***Aspects of Life Conditions on Earth in Relation to Awareness of Mind, in the Light of Buddhist Teaching***

***Dr. Maciej Morlewski***

*Greetings all! First, I would like to thank you for the opportunity of meeting such wonderful people in such a beautiful setting. I drove here from Warsaw, and am experiencing oxygen shock. So, if what I’m telling you seems strange, that’s the reason. I want to also thank Paul for translating the text into English. But I’m afraid that my terrible pronunciation might spoil the effect.*

*As you probably know, I am addressing myself here to Buddhist studies. Here also I beg your indulgence. Many issues emerge here that are far beyond our conception, and are very difficult to verbalize. Many Buddhist masters show an unusual ability in describing what is indescribable. Because I don’t have such an ability, I will try to draw on their wisdom. However, I don’t want this to be a collection of quotations, classifications and ideas, easily accessible on certain internet sites. I will try to discuss this subject, at least in part, in my own words, as my teacher has encouraged me.*

*Neither do I want to in any way advertise Buddhism. After many years of practice, it is a state of continual chewing through or penetrating reality, that sometimes feels like the neurosis of an insomniac. It’s rather difficult to make an advert of such things.*

*In discussing the subject I won’t be constantly indicating that such is the Buddhist view. I don’t want to waste your time that way. I wanted also to point out that Buddhism is unusually broad and varied. There exist many threads of Buddhist thought, and sometimes you may have the impression that what you hear may not fit with what you have encountered as Buddhism. On the other hand, my knowledge is very limited, and I may not know about what for you is well-known.*

*Coming now to the particular subject. About 2500 years ago on the territory of today’s northern India, near the border of today’s border with Nepal, in the Shakyja Clan, there was born a prince. The Shakyja clan ruled over a small but rich kingdom.*

*After years of a life of luxury, the twenty year old prince managed to contact the reality outside the palace walls.*

*In the course of many previous incarnations he had developed a great love and compassion for all sensate beings, and the reality of our world, so full of suffering shook him to the core.*

*There awoke in him a powerful determination to discover a cure for all suffering. This was not megalomania. His was defiant, extremely curious mind filled with great compassion, that could in no way accept such a reality.*

*The young prince decided to leave the palace. During the first six years he practiced under the eye of yogis and wise men, but no known religious practices brought any results. In the end, he submitted to unusually severe austerities, and as a result of extreme fasting he almost died. Finally, he tossed aside all ideas, dogmas and extremes, and entered a state of pure meditation. He sat under a tree in a place that today is called Bodghaya, and for 49 days he experienced a final, and complete enlightenment. He became the Buddha --- or one awakened from the sleep of ignorance --- Tathagata, or the one who brought to reality “suchness” , or ultimate reality.*

*The world into which we are born, that reality which is known to us, our planet Earth, is a very diverse world. We are born and live in very different places. From countries that are very poor, to very wealthy, from places where there is continuous war, to places that are relatively peaceful. We appear in families that are wealthy, or those that are poor.*

*We have varied access to nourishment, clothing, to a roof over our heads, education, rest and recreation. What for us people and other sensate beings is common, is an aspiration of happiness and avoidance of suffering. And also fear lest we lose what we value, and fear of suffering that might appear. Where does all that come from?*

*Why do we constantly pursue and desire something, while at the same time we are afraid of, and try to avoid something else? Why do we live in a world of omnipresent competition, rivalry and expansion?*

*We compete with ourselves as individuals, family, firms, society, nations. Competition penetrates all life on Earth. If a plant grows next to another which is growing faster then the first one dies. Then we say --- how wonderful nature is. We react the same way when we look at a nature film.*

*Most of such films show animals of prey that attack the weakest animals in a herd, often those that are ill or too young to escape, and then they devour the body. Amazing, we say. How nature is so wise, how wonderfully it promotes the strongest and most resourceful. And expansion. Expansion of individuals, species, nations, great businesses, powers, ideologies, and finally the expansion of religions.*

*Spiritual leaders of such religions teach their faithful for example, to reproduce most effectively. So that their numbers might assure their expansion. Viruses and bacteria show a similar level of spirituality. There are over 7 billion people, and we are already dreaming of colonizing other planets. Thankfully the universe protects itself against such ideas by its cosmic distances.*

*What sort of reality is this whose basic law is the law of the most powerful? One of the Buddha’s fundamental discoveries was the recognition of the illusory nature of the ego and how that illusion can be overcome. In order to achieve that one has to begin with silenc*ing, and transcending *called accumulations. Those are ways of functioning, habits, identities, learned reactions, stores of experiences. Everything that builds the illusion of a concrete, stable ego. This is a complex, multi-step process. Our most subtle habitual reactions and movements of thought are cut off at the root. Also, all conceptions, ideas and forms are transcended.*

*In such a manner we draw closer to a state that usually evokes certain misunderstandings. That is the state of experiencing emptiness, which means seeing all forms and phenomena as emptiness. The Buddhist “emptiness” (in Sanscrit “suniata”) has nothing to do with nothingness. The mind that draws close to self-enlightenment discovers that no phenomenon or form, whether of the material world or thought, conception, idea or emotion, possesses an independent or unconditional being. Co-dependence is here key.*

*Each phenomenon or form can exist only then, when the appropriate conditions are present, and will last as long as those conditions last. This leads to a disintegration or re-forming into a different existence or appearance. This is a very profound level of insight. The mind recognizes and transcends the reality of the world of matter, energy, time and space. All those collective features of reality as we know it, as well as those interdependent, lose all real existence.*

*Today thanks to fundamental discoveries in modern physics, both theoretical and experimental, it’s a lot easier for us to approach that level intellectually. Einstein’s Special and General Relativity Theory has been proved experimentally and practically in our lifetime. Physicists working for example with the Hadron Supercollider, observe sub nuclear particles that spontaneously emerge from vacuum, and then disappear into it. Empty space ceases to be nothingness. Physicists already know that “existence” and “non-existence” are both relative. The enlightened mind approaches the level of emptiness, and perceives that all manifested forms emerge from emptiness, and have the same nature as emptiness. The duality of existence and non-existence is thus transcended. Physicists, thanks to specialized apparatus, are able to observe it experimentally.*

*Unfortunately in a very narrow range. The great, enlightened masters do not as much observe, as do they realize, actualize that level. There appear then spontaneously many “siddhis”, so called supernatural abilities. The great, actualized Tibetan lamas can of course fly, or walk on water. However, I rather like certain funny stories associated with that subject. At the beginning of the eleventh century, Marpa, one of the great masters of my school, brought the teachings of his Indian teachers to Tibet, and began the tradition of my school, the Kagyu. In his older years Marpa would forget himself sometimes and, witnessed by people who came for teachings and blessings, distracted, he would enter and leave his hut by going through a thick wall instead of normally via the door. His close disciples constantly asked him not to do this, because it scared people who weren’t used to such a sight.*

*Marpa was remorseful and promised to correct his behavior but even so he often forgot. An agile brain is very necessary on the road to the first steps on the road to enlightenment, but later, the enlightened mind has nothing in common with the condition of that instrument. Because this story is set in bygone times, I would like to relate one more, more modern, from the seventies of the last century. I promise that it will be the last. It concerns the previous sixteenth Karmapa. Subsequent incarnations of the Karmapas are the heads of my school. In one of his journeys to the United States, his Holiness was asked by a group of scientists and medics about the possibility of having a chest X-Ray done. The astonished medics made three successive photos, because on the first one they saw and absurdly large heart and very small lungs, and on the second one the reverse – a small heart and large lungs. Only on the third were the organs in normal proportions.*

*Karmapa explained that it was He who decides how his body is to appear. Sometimes enlightened teachers decide to shake up people’s minds, to make them a little more elastic. As we know, the minds of doctors can be rather stiff. I know that at least about myself. That type of siddhi is shown very rarely, because it can cause a considerable shock. Looking at something like it on an X-Ray film is easier, like a soft landing. The most essential and greatest siddhi of those enlightened beings is their great love, compassion and ability of leading others to enlightenment.*

*Let’s return now to emptiness. Eventually everything returns to that. As I mentioned the mind in its journey to final enlightenment discovers and reveals the relativity of all forms and phenomena. The next step is very important, as the mind recognizes itself in the end, as being also empty in its own, personal and ultimate nature.*

*In Buddhist teachings we say that the mind is ultimately empty and bright. The light of the mind is the ability to recognize the nature of the phenomenal world and one’s ultimate nature. illuminated emptiness (śuniata) is a state of unconditional, boundless joy and spontaneous, unconditional and love, unbounded by anything, and transcending all conception and conceivable wisom. Increasing self-illumination leads in the end to transcendence, the dissolution of the individual mind . It’s a little like the dissolution of a parliament or government.*

*The individual self, the centre, the illusion of the ego disappear, are transcended. There remains only the ultimate reality, very far from the dualism of “existence --- non-existence”. It has no beginning nor end, has nothing to do with time, duration or change. It is immeasurably far from any causes and effects --- as is joy, or love. It transcends all virtues.*

*Joy, love and wisdom become one, all transcending the fullness. That is the reality that in Buddhism is called the Buddha Nature, the final, full enlightenment, the ultimate fruit (in Sanscrit, “Anuttara-Samyak-Samboddhi”, or simple – “suchness”). Personally, I very much like the concept of “suchness”, because it is relatively inconceivable and unpretentious. Of course, these are only attempts at naming or description. Well, what can one say.*

*Let’s try something totally in reverse. Meaning, that we will try to determine how the illusion of the ego arose. We imagine self-consciousness emerging from an ultimate reality. This takes place totally spontaneously, and is not any beginning. It does not take place in any moment or place. It has no relationship with any cause or effect. It does not emerge from any need. We could say evasively that it takes place because it can.*

*Such self-consciousness is totally free from the need of existence or non-existence. It is conscious of its spontaneity, and that it is no different from ultimate reality. And thus this is excellent. And in no way is this the ego. Unfortunately, as we know, things sometimes like to happen. Because they can. The problem arises when our self-consciousness starts to play with the illusion of its separation and when that illusion begins to suck it in. The separation of the “I” and “Not I” begins to be treated more seriously. This is what we could call the first, still very unstable, beginnings of the ego and of its primordial origin. It is a very rickety ego, it likes itself, and starts to look around and draw to itself something to strengthen itself. Thus it reaches out to the illusion of existence and nonexistence, characterizing itself as existence. In such a way the ego constitutes itself.*

*If something happens once, it will easily happen many, many times. And so it is. In effect we have an ocean of beings, all fundamentally sick with the same basic ailment, the illusion of the separative, individual ego.*

*That illusion constantly wants to strengthen and feed itself. The costs are enormous. Unconditional joy is substituted for conditional joy. Boundless and impartial love is replaced by its negation, conditional love, and only directed at specific objects. Transcendental wisdom is replaced by knowledge of what is useful or not useful. For those processes to go ahead at full steam, a large playground is needed.*

*We’re saying that the ocean of sentient beings requires a vessel. That vessel (vehicle?) is the universe --- familiar to us and increasingly understood by science. Universes appear as does every form, from emptiness. They emerge spontaneously, because the ego of sentient beings requires a stage for its activity. Space-time emerges as that same stage, and energy-matter, which will act on that stage. When we look closely at them, we perceive at the most elementary level the interplay between being and non-being.*

*They are interdependent and impermanent. When the ego obtains its own stage, there appears something that will be the foundation of its relationship with the world and can strengthen the feeling of individuality. Such a phenomenon is the form, or the body. We have three main causes, elements of the body’s appearance. In the Vedic tradition, specifically in Aruveda they are called: kapa, vata and pitta. In Tibetan tradition they are badkan, lung and tipa.*

*As named, so they’re named. The first of those elements, or humours, is translated unfortunately as mucus, forms the framework of the body. The second humour, which we can translate a wind, is a dynamic component --- the capability of the body for movement, sending information into the body, and also movements of different organs, for example, movements of the intestines, the heart, emptying the bladder. That humour, i.e. wind, is the manifestation of the ego, following objects and forms, that it regards as desirable, attractive, satisfying and strengthening. It is the desire, grasping and clinging of the ego.*

*The third humour is fire. It is an aspect of so-called metabolic heat, digestive fire, maintaining the heat of the body. This humour is the manifestation of the ego in an adverse state, anger and hatred. It is all forms of conflict, that we understand here as fire by abrasion, friction. These three humours are of course the most basic activities of the ego --- persistence in ignorance, pursuit of an object and aversion. When ignorance joins with wind and fire, but with greater influence of wind, pride arises --- conviction that one is better, more important, deserving more than others.*

*On the other hand, wind along with fire, but dominated by fire, gives rise to envy --- or anger that someone else has achieved more. In medical systems based on this knowledge, we speak of relative health when the three humours and their components are in a state of relative, dynamical equilibrium. It’s a very unstable condition. Sooner or later an illness must arise. This arrangement of five elements is a very basic scheme of symptoms associated with the disease, that we call the ego.*

*And so in actuality, this scheme develops and expands to 84 thousand possible disorders that afflict sentient beings living on our and many other similar planets. Buddha Siakjamuni explained, that his teaching is medicine for all 84,000 illnesses, originating from one collapse, and remaining ignorant of our real nature. Our Earth, and many other similar planets belong to one of the worst categories --- so-called worlds of immeasurable suffering.*

*Let us return to the five element scheme already mentioned. A very important common emotion, penetrating all disturbances of the mind immersed in the illusion of the ego, is anxiety and fear. Anxiety associated with base ignorance --- is fear of the unknown, of the incomprehensible. Anxiety associated with desires, is anxiety of not fulfilling or attaining those desires. Fear of the unwanted and hostile is the next type. Pride generates the anxiety of being unimportant, inessential. Envy is associate with fear that the ego may not attain as much as others. All those, and other more subtle varieties of fear and anxiety, accompany all beings on our planet, from birth to death.*

*Let us return now to the physical world as a vessel for the beings reborn in it. As I remarked, it emerges from emptiness which is why we can observe today the smallest sub-nuclear particles as arising from vacuum and disappearing into it. The vessel, that is the universe, or a very small part of it – I.e. our planet, is made from the dualistic oscillation of existence-non-existence. Though it is not a real and stable creation, on a larger scale it appears so. In the case of worlds such as our planet, where matter emerges in various states of concentration, and a great variety of forms, eastern philosophies speak of the five, so-called basic elements.*

*In Taoistic studies, i.e. we speak of earth, metal, water, wood and fire. In Vedic and Buddhistic studies, analogously about earth, space, water, air and fire. There are also systems based on four or even three elements. What is here essential, is that our world arose from specified types of building materials. From those same materials are built the bodies of beings in specific worlds. The first cause is the ego. Its three main states: ignorance, desire and aversion are in their turn the causes of the three basic humours. The final body arises from those same raw materials that appear on our planet. There is a close correlation of those raw materials with the system of the three humours.*

*Of course, we know that the atoms of our planet are the same* *elements that appear in the entire universe. Some of these, the simplest, arose soon after the so-called big bang. Others, the more complex only in supernova explosions. This is the chain of cause and effect of the evolving physical world, or the vessel. On such a planet as our Earth, atoms group together and appear in proportions that are matched to the making of bodies of a specified condition of the mind. Those are the elements we mentioned, the raw materials for building. Because the ego seeks to be confirmed in its illusion of separation, it needs instruments to realize that illusion.*

*Such instruments, in the case of human beings and most animals, are the five senses. For example, sight generates a duality in the form of “observation---non-observation”. The mind, in its state of ignorance, with its conceptions, names, ideas and feelings, is in this case we call the sixth sense. One of the activities of such a mind is the sensing of the illusion of time. Specifically dualistic time. The mind either runs into the past, or reaches into the future. The present is truly unattainable, because when we try to grasp it, it already becomes the past. The so-called “great present”, that exists truly beyond the illusion of time, we can recognize only thanks to a profound meditative insight, when the mind feels itself grasping, and stopping.*

*The reality of our planet supports and confirms every form of duality, beginning with basic dualities, of existence-nonexistence, the I—Not-I, and so to endless sets of dualities such as wanting---not wanting, better and worse, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, enemy and friend, and many more. Supporting factors here are for example, light and darkness, day and night. Beings such as us are reborn most often in worlds in which they can observe a single sun and a single satellite such as our moon. Similarly we are reborn into worlds where the bodies of most inhabitants have the duality of gender. This is a very important factor. For most people to be either a man or a woman is of prime importance.*

*Meanwhile, according to Buddhist teachings, each of us has been reborn countless times, as often a man as a woman, and nothing has resulted from this. That dualism is additionally strengthened by the fact, that in our world, subsequent incarnations appear based on the duality of gender. Transcending that dualism in some, can evoke in others considerable aggression and atrocities because the strong ego so desperately needs that important factor to strengthen its identity. Of course, there exist a great many worlds inhabited by highly developed beings, where instead of the dualism of gender, there appear countless forms of expression in a single being, and countless ways of unifying with each other. These are unimaginable for us numbers of shades, and intense fulfillment in unification.*

*The ego constantly wants to strengthen and grow. The fruit of that is the body that needs food to sustain it, water, air and shelter. Our reality is so to say a consequence for our state of mind. Desires give rise to needs, aversions create dangers. Some are specifically associated with the body, others more with the senses or with the mind itself. Very strong desires and impulses might give fruit and realize large problems. This gives birth to competition and can lead to conflict and cruel, ruthless behavior.*

*If that mechanism repeats, it can lead to extreme deformity, such as gaining pleasure from humbling others, a hunger for power, satisfaction from controlling others, or simply getting pleasure from ill-treating or even killing. Such are the states of the mind into which transcendental wisdom practically vanishes. They variously anoint autocrats and despots, people of the least possible intelligence or wisdom, who are paradoxically seen as very clever and resourceful. Often millions follow such people. The very desire for power is most often evidence for great stupidity.*

*The same with the great desire for possession, fulfilled at the cost of others. Such people are in danger of serious consequences in subsequent incarnations. The world works as a very precise machine for the fulfillment of desires. Because the ego sees itself as the most important, as the centre, it makes this possible, so that the strong tendencies of the ego might be fulfilled upon its request in its own centre. Thus, beings that with great satisfaction robbed, cheated and took advantage of others, will most likely be robbed and taken advantage of. Other beings that ill-treated or simply killed, in consequence will suffer ill-treatment or killing. The key in this fulfillment, is the gaining of satisfaction, complacency or pleasure in such behavior. In that way we make known what we like. However, reality makes possible for us to re-live the same pleasure, as much as we can. Our lives on Earth pass very fast. The ultimate stupidity is taking advantage of, or ill-treating others to the bitter end, for no reason other than to feed the ego with ever greater power or greater possessiveness. The ego can attain to such an unbelievable level of stupidity, that it feeds on the idea of leaving behind something great. Another way of cheating the end, is the idea to leave fruits behind, such as the accomplishments of one’s progeny.*

*Children are most often trained in similar behaviour, and parents pay terrible karmic consequences, for their children, as well as for themselves. The very word and concept of “karma” means simply, taking place, activity --- in particular the activity that is a consequence of need, and of tendencies strongly expressed by the ego. After death, being simply the wearing out of interdependent conditions of the last incarnation, there proceeds in the transitional state the gathering of requirements for the next incarnation. Strong tendencies of previous incarnations ripen in the subsequent life, under prescribed conditions.*

*They decide on the characteristics of the body, the place of birth and many other collective realities. The compassion of buddhas and boddhisattvas is of course directed towards those beings in a particular way, who gathered many terrible karmic potentialities, but saving them is of course very difficult. When Mao Tse-tung was dying many Tibetans were joyfully celebrating. The Dalai Lama reacted to this with great anger, and counseled them that if they wanted to have anything to do with Buddhism*, *they needed to pray hard that, to the extent that it is possible, the karmic consequences of the bestiality that he allowed towards the Tibetan people be alleviated.*

*Apart from the individual ego and individual causes, and karmic effects, the so-called collective ego and collective karma is very important. It can concern family karma, karma of a certain society, of the entire nation, or finally of all beings who were reborn in a specific time, on a specific planet. On our planet for example, all beings are concerned with the necessary acquisition of nourishment, and water for drinking. The nourishment for some of them are the bodies of other inhabitants of the planet.*

*The strongest law being realized on the Earth is the law of the strongest. In turn, a country’s negative karma is created when for example some country regards itself as being better --- chosen, and because of this, deserving more than others. That “more” might mean more territory or natural wealth. It can also mean a need, so that there would be more of so-called, “us”. What that leads to, we all know. It’s a good thing, that not all societies that regard themselves as better and more important, have sufficient resources for military aggression.*

*I spoke until now about negative karmic potentials. Simply because the ego has an unsatiated feature, beginning with trivial stirrings of the type, “I want this, but I don’t want that” , and ending with the most greedy and ruthless activities, producing karma that supports subsequent incarnations. I think that one can compare it to the gravitation of a planet. The larger the mass, the stronger is the gravitational well of that planet, and the harder it is to escape such gravitation. The stronger the ego, the stronger its imprisonment by karmic forces.*

*Let us remember that all things are marked with perfection, the perfection of ultimate reality. The illusion of the ego is only an illusion. Being only an illusion it cannot change ultimate nature. Sentient beings will experience many forms of suffering in ways that are deeply real, but on the ultimate level, they remain untouched by such suffering. Thanks to our ultimate nature we are capable of wonderful, selfless acts of love, to experience and share joy, to great compassion and great altruism. We can also, gradually discover and develop a great, transcendent wisdom. Those manifestations of our perfect nature most strongly give fruit to good karma, and finally take us out of the wheel of birth and death. Buddha Siakjamuni constantly stressed that on the ultimate level we have the same potential for final freedom and enlightenment of the Buddha state. I think that is our true power.*