

THE WAY OF THE WISE LEADER ...

By Datuk Mohammed Sopiee

It is indeed heartening to note that in the face of increasing dogmatism and religious intolerance, there are some Malaysian leaders who have the wisdom and courage to speak up for greater inter-religious understanding. To foster this understanding one must allow others to speak about their beliefs and if necessary learn from them. This does not mean that one has to surrender one's beliefs – one merely has to seek to understand those beliefs with greater clarity by comparing them with the way others look at the world around them. Datuk Mohammed Sopiee is a devout Muslim who has contributed much to nation building. In the introduction to this following article he has this to say: "Every religion teaches its followers to do good and lead a clean and moral life." "People of other religions can also benefit from enlightening programmes concerning their respective religions and become better citizens." "An understanding of the teachings of other religions can only strengthen us in our own faith, while instilling a sense of mutual respect between people of different religions."

Buddhists especially should not be held in suspicion because they have no desire to convert others – all they wish is that their beliefs be respected as much as they respect the beliefs of others.

–Ed. -

More than 2,500 years ago Buddha said:

“If an important minister of state neglects his duties, works for his own benefit or accepts bribes, it will cause a rapid decay of public morals. People will cheat one another, a strong man will attack a weaker one, a noble will mistreat a commoner or a wealthy man will take advantage of the poor, and there will be no justice for anyone; mischief will abound and troubles will multiply.

“Under such circumstances, faithful ministers will retire from public service, wise men will keep silent from fear of complications, and only flatterers will hold government positions, and they will use their political power to enrich themselves with no thought for the sufferings of the people.

“Under such conditions the power of the government becomes ineffective and its righteous policies fall into ruins.

“Such unjust officials are the thieves of the people’s happiness, yet are worse than thieves because they defraud both ruler and the people and are the cause of the nations’ troubles. The king should root out such ministers and punish them...”

Buddha Prescribed The Following Way For A Ruler:

“The duty of a ruler is to protect his people. He is the parent of his people and he protects them by his laws. He must raise his people like parents raise their children, giving dry clothes to replace wet ones without waiting for the child to cry.

“In this manner, the ruler must remove suffering and bestow happiness without waiting for people to complain. Indeed, his ruling is not perfect until his people abide in peace. They are his country’s treasure.

“Therefore, a wise ruler is always thinking of his people and does not forget them even for a moment. He thinks of their hardships and plans for their prosperity.

“To rule wisely he must be advised about everything – about water, about drought, about storm and about rain; he must know about crops, the chances for a good harvest, people’s comforts and their sorrows. To be in a position to rightly award, punish or praise, he must be thoroughly informed as to the guilt of bad men and the merits of good men.

“A wise ruler gives to his people when they are in need, and collects from them when they are prosperous. He should exercise his correct judgment when collecting taxes and make the levy as light as possible, thus keeping his people consonant.

“A wise ruler will protect his people by his power and dignity. One who thus rules one’s people is worthy to be called a king...”

Buddha also taught:

“A wise ruler will temper his verdict with compassion. He will try to consider each case with clear wisdom and then make his verdict in accord with the five principles.”

The Five Principles Are:

“First, he must examine the truthfulness of the factors presented”.

“Second, he must ascertain that they fall within his jurisdiction. If he renders a judgment with full authority it is effective, but if he does so without authority, it only causes complications; he should await the correct conditions”.

“Third, he must judge justly; that is, he must enter into the mind of the defendant. If he finds that the deed was done without criminal intent, he should discharge the man”.

“Fourth, he should pronounce his verdict with kindness but not harshness; that is, he should apply a proper punishment but should not go beyond that. A good ruler will instruct a criminal with kindness and give him time to reflect upon his mistakes”.

“Fifth, he should judge with sympathy but not in anger; that is, he should condemn the crime but not the criminal. He should let his judgment rest upon a foundation of sympathy, and he should use the occasion to try and make the criminal realise his mistakes”.

On Leading A Nation To Prosperity:

“First, people should assemble often to discuss political affairs, and to provide for national defence”.

“Second, the people of all social classes should meet together in unity to discuss their national affairs”.

“Third, people should respect old customs and not change them unreasonably, and they should also observe the rules of ceremony and maintain justice”.

“Fourth, they should recognize the difference of sex and seniority, and maintain the purity of families and communities”.

“Fifth, they should be filial to their parents and faithful to their teachers and elders”.

“Sixth, they should honour the ancestors’ shrines and keep up the annual rites”.

“Seventh, they should esteem public morality, honour virtuous conducts, listen to honourable teachers and make offerings to them”.

“If a country follows these teachings well, it will surely prosper and will be held in respect by all other countries”.

The following Buddhist story shows how a country can be successfully ruled:

Once there was a king who was notably successful in ruling his kingdom. Because of his wisdom he was called King Great-Light. He explained the principles of his administration as follows:

“The best way for a ruler to reign over his country is first of all to rule himself. A ruler should come before his people with a heart of compassion, and should teach and lead them to remove all impurities from their minds”.

“The happiness that comes from good teachings far exceeds any enjoyment that the material things of the world can offer. Therefore, he could give his people good teaching and keep their minds and bodies tranquil”.

“When poor people come to him he should open his store-house and let them take what they want, and then he will take advantage of the opportunity to teach them the wisdom of ridding themselves of all greed and evil”.

“Each man has a different view of things according to the state of his mind. Some people see the city where they live as fine and beautiful, others see it as dirty and dilapidated. It all depends on the state of their minds”.

“Those who hold good teachings in respect can see in common trees and stones all the beautiful lights and colours of lapis lazuli, while greedy people, who do not know enough to control their own minds, are blind even to the splendours of a golden palace”.

“Everything in the nation’s daily life is like that. The mind is the source of everything, and therefore, the ruler should first seek to have his people train their minds”.

The first principle in wise administration is like the principle of King Great-Light: to lead the people to train their minds.

To train the mind means to seek Enlightenment, and, therefore, the wise ruler must give his first attention to the Buddha’s teaching.

If a ruler has faith in Buddha, is devoted to his teachings, appreciates and pays tribute to virtuous and compassionate people, there will be no favouritism toward either friends or enemies and his country will always remain prosperous.

If a country is prosperous, it is not necessary for it to attack any other country and it does not need weapons of attack.

When people are happy and satisfied, class differences disappear, good deeds are promoted, virtues are increased, and people come to respect one another. Then everyone becomes prosperous, the weather and temperature become normal; the sun and the moon and the stars shine naturally; rains and winds come timely; and all natural calamities disappear.

The universal values of propriety and morality contained in the teachings of Buddha are as useful for the guidance of Buddhists as are the ethical and moral teachings of Islam.

Chinese who are good Buddhists and Malays who are good Muslims can live together in peace and harmony, mutually respecting one another, and co-operate and unite as one Malaysian nation which is progressive and prosperous, and can be a model to other nations.

Buddha enjoined his followers to follow the five precepts; not to kill, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to lie or deceive, and not to use intoxicants.

Can any person from any other religion have any objection to these precepts?"

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