

BUDDHISM AND PEACE PROMOTION*

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Abstract

Increasingly, issues of development with sustainable peace have been occupying a central place in any discussion on development and reform. In present-day society, unrestrained egotism has brought profound disruptions to the human heart and humanity is losing sight of the art of coexisting with nature. While a great deal has been achieved in respect of achieving external material development, however, this is not sufficient as we have not yet succeeded in bringing about peace and happiness or in overcoming suffering. With the advent of increasing violence and materialism in the society, peace promulgation occupies a pivotal place.

Buddhism advocates that with the promotion of awakening to the interdependent reality, selfish compulsive responses will be replaced by loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. The degree of kindness, compassion and sympathetic joy largely depends upon the extent of internalization of the teachings of Buddhism. Teachings of Buddhism are pivotal in enhancing the universal values promulgated by Buddha. An active religion working in proximity with people, have a wider scope to orient the people and demystify the gaps in religious teachings and practices in the society. The paper brings forward the teachings of Buddhism to promote peace.

Keywords: Buddhism; Non-Violence; Sustainable Peace

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Introduction

The contemporary world is confronting with the problems of increasing self-centeredness, violence, greed, hatred, suffering and agony. The impacts of these have given rise to economic disparities among racial and ethnic groups, and between countries. Buddhism views these impulses- greed, hatred and ignorance - have an impact on the inner lives of individuals, families, nations. Exorbitant increase of the self-centeredness will eventually lead to the destruction of all living beings.

The fundamental goal of Buddhism is peace in this world. If the efforts are made to eliminate the causes, the problems will automatically vanish. Following are the glimpse of Buddha teaching for sustainable peace.

Buddhism's Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path and the Middle Way

The Four Noble Truths are for those seeking enlightenment and refuge from suffering. The first two truths discern the Causes of violence and conflict and the suffering caused thereby: (1) Suffering exists. (2) Suffering arises from attachment to desires. The third and the fourth prescribe the cure for this unpleasant way of living, that is, how to promote a peaceful way of living and ultimately live in peace: (3) Suffering ceases when attachment to desire ceases. (4) Freedom from suffering is possible by practicing the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is expressed as the roads to the cessation of suffering and to enlightenment for the purpose of personal happiness and the happiness of all others. The codes of conducts that aim at cultivating inner states of mind as well as regulating external behaviors, the principles of cordiality prescribe that in private and in public, one must maintain. They are: (1) Right View/Right Understanding, (2) Right Thought/Right Intention, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right

Action, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness, and (8) Right Concentration.

The above The Noble Eightfold Path appears to have been formulated to bring happiness and peace not only to the individuals but to society at large. The proper orientation of these teachings will help us in quenching the desires, prevent us from coveting wealth and power at the expense of others. Eventually equips us to inculcate the right thinking, right actions and compassion for others and increase their happiness. Similarly, other steps in the Eight fold path also exhort us to remove evils from our mind, generate good thoughts to produce harmony and happiness in the society.

Another principle of Buddhism is “The Middle Way” which implies a balanced approach to life and the regulation of one’s impulses and behavior. Buddhism itself is sometimes referred to as “The Middle Way” indicating reconciliation of the extremes of opposing views. In the broadest sense, the Middle Way refers to the actions or attitudes that will create happiness for oneself and others. In many ways it is similar to the humanist perspective that recognizes that reason and rationality should be balanced with empathy and compassion.

Dependent Origination

The most fundamental law in Buddhism is the law of karma. In Buddhist terminology, it is known as dependent origination. Dependent origination explains the genuine condition of things that exist in the universe. Everything that exist in this universe in relation to everything else; if the causes of its existence disappear, then it ceases to exist. Nothing can exist on it's own and everything is dependent on other things. In other words, existence of everything is conditional, dependent on a cause. Nothing happens fortuitously or by chance.

All elements, all entities, all phenomena are thus related directly and indirectly to one another in the universe.

Dependent origination is all about understanding each individual's connectedness to the world at large and vice a versa. This principle teaches us that all things occur and exist only through their interrelationship with all other phenomenon. This network of relatedness is an indication of mutually supportive coexistence of all beings on this cosmos. In this vast, endless cosmos, everything is still interrelated even in the most remote sense. Any change in this huge interconnected compound of existence would definitely, eventually exerts influence on everything else.

The principle of dependent origination and the Buddhist view of the universe and the human beings provide a philosophical base for promoting peace. It gives an impetus for people to realize the interdependent nature of their existence and the interconnection among all things. Eventually they would develop a strong sense of responsibility for their own behaviors, as well as appreciation, empathy and tolerance for others. This realization of the true nature of existence gives rise to non-harming, compassionate, altruistic actions. The practice of compassion is nothing but showing concern for others to the extent that leads to empathetic involvement with others. Empathy is all about putting yourself in the shoe of the sufferer. The Buddha is quoted in the Dhammapada as saying, "All are afraid of the stick, all hold their lives dear. Putting oneself in another's place, one should not beat or kill others" (Harris, Elizabeth J. 1994).

According to the Buddhist beliefs, many of us cannot see or be aware of this relatedness as we are confined by all sorts of limitations due to our past experiences and actions. Ignorance of this interconnectedness is the root cause of the lack of compassion among people, which blinds people to the reality of

dependent origination. This ignorance gives rise to the greed that drives people to seek the fulfillment of their own desires even at the cost of the suffering of others. It also leads to the kind of uncontrolled self-centeredness due to increase of the desires. Deluded impulse of ignorance is considered equivalent to a fundamental egocentrism, which is self-destructive egocentrism because it violently disconnects the strand of the web of life that supports one's own existence.

Karma: the Network of Cause and Effect

Karma refers to activity mental, verbal, and physical-as governed by complex patterns of cause and effect. It is not unconscious or involuntary action; rather it is intentional, conscious, deliberate, willful action. The belief in the theory of karma, it will be seen, is only an aspect of this doctrine. The present existence of an individual is, according to this doctrine, as according to that of karma, the effect of its past; and its future would be the effect of its present existence. In other words, the law of karma in the moral sphere teaches that similar actions will lead to similar results. Each karma or deed or action produces its reaction or effect. The karma is a causative factor in creation. Actions done with good intention will give rise to good results and the works with ill intention will give rise to ill results. This is what we mean when we say that causes bring about effects that are similar to the causes.

A karma may or may not produce its effect immediately. Therefore, individual karma is not limited to a single lifetime. The situation of present life is determined by actions of one's past lives. Good deeds in past lives will result in auspicious rebirth and the bad deeds of the past lives result in inauspicious birth. In the same way one's actions in current life will decide the state of the future life. Although the present situation of a person in every moment is determined by his past actions, his action in the present moment, in the present

circumstances, can be totally unconditioned and, therefore, totally free. The potential for the individuals to act mindfully and freely is always there. It is up to the person to realize that he has the choice and to make it. This realization is the beginning of true spiritual growth. The law of karma has been seen very clearly in connection with the explanation of the origin of suffering in the light of theory of dependent origination.

The teaching of dependent origination shows way to break the cycle of the existence. With the arising of true knowledge, full penetration of the Four Noble Truths, ignorance is eradicated. Consequently the mind no longer indulges in craving and clinging, action loses its potential to generate rebirth, and deprived thus of its fuel, the round comes to an end. This marks the goal of the teaching signalled by the third noble truth, the cessation of suffering.

Causes of Violence

We can notice poverty and disparity in wealth as a cause of social unrest and breakdown of morality in society. This narrative shows the relationship between morality and the economic conditions of the people. It points out that a major cause for the gradual deterioration of morality is poverty, economic disparity, and destitution. It also shows that it is through the revival of moral standards, value orientations in society that a prosperous social order can be restored.

In this world of multi-levelled plurality, peace is not a stable, end state but a more interactive process of a series of changing and balancing acts, an on-going dialectic between our actions and the world. Both peace and war are produced by the collective, rather than individuals. Neither single nor simple explanation of what builds peace or creates conflict would suffice due to the dynamic, constant changing nature of all the possible causal forces in this world. Buddhism, being a religion with a claim of the reality of existence, has well

acknowledged causal forces that could constitute the hindrance to a harmonious living on every level of human actions. Violence and conflict, from the perspective of Buddhist principle of dependent origination, are, same with everything else in the world, a product of causes and conditions. To eliminate violence and conflict, all we have to do is to resolve the underlying causes and conditions. Using human body/consciousness as a division, the Buddhist analysis of the causes of violence and conflict is arrayed along three domains: the external, the internal, and the root (Shih Yin-shun, 1980).

The External Causes of Violence

The Buddha's orientation common to all living beings is avoiding harm and obtaining happiness. If people want to live an ultimately happy life should start with avoiding causing harm to others, physically and verbally at the personal level. Since people are afraid of physical violence and resent harsh words, they resort to inflict violence which further result in hate and conflicts and cost our happiness. In response to violence people again resort to violence, and hence a conflict arises. In other words, violence always leads to violence only; it may be either in the form of self-defense or in the form of retaliation.

However, even when there is no threat of personal safety, one may resort to violence because of the strong attachments to 1) subjective views, opinions and, 2) the desire for materials, relationships. The stronger the attachment is, the more obsessive one would be, the more extreme behaviors one would engage, and the more severe the conflict would become.

The attachment to views refers to one's own views, ideas, and ways of doing things. This kind of stand point often give rise to prejudice, polarity, rejecting others views and ways of life. Our views, ideas, perspectives and

identities are being shaped by our socialization process in accordance with our socio-cultural practices.

The attachment to desire, refers to want for material goods and longing for affection and belonging in human beings. It can easily go beyond the level of necessity and become greed. The greedy desire to have and to own drives individuals, groups, and nations into competition for what they want, followed by conflicts and even wars. As depicted in Vibhava-sastra: For the sake of greedy desire, kings and kings are in conflict, So are monks and monks, people and people, regions and regions, states and states (The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, Taisho 28).

Internal causes of Violence

The internal cause of violence and conflicts as analyzed through a Buddhist perspective, focus on individual and inner transformation of attitudes responding to the external factors. As stated earlier, the individuals' attitudes are being shaped by the socio-cultural practices prevailing in the particular society in general and familial atmosphere in special. Buddhism teaches that the roots of violence and conflicts exist within the mind and advocates for careful guard of mind i.e. the training of mind to do surveillance of the state of mind. To achieve peace within a person, the Buddhist approach is to observe and reflect upon the conditions in the external and mental operations, and then to decide on the most appropriate course of action as response to the outer and inner environments. Before taking any external action to realize peace, the first step for any Buddhist would be to look at ourselves and the events happening around us carefully and honestly, "not sugar coating anything about the realities of life, consciousness, or culture" (Sivaraksa, 1999).

What is important is to make right assessment of the complex set of plural forces, causes responsible for the event to take place. This is possible the insight (vipassana) we develop from inner reflection in the light of the principle of dependent origination. External peace is largely determined by the internal peace. In adversity I react with no anger; living among angry people, I act with no anger (Dhammapada, Taisho 4: 210). Inner reflections of mind not only help us in resolving the problems successfully, but also help in developing a sense of righteous judgement.

The rigorous practice of inner reflections will help us to choose appropriate course of actions in appropriate manner and beneficial to all parties involved, without any anger or hate harboured within ourselves. That is where the principal of non-violence is significant. This depends largely on the individual's awareness level and mindfulness for practicing peace. The Venerable Shih Sheng-yen (1999) stresses the influence of few on many, in that “peace in society begins with peace within oneself”, since the widening circle of influence of each individual would expand from their immediate sphere gradually to the larger contexts. Without this “internal disarmament” (as The Dalai Lama called it; see Hopkins, 2000), our negative emotions derived from the ignorance to the true operating principle behind all phenomena (including our own feelings and thoughts), the fear, anger and confusion in the state of mind, would rise as reactions to the adversary conditions, and would prevent us from acting non violently and living harmoniously with other people in the world.

Both external factors and internal factors are interconnected and feed one another, just as external sense objects interconnect with the senses, giving rise to consciousness and psychological processes. If a people's external environment is unproductive or unjust, the seeds are sown for violent resistance, through the

growth of motivating ideologies which take on a life of their own as they grip the minds of those who are being oppressed.

Human Ignorance is the root Cause of Violence

Human ignorance is the fundamental cause for the suffering inflicted by violence and conflict. All our attachments, the resulting harming behaviours and the suffering hence caused, to the human ignorance (avijja). We are ignorant to the cosmic reality that everything in the world is inter-related, inter-connected and interdependent. Due to ignorance of this we tend to think that we are separate from others as an independent entity. Hence we develop our attachments to our own views, ideas, desires and identities through the reinforced self centeredness. As a result, we fail to examine the whole event in its context with all the causes and conditions conducive to its happening. This ignorance to the principle of dependent origination alienates us from what really happens in the situation and the complex set of conditions around any given situation, and thus rids us of the possibility of making correct assessment of the event and reacts accordingly in time. Without the lucidity to discern the causes, development and effects of specific events, we are inevitably causing conflicts and doing harm to others as well as ourselves all the time (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2003).

This ignorance is what Buddhism identifies is the root cause of violence, conflict, and war. The basic ignorance is our failure to understand that the self, which is at the centre of all of our lives, which determines the way in which we see the world, which directs our actions for our own ease and benefit, is an illusion. The illusion of the self is the cause of all our suffering. Selfishness poisons us with desire and greed. When they are not fulfilled, we tend to become angry and hateful. This self-centred perspective tends to influence our own

thoughts and actions. If suffering is due to false vision, the immediate task is to remove it by right understanding.

Translating Buddhism into Practice

In the Buddhist conception of peace, all causes of violence and peace are interrelated and mutually influential; and the interrelations between violence at all levels. Hence, it demands a multi-lateral comprehensive approach to deal with violence and promoting peace at all levels. In fact, all the Buddhist practices are developed in accordance with the Four Noble Truths; that is, they are designed to enable people to alleviate this suffering and to realize a peaceful state of existence at all levels.

At the individual level, this means a transformation from a way of life dominated by attachment to material desires to one more focused on spiritual and existential values. There is a need to strive to establish a condition of inner peace in daily life. Unless there is no inner peace, there can't be peace externally. Person with peace from within can only contribute to the realization of the peace of the world around. Through the practice of dependently originated reality, individuals can be enabled to develop one's faculties to overcome one's ego-centeredness by working with others to ameliorate their sufferings.

Internalization of dependent origination principle will change our thinking and actions. In the whole process of peace making, what is significant is "being peace". The ideals of the bodhisattva include the cultivation of giving (dana) and loving-kindness (metta or maitri)—both of which are nurtured through walking the Eightfold Noble Path. Inculcating concern for other is prerequisite for the social harmony. Sustainable peace is possible only when we think about the problems in an integrated and holistic way and concentrate on the long term effects on universal life as a whole.

We must have the proper perspective that of the universal life process, so that the happiness of one person or group is not sought at the cost of others. The wiser course is to think of others also when pursuing our own happiness. This is called in the words of the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet – ‘Mutual Interest’ (2015).

Practice of Compassion

We need to recognize that every individual is potentially capable of manifesting that condition of unlimited wisdom and compassion. Compassion is determined by how the persons going beyond oneself and show the qualities of sharing, readiness to give comfort, showing concern and caring; having a kind heart, being generous and helpful to fellow beings; and respecting all lives while being mindful of one’s actions and words. When we see someone in distress and feel their pain as if it were our own and strive to eliminate or lessen their pain, this is compassion. All of the best in human beings and all the Buddha-like qualities like sharing, readiness to give comfort, sympathy, concern and caring all are manifestations of compassion. Our compassion is determined by not merely by feeling about the sufferings of the other, but cultivating a strong wish to eliminate their sufferings. People's practice of compassion in daily life provides an environment of cooperation, spiritual sustenance and support.

“Whichever way you do it, the practice of taking with compassion and the practice of giving with love give rise to the special resolve to free all beings from suffering, and that leads to the awakening mind.” (p. 123). “... it is important that development of the qualities of compassion should be augmented by wisdom, and development of the qualities of wisdom should be augmented by compassion. Compassion and wisdom should be practiced in combination.” (Dalai Lama, 1995).

Practicing of compassion will pave a way towards eliminate sufferings of the others and eventually leads to the awakening of the mind of the practitioner. Buddhism suggest for the cultivation of the qualities of compassion should be augmented by wisdom, and development of the qualities of wisdom should be augmented by compassion. i.e. Compassion and wisdom should be practiced in combination.

Practice of Non-Violence

“Violence begets violence” become a mandate to prevent the destructive pattern of accelerated violence, but the impact and the consequence of the peaceful means employed in the process would eventually contribute to peace. A constant, regular reflection upon our own thoughts and feelings would facilitate to pursue our quest for peace with peaceful means, internally and externally.

True peace emanates from non-violence which is a rational and mighty force. The practice of non-violence is life-affirming which contributes to human unity, progress and peace. The four Brahma-viharas, viz. Friendliness, Compassion, joy and equanimity which are ingredients of Right Mindfulness tend to promote global welfare. Further, the Bodhisattva ideal based on unselfish and sacrificing spirit, the compassionate and benevolent attitude of the Buddha towards the whole mankind, and the principles of Ahimsa or Non-violence, forbearance and humanitarian outlook all tend to promote peace.

The process of peace building requires understanding the complex web of interactions and interrelations among all entities existing in the world. The positive orientation focusing on cultivating causes of peace and preventing causes of violence will bring the desired peace in the society. The process of peace building must ensure various issues like promoting positive interpersonal relations, human rights and the environmental justice etc.

A Buddhist approach to peace, offers important common ground with other traditions. With the constant changing multi-causal conditions, there is a need for promoting regular dialogues between all the parties involved, on the international and non-government organizational levels. The cause of a truly comprehensive and lasting peace can most effectively be furthered by ceaselessly expanding circles of friendship and understanding through dialogue, exchange and cooperation. As the world is gradually entering “a new era of cooperative politics and international conflict resolution” (Galtung, Jacobsen, & Brand-Jacobsen, 2002), the Buddhist emphasis on process and the ever-changing, interdependent nature of the reality have inspired peace builders and scholars to discover innovative means to peace.

Concluding Remarks

A Buddhist worldview based on the principle of dependent origination, its analysis of the causes of conflicts and violence, and the open communication and participatory decision-making procedures in social organizations, would provide useful insights in the path of peace building. The true value of nonviolence, compassion and altruism advocated by Buddhism would pave a way towards promoting the path of peace. Peacemaking is an imminent, common responsibility mandated by the interdependent nature of our existence and therefore to be shared by every one of us. Buddhism lays down a form of mental culture to lessen the mind's tendency to veer towards violence. Therefore, it needs cultivation of a culture which involves qualities of faith and effort towards a more just and humane world. The philosophical basis for sustainable peace can be found in establishing creative symbiotic relationship with the rest of the natural world. Such a philosophical outlook will promote the lifestyle that is truly in harmony with the ecosystem.

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