

BUDDHISM, NON-VIOLENCE AND MAKING OF A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY: A STUDY IN PROSPECTS AND POTENTIALS

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All human beings around the world reflect deeply on the cause of violence and how it can be removed from our live. This is not an easy task. It has never been easy because the whole world live in a culture where different forms of violence have become recreation and entertainment. On our highways we have “road rage”. Domestic violence against women continues, and we have not seen the end of hate crimes against people of color and citizens who are gay. Ethnic and religious violence erupt almost every day in the Middle East, England, Afghanistan, Africa and from coast to coast in America, where some people see the emotion of “anger” as being righteous and justified.

Now we can understand that all forms of violence which arise from anger, hatred and fear are unacceptable for a civilized people. Violence is not only physical. It is also psychological and verbal. Violence can exist in our spirits. Violence can appear wherever and whenever our own egos lead us to believe that we and our destinies are separate from others. Violence appears when we speak harshly to or about others. In other words, violence first begins in the mind when we think dualistically, and when we forget that everyone on earth simply wants the same two things that we want happiness and

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to avoid suffering.

There is a very old Buddhist idea that is known as the Four Right procedures. The first right procedure is to prevent evil or violence from starting. The second is to remove any evil or violence as soon as it starts. The third is to encourage acts of peace and nonviolence. And the fourth is to nurture the growth and continuance of actions that lead to goodwill and the recognition that all our lives are interrelated. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tide in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Knowing that all life is inter related. Here the Buddhist mind is different from the mind of others. “As a Buddhist, if you really want to consider what we, as human beings, are here for it’s quite simple: we are trying to achieve enlightenment and to use the wisdom that is gained to serve others, so that they too might be free from suffering. While we can’t all be Buddhists, I feel a responsibility to do as much as I can to realize enlightenment to the degree that I can, to use it to believe the suffering of others.¹ There are four major points in the teachings of the Buddha (i) People the Sangha regardless of their caste. The Buddha set up the Sangha as an ideal community equally open to all.² (ii) Through abilities differ, everyone has an “equal right” to an equal opportunity to achieve whatever they can (iii) The Buddha “gave right to women” to benefit from Buddha dhamma and reach the final goal of the teachings just the same as men.” And (iv) the Buddha “taught Buddha dhamma with a common tongue so that people of any educational background could benefit from Dhamma.

Here it can be said that Buddhism is one of the earliest religions to recognized the fundamental equality of all human beings belonging, as they are to one community in the sense that people’s essential natures are the same whatever their individual differences, due to heredity, environment and other factors may be. This sense of equality is further reinforced by the Buddhist view that (a) all human beings, in the final analysis, face the same

1. Aung San Suu Kyi, *The voice of Hope: conversations with Alam Clements* (London and New York: Penguin Books 1997), p.148

2. Phra Prayudh payutto, *Buddha dhamma: Natural Laws and values for life*, trans , Grant A Olson (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1995), p.42

basic phenomena of birth, decay and dissolution, spelt out as the First Noble Truth and (b) that at the same time human beings are capable of overcoming these problems by attaining the very highest moral and spiritual level by a development of the human potential through an extension of human capacity. Human life is so placed in the cosmic scheme of things, that human beings along enjoy the best opportunity of transcending the satisfactoriness of existence into the state of Nirvana the state of Highest Happiness, in this very life.³ From eliminating inequality in ancient India to purifying the human minds the Buddha or prince siddharth was concerned about human nature not just in one country but in the whole world. This is where prince siddhartha's greatness lies. In spite of being born in a palace and living a prosperous, life, the prince was able to feel the suffering of the poor and the arrogance of the other religious leaders of his time. This inequality led him to search for a way to and the suffering of all being. In order to free people from suffering he had to start with himself. Thus he left his home to experience the feelings of other living beings and to look for the truth in life.

Buddhism teaches that internal life of the individual as intimately related to the external life of society and holds that values in the two realms are inseparably connected compatible and are infect one and the same thing. What would be the implications of the internal life of the individual and the external life of society being intimately related?

The non-adversarial of Buddhism that we see in the discussion of the precepts. By engaging in Buddhist practices, one transforms oneself into a person with less violence and more loving kindness and compassion, this is good for the individual and good for society. One is after all, a part of society, not separate from it; society is the sum total of many such individuals, Thus the internal life of the individual and the external life of society are "intimately related."

Nhat Hanh has written the classic statement of the relationship between individual and society. Drawing upon the idea of emptiness, which he explains with characteristic simplicity Nhat

3. L.P.N. Perera, Buddhism and Human Rights: A Buddhist Commentary on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Karunaratne and sons, 1991), p.p. 23-24

Hanh demonstrates his understanding of the interdependence of individual and society.

When a person goes to meditation centre, we may have the impression that we leave everything behind family, society and all the complications involved in them and come as an individual in order to practice and to search for peace. This is already an illusion, because in Buddhism there is no such thing as an individual.

The individual is made of non-individual elements. How do you expect to leave everything behind when you enter a meditation centre. The kind of suffering that you carry in your mind, that is society itself. You bring that with you, bring society with you. You bring all of us with you.

Leaves are usually looked upon as the children of the tree. Yes, they are the children of the tree, born from the tree, but they are also mothers of the tree. The leaves combine raw sap, water and minerals, with sun shine and goes and convert it into a variegated sap that can nourish the tree. We are all children of society, but we are also mothers. We have to nourish society. If we are uprooted from society we cannot transform it into more livable place for us and for our children.⁴

The relationship between individual and society is one of interpenetration; the individual contains society within himself and society is constructed of individuals. We are children and mothers of society and society is our mother and our child. We produce each other.

The interdependence of the individual and society has practical implications. What is good for society is good for the individual and vice versa, whether viewed from a material or a spiritual perspective. A stable and harmonious society is the best support for Buddhist practice. Buddhist practice, in turn should make one a better person, with more helpful contributions to bring to society. Sulak Sivraksa says “Hence we should all take responsibility both for our own development and for the development of our

4. Nhat Hanh Being Peace (Berkeley, Calif: Parallax Press, 1987), p.p. 45-47.

common society both of which are inseparably, intertwined.⁵This is the kind of thinking that is the foundation of the making of sustainable society.

The ancient Buddhist institutions like the great Nalanda University also, emphasized on the importance of interdependence in the world. The practical application of Nalanda wisdom studies has a deep impact on the world is interdependent both in terms of human to human relations and the relationship between human beings and the flora and fauna. The insight into the interdependency of everything instills a sense of responsibility for fellow humans and the delicate environment. A sense of unconditional love and care is also encouraged.

At the moment the world is facing many crises owing to a lack of insight reading the point of interdependency. To know the concept of dependent origination one need not be Buddhist. Anyone can acquire knowledge and conviction in the interdependent nature of all phenomena for a deeper insight into other fields of knowledge such as education, environment, law, business and so forth. With this awareness one will become wise enough to take care of others, knowing that the happiness and success of you and your group depends on the happiness of others and their contributions.

Although many Buddhist scholars are interested in promoting the idea of social responsibility indeed social responsibility is a basic premise of Buddhism. The Dalai Lama has done more to develop this idea than anyone else. In addition to the case for responsibility that he makes from human nature, His Holiness also makes a logical case for responsibility: each of us is only one individual, while others are “infinite”. No individual’s value no matter how important can out weigh the combined value of others. “Because of numbers the infinite numbers of others: “Because of numbers the infinite numbers, the infinite numbers of others right and welfare naturally become most important.” The welfare of others is important not only because of the number but also if you were to sacrifice the infinite others for your own happiness eventually you will lose. If

5.Sulak Sivaraksa, *A Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Bangkok: Thai Inter Religious Commission for Development, 1998), p.76.

you think more of others taking care of others right and serving others, ultimately you will gain.⁶

His Holiness's belief in human equality or sameness combines with a utilitarian argument that the good of the greater number is objectively more important than the good of any individual. Therefore the good of the group is more important than my narrowly conceived individual good and I should act for the good of the group. There is an additional argument based upon interdependence: because my good is interdependent suffer, too. Therefore, I should look after the good of the many putting aside my narrowly conceived individual good if necessary even for my own sake as seen from the perspective of enlightened self-interest. We can also see the combination of these arguments as an implicit natural law argument: We cannot survive without society; society can survive without anyone of us; therefore, it is "normal".

Universal responsibility then is based upon human sameness ("the equal right of all others to happiness and not to suffer") and expressed in altruistic behavior putting oneself second and others first. In the end responsibility translates into a positive moral duty to care for others.

A sense of responsibility toward all others also means that both as individuals and as a society of individuals we have a duty to care for each member of our society. We need therefore to ensure that the sick and afflicted person never feels helpless rejected or unprotected. Indeed, the affection we show to such people is the measure of our spiritual health both at the level of the individual and at that of society⁷.

As individuals need to be responsible to society so also society needs to be responsible to individuals. The rationales for these two forms of responsibility differ however. The individual needs to be responsible to society because the good of the entire society outweighs the good of the individual. Society, however needs to be particularly responsible to those individuals who need help. Those

6. Dalai Lama, *Worlds in Harmony* (Berkeley Calif: Parallax Press, 1992) p.p. 131-139.

7. Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), p.p. 162-163.

individuals who can take care of themselves have no special call on society's attention; it is the needy who require our care. The rationale for society's responsibility toward individuals than is compassion. We can see here one of several reasons why the Dalai Lama is sympathetic to human right. Human rights are designed to protect people, whether individuals or in group, who need protection from more powerful individuals or groups. They also can be seen as an expression of compassion.

In above paragraphs it has been discussed that what is relationship between individual and society. How the individual and society are dependent on each other and the interest of society is predominant over the interest of an individual. Plural is always dominant on singular. Now there will be discussion about Balancing the individual and society, Karma and conditioning, self-reliance and responsibility. Here is the Buddhist concept of sustainable society is different from the western concept of society and individual.

There is no such thing as a "free will" in Buddhism. That such a "will", alone in the universe, could exist as some kind of entity free of all causal and conditioning influences from outside itself is an impossibility from a Buddhist perspective. This does not mean, however, that Buddhism sees humankind as fully determined. The entire enterprise of Buddhism is based upon the Buddha, and subsequent teachers, encouraging people to make wise choices. This enterprise would make no sense if people could not choose; from Buddhist point of view free will and determinism are the poles of a false dichotomy. The western preoccupation with this issue may be traced to European Enlightenment thinking, epitomized by Descartes and carried forwarded by Kant, in which a person is regarded as an autonomous individual in which a transcendent reason and a free will are essential to the individual's identity. None of the term in this connection of concepts exist in Buddhist notions of the human being.

As we know the starting point in Buddhist thought is very different. Buddhism sees the human being as a composite being lacking in selfhood and highly interdependent with his or her surroundings. As Nhat Hanh says, "The individual is made of non-individual parts." There are only cause and conditions. "These views

open up an entirely different approach to certain ethical issue, an approach not without its own difficulties.

To see more clearly the ethical implications of anatman and the interpenetration of individual and society. There should be focus on the issue of causation with respect to an individuals choices and actions. The Buddhists would not accept free will.

In other words if people feel that their lives are predetermined, they will not make any effort either to live, a moral life or to engage in religious practice. They will become passive, letting things happen to them rather than trying to guide their own lives in a direction of their own choosing. The Buddha goes on to say that he came into world precisely to exhort humankind not to commit moral misdeeds. The point of the Buddha's teaching about karmic suffering in the future, not to feel trapped by any misdeeds committed in past. It is essential that they exert themselves to make wise choices. They will not do that, unless they believe that, those choice are not simply fated, but real.

The Buddha recognized the role of external conditioning as crucial support to personal development. There is no self there are only causes and conditions, it is clear that the causes and conditions to which one is exposed will play a very great role in shaping the beliefs, values, attitudes, inclinations, habits and behaviors that constitute "the individual". Thus it was natural indeed, inevitable that the Buddha would emphasize the importance of external factors in influencing the future development of an individual engage in Buddhist practice. If such a person has kalyanmitta which is to say a teacher he or she would have access to the entire world of Buddhist teaching and Buddhist community. This world constitute wholesome causes and conditions shaping the individual and obviously make it far more likely that such a person would make progress on the Buddhist path.

We have seen that Buddhist thinkers have recognized the interdependent of individual and society. There can be no clear line between the two because one shades into the other. This perspective points in the direction of a need for Buddhist ethical theory to identify the correct balance between the roles of individual and society as they interact in various ways. Their interactions are unclear.

The paper has discussed about the problem in the world and what are the balancing factors between the society and individuals. Because the condition of the society in different parts of the world at large scale. The man became so insensible the becomes clear through these lines.

The killing of a human being by an animal, by an elephant or tiger, now becomes a news item. But human beings killing other human beings, this has almost become normal now. Terrible! I think it is absolutely wrong. The same planet, same human beings, same species, some are dying due to human activities and behavior, and we remain indifferent. As a Buddhist practitioner, in our daily practice, we describe the entire sentient beings having been one's mother and as dear as to one as one's own mother. If you seriously say these prayers, then you have to mean it. At the practical level, we have no connection with other galaxies only with this planet. Even within this planet, we cannot communicate with these sentient beings.

As a human being, the real destroyer of our inner peace is negative emotions, such as anger, hatred, and fear. There are not sensorial level, but mental level pains. So the method, the right approach, in order to reduce these pains is not to rely on sensorial level experiences, induced by alcohol, drugs, tranquilizers, because these bring limited calmness at the physical level but since these problems have developed at the mental level, so the counter force must also be developed at the mental level. Hence training of mind is so very important. Now in the West, more and more people are really showing an interest in learning about meditation or mindfulness. Again meditation- usually considered as single pointedness of the mind or shamatha that is also a sort of temporary tranquilizer. The real antidote to destructive emotions is analytical meditation what call Vipassana. Vipassana is most appropriate way to tackle destructive emotions.

In this way the attempt has been made to understand individual and society through Buddhist method and it has also been discussed the potentials perspectives of sustainable society.

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