

Buddhist Contribution to World Peace and Sustainable Development

Ven. Dr. T. Dhammaratana, PhD (Sorbonne)

UNESCO Consultant, Paris, France

In this study, what the Buddha said about peace, justice, and freedom – is important to learn, especially in the context of our much-plagued modern world. The concept of peace is central to Buddhism. Therefore, the Buddha is called the “*Santiraja*” ‘king of peace. Leading a Buddhist way of life, is to maintain harmonious, untroubled good life, which consists of “*samacariya*”, which literally means, a harmonious life or a peaceful way of living with one’s fellow beings. It is this doctrine, which gives ‘inward peace’ that allows externally to lead a harmonious or a righteous living’ (*Dhammacariya*). This is what the Buddha, for the first time in human history, made known to the entire world, when he set up the ‘kingdom of righteousness’ (*dhamma cakka*) literally the rule of righteousness.

The Buddha, with great compassion for the world, required his followers to practice the four boundless states (*appamanna*) of loving kindness (*metta*), of compassion (*karuna*), of sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and of equanimity (*upekkha*). This practice of ‘*metta*’ or universal love, begins by suffusing ones own mind with universal love (*metta*) and then pervading it to one’s family, then to the neighbors, then to the village, country and the four corners of the Universe.

The concept of peace is expressed with the word “*Santi*” in both the ancient and modern languages of India. As *Santi* is described as the ideal state of man in Buddhist literature, we can say that Buddhism has aimed at peace in its long history. Sakyamuni Gotama, the Buddha deplored that the peaceful life of common people was seriously damaged owing to the conflicts of various states, which occurred during the rising of Buddhism. In the *Majjhimanikaya*: people seek riches, and kings want to expand their territories (*Majjhimanikaya*, Vol.II. p.72). Elsewhere mentioned, is the desire for kings to begin war, and bring trouble to the common people with disasters and damage.

A. How Buddhist Teachings contribute to Peace Negotiation and World Peace:

Today, the nations of the world face many problems, especially in the areas of human security and peace. After World War II, nations agreed to create the United Nations to establish peace and solidarity among different nations to avoid war, terror, aggression and invasion. But unfortunately, such a noble objective still has not become true, as many parts of the world still continue terrible war, territorial

disputes, religious, ethnic and political conflicts etc. Because of these unfortunate situations, peace-loving people, including political and religious leaders, look for urgent and effective solutions to establish peace for the planet. In this work, we find out some positive guidelines for world peace in the light of Buddhist teachings. In the *Samyuttanikaya* (Vol. I, p.26) and in the Chinese version of *Samyuktagama* (Vol.39. Taisho, Vol.II, p.88c), it clearly notes that the secular world advocates the ideal of realizing peace and politics should be advanced: “without killing, without hurting, without conquering, without becoming sad, without making sadness, only complying with the Law of *Dhamma*. Early Buddhists made efforts so that wars would not occur, and persuaded other monarchs to that effect. When Ajatasattu, the King of Magadha wanted to attack the Vajjis neighboring country, and sought out the opinion of Sakyamuni, the Buddha through his wise minister Vassakara, the Buddha admonished him not to go for a war (*Mahaparinibbana-suttanta*). The ideal of benevolence was emphasized in Buddhism and pacifism or peaceful environment was always advocated. In Buddhism, the ideal ruler should govern his country with modern policies and maintain peace without invading other countries. This idea was repeated in the Chinese *Tripitaka* (Taisho, vol.13, p.733a), mentioning that “ A king should fulfil the duties of a king, which have been observed by his ancestors, cherish all the subjects in his country, guard his own country and not invade territories of others. The same *Tripitaka* gives additional information concerning the *Cakravartin* or Universal monarch and how one should conduct his policy vis-a-vis neighboring countries and rulers. The text says that *Cakravartin*, does not threaten people with force, gives up weapons, and does not hurt people. Then, people and rulers under his power do not move from heir own abodes. As a result of that, all countries surrender to him without being forced by means of weapons. In some other place, there is a record stating that a pious and wise king should conquer the four quarters with virtues, and fulfill his duties. The *Buddhacarita* (Taisho, Vol. 17. p. 515a), notes that the King Suddhodana, father of Sakyamuni, is lauded as having defeated his enemies by good deeds, without war. To avoid engaging in war, a technique from the *Dharmasamuccayasutra*, proposes: ‘even if an army of another country should invade and plunder, a king should know first whether his soldiers are brave or cowardly, and then conclude peace by means of expediency’.

When maintaining peaceful negotiations between two territories, there is always something to work out. Such ideals need to be realized to some extent. An Indian monk known as Gunavarman visited China in the early days – a Chinese king asked him: When foreign armies are going to invade my country, what should I do? If we fight, there must be many casualties. If we do not repulse them, my country will

be imperiled. O' master, please tell me what to do? The monk answered: just entertain a compassionate mind, do not have hurtful mind". The king applied his advice. When the banners were going to be hoisted and the drums beaten, the enemies retreated (Taisho, vol.50, p. 340b). The above mentioned passage teaches us not to fight against enemies. They do not teach us to repulse them deliberately. But, when enemies invade into the country what should we do? A king should observe the duty of protecting the country. Otherwise, the enemies take advantage of the peaceful attitude of the king. His subject may rebel. The same text clearly explains the necessary expediency in details. It is the duty of a king to protect his country; he must repel invading enemies. The text explains how to carry on a battle to save the people and the kingdom as follows: in the first place if the enemy is as powerful as his own army, the warfare will inflict damage for both armies. There is no benefit for any one, but may lose many human lives. If the enemy is more powerful than his army, then the army should abandon war and the king should look for a peace settlement through negotiations with good enemy officers; then, avoiding a possible war and the killing of innocent people. Secondly, in such cases, he should try to solve the conflict by showing generosity and giving anything the enemy required, then violence would be prevented. Thirdly, if the enemy seems to be more powerful, and his force is less powerful, he should try to solve the conflict by arousing astonishment in the mind of the enemy king by pretending his own army is a more powerful force. If these three ways fail, then he is allowed to take up arms, keeping the following thoughts: on account of the lack of mercy on the part of enemy, we engage in war and the killing of living beings. However, we hope that we will kill as few as possible. In the above three circumstances Buddhist teachings advise not to go to war but to negotiation to bring peace upon both parties.

B. A Buddhist Road Map for Sustainable Development of World Peace:

According to Buddhism, conflict, intolerance and disharmony arises out of desires, hatred and ignorance. To develop confidence, tolerance, and harmony it is extremely important to cultivate common values or universal ethics. Therefore, promotion of education, dialogue, social and economic development would lead for sustainable development of peace in the world. The Buddha welcomed teachers of other religions, but he never attempted to convert any or urged any one to change their beliefs, traditions or teachers. In this regards, we find evidence throughout the Pali Canon where wandering ascetics, sophists and philosophers come to meet the Buddha and discussed or exchanged their different views concerning the way of

spiritual practice and liberation. In the *Brahmajalasutta* the Buddha summarizes the main ideas of his contemporary teachers by saying the following words:

“You may remember this exposition as the ‘net of aim’, the ‘net of doctrines’, the ‘supreme net’ ‘ the net of religious–philosophic theories’ and the ‘glorious victory’ in the war of ideologies” (*Dighanikaya, Brahmajalasutta*).

Today, it has become an urgent necessity to provide avenues to build world peace through understanding different cultures and religions; because, the causes of religious and ethnic conflict in the world today have their roots in the misunderstanding religious beliefs and misinterpretation of sacred texts. Therefore, it is important to apply the wisdom of the Buddha to extend understanding through learning the religious beliefs of others through direct contact and dialogue. This approach in the modern world requires tolerance in a deeper understanding that all religions may have common ground on which bridges could be built to establish trust and acceptance, and therefore peace and harmony.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at its 161st session of the Executive Board in 2001 examined a resolution on dialogue among civilizations, which states as follows:

“Only dialogue ends war, and the dialogue of peace is very much a cultural dialogue as well. Many nations and peoples nurse memories of historic grievances and cultural slights. Dialogue alone brings these clearly into the open, where they may be assessed with full intellectual honesty and deep concern for one another’s merits. Only then can past wrongs be finally laid to rest. Cultural dialogue thus helps dispel the germs of war, and sows the seeds of peace - and any chance for lasting, harmonious development. UNESCO is one of the world’s forums for such dialogue. The dialogue fostered is predicated upon universal acceptance and observance of basic human rights, as enshrined by the Universal Declaration of 1948, to which all the organizations’ members are committed. Within this broad moral framework, each culture knows that its voice is heard, weighed, and respected”.

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The Buddhist doctrine of universal love and compassion was practiced by the Great Indian Emperor Asoka, with his mind pervading with loving kindness, said thus:

“All men are my children, and as I desire for my children that they obtain every kind of welfare and happiness, both in this world and the next world, so do I desire for all men”.

The King Asoka's Rock Edict XIII, states, that when he embraced Buddhism, he indulged in spiritual conquest saying that: the war drums are now replaced by the drum of the *dharma*. Some scholars say that the King Asoka, was trying to emulate the example of a righteous 'universal monarch' (*cakkavatti raja*) as depicted in the Buddhist texts. Elsewhere, the Buddha said that: it was possible to rule a country in accordance with *dharma* without resorting to harsh punishment (S.I.116). The universal monarch who is called a 'king of righteousness' governs his country as a model state in which there is both economic prosperity, as well as righteousness.

The concept of a just society is unthinkable today in our modern world, until and unless the people reduce their unlimited desire, hatred and ignorance. A just society may be establish in the world, when the nations and rulers of the world stop the fabrication of arms of mass destruction, and use that wealth for “mass construction”, through social development and elimination of social injustice.

The international community has recognized, that social inequality leads to ethnic and political violence, theft, and other forms of crime. Revolutions, wars, and terrorism in general have as a root cause, an imbalance of: wealth distribution, political power, educational and professional opportunities. The Buddha viewed extreme poverty as a cause of violence. Therefore, the Buddha suggested in the *Kutadanta Sutta*, in the *Digha Nikaya*, the following solution to prevent violence:

“Per chance His Majesty might think, I will soon put a stop to these scoundrels' game by degradation and punishment, and fines and imprisonment and execution”. But the criminal actions of bandits who pillage villages and towns and make roads unsafe cannot be satisfactorily put to a stop. The criminals left unpunished would still go on harassing the realm. Now there is one method to adopt to put a thorough end to this disorder; to those who keep cattle and cultivate farms, let the king give fodder and seed-corn. To those who trade, let the king give wages and food. Then these people, following each one's own business, will no longer harass the realm. The king's revenue will go up and the realm will be quite and at peace. The populace,

pleased with one another and happy, dancing with their children in their arms, will dwell with open doors”.

Though, the Buddha took no interest in shaping political situations, he was directly involved with politically active people. He took advantage of every occasion to admonish such people to maintain moral standards, to act with responsibility and to work for peace within the country, and with the neighboring countries. The *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* provides an example of the Buddha's idea on statecraft, and even his sympathy for a republic-form of government.

It is important to note that the Buddha's struggle was to establish a society, where all human beings could live with dignity, irrespective of their birth, caste, class, sex, and religion. Therefore, the Buddha repeatedly stood against unequal treatment of any human being. He wanted a society free from: violence, discrimination of ethnic, and with religious and professional opportunity. His vision for society, which existed in the 6th century BCE, is still valid to our modern society in the modern world. Whether deliberately or unknowingly, the United Nations is forging ahead with its noble mission - to work for the betterment of humanity, with the same theme and same solutions that the Compassionate Buddha thought out during his time, 2500 years ago.