

BUDDHISTS IDEALS OF WORLD PEACE AND FELLOWSHIP

By Dr. L. M. Joshi

Buddhists are peace-loving people. They love peace, tranquillity and happiness. Through the Buddha Dhamma they learn to cultivate peace of mind and tranquillity for themselves, and compassion and loving-kindness for their fellowmen. For the lofty doctrines of Lord Buddha declare that all men, whether they be rich or poor, mighty or weak, belong to one race – the human race and that we are related to one another now or were related in the infinite past during the countless round of rebirths.

The Buddhists ideal of world peace and fellowship is therefore a world where all nations belong to one family – the family of nations and where all people are at peace, living happily side by side showing tolerance, understanding, cooperation and goodwill towards one another. That is why in every true Buddhist heart there always springs that compassionate and spontaneous prayer – ‘Sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatta!’ – May all beings be well and happy! As Dr Joshi says, ‘One of the most important and fundamental teachings of Buddhism is the practice of universal friendliness. It is the declared Buddhist road to peace and harmony in human society; it is the key to peace, justice and happiness in the world of living beings.’

But the world today is torn asunder by the anger, greed and hatred of power-mad nations and world peace is shattered by the senseless wars of death and destruction waged between nations. The possibility of mankind’s total annihilation through nuclear warfare rears its ugly head and stares us starkly in the face, and unless we lay an unshakable foundation of world peace, world understanding, world compassion and world love based upon Lord Buddha’s noble teachings, mankind will certainly perish.

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Ed

The Buddhist religion has played a unique part in promoting the ideals of enlightenment, peace, and happiness in the history of the world. Reason and

rational analysis, rather than custom and belief, are the characteristic features of Buddhist thought.

Without admitting the existence of God or Creator and without insisting on a particular divine revelation, it has successfully advanced human religiousness in a large part of the world for over twenty-five centuries. This fact has a singular relevance to our contemporary civilization which is dominated by scientific temper, a spirit of inquiry, rational analysis, and technological skill.

The ultimate goal of human striving set forth by Buddhism is the peace that passes understanding. Nirvana is nothing but lasting peace; it is called the abode of excellent peace. From this ideal of lasting peace is derived the ideal of peace in the world in which we live and work.

Before one attains the transcendental peace, one has to attain peace here and now. The Buddhist way of life is oriented towards the technique of achieving peace and harmony in the world of living beings.

Nirvana is also described as supreme happiness. The quest of happiness is indeed the central quest of Buddhist tradition. The awareness of suffering in the world is the starting point of Buddhist culture; to put an end to suffering is its declared goal.

The Buddha is renowned as the great healer who found the supreme medicine for the treatment of ills with which living beings are afflicted. Freedom from such ills leads to happiness.

Happiness has two aspects, phenomenal and transcendental. Phenomenal happiness is the immediate aim while transcendental happiness is the ultimate aim of life. When we talk of peace in the world of human beings, we have to understand the meaning of peace in our immediate practical context. The Buddhist religion offers a way to transcendental peace; it also offers guidelines for establishing peace and justice in the world.

The preamble of the UNESCO charter states that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.” This is a profoundly religious proposition. We can even say that this is a Buddhist religious proposition.

The **Dhammapada** teaches as follows:

“All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.

Peace in the world can be established only when there is peace within the minds of men and women. The Buddhist religion is essentially a discipline for peace.

Those who talk of peace on the earth will have first of all to purge themselves of all the impurities of the heart.

According to Buddhism, self-purification is the supreme form of religious life and self-conquest is the supreme form of victory. He who conquers himself finds peace within; he who has peace within spreads peace without. He who harbours ill will and anger in his heart is a source of disturbance and sorrow not only for himself but also for others.

Ill will and hate are the starting points of violence, and therefore, are basic enemies of peace. Ill will leads to hostility, hatred breeds violence, and violence leads to further violence. Tolerance, patience and pacification alone can clear the way for goodwill and genuine understanding among men.

But the supreme remedy is the practice of loving kindness or universal friendliness (**maitri**). This is a key term in Buddhist thought and culture.

One of the most important and fundamental teachings of Buddhism is the practice of universal friendliness. It is the declared Buddhist road to peace and harmony in human society; it is the key to peace, justice and happiness in the world of living beings.

The Buddha has taught in the ‘Discourse on Friendliness’ the following method of practice:

“Whatever living beings there are, either feeble or strong, either long or great, middle-sized or short, small or large, either seen or unseen, and which live far or near, either born or about to be born, may they all be blessed with happiness. Let no one deceive another, let him not despise another in any place, let him not out of anger or resentment wish harm to another. As a mother at the risk of her life guards her own child, her only child, so also let everyone cultivate a limitless friendly thought towards all beings. And let him cultivate goodwill towards all beings an infinite thought of friendliness, above and below and across, unobstructed, without hatred and without enmity.

Buddhism has stressed respect for all forms of life. According to Buddhism, all beings are worthy of honour because all beings have the seed of Buddhahood in them.

Another argument for the spiritual unity of mankind is that all human beings desire happiness and do not like sorrow. The goal of happiness is common to all human beings; they all seek freedom from suffering. These common urges declare the equality of all human beings.

Love of life and fear of death are common characteristics of all human beings. The Buddha asks us to treat all human beings just as one treats one's self. So the **Dhammapada** says:

“All men tremble at the thought of punishment, all men fear death; remembering that you men are all alike, therefore, do not kill nor cause slaughter. He who, seeking his own happiness, offends or kills beings who long for happiness will never find happiness.”

Buddhism teaches the interdependence of all phenomena; one's happiness depends on another man's happiness, and one's suffering is linked, directly or indirectly, with another's suffering. This is true of nations and countries also. Every country is dependent, in one way or another, on other nations.

This world of ours has become like a small village, thanks to modern transportation and communication. Here each one's life is influenced by and, in its turn, influences the life of everyone else. Happiness and peace being our common aims, we ought to employ common and universally applicable means of achieving these aims. Wisdom and compassion, goodwill and friendliness, tolerance and enlightened understanding, are the obvious guiding principles for our behaviour.

One recalls here the words of an ancient Buddhist sage who sang:

“To all I am a friend, comrade to all and to all creatures kind and merciful; a heart of amity I cultivate, and ever in goodwill is my delight.”

He who meditates on these noble thoughts does contribute to world peace and universal harmony. Peace can be established only by peaceful means. Meditation on universal love and friendliness is certainly a road to peace; prayer for the welfare of all living beings is also an effective means of bringing about happiness and harmony.

The bodhisattvas, the saviour beings, who strive for the complete welfare of all living creatures, pray as follows:

“May all beings have clothes, food and drink, garlands, sandalwood, fragrance, ornaments and all that their hearts desire. Let the fearful become fearless, and those afflicted with suffering attain joy; let those distressed be free from distress and attain peace.”

We have to devise and adopt non-violent ways and means to deliver people everywhere in the world from poverty and hunger, fear and danger, racism, casteism, sectarian fanaticism, oppression, lawlessness, and war.

The way of establishing order and peace on earth is not through force but through persuasion, friendliness and compassion. The spread of Buddhism in

the world was achieved by peaceful means. Buddhism has never justified war, violence and aggression.

The manufacture, sale and use of weapons of war are anti-Buddhist activities prohibited for both monks and laity. Non-violence (**ahimsa**) has always occupied the first place in Buddhist ethics.

All kinds of prejudices – ideological, national, racial, social, economical and political – constitute hindrances to peace and justice. We have to eradicate these prejudices or at least minimize their power before we can hope to build forces of peace.

Peace on earth can be secure and lasting only when the spirit of violence within men is destroyed. In order to destroy the spirit of violence within men, the roots of violent impulses including greed, hate and delusion, will have to be eradicated. Eradication of greed, hate and delusion demands not only a right philosophy of life and moral effort on the part of each individual, but also a just social order, economic equality and political freedom.

The leading political leaders and statesmen of all countries of the world, who have assumed enormous power and whose decisions decide the fate of millions of human beings ought to seek guidance from the profound moral principles taught by the great religions of the world.

Political ambition without moral awareness has always been disastrous. We are haunted by the constant fear of global nuclear war. It is the duty of all political leaders and rulers of the world to remove this fear from every human heart.

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