

BUDDHISM AND PEACE

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(This is the winning essay organized by the Buddhist Society of the National Institute of Technology, Kuala Lumpur. Ed.)

Peace, what is peace? A man in the street may simply cry. "Make love not war!" But has he understood peace? What has he done to contribute to the peacefulness of this world? There are men rioting in the street; there are men fighting in the jungles, in the swamps; there are men using deadly weapons to destroy lives all in the name of peace.

What has Buddhism contributed to bring about peace? When religions and peace are mentioned, the idea which flashes in one's mind is perhaps that religions cause wars. History tells us there were wars fought in the name of religion. What is worse, we can see with our own eyes how some men tried to do things in the name of religion for their selfish benefits; and how some men made religion their machine guns and the religious books their bullets. These men have destroyed the good name of their religions.

Buddhism is perhaps the most peaceful religion in this world. Not a single drop of blood was shed in the name of Buddhism.

The founder of this great religion had set an extremely good example to his followers. The message of peace and tolerance was given to the world without any violence. The universal love and boundless compassion employed in propagating this religion have succeeded in converting one-fifth of the world population to hail the Buddha as their supreme religious master. This religion never used compulsion or fear as a means of gaining converts.

It tries to bring peace and happiness to mankind. It illuminates the way by which mankind can cross from a world of unsatisfactoriness to a new world of love, peace and happiness. This religion teaches the equality of mankind. In this religion, loving kindness, compassion and sympathy towards others, are not limited to human beings, but also to every other living thing.

The practice of 'metta' or compassionate love is strongly emphasized in Buddhism. The worth placed on 'metta' in Buddhism may be gathered from the following remarks of the Buddha. "None of the good works employed the acquired religious merits is worth a fraction of the value of loving kindness." "Hatred does not cease by hatred, hatred cease by love."

Like every other religion which give full freedom of thought and expression to man, there existed differences in opinion with regard to the interpretation of the texts among Buddhists. But these differences do not result in fanaticism and an attempt on the part of one party to persecute the other. History tells us that the followers of Mahayana or Theravada Buddhism were able to study side by side in the same monastery. In world conferences of Buddhists, followers of the two different schools can come together in spite of the known differences in their views.

The Buddha also taught the doctrine on the equality of mankind. This doctrine was introduced 2500 years ago, at a time when human equality was taken for granted. The Buddhist idea of fellowship or 'metta' is thus founded on the conception of human species, the equality of man and the spiritual unity of mankind.

Buddhists also observe the precept of not killing. There can be no peace unless killing is stopped. The Buddha said, "Life is precious, don't attack others or let others attack you." This precept of no killing means no destruction of life of any kind. The loving kindness and compassion taught in Buddhism is boundless and extends to all creatures and beings.

Buddhism not only preaches against killing, against war, but the founder of this religion has actually intervened on one occasion to prevent a war. Two tribes who lived on either side of a river were preparing to kill each other because they could not agree on dividing waters for their use. The great religious teacher intervened and brought about a peaceful settlement.

The effects of the teachings of Buddha on its followers can be seen from the action of King Asoka. He was a king, unique in history who on his conversion to Buddhism gave up military conquest as an instrument of policy.

The Buddha said, "It was possible to rule a country in accordance with Dhamma without resorting to harsh punitive measures or engaging in military conquests."

The Dhammapada says, "Victory breed hatred, for the conquerors sleep in sorrow, casting aside defeat, the peaceful one dwells at ease."

In the modern world, the effect of the doctrine of loving-kindness and compassion has not reduced. When in 1959, Chinese army moved into Lhasa, The Lama, with grave serenity, said, "I have absolutely no hatred in my heart for the Chinese people."

Today, this doctrine of loving-kindness is spread all over the world. Buddhism is now a universal religion. In a world when human beings are still mentally divided, Buddhism serves as a path to unity. Buddhists from different parts of the world have their hearts linked together through their understanding of

Buddhism. People from different parts of the world can come to closer understanding when they have something in common to unite them – Buddhism can successfully serve as a common means.

Man must now start to consider seriously, either to prepare to live happily and peacefully in this world or face complete annihilation of lives – in the light of modern sciences, complete annihilation of lives is not something impossible. History tells us that racial discrimination, colour war, religious fanaticism and greed for political power and wealth have created enormous misfortunes, miseries and troubles in this world and have taken a heavy toll of lives in a cruel way. Now we all must accept the principle that if we want to live in this world peacefully and happily, then allows others also to live peacefully and happily. Unless we live according to this principle we can never expect to see peace in this world. Peace will not drop down from the heavens by praying. It is all up to us to create peace in this world.

It is possible for us to create our own heaven right here in this world and let our younger generations live happily, harmoniously and peacefully in the heaven we created.