Effective Buddhist Approaches to World Peace: An Analytical Study

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I. Introduction

While fellow-scientists have been able to come together and discuss their common problems without bitterness or acrimony, the idea that people of different religions can meet and discuss topics of mutual interest is of more recent origin. This is unfortunate since it is the religious men who profess to stand for the ideals of truth and love, who should have given a lead in this matter to the others. I need not go into the historical reasons for this, but I am glad that this organization among others has in recent times succeeded in extending its hand of fellowship beyond sectarian boundaries.

It is evident that there is a common content in the higher religions. All these religions profess a belief in a Transcendent Reality, in survival, in moral responsibility and moral values, and in a good life, despite the differences when we go into details. The Christians and Muslims seek communion with God, the Hindus seek union with Brahman, and the Buddhists seek to attain Nibbāna. It is equally evident that on matters on which they disagree they cannot all be true - unless it can be shown that the disagreements are purely verbal. Christianity believes in one unique Incarnation; Hinduism in several. To Islam the very idea is blasphemy. To the Buddhist it depends on what you mean. Now what I have to say on the concepts of peace, truth, freedom, justice and love in Buddhism belongs partly to the common content and partly to the disparate element, which distinguishes Buddhism from other religions. It would be necessary for me to point out both, if I am to give a clear picture of the account given of these concepts in Buddhism.

Peace is a central concept in the religion of the Buddha, who came to be known as the “santirājā” or the “Prince of Peace.” For, on the one hand the aim of the good life, as understood in Buddhism, is described as the attainment of a state of “Peace” or “santi,” which is a characteristic of Nibbāna or the Transcendent Reality. On the other hand, the practice of the good life is said to consist in “sama-cariyā” or “harmonious (literally: peaceful) living” with one’s fellow beings. It was this doctrine, which gave “inward peace” (ajhattlesanti)\(^1\) and resulted in “harmonious living” (or “righteous living” - dhammacariyā - as it is sometimes called), which the Buddha for the first time in the known history of mankind sought to spread over the entire earth when he set up, as he claimed “the kingdom of righteousness” (dhammacakkām, literally, rule of righteousness) or “the kingdom of God” (brahma-cakkām)\(^2\).

The Buddha, who in the earliest texts is said to have been “born for the good and happiness of mankind” (manussaloka hita-sukhatāya jāto), first trained sixty-one of his disciples to attain the highest spiritual goal in this life itself and then sent them out, requesting that no two of them were to go in the same direction. They were “to preach this good doctrine, lovely in the beginning, lovely in the middle and lovely in its consummation.” It is necessary to stress the importance of this training which was intended to bring about the moral (sīla), intuitive (samādhi) and intellectual-spiritual (paññā) development of the person. For it was only those who had attained the “inward peace” who were considered fit to preach, since according to Buddhism “it is not possible for a man who has not saved himself to (help) save another.”\(^3\) Those who went out on such missions were to train themselves in such a way that “if brigands were to get hold of them and cut them limb by limb with a double-edged saw,” they should not consider themselves to have done the bidding of the Buddha, if they showed the slightest anger towards them.\(^5\)

II. Content

1. Conception of Peace

Peace can be defined in a positive direction and in a negative sense. Positively, peace is a state of tranquility and stillness; however, in a negative sense, peace is the absence of war or violence.

\(^1\) Sn 837.
\(^2\) “Brahmā” means here “the highest” or the “most sublime” without theological connotations.
\(^3\) Sn. 683.
\(^4\) M I 46.
\(^5\) M I 129.
The term ‘peace’ originates most recently from the Anglo-French pes, and the Old French pais, meaning “peace, reconciliation, silence, agreement” (11th century). But, Pes itself comes from the Latin pax, meaning “peace, compact, agreement, treaty of peace, tranquility, absence of hostility, harmony.” The English word came into use in various personal greetings from c.1300 as a translation of the Hebrew word shalom, which, according to Jewish theology, comes from a Hebrew verb meaning ‘to restore’. Although ‘peace’ is the usual translation, however, it is an incomplete one, because ‘shalom,’ which is also cognate with the Arabic salaam, has multiple other meanings in addition to peace, including justice, good health, safety, well-being, prosperity, equity, security, good fortune, and friendliness. At a personal level, peaceful behaviors are kind, considerate, respectful, just, and tolerant of others’ beliefs and behaviors — tending to manifest goodwill.

This latter understanding of peace can also pertain to an individual’s introspective sense or concept of himself, as in being “at peace” in one’s own mind, as found in European references from c.1200. The early English term is also used in the sense of “quiet”, reflecting calm, serene, and meditative approaches to family or group relationships that avoid quarreling and seek tranquility - an absence of disturbance or agitation.

In many languages, the word for peace is also used as a greeting or a farewell, for example the Hawaiian word aloha, as well as the Arabic word salaam. In English the word peace is occasionally used as a farewell, especially for the dead, as in the phrase rest in peace.

Several conceptions, models, or modes of peace have been suggested in which peace research might prosper.

The first is that peace is a natural social condition, whereas war is not. The premise is simple for peace researchers: to present enough information so that a rational group of decision makers will seek to avoid war and conflict.

Second, the view that violence is sinful or unskillful, and that non-violence is skillful or virtuous and should be cultivated. This view is held by a variety of religious traditions worldwide:

Quakers, Mennonites and other Peace churches within Christianity; Jains, the Satyagraha tradition in Hinduism, Buddhism, and other portions of Indian religion and philosophy; as well as certain schools of Islam.

Third is pacifism: the view that peace is a prime force in human behaviour.

A further approach is that there are multiple modes of peace.

2. Causes of Conflicts

Buddhism, being a religion with a claim of the reality of existence, has well acknowledged causal forces that could constitute the hindrance to a harmonious living on every level of human actions. Violence and conflict, from the perspective of Buddhist principle of dependent origination, are, same with everything else in the world, a product of causes and conditions. To eliminate violence and conflict, all we have to do is to resolve the underlying causes and conditions. Using human body/consciousness as a division, the Buddhist analysis of the causes of violence and conflict is arrayed along three domains: the external, the internal, and the root.

2.1. External Causes

The Buddha looks at the external causes of conflict as consequences derived from a general orientation common to all living beings: avoiding harm and obtaining happiness. Anything contrary to this would result in disturbing one’s peace and lead to conflict. If people want to live an ultimately happy life with no harms toward themselves at all, the Buddha teaches, they should start with avoiding causing harm to others, physically and verbally at the personal level, since people are afraid of physical violence and resent harsh words; and the physical and verbal harm we inflict upon others usually leads to hate and conflicts that, in turn, would bring harm to us and cost our happiness.

As stated in one Buddhist Scripture, All fear death.
None are unafraid of sticks and knives.
Seeing yourself in others,
Don’t kill don’t harm
Bad words blaming others.

10 Dhammapada 18.
Arrogant words humiliating others. 
From these behaviors 
Come hatred and resentment. 
…
Hence conflicts arise, 
Rendering in people malicious thoughts  
And these malicious thoughts would, in due term, result in harm upon us since none are really exempt from the influences of all others, including the people we harmed. The Buddhist principle of dependent origination crystallizes the imperative of many peace workers’ advocacy for nonviolent interpersonal communication and interactions as they are indispensable to what human pursue – a life of happiness. That is, practicing nonviolence in speech and action would ultimately benefit the practitioner.

In larger contexts, Buddhism recognizes the indirect form of violence in the social systems to be external causes of conflicts as well. Violence, conflict and war caused by injustice in political and economic structures bring even more harms to people on a grand scale. Recognizing the material needs for sustaining human living, Buddhism postulates the principle of Middle Way as a criterion in making decisions on all levels of activities and encourages frugality as a positive virtue. The relentless pursuit of economic development and personal property regardless of environmental or moral consequences is considered not in accordance with the Middle Way since it destroys the balance between consumption and resources, as well as material gain and spiritual growth.

2.3. Internal Causes

Albeit external verbal and physical wrongdoings as well as social injustice are causing conflicts and violence, Buddhism contends that these behaviors and structures originate all from the state of human mind, since the violence and injustice are responses toward external stimuli produced by people’s inner mind operation. That is, the deeper causes of any conflict lie internally in the mental operations within each being.

Similarly, institutions or groups would respond to adversity with establishing policies or laws trying to protect whatever interest they perceive to be under threat or attack, which would cause conflicts since others’ interest and well-being might be undermined by these measures. In other words, physical and structural violence are the product of human mental status such as fear, anger, and hate, which are considered in Buddhism to be the internal causes to violence and conflicts. Even when no threat of personal safety or collective interest is in presence, conflicts may occur, from the Buddhist perspective, as a result of our two major mental attachments to, first, subjective views, opinions and, second, the desire for materials, relationships.

The attachment to views refers to insistence on the correctness of one’s own views, ideas, and ways of doing things. It would elapse into prejudice, polarity, negating other views and ways of life and ultimately negating people who are different from “us”. The Buddha sees this attachment to difference as one major cause of in-group and inter-group conflicts. Two thousand years later, this has also been identified by modern scholars as central to conflicts between ethnic, social, religious groups and individuals.

The second major cause of conflicts, the attachment to desire, refers to want for material goods and longing for affection and belonging in human beings. It can easily go beyond the level of necessity and become greed. The greedy desire to have and to own drives individuals, groups, and nations into competition for what they want, followed by conflicts and even wars. As depicted in Vibhosa-sastra: “For the sake of greedy desire, kings and kings are in conflict, So are monks and monks, people and people, regions and regions, states and states”12. This competition is discerned by the Buddha as a lose-lose situation: “If we win, we incur resentment toward ourselves. If we lose, our self-esteem is hurt”13.

The internal cause of violence and conflicts as analyzed through a Buddhist perspective, corresponds to many peace educators’ emphasis on intrapersonal peace building and the United Nations’ campaign for a culture of peace. The focus on individual and inner transformation of attitudes on and interpretations of what happens externally, which in turn would motivate appropriate change in behaviors, is considered more effective in eliminating the causes leading to violence and conflicts on all levels of human interactions.

2.3. Roots of Conflicts

Behind the mental, behavioral and structural causes of violence and conflict, Buddhism goes even further to the ultimate fundamental cause

11 Dhammapada 8.  
12 The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, Taisho 28: 1547.  
13 Dhammapada 210.
leading to all the suffering inflicted by violence and conflict. Buddha attributes all our attachments, the resulting harming behaviors and the suffering hence caused, to the human ignorance (avijja). We are ignorant to the cosmic reality that everything in the world is inter-related, interdependent. Not adopting the Buddhist worldview, we thought we are separate from others as an independent entity: our views are different from theirs; our properties are certainly not theirs.

Hence we develop our attachments to views and desires through the reinforcing notions of “me” and “mine.” We are not impartial in looking at things. We tend to focus on the harm that is done to us, instead of examining the whole event in its context with all the causes and conditions conducive to its happening.

This ignorance to the principle of dependent origination alienates us from what really happens in the situation and the complex set of conditions around any given event, and thus rids us of the possibility of making correct assessment of the event and react accordingly in time. Without the lucidity to discern the causes, development and effects of specific events, we are inevitably causing conflicts and doing harm to others as well as ourselves all the time. Even wars between states come out of great fear and the collective ignorance. This ignorance is what Buddhism identifies as the very root cause of violence, conflict, and war, which prevents human beings to live a peaceful life.

3. Buddhist Approaches to Peace in Present World

3.1. Dependent Origination

In the state of tranquillity, the light of enlightened wisdom shines brilliantly, unblocked and unhindered by the clouds of deluded impulses. If one surveys the Buddha’s teachings, from the earliest scriptures through the subsequent Mahayana tradition, one can see that the core of Shakyamuni’s enlightenment was his awakening to the “law of dependent origination.”

Dependent origination teaches us that all things occur and exist only through their interrelationship with all other phenomena and that this fabric of relatedness is of infinite extent both temporally and spatially. Herein lies the basis for the principle of mutually supportive coexistence of all beings so central to Buddhist thinking.

Each human being exists within the context of interrelationships that include other human beings, all living beings and the natural world. In other words, each person is sustained by the interdependent web of life. By awakening to this principle we are able to expand instinctive self-love into an altruistic love for others; we are able to nurture the spirit of tolerance and empathy for others.

The doctrine of dependent origination also provides a theoretical foundation for peace. In terms of concrete action, it manifests itself as the practice of compassion. In Buddhism, compassion indicates the practical ethic of always maintaining an empathetic involvement with others. It means sharing their sufferings and unhappiness, working alongside them to overcome the deluded impulses that are the root cause of suffering, transforming these into happiness, benefit and joy.

As mentioned earlier, the law of dependent origination describes the insight that all things and phenomena are interdependent and all manifest the ordering principle of the cosmos, each in its own unique manner. Since Buddhism views deluded impulses as those that prevent people from clearly seeing this reality, we feel that humankind will be best served when each religious tradition engages in its own characteristic struggle against the three poisons of hatred, avarice and ignorance, while cooperating toward the resolution of global issues. This is how Buddhism views the key concepts of cultural pluralism and religious tolerance.

3.2. Compassion

As one brought up in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, I feel that love and compassion are the moral fabric of world peace. Let me first define what I mean by compassion. When you have pity or compassion for a very poor person, you are showing sympathy because he or she is poor; your compassion is based on altruistic considerations. On the other hand, love towards your wife, your husband, your children, or a close friend is usually based on attachment. When your attachment changes, your kindness also changes; it may disappear. This is not true love. Real love is not based on attachment, but on altruism. In this case your compassion will remain as a humane response to suffering as long as beings continue to suffer.

This type of compassion is what we must strive to cultivate in ourselves, and we must develop it from a limited amount to the limitless. Undiscriminating, spontaneous, and unlimited compassion for all sentient beings is obviously not the usual love that one has for friends or family, which is alloyed with ignorance, desire, and attachment. The kind of love we should advocate is
this wider love that you can have even for someone who has done harm to you: your enemy.

The rationale for compassion is that every one of us wants to avoid suffering and gain happiness. This, in turn, is based on the valid feeling of ‘1’, which determines the universal desire for happiness. Indeed, all beings are born with similar desires and should have an equal right to fulfill them. If I compare myself with others, who are countless, I feel that others are more important because I am just one person whereas others are many. Further, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition teaches us to view all sentient beings as our dear mothers and to show our gratitude by loving them all.

The development of a kind heart (a feeling of closeness for all human beings) does not involve the religiosity we normally associate with conventional religious practice. It is not only for people who believe in religion, but is for everyone regardless of race, religion, or political affiliation. It is for anyone who considers himself or herself, above all, a member of the human family and who sees things from this larger and longer perspective. This is a powerful feeling that we should develop and apply; instead, we often neglect it, particularly in our prime years when we experience a false sense of security.

Another result of spiritual development, most useful in day-to-day life, is that it gives a calmness and presence of mind. Our lives are in constant flux, bringing many difficulties. When faced with a calm and clear mind, problems can be successfully resolved. When, instead, we lose control over our minds through hatred, selfishness, jealousy, and anger, we lose our sense of judgement. Our minds are blinded and at those wild moments anything can happen, including war. Thus, the practice of compassion and wisdom is useful to all, especially to those responsible for running national affairs, in whose hands lie the power and opportunity to create the structure of world peace.

The practice of “mettā” or Compassionate Love was thus an essential part of the training. The worth placed on Love in Buddhism may be gathered from the following remark of the Buddha: “None of the good works employed to acquire religious merit is worth a fraction of the value of loving-kindness.” The word mettā is the abstract noun from the word mitra, which means “friend.” It is, however, not defined just as “friendliness” but as analogous to a mother’s love for her only child. “Just as a mother loves her only child even more than her life, do thou extend a boundless love towards all creatures.” The practice of the “highest life” or the “God-life” (brahma-vihāra) is said to consist in the cultivation of compassionate feelings towards all beings, sympathy (karuṇā) towards those in distress who need our help, the ability to rejoice with those who are justly happy (the opposite emotion to that of jealousy, envy, etc.) (muditā) and impartiality towards all. The person who has successfully developed these qualities is said to be “one who is cleansed with an internal bathing” after bathing “in the waters of love and compassion for one’s fellow beings.”

Differences of opinion there were with regard to the interpretation of the texts among the Buddhists themselves, and this was inevitable in a religion which gave full freedom of thought and expression to man. But these differences did not result in fanaticism and an attempt on the part of one party to persecute the other. History records the fact that those who subscribed to the ideals of Mahāyāna or Theravāda Buddhism were able to study side by side in the same monastery. In world conferences of Buddhists, Mahāyānists and Theravādins come together despite the known differences in their views. Another aspect of this practice of compassion on the part of the Buddhists is the fact that they were the first in history to open hospitals in India, Ceylon and China for the medical treatment not only of human beings but of animals as well, thus translating into action the saying of the Buddha that “he who serves the sick serves me.”

The effect that this doctrine of compassion had on the Buddhist emperor, Asoka, may be seen when he says, “All men are my children, and, as I desire for my children that they obtain every kind of welfare and happiness both in this world and the next world, so do I desire for all men.” When he embraced Buddhism, he indulged in spiritual conquest saying that “the reverberation of war drums” was now replaced by the “reverberation of the drum of the dharma.” It appears as if Asoka was trying to emulate the example of the righteous “universal monarch” (cakkavatti-rāja) as depicted in the Buddhist texts. The Buddha had said that “it was possible to rule a country in accordance with dharma without resorting to harsh punitive measures or engaging in military conquests.”

14 Itivuttaka, 19–21.
15 M I 39.
16 Vinaya Pitaka, Mahāvagga VIII. 26.
17 S I 116. According to Buddhist tradition, there are periods in the world cycles when human beings are at the peak of moral and intellectual development, and at such times a world ruler
3.3. Loving Kindness

Like all of the major world religions, at its core, Buddhism is a religion of peace. An early Buddhist collection of verses on practice in everyday life, the Pali (Theravadin) Dhammapada, makes this abundantly clear. Verse five of the text (of 423 verses) states: “Hatred is never appeased hatred. Hatred is only appeased by Love (or, non-enmity). This is an eternal law.” The Pali term for “eternal law” here is dhamma, or the Buddhist teachings. So, this verse on non-enmity has to do with a tenet of the Buddhist faith that is fundamental, namely, peace and non-harm.

Buddhist teachings tell us that hatred and aversion, like their opposites desire and greed, all spring from a fundamental ignorance. That ignorance is our mistaken notion of our own permanent, independent existence. In ignorance, we see ourselves as separate beings, unconnected with others. Blinded to our true state of interdependence and interconnectedness, it is this basic ignorance that keeps us divided. Only practice that leads to overcoming such ignorance will help to free us from the prisons we make for ourselves and for others.

The problem occurs as, unfortunately oftentimes is the case, when our own individual likes and dislikes become reified and solidified; when we not only form inflexible opinions, but take them as truths; when we form negative judgments about other human beings and about ourselves and these judgments become for us the lenses through which we view and experience ourselves, the world around us, and its inhabitants. At this point, we have entered into the arena of prejudice of a quite pernicious sort, the sort which causes harm and suffering both for ourselves and for others. And whether it be friendships and loving personal relationships destroyed, or wars fought over religion or contested territory, or one group of beings dominating another or restraining their freedom of movement, at this point we cease being human beings at our best.

In reality, at our innermost cores we are all exactly the same: we are human beings who wish to have happiness and to avoid suffering. Yet, out of ignorance, we go about seeking these goals blindly and without insight. We live our lives seemingly oblivious to our own prejudices even though they are right in front of our eyes. In short, we suffer because we embrace the mistaken notion of our separateness from one another.

The illusion of separateness actually works to prevent us from finding the beginning of this erroneous spiral. Buddhist traditions tell us that from the very moment the notions of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ arise, there simultaneously arise the notions of ‘not me’ and ‘not mine.’ That is, from the moment we conceive of ‘us,’ there is a ‘them.’ Once the notions of separateness, difference, and otherness enter our thinking, they then go on literally and figuratively—to color all of our subsequent experience, judgments and perceptions.

The dismantling of hateful prejudices begins with the recognition that we do, in fact, harbor them. Next, we must be willing to look at our own particular prejudices with honesty and resolve. We need to know how and why we, as particular human beings, came to harbor the specific views we do and, through this understanding, to be willing now to replace them with more positive views and behaviors. Lastly, we need to know that we can indeed make a difference; that we can work together for positive change in our own society and in the world. Thus, with understanding and with practice comes a softening of our rigid views. Our hearts can open and, ultimately, we can transform ourselves into loving individuals and loving neighbors; in short, into human beings at our best.

Hatred is learned. It must be our task to unlearn it. Racism and racial profiling is learned behavior. We must strive to unlearn it. Ethnic and class distinctions are learned. We must come to see and to appreciate the common humanity that unites us.

3.4. Mindfullness

Mindfulness is the key to the present moment. Without it we simply stay lost in the wanderings of our minds. Mindfulness is the quality and power of mind that is aware of what’s happening - without judgment and without interference. It is like a mirror that simply reflects whatever comes before it. It serves us in the humblest ways, keeping us connected to brushing our teeth or having a cup of tea. It keeps us connected to the people around us, so that we’re not simply rushing by them in the busyness of our lives.

The Buddha also spoke of mindfulness as being the path to enlightenment: “This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the

( cakkavatti) is able to govern in righteousness, without the use of force.
disappearing of pain and grief, for the attainment of the Way, for the realization of nirvana.”

We can start the practice of mindfulness meditation with the simple observation and feeling of each breath. Breathing in, we know we’re breathing in; breathing out, we know we’re breathing out. It’s very simple, although not easy. After just a few breaths, we hop on trains of association, getting lost in plans, memories, judgments and fantasies. This habit of wandering mind is very strong, even though our reveries are often not pleasant and sometimes not even true. As Mark Twain so aptly put it, “Some of the worst things in my life never happened.” So we need to train our minds, coming back again and again to the breath, simply beginning again.

On the subtest level, we learn not to identify with consciousness itself, cutting through any sense of this knowing faculty as being “I” or “mine.” As a way of cultivating this radical transformation of understanding, I have found it useful to reframe meditation experience in the passive voice; for example, the breath being known, sensations being known, thoughts being known. This language construction takes the “I” out of the picture and opens us to the question, “Known by what?” And rather than jumping in with a conceptual response, the question can lead us to experience directly the unfolding mystery of awareness, moment after moment.

The wisdom of understanding selflessness finds expression in compassion. We might say that compassion is the activity of emptiness. Compassion arises both on the personal level of our individual relationships and on the global level of great cultures and civilizations interacting with one another. The integration of the understanding of our own minds with what is happening in the world today has enormous implications.

Most importantly, we need to acknowledge that these feelings are arising. In this regard, it is mindfulness that can bring the gift of compassion, both for ourselves and others. Mindfulness sees the whole parade of feelings, however intense, without getting lost or drowning in them, and without judging ourselves for feeling them.

Through mindfulness, our hearts become spacious enough to hold the painful emotions, to feel the suffering of them, and to let them go. But it takes practice - and perhaps several different practices - to open to the difficult emotions that we’re aware of and to illuminate those that are hidden.

3.4. Moral Observance

The Buddhist undertaking to refrain from killing is not a negative precept and has its positive side when fully stated, viz. “One refrains from killing creatures, laying aside the stick and the sword, and abides conscientious, full of kindness, love and compassion towards all creatures and beings.” 18 A Buddhist layman has to follow a righteous mode of living (samma-ājīva), the sale of human beings or animals (satta-vijjā), the sale of flesh (maṃsa-vijjā), the sale of intoxicating drinks (majja-vijjā) and the sale of dangerous and poisonous drugs (visa-vijjā)19. The order of monks were exhorted to practise the following, which are said to promote unity—to be compassionate in their behaviour, their speech and their thoughts towards one another and to have all things in common.20

The ideal in Buddhism was to attain a permanent state of mind described as the “inward peace” not in the remote future but in this life itself. This is not a passive apathetic state of quietism as some Western critics of Buddhism have thought. For the passage from our finite self-centred existence to Nibbāna is pictured as one from bondage to freedom (vinutti) and power (vasi), from imperfection to perfection (parisuddhi, parama-kusala), from unhappiness to perfect happiness (parama-sukha), from ignorance to knowledge (vijjā, ațhā, ṃṇā), from finite consciousness to infinite transcendent consciousness (ananta-vijjā), from the impermanent to the permanent (nicca), from the unstable to the stable (dhūva), from fear and anxiety to perfect security (abhaya), from the evanescent to the ineffable (amossadhamma), from a state of mental illness to a state of perfect mental health, etc. It is a peace that passes understanding for it is the result of what is paradoxically described both as the extinction of one’s self-centred desires and the attainment of an ultimate reality.

According to Buddhism, the springs of action are six-fold, comprising the three immoral bases of action (akusala-mūla) and the three moral bases of action (kusala-mūla), viz. Immoral bases: rāga (craving), kāma-rāga or kāma-tanḥā, the desire for sense gratification; bhava-rāga or bhava-tanḥā, the desire for selfish pursuits; dosa (hatred): vibhava-

18 D I 4.
19 A III 208.
20 M I 322.
3.5. Law of Causation and Karma

Buddhism parts company with other religions in holding that moral and religious truths are not different in principle from scientific truths. Paradoxical as it may seem, it was the Buddha—i.e. a religious teacher—who was the first in the history of thought to state formally the two principles of causal determination, namely that A and B are causally related: if whenever A happens B happens and B does not happen unless A has happened. The theory of causation is central to the understanding of Buddhism. The Buddha tells us “the causes of things that arise from causes” and adds that “he who understands causation understands the Dhamma and vice versa.” Causation, however, is not Strictly Deterministic since the mind (with its acts of will) can often divert and direct the operation of causal processes and the mind is said to have the capacity to act with degrees of freedom according to its state of development. The Buddhist concept of causation, therefore, stands midway between Indeterminism (adhicca-samuppāda: Skt. yadṛccha) on the one hand and Strict Determinism (niyati) on the other.

There were three forms of Determinism prevalent at the time to which Buddhism was opposed - one was Natural Determinism, which held that everything that happens is due to the innate constitution of things; another was Karmic Determinism which held that everything that happens to an individual was due to his past karma; lastly, there was Theistic Determinism, which held that all that happens was due to the fiat or will of a Personal God who has created the universe and sustains it.

In the universe there operate physical laws, biological laws, psychological laws and moral and spiritual laws. While the natural scientists tell us about the first three, the Buddha discovers and reveals the latter. It is said that, whether the Buddhas appear or not, these laws operate and we are subject to them. All that the Buddha does is to discover (or re-discover) them. What is thus discovered is said to be verifiable by each and every one of us, by following the path that leads to their discovery. It is a contingent fact that the moral and spiritual life (i.e. the religious life) is both possible and desirable in the universe in which we live. If the universe were different from what in fact it is (e.g. if Indeterminism or Strict Determinism were the case), if the soul were identical with the body or were different from it, if there were no Transcendent Reality, then the religious life might not have been possible and would not have been desirable.

One of the spiritual truths stated in Buddhism is the law of karma. As understood in Buddhism it merely states that there is an observable correlation between morally good acts and pleasant consequences to the individual and morally evil acts and unpleasant consequences. It does not state that all our present experiences are due to our past karma. This is in fact emphatically denied, where it is shown that many of our experiences are due to our own actions in this life or to causal factors (such as the weather, our state of physical health), which have nothing to do with our karma. The law of karma as stated is a causal correlation, which guarantees the fact of individual moral responsibility.

III. Conclusion

The potentials that these perspective and practices that Buddhism may enrich the fields of peace studies and peace activism of course certainly merit further investigation in theories as well as in practicum. Along with the longtime criticism of Buddhism as a passive and individualistic religion which encourages people to withdraw from the real world over-emphasis on the role of inner transformation and the widening circle of individual influence as approaches to peace in larger contexts may seem slow and procrastinating in the eyes of those who consider immediate effort is needed in working for social justice and conflict intervention.

Whereas the compassion and loving-kindness cultivated within individuals can certainly be necessary for transformation into a new culture of peace, specific areas of problem, such as class/race oppression and environmental degradation need to be adequately addressed and fully explored.

The introduction of the concept of nirvana into the West since the early days may also cause misunderstanding of peace as the ultimate existence in Buddhism. In some Buddhist branches, the state of nirvana equals with ultimate peacefulness, or it is considered as an ultimate solution for conflicts. Since nirvana is extremely difficult to attain for almost all Buddhists, the equation (peace = nirvana) renders peace a remote, unattainable label that would not be conducive to any present peacemaking efforts. Along the same line of thinking, interpreting “right concentration” as being peace would be easily misunderstood to be
that one can only stay in peace on the meditation mat, if without a background in the Buddhist traditions. These two cases would call for greater efforts in trying to translating Buddhist concepts into peace studies.

Besides the problems of modern interpretations and translations across cultures and languages, in practice, the Buddhist monastic orders are often criticized as ingratiating themselves with authorities in exchange with advantages. A group aiming at liberating self and others could in this world turn out to be part of the oppressive structure. Together with the fact that violence and conflicts still exist in countries where Buddhism is the state or majority religion the relations between Buddhism, political authorities, and nationalism as well as discrepancies between the Buddhist doctrine and its manifestations would need to be carefully observed and further studied, if an integrated model of peace is to be realized.

This article examines the Buddha’s fundamental teachings that contribute to peace-building and peacekeeping in the world. A Buddhist worldview based on the principle of dependent origination, its analysis of the causes of conflicts and violence, and the open communication and participatory decision-making procedures in social organizations, would inform and provide useful paths for theoretical approaches and research-based applications in peace studies. In particular, the Buddhist observation and reflection techniques developed for more than 2,500 years may start an “inner revolution” among warring people as well as peace activists: enabling them to see more clearly the multilateral forces operating in the situation, and reexamining the appropriateness of own causes and behaviors. The true value of nonviolence, compassion and altruism advocated by Buddhism would also inspire all people on the path of peace.

Given the will, the insight, the perseverance, and the proactive creativity to realize the infinite possibilities latent in the dependently originated reality, peace, from the Buddhist perspective, is realistic and achievable; and, aiming at making a more just and humane world, peacemaking is an imminent, common responsibility mandated by the interdependent nature of our existence and therefore to be shared by every one of us.

**Bibliography**

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