

HUMANISTIC BUDDHISM AS AN APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT

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Foreword

The Humanistic Buddhism advocated by Venerable Master Hsing Yun serves as an antidote to the negativity, escapism, and long-running flaws of traditional Buddhism. It allows Buddhism to embed its profound *prajñā* wisdom into the fabric of society, enabling it to approach society to improve mankind and perfect character through altruistic deeds. In terms of wealth, Humanistic Buddhism does not harbor a negative view of money. Rather, it advocates making good use of wealth to promote the welfare of humanity and propagate Buddhist undertakings to advance the purification of this world. As Venerable Master Hsing Yun mentioned in *Humanistic Buddhism in Development*: “Humanistic Buddhism must arise from the basis of purifying the spirit, but it should not neglect the construct of the material world. Rather, it uses wisdom to guide the use of wealth, and performs a worldly career with a supramundane mind, thereby creating an abundant and proper Humanistic Buddhism.” This humanistic turn in the concepts and practical approaches of Buddhism intertwines the various aspects of modern life with Buddhism, providing wisdom and guidance for worldly activities.

The approach of the “this-worldly” practice of Humanistic Buddhism provides deep inspiration and guidance for contemporary management. It helps managers to go from a technical level of management to the level of “the way” and elevate their overall managerial potential. For upper managers of for-profit and nonprofit organizations, management expertise and accumulated experience are important, but without proper ethical consciousness and good character, there might be dishonesty and risk-taking in the pursuit of profits, which could result in the entire organization being mired in difficulties. Managers might have personality issues, making it difficult to lead a team to reasonable business performance. Humanistic Buddhism is a method of cultivation that enhances managers’ wisdom and helps to develop a clear mind. It is a form of self-cultivation that perfects our characters. Humanistic Buddhism and professional management knowledge

and skills complement each other to cultivate modern managerial talent. This type of cultivation deserves an in-depth investigation. “Humanistic Buddhism management studies” should be developed as part of the managerial skill set.

1. The Application of Christian References

Comparing the views of traditional Buddhism—wherein there is a tendency to shun the materialistic world, and a strongly negative comparison of riches to venomous snakes—Christian views are multi-faceted and seek an equilibrium between attaining riches and spiritual cultivation. The Old Testament views riches as blessings from God, where the righteous enjoy the abundant wealth (Proverbs 10:22; 15:6). Despite this, there is still a strong emphasis on cultivating spiritual wealth and demonstrating that wisdom is higher than materialistic riches (Wisdom of Solomon 7:8). The New Testament is more critical towards the accumulation of riches: expressing the dangers of riches, pointing out that the love of money is the root of all evil, and that clinging to wealth will lure people away from the true path. It warns people against storing treasures that are prone to destruction on Earth and advises them to store indestructible treasures in Heaven instead. It also emphasizes that it was impossible to serve the two masters of God and money simultaneously (Matthew 6:19-20, 6:24). It exhorts those who are rich to avoid placing hope in their uncertain wealth. Rather, they should place their hopes in God who richly bestows everything for their enjoyment. It is believed that they will accumulate wealth through good deeds and generosity, which establishes firm foundations on which they can enjoy the true life in the future (Timothy 6:10; 6:17-19). Religious practices do not necessarily reject riches. Instead, riches can be used with the guidance of conscience to improve society and create a more conducive environment for spiritual practice to benefit all beings. If Buddhism continues to distort the true value of monetary wealth, it will force itself into a limited perspective of supramundane liberation. On this point, one can glean the importance of Venerable Master Hsing Yun’s comment on the attitude of Humanistic Buddhism towards wealth: wealth itself is neither wholesome nor unwholesome, the outcome is dependent on a person’s attitude and usage.

Contemporary Western management practice also applies the moral and ethical spirit of Christianity toward improving leadership, with training courses such as “servant leadership,” “monastic leadership,” and “spiritual leadership” to fill the gap in academic

management education with a Christian character. A noble personality does help in applying superior leadership, but moral character cultivation is not easily attained. Christian doctrines and systems of practice can provide an effective reference structure for cultivation. In contrast, the applicability of Buddhist teachings has been seriously underestimated because the transcendental practice of traditional Buddhism tends to make people think that its spirit of pure cultivation is contrary to the trends of secular management practices. Venerable Master Hsing Yun advocates a this-worldly practice of Buddhism, making the moral spirit of Buddhism a guide for various activities in the world, thereby enhancing the spiritual quality of human beings and creating a pure land of benefits and joy. Contemporary managers may be hindered by afflictions and emotions which can limit their management and leadership ability, such as impacts on the quality of their strategies resulting in an inability to put forward a broad vision, harming public interest by pursuing selfish desires, a lack of decisive decision-making ability causing inability to foresee management problems, having personality traits that go against the public leading to the inability to drive team performance, etc. The Chinese community has a dynamic form of Buddhism—Humanistic Buddhism provides a paradigm for cultivation and study in life. It is an excellent resource for cultivating a noble character and can serve as an excellent breeding ground for exceptional managerial talent.

2. The Integrity and Ethics of Business Management

People manage organizations, and the lack of moral values for those involved in management can lead organizations to an ethical crisis. Greed, hatred, and ignorance can deceive and steer people towards committing harmful acts for personal benefits. For instance, the global financial crisis that occurred several years ago reflected the collective greed and lack of corporate ethics among financial institutions; the Kaohsiung gas explosion and gutter oil scandal incidents in 2014, shocking the Taiwanese community, arose because of management gaining improper monetary benefits. Also, the disparity between rich and poor has been worsening globally as wealth is overly concentrated in a handful of people; business owners are unwilling to share profits with their employees. They make senior staff redundant to reduce costs, causing financial hardship and a breakdown in trust between employers and their staff. These businesses may have already been generating good profits, but their greed drives them to abandon the concept of sustainable management and to plan for schemes that benefit themselves but harm others, which result in an irreversible crisis for the company.

Buddhism's law of cause and effect in the past, present, and future, its rules, ceremonies, as well as regulations, purification of the mind, compassion, benefiting others, and many other teachings can contribute to developing business and professional ethics. In *For All Living Beings: A Guide to Buddhist Practice*,¹ Venerable Master Hsing Yun has put forward "The Ten Ethical Guidelines for Society" of Humanistic Buddhism's modern standards of conduct, in which the seventh states, "one must comply with professional ethics, act within the law, not to embezzle, not malignantly bankrupt, not possess by force, and not to seek to get rich overnight." The eighth guideline says, "there should be no cheating in trading, profits from one's capital, no hoarding, no market monopolization, no artificial inflation of commodity prices, and illegal gains." Furthermore, in "The Ten Standards of Conduct for Human Relations," the third states, "one must not mistreat employees and must not exploit labor, but instead provide them with reasonable remuneration and promotions." If a manager can believe and accept Buddhism, use Buddhism's rules and ceremonies as the standard of conduct, he will be able to work in accord with the requirements of business ethics and professional morality, and treat customers as well as employees fairly and with honesty. Facing the problems with honesty and ethics in organizations, most of these problems are caused by lack of moral awareness, or the inability to stand upright with moral character. Humanistic Buddhism's doctrines offer a very good system of practice, which can contribute significantly to solving these problems.

3. Cultivating the Character of an Excellent Leader

Venerable Master Hsing Yun pointed out that the core aspect of management lies in "management of the mind." Moreover, a leader must have the ability to manage one's mind before managing that of others. "The key to management consists firstly of managing one's mind: possessing a sense of time, an idea of space, statistics, and principles. To fulfill [from the chapter] "The Highest Management Study," it is especially important to have the existence of others and public interest at heart, to cultivate a compassionate and gentle mind that values the unity between self and others. It is then we have completed the learning of 'the highest management study'."² These are the "secrets of the mind" for management studies, which indicate that the practice of Buddhism can provide an excellent and comfortable setting for the cultivation of managerial skills in the present age. The written works of Venerable Master Hsing Yun are filled with wisdom, guidance, and experience for the cultivation of noble leaders, and can be used as a treasured

collection for the cultivation of high-level managers.

The difficulty in improving one's character lies in whether one can readily accept the wisdom in Dharma words and persevere in cultivation. There needs to be an appropriate environment, as well as motivation from support and encouragement. The abundant resources of Humanistic Buddhism can be used to create a practical platform for cultivation that can be applied to the theories of leadership and management, thereby enhancing its value in the field of management. Venerable Master Hsing Yun expounded in his books about the grooming of leadership qualities, still awaiting to be organized and promoted as a system. For example, *For All Living Beings: A Guide to Buddhist Practice* states: "managers ought to cherish and be open to their subordinates' opinions to perfect their roles. Examples include having tolerant minds, the courage to shoulder responsibilities, the wisdom of decisiveness, the spirit of being proactive, to not belittle their juniors, to not be attached to power, to not be suspicious, to not compete for recognition, and to be able to share all accomplishments with their subordinates." These are insightful views but are difficult to achieve. One can only truly grasp the profundity of these insights through practice. There are many more such pearls of wisdom in the Venerable Master's books awaiting our exploration and appreciation.

Conclusion

I offer my humble opinions in the hope that readers may produce more refined ones. This is put forth hoping more enthusiasts will contribute to the exploration and establishment of "Humanistic Buddhism and management." As I have studied and worked in management, I have noticed that parts of my temperament have affected both my performance and that of my team. I have later found various ways to adjust and then solve difficulties through the Dharma. Indeed, I have found the Dharma to be beneficial for management and training. Unfortunately, this understanding has not been properly organized into a system. The idea of Humanistic Buddhism established by Venerable Master Hsing Yun smooths the integration of the Dharma and management, therefore serving as the best model for developing a Buddhist approach to management.

Notes

1 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, in *Selected Humanistic Buddhism Prefaces* 《人間佛教序文選》. -Ed.

2 Venerable Master Hsing Yun, *Hundred Sayings 2, Philosophy of Being Second*.