

## BUDDHISM'S UNIQUE POSSIBILITY TO PURSUE INNER PEACEFULNESS TO AVOID VIOLENCE AND WAR

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### ABSTRACT

Religions must both be necessary and indispensable for human beings to live in peacefulness and fearlessness nowadays, as well as in ancient times. There is a distinction between monotheism and polytheism. Buddhism is neither monotheism nor polytheism, though it admits the existence of many gods or deities and it co-exists with theistic religions in many countries including Japan. But these gods are not indispensable to Buddhism, so Buddhism must be a kind of atheistic religion. I do not agree with the opinion that Buddha is to be regarded as a deity, because Buddha is worshipped. Buddha is an enlightened man but not a god. Some Japanese scholars consider Buddhism to be a kind of humanism, but not theism. What is unique to Buddhism as contrasted to other religions? The unique and most dominant trend of Buddhism must be to aim at the calmness or peacefulness of mind that should be free from anger, mental excitement, etc. This trend has been shown in the final goal of Buddhism: *nirvāṇa* (calm peacefulness, extinction of transmigration, i.e., final, calm and peaceful death) and in the Buddha's teaching that one should abandon hatred, anger, desire, etc. The biographical texts of the Buddha tell us His compassionate and merciful stories but never hint at His anger even toward evils. Generally speaking, this trend has been dominant in the development and spread of Buddhism in many countries and districts over two millennia. Because we are now at the verge of a total annihilation due to nuclear weapons, which can destroy all human lives and ecological environments, this uniqueness of Buddhism holds the possibility to avoid violence and war which would become a catastrophic danger to the survival of human beings on the earth in this year and in coming centuries.

## 0. Introductory Remarks

‘Basic Common Values in Religions’ are to be taken into consideration, because in any human society religions must both be necessary and indispensable for human beings to live in peacefulness and fearlessness. In many religions this value seems to be recognized widely, though there have been not a few criticisms of religions which seem to focus particularly on the monotheistic religions. Now, I will, with due regard to the motto of this Congress (ICANAS): “Peace at Home Peace in the World,” point out a unique characteristic of Buddhism that holds a possibility to keep inner peacefulness among people.

### I. Monotheism, Polytheism, and Atheism

Religions can be classified into two groups, i.e. monotheism and polytheism. Generally speaking, however, **Buddhism** is neither monotheism nor polytheism, though Buddhism admits the existence of many gods or deities and it co-exists with polytheistic (and even monotheistic) religions in many Asian Buddhist countries including Japan. But the gods are not indispensable to Buddhism, so Buddhism must be a kind of **atheistic religion**.

There are opinions that regard Buddha as a deity because Buddha is worshipped and believed in. A famous Jain Philosopher Haribhadras) ri (in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century) says in his *Ād-darśana-samuccaya* 1.4 that according to the Buddhist opinion first of all their deity is Buddha (*sugata*, well-fared). Some Japanese professors of history of religions regard Buddha as a god, which means an object of religious worship (see *Shomin Shinko no Sekai* 庶民信仰の世界 by Prof. Masahiro Kusunoki 楠正弘, p.228). But I do not agree with these opinions, because they ignore the unique character of Buddhism as most of the Japanese Buddhists maintain that Buddhism is the doctrine how one can become finally enlightened, i.e., Buddha. A Japanese scholar of Buddhism: Prof. Hakuy( Hadano 羽田 野伯猷 told us that Buddhism is so to speak a kind of humanism but not any kind of theism; because one can and must become enlightened one (Buddha) by means of aspiration, discipline, meditation, and insight, etc. His opinion must chiefly be derived from the tradition of Zen Buddhism as in Japan.

In this way in Buddhism God or gods who are some kinds of transmigrating sentient beings are not of great importance and so Buddhism can be free from theism. This point must be one of the peculiar or unique characteristics of Buddhism. This point of view seems to be related to other characteristics of Buddhist thinking.

## II. Closed Religion and Open Religion

Religions can also be divided into two categories, i.e. closed religion and open religion. Though these terms might remind you of Henri Bergson's terminology of *l'âme close* (closed soul) and *l'âme ouverte* (open soul) (Cf. *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, Paris 1932, pp.33-34), my opinion must be different from his philosophy.

Roughly speaking, most of the theistic religions seem to be closed religions, because worshippers and believers of the theistic religions might have the belief that they should, so to speak, be chosen or selected by God or some of gods. Some of the theistic religions are restricted to the local, tribal, racial, native, or national groups. For instance, most of the varieties of Japanese Shinto 神道 belong to the closed religion, because their members are almost limited to small groups of Japanese people mainly in Japan.

Monotheism is also a closed religion, because in any monotheism other monotheistic religions as well as other pagan and heretic polytheistic religions have not easily been tolerated. We know many wars between Christian and Islamic countries have often been repeated from the first Crusade (1096-99) up to the Afgan and Iraqi wars (2001-, 2003-respectively) in dispute now. We have heard the Christian president encourage his citizens and soldiers in his speeches quoting some passages of the Old Testament on one side, the antagonistic Islamic paramilitary leaders appeal Islamic people to fight the holy war (*jihad*) even committing suicide-bombing on the other.

On the contrary, Buddhism belongs to open religion, though there are, of course, some exceptional cases.

One exclusive principle can be recognized in the case of the Buddhist Order (*saṅgha*) of ordained celibate monks or celibate nuns. The Buddhist Order was an exclusively independent group which should not be controlled by any un-ordained secular persons, and it had its own religious ceremonies which no secular persons could participate in.

But its doctrine (philosophy) is open to all living beings, because Buddhist Canon tells us to be free from 'I' (ego, self) and 'mine.' One who is free from 'I' and 'mine' cannot help being open (or open-minded) to others and compassionate to everyone. And the enlightened one (Buddha) is open to enlightenment, unveiled from cravings (*vivāḍa*), and unveiled from covering, i.e., mental defilements of greed, hatred and delusion (*vivatta-cchada*).

This covering (*chadda*, *chadana*) means ignorance and craving, or mental defilements, i.e., greed, hatred and delusion. And the goal of Buddhism, i.e., the calm peacefulness (*nibbāna*) is uncovered (*vivaḍa*, open), just like a light, for him whose covering has been unveiled, uncovered and removed. This adjective ‘unveiled (uncovered) from the covering (*vivatta-cchadda*)’ is one of the epithets of the fully enlightened one (*sambuddha*), i.e., Buddha (*Sutta-niṭṭa*=Sn.763, 793, etc.). The Pāli tradition mentions Buddha’s first words which hint at His openness of mind:

I have run through the transmigration of many births looking for the maker of this house (craving that is the carpenter that makes my own existence, i.e., body) without attaining [the knowledge to see] him; painful is birth again and again (*Dhamma-pada*=Dh.153).

O maker of the house (craving), you are seen; you will not make the house (my own existence, i.e., body) again. All your rafters (mental defilements) are broken, the roof of the house (ignorance) is destroyed; my mind, having attained to the state where mental and physical latent forces are exhausted (*nibbāna*, i.e., calm peacefulness and cessation of the transmigration), has attained to the extinction of cravings (Dh.154, the words in bracket are supplied by the Commentary: *Dhammapadaha-kathā* = DhA.III.128).

These verses, according to the commentary, tell us that the Buddha, having discovered the craving which makes His own existence in transmigration, destroyed mental defilements together with ignorance, with both of which His own existence is covered with just like a roof of a house. And when He is uncovered and unveiled from these coverings, the calm peacefulness and truths (*dhammā*, i.e. constituent elements of our human existence) are open (manifest) to Him, as we see next.

The Buddha’s other first words were uttered after having considered upon the dependent origination (*paḍicca-samuppāda*) through the whole night under the Bodhi-tree (*Mahāvagga*, *Vinaya* I.2):

1 When the constituent elements (*dhamm*) [of human existence] become clear (open) to the ardent, meditating Brāhmaṇa, then all his doubts go away, since he realizes the Law (*dhamma*, doctrine, truth) which accompanies the causes [of human existence] .

2 When ... (as above) ..., since he has understood the cessation of conditions [of human existence] (The words in bracket are supplied by the author’s understanding).

This meditating Brāhmaöa is another expression of Buddha, to whom the *dhammā* (constituent elements of human existence) become clear (open). Among these constituent elements (*dhammā*), He realizes the Law (*dhamma*, doctrine, truth) which accompanies the causes [and conditions] of human existence and He knows the cessation of [the causes and] conditions of human existence as well. The enlightened one (Buddha) was said to be free from desire, and then look around at living beings with His compassionateness (*kruat*); and thus His activities began.

### III. Static Religion and Dynamic Religion

There has been another opinion to divide religions into two categories, i.e. static and dynamic religions (Cf. Bergson's *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*). I know it is difficult to regard the God of monotheism as the same as one of the gods of polytheism, but I would like to ignore this difficulty, because I want to find similar and common characteristics in monotheism and polytheism. Generally speaking most of the theistic religions are dynamic, enthusiastic and exciting religions, because most of the deities are awful, and have been strong influence upon men and women, by moving, exciting, terrifying or consoling them. Anyone who commits sin against God or gods should have fear to be punished and damned by Him. Some religious and magical persons (*shaman*, *sangoma*, *itako*, *gomiso*, *yuta*, etc.) are said to communicate with deities, and some are said to be possessed by some deities or spirits.

On the contrary, Buddhism is originally a calm and static religion which makes people calm and peaceful and heals and consoles them, because Buddhism pursues a calm peacefulness of mind, and its last goal, *nirvā*)a is an absolute calm peacefulness which means extinction of transmigration (or final, calm and peaceful death). Buddha who is said to be compassionate and merciful does not punish any of sinful and criminal persons. Anyone who commits offences is to be punished only through the natural consequence of one's deeds (*karman*), or some deities who protect Buddhist Law punish the evil ones. In later Esoteric Buddhism, many of the deities are included in its religious pantheon (*ma*)öala), so Esoteric Buddhism seems to include dynamic religion in itself, however, it does not lose its original calm and static religion.

### IV. Possibility and Necessity of Co-existence of Religions

In most of Asian countries (India, China Proper, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, etc.), polytheistic religions, monotheistic religions, and atheistic religions are peacefully co-existent in general. In

some of these countries and districts, we can see Buddhism co-exist with polytheistic religions.

For instance, in Japan most Buddhists go to worship at Shinto shrines as well; most funeral services are performed with Buddhist rites, wedding ceremonies are held with Shinto rites or Christian rites, but a few with Buddhist rites. Although the policies to separate Shinto from Buddhism were promoted since 1868, there has been a long history of syncretism of Buddhism and polytheistic Shinto in Japan.

These instances hint to us that religions can co-exist; however in most monotheistic (Christian, Jewish or Islamic) countries religious conflicts and troubles are not easily avoided or calmed down nowadays. But in this internationalized and global age, co-existence of religions seems to be greatly needed in order to avoid the danger of the dreadful religious conflict, associated with violence and war.

## **V. Buddhism's Unique Possibility to Pursue Inner Peacefulness Which Would Avoid Violence and War**

What is unique to Buddhism as contrasted to other religions? I have shown four of essential characteristics of Buddhism above. Now I will point out one more characteristic, i.e. the most dominant trend of Buddhism in comparison to other religions. This must be its aim at pursuing a sense of inner calm peacefulness or an inner peaceful tranquillity of mind that should be free from anger, hatred, jealousy, mental excitement, etc. This characteristic has been shown in the final goal of Buddhism, *nirvāṇa* (*nibbana*, calm peacefulness, extinction of transmigration, i.e. final, calm and peaceful death) and in the Buddha's teaching that one should remove greed, hatred, anger, etc.

**a. Central Concept of Buddhas' Teaching:** Traditionally Buddhas' teaching runs thus:

“Non-commitment of all evil (*sabba-pāpassa akara*) $\infty$ ),

Perfecting of goodness (*kusalassa upasmpadā*),

Purifying of one's mind (*sacitta-pariyodapana*),

This is the teaching of Buddhas (the enlightened) (*eta $\infty$  buddhāna sāsana $\infty$* ).”(Dh.183)

This stanza is very famous in the Buddhist sacred texts and transmitted widely. According to the Pāli Canon this is the past Buddha Vipassin's precept (*pātimokkha*) (*Dxgha-nikāya* = D.II.p.49<sup>26-27</sup>), while the Commentary on the Dh ascribes it to all the past six Buddhas (DhA. III.

pp. 236-7). There are many versions of this stanza in Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan. This stanza was translated into Chinese by Chih-ch'ien 支謙 and Wei-ch'i-nan 維祇難 in the *Fa-chü ching* 法句經 in the third century (222-253): 諸惡莫作 諸善奉行 自淨其意 是諸佛教. And this stanza (in Chih-ch'ien's translation) has been very famous in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism too. The first two lines express a very universal ethical norm, and as several parallel passages are also found in the Jaina Canons (Kenji Watanabe 渡辺研二 2004), they are not solely unique to Buddhism. But **purifying of one's mind** is very characteristic to Buddhism.

According to the Commentary, 'purifying of one's mind (*sacitta-pariyodapana*)' is purification of one's own mind from five coverings (hindrances) (*pañcahi nxvara*) *ehi attano cittassa vodāpana*∞. DhA. III. p.237<sup>17-8</sup>). The five coverings mean five kinds of mental defilements (*kilesa*), which consist of desire for sensual enjoyment (*kāma-cchanda*), malevolence (*vyāpāda*, hatred), sloth and torpor (*thxna-middha*, low-spiritedness and sleepiness), excitement and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*, frivolity and regret), and doubt (*vicikicchā*).

In the context of Buddhist Canonical texts and their commentaries, sloth (low-spiritedness), torpor (sleepiness), and excitement (frivolity, high-spiritedness) are all deemed as mental and spiritual evils which hinder monks in attaining the liberation from mental defilements. **Malevolence** (hatred, fury, anger) is always deemed as evil in most Buddhist texts. Moreover, this explanation of the DhA indicates simply how to purify one's mind, but it hints at a characteristic of Buddhism, i.e., inner calmness or tranquillity of mind that should be free from hatred (malevolence), mental excitement, etc.

This is, I think, one of the important characteristics of Buddhism, and it is not in common with most of the other theistic religions, i.e. Christian, Jewish, and Islamic religions, all of which extol the hatred or anger toward their or their God's enemies in their Canons but never deny entirely their hatred toward inimical people. The Gospel according to Matthew 5.44 says: "Love your enemies, and pray for your persecutors, " but I think no Christian political leaders think highly of this passage, they seem to advertise the Old Testament which tells us that people of Israel killed and destroyed all the enemies and enemies' cattle under God's instructions, e.g., The book of Joshua 6, The book of Judges 6-8, etc. (Cf. Akira Sadakata 定方 晁 2003).

According to another explanation, purifying of one's mind (*sacitta-*



*pariyodapana*) is to make one's own mind glorious (*attano citta-jotanaṃ*). And this purifying of one's mind depends on getting rid of all evil by means of carrying moral precepts, and doing good by calm concentration and clear insight (*Suma°gala-vilāsin'* = DA.II. p.479<sup>6-9</sup> on D. II.p.49<sup>26-27</sup>). It is not clear exactly how to purify our own mind; however, we are urged to ascertain what is good and what is evil, because purifying of one's mind is closely related to good and evil.

The moral and disciplinary precepts or monastic rules of monks and nuns (about 250 for monks, 350 for nuns) consist of all of the prohibitions on unmoral (evil) and unfit deeds and behaviours, which are collectively called as a code of precepts (*pātimokkha*) of monks and that of nuns. The moral precepts (*s'la*, *dhamma*) that common people should follow are of three kinds: five items of good character (five precepts), ten items of good character (ten precepts), and eight pledges (precepts) which should be kept in particular six days in a month (*uposatha*). Here I will consider the five and ten precepts only, in which we can see characteristics of Buddhist moral precepts.

Among them ten precepts are the most typical, important, and universal in all the history of Buddhism. And these are generally called ten ways of good acts (*dasa kusala-kamma-pathā*, D.III. p.269<sup>5-</sup>) which are contrary to ten ways of no-good (evil) acts (*dasa akusala-kamma-pathā*). The ten ways of good acts consist of (1) abstinence (*veramaö'*) from taking life of living beings (*pāâtîpāta*, killing), (2) abstinence from taking what is not given (*adinnādāna*, stealing), (3) abstinence from adultery (*kāmesu micchācāra*), (4) abstinence from telling lies (*musā-vāda*), (5) abstinence from slander (*pisuā vācā*), (6) abstinence from harsh speech (*pharusā vācā*), (7) abstinence from frivolous and senseless talk (*samphappalāpa*), (8) non-greed (*anabhijjhā*, non-covetousness), (9) non-hatred (*avyāpāda*, non-malevolence) and (10) a right view (*sammā-diṅṅhi*).

Among these ten precepts, the first four are also the first four of the **five precepts**, in which the fifth precept is to abstain from any state of indolence arising from intoxicants (i.e., abstain from drinking, S. IV.245,V.395). These four are very universal moral precepts not only in Buddhism but also nearly everywhere in the world. Especially, **the first precept**, i.e., abstinence from taking life of living beings (i.e. **non-killing, non-violence**), is very important. It is difficult for us to keep this precept, because it prohibits us from killing not only human beings but also all living beings as well. And this precept forbids us not to kill, not cause others to



kill, and not to approve of others' killing. This precept urges us also to have compassion and sympathy to all the living beings without exception of enemies. This precept prohibits us to kill even enemies in war. Though Buddhist people do not seem to have been successful to prevent war till even now, it is very much needed for us to remind this precept again and again.

The last **three** of the ten precepts, i.e., non-greed, non-hatred, and a right view is characteristic to Buddhism. This is very difficult for us to carry out, because in order to fulfil these precepts duly we need discipline and training over many long years: indeed even through all of one's life. In other words, to keep these three precepts for us is to follow the principle of Buddhism, i.e. teaching of Buddhas. Among them the precept of non-hatred is unique to Buddhism, and we know that hatred becomes often a motive for violence and war. And then war ignites people's hatred, which makes war severe again and again.

As regards to these precepts Buddhist Canon runs as follows:

“Do not kill living beings, not let [others] kill, and not approve of others' killing.”(Sn. 394ab)

“I call him a noble man (*brhma*)a) who, refraining from violence (*da*)*da*) to [living] beings: trembling (weak) and steady (strong) ones, does not kill [them], not let [others] kill [them].” (Sn.629)

“For hatred does not cease by hatred (*vera*) at any time; hatred ceases by non-hatred (*avera*, love), this is an old law (*dhamma*).”(Dh.5)

“Because of non-violence (*ahiṃsa*) to all the living beings, he is called noble (*ariya*).” (Dh.270cd)

**b. Concluding Remarks:** The biographical texts of Buddha as well as His past stories (*Jātakas*, *Avadānas*, etc.) tell us of His compassion and mercy but never hint at His anger even toward evil. Buddhist Canonical Texts lead us to be calm and peaceful but not to be angry, excited, or irritated. Images (sculptures, pictures, etc.) of Buddhas (*Tathāgatas*) and Bodhisattvas also seem to let us be calm and peaceful, dispelling anger, fear, or hatred.

On the other hand, God and gods of most other religions seem to make people feel awe and fear of being scolded and punished, for God and gods are not always free from anger, jealousy, and hatred. We can easily find ‘God’s (or the Lord’s) anger or wrath’ or the phrase: ‘God (or the Lord) is angry with ...’ in

the *Old Testament* (Nahum, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Malachi) as well as in the *New Testament* (Revelation). The *Koran* (*Qur'ān*) warns Muslims to fear Allah's anger and punishment.

Indian Vedic and Hindu gods, Greek and Roman gods, as well as Japanese gods are very awful and numinous, liable to get angry, excited, or jealous. There is a god of wrath (*manyu*) in Vedic religion (*Ig-veda* 10.84). But later some Indian philosophers tried to demonstrate that the highest god (*x♣vara*) is free from anger and other evil qualities or rather devoid of any quality (*gu*)a). And Indian religious philosophies have been engaged in inquiring into how to get liberation from recurring transmigrations.

Generally speaking, this trend of inner calm peacefulness with no hatred has been dominant in the development of Buddhism in many countries and regions over the past two millenniums. This trend of Buddhism contrasts with other religions such as monotheistic Christian, Jewish, and Islamic religions as well as polytheistic Greco-Roman religions, Hinduism (Vedic religion), Shinto, etc., all of which consist in a faith in one God or many gods.

This unique Buddhist trend: inner calm peacefulness without hatred and the precept of non-killing (non-violence) should be a modest but hopeful possibility to avoid violence and war.

At the time of Buddha, war was not avoidable. Buddha is said to prevent twice the war between Kosala-king Viḍḍabha and Sakya-people who were Buddha's relatives but in vain. Sakya-people, who kept Buddha's precept of non-killing, were fighting but without killing their enemies and then all killed. Many texts tell us this tragedy (DhA.I.pp.337-361, *Jtaka hakath* IV.pp.144-153, etc.). The tradition of non-violence (non-killing) had been arisen before Buddhism, and has also been prevailed in Hinduism and Jainism in India widely. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)'s non-violent resistance and independence movement succeeded to acquire independence from British Empire; however he himself was assassinated by a Hindu radical: Nathuram Godse.

Although Gandhi's idea of non-violence has been influential world-wide, wars do not cease in the world, and now the hard-fought and incessant 'war on terror' is raging fiercely. 'War on terror' cannot stop terror, but it is newly increasing terror and disaster more and more. So, all of us feel far less safe and convenient to travel abroad owing to the 'war on terror.'

Owing to Buddha's precept of non-killing no Buddhists can approve of

this war. In the present day any kind of war would become a catastrophic danger to the survival of human beings on the earth; we are now at the very verge of a total annihilation due to nuclear weapons, which would destroy all human lives and ecological environments all together. We must take into more consideration of any possibility to avoid violence and war, because we wish the survival of human beings now and in future. We need to endeavour more to prevent violence and war in the world. I wish and hope that the tradition of non-killing and non-violence is going to prevail world-wide. For this purpose Buddhism's inner calm peacefulness is also to be accepted, sought and pursued widely and deeply.

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