

Yoniso Manasikara - Wise attention for the modern problem

In these days, we humans are encountering multiple problematic conditions for our existence. Many experts are warning of critical threats to human civilisation due to natural disasters from anthropogenic climate change and existential threats to our survival from human inventions with the potential to surpass or destroy us like A.I and the atom bomb.

In the online digital space of the internet and social media, the dangers of machine learning and A.I are manifesting rapidly. Without a doubt, we are already experiencing serious negative side-effects from interacting unwisely with these digital platforms.

In spite of the dream-fulfilling promises the internet seemingly offered in its initial stages, the outcomes today show that individuals are losing a lot of essential good qualities like peace and harmony within and without, in order to obtain the delusive unessential temporary satisfactions the internet and social media provide.

This unwholesome and non-beneficial flow of the internet and social media misuses are not going to slow down easily. Rather it looks like accelerating towards increasing unhappiness and disharmony in the world.

What is the cause of all these problems and how should we understand them from a Buddhist perspective?

There are various Buddhist terms and frames to deal with this matter. However in this article, I feel that sharing of the term "Yoniso Manasikara(wise attention)"and "Ayoniso

Manasikara(unwise attention)" would be quite helpful to get the answer.

Simply put, the causes of all the problems which we discuss above are basically due to our unwise attention (ayoniso manasikara).

Its important to understand that our unattended human minds are defiled with greed, hatred and delusions. When our attention goes to a certain object unwisely (without mindfulness), defilements such as greed and hatred accompany that unwise attention.

Internet and social media content and the algorithms that work behind the scenes to connect you to that content are created solely to drive engagement. However, what is the nature of that engagement when the creators of these algorithms and content are humans who have defilements, with motivations often driven by greed (promoting greater consumption) and hatred (propaganda that divides and turns individuals and communities against one another).

The profit-oriented capitalistic tendencies of internet algorithms stimulate and enhance unwholesome qualities. Algorithms exist primarily to expose the unmindful consumer to content that preys upon their psychological weaknesses for fulfilment through external consumption.

The promotion of unwholesome ideas linked to political agendas or divisive social movements and tribalism are another way in which algorithms work to sow discontent, fear and hatred amongst individuals interacting on social media platforms. This tenacious digital manipulation of propaganda means peaceful and harmonious content has less chance to attract online traffic and influence peaceful world-views.

If we as online consumers remain ignorant of the irresponsible and defiled nature of content that dominates digital platforms, humanity will suffer as a result from increased unwholesome and unfulfilled interactions and direction, (as is already being witnessed today).

When it comes to the internet its safe to say, they know our own defilement, they control us based on that, and it works. Sad but true.

If we choose to remain unaware of the nature of the defiled human mind and its tendency for chasing and grasping for external fulfilment online, then this type of flow will bring us bound to the ditch somewhere, with frustration and unhappiness. The result of Ayoniso Manasikara (the unwise attention)

However, in our human mind, there are also many wholesome qualities like compassion, loving kindness, altruistic joy, and more. So, if we humans can create engagement based on these wholesome qualities through any system or device in the future, it will bring us back on the right course to the ocean of peace and true happiness.

Here, we can clearly see the criteria. With wise attention (yoniso manasikara - literally wise doing of the mind), free from defilement, we can create a wholesome and beneficial world. And of course vice versa.

By the way, I want to share another meaningful implication which we can get from the word 'Yoniso manasikara'. Actually, the etymological meaning of yoniso manasikara is 'mind act going back to the origin-source'. Simply put, look inward. It's the opposite of the common human mind, which tends to look outward to find meaning and fulfilment in life.

One of the obvious example of this outward tendency is people's over-engagement with social media these days.

So, for the end.

“On Facebook, there are so many faces, including yours. However, have you ever seen your original face? As Zen teaches, once you see your original face, you see all the original faces of others in the universe. Because there is only one original face from which all different faces emerge.

‘Faces, fakes, masked upon the empty skull, so many times already perished and reborn, even now. Makeup again and again for the show. Delighted by own delusion.’

To see the original face, which is not of division and multitude but of union and oneness, we should go within, not without."

With metta,
Bhante Anuttara.