



# *Marrying* BUDDHISM *and* BUSINESS

According to marketing strategist Kees Klomp, advancements in Corporate Social Responsibility cannot be achieved by implementing more laws and stricter rules and regulations.

An overall modification of mentality is an imperative. The rise of the Cultural Creatives is possibly the precursor of a new wave of a socially compassionate entrepreneurship. “Being a Buddhist myself, I assume that there is always a good side within every single human being.”

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## 'BUDDHA IS A PATRON OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP'

Beware of businesses that scream-out their 'Planet, Profit, People' vision, many critics warn. According to them, these businesses are often very much profit-driven and are willing to risk everything, even the welfare of the 'Planet' and the 'People'. Isn't it pretty obvious that the risks of derailment from work ethics and values must be limited, if not totally abolished? Wouldn't the actualisation of sharper rules and regulations enforce responsible entrepreneurship?

"I don't think so!" says marketing strategist Kees Klomp, co-author of the recently released book *Verlichting in business* – a book that has a strong emphasis on Buddhism. "Executing stricter rules and regulations is not the best manner to change people. One must not cling to the behaviour of a person but one must work towards winning his heart and master his way of thinking." Klomp, a formerly prominent youth trend watcher, sees himself as an advocate of Buddhism and believes in the power Buddhism can bring about in society. "Buddha has once preached: Buddhism does *not* exist! It is more like a total sum of virtues such as good camaraderie, interdependence/co-existence, reciprocity, compliance, generosity and selflessness. These are a universally recognised (and anticipated) set of human values, and I'd like to pass these on."

Should we desire to live in a more humane society, we ourselves must learn to change our ways, says Klomp. "The illusion that prosperity and welfare are two similar things is something people try to cherish, if not hold

on to. They are in a search of happiness and believe they can find it through a continuous production and heavy consumption.”

According to Klomp, the confusion between prosperity and welfare has even damaged the economy we are in: it led numerous companies to reward shareholders at the expense of their employees, clients, suppliers and nature itself.

“I look at the crisis in the light of Buddhism”, he states. “The very reason to write *Verlichting in business* was that I couldn’t quite comprehend why people focus themselves (and worry themselves thereafter) on the consequences and harm of the crisis instead of rooting-out the cause. This is the core of my subject: the cause of the crisis. I am a firm believer of Karma: you’ll be done what you’ve done unto others. In a more materialistic light: things come into being because someone at the other end instigated it. In this case, the bewilderment in money and luck=happiness led to the decline of our economic system.”

### Compliance? Compassion!

Klomp tries to find a solution to the crisis through a wide-range change of mentality in the society, and therefore, unlike many others, not in stricter regulations aiming at curbing-up the methods of banking and (en) forcing companies to become more responsible. “I do not advocate more compliance but rather a deeper sense of compassion. I suggest companies let go of the profit-

maximisation disposition and pursue the happiness of all stakeholders.” He generally implies that companies should reward their employees at a certain degree that they reach a happier state – and that they motivate them to produce the best possible product there is. Through this, companies become more innate to the society instead of just being about the money. With companies that are solely profit-driven, employees get all the more reason to feel dissatisfied and eventually get the urge to look for something that pays a whole lot better – given that i.e. loyalty has not been established from the employee to the employer, and that it was only the digits that have purely become the main purpose of work or service. The same thing goes for clients and other parties involved. “In other words: reciprocity is much better than profitability.”

*Verlichting in business* culminates in a plea for what Klomp called a ‘socially compassionate entrepreneurship’, with entrepreneurs that do not do business in the light of ‘Planet, Profit, People’ but more in the light of ‘Pleasure, Profit, Prosperity’: personal happiness, professional success and social prosperity. Klomp witnesses how a lot of the entrepreneurs of today strive for these three alternative P’s. In his book, he awaits the widespread of the ‘Cultural Creatives’. Cultural Creatives are a group of people – sometimes consumers and sometimes producers – working for the betterment of the society. Not because it is lawfully obliged but because they want to do it themselves:

personal happiness, professional success and social prosperity coincide. Klomp hopes that the movement representing the Cultural Creatives gets free restraint. "It is basically just a matter of further manifesting all of the energy that is already there." He tackles eight budding trends in his book, which could bring about all sorts of commercial possibilities to companies – from 'Spirit' (spirituality) to 'Slow' (the new definition of fast). "It could be that the most important trend will be 'Small'. This trend has a lot to do with the crisis – that is also caused by companies that thought bigger was better. That was a brisk misconception. Bigger was not better, but rather worse. Big multinationals happen to be somehow faceless en uncontrollable. This is also why a lot of self-employed professionals emerge."

## Happy Buddha

How realistic are Klomp's ideas? Will the essence and values of the 'Cultural Creatives' ever become mainstream, and will these eight budding trends persist and find their place in the society? And if this happens, will we want to exterminate selfishness? And how? Is our state of well-being not due to the same self-centredness of the money-minded businessmen and women and greedy consumers? Are their 'private vices' not considered as 'public virtues'? And if this is not the case, is selfishness not inconsumable? Isn't it that jealousy, vanity and the like, all a part of being human – able to

feel the good and the not so good? These questions can be well answered by Klomp based on his Buddhist belief. "As a Buddhist, I'd like to believe that a Buddhist nature rests in every soul of every human being. And a Buddhist nature is good, so therefore I'll keep on believing that a person is good by nature. I don't agree with an economy that functions only in generating more and more profit by so called involving the individual with their own 'growth'. I, however, believe in creating and causing a higher level of happiness that can be reciprocated and is collective. Many people want a luxurious and real pricey car. Once they have one, they find out it doesn't really make them happy. So why wish for an expensive car? Stop being selfish and put an end to that jealousy!"

Klomp hopes that people will follow the Cultural Creatives and work for a better society – a society where Buddhism and capitalism can shake hands with one another. He thinks that there is no contradiction between the two. "Buddha has not yet condemned the act of doing business", he writes. "As a matter of fact, if you use your imagination a bit, you can see him as a patron of entrepreneurship. Buddha considered earning money an essential thing in order for people to lead the lives they want and to be able to work on attaining happiness. Accomplishing success independently and individually is a good thing. He said though that this luck and/or happiness must be



shared in order for it to multiply. Distributing money and administering something for the good of the society is just as important as earning money.”

According to Klomp, marketing can contribute to a deeper understanding into what real happiness is all about. “I personally think that marketing should revolve around the art of gratifying realistic needs instead of gratifying false desires. I am a fan of the militant marketing by environmental groups and action groups such as ‘Wakker Dier’, Oxfam Novib and Fair Trade. What they actually do is Buddhism on a smaller scale: they take illusions away by pinpointing the unbalances in our economic system and hereby help people weigh alternatives and eventually make sound choices. Marketing can contribute to the arousal of different desires, having said this, why not concentrate on satisfying one’s realistic needs?”

### **Jan Bletz**

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