

CHAPTER 2

MORAL VALUES IN BUDDHISM

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the meaning of moral values in Buddhism, specifically on ethics, its definitions, and the source of moral values in Buddhism. Besides that, the Buddhist perspective on ethics, its significance and objectives will be discussed along with the moral values in Buddhism. The discussion on the practice of Buddhism in Malaysia's context will also be included in this chapter.

2.2 Moral Values in Buddhism

Essentially, the discussion of moral values in Buddhism is included in the two central doctrines of the Buddha, namely The Four Noble Truths and The Noble Eightfold Path (Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli et al., 2018). The Four Noble Truths are a linked chain of truths about life: (1) Suffering exists; (2) it has a cause; (3) it has an end; and (4) there is a way to attain release from suffering- namely, by following the Noble Eightfold Path. Regarding the Four Noble Truth, to Mohd Rosmizi (2010) contends that:

“The Four Noble Truths is the Buddha's first formal discourse after his awakening. Awakening refers to the state in which the Buddha attained the Truth or the right answer to his journey related to the sufferings of birth, sickness, ageing, and death, which, in his viewpoint, are experienced by each man over and over in existence without cessation or suspension”. The Buddha was moved by what he encountered on his journey and realized that all beings were vulnerable to these things, regardless of how much material wealth and grandeur they possessed. The truths of life—pain, and death—could no longer be denied.

In Buddhism, The Four Noble Truth consists of four stages of “truth,” as the name implies:

- i. To live Is to Suffer (*Dukkha*)
- ii. Suffering Comes from Desire (*Tanha*)
- iii. To End Suffering, End Desire
- iv. Release from Suffering Is Possible and Can Be Attained by Following the Noble Eightfold Path

The First Noble Truth, to state it may be more expressively, “birth is attended with pain, decay is painful, disease is painful, death is painful” (Davis, 2017). To live means experiencing anxiety, loss, and sometimes even anguish. In other words, “living means sorrow” (Molloy, 2014). As indicated by the Buddha, regarding human beings, every man’s birth is inseparably bounded by suffering, such as sickness, ageing and death (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010).

While the first Noble Truth reveals the truth of suffering, the second discovers its cause. When analyzing the truth of suffering, the Buddha saw that it comes from wanting what people cannot have and from never being satisfied with what they do. The word *tanha*, which is often translated as ‘desire’, might better be translated as ‘thirst’; it also can be translated as ‘craving’, suggesting both an addiction and a fear of loss (Molloy, 2014). *Tanha* is the root of dissatisfaction with one’s existence (Harris, 1998). Buddhism believes that *tanha* exists in every individual, whether the obvious one, such as food, sleep, clothing, housing, and health, or the more subtle one, for instance, privacy, friendship, security, beauty, or some of the desires that are “wants” that are developed in society such as alcohol, tobacco, entertainment, or expensive foods. Desire is insatiable; no matter how much that person acquires, they cannot be permanently satisfied (Molloy, 2014).

The third Noble Truth is the truth of the suspension or cessation of suffering. Here, the Buddha stated that the suffering could terminate and must be eliminated. This third truth clarifies that suffering stops when its cause, the desire and craving, stop (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010).

In the fourth Noble Truth, the Buddha revealed how to suspend or cease suffering, known as the Noble Eightfold Path. The goal of Buddhism is *nirvana*. *Nirvana* proposes many things: end of suffering, inner peace, and liberation from the world's limitations (Molloy, 2014). Hence, Buddhism recommends that its followers follow the Noble Eightfold Path to reach *nirvana*.

According to the above sermon, the Noble Eightfold Path consists of the following components:

- 1) Right Understanding
- 2) Right Intention
- 3) Right Speech
- 4) Right Action
- 5) Right Livelihood/Work
- 6) Right Effort
- 7) Right Meditation/Mindfulness
- 8) Right Contemplation

The eight “steps” of the path form a program or system that the Buddha taught its followers to lead them toward liberation from suffering and the impermanence of reality (Molloy, 2014). Besides, the Noble Eightfold Path is regarded as the practical

ethics of Buddhism. Together, they described three main goals: to face life objectively, to live kindly, and to cultivate inner peace (Molloy, 2014). In other words, it is further divided into three sections: wisdom (*prajna*), morality (*sīla*), and meditation (*samadhi*) (Gruzalski, 2000). Wisdom comprises of the first two components, namely right view and right thought; morality consists of the third, fourth, and fifth components, namely right speech, right action, and right livelihood; and meditation comprises the last three components, namely right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010). In summary, the Buddha's discovery of the Four Noble Truths expresses that all life is suffering caused by craving and desire; therefore, this craving and desire can be eliminated through the Noble Eightfold Path. Hence, in this research, the focus is given to the morality section, which is one of the main objectives of this research.

Additionally, according to Scephile (2008), the doctrine of The Four Noble Truths is also related to the concept of 'The Golden Rule', which is linked to the samsara determined by one's behavior. If a person succeeds in passing the cycle, he will reach nirvana; otherwise, if he fails, it is due to karma or bad deeds. Therefore, in the context of reaching that level, every Buddhist are required to perform good deeds in their life based on 'the ten virtues' in the *paramita* (Greater Vehicle), practiced by *bodhisattvas* (Buddhas-to-be) in the path for attaining nirvana or enlightenment, the ten virtues are, generosity (*dana*), morality (*sīla*), wisdom (*panna*), renunciation (*nekhamma*), effort (*viriya*), patience (*khanti*), true (*sacca*), resolute determination (*aditthana*), loving-kindness (*metta*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) (Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli et al., 2018).

The Three Jewels (*Triratna*), the Buddha, the *Dharma*, and the *Sangha* (Molloy, 2014) are at the core of what is generally regarded as fundamental Buddhism. Therefore, it is essential to inspect the fundamental teachings of Buddhism briefly before discussing Buddhist ethics so that a clear comprehension of Buddhist ethics can be acquired. The central teachings of Buddhism center on *Nirvana* (Gupta, 1978). Buddhism's fundamental aim is to achieve liberation or enlightenment, *Nirvana*, which is liberation and freedom from the remorseless round of birth, death, and rebirth (Encyclopedia of Religions, 1975).

The doctrine of *karma samsara* and rebirth played a significant impact and influence on Buddhist ethics (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010). *Karma* comes from a root that signifies "to do" and suggests moral consequences conveyed alongside each act. *Karma* is the moral law of cause and effect, and belief in *karma* is that each action has an automatic moral consequence or outcome. One notable saying expresses nicely the nature of *karma*: "What goes around comes around" (Molloy, 2014). Good *karma* brings "higher" rebirth; bad *karma* brings rebirth in "lower", more painful forms. In a certain way, this belief allows for upward mobility, since individuals, by their actions, have influence and impact over their future births. Ultimate freedom comes when *karma* ceases to operate and rebirth, whether upward or downward on the scale, has entirely ended and finished (Molloy, 2014). Moreover, according to Tachibana (1975), the doctrine of *karma* also forms a prominent feature of Buddhist teaching.

Meanwhile, *karma samsara* can be deciphered as the law of cause and effect of actions which is believed to automatically; this is because Buddhism believes that there is nobody who can stop the operation of this cycle, neither man, priest, nor divinity or God (Anderson, 1991). Additionally, *karma* decides how one will be

reborn. However, *karma* in Hinduism and Jainism, the concept of *karma* is like something that sticks to the soul as it passes from life to life in reincarnation. It works automatically; good actions produce good effects, such as intelligence, high birth, and wealth; bad actions produce *karma* that brings the opposite, including rebirth, into animal and insect life forms (Molloy, 2014). Because of that, since Buddha rejected the existence of a soul, it is more difficult to clarify how *karma* works in Buddhism as it is thought to influence and affect the elements of character and personality that return in later lifetimes.

In the meantime, the term *samsara* alludes to the wheel of life, the circle of constant rebirth, and it suggests firmly that the everyday world is brimming with change as well as struggle and suffering (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010). The term *samsara* suggests decay and liberation (Molloy, 2014). Nevertheless, Buddhism believes *karma* creates only action with volition, which begins in the mind (Harris, 1998). Thus, all actions not involved by volition, such as involuntary and unintentional actions, do not create *karma* (Piyasilo, 1987 & Samarawickrama, 2006). This process of rebirth will only stop if one has achieved Nirvana.

Consequently, Buddhists believe man's future fate is his responsibility; he can mold and future his future by his present actions. As referenced before, Buddhism considers life as suffering. Therefore, from the Buddhist viewpoint, everybody needs to attempt, as best as he can, to try not to be reborn to live, which promises nothing but suffering. All Buddhists should endeavor to get out from *samsara* by living ethically and morally through purifying the mind.

In addition, another vital doctrine of Buddhism is *nirvana*, which becomes the aim of each Buddhist in their life. Nirvana is thought of as existence beyond limitation.

As stated by Molloy (2014), numerous people in the west associate nirvana with a psychological state because it is portrayed as suggesting joy and peace. However, it is better to see *nirvana* as indescribable and beyond all psychological states. Despite reaching nirvana occurs rarely, it is theoretically possible to attain it during one's lifetime; the Buddha is said to have "entered nirvana" at the time of his lifetime (Molloy, 2014). Once a person has attained *nirvana*, rebirth is finished.

As often emphasized in this chapter, the essential goal of Buddhism is to attain enlightenment or liberation or *nirvana*. According to the Encyclopedia of World Religions (1975), "nirvana is liberation from the remorseless round of birth, death and rebirth. Unless a man achieves liberation, he is reborn repeatedly, 'transmigrating' from one existence to another." In addition, *nirvana* is the *summum bonum* of Buddhism, which, as stated by Mahathera (2010), "*Nibbana* is not something to be set down in print, nor is it a subject to be grasped by intellect alone; it is a supramundane (transcending or superior to the physical world) state (*lokuttara dhamma*) to be realized only by intuitive wisdom." The concept of *nirvana* itself is beyond the scope of logic, although the words from the Buddha are perfectly logical. Despite that, by observing and reflecting on the negative and positive side of life, some logical deduction arises in contradiction to accustomed phenomenal existence; in Buddhism, there must exist a sorrow less, deathless, and non-accustomed state (Mahathera, 2010). Therefore, *nirvana* is each Buddhist's goal, which is the state of enlightenment and liberation that each Buddhist wants to accomplish. In addition, according to Mohd Rosmizi (2010) "it is the *summum bonum* (the highest good) of Buddhist soteriology".

To conclude, the discussion on the moral values in Buddhism was centered around the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, specifically on the values of

Buddhism teaching, which are the values that can be derived from stages and paths for Buddhists in attaining *nirvana*. To reach that level, every Buddhist ought to perform good deeds or behaviors based on the ten virtues of the doctrine of *Parami* in Buddhism (Ahmad Faizuddin Ramli et al., 2018). Thus, regarding the discussion of the moral values in this research, specifically the morals or ethics of Buddhists, can be found from the precepts in Buddhism, namely, the Five Precepts (*pancha-sīla*), the Eight Precepts (*astanga-sīla*), and the Ten Good Actions (*dasa-sīla*).

2.2.1 Buddhist Ethics

The term “*sīla*” is derived from Pali, means morality or right conduct in the Buddhist tradition (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia, 2011). In Buddhism, *sīla* is equivalent to morality or ethics (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010). From Buddhist perspective, morality means abstaining from specific improper conduct. Buddhist laypeople and monks alike follow the five basic precepts of not taking life, not taking what is not given, not engaging in sexual misconduct, not telling lies, and not drinking liquor. The monk also agrees to follow a code of over 2,000 restraint rules. It is important not to harm human or animal life; most other precepts serve that purpose. The lowest grade of wisdom is based on hearing the doctrine, the next on thinking about what has been heard, and the highest on meditative trances. Morality provides a foundation for concentration, which supports wisdom, and wisdom frees the mind from the ‘outflows’ - sensual desire, becoming (living again and again), and wrong beliefs. By extinguishing the outflows, one becomes a saint (*arahant*), attains *Nirvana*, and is free of further births (Encyclopedia of World Religions, 1975).

Furthermore, morality in Buddhism is divided into three components: right speech, right action, and right livelihood. The formulation of the Five Precepts

exemplifies the fundamental Buddhist ethical system (*pancha-sīla*). All Buddhists accept the Five Precepts (*pancha-sīla*) as their basic ethical guidelines (Sivaraksa, S., 1992). *Sīla*, in technical terms, refers to the Buddhist code of conduct, a systematic system of Buddhist ethics (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010). According to the Encyclopedia of Religion, Buddhist ethics are “systems of morality as well as styles of moral reasoning that have emerged in Buddhist traditions” (Jones, 2005). Buddhist ethics is primarily based on the Buddha’s analysis and insights on ethical and moral issues, which can be found in his talks and lessons. The Buddhist ethical system or framework emphasizes moral improvement through discipline and training of the psyche and mind. According to Mohd Rosmizi (2010), the way to develop ethical quality is to practice moral discipline, which leads to a harmless and decent life.

Sīla is not Buddhism’s only precept or ethical system. There are additional precepts and ethical systems, some of which are general and thus apply to all Buddhists, while others are specific to monks. The fundamental moral precepts that every Buddhist should follow are divided into three categories: the Five Precepts (*pancha-sīla*), the Eight Precepts (*astanga-sīla*), and the Ten Good Actions (*dasa-sīla*), also known as the Ten Good Path of Action (*dasa-kusala-karmapatha*) (Keown, 2005). According to Mohd Rosmizi (2010), they are as follows:

I. The Five Precepts (*pancha-sīla*) are:

- i. Do not kill
- ii. Do not steal
- iii. Do not commit adultery
- iv. Do not tell lies

v. Do not commit intoxication

II. The Eight Precepts (*astanga-sīla*) are:

- i. Abstinence from destruction of life
- ii. Abstinence from taking what is not given
- iii. Abstinence from all sexual uncleanness
- iv. Abstinence from speaking falsely
- v. Abstinence from drinking strong and maddening liquors which are cause of sloth
- vi. Abstinence from eating at forbidden times
- vii. Abstinence from dancing, singing, playing music, and seeing shows
- viii. Abstinence from adorning and beautifying the person by the use of garlands, perfumes, and unguents, and from using a high or a large couch or seat

III. The Ten Good Actions (*dasa-sīla*) are:

- i. Abstinence from taking life
- ii. Abstinence from taking what is not given
- iii. Abstinence from adultery or unlawful sexual relations, or sexual misconduct
- iv. Abstinence from speaking falsely or lying
- v. Abstinence from slandering

- vi. Abstinence from abuse or harsh speech
- vii. Abstinence from foolish talking or frivolous gossip or idle talk
- viii. Abstinence from covetousness
- ix. Abstinence from ill-will or malice or malevolence
- x. Abstinence from being skeptical or to have right views

The Five Precepts are a Buddhist method and guidance on success and happiness in this life and the next. This precept is one of Buddhism's most widely known precept lists (Barua.Ven. M., 2019). All Buddhists accept the five precepts as their fundamental ethical guidelines (Shende, V. et al., 2014). According to Mohd Rosmizi (2010), Buddhism believes that those who follow these precepts will reap numerous benefits.

While the Five Precepts should be practiced daily, the Laity may observe the Eight Precepts on special "Upavasatha days" (Misra, 1984). Individuals who observe the Eight Precepts are believed to be more devoted, humble, and faithful than those who only observe the Five Precepts (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010). Aside from the Five Precepts (*pancha-sīla*) and the Eight Precepts (*astanga-sīla*), the Ten Precepts (*dasa-sīla*) are also crucial for novices and monks (Barua, Ven. M., 2019). On the other hand, the Five Precepts are the fundamental ethical guidelines for Buddhists following the Noble Eightfold Path of Dharma teaching.

Buddhism's three significant sets of moral precepts are the basic ethics that every Buddhist should practice and observe (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010). These precepts cover all aspects of man's actions, mainly thought, speech, and physical. These moral

precepts that appear in negative formulations or definitions are not viewed negatively by Buddhists, and they acknowledge that these moral precepts have positive aspects.

From Mohd Rosmizi's (2010) analysis, he observes that there are eleven ethical items of personal ethics, apart from the last three precepts of the Eight Precepts, that can be drawn from the above three sets of moral precepts. Consequently, these three sets of moral precepts can be combined and classified into two main groups of bad conduct and contrary good conduct. The first conduct, the bad conduct, should be evaded, while the second, the good conduct, should be developed. They are as follows:

(Mohd Rosmizi, 2010)

a) Bad or Unwholesome conduct (to be avoided):

I. Bodily actions (*kaya*):

- i. Killing or taking a life (*panavadha*)
- ii. Stealing or taking what is not given (*adinnadana*)
- iii. Sexual misconduct or promiscuity (*kamesu micchacara*)
- iv. Taking intoxicating liquors

II. Verbal actions (*vaci*):

- i. Lying (*musavada*)
- ii. Slandering (*pisunavaca*)
- iii. Rudeness (*pharusavaca*)
- iv. Gossiping, idle chatter (*samphappalapa*)

III. Mental actions (*manas*):

- i. Covetousness (*abhijja*)
- ii. Ill-will or malevolence (*vyapada*)
- iii. False views (*micchaditthi*)

b) Good or Wholesome conduct (to be cultivated):

I. Bodily actions (*kaya*):

- i. Loving-kindness
- ii. Generosity
- iii. Stillness, simplicity, and contentment
- iv. Abstinence from taking intoxicating liquors

II. Verbal actions (*vaci*):

- i. Truthful communication
- ii. Unifying and harmonious words
- iii. Gentle and loving words
- iv. Beneficial talk

III. Mental actions (*manas*):

- i. Unselfishness
- ii. Good-will
- iii. Right views

Therefore, according to this classification, based on an analysis of three sets of Buddhist moral precepts, the first set of precepts is that bad or unwholesome conduct should be avoided, while the second set of precepts is that good or wholesome conduct should be cultivated for all Buddhists.

2.3 The Position of Ethics in Buddhism

Buddhism has developed its ethical system, and regarding the positions of ethics or *sīla* in Buddhism, ethics, or morality (*sīla*) is put in the most important position (Abd Rahman, 2010). *Sīla* is one of the three essentials of Buddhism, which is divided into three sections, namely wisdom (*prajna*), morality (*sīla*), and meditation (*samadhi*) (Gruzalski, 2000). *Sīla*, morality, or ethics is considered part of a spiritual path which mainly comprises cultivating a wholesome character by removing any moral violations and then cultivating more remedial virtues. This process is seen as the termination of a state of liberation from all unwholesome aspects such as hatred, greed, and their resultant suffering through a nirvana experience (Harvey, 2013). Moreover, this virtuous conduct can also be recognized as a discipline in the Pali term itself, which in Buddhism, it contains duties that one should execute (*caritta*) and abstinences that one should practice (*varitta*) (Mahathera, 2010). *Sīla* is the essence of Buddhism and the core of the Buddha's teaching (Keown, 1992). These are among the respectable titles and positions given to ethics by Buddhism. For the duration of the Buddha's life, the Buddha consistently educated and guided individuals towards moral life. In this manner, Buddhism is known as a moral and ethical religion and comprehends the high position of ethics in Buddhism. It is presumed that ethics or morality cannot be isolated and separated from Buddhism (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010).

2.4 The Source of Buddhist Ethics

The *Dharma* is the ultimate foundation for Buddhist ethics (*Dharma* in Sanskrit, *Dhamma* in Pali). *Dharma* has many implications and meanings, but the fundamental idea is of an all-encompassing and universal force that governs the universe's physical and moral order. *Dharma* is also best interpreted as 'natural law', a term that captures its primary meaning, namely as the principle of order and regularity seen in the behavior of natural phenomena. The idea of a universal moral law whose necessities have been revealed by enlightened beings, the Buddha (Keown, 2005). According to Keown (2005), *Dharma* governs every aspect of life, from the progression of the seasons to the movements of the planets and constellations. *Dharma* is neither caused by nor under the control of supreme beings, and the gods themselves are dependent upon its laws, just like the Buddha.

The *Dharma* also contained the voluminous text that the monastic *Sangha* protected and studied. The guidance and advice that monks and nuns give to the laity are based on these texts, their own experience of practicing Buddhism, and the oral and written tradition passed down from previous generations of monastics and, in some cases, lay practitioners. Laypeople have no strict and exacting obligation to do what monks and nuns exhort or advice, but rather regard for their lifestyle and characteristics will impact or influence them, depending on the level of the layman's dedication and devotion to the Buddhist way (Harvey, 2013).

The Buddha's conduct serves as a model and foundation for Buddhist ethical actions. Buddhists believe the *Dharma* has provided a practical and systematic ethical principle for living morally (Keown, 1992). These teachings have been gathered and compiled and can be found in Buddhist sacred books such as the *Tripitaka* (the Three

Baskets), *Suttapitaka* (the Basket of Discourse), *Vinayapitaka* (the Basket of the Rules of the Order), and *Abhidhammapitaka* (the Basket of Scholastic Philosophy) written in Pali (Carmody, D. L., & Carmody, J. T. 1996).

2.5 The Significance and Objectives of Buddhist Ethics

Buddhist ethics' importance and goals are frequently highlighted. Buddhist ethics, for instance, Chidester (1987) argues that ethics in Buddhism "may be considered as a preparation for Nirvana". According to Klostermaier, K. K. (2002), performing excellent deeds is the first step toward enlightenment. Likewise, according to Keown (1992), a person who practices *sīla* is "reborn among men of good fortune". Buddhism holds that leading an ethical life can result in many positive effects on one's life, including wealth, a good reputation, self-confidence, and easy progress in meditation, dying without anxiety, and most importantly, rebirth in a heaven world (Harvey, 2013). As a result, ethical conduct in Buddhism played a significant role in one's life, especially as it related to the path leading to *nirvana*.

These demonstrate the importance of ethical behavior for Buddhism since it not only has noble goals but also has the potential to lead to liberation or *nirvana*, which is the ultimate objective of every Buddhist. There are plenty of other important goals and objectives of Buddhist ethics. Buddhist ethics, for instance, aims to eradicate attachment, lead people throughout their lives, cleanse the mind, restrain desire, and free them from the cycle of *karma samsara* (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010). In conclusion, ethics is the cornerstone of Buddhism; without it, there would be no Buddhism.

2.5.1 Buddhism in Malaysia

The multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-religious Malaysian community is very familiar with the rituals and culture of Buddhism. Buddhism in Malaysia is briefly explored in this research to discuss the practices and values found in Buddhism.

The beginnings of the Buddhist faith may be traced back to the sixth century AD, according to research on Malaysia's Buddhist heritage that used information from archaeology and classical Malay literature. Their ancestry may be traced to Sarawak, Kedah, Perlis, Perak, and Kelantan. Buddhist images, candies, inscriptions, and votive tablets are heritage objects. Sungai Mas Inscription, Cherok To'kun Inscription, Bukit Meriam Inscription, and others are among the inscriptions. They were written in Sanskrit and date to the sixth or seventh century AD. *Avalokitesvara*, *Hariti*, and Buddha representations are among the artwork (Rahman, Nik. et al., 2012). According to archaeological evidence, Buddhism was only acknowledged and practiced in Malaysia from the 5th century AD to the 10th century AD. According to a study on Malaysia's Buddhist legacy that incorporated evidence from archaeology and traditional Malay literature, the origins of the Buddhist faith may be traced back to the sixth century AD. It is possible to trace their heritage back to Sarawak, Kedah, Perlis, Perak, and Kelantan. Heritage artefacts include Buddhist statues, candies, inscriptions, and votive tablets. The inscriptions include the Sungai Mas Inscription, Cherok To'kun Inscription, Bukit Meriam Inscription, and others. All these artefacts were written in the sixth or seventh century AD and in Sanskrit. There are representations of Buddha, *Hariti*, and *Avalokitesvara* in the artwork (Rahman, Nik. et al., 2012). According to archaeological evidence, Buddhism was only accepted and practiced in Malaysia from the 5th century AD until the 10th century AD. The primary Buddhist center on the Malay Peninsula was Sungai Mas (Kedah). However, the Malay

Peninsula's western coast was home to numerous Malay Buddhist kingdoms, including Chieh-cha, which the I Ching visited in 671 AD, Gangganegara in Perak, and Vijayapura in Santubong (Sarawak). There were more kingdoms in the area (west coast), according to the archaeological evidence found in Takuapa and other areas of Peninsula Thailand (Rahman, Nik. et al., 2012).

According to data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia for 2010, Buddhists make up the second-largest population in Malaysia. Buddhism was one of the first religions to be introduced to Southeast Asia through trade and conquest. Most Buddhists, particularly Chinese Buddhists in Malaysia, currently follow the Mahayana Tradition (Nur Suriya, 2018). The Buddhist community today is highly diversified due to Buddhism's long and complicated history in Malaysia. For instance, there are large followings for both the Mahayana and Theravada schools of Buddhism. In general, Mahayana Buddhists tend to be Chinese Malaysians, whilst Theravadins tend to be Indian Malaysians and those of Thai or Sri Lankan origin. Each temple, monastery, or association is autonomous, resulting in diverse practice and organizational structures within Buddhist communities. In addition to Buddhism, members of the Chinese-Malaysian community may also practice Taoism or Confucianism. For instance, Taoist deities sometimes appear in Mahayana Buddhist temples and vice versa. However, Buddhists from many traditions unite to observe significant Buddhist occasions and festivals, such as Vesak Day (Scroope, 2020).

2.6 The Moral of Siddhartha Gautama (The Buddha)

According to Molloy (2014), Buddhism is appealing because many of its essential teachings appear to agree with modern values and fit well with the views of modern science. This statement from Molloy (2014) could be because some parts of

the world are beginning to recognize Buddhism. After all, the Buddha's fundamental teachings appear to agree with modern values, such as emphasizing self-reliance, insights, and awareness. Furthermore, some people agree that Buddhism fits well with the viewpoint of modern science and the ideal Buddhist concept of nonviolence appeals to people as a standard for civilized behavior in a multicultural world (Molloy, 2014).

Buddhism is most recognizable in the various monks who strive to uphold the ethics of their Master, Siddhartha Gautama. Because monks without a temple (virtuosi) are such a prominent feature in Buddhism, and because anyone can become a monk, it is easy to overlook another aspect of Buddhism, precisely its strict ethical nature, which imparts a lifestyle to ordinary people interested in society. Mainstream Buddhist ethics is not monastic ethics but a practical set of proverbs about living in purity and avoiding deviating by relying on bogus solutions such as drinking alcohol (Ersson, S. & Lane, Jan-Erik. 2005).

According to Buddhists, Buddhism's ethical ideal was fully practiced and demonstrated by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha himself. Buddhists believe that the Buddha set an incredible example of how to live morally. Not only is that but the Buddha's way of life regarded as the best method for attaining *nirvana*. Following the Buddha's path is the goal of every Buddhist. As a result, Buddhists regarded the Buddha as having an ideal and great character. Some excerpts from the Dhammapada, a compilation of Buddha's sayings expressed in verse, regarding the Buddha:

“He who experiences the unity of life sees his own Self in all beings, and all beings in his own Self, and looks on everything with an impartial eye” (Dhammapada, Verse 220).

“Do not dwell in the past; do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment”. (Dhammapada, Verse 348).

“Just as a solid rock is not shaken by the storm, even so the wise are not affected by praise or blame”. (Dhammapada, Verse 81).

“Radiate boundless love towards the entire world”. (Dhammapada, Verse 9).

The quotations mentioned above exemplify the teachings of the Buddha about compassion, mindfulness, wisdom, and inner tranquility. Without a doubt, the Buddha advised all Buddhists to practice the good and avoid the bad (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010). The Buddha himself practiced moral behavior, which he taught to others. Buddhists regarded the Buddha as tolerant, patient, humble, and consistently honest and truthful in all aspects of speech, thought, and action. The Buddha’s excellent ethical behavior can be seen in Buddhist sacred texts and scholars’ writing (Dhammapada, 1985).

As quoted by Shah Kazemi (2010), ‘He is not merely a wise sage or a benevolent moralist but the latest in the line of Fully Enlightened Ones, each of whom arises singly in an age of spiritual darkness, discovers the deepest truths about the nature of existence, and establishes a Dispensation (*sasana*) through which the path to deliverance again becomes accessible to the world’. Furthermore, the early record mentions the Buddha’s incredible personal charisma, which is evident in his listeners’ willingness and the solemn way he bestowed this gnosis (Encyclopedia of world religions, 1975). Furthermore, the Buddha is thought to be more than the first *Arahant* (one who has gained insight into the true nature of existence and has achieved *nirvana*) among equals in the last layers of the early sacred texts of Buddhism. His uniqueness is that he attained complete enlightenment without the assistance of a master in this life. Later in the early canon, the Buddha is exalted far above his sacred disciples. Though previous writings attribute only three extraordinary cognitions to

him, namely: 1) memory of previous lives, 2) cosmic vision, and 3) knowledge that his outpourings were extinguished, later Pali texts claim the Buddha was omniscient (Encyclopedia of world religions, 1975).

Buddhists believe that the Buddha was the most energetic and dynamic religious teacher in the world. Apart from when he was taking care of his actual necessities, he spent the entire day engaged in religious activities. He was efficient and systematic in carrying out his daily obligations or duties. His inner life was focused on meditation and attaining *Nirvana*, while his outer life was focused on selfless service for the moral upliftment of the world. Being enlightened, he tried his hardest to enlighten others and liberate them from the ills of life (Bomhard, A. R, 2023). This is clearly stated in Dhammapada (1985), “to avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse one’s mind – this is the teaching of the Buddhas”; “Not despising, not harming, restraint according to the code of monastic discipline, moderation in food, dwelling in solitude, devotion to meditation – this is the teaching of the Buddhas”; “Hard to find is the thoroughbred man (the Buddha); he is not born everywhere. Where such a wise man is born, that clan thrives happily” (As stated in Dhammapada, 1985).

In Buddhism, the Buddha is frequently depicted as a widespread ruler. His character was generally portrayed as having no flaws, not only his appealing character, but also his honorable actions such as temperance, self-control, and many other similar virtues characters such as sympathy, love, tolerance, liberality, and many more. This kind of character helped make an impression on his disciples, or potentially even those who were hostile to him (Tachibana, 1978). As stated in the *Dhammapada*:

“Like beautiful flowers, full of color and full of scent, are the fine and fruitful words of him who acts according to his words.” (As quoted in Tachibana, 1978).

The Buddha proposes explaining his teaching and practicing it himself and making others practice it. Practicability is a significant characteristic of his teaching, with each word he articulated expected to be included. He did not intend to direct his disciples with insignificant meaningless statements but rather to take the lead in how he achieved the highest life goal. Practicability is a crucial feature of Buddhism, and it was evident in the Buddha's person, who was unquestionably the embodiment of his teaching (Tachibana, 1978). Also, the Buddha demonstrated his consistency between speech and action, which was consummately displayed in his individual, which was the exemplification of his teaching and simultaneously served as an example of his disciples' otherworldly endeavors. Indeed, his character has an ethical value in inspiring others to follow in his footsteps of purification (Tachibana, 1978). According to Tachibana (1978), the Buddhist should pursue all valuable virtues demonstrated by the Buddha's eighty-year life and serve as the ideal example of religious life. To sum it up, the Buddha not only teaches his disciples but also practices all his teachings as an example to them, demonstrating to them how to live an ethical life.

2.7 Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, *śīla*, the systematic system of Buddhist ethics, plays a significant role in Buddhism. Buddhist ethics is mainly based on the analysis and insights of the Buddha Siddhartha Gautama on the ethical and moral issues found in his preaching and teaching. The Buddhist ethical system focuses on moral improvement through discipline and training the psyche and mind (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010). The fundamental moral precepts which every Buddhist should practice can be

classified into three major groups, namely, the Five precepts (*pancha-sīla*), the Eight precepts (*astanga-sīla*), and the Ten Good Actions (*dasa-sīla*). Buddhism's three significant moral precepts are the basic ethics that every Buddhist should observe and practice (Mohd Rosmizi, 2010). Buddhists believe these precepts can cover all aspects of man's conduct, specifically thought, speech, and bodily actions.

Examining *sīla*, the systematic system of Buddhist ethics has revealed its profound significance in Buddhism. Rooted in the teachings and insights of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, Buddhist ethics serves as a framework for moral improvement, emphasizing discipline and cultivating one's character and mind. These ethical principles are manifested through various precepts, including the Five Precepts, the Eight Precepts, and the Ten Good Actions, which address aspects of thought, speech, and bodily actions, guiding all facets of human conduct.

Buddhism places *sīla* at the forefront of its teachings, considering it one of the three essential components of the spiritual path, alongside *prajna* (wisdom) and *samadhi* (meditation). It is recognized as the essence of Buddhism and the core of the Buddha's teachings, fostering wholesome character, and eliminating moral violations. The Dharma, the ultimate source of Buddhist ethics, embodies natural and moral order, transcending the influence of supreme beings and serving as a guiding force for enlightened beings, including the Buddha. Monastic monks, the Sangha, safeguard and study the voluminous texts that contain the Dharma's teachings, providing guidance and advice to the laity based on their profound insights into the Buddhist way of life.

The significance and objectives of Buddhist ethics are deeply intertwined with the pursuit of Nirvana, the goal of Buddhists. Ethics is a transformative process that

can lead to personal and spiritual growth, enhancing wealth, reputation, self-confidence, and liberation from suffering. The lifestyle and conduct of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, serve as a model for these values and are deeply rooted in the Buddhist ethical framework.

Through a brief exploration of Buddhism in Malaysia, this research sheds light on the practices and values inherent in this ancient faith, which resonate as universal values transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. Despite fluctuations in its historical acceptance and practice, Buddhism has endured and flourished in Malaysia, particularly evident in its status as the second-largest religious community. The contemporary Buddhist community in Malaysia reflects a vibrant diversity, with each temple, monastery, or association operating autonomously, fostering unique practices and organizational structures. This diversity extends beyond Buddhism, with members of the Chinese-Malaysian community often embracing other belief systems, such as Taoism or Confucianism, resulting in a rich tapestry of religious coexistence and syncretism. While the Malaysian Buddhist community may be diverse in its practices and cultural backgrounds, its shared reverence for the teachings of Buddhism serves as a unifying force, embodying enduring values of peace, compassion, and spiritual enlightenment.

The moral teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha, resonate profoundly in both ancient wisdom and modern understanding. As contemporary perspectives increasingly align with Buddhist values, the enduring relevance of the Buddha's teachings becomes evident. The appeal of Buddhism in modern times lies in its harmony with contemporary values and scientific viewpoints. Emphasizing self-reliance, mindfulness, and nonviolence, Buddhism offers a practical framework for

ethical living in a multicultural world. Central to Buddhism's ethical framework is the figure of Siddhartha Gautama himself, revered as the ideal embodiment of moral conduct. Beyond his moral teachings, the Buddha's character is extolled for its perfection and virtuous qualities. In essence, in Buddhism, the Buddha's moral teachings transcend time and culture, offering timeless wisdom for navigating the complexities of human existence.

