

IN PURSUIT OF PEACE AND HAPPINESS

By Ven. Dr. Henepola Gunaratana

Man, either individually or in groups, wants peace and happiness, but these elude him because of his greed, hatred and delusion. The solution to the problem is therefore clear – get rid of these enemies.

The Ven. Dr. Gunaratana shows you the way.

Ed.

The Buddha taught His doctrine for the good, peace and happiness of all mankind. His aim was to establish righteousness in the world. The Buddha speaks of peace (santi, upasama) as the goal of His doctrine. The ultimate peace is the peace of nibbana, the complete liberation of mind to be reached by following the noble eightfold path. The spirit of peace pervades the teaching at all levels.

The Buddha emphasizes both inward peace of mind and peaceful, harmonious relationship between people. But he stresses an important point we tend to overlook: that our own inward peace is necessary if we are to bring peace to others. Thus the Buddha said: “It is not possible for a man who has not saved himself to save another”. The development of the path takes place within oneself, not outside. All good qualities grow within the mind of a person who is sound in morality, concentration and wisdom.

We should also note that love does not take root in the mind when we are not relaxed. In a tense and anxious mind, love cannot unfold. Relaxation gained from meditation is therefore the most fertile ground for the growth of love. Love grown in a relaxed state of mind is true love, love that is without attachments or expectations. It is this love that we can easily share with others. So when we have this loving peace we should wish “May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful”. The Buddha did not advise us to ask anybody to make us peaceful and happy. Peace and happiness do not come from others but from within. We train our minds to find them within ourselves.

Peace cannot be achieved without friendliness or sublime love for ourselves as well as for others. To develop love for others, we first have to develop true love and respect for ourselves. We can never love anybody else if we do not love ourselves. Then, to extend love to others we should begin with those close to

us. We cannot love complete strangers if we cannot love our parents and the immediate members of our family. Then, in turn, we should widen our love extending it to teachers, relatives, friends, indifferent persons, enemies and all living beings. Love and friendliness are equivalent terms in Buddhism. Friendliness is so important in the teaching of the Buddha that once the Buddha said that the whole purpose of the religious life was to establish friendship with the noble. The Buddha Himself was the embodiment of this love, which inspired Him to teach others. He was able to impart His knowledge for forty-five years until His last breath because He was full of love. This love, He said, was not His monopoly. Anybody following His path can cultivate this love within himself.

Loving kindness has been very heavily emphasized in Buddhism because it counters hatred. Hatred is a terrible cause of evil in our minds. It manifests itself in jealousy, resentment, dislike, prejudice, unfairness, injustice, and biases. It causes murder and violence. It is responsible for the instruments of murder – guns, bombs, tanks, and all the war materials in the world. Greed, hatred, and ignorance are the root cause of all suffering. Love cannot grow in a mind full of greed, hatred and ignorance. The greedy mind looks only for pleasant objects and gets itself trapped through its craving like a monkey in a monkey-trap. Suppose you put some peanuts into a bottle and tie the bottle firmly to a tree. If a monkey comes along and grabs a peanut you will find him glued to the tree because once he grabs a peanut he won't open his fist to let it go. His greed dulls his mind so that he does not know how to free himself from the trap. Similarly, when one with a greedy mind grabs hold of some pleasant object one will exclude everything else from one's thoughts.

We need love to accept everyone because everyone is different from everyone else in many respects. Buddhists do not say "all are created equal". On the contrary they say "Kamma divides beings into low and high positions". (Kamman satte vibhajati yadidam hinappanitata.) Kamma is action, our volitional action. The Buddha teaches that our lives, our fortunes, our personal endowments, are the results of our accumulated kamma. We are the heirs of our good and evil actions. No two human beings are physically alike. Even identical twins have differences. Billions upon billions of fingerprints have been collected by intelligence agencies in the world. No two of them are alike. These differences reflect the different mental constitutions of different people, which are due to their different kmmas.

If we do not learn to restrain and reduce our greed, hatred and delusion, if we allow our moral degeneration to continue, then we cannot achieve peace and happiness. In our present predicament we can see that moral, ethical and religious degeneration is taking place all over the world. Children no longer

respect their parents, teachers, or elders. As people do not restrain themselves the world's population is increasing by leaps and bounds every day. Because food production and other needs cannot keep pace with the increasing population, people are already practising unethical ways of reducing the population, including killing defenceless babies. Now we even hear from time to time of mercy killing.

In recent years, man has suddenly realised the dangerous situation he is facing and has begun to re-evaluate the very foundations of morality. While he pays more and more attention to science and technology, he becomes less and less concerned about moral and ethical problems. Science and technology treat people more or less like robots, without any sense of moral responsibility, since science itself is neither moral nor immoral but amoral. Science has created a monstrous stockpile of nuclear weapons which now is threatening the very existence of mankind. Where will this technological civilization lead us? A third world war, a war that can annihilate all living beings, casts its shadow over us, and may break out at any moment. All the power blocs have invented and stockpiled enough murder machines to destroy this planet, the only known planet with living beings, a thousand times over. Where do these weapons come from? They come from our own minds. Every bomb is an embodiment of our greed, hatred and delusion – the very things the Buddha asked us to eliminate. Guns are easily available anywhere in the United States. Drugs and drinks can be readily obtained in any part of the world. The crime rate is always on the increase. Our jails are full of criminals. People are afraid to give evidence against the crimes they witnessed. Even judges seem to be so afraid of the criminals that they pass very light sentences on them or set them free. Thus criminals walk the streets committing worse crimes than they had committed before. Even victims of rape and other crimes are afraid to come forward to identify their assailants. In the name of civilization, development, and improvement we have polluted our land, our water, and our air while neglecting morality and ethics.

In pursuit of peace and happiness through science man has certainly done much good. He has reduced infant mortality and premature or untimely death, controlled most infectious diseases, and illegalized most cruel types of physical punishment. He has made many discoveries in medical science, healthy lives healthier, comfortable lives more comfortable; he has prolonged life expectancy. He has even learned to conquer space. But if he does not devote more of his time, skill, energy and money to develop ways and means to promote peace and happiness without killing one another in the name of peace and happiness, our future is still in jeopardy despite the advance that man has made in science.

How many scientists are still engaged in researching and producing weapons which can eventually destroy peace and happiness of all mankind? How many are involved in polluting our environment? Have they been fooled by their own delusion? When will the policy-makers and politicians be matured and wise enough to realize that they cannot destroy their enemies without destroying themselves? The Buddha said that when people become excessively greedy, hateful and ignorant, they destroy the world and its inhabitants. Only when people forget their greed, hatred, and ignorance will they be able to live in peace and harmony with one another.

Those who have been obsessed by distorted perceptions, thoughts and views, cannot understand the benefit of giving up desire and attachment. They sometimes turn round and ask: “What would be left without these fundamental human emotions? How can one live without desire? If there is no desire man would never improve his standard of living through the advancement of science and technology, medicine, psychology, education, philosophy, improved and comfortable homes, etc. We can never progress in life if there is no desire. A person without desire is a dead person.

To answer this, we have to distinguish between two kinds of desire – wholesome desire and unwholesome desire. Wholesome desire is the desire to do what is good and noble: the desire to help others, to improve our conduct and character, to relieve suffering. Unwholesome desire is greed – the self-centred desire to increase our own wealth, status, fame, and power, even at the expense of others. The Buddha teaches that the first kind of desire should be cultivated, while selfish desire should be abandoned. All the vices in the world arise from this selfish desire. It is true that desire is the driving force of the world. In fact it is so strong a force that it drives people crazy. It is most difficult to eliminate selfish desire totally and completely.

Ordinarily an average person thinks that the greater his desire the happier he is. Thus he increases his desire in order to satisfy his desire. When we reflect on the state of the world we can see unmistakably how deeply we are engaged in activities aimed at gratifying our lower desires; but these subsequently increase our suffering, instead of reducing it. We work on the premise that the more wealth we acquire the happier and more secure we will be. But this is an illusion: increasing wealth doesn't bring us happiness. Our greed is insatiable, and the more it increases the more deeply we become immersed in discontent and suffering.

In pursuit of wealth, and power, people compete with one another at the risk of their own peace and happiness, their own physical and mental comfort. A person might feel for a while that the very pursuit of wealth is itself a source of

happiness, but as he goes on he finds that the law of diminishing returns is in operation all the time. There will come a time when he can no longer continue at the same rate at which he has been operating. But his greed is so strong that he cannot slow down lest he loses the opportunity to make a few more dollars. Even when he has accumulated a vast amount of wealth he will not have much time left to enjoy it. Then he will feel that he has wasted his valuable time without ever having experienced real peace. He is only caught up in the conflict between insatiable desires and the limited means to satisfy them.

What he would have increased would be his pride and conceit. He uses his own power – whether physical, social, economic, intellectual, or political – to measure himself against others. If he is lower in these assets than others he works hard to compete with them until he can equal or surpass them. If he is equal with others he tries to surpass them. If he is superior to others he tries to suppress them. He struggles to maintain his superior position. In this struggle his mind may be obsessed by selfishness regarding housing, social standing, economic status, physical appearance, academic achievements, etc. He does not want to share any of these things with others. Also he will be obsessed by envy (*issa*). He cannot tolerate the achievements of others; he wishes to destroy those who are prosperous and happy. In pursuit of his selfish motives he meets sorrow, disappointment, fear, and he creates suffering for others. Therefore the Buddha said: “From craving springs grief, from craving springs fear; for him who is wholly free from craving there is no grief, whence fear?”

As long as self-centred desire rules our mind we do not gain peace and tranquillity. The mind only becomes calm and collected when craving is absent. It is only the calm and concentrated mind that can see things as they really are. On the other hand, if we become a slave to our desire we will never see things as they are because the mind obsessed by desire lacks the necessary calmness and clarity. It is only when we gain concentration by the absence of desire that our wisdom will grow, leading to inner peace. In other words, when we begin to see things as they really are we gain inward peace. The Buddha always speaks of joy and happiness born of solitude (*vivekajam pitisukham*) and joy and happiness born of concentration (*samadhijam pitisukham*).

As we pointed out earlier, it is we human beings ourselves who create all the miseries, evil, crimes, pain and suffering in the world. It is we human beings who must find the solution to these problems. It is we human beings who can bring peace and happiness to this world. We destroy this peace and happiness by our own greed, hatred and delusion. We promote them by conquering our greed, hatred and delusion. The Buddha says that the conquest of oneself – of one's greed, hatred and ignorance – is far better than the conquest of others:

Though he should conquer a thousand, thousand men in the battlefield, yet he, indeed, is the noblest victor who would conquer himself.

Better, indeed, is the conquest of self than of all other folks. Neither a Deva nor a Gandhabba, nor a Mara with Brahma, could turn into defeat the victory of such a person who is self-subdued and ever lives in restraint. (Dhp 103-105)

The Buddha also says:

Hatred is never ended by hatred in this world. By love alone is it ended. This is an ancient law. (Dhp. 5)

To illustrate this point, he teaches his monks to respond to hatred and violence, not with anger, but with a mind of love:

Even, O monks, should robbers and murderers saw through your limbs and joints, whosoever should give way to anger thereat would not be following any advice. For thus ought you to train yourselves.

Undisturbed shall our mind remain, no evil words shall escape our lips, friendly and full of sympathy shall we remain, with heart full of love, and free from any hidden malice; and that person shall we penetrate with loving thoughts, wide, deep, boundless, free from anger and hatred. (M. 21; Word of the Buddha 51)