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BUDDHISM AND NON-VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Non-violence is now an essential demand for the peace in the world more than ever. People are facing a lot of violence's problems in the family and society outside. The world is being divided on the issues of ideologies and people are suffering very much from war caused by individual interest and leaders' spiritual crisis. The war is taking heavy toll of human life. Who is responsible for this problem? This is a matter of social conscience. Whenever human conscience is awakened, an aggressive war occurring around the world will be stopped and peace is coming back to the earth. How? Please read more below!



KEYWORDS: *Buddhism, non-violence, issues of ideologies, human conscience, war, family's violence, psychological disorder.*

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a Sakyan Prince Siddhattha (*Skt. Siddhartha*) who was born in 624 BCE, in Lumbini Park not far from Kapilavatthu (*Skt. Kapilavastu as the capital of Sakiya, Skt. Shakya*) of northeastern ancient India (*in present-day southern Nepal*) renounced all of his royal material comforts in order to live another life of self - mortification. Both of these ways of life didn't result in a good outcome of enlightenment as he expected. He continued to search much of his concerned answers to this life's big problems and gradually emerged series of questions such as: Why was I born in the world? Who am I? What was I born here for? Do I die? Why do I die? After I die, do I get rebirth (*samsara*)? What was my a life's ultimate goal for?...Happiness or Suffering? Who is making me suffering? Where does violence come from?... One day, after having meditated forty - nine days under a bodhi tree, he attained enlightenment which is called "The Buddha - The Awakened One - The Enlightened One". Hence, Buddhism is found in the world with the principle of non-violence by the Buddha Sakyamuni.

II. CONTENT

Like other religions, Buddhism has been constituted the system of its teachings based on a foundation of non-violence, i.e. non - harming other lives. The Buddha is an advocate of peace for all mankind in the world. A Buddhist member, who wishes to achieve a Bodhisattva (Buddha to be), first of all, stops actions of culpable homicide. There is a general principle that is all beings love life fear death and averse to pain.

Suicide is a matter considered as a violation of the intention to destroy life is absent. If you try to kill an animal's life, a person's life, or even your relatives' life because of an anger by chance or intentionally, you are killing your own compassion. And your life is a hell of ignorance on earth.

Moreover, killing a person's life is killing a future Buddha. In Dhammapada, verse 129, the Buddha says that everyone fears stick, rifle, pistol, bayonet, violence and death. If taking oneself as a criteria of example, one shouldn't kill animal, not killing human and not even tell others to cause death.

Have you ever been concerned about violence status in your family and schools? Have you ever been concerned about the war occurring around the world? If ever, what should you do? Each individual is a family's cell. Each family is a social cell. If an individual is good, that family is good. If a family is healthy, that society is healthy too. From the point of view of the Buddha, 16th President of the United States in 1861, Abraham Lincoln said that when he does good he feels good, when he does bad he feels bad, and that's his religion. Here is a Buddhist guideline for all Buddhist members who are willing to follow the Buddha's teachings, not to make harmful things for others.

The root of violence is in one's mind. So the Buddha guided his disciples a way of not to do all evils, to make good things, to cleanse one's consciousness first, anyone who understands this way is performing the Buddhas' teachings. (Dhammapada, verse 183). If there is a good definition on religion, we listen to Thomas Paine's definition of religion that this world is his country, all people are his brethren, and to do good is his religion.¹

1. SOCIAL CAUSES OF CONFLICT

1.1. INSUFFICIENT CULTURE

One of the primary causes of violence in society is poverty. The poverty deprives people of one's own happiness. According to the statistic of World Bank and The Brookings Institution, there are approximately 10% of the world's population live in extreme poverty, 70% of the world's poorest people live in Africa, and 79% of the worldwide poor people living in rural areas.

What is poverty? Poverty is no income, lack of food, die of hunger, insufficient of shelter, illiteracy, inadequate of education, insufficient of culture, lack of health care, and so on. Poverty makes people to create conflict in society. There are two main cultural elements contributing the existence of people poverty which are external and internal elements. The first element, external – tangible conditions are insufficient food, lack of shelter, insufficient clean water resources, inadequate of health care, status of unemployment, insufficient of social services, physical disabilities, poor infrastructure, discrimination of gender, government corruption, environmental circumstances of tsunami, drought, earthquake, depletion of natural resources and many other natural disasters. The second element, internal – intangible conditions are aspiration, learning, confidence, freedom, creative leadership, culture, social civilization, democracy, equality, behaviour, spiritual way of life, values, peace, happiness...

Life is an integral whole thing. Mahatma Gandhi said that he claims that human mind or human society is not divided into watertight compartments called social, political and religious. All act and react upon one another.² All religions play an important role in the social life. His holiness 14th Dalai Lama says a simple sentence: The religion is to guide people to a big road that is kindness, loving, compassion and sympathy. It is very simple but it is very profound too. If you are kindness, you never discriminate others. That is a good religion and this society doesn't have conflict each other and racial problems.

1.2. PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDER

The psychological disorder is a mental disorder. The psychological disorder is a condition described by distressing, impairing such as atypical thoughts, emotions, feelings, speech, behaviors...A medical term calls "Psychopathology". The psychopathology is the study of psychological disorders

¹ <https://www.ushistory.org/Paine/rights/c2-052.htm>

² Compiled & Edited by: R.K. Prabhu & U.R. Rao, *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*, Encyclopedia of Gandhi's Thoughts, Chapter 18: Religion and Politics, YI, 2-3-1922, P.131

which is including their symptoms, causes (*etiology*) and treatment. The psychopathology is the manifestation of a one's psychological disorder.

American Psychiatric Association (APA) developed the features of the harmful dysfunction model that are incorporated in a formal definition of psychological disorder. According to the APA (2013), a psychological disorder is a condition that is said to consist of the following: 1) There are significant disturbances in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. 2) The disturbances reflect some kind of biological, psychological, or developmental dysfunction. 3) The disturbances lead to significant distress or disability in one's life."

Human personality is manifested from inner experiences. The Buddha says that all appearances are from your inward, not being outward. Your behaviour is you. You can understand your wife, your husband, your kids, your father, your mother, everyone, but you couldn't understand by own yourself. That is why the Buddha advises his disciples to cultivate concentration (*samādhi*) to look inside one's mind. Do you go to work everyday, don't you? Yes, you do. If you spend much energy for working all day, your mind will be burn out and you will get irritable with your relatives, coworker, boss, employee. If you get mad with everyone daily, that is your psychological problem which is called psychological disorder. The psychological disorder is incapability of an inner mechanism to implement its natural function.

Today men are facing many kinds of psychological diseases such as psychological disorder, mental disorder, psychosocial disabilities, mental illness compatible with important distress, weakening in functioning, risk of self-harm, anxiety disorder, bipolar, depression, post-traumatic stress disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorder, disruptive behaviour and dissocial, neurodevelopmental disorders, autism spectrum disorders etc.

According to WHO's office, in the year of 2019, there is a detailed statistic saying that one in every eight people, i.e. approximately 970 million people of the world living with a mental illness, the most common with the disorder of anxiety and the disorder of depression and so on.

So the Buddha also says people have a lot of serious mental illness that are originally craving, anger and ignorance. However, the Buddha characterised that the one's original mind is pure conscience in which people have charity, virtue and understanding, wisdom, at once people are neither fear nor ignorance. Of course, there is non-violence.

On the other hand, according to the Buddha's teachings, if you have true love with somebody, there is no place for pride inside you. The Buddha has given an example that men's life is just as a candle which couldn't burn without fuel or fire, people couldn't live without love and a spiritual life.

2. SOLUTIONS

2.1. CULTIVATING OF THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Government, Educationalists, and Scientists are finding a good solution to untangle the causes of poverty for people in the world by building better infrastructure, creating positive and healthy living environments, and providing better educational programs. This is an essential external and internal approach in order to reduce the global poverty problems, but not still to reduce the conflict problems in the world.

The Buddha has seen the roots of conflict not just about one's poverty but about several inveterate causes of conflict such as desire (*lobha*), hatred (*dhosa*), delusion (*moha*), craving (*taṇhā*), stinginess, individual opinions, hostility, insolence, anger, miserliness, envy, hypocrisy, craving for rebirth, evil desires, clinging dogmatically to views, beliefs, ideologies...All of these are the unwholesome roots of each individual and family. If they aren't eradicated totally, our society will always be facing the violence problems.

To sort out the individual's problems, family's conflict, and social contradiction, the Buddha has suggested several effective solutions as follows: each person has to 1) stop clinging to desires, 2) stop clinging dogmatically to ideologies and beliefs, 3) stop individual opinions. This is a process of eliminating one's defilements applied by his lay followers who have attained sainthood.

In Buddhism, there are two types of people mentioned by the Buddha. The first one is called the uninstructed worldlying and the second one is the instructed noble disciple. What is difference between the uninstructed worldlying and the instructed noble disciple? Thus one always harms living beings who is called non-noble. One never do living beings harm who is called noble. Noble one or non-noble one is up to you, not made by somebody else.

After his enlightenment, the Buddha advises his disciples to avoid two extremes which can help them living in peace of mind and non-violence happily. The first extreme is constant attachment to worldly sensual pleasures that are described a vulgar, base, ignoble, profitless. The second extreme is constantly addicted to self- mortification. Therefore, the Buddha introduces us a another way, a newer way – “Middle Way” whose way makes people be free from vile desires. That is the Noble Eightfold Path. If we are intelligent, we can apply these eight parts in our daily life.

The Noble Eightfold Path is a path leading to end suffering that is praised by the Buddha to those who is practicing in search the happiness of life. They are divided into three essential groups which are moral conduct (*Sīla*), mental discipline (*Samādhi*), and insight (*Prajñā*). The Noble Eightfold Path is constituted of eight parts, namely: Right Understanding/View (*Sammā Diṭṭhi*), Right Thought (*Sammā Saṅkappa*), Right Speech (*Sammā Vācā*), Right Action (*Sammā Kammanta*), Right Livelihood (*Sammā Ājīva*), Right Effort (*Sammā Vāyāma*), Right Mindfulness (*Sammā Sati*), Right concentration (*Sammā Samādhi*)

- Right or Appropriate View (*Sammā Diṭṭhi*) is seeing the way needed to go, the realization of suffering, realization of its cause, realization of its termination, and realization of the way leading to its termination, Viz. Understanding the Four Noble Truths.
- Right or Appropriate Thought (*Sammā Saṅkappa*) is thought without greedy mind, without anger mind, without ignorance mind, non-violence for all beings.
- Right or Appropriate Speech (*Sammā Vācā*) is verbal conduct of being without false speech, frivolous speech, divisive speech, harsh speech, slander, insult and chatter.
- Right or Appropriate Action (*Sammā Kammanta; Skt. Samyak Karmanta*) is right action of the body, bodily conduct of being without taking life (killing), without taking something is not given permission (theft) and without sexual misconduct (excessive sensuality), practice of opening the heart, preventing harm, practice of non-violence toward ourselves and the others.
- Right or Appropriate Livelihood (*Sammā Ājīva*) is giving up wrong ways of making a living, that is, through activities which harm or torment other beings.
- Right or Appropriate Effort (*Sammā Vāyāma; Skt. Samyak Pradhana*) is striving to prevent the arising in oneself of the evil minds, and know how to eliminate those evil minds that have arisen; striving to generate the good minds, and striving to develop those good minds that have arisen; is the type of energy which helps practitioner realize the Noble Eightfold Path.
- Right or Appropriate Mindfulness (*Sammā Sati; Skt. Samyak Smṛti*) is giving an attention constantly and abides contemplating body, feelings, mind and mind – objects. The purpose of this exercise is to bring under conscious control all his processes and functions.
- Right or Appropriate Concentration/Unification (*Sammā Samādhi, Skt. Samyak Samādhi*) is various levels of deep calming known as meditation (*jhānas – Pāli; Skt. Dhyānas*), literally, to maintain stillness and evenness and attainment of the four Jhanas.

We vow to practice the Noble Eightfold Path is to discover our inner beautiful gems. Our consciousness has two parts wholesome state and unwholesome state. If our unwholesome states are afflictions (*kleshas*) daily that have been quelled and transformed completely, wholesome states are beautiful aspects of our mind known as faith, diligence, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom, humility, non-desire, non-anger, non-delusion, and especially non-violence.

2.2. DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOUR BRAHMA VIHARAS

One wants to be happy but one doesn't know to create happiness. Happiness doesn't come from the sky and suffering does not also come from there. Happiness or suffering isn't an individual matter.

The happiness of one is the happiness of the other; the suffering one is also suffering of the other. They couldn't be separated each other. Everything around us is interdependent.

Here the Buddha introduces his disciples a good way of cultivating wholesome states towards all sentient beings. Among the good ways of the practices taught by the Buddha, there are four things concerned by his disciples called the "Four Immeasurable Minds – the Four Sublime States – the Four Brahma Viharas" that encompass Loving – kindness/ benevolence (*Maitri*), Compassion (*Karuna*), Appreciative joy/ Sympathy joy (*Mudita*) and Equanimity/ Non – discrimination (*Upeksha*).

What religion do you profess? It doesn't matter. But I know for sure you are having a good belief in your life. Bhikkhu Phuoc Hanh states: "There is no belief without life." Yes, it is true. The Faith (Shraddha) of Buddhism doesn't signify to accept a theory or doctrine that hasn't been personally verified. First of all, you have to practice them. Now please allow me to invite you take a look above phrase the "Four Brahma Viharas." In the Buddha's time, there is a Brahma person came to ask the Buddha, "How can I get to be with Brahma after I die?" The Buddha responded to him that if Brahma is a source of big love, wish to live with him, you have to practice "Brahma Abodes," i.e. Brahma Viharas/ Four Immeasurable Minds which are Loving – kindness, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity.³

If you are practising on Loving – kindness, Compassion, Appreciative joy and Equanimity daily, you can gradually eradicate your desire, jealousy, ill will, evils, cruelty, clinging, aversion and so on. The more you practice regularly, the more your heart will grow in you. One day you can embrace fastidious people or a tough person. Who is it? It is your family, relatives, customers and everyone around you. Thus you will be happier and anyone who sees you daily will also be happier. That is your fruit of practice. Please be patient! The following are the practical steps instructed by the Buddha.

1. Loving – kindness (*Maitri*), the first immeasurable mind, is wishing for all sentient beings to be happy without exception. Cultivating Loving – kindness is to remove ill will.
2. Compassion (*Karuna*), the second immeasurable mind, is wishing for all sentient beings to be liberated from suffering. Cultivating Compassion is to remove cruelty.
3. Appreciative joy (*Mudita*), the third immeasurable mind, is wishing for all sentient being to be successful and happy in their life. Cultivating Appreciative joy is to remove jealousy.
4. Equanimity (*Upeksha*), the fourth immeasurable mind, is wishing for all sentient beings to be equal and non – discrimination. Cultivating Equanimity is to remove clinging and aversion.

The Four Brahma Viharas brings people to work together easily. Civil-rights activist of the United States, Coretta Scott King says that the compassionate actions of a community members are the most accurate measurement of it's the greatness. Whatever you did for people, you will get that result as good or bad now or in the future. What goes around comes around, i.e. one's the value of life isn't based on your duration, but based on your contribution. You don't expect because of how long you live, you should expect because of how valuable you live.

A community is a group of people connected each other by common intention by their definition and the power of community can make you impact on your thought, your speech and your action which are called "collective consciousness". If you participate in a good community for activities daily, you will be a good person. On the contrary, if you participate in a bad community with the same their purpose, you will be a bad person. What happens? You will be a trouble maker in your family or a violence maker in the society. Shame on you! What happens next? You will also bring shame on your family.

It is time for you to change your view on the life. The life is too short and too beautiful if you practice meditation daily. Meditation is not trying to run away from reality, or trying to evade the painful problems right now. On the contrary, meditation is looking at them one by one or face to face gently. You have to spend time to practice a method of deep looking direct toward your the nature of the pain. In daily life, you are joy, but you are also pain; you are sometimes understanding, but you are also hatred of something. Remember that meditation is not a battlefield where this side fights another, or where good one fights against evil one. If you think meditating is managing to dispel apprehensions, doubts like trying to dispel darkness, that is truly not Buddhist meditation.

³ Thich Nhat Hanh, The Heart of the Buddha Teaching, Chapter Twenty Two.

“The Real Buddhist meditation is based on the principle of nonduality.”⁴ The “nonduality” means no being twofold, a classification into two opposed parts or subclasses; viz. when you are mindfulness, you are aware of loving and suffering the same time. Because both of them is in you and why do you try to suppress them? Anger is you and anger is your energy; mindfulness is you and it is your another also. If you are intelligent, you should maintain the second energy to take good care of the first as a mother knowing how to care for a baby. If you understand this method of the Buddha, you don’t waste your energy at all.

III. CONCLUSION

I would like to borrow a famous idea of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, aged 65 (1891 – 1956), Indian political leader and Indian Constitution’s father, to conclude this article. He said that he likes the religion that teaches liberty, equality and fraternity rather than attachment to views.⁵ If we cling to a point of view, an opinion, we can misunderstand others and create suffering each other everyday. One gun that can kill one, two, three people; but a religious doctrine or an ideology, cling to it, saying it is ultimate truth, that can kill hundred thousands, millions people etc. It is a terrible death. Therefore, human life, fraternity between nations, brotherhood, sisterhood which are more precious than any in the name of religious doctrine and ideologies.

Buddhism has chosen a way of life of non-violence which brings peace to people in the world. Wishing the peace is a matter of general concern of everyone. If one wants to get a real peace, one must cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path, extend the Four Immeasurables aforementioned. Therefore, the Buddhist teachings relies on the firm bedrock of Loving-kindness, Compassion, Sympathic joy, and Equanimity that will be automatically leading us to the non-violence’s path. This is a Buddhist characteristic contributing to the world’s peace.

If one performs the non-violence’s action each other, one can save a lot of lives from reasonless death. There are reasonless death from the individuals’ a little discord and long-standing grudge, families’ violence, from senseless war which have been derived from one’s greed, hatred, ignorance jealousy etc.

Overall, Buddhism offers people in the world a long – lasting peace’s solution that is the principle of non-violence. Buddhist non-violence is one’s true happiness to be expected. There are two types of happiness: true happiness and deceptive happiness. True happiness will be always easeful and can help nourishing ourself and other people. Deceptive happiness just brings temporary desires and helps us forget current suffering but easily disappear from our mind and it can be harmful like alcohol, beer, cigarette, hop, cocaine, opium, marijuana and so on.

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⁵ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/ambedkar-jayanti-2022-famous-quotes-of-dr-babasaheb-br-ambedkar/articleshow/90833201.cms>

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