

## **Buddhist Values towards Conflict and Peace: Truth, Justice, Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

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### **Prelude:**

We have reviewed all of the documentation for the roundtable discussion on the Role of Religions in Advancing Reconciliation and Peacebuilding. The documentation wishes to stress equally: religious and liberal human-rights approaches to transitional justice. These two categories are distinct and suggests that the two are not compatible or demonstrates that the model only infers Abrahamic religious conceptions – and thus a weakness in the incomplete model that excludes the indigenous religious from Africa, the areas under Indian influence (practicing forms of Hindu-Brahmanism, Jainism, Buddhism, and so forth), and the religious that fall under the sphere of Eastern-Asian nations (such as: Confucianism, and the distinct forms of different applications of Buddhism), and the varieties of local animistic beliefs. There is no certain one-way to manage the process of reconciliation or the harmonious restoration of the new ideal society. What we will do below is discuss the value of conflict, how peace is essential for civilization, discuss how peace can be achieved... As Buddhist scholars, we advocate the perspectives learned from our great enduring tradition.

### **Value and Significance of Conflict**

Buddhism would argue conflict arises from a logical-curiosity that is rooted in one's unwholesome consciousness. Also, in many situations: conflict also leads to many benefits for human beings and societies.

**1. Conflict leads to self-development:** According to Tipitaka, before Siddhattha Gotama became a wandering ascetic, he was confronted with many important questions, such as: why human beings have to be born, grow old, suffer pain and die? He continued to ponder these dilemmas, against the wishes of Suddhodana (his father), who prevented him from asking these sorts of questions, through sensual-materialistic distractions, since his earliest childhood days. However, the most important question asked became the turning point in his life: finding true-happiness. Although he repeatedly tried to answer this question - he did not solve the problem until he met a homeless religious-ascetic. As

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a result of this encounter, he chose, likewise, to become a renunciate a monk. Several years later, he discovered the harmony away from conflict: Nibbana. We can highlight the case of Yasa, who found conflicts everywhere he went. Upon meeting the Buddha, Yasa soon learned that the source of conflict was only in his inner mind.

2. Conflict leads to socio-political development: conflict is an unfortunate factor fundamental to the development of society and politics, leading to the formation or establishment of states. According to Aggañña Sutta, a system of monarchy was established as a remedy to enforce social-justice following some conflict. Members of society have physical and material needs: needing land for living upon and growing our own foods/medicines, clothing, our dwellings, employment, and so forth. After consulting together and concluding that foods should be shared and lands divided away for living – some individuals were unable to conform with the first social contract, and began to steal neighbors' rice. Individuals with excessive desires wanted more material things than they needed and began to steal and hoard items that were not given freely.<sup>2</sup> From the exploitation of materials, in the void of disciplined behavior, it was not so long afterwards that more quarrels arose – some people just cannot become socialized or civil beings who can share items within the community. Furthermore, owing to the widespread and deepening conflicts within an increasingly violent society, the suggestion arose, since: 'Evil occurs in our group: stealing, censuring, telling lies and destroying by weapons... so, we should appoint somebody who can negotiate, give advice and punish those who make mistakes regarding our regulations. As a result, they elected somebody within their group to judiciously decide upon matters brought to his attention and to further ensure that rice and land was shared amongst all parties efficiently.

3. Conflict leads to the establishment of Vinaya: The Vinaya, as the entire textual collection of monastic regulations, is designed to be followed by Buddhist monks for eliminating passion from their minds; however, the formation of the Vinaya did not occur from the Buddha's will, rather, it is based from the mistakes of the monks. The Buddha said, 'I did not establish the Vinaya until after monks had made mistakes within the Sangha and society'.<sup>3</sup> The Buddha realized Mahavira did not establish rules for his followers after his death, as a result: they did not know and understand what the rules were – and because of this, they undertook different views and practical perceptions, leading to various conflicts and schism occurred. With reference to this, there are other examples of monastic behavior that was determined to be against the spirit of what a monastic was supposed to be: in this case, Daniya took some royal-wood to build his personal-hut. When the King Bimbisara and the villagers blamed him of theft, the Buddha established this Vinaya regulation: 'the monk who takes public-wood to build a Kutī must be making *āpatti* (a mistake), and *pārājika* (defeat - loses his monkhood)'.<sup>4</sup> In another case, any monk who is schismatic or tries to destroy the unity of the Sangha

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<sup>2</sup> Ti.Pa. (Thai) 11/129/94.

<sup>3</sup> Vi.Ma. (Pāli) 1/21/13.

<sup>4</sup> Vi.Ma. (Pāli) 1/87/76.

(group of monks) must *āpatti-sanghadisesa* – repent or face judgment from the Sangha.<sup>5</sup> From the above discussion, we comprehend that there are similar goals with the Vinaya and judicial-state law – to manage conflict in societies; the former resolves conflict monastic groups, whereas the latter resolves problems amongst lay people. Furthermore, regarding civil-law, in many cases, this can lead to additional conflict. The Buddha established rules, and this is very important to understand, because: the establishment of the rules were not a matter of covering the mistakes that some monk made. If the Buddha ever felt the need to supplement a regulation with additional material to clarify the circumstance, he laid down the additions, known as: ‘*anupaññatti*’.<sup>6</sup>

4. Conflict led to the First Council: In my opinion, conflict led to the First Council for the recitation of the Buddhist oral-scriptures, and had an influence on any revisions. Considering this, it is very important to answer the following questions:

- Why did monks decide on having a council in order to set down the Buddha’s teachings, three months after he had passed away?
- When Mahākassapa heard the words of Subhadda, who criticized the Buddha after his death, saying to the monks, ‘you should not cry; it is a very good thing that the Buddha has passed away, because nobody should assert that one thing is wrong and another is right, or that one thing should be done and another should not be done’<sup>7</sup>, he (Mahākassapa) was very concerned that the Vinaya should be revised to prevent unrighteousness from spreading and righteousness from decreasing. He said that *avinaya* would spread and the *vinaya* would decrease; that *adhammavāti* would gain power and *dhammavāti* would lose power; *avinayavāti* would have power and *vinayavāti* would lose power’.<sup>8</sup>

In order to be reasonable, Mahakassapa referred to Subhadda’s critical words again, and as a result convened the Sangha for the sake of collecting and revising the Buddha’s teachings and code of monastic discipline – so it would not be lost from nonchalant attitudes. This is the most likely explanation for the organization of the first sanctioned council by a political authority, beginning three months after the passing away of the Buddha. Therefore, in this case, it is possible to argue that conflict, although circumstantial, was necessary and significant for these first revisions. It would not have been possible for Mahākassapa to conceive of the politically-sanctioned council if he had not looked into the root causes of the conflict that had arisen within the Sanghas.

5. Conflict leads to economic development: According to the *Kuthatanta Sutta*<sup>9</sup>, a king had a great amount of property, and wanted to retain everything for as long as he

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<sup>5</sup> Vi.Ma. (Pāli) 1/409/309.

<sup>6</sup> For additional material concerning the establishment of the Vinaya, see: Somdej Phra Mahā Samaṇa Chao Krom Phrayā Vajirañāṇavarorasa: The Entrance to the Vinaya: Vinayamukha Vol. I (Bangkok: Mahāmakūṭṭ arājavidyāyaya, 1992), pp. 1-26

<sup>7</sup> Vi.Ju. (Pāli) 7/437/376.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ti.Si. (Pāli) 9/323-358/127-150

lived; so, he wished to offer a sacrifice in order to appease the celestial-beings. According to his ideas: they could grant any desire or give anything to him. The court-Brahmin stated that the heart of the king stands for his people, even if the king cannot understand their needs, it is possible that some of them will protest against him, and destroy his property. However, the king's advisers said, 'our country has enemies who persecute us and steal from our homes, villages, and cities; if you, as the king, perform an act of worship, this is the right thing to do'. Moreover, the king's advisers argued convincingly that suppressing thieves by killing, confinement, fines, blemish or deportation will not completely eliminate theft or enemies, because the uncaught thieves will continue to steal. As an alternative, the king's advisers suggested a process of administrative science and economic development:

- The state should develop the economy for the poorer classes by providing plants and foods to people who are diligent, so that they can practice agriculture and raise animals - subsidizing them until they can help themselves.
- The state should develop the economy for the middle and upper classes by providing material and financial support, in order to permit them to buy products and goods from the agriculturists. This is an excellent way for the exchange of goods and services.
- The leader of the state should motivate administrators by offering food and raising salaries when they work diligently in serving the people and continuously developing the country.

From considering this issue, we can see the importance of proceeding with a multi-layered planned socio-economic policy to develop nations. Too often private interests are not parallel to the interests of the common public. The king's advisers concluded: 'Whenever citizens are diligent, concentrating on their work, do not confine or take advantage of them. The people in the country will be able to live peacefully, and people will be happy and families will enjoy happiness'.

### **Why is peace very essential to human beings and societies?**

There is no less suffering in the world today than there was in the past, and there are no fewer problems. Indeed, it could be said that there are now more problems and greater unhappiness than ever before. This suggests that the solution to our problems, and to those of society as a whole, does not lie in knowledge or control of the external world. Furthermore, in the present world, whenever a conflict arises between humans in society, they often meet each other with violence. Instead, they should resolve problems through reconciliation rather than violence as the management-tool in order to appease or eliminate the frustrations. 'Peace' is the best alternative way. This article, therefore, proposes to show why peace is so essential to human beings within societies and how it can be used to manage conflict?

### **Peace brings loving-kindness to human beings and societies**

From a Buddhist perspective, whenever our minds have inner peace, it is very easy to build loving-kindness and give it to other people who need help. Loving-kindness means we understand the feelings and needs of other people. We are encouraged to take positive action when we are represented with an appropriate opportunity to help those who are in need. Human beings are not independent of each other, and for this reason: humanity should love each member of society. Loving-kindness (metta), is also like a bridge that builds harmony between humanity and other societies. Clearly, because of just peace, we are able to have loving kindness and be happy as well as helping other people unconditionally.

### **Peace brings happiness to human beings and societies**

Why do humans have so many material possessions in their lives, such as: money, cars, and houses, but are still unhappy with all this. Other animals do not need such things to survive. The reason is that what they receive every day is not true happiness but false happiness. In fact, true happiness does not arise if our minds do not have peace. Not only can peace build true happiness but it also brings such serene contentment to other people to those around us. Moreover, happiness and suffering are states of mind; they cannot be found outside the mind. The real source of happiness is inner peace. If our mind is peaceful, we will be happy all the time, regardless of external conditions, but if it is disturbed or troubled in any way, we will never be happy, no matter how good our external conditions may be. External conditions can only make us happy if our mind is peaceful. We can understand this through our own experience; for instance: even if we are in the most beautiful surroundings and have everything we need, the moment we get angry any happiness we may have disappears. This is because anger has destroyed our inner peace. Therefore, peace is important for building happiness within humanity's societies. Without peace, our world will be permeated by both conflict and violence, until no one helps, understand or love anyone else.

### **Peace brings solidarity and harmony to human beings and societies**

Solidarity in this sense is like 'social energy' that arises from cooperation within human beings to help each other in society, to find values and agreement in each group. In order to establish solidarity and harmony in societies, we first have to build peace in our minds; because it leads us to positive behaviors, such as speaking, listening, walking and living together. Therefore, peace is very important for building solidarity and harmony. If we do not have solidarity, it is impossible for the world to have happiness and cooperation in various activities, such as prevention of terrorism and global warming. To summarize the reasons why human beings and societies should have peace or why peace is so important to them: simply illustrated, the world cannot survive without peace.

Peace is like a bridge that joins between humans with others in societies. Without this bridge, it is impossible for people to talk and share happiness and suffering with each other.

### **Peace building: Justice, Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Forgiveness is a cognitive process that consists of letting go of feelings of revenge and desire to retaliate (Cahn & Abigail, 2007). In Buddhism, it is called “Abhayadana”. From studying the Tipitaka and the Commentaries, Abhayadana is the great Dana which has the meaning of “giving no danger”. Fundamentally, the Abhayadana in Buddhism is primarily developed by Right Views and Right Thought which are the result of loving-kindness (Metta), patience (Khanti) and the Five Precepts (Panca-sila). The framework guidelines of practising Abhayadana are Brahmavihara, Saraniya Dhamma and Catu Sangahavatthu Dhamma, which can be conducted in 3 ways through body, speech and mind. The Abhayadana through mind primarily plays a very important role in patience, loving-kindness and dissolution of revenge. Consequently, the Abhayadana through speech is Right Speech of saying an excuse, meanwhile the Abhayadana through body shows respect to human beings. Forgiveness or Abhayadana is essential mental medicine for treating emotional illness by reducing or abandoning the negative reactions to an offense but increasing or fostering positive reactions such as taking the forms of compassion and generosity toward an offender.

Choosing between trapping in a prison of hate and forgiving: the freedom from feelings of revenge, how should we handle such this situation? Some people might be reluctant to express forgiveness because they believe that pardoning a debt violates standards of justice (as cited in McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). However, according to Buddhist perspective, it might be viewed that the principle of justice affirms our common humanity supported by *the law of karma*. The Buddhist believes that no one is above the law of karma like the rule of law. Karma means action, deed. The law of karma is the law of action which works scientifically just like other natural laws in having a cause and effect. The cause is the action or karma that you carry out whether

good or bad, and the effect is that you will reap the good and bad results according to what you have put in. In short, human beings have to be responsibility for the consequence of the actions. Similarly, the offender have to be responsibility for the consequence of such bad actions. Accordingly, it is assumed that Buddhist states should agree with the justice principle.

Reconciliation is a behavior process in which we take actions to restore a relationship or create a new one following forgiveness (Cahn & Abigail, 2007). As mentioned above, the Abhayadana in Buddhism is primarily developed by Right Views and Right Thought and Abhayadana through mind primarily plays a very important role in patience, loving-kindness and dissolution of revenge. By all the processes, the identity attachment may be transformed into the dissolution of identity. Accordingly, Abhayadana may bring about reconciliation behavior to build the sustainable relationship which is the crucial target of conflict management in Buddhism.

### **How can we find true peace?**

How can we find the “true peace”? There is genuine evidence that the Buddha or many of his followers, at least down into modern times, have been greatly concerned with the question of “how we can find true peace”. Of all the religions in the world, Buddhism is the one religion truly based on “peace”.<sup>10</sup> There is at least one dimension how we can find true peace: this is to do meditation. There are two significant reasons why meditation is a very important thing for seeking “true peace”:

First, when our mind becomes focused or concentrated on breathing in and out - we will be resident in the present moment, which means we will be aware and understand everything as it is.<sup>11</sup>

Second, our mind is aware of one thing at one time continuously. After a short time, we will seek the true happiness that is hidden in our mind. Generally, whenever our mind is calm and peaceful, we will find true happiness. In other words, true peace and happiness are exactly the same. We could also use the term ‘Nibbana’.<sup>12</sup> ‘Nibbana’ is true peace and happiness.

From this, we can explain that “true peace will arise from doing meditation. In other words, meditation will make our mind calm and peaceful. So, we cannot seek true peace outside our mind, but we have to find it in our mind by doing meditation.

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<sup>10</sup> United Nation announces Buddhism as “religion of peace” in 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Thich Naht Hahn, **Waking: The Way of Mindfulness**, (Bangkok: Rurnkeaw, 2543), p.4.

<sup>12</sup> Bhikkhu Nanaponika, **The Heart of Meditation**, (Bangkok: Siam, 2538), p.23.

Therefore to conclude: from what was stressed above, if we employ these methods we should find true peace. From a Buddhist perspective, the way leading to “true peace” is to do meditation. It is not difficult to seek true peace, because it dwells within our mind. We do not have to spend more time looking for it elsewhere. Therefore, in order to achieve it more effectively, we should start to do meditation right now, otherwise: we continue to procrastinate – we might push it off for another hour, a week, a month, a year or so on. As we all know, we might die at any minute. We absolutely never know when the time of death impends and we pass away. Therefore, the most important thing we should do right now is to be aware of every moment while we are breathing in and out. In fact, we might say that whenever we forget to breathe – then we become like someone about to die. Our breath brings greater vitality.

### **Summary**

To sum up, from the Buddhist perspective, conflict is possibly, natural and conventional in the world, because the suffering of human beings and societies is common one. However, there is one unconditional thing which has no conflict, in Buddhism that is Nirvana: ultimate truth - absolute freedom from and transcendence beyond three common characteristics of things (impermanence, suffering, and not-self). Furthermore, from the above discussion, objectively speaking: conflict leads to development as well as disintegration of inner values of human beings; moreover, in a subjective sense, conflict led to the establishing of the Vinaya, the first sanctioned Buddhist council, and the development of the economy as well. So, conflict in Buddhism can be a good and a bad thing. Essentially: how should we view conflict? We would be able to live with each other happily and peacefully in this different and pluralistic society. We should not though, advocate for the destructive aspects of society – and we must collectively encourage activities that bring about peace and social cohesion.