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The Buddhist Concept and Culture of Peace

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ABSTRACT:

The Buddhist concept and culture of peace is deeply rooted in the teachings and practices of Buddhism. This abstract explores the key principles and applications of peace within the Buddhist tradition. Peace, in the Buddhist context, goes beyond the absence of violence or conflict. It is seen as a state of inner well-being and tranquility that radiates outward to create harmony and balance in all aspects of life. The attainment of peace is considered an essential goal for individuals and societies alike. Buddhist teachings emphasize the cultivation of inner peace through mindfulness, compassion, and insight. Meditation is a central practice that helps individuals develop a calm and clear mind, leading to a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings and phenomena. With this understanding, Buddhists strive for peace not only within themselves but also in their relationships, communities, and the world at large. The principles of non-violence (ahimsa) and loving-kindness (metta) guide their actions and interactions, promoting harmony, empathy, and respect for all living beings. Buddhist culture also embraces the values of peace through various rituals, ceremonies, and traditions. Monastic communities serve as centers of peace and are seen as spiritual guides, promoting ethical conduct, harmony, and social harmony. Festivals and celebrations are occasions to foster a sense of unity, goodwill, and joy among individuals and communities.

In contemporary times, Buddhism continues to inspire efforts for peace and social justice worldwide. Buddhist leaders and practitioners are actively engaged in promoting interfaith dialogue, environmental sustainability, and conflict resolution. They advocate for non-violent means of resolving conflicts and advocate for compassionate action to alleviate suffering and promote peace. The Buddhist concept and culture of peace provide valuable insights and practical tools for individuals and societies seeking inner and outer harmony. By cultivating mindfulness, compassion, and understanding, we can contribute to the creation of a more peaceful and compassionate world.

Keywords: Buddhism, peace, inner peace, mindfulness, compassion, non-violence, loving-kindness, culture, rituals, social harmony, ethical conduct, interfaith dialogue, sustainability, conflict resolution, compassionate action.

The Buddhist concept and culture of Peace entails those "values, attitudes and behaviour that reflect and inspire social interaction and sharing based on the principles of freedom, justice and democracy, all human rights, tolerance and solidarity, that reject violence and endeavour to prevent conflicts by tackling their root cause to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation and that guarantee the full existence of all rights and means to participate fully in the development process of their society." We need to nurture the Buddhist concept and a culture of peace and non-violence. We have to recognize that people are not always, by instinct, democratic and tolerant.

Non-violence, Peace, Secularism and Democratic values have to be cultivated among the people. It is self-deception to pretend that the common person is naturally democratic and secular and have the Buddhist concept and a culture of peace. Until we recognize this basic truth and consciously work towards cultivating the culture, where values of peace, nonviolence, democracy, secularism and good governance, our world culture will be exploited and abused by the unscrupulous in the name of democracy.

The Buddhist concept and culture of peace needs to be cultivated, nurtured and learned, as it is not just there in the open. We always learn from history and from the lives of great past masters. Realization takes place when we look at and learn from the lives of our past masters. We need our past in order to go ahead. Everyone should have a mooring in the past to go ahead, as one moves by placing either of the legs forward, but standing on or getting support from the other, which would be behind always. Let us learn from Buddha. He is our past, which glows for the present. With Buddha, Time has painted the past for us, so that it glows. Shall we not learn from him for the Buddhist concept and Culture of peace? Humans hoard memory, the memory is history. We have written great and glorious pages of history.

There is nothing wrong in gaining strength from such glorious past. Buddha is one of the most shining examples for us whose teachings and ideals paved way for the Buddhist and culture of peace and non-violence. He is what we call larger than life. On the other hand, perhaps we are smaller than life, I do not know. Tennyson wrote in his famous Ulysses "Death closes all: but something ere the end, some works of noble note may yet be done." Yah, before we all embrace the inevitable death, let us also do some worthwhile deeds for the betterment of humanity; and thus cultivate in us and install in others the Buddhist concept and culture of peace and nonviolence. For this, we are basing ourselves on the approaches of Buddha, which he had taken some 2500 years ago and that which he had taught to the world to follow.

Buddha's Approach to World Peace: Pancasila Buddhism, as a discipline, permeates into Philosophy, Religion and even Psychology. It is not just a form of faith or system of religion to be treated through its doctrines and philosophies, but it is most intimately linked to the life of the people and the world culture as whole. It has a universal message to offer. It is so catholic that within its orbit all could be accommodated and dealt with, because Buddhism never thinks of identity and uniformity, but unity. That monk Nagana of old told king Milindathat the chariot could not be identified with the various components and yet is called so, because of them. There can be diversity, but there could be unity in diversity. That unity imparts the identity of Buddhism. The study of the philosophical and religious aspects of Buddhism, one of the dominant cultural treasures in the world, Eastern societies in particular, has been a constant source of inspiration and solace for the humanity in these testing times of violence, atrocities and fragmentation. One finds differences and divergences increasing, and dissension, strife and bitterness getting rampant. Further, we see the disparity between the haves and the have-nots, oppressors and the oppressed. There is now greater need and urgency to search for the essential unity of beings in the world. For this, the ethical code of Buddhism, which was Buddha's approach for the Buddhist concept and culture of peace and wellbeing, known as the Pancasila will help everyone.

Buddha's unfathomable conviction of promoting common good and interest, mutual welfare and wellbeing, nobility of life and its perfection, justifies his great compassion for the humanity. Noble are the Four Great Truths, noble is the Eightfold-fold Path. Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, namely, (1) the universality of suffering, (2) the cause of suffering, (3) the cessation of suffering and (4) the ways to the cessation of suffering. Buddha said that desire (*Tanhā*) was the cause of suffering. The *Pāli* word *Tanhā* literally means 'thirst'. There are gross forms of *Tanhā* like obsessive lust for money, power and sensual pleasures.

Tanhā can be reduced to a fundamental ache that is implanted in everything that exists: a gnawing dissatisfaction with what is and a concomitant reaching out for something else. This *Tanhā* makes us restless, and always makes us clasp something outside ourselves. The eradication of *Tanhā* will bring about freedom or Nirvana in Buddhist terms, which is the inner peace, and at peace with oneself and others. In the fourth Noble Truth (ways to the cessation of suffering), Buddha gave the noble eight-fold path, the practical steps to root out this *Tanhā* or thirst.

At *Isipatana Migadava* (in Sarnath - Varanasi) Buddha preached his first sermon and gave the Four Noble Truths to the five ascetics, who became his first disciples. Here he also enlightened them on the sublimity of "Middle Path" the Golden Mean of Buddhism. The Middle Path enables us to give up both the extremes in life: a middle position between sensual indulgences and self-mortification, a middle path of moderation in terms of Right Views, Right Speech and Right Conduct. It also implies a philosophical position between 'Being' and 'Non-- being, that is, a constant 'Becoming'. This "Becoming" is Pure Act, or a benevolent action oriented philosophy of life. Out of these sublime truths, Lord Buddha evolved a genuine code of ethics and morality, the practical side of his philosophy, in the form of simple yet practical system of human life. They are the five noble precepts known as *Pañcasila*. The code of *Pañcasila* or five noble precepts enjoin us (1) not to kill, (2) not to steal, (3) not to tell lies, (4) not to live immoral life and (5) not to consume intoxicants.

The set of five precepts is known as the five *Sikkhā-padani* in Sanskrit literature. It is called *Sikkhapada* in *Paāli*, which might refer to the special rules for the monks' only. They are also known as the *Sikkha-padas* of an upasaka or layman. Every layman who would like to

get the inner peace has to make a vow to follow these five precepts immediately after accepting the faith in Buddha, *Dhamma*, and *Sangha*. In *Pall*, they are also mentioned as *Pañcasila*, and this has come down to us in the same name down through the ages. This noble precept applies to the non-killing of humans, animals and other living beings. Life is dear to all creatures. This has far-reaching implications. All the living beings, irrespective of age, sex, size, from the time of their conception in the mother's womb are under this precept's purview. This precept wards off the scope for recent ethical issues like euthanasia and abortion.

Euthanasia as a practice that involves intentional and deliberate taking of life is contrary to the basic Buddhist ethical teachings because it violates the first of the Five Precepts (*Pancasila*). Both active and passive forms of the practice, even when accompanied by a compassionate motivation with the intention of avoiding suffering are ruled out. It is true that the term "euthanasia", as it is used today, has no direct equivalent in canonical Buddhist literature.

Abortion as a moral problem is not discussed at length in Buddhist literature. However, there are sufficient references in the *Pāli* Canon and other ancient sources to indicate that the practice was regarded as gravely wrong. Buddhist disapproval of abortion is related to its belief in rebirth and its teaching on embryology. It is widely held that conception marks the moment of rebirth, and any intentional termination of pregnancy after that time is a deliberate breach of the first precept in *Pancasila*, namely ahimsa. Largely, this constitutes to be the avowed view of most of the Buddhists. However, this position is not reflected in the abortion statistics in Buddhist countries. In the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia, abortion is generally illegal unless there is threat to the mother's life.

Compassion and Loving Kindness: The Core of Buddha's Approach Buddha always upheld compassion as one of the highest virtues. *Karunā* or *Mahā-karunā* is an attribute of a *Bodhisattva* and a perfect Buddha. It should be rendered in English by such words as "love", "pity", "mercy", "compassion", and all their synonyms or approximate synonyms put together. We cannot convey an adequate idea of what *Karunā* means by one equivalent word in English. Perhaps, the word occurs most frequently in Mahayana literature. A *Bodhisattva* shows his *Karuna* chiefly by resolving to suffer the torments and agonies of the dreadful purgatories during innumerable ages, if need be, so that he might lead all beings into perfect Enlightenment. He is consumed with grief because of the sufferings of others, and does not care for his own happiness. He loves all beings, as a mother loves her only child. He is like a mother, a father, a relative, a friend, as love, and a teacher for all beings. *Karuna* is the life and soul of Buddhist Religion. The Buddhist writers have not only sung the praises of *Karuna*, but also have attempted to analyse and explain it in a philosophical spirit. They teach that it might be considered in two ways: it consists in realizing the equality of oneself and others, and practicing the substitution of others for oneself.

When one cultivates the attitude of regarding others as equal to himself, he gets rid of the notion of "I and you" and "Mine and yours". He feels the joys and sorrows of others as his own, and never prefers his own happiness to that of others. He loves and cares for others as he loves and cares for himself. He is also always ready to exchange his happiness for the miseries of others. He gives himself for the sake of others. He returns good for evil, and even helps those who have injured him. He identifies himself with the lowly and the poor and looks upon himself as if he were another person. We have the beautiful words of Buddha, which unravel the loving kindness of Buddha in one of the most famous poems of Buddhism called the *Mettasutta* or the 'Discourse on Loving Kindness' in the *Suttanipata*.

It goes like this:

May all beings be happy and secure; may their minds be contented.

Whatever living beings there may be feeble or strong, long or tall, stout or medium, short, small or large, seen or unseen, dwelling far or near, born or yet to be born - may all beings, without exception be happy-minded! Let no one deceive another nor despise any person whatever in any place. In anger or ill will let not one wish any harm to another.

Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so let one cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let one's thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world - above, below and across without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity. Whether one stands, walks, sits, or lies down, as long as one is awake one should maintain this mindfulness. This, they say, is the Sublime State of this life.

Not falling into false views, virtuous and endowed with Insight, one gives up attachment to sense desires. Verily such a man does not return to enter a womb again. (-The *Suttanipata* 1: 8 (verses 143 - 152))

Conclusion

In conclusion, I should mention about the Ten Commandments of Buddhism also, though it is not called as Decalogue. We find in Buddhism ten 'Ways of good or meritorious Action' which is known as the *DasaKusala-kamma-patha* (the word *patha* is often dropped, and it is also just called as *DasaKusala-kammāni*; and even it is simply called as ten *Kusalani*). The ten rules are: (1) Abstain from destroying life. (2) Abstain from taking what is not given. (3) Abstain from Unchastely. (4) Abstain from telling lies. (5) Abstain from having intoxicants. (6) Eat only one meal a day, and this should be forenoon. (7) Abstain from the use of ornaments. (8) Abstain from dancing, singing, and theatre. (9) Avoid high and soft bed (i.e., sleep on the floor). (10) Do not accept gold or silver (wealth).

These ten rules were initially meant for the Sangha (monks and nuns), and the essence of these ten rules could be seen in the code of Pancasila. It is a matter of great interest for a student of Comparative Religion to note that the content of these ten rules has much in common with the Ten Commandments given in the Bible. As we have seen so far, Buddhist ethics is not simply a codified theoretical rigid code, but an ethics in complete praxis. This is an action-oriented philosophy, the philosophy of "becoming". It teaches us Right Action. All, irrespective of caste, creed, sex, nationality, could follow it, as one's Action is important in it. The five precepts (Pancasila) must have its origin from the four old Indian ethical rules with the three 'roots of evil', namely, raga, *dosa*, and *moha*. The ancient sages of India inculcated four virtues and discouraged four vices by teaching the people to abstain from killing, falsehood, theft and unchastely, and cultivated the Buddhist concept and a culture of peace. These are the four basic articles of social ethics found in Hindu sacred literature, in the Decalogue of Judaism, Five *Mahavratas* of Jainism and in the *Pali* Canon of Buddhism. Though I have highlighted only Buddha's approach to the Buddhist concept and culture of peace, all the religions have taught us and still teach us the same culture of peace. What is essential here is love and compassion. This love is epitomized by the heart-felt wish "May all beings be happy" and the compassion is epitomized by the heart-felt wish "May all beings be free from suffering", suffering in all its nuances physical, mental and spiritual.

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