

The Lack of Moderation in *The Great Gatsby*: A Buddhist Perspective¹

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the characteristics of Jay Gatsby, the main character in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, from a Buddhist perspective. The researcher claims that the downfall of Gatsby arises from the lack of moderation, the concept that urges people to stay in the "Middle Path", known as the "Noble Eightfold Path". The Noble Eightfold Path is one of the Buddhist teachings that help guide men in living a happy life in the secular world.

Introduction

Many people struggle to fulfill their needs in numerous ways because they believe that wealth and material possessions are indicators of desire in success. Changizi and Ghasemi (2012) and Dorn (1996) believe that materialism may lead to moral decadence in society and, as a result, various problems. In Charles Shaw's *Material Progress and Moral Decadence*, "speed, radio, sex, over-emphasis on health, jazz, modern psychology, and money" are seven things that could destroy human life (6). Moreover, it is prescribed in Buddhism doctrine that the over attachment to something would result in the destruction of life. According to Buddhism, living in moderation urges people to stay on the "Middle Path" which leads men to keep balance of life. One can see that the seven areas that Shaw mentions reflect the lack of moderation in people's lives, and that writers always take it as a cause that leads to the destruction of the characters in novels. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, one of the greatest American novels, the story portrays the deterioration of Jay Gatsby, the main character, whose life is led by the belief that the desire to gain money and material possession would bring him success and fulfillment of life.

Jay Gatsby, the main character of *The Great Gatsby*, represents one who follows the American Dream without a true understanding of it. Gatsby has a strong intent that material and financial wealth would lift his social status up to par with Daisy, the woman whom he is in love with. When he finds out that Daisy married Tom Buchanan, a wealthy old rich man, Gatsby still believes that it is because of wealth and social status. Gatsby believes that Daisy still loves him. This allows Gatsby to try by all means to be equal with Buchanan's financial status so that he could fulfill his love with Daisy once again.

Gatsby's struggle to win Daisy heart is an example of those who distorted American Dream, and became a victim of extravagance. Gatsby involves himself with illegal business to raise his social status. He sees this as the only path to wealth since it brings him close to the goal faster. Gatsby shows to the society that he is rich by possessing material wealth such as a mansion, glamorous cars, and a lot of flamboyant parties. Gatsby does not enjoy his wealth, but he uses it as a tool to reach his goal. However, the financial and material wealth could not fulfill Gatsby's goal that is Daisy, it, in return, destroys himself.

To understand Gatsby's decadence, which the researcher believes is partly caused by his lack of moderation; the concept of self-sufficiency or moderation is employed in this study. Self-sufficiency is one of the key concepts in Buddhist teachings. It suggests that people should not overly value the attachment towards material things (Loy 55). Loy also explains that material wealth brings secular happiness to men rather than psychological happiness. The secular happiness refers to happiness that is caused by material possession, while the psychological happiness means the happiness from within. According to Loy, the teaching of detachment advises the Buddhists to be satisfied with "minimum material needs"

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(55). The “minimum material needs” that Loy refers to is the four requisites instructed by the Lord Buddha to help guide laymen to live happily.

Many studies about *The Great Gatsby* and its characters have been carried out from various aspects, but none of the studies demonstrate the lack of moderation as a cause that leads the main character to his downfall. Thus, it is in the interest of the researcher to analyze the characteristics of Jay Gatsby from a Buddhist perspective. In doing so, the researcher employs the concept of the “Noble Eightfold Path” as an empirical framework in the study.

Review of Related Literature

Fitzgerald portrays the decadence of the American society caused by capitalism and high consumption of materials. In *The American Literature in Early-Mid of the Twenties: Historical Critic written in 1979*, Chaichit argues that Jay Gatsby represents people in the Mid-West of the United States who believe that money can buy anything they want, even love. Due to his innocence, Gatsby is deceived by “The American Dream”--a dream that postulates equal opportunity for everyone to pursue happiness, wealth, and success no matter which class he was born in (Adam 1931). Thus, *The Great Gatsby* is seen as a reflection of American society and its decadence of the 1920s.

The 1920s was a decade of mass change in the United States. It was the time when people freely enjoyed luxurious lifestyle. Many scholars refer to this period of time as the “Jazz Age”. The Jazz Age represents the amusement of jazz music originated in the U.S., and this allowed people to go to parties and consume alcoholic beverages. Consequently, the American way of living was full of complexity than it used to be in the past. American people satisfied themselves with extravagant materials such as throwing big parties, consuming excessive alcoholic beverage, and buying luxurious cars and houses. They were trapped by technology, business, and advertisements, which brought them too much comfortable life and gradually led them away from a sense of moderation.

According to Leland D. Baldwin’s *The Stream of American History, Americans in the 1920s* believed that wealth and possession of materials would bring happiness in life, so they had to quest for luxurious lifestyles in order to fulfill their enjoyment in life (420-423). As a result of materialism, American way of life has turned into more material aspects. The following parts provide details how capitalism affected the American way of life in the 1920s in many ways.

In the 1920s American capitalist society, people had more chances to obtain wealth through abundant of jobs arisen with various kinds of business. Money became a means to enjoy extravagant life, purchasing luxurious cars, big houses, and anything that bring comfort to their living. It can be seen that American people in the 1920s were able to enjoy their lives to their full extent. Such extremity could result in pain if they rely on it too much.

Moderation: A Buddhist Perspective

Moderation is one of the key concepts of Buddhism. Buddhism sees that living life in extremity does not bring happiness and peace to life. The Lord Buddha suggests that living a life in an extreme way but between both sides of extreme because living with moderation and balance can also bring more happiness in mind with less stress (The Path to Peace, “Buddhism is the Middle Way”). Additionally, moderation suggest man to be satisfied with what one already possesses, being happy with basic needs which are described as the four requisites (clothes, diet, shelter, and

medicine), and living moderately and righteously with what one can gain from his own career (Loy 2003, Thitapanyo 2005). The meaning of moderation is also clarified by Payutto (1997), one of the most revered monks in Thailand, that the scope of moderation or *Mattanuta* in relation to how one should live and act on a daily basis.

[T]he right amount in such areas as consumption and spending; he [practitioner] knows moderation in speech, work and action, in rest and in all manner of recreation. He does all things with an understanding of their objectives and for the real benefits to be expected, by acting not merely for his own satisfaction or to accomplish his own ends, but rather to achieve a proper balance of supporting factors that will produce the beneficial result as revealed to him by wisdom (15).

According to Payutto, man should maintain their lives in moderation as it helps eliminate the coming obstacles consciously and reasonably.

Moreover, the concept of moderation teaches man to overcome the sufferings, to consider the causes from which the laity suffers, and to settle all the sufferings to the right way without nonsenses (Thitapanyo 28). Thus, the notion of moderation is the main practice that leads all the practitioners to balance in life and happiness. Thitapanyo, a graduate monk in Thailand who studies *The Concept of Moderation in Theravada Buddhism and H. M. King's Sufficient Economy*, explains that moderation can be concluded into two categories: self-evaluation and other-assessment. Apart from the aforementioned concepts, moderation is also suggested in the practice of the "Middle Path" known as the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path

The notion of moderation is generally referred to as the "Middle Path". According to the Buddhist teaching, the concept of the "Middle Path," best known as the "Noble Eightfold Path" suggest the way of living in non-extremeness: the right or moderate amount of practice. The path provides guidelines for laymen to practice in their daily life in order to attain a happy and peaceful life.

Buddhist teaching explains that the Noble Eightfold Path consists of eight "Right" aspects. The Path consists of Right View, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Diligence, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. By being "Right", it means the right amount of committing anything in a moderate way, not too much or too little. The practice of "Right" can eliminate the greediness in oneself as it helps people to know the limit of their actions. Ultimately, this Path serves as the "uprooting of the causes of suffering, and thus to increasingly stable and profound peacefulness, wisdom, virtue, and happiness" (Hanson 1). If layman thoroughly practices or is engaged with this path, he can discern all causes of suffering and meet the real meaning of life by not engaging their lives in any extreme acts. Furthermore, Buddha pronounces, "if you do practice the Noble Eightfold Path, wherever the Noble Eightfold Path is practice, joy, peace, and insight are there" (qtd. in Nhat Hanh 49).

Analysis: Jay Gatsby and his Lack of Moderation

Gatsby's Life Goal

I [Gatsby] can't describe to you how surprised I was to find out I loved her [Daisy], old sport. I even hoped for a while that she'd throw me over, but she didn't because she was in love with me too (Fitzgerald 115).

In a conversation with Nick, Daisy's cousin, Gatsby admits that Daisy is the first woman that he is fond of. The above quote reflects how Gatsby sees Daisy as the most extraordinary woman whom he has ever met. He believes that Daisy also loves him. Such belief becomes a drive force for Gatsby to push him to reclaim her. He even compares his status that he is "from much the same stratum as herself" with Daisy (115). By building up his new identity, Gatsby "deliberately give[s] Daisy a sense of security" that "he was fully able to take care of her" (114-115). To build up his identity is to assure Daisy that he is the person for whom Daisy should love and await marriage, offering her a security which he does not possess. This also can be viewed immoral act of speaking falsely, lacking the Right Speech. The excitement of competition with other men for Daisy's attention encourages Gatsby, a "penniless young man", to be brave enough to attempt sexual relations with her, a woman of different class (114).

Gatsby is not content to simply think about getting Daisy back. He crafts plans based on those thoughts and his plans are translated into action. He expresses to Tom, Daisy's husband, that "[y]our wife doesn't love you," and "[s]he's never loved you. She loves me" (Fitzgerald 100). Potentially, Gatsby's false speech can also destroy the relationship between Tom and Daisy, conveying that Daisy loves someone else rather than her husband. Moreover, he explains his reasoning as to why Daisy married Tom during the big fight they have over her that "[s]he only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake, but in her heart she never loved anyone except me" (100). Gatsby has been thinking for five years that Daisy married Tom solely because of his financial status, as Gatsby himself was only a young and poor man at the time, lacking the competence to taking care of a fine girl like Daisy. Additionally, Gatsby continues to attempt to convince Daisy by saying "[j]ust tell him [Tom] the truth--that you never loved him--and it's all wiped out forever" (101). He angrily tells Tom that "[y]ou're not going to take care of her any more" because "Daisy's leaving you" (102). However, later in the novel, Daisy does not follow the course of action that Gatsby plotted for her. They clearly live in two different realities. The above quotes demonstrate that Gatsby is attempting to manipulate people for his own personal gain. He is driven to take what he wants and cares little for the harm he inflicts on others in the process of attaining his goals. Therefore, it can be clearly seen that Gatsby does not try to live his life in the right way of speech that is resulted into the action, which will lead him directly to his downfall because he is absent to balance his life following the doctrine of Right Action.

Gatsby's attempt to take Daisy, a married woman, back to him can be explained from a Buddhist perspective as a wrong action. In the Buddhist's Noble Eightfold Path, Right Action is an action in the moderate way, being not too extreme. One of the three aspects described in Right Action explains that one should refrain from the intention to take what is not given (Naht Hanh 94). Gatsby's illusion that Daisy loves him leads him to do an unacceptable thing. By having "no real right" means that Gatsby does not have the authority to possess it, and he cannot control himself, his intent, as he allows the illusion dominate his thinking which is translated into his actions (Fitzgerald 114). It can be concluded that Gatsby lacks the conducts of Right Action by longing for the only goal in his life and denying the truth that the woman he loves would never go back to him, living in his own illusion. Consequently, trying to take what is owned can bring problems to those who are related.

Due to his intention, trying to take a married woman away from her husband is not only socially unacceptable, it is also against religious practice. According to the

Buddhist teaching, it is prescribed in the “Five Precepts” that one should “undertake the training to avoid sensual misconduct” (“Buddhist Ethics”). Moreover, Gatsby’s action and intent can be viewed as he lacks the notion of Right View because it is the “mother of all” other doctrines in the Noble Eightfold Path, the way to live moderately (Nhat Hanh 56). The Right View is prescribed that it is the “understanding what is unwholesome and avoiding it, and understanding what is wholesome and doing it” (56). Gatsby allows the unwholesome actions, that are “all forms of greed, hatred, delusion”, to predominate his thinking (Hanson 2). His greediness or thirst in achieving his goal and his delusion unconsciously drive him to become delusional as a perception is focal in committing something righteously. In addition, Nhat Hanh suggests that “wrong thinking cause[s] us to see in an ‘upside-down’ way” (59). Additionally, it can be seen that Gatsby does not accept the fact of the consequence that his love is not his anymore.

Being driven by the false thinking, Gatsby believes that gaining wealth and status is the key to bring back Daisy, his lover. By becoming too caught up in the world of materialism, his ways of living reflect immoderation and, as a result, the performance of casually destructive behaviors occurs more easily in him.

Gatsby and Illegal Business

In Stephen Brauer’s *Jay Gatsby and the Prohibition Gangster as Business*, Gatsby is seen as a self-made man. This means that he makes his way by starting with little and is able to achieve great economic success. He sees that the means to success “do not matter as much as the result” (52). Many Americans in the 1920s, similar to Gatsby, saw money as an ultimate goal, they did not care whether the source of the money was righteous or not. At this point in time within the American Dream, people of the early 1920s were transitioning from the notion of traditional work as a virtue, to a more “secular understanding of the American dream” which means that society, as a whole, was moving further away from a belief in moral obligation (Berman 178 qtd. in Brauer 53). Thus, they defined the concept of success as if there was no moral component within the world of business. In *The Great Gatsby*, Jay Gatsby has been recognized as a “bootlegger”, a person who engages in the illegal business of selling and transporting alcoholic beverages. The book is set within the Prohibition era, when alcohol was completely illegal within the United States, thus bootlegging was quite a serious crime. Gatsby’s lack of morality, as Brauer displayed, is represented through the association of Gatsby with the “gangster and business” and between the “criminal and self-made man” in the 1920s (53).

Gatsby’s illegal business is revealed during the meeting at the hotel, by Tom Buchanan, as Gatsby and Tom argue about the love that Daisy has for both of them. Gatsby is exposed as a “bootlegger” because he has been involved in selling illegal alcohol in the “side-street drug-stores” and sold the “grain alcohol over the counter” (Fitzgerald 103). According to Brauer, Gatsby and Wolfsheim provide “services” to their clients, which in turn bring them a lot of money. Such “services” probably include “bootlegging, gambling, loansharking, and selling stolen bonds” both fulfilling and creating additional demand for leisure activities, such as drinking alcohol and prostitution (55-56). Buddhist teaching suggests that laymen avoid consuming alcohol because it can be viewed as a destructive item because those who consume it too much can lose consciousness. Further, by losing consciousness, one can do harms to oneself and others easily.

The relationship between Gatsby and Wolfsheim as illegal business partners is also portrayed in the novel. After the death of Gatsby, Nick invites Wolfsheim, whom

Nick assumes to be both Gatsby's friend and business associate. His refusal to attend drives Nick to anger. Later, the revelation of Gatsby as a "business gonnegtion" is made, as Wolfsheim explains that

I raised him up out of nothing, right out of the gutter. I saw right away he was a fine appearing gentlemanly young man and when he told me he was an Oggsford I knew I could use him good (Fitzgerald 132).

Gatsby was chosen because he had a "fine" appearance as a young man, and he claimed to have an "Oggsford" education. Wolfsheim raises Gatsby up "out of nothing" because he sees Gatsby's potential as a man who can make good connections and represent his "gangsters" or "underground" organization well. Moreover, the word gangster, chosen by Wolfsheim, conveys negative connotation as a group of people who gather to perform illegal acts. His part within Wolfsheim's corporation proves Gatsby's involvement in illegal business, violating directly the Buddhist tenet of Right Livelihood, which specifically states that people avoid participation in selling alcoholic beverages. His choice of career brings him to wealth quickly by focussing on prohibited and immoral tasks. At the same time, he moves still further down this slippery slope because he does not realize the danger to which his extreme career choices may lead. Gatsby's violation of the tenet of Right Livelihood can be interpreted as earning a livelihood immoderately.

Not only does Gatsby involve himself in such illegal business, which brings harm to him, but he also tries to convince Nick to be a part of his "underground" business. To that end, Gatsby says, "Well, this would interest you [Nick]. It wouldn't take up much of your time and you might pick up a nice bit of money. It happens to be a rather confidential sort of thing" (Fitzgerald 62). Gatsby tries to tempt Nick with the lure of quick riches, saying it would not "take up much of your time", and explaining he could "pick up a nice bit of money". The word "confidential" which Gatsby uses to describe the type of work he offers to Nick can be assumed to be a code for "illegal" or "under the table". Gatsby gives a clue as to just how lucrative his illegal business is, by stating that he spent "just three years to earn money and bought it [mansion]" (68). The involvement in illegal alcohol business reflects Gatsby's choice to become rich faster regardless of social acceptance.

Gatsby's involvement in this racket is driven by a motivation to recapturing the illusory goal due to the lack of Right View. Buddhist teaching explains Right Livelihood as to not be involved in any occupation that causes harm to oneself and the others, as well as not gaining money from the sale of alcohol. Further, it is advised, according to the Buddhist's "Five Precepts" that laymen should refrain from consuming alcohol because it can bring harms to physical and mental health of the undertaker ("Buddhist Ethics"). It can be viewed that alcohol is a source of the sufferings for those involved and consumed. Gatsby's involvement in illegal business can be described as the wrong choice of living.

Gatsby and Materials Possession

Despite the fact that Gatsby is an intelligent and successful man, he is lured into the world of materialism by the illusion that Daisy loves him and his will to bring her back. Gatsby's materialistic obsession leads him to act beyond what can be claimed as "moderation" from Buddhist perspective He lives his life excessively starting from buying a big mansion, throwing big parties, and having luxurious cars of which he has little practical use or enjoys them. All of his actions are devoted to one singular goal, which is to Daisy.

Gatsby tries to convince Daisy into believing that he is a man who can fully take care of a woman by attempting to appear as if he were of the same social status as she is. His thirst for Daisy pushes him to struggle for equivalency with Daisy's husband, Tom Buchanan. Gatsby's perception of these realities may be irrational, perhaps even falsely believing that Daisy is married to Tom solely for financial reasons. Both the reasons for his obsession with material wealth and the acquisition of the wealth itself demonstrate immoderation and extremity of behavior in Jay Gatsby. He has to build up his personal wealth in order that he could fulfill his ultimate goal, to resort himself into illegal business.

Comparing to his status, Gatsby lives an imbalanced life. He demonstrates his extremity through his life choice, a material gain. He is confident that his life will never be fulfilled. Accordingly, Jay Gatsby deludes himself into believing that true happiness can only be achieved through re-capturing the love of his past. Further, he believes that his love may only be re-captured through gains in social status and material acquisition. Based on this false premise, Gatsby pursues his hollow dream by making a fortune and living an exceedingly luxurious life.

In the first party that Nick attends, Gatsby convinces Jordan Baker, Daisy's friend, to inform Nick to arrange a meeting between Daisy and himself because Gatsby "wants her [Daisy] to see his house," she explained. "And your house is right next door" (Fitzgerald 59). To his innocence, he tries to move closer to his dream of winning Daisy's heart through his personal gains: a gigantic mansion, a luxurious car, and big parties.

Gatsby first earns himself money so that he can buy a mansion "just across the bay" from Daisy's house (Fitzgerald 58). Purchasing a mansion to live alone and to attract his love demonstrates Gatsby's immoderation and lack of Right Action by making such a large and immodest financial commitment, based solely upon his desire for a woman who is already committed to another man. Fitzgerald describes the picturesqueness of Gatsby's mansion was a "colossal affair" and a "factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden" (4).

Gatsby's mansion is far too large and impractical to stay in alone because it is prescribed, as suggested in the four requisites, "shelter sufficient for serious engagement with cultivating the mind" (Loy 55). According to the British Broadcasting Corporation or BBC, the design of the Hotel de Ville in Normandy is "inappropriately grandiose for a dwelling house" (3). The mansion's bedrooms are "swathed in rose and lavender silk and vivid with new flowers, through dressing rooms and poolrooms, and bathrooms with sunken baths" (Fitzgerald 69). It is unsurprising that Gatsby's bedroom is described thusly "his bedroom was the simplest room of all--except where the dresser was garnished with a toilet set of pure dull gold" (69). The embellishment of Gatsby's mansion provides a sense of luxury that is both impractical and unsuitable for a solitary man from the American Midwest. Thus, Gatsby's house is likely to exist for the purpose of being viewed, not for the purpose of being lived in. It is a showpiece, built upon a foundation of desire.

Gatsby's penchant for materialism is not only demonstrated by his gigantic mansion, but also in his choice of cars. Fitzgerald depicts Gatsby's car as a "rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hatboxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns". Instead of buying a classic black or red car, the opulence of Gatsby's car indicates that it is a representation of his personal wealth

and the “rich cream” color of the car is so unique that “everybody had seen” it as it “mirrored a dozen suns” (47). The purpose of Gatsby’s car is meant to solely be impressed by Daisy. He seems to direct large amount of his wealth toward personal glorification or enhancement of self-image with the gaudy “new money”.

While Buddhist teaching allows for happiness gained through possession of wealth or *Atthi sukha*, it is a lesser happiness than *Bhoga sukha*. *Bhoga sukha* is gained through the utilization and sharing of one’s possessions (Saranapala, “Concept of Happiness: A Buddhist Perspective”). It is unlikely that Jay Gatsby ever reaches this higher happiness because of his extreme focus on material acquisition for the purpose of self-aggrandizement.

It is not only a luxurious car that Gatsby believes will attract Daisy, but also big parties. He hopes that by throwing extravagant parties, Daisy will be able to see the light across her bay. Gatsby dearly hopes to see her in one of his big parties. His parties are always full of people like “moths” or insects that come and go via his Rolls-Royce car, and they have short lives or time to live. They enjoy drinking alcohol and playing on his beach, like they are at home. His excessively extravagant parties are even compared thusly “[it] looks like the World’s Fair” (Fitzgerald 61). Seemingly, many guests who come to his parties do not care much about the host.

Buddhist teachings suggest that becoming too obsessed with material possessions does not constitute right action because it signifies a lack of balance within oneself, which may ultimately bring suffering. He does not contemplate the ultimate consequence of his actions. The way to eradicate all suffering is to live life in accordance with Right Action. This means performance of all action with mindfulness and moderation. One must learn to evaluate one’s own choices and determine whether they may have negative impacts or consequences, or they may lead to a deviation from the middle path. The behaviors portrayed prove that Gatsby does not follow the course of Right Action. He lives his life extravagantly, throwing big parties, possessing a big mansion and luxurious cars of which he has little practical use. All his life’s energy is devoted to one singular and precarious goal, to win the heart of a woman whom he loved in the past.

In addition, his involvement in illegal and immoral business causes harm to himself, and he also brings harm to those affected by the vices his business sponsors. It can also be said that he unknowingly brings harm to his only real friend, by inviting Nick’s involvement in this criminal enterprise. Due to a disregard for himself and others, within the realm of his work, the conclusion can be drawn that Gatsby lacks the notion of moderation that is necessary to properly observe the Buddhist concept of Right Livelihood.

Conclusion and Discussion

Jay Gatsby represents a man who is filled with desire in both action and livelihood. He utilizes all available means to elevate his social and financial status so that he can pursue his singular goal that is to win his lost love back. His goal can be seen that it is a result from his sexual drive (Thi Huong “Jay Gatsby’s Trauma and Psychological Loss”). However, his plan to obtain Daisy, a woman who is married to a wealthy man named Tom Buchanan, does not ultimately result in what he hopes. This study investigates the lack of moderation with the researcher claims that was instrumental in causing Jay Gatsby’s life to downfall. The researcher employs the Noble Eightfold Path, namely Right View, Right Thinking, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Diligence, Right Mindfulness, and Right

Concentration as a conceptual framework in this study. The study finds that Gatsby's lack of moderation is caused by the lack of Right Livelihood and Right Action.

The Lack of Right Livelihood

In the Buddhist teaching, Right Livelihood refers to a moderate way to earn one's living, which should not be harmful to one or others. As well, it states that one should not involve oneself in any illegal or morally questionable business, such as dealing in arms, slavery, meat, alcohol, drugs or other poisons. Gatsby neglects the concept of Right Livelihood due to the intensity of his desire. This allows him to resort to illegal business; both selling alcoholic beverages and providing some other underground services, with the cooperation of Wolfsheim. Gatsby believes that by involvement in such questionable business, he can more quickly make his way to his ultimate dream of living with his love, Daisy Fay, once again. Gatsby's way to make his dream or success is driven by the strong will to succeed and the accomplishment in wealth and materials, and it comes from the impulse that Gatsby needs to fulfill his needs (Kongsri 2012, Pawanarith 1992). Moreover, his career is not a wise choice according to the practice of Right Livelihood, as he only sees it as a means to win back the object of his desire. Also, he does not spend the fruit of his labor wisely, as his money primarily pays for an extravagant and luxurious life, in hope that Daisy will notice how affluent a man he is and therefore deem him a desirable mate.

Not only does Gatsby cause harm to himself by involving himself in illegal business, but he also attempts to involve Nick, his only real friend. From a Buddhist perspective, the career that Gatsby chooses to earn his living and his intent to bring his friend into the world of unsavory business, demonstrates that he is not aligned with the practice of Right Livelihood. Lacking understanding of this precept may potentially endanger one's life, as well as the lives of one's friends and family that living far beyond morality will lead to destruction.

The Lack of Right Action

It is first found that Gatsby lacks the practice of Right Action. The practice refers to the conscious act of avoiding destructive actions or behaviors in life. Such destructive actions depicted within the novel include dwelling within extremes, obtaining something that is not given, and committing sexual misconduct. The ultimate goal of the practice is the elimination of suffering caused by the actions of laymen. In this study, the researcher finds that Gatsby lives an extreme life in two aspects. Gatsby's irrational purpose leads him to dwell within extremity and to seek to obtain something that does not belong to him.

Gatsby's dwelling within extremes takes multiple different forms. He throws big parties every Saturday, primarily so that someone not even in attendance will see the lights. He buys a gigantic mansion, for which he has little practical use, "just across" the bay from his object of desire. He drives an extravagantly unique car that later transports him to his eventual doom. He is deceived by the specter of material gain because he is under the impression that Daisy married wealthy Tom Buchanan for purely financial reasons. His ostentatious lifestyle demonstrates that he lacks one of the qualities of the Right Action, as he allows himself to drown in a river of materialism. His way of life, with its singular aim, demonstrates that he resides within extremity. This, according to the concept of Right Action, means that he continually initiates suffering, rather than vanquishing it.

The desire to regain his lover leads Gatsby to become obsessed with the acquisition of material wealth. He believes that gaining wealth and status is the key to

bringing Daisy back to him. By becoming too caught up in the world of materialism, his life lacks moderation and the performance of casually destructive behaviors come more easily to him. He fervently hopes that all of his material possessions and wealth will bring him closer to his singular dream. Gatsby is eager for accepted Daisy as well as society (Kazine 1942). Unfortunately, he does not begin to comprehend that these same motivations, which guide his behavior are also the ultimate cause of his suffering.

In addition to his exhibitionistic lifestyle, Gatsby's propensity for destructive action is illustrated by his attempts to take Daisy as his own, a woman already married to another man, Tom Buchanan. Thus, we can see that Gatsby's deterioration is directly caused by a lack of moderation, beginning in his motivation and carrying through to his real-world actions and their ultimate effects.

He longs for his love, as she was the first nice girl that he fell in love with. To ensure that she is swept up by his desire for her, he creates a new and appealing identity for himself. His desire, known in Buddhism as *tanha*, pushes his mind to dwell in focus on this singular goal. Even though there is no trace found in the novel that Gatsby has sexual intimacy with Daisy, his goal to take his love back is strongly evident in many parts of the story. Consequently, the relationship between Daisy and her husband may be destroyed because of Gatsby's destructive desire, demonstrated by his intent to win back his love.

Literary works capture many wonderful elements of the human experience, through the eyes of the authors. They can serve as a representation of society and a reflection of the human mind. In addition to this fact, readers can relate some interesting aspects of novels to their own lives and to society at large. Similarly, in *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald uses his fictional characters to represent the decadence of American society in the 1920s, a time when people were less interested in morality and more interested in the acquisition of wealth and personal satisfaction. Jay Gatsby, together with other characters, represents an embodiment of this general societal attitude. Gatsby crafts his own dream and strives hard toward the materialization of that ultimate goal, without much consideration for his own personal welfare or the welfare of those around him. Further, he lives a life far beyond moderation, struggling to feed his desire with money that is not gained righteously.

In this modern era, the researcher believes that money has become the singular means by which we either survive or thrive. It cannot be denied that most of us now view money as a path to happiness. However, it is still possible to gain a sense of joy in life without struggling to fulfill our unlimited desire with money. Living a life in moderation or walking the middle-path means attempting to dwell in moderation and avoiding extremity. This lesson is one of the keys that allow us, according to Buddhist doctrine, to potentially open a door that leads to the ultimate eradication of all suffering.

Suggestions for Further Study

The notion of moderation from Buddhist perspective should be viewed and studied in other novels, as well as different concepts from Buddhism as it guides man to live peacefully and happily. The researcher suggests that those who are interested in this particular novel can employ other theories or concepts to examine *The Great Gatsby* and other novels to gain greater understanding.

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