. The relational dimension emphasizes the reality of human existence in relationship with others, including the natural environment. The developmental dimension highlights the need for personal self-cultivation and transformation in order for human beings to live out these relationships in such a way that promotes well-being for others, and at the same time, is beneficial towards our goals for spiritual progress and ultimate happiness. This dissertation argues that these two dimensions must be upheld together in order for a Buddhist environmental spirituality to exist. It also argues that the effort to cultivate oneself and to enter into healthy and wholesome relationship with nature is
part and parcel of the entire Buddhist spiritual pedagogy that aims towards authentic happiness and emancipation.

Declaration

I confirm that no part of the material contained in this dissertation has been previously submitted for any degree at Assumption University or any other university. All the material is the author's own work, except for quotations and paraphrases, which have been appropriately indicated. The copyright of this dissertation rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

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